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Sonata, what do you mean to me?
Creative dialogues with a form.

Written Commentary

Matthew Jonathon King

Submission for the award of DMus in Composition

Guildhall School of Music & Drama

Department of Composition

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**GUILD
HALL
SCHOOL**

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List of Videos

Since 2019, as this project has progressed, I have filmed myself playing many of the pieces, slowly building up a video archive of the ongoing compositional/pianistic research. These video documents are not polished performances: the pieces are challenging to play and very rarely did I have much time to prepare before filming. They function simply as a record of the work-in-progress: a documentation of the emerging sonatas and the challenges they present to the pianist. The following list is a sequence of the sonatas which have been recorded in this way with links to a private YouTube account.

1. Boulez-Bowie Sonata (Notturmo Funebre in memoriam: January 2016).
Matthew King (piano), 2 recordings:
<https://youtu.be/idGCNTFigWA?si=MMMFZpjwk8AHjVKx>
[://youtu.be/i5mSkTIRw60](https://youtu.be/i5mSkTIRw60)
2. Sonata Infernale: *Goodbye Ginger Baker*
Matthew King (piano):
<https://youtu.be/GOrWxybhmNc?si=uqpZfWhaS5fRSn1g&t=9>
5. Sonata in Phrygian Mode: *O Vis Aeternitatis* (after Hildegard of Bingen)
Matthew King (piano):
<https://youtu.be/otsdyILDwiw?si=ZEoVy9fiW58edHf0>

6. Sonata in F minor: *In Empfindsamer Stil*
Matthew King (piano):
<https://youtu.be/HjD4NKsEvf0?si=91vtO3wuulXKazBy&t=4>
7. Sonata in A Minor (after Purcell): *'Musick for a While'*
Matthew King (piano):
<https://youtu.be/bVGzrGxkwkl?si=3tkAwWI4pmPLg5LB>
10. Sonata Autumnale (a Brahmsian Rhapsody)
Matthew King (piano):
https://youtu.be/TOuyq9AiVtQ?si=YABJbvFJwBF_PgLk
11. Sonata Via Crucis
Matthew King (piano):
https://youtu.be/1XQyipYvbHc?si=UTZBvl_ybpcrxUVR
12. Sonata for Left Hand 1: *Neon, Glass and Ashes*
Matthew King (piano):
https://youtu.be/7pfGPi2S8_l?si=NiDDgj58cCt_l86i
13. Sonata in B minor: *Laurence Crane in Folkestone*
Matthew King (piano):
<https://youtu.be/6AV37u8-0Sc?si=AyIgvWuzWysQPP3y&t=1>
14. Sonata in F Minor: *on Christmas Eve*
Matthew King (piano):
<https://youtu.be/T20qS3LCVBk?si=VofSAsUNBfv7ULrA&t=5>
15. Sonata Enigmatica I: *The Well-Shuffled Hand*
Matthew King (piano):
Version 1. https://youtu.be/mhO_n8CHFSU?si=2G9HX0tE8gvIYE_j
Version 2. <https://youtu.be/TVHf6HU0EdQ?si=Q8OoYTP1kOrBxfAA>
Version 3. <https://youtu.be/bvBwsnW4t3Q?si=K6B-nxNv533VR73N>
Version 4. <https://youtu.be/bg9d5Giib5k?si=METwbO7d-RbHYid6>
Version 5. <https://youtu.be/bdibaJEqRE4?si=dzmRQWoJ9MzqN34>
Version 6. <https://youtu.be/szLNORjqQq0?si=14nNIEnv9Z-zJYlb>
16. *Mystery Play* (a Sonata in several scenes)
Matthew King (piano):
https://youtu.be/NRLVnq_b5_o?si=pFpQTTKQN6h0ddbf&t=1

17. The Elements Sonata (Excerpts)

Matthew King (piano):

Water 1: <https://youtu.be/svBt9MGpMuM?si=UxLkPO4JEiosVgy8>

Caves 1: <https://youtu.be/3Gf9TX82ID8?si=4PMdWby1kbAskyPQ&t=11>

18. Pastoral Sonata II: *Summer Games*

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/i7lQ49M6GvA?si=uYglpVmK--L0yc7Q>

19. Pastoral Sonata III in A minor: *Puffball*

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/Gf9oQ7S5buw?si=yWZG2ifJsW9pe6IS>

23. Sonata Sonata (homage to César Baldaccini)

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/V4wJLUW-bow?si=9sY8sF519WkRoF0K>

24. Sonata Invernale in E minor: *Snowy Woods*

Matthew King (piano):

https://youtu.be/q0mSDQG1wv0?si=N50JW6L622PRDh_A&t=8

25. *Between the Acts*: A Sonata Pageant (homage to Virginia Woolf)

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/0j5NzkA4WDc?si=FsmGyNOvnlx6VtS2>

26. Venetian Sonata 1: *Venice by Day*

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/nOCO0s8ONeg?si=RGdG6s5YEs6EHbrv>

27. Venetian Sonata 2: Sonata Barcarola I: *Venice by Night*

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/7BfAG2PsVd8?si=yergewmXXO93mXnZ>

28. Venetian Sonata 3 (on 12 fixed tones) Sonata Barcarola II: *Rowing by Twilight*

Matthew King (piano):

https://youtu.be/zAE53d_N6ZA?si=1SKld_aU1k_TjQcT

29. Venetian Sonata 4: Sonata Barcarola III: *RW in Venice, 1883*

Matthew King (piano):

https://youtu.be/sMeIrXI5eCs?si=P_1gNQk2KRd-pbjc

30. Venetian Sonata 5: *Voyage to San Michele*

Matthew King (piano):

https://youtu.be/X7n4JM_sbBk?si=zDP3Khd_kotbpX4L

31. Venetian Sonata 6 (homage to Daphne du Maurier)

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/4KCifAo5eMA?si=Z-0BEMeSUg2RXzos>

35. Venetian Sonata 10: Sonata Barcarola V: *The Glassy Sea*

Matthew King (piano)

<https://youtu.be/OqfdhpwWyuc?si=qFc1-hCNb51s0t3c>

37. Venetian Sonata 12: Sonata Barcarola VI

...Unheeded Prophecies, Rising Waters...

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/v3ab1Rfru3w?si=py9JYEbBXjvyqG2O>

38. Sonata in A Minor (after Satie Ia)

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/o4QzYG1cZeY?si=ES45PK6n5X5DSK8s>

42. Sonata Enigmatica II: *Statues in a Garden* (after Satie VI)

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/H69sMvaO4Gc?si=-gWcqPcWjTRac2Tw>

43. Sonata in F minor: *Mozart's Mirror* (after Satie VII)

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/rDqUy5saMFE?si=b2DoHwwXlvSWhla7>

44. Sonata for Left Hand II: (after Satie VIII)

Matthew King (piano):

<https://youtu.be/rkFFIQWaGE4?si=V48yhviLaGXzOEB3&t=8>

0 Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my supervisors Prof. Julian Anderson CBE, Laurence Crane, Rolf Hind and Dr Simon Clarke for their invaluable help, support and friendship during this project. Without Simon's clear and patient explanation of various tricky philosophical topics, I would have been all at sea; Rolf's pianistic and compositional expertise (and his commissioning of the miniature which became Pastoral Sonata I) were rays of light, especially in the dark days of Lockdown; Laurence became a virtual character within the project: Dungeness Sonata II, Sonata in B minor: *Laurence Crane in Folkestone*, and Sonata for Left Hand I: *Neon, Glass and Ashes* all came into being because of his creative influence and encouragement (and I am grateful for his generous permission to tinker with his beautiful piano music in Sonata in B minor: *Laurence Crane in Folkestone*). Julian has been a consistently erudite and inspiring dialogue partner over the four years, continuously influencing the project with his richly creative insights, making all kinds of suggestions which subsequently turned into pieces, and frequently goading me into more adventurous territory. It has been a privilege to have such a dream-team of supervisors, without whom the project would have been far less interesting, and many of the sonatas would never have been composed.

I would also like to thank the following friends and colleagues: Dr. Nye Parry for his advice on a number of topics (doctoral and compositional) and his help in developing a project with Guildhall EPM students around The Elements Sonata in 2024; Peter Longworth for listening to several of the sonatas and for making many kind and encouraging comments; Alasdair Middleton for his creative insights, and for introducing me to the novels of Isabel Colegate; Anthony Etherin, whose wonderful and intricate poems inspired my Sonata Palindromica; Nancy Gaffield (who crafted beautiful sonnets to be read alongside my Dungeness Sonatas I and II); the film-maker Kiyani Agadjani, who generously chose to make a short film about both Dungeness pieces;¹ Laura Roberts for her support and encouragement; Pau Vendrell who gave a terrific performance of the Boulez-Bowie Sonata at Guildhall in June

¹ *A Cottage by the Sea*, directed by Kiyani Agadjani (the film is currently in production).

2022; Dominic Saunders, who took such an interest in the pieces, and is preparing to play Pastoral Sonata I and The Elements Sonata in 2024, and Dr. Matthew Kaner for his consistent help, advice and encouragement throughout the project.

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*Sonata, what do you mean to me?*² Creative dialogues with a form.

In borrowing a form already established and consecrated, the creative artist is not in the least restricting the manifestations of his personality. On the contrary, it is more detached and stands out better, when it moves within the limitations of a convention. (Stravinsky 1936, 215)

1 Research Aims

It is customary to begin with an assertive opening statement:

a grand rhetorical gesture!

The weight of tradition compels it.

There are expectations: a certain sequence of events is required.

Within these parameters

personality is expected to assert itself,

moving within the limitations of convention

(whilst, simultaneously, subverting convention:

the unexpected... is also expected).

This project is a creative journey into a form with a rich and diverse history. It is also a project which engages, in a very personal way, with aspects of my own life and my musical practice as a composer-pianist. Over the past four years, I have composed 45 single-movement piano sonatas, works which simultaneously interrogate the idea

² 'Sonate, que me veux-tu?', a much quoted remark attributed to Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, and also the title of an article by Pierre Boulez about his *Third Piano Sonata*, published in *Orientations* (1986, 143) The English translation in my title, chosen for its explicit reference to meaning, is from a paper by Beverly Jerold, in which she observes, "In recent years, it has been translated as 'Sonata, what do you want from me?', but its usage in texts of the period indicates that it is simply an abridgement of the common idiom *Que veut dire cela?* (What does that mean?), so that it can read: 'Sonata, what do you mean to me?'" (Jerold 2003, 150.)

of sonata both as genre and as form.³ All the works contained in this submission are in sonata form, and all are composed for piano solo.⁴

The term sonata is notoriously complex and, having evolved over 200 years of compositional practice, has become loaded with an array of meanings. Therefore, I will begin with a simple clarification: in this submission, the term sonata is applied to all 45 complete works for solo piano, composed by me during four years of doctoral research, and the term is used in two specific ways, outlined below.

Firstly, all the works contained in this submission are single-movement pieces. Inspired by the fine repertoire of single-movement sonatas by Scarlatti and later composers (discussed in more detail in the Literature Review below) I decided to focus on the concision and singularity (I use the word deliberately, with its connotation of eccentricity) of form that one movement alone provides. The result is a diverse set of single-movement pieces, with a consciously wide (indeed wildly eclectic) range of approaches to musical architecture, character, and pianism.

Secondly, all 45 complete works composed during this research project are written in some kind of sonata form structure. Several of the sonatas employ the form in a relatively straightforward way (some even have an exposition repeat); however, most of the pieces in this folio push formal boundaries in surprising directions, amalgamating sonata with other forms, creating collisions of style and genre, and

³ Jeffrey Kallberg gives a very helpful and relevant description of how genre normally functions in musical composition: “Genre exerts a persuasive force. It guides the responses of listeners...The choice of genre by a composer and its identification by the listener establish the framework for the communication of meaning...a frame that consequently affects the decisions made by the composer in writing the work and the listener in hearing the work. A kind of “generic contract” develops between composer and listener: the composer agrees to use some of the conventions, patterns and gestures of a genre, and the listener consents to interpret some aspects of the piece in a way conditioned by this genre.” (Kallberg 1988, 243.)

⁴ Alternative versions of several of the sonatas also exist: two (The Elements Sonata [17] and Pastoral Sonata I [18]) have versions with electronics (currently being developed for performance in May 2024); one (*Laurence Crane in Folkestone* [13]) exists in an alternative version for instrumental ensemble (premiered by Silk Street Sinfonietta in January 2023, and submitted in this folio alongside the piano original) in which the piano material remains the same, and the ensemble extends, colours and ‘amplifies’ it. A second sonata (Sonata in A minor (after Satie Ia) [38]) is currently being scored for chamber orchestra. One sonata (34) may alternatively be played on a harpsichord.

subverting certain traditional orthodoxies and expectation. Some of these works interrogate the components of sonata form in an extreme manner: for example, Sonata Enigmatica: *The Well-Shuffled Hand* (15) (discussed in more detail below in section 5.2) explores the possibility of combining sonata form with open form; Sonata Sonata (23) compresses fragmentary material from all the previous sonatas into a notional sonata form structure consisting entirely of quotations; several sonatas (including Boulez-Bowie Sonata (1); Sonata Infernale: *Goodbye Ginger Baker* (2); Sonata for Left Hand I: *Neon, Glass and Ashes* (12); *A Voyage to San Michele* (30); Sonata in F minor: *Mozart's Mirror* (43) and Sonata for Left Hand II (after Satie VIII) (44) can only be understood as sonata form in the context of their use of quoted material and an awareness of biographical elements symbolised by these quotations; *Between the Acts: a Sonata Pageant* (25) (the grand finale of the project, also discussed in more detail below) combines sonata form with 4-movement form (each movement-within-the-movement is itself a multi-movement sonata structure, and one of these movements is also a quasi-Baroque suite) whilst simultaneously containing a sort of history of music and a sequence of quotations from Virginia Woolf's final novel.

The word *sonata* carries immense canonical and musicological weight, and the idea of writing one tends to be loaded with a notion of significance.⁵ Since the late 18th century, composers have been inclined to use the form only when there is something of sufficient gravitas to communicate, particularly after Beethoven, whose titanic shadow has fallen upon the subsequent evolution of the sonata, and whose 'Hammerklavier' Sonata appears - no less now than in 1818 - to represent a grand summation of the genre's potential rhetorical power.⁶ But sonata production

⁵ Per Nørgård's career, for example, was apparently set on course by writing the word 'Sonata': 'I began making very childish classical music, and then began making songs and dances for "tecnis", sort of drawn movies: my brother would make texts and I made cartoons which we would show to the family. Then one day, in 1949, when I was 15 years old, I got a sheet of manuscript paper and wrote "Sonata" on the top, and I have not stopped (Martin Anderson 1997, 3)

⁶ Some of Schubert's late sonatas, around a decade later, present a radically alternative rhetoric of intimacy and vulnerability, largely ignored by the 19th century but, I would suggest, increasingly important in our own time.

is somewhat in decline in the 21st century. Indeed, the idea of sonata composition, in our current cultural landscape, is perhaps even a little problematic. (One younger colleague described sonata composition to me as ‘Austro-German mansplaining’!)⁷ If anyone chooses to engage in such a recondite activity, it carries implications of a grandiose, old-fashioned, pedantic undertaking, potentially giving rise to a large-scale work of almost inevitably dry or academic character, neo-neoclassical in form and content (and suggestive of bygone compositional concerns).⁸ Several seminars at Guildhall School of Music and Drama, during which I have presented some of my pieces, have demonstrated that students are inclined to view the genre as something rather esoteric, evoking music of distant eras, and half-understood analysis classes, and they have not always found it easy to hear how my eccentric efforts belong within it. As an activity, sonata composition seems indicative of a certain reactionary formality (in all senses of the word) and a regression into musical tradition, as if wanting to ‘play with history’ as Boulez once described it (1976, 31), potentially even setting one’s face against the cultural pluralism and multiplicity of our own age.

To some extent, my project certainly does take some delight in ‘playing with history’ (in a manner which might disquiet the ghost of Pierre Boulez). With the (dwindling but still discernible) influence of the post-war generation of composers, there is still, even today, a lingering sense of forbidden fruit about traditional form which, for me, far from seeming dry and dusty, has all the allure of a fresh orange, with plenty of juice still to be squeezed from it!⁹ As far as cultural pluralism is concerned, my project attempts (in its own peculiar way) to embrace it wholeheartedly (see section 3). The history of the sonata (which I will discuss as concisely as possible in the literature review) is one of constant change and adaptation: it is a form which has

⁷Susan McClary reads sonata form itself as a masculine-feminine hierarchy in which the dialectical overcoming of the ‘feminine’ second subject by the ‘masculine’ first subject’s key amounts to a form of masculinist propaganda (see McClary 2002, 53 – 79)

⁸ cf Thomas Adès’s intriguing comments (originally about Berlioz’s *Les Troyens*): “most people just hear...a recidivist neo-classic style, which is, of course, almost always very unfashionable.” (2012, 88)

⁹ Having grown up in their shadow, the quasi-Mosaic precepts and ‘Thou shalt nots’ of the Darmstadt era have often been a negative inspiration for the project!

altered its function radically through the generations, and even - as in Beethoven's case - with each opus. (Beethoven's 32 published works, unquestionably the most significant and most varied collection of works in the genre, are unique in their continuous, career-long sense of investigation and renewal, from one work to the next: a chain that leads logically and compellingly from his Op. 2 to Op. 111).¹⁰ Far from being a reactionary device, I would suggest that the essential history of the sonata reveals a form which adapts comfortably to whatever structural and expressive purpose composers may wish to impose upon it, and this malleability, through the radical fluctuations of history, style and expressive function, is surely what makes the form so interesting. The sonata literature would suggest that sonata form has one consistent (and not much discussed) property: it is perennially capable of adapting to new treatments, functioning as a repository for the complex network of cultural signifiers with which composers choose to communicate through it.

My aim, during this research, has been to compose a substantial number of single-movement piano sonatas and, in the process, to consider different approaches to sonata form whilst composing for my own instrument. The research is a convergence of different aspects of creative musicianship: compositional, manual and theoretical, and there is a diary-like character to the whole set of pieces, with a diversity of personal elements; literary, artistic, pastoral and seasonal references; landscapes, tributes and epitaphs, musical homages, portraits and biographies. Each of the 45 works, in this project, has a title and an initial source of inspiration, and each piece

¹⁰ In his characteristically polemical essay *Organic and Inorganic Form (Mi Contra Fa*, page 47), Sorabji compared these two pieces in order to inveigh against the "inorganic" academic notion of Sonata Form as an "abstract generalized" entity – a mould waiting to be filled with material: "But if there be any entity, any shape that can be isolated, such as sonata "form," what and where is it? That of the little F minor sonata opus 2 or opus 111? If *both* are - as they are – called Sonatas, talk about an abstract generalised sonata form is plain nonsense." (1947, 50.) More recently Scott Burnham has argued that Adolph Marx's original definition of Sonata Form (*Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, vol. III, 1845) was distorted by subsequent interpretation: "what many now regard as a formulaic recipe was, in its original statement, a dynamic understanding of sonata form, based on a recognition of the form's potential for the type of organic coherence then felt to be the benchmark of art in its highest manifestations. In a sadly typical historical metamorphosis, the schema Marx considered as an underlying construct later became a textbook recipe for constructing a form: the prototypical is mistaken for the literal. The fact that few works, if any, actually conform to the received textbook schema should thus come as no surprise, for Marx's model was not intended as a mould but rather as a dynamic pattern." (1989, 247-8.)

gathers a significant number of cultural references and musical topics as it progresses. Musical topoi are used, throughout the collection, to trigger a network of cultural references (see section 4.2). Beyond the material, there is a concern with the topic of form itself, since sonata is, in a sense, a form about a form. In all the submitted works, specific structural challenges are addressed, many pieces improvise with musical genre, mixing incompatible or surprising elements (surprise itself has been a topic of the creative journey, as the research has given rise to many unexpected musical results). Most of the sonatas have undergone several stages of revision, refinement and recomposition. Some sonatas have progressed in this way from relatively simple, improvisational sketches, to large and intricate forms. Discussions with supervisors, about formal and material constraints, have been a key component of the research, as the pieces have proliferated in number and complexity. The process of composing at the piano, trying out different versions and revisions at the instrument, and playing through the finished works, has been a reminder to me of how closely enmeshed are the composer and the pianist aspects of my own creativity. The physicality of the piano, the drama of pianistic experience, the effort of engaging with a large-scale form, the story-telling, the use of hands and feet to produce sonorities and colours, articulating the form so that the theatre of performance itself becomes part of the structure; all these things are components in my research.¹¹ The pianist Andràs Schiff has spoken movingly, in a recent lecture, about sonata form itself as an essentially theatrical conception:

Sonata form is, to me, one of mankind's greatest inventions, certainly in music. It's a wonderful way to express drama, different characters, different sonorities and contrasts: it's very, very dramatic and I don't think that anything similar has been invented in music. I hope that composers today don't think that sonata form is finished...¹²

¹¹ Recently, whilst coaching a student pianist playing the first movement of Schumann's Op. 11 piano sonata in F sharp minor, I noticed the extent to which my own understanding of the radical structure of that work was connected to the physicality of playing, the feel of the material under the fingers, the leaping arm movements, hand over hand effects, wild juxtapositions of dry and pedaled passagework etc. It may be possible to view the entire history of sonata composition in terms of the dialogue between physicality and form.

¹² Quoted from the podcast of Andràs Schiff: Wigmore Hall lecture-Recital on Beethoven Op. 10, no. 1. [https://wigmorehall.podbean.com/page/3/\(7:56\)](https://wigmorehall.podbean.com/page/3/(7:56)). (Accessed 5 Jan 2024).

2 Research Questions

1. How might a composer today interrogate the idea of sonata composition through a diversity of approaches to form, genre and material?
2. Sonatas of the past established a repertoire of compositional tropes, affects, and rhetorical figures known to contemporary musicology as 'topics'. Is it possible, in composing single-movement piano sonatas in the 21st century, to establish musical and pianistic signifiers that might be meaningful to listeners today?
3. Sonata Form is commonly associated with music of the past, and academic notions of standard practice using routine compositional devices. Is it possible to think the form afresh, to stretch it beyond normal bounds, whilst still retaining its essential properties?

3 Methodology

To indulge briefly in a kind of ‘exposition repeat’, I have outlined how this project began with a desire to undertake what might be described as an experimental form of composition-as-research with a very specific goal: to journey into a particular form (sonata form) and genre (the single-movement piano sonata which itself becomes the repository for numerous topics and genre categories);¹³ to subject it to all kinds of obstacles, treatments and filters, to test its limits and boundaries, to expose it to anti-sonata influences, to combine it with other forms and genres, and to see generally how far it was possible to push the idea of sonata and still, at the end of it all, somehow retain ‘sonataishness’ as a discernable idea at the heart of the investigation. This could be described as an ‘Oulipian investigation into invention through constraint’,¹⁴ with some similarity - in theory if not in practice – to Igor Stravinsky’s description in his *Poetics of Music*:

My freedom thus consists in my moving about within the narrow frame that I have assigned myself...my freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. (Stravinsky 1942, 65)

From this point of view, the word ‘research’, with its Bachian connotations of ‘Ricerca’ (‘to search out’) does not seem an inappropriate term. Bearing in mind the recent debate concerning the validity of composition-as-research between Croft (Croft 2015), Reeves (Reeves 2015) Pace (Pace 2015) etc. and of the broader discussion about Practice as Research, I am also keen to situate my own research in the context of compositional practice, which “when placed in historical, social and

¹³ Raymond Monelle observes that, “for literary theorists, genre means much more than merely formal category (its common meaning for musicians); a genre has clear superficial features or marks of identification and...is sufficiently conventional or rule-governed to enable us to say, for example, that a given work is a pastoral elegy or a Petrarchan love poem or a verse satire or a Plautine comedy or an encomium, and not another thing. Genre is governed by its own codes and rules and possesses its own lexicon.” (Monelle, 2000: 118). Monelle illustrates, through examples from Schumann, Tchaikovsky, Mahler and others, that instrumental music in the 19th century becomes so overwhelmed by the tension between genre and form that these works “deconstruct the factitious unity of Classical form, throwing lyric time and progressive time into collision.” (ibid, 126)

¹⁴ An observation by Julian Anderson during Doctoral Supervision, 26/06/2021.

cultural contexts, form a neo-narrative, a new story shaped through autobiography as a portrait-of-self that mirrors and situates their experience” (Nelson 2013, 126).

With an output of this size and variety, there is inevitably something of a challenge in knowing how best to “present and communicate the research enquiry in a coherent manner.”¹⁵ Since all 45 single-movement piano sonatas in the collection are part of the same ‘neo-narrative’ (see above) and, despite their diversity of style, character and scale, all of them are composed in (various forms of) sonata form, they collectively represent the research in all its heterogeneity. Consequently, I have made the somewhat unorthodox decision to include all 45 pieces in the submission in order to fully reveal the scope of the project, whilst avoiding any hint of a hierarchy of importance which, in research terms, does not exist. This is a composition project in which the scores are a commentary, in themselves, on the question ‘Sonata, what do you mean to me?’. The primary purpose of this methodological discussion is therefore to explain the extent to which the sonatas embody this research effectively. Viewed collectively, the sonatas represent a kind of ‘portrait-of-self’ and (simultaneously) an investigation into sonata as genre and as form. The 45 works, composed during this project, are found in Table 3-1 below.

Table 3-1 Complete List of all 45 works composed during this project

45 Sonatas
1. Boulez-Bowie Sonata (Notturmo Funebre in memoriam: January 2019)
2. Sonata Infernale: <i>Goodbye Ginger Baker</i>
3. Dungeness Sonata I: Toccata
4. Dungeness Sonata II: <i>Sound Mirrors</i>
5. Sonata in Phrygian Mode: <i>O Vis Aeternitatis</i> (after Hildegard of Bingen)
6. Sonata in F minor (<i>In Empfindsamer Stil</i>)
7. Sonata in A Minor (after Purcell): ‘ <i>Musick for a While</i> ’
8. Sonata Domestica (portraits and reflections)
9. Sonata in A flat: <i>2nd July 1798</i> (on Ancient Irish Airs)
10. Sonata Autumnale (a Brahmsian Rhapsody)
11. Sonata <i>Via Crucis</i>
12. Sonata for Left Hand I: <i>Neon, Glass and Ashes</i>
13. Sonata in B minor: <i>Laurence Crane in Folkestone</i>
14. Sonata in F minor (<i>on Christmas Eve</i>)

¹⁵ See Guildhall Doctoral Programme Handbook 2020/21, 27.

Table 3-1 continued

<p>15. Sonata Enigmatica I: <i>The Well-Shuffled Hand</i> 16. <i>Mystery Play</i> (a sonata in several scenes) 17. The Elements Sonata (2 versions: one for piano solo, the other with electronics) 18. Pastoral Sonata I: “<i>When Birds do sing</i>” (<i>Stour Valley, Summer</i>) (2 versions: one for piano solo, the other with electronics) 19. Pastoral Sonata II: <i>Summer Games</i> (homage to Castiglioni) 20. Pastoral Sonata III in A minor: <i>Puffball</i> 21. Sonata in B minor: <i>Didone Abbandonata</i> (homage to Morricone) 22. Sonata Palindromica 23. Sonata Sonata (homage to César Baldaccini) 24. Sonata Invernale in E minor: <i>Snowy Woods</i> 25. <i>Between the Acts: A Sonata Pageant</i> (homage to Virginia Woolf)</p>
<p>12 Venetian Sonatas:</p> <p>26. Venetian Sonata 1 - <i>Venice by Day</i> 27. Venetian Sonata 2: Sonata Barcarola I - <i>Venice by Night</i> 28. Venetian Sonata 3 (on 12 Fixed Tones): Sonata Barcarola II - <i>Rowing by Twilight</i> 29. Venetian Sonata 4: Sonata Barcarola III - <i>RW in Venice, 1883</i> 30. Venetian Sonata 5: <i>Voyage to San Michele</i> 31. Venetian Sonata 6 (homage to Daphne Du Maurier) 32. Venetian Sonata 7: <i>Imaginary film music for a Murder Mystery</i> (homage to A.C. and F.P.) 33. Venetian Sonata 8 in B flat minor: <i>Gnossienne/Gondola Lied/Lament</i> (Sonata [after Satie] Barcarola IV) 34. Venetian Sonata 9: <i>Su e Zo per i Ponti di Venezia</i> (homage to Scarlatti and Kate Bush) 35. Venetian Sonata 10: Sonata Barcarola V: <i>The Glassy Sea</i> 36. Venetian Sonata 11: <i>L'estro armónico</i> 37. Venetian Sonata 12: Sonata Barcarola VI: <i>...Unheeded Prophecies, Rising waters...</i></p>
<p>9 Satie Sonatas:</p> <p>38. Sonata in A minor (after Satie 1a and 1b)¹⁶ 39. Sonata-Notturmo in E flat minor: <i>...into the darkness...</i> (Sonata after Satie II) 40. Sonata in Stasis (Sonata after Satie III) <i>Gnossienne/Gondola Lied/Lament</i> (Sonata [after Satie] Barcarola IV)¹⁷ 41. Sonata in A minor: <i>Cocteau Chapel</i> (after Satie V) 42. Sonata Enigmatica II: <i>Statues in a Garden</i> (after Satie VI) 43. Sonata in F minor: <i>Mozart's Mirror</i> (after Satie VII) 44. Sonata for Left Hand II (after Satie VIII) 45. <i>Sonata of Games and Diversions...for a Dog</i> (after Satie IX)</p>

¹⁶ There are two different versions of this sonata

¹⁷ The 8th Venetian sonata is also the 4th sonata ‘after Satie’.

Because of the sheer volume of this collection, only fourteen of these pieces are discussed in this commentary (see section 5 below).¹⁸ In addition, I have included, in the appendix, some extracts from a composition diary, which I have kept during the project as a record of my work, along with revisions, conversations and general observations etc. on each piece. In a similar vein, I have videoed myself attempting to play many of the sonatas, and these video recordings are also a kind of archive of the ongoing research project. Examiners are under no obligation to view all of this material. Nevertheless, some awareness of the entire output is necessary to adequately illuminate the methodology, and a brief explanation here must suffice for the entire set of works.

Since sonata, as a form, is concerned fundamentally with the structuring of time, it seemed appropriate to me that my entire project ought to be (in a highly subjective, experiential sense) about structuring time. Thus, to quote Nelson again, the works themselves are a form of “autobiography as a portrait-of-self that mirrors and situates (my) experience” (2013, 126). The complete set of 45 sonatas is therefore a kind of diary in itself: some of the sonatas (18, 19, 10, 20, 24) are seasonal; some (1, 2, 21, 35, 39, 44) are memorials of people who have died; some (5, 8, 9, 19, 35) are about my family; some (11, 14, 16) are Christmas and Easter pieces; some (3, 25, 31, 32, 42) are responses to novels and films, some are responses to landscapes (3, 4, 13, 18, 20, 24, 26-37); some are responses to the Covid pandemic (7, 18, 39, 40); some reflect on current affairs (1, 7, 35, 37, 39, 40, 44); several of the sonatas record specific diary-like moments in time: sonata 4, for example, was written after visiting the monumental remains of 1930s acoustic mirrors at Denge in Kent;¹⁹ sonata 20 records a rather worrying encounter with a puffball mushroom; sonata 24, a morning run in snowy woods; sonata 26, the bells of Venice on a Sunday morning; sonata 30, a visit to Stravinsky’s tomb; sonata 33, on hearing the desultory news of Johnson’s election victory at 4 AM in a Venice hotel room; sonata 41, a visit to

¹⁸ As stated above (page 19), the scores are a commentary, in themselves, on the question ‘Sonata, what do you mean to me?’

¹⁹ Various concrete acoustic mirrors were built on the Kent coast in the 1930s as an experimental aircraft warning system. They were already obsolete by the beginning of World War 2. The most impressive site is an island complex at Denge, near Dungeness.

Cocteau's Chapelle de Saint Pierre de Pecheurs in Villefranche; sonata 45, a walk with our family dog... etc.

Simultaneously, these sonatas represent, as outlined above, an inquiry into form and (to use Stravinsky's terminology, quoted above) various 'obstacles', limitations, and a raft of different types of form and material have been brought to bear on the sonata concept: sonata form has consequently been amalgamated with numerous other kinds of form: passacaglia (1, 7, 25, 26, 36, 42); variation (5, 8, 26); binary (17, 20, 42); 4-movement form (10, 25); Lisztian tone poem (11, 29, 30); open form (15, 17); Baroque suite (25); novel form (25, 31, 32); biographical form (29, 30, 43); crushed/fragmented form (23, 25, 30); architectural form (30, 41), and theological narrative (11, 16). Sonata has also been subjected to all kinds of compositional constraint: palindrome/retrograde (2, 22, 41); mirror/inversion (4, 20, 25, 43); writing for left hand (12, 44); limitations of pitch and register (9, 12, 19, 28); composing with spoken poetry (3, 4); composing with Satiesque text above the staff (25, 26, 45); composing with the circle of 5ths (17, 20); composing with fixed pedal points (1, 11, 27, 28, 37); composing with continuous chromatic movement (11, 20) and composing with quoted musical material (1, 2, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 20, 23, 25, 29, 30, 32, 34, 36, 41, 42, 43, 44).

Pierre Boulez made an intriguing observation about form in his conversations with Rocco di Pietro (Boulez/di Pietro 2001, 37) in which he favoured an intuitive, 'accidental' approach as an 'organic' alternative to overly preconceived notions of form:²⁰

This kind of dialectic between a real form and a preconceived idea, when you are developing your musical ideas with the material, brings us back to what I called before "accepting the accident." You make room for this accident within the development of the work like a mutation – that I call organic...like a plant that a gardener has moved from one part of the garden so that its relationship to the light has changed. Well the plant will go to the sun. (Boulez/di Pietro 2001, 37.)

²⁰ The comments are made in the context of Boulez's criticism of preconceived notions of form in late Stockhausen and the "theocratic vision" of Schoenberg's late dodecaphonic music. (Boulez/di Pietro 2001, 37-38.)

Struck by this gardening analogy, I have been reminded of Boulez's comment, quite frequently during my project, because of the way in which certain pieces, or collections of pieces, have grown into shapes that I could never have predicted. Several sub-groups or constellations of sonatas have gradually emerged: for example, there are two Dungeness Sonatas, both influenced by the landscape of the Dungeness peninsula in Kent,²¹ by Derek Jarman's cottage and garden on the peninsula (see figure 3.1 below), and by his film *The Garden*, shot at Dungeness.

Figure 3.1 Prospect cottage in October 2020. John Donne's poem, The Sunne Rising is written on the black timber wall.



There are also three Pastoral sonatas, and two sonatas for left hand. However, two particular groups of sonatas are noteworthy for having developed into large collections: these are the 12 Venetian sonatas (inspired by a trip to Venice in December 2019) and the 9 sonatas 'after Satie'.

²¹ described so beautifully by Derek Jarman: "Beyond, at the sea's edge, are silhouetted a jumble of huts and fishing boats and a brick kutch, long abandoned, which has sunk like a pillbox at a crazy angle; in it, many years ago, the fishermen's nets were boiled in amber preservative. There are no walls or fences. My garden's boundaries are the horizon. In this desolate landscape the silence is only broken by the wind...gulls feed alongside fishermen digging lug. When winter storm blows up, cormorants skim the waves that roar along the Ness – throwing stones pell-mell along the steep bank." (Jarman 1991, 3)

It is quite hard to give a coherent explanation of exactly how the Venetian sonatas grew into a large sub-group, within the entire project, out of a mixture of different currents: spontaneous, diary-like responses to what Marina Abramović recently described as the “unbelievable, overwhelming beauty...almost too much...”²² and the fabulous and labyrinthine vistas of the old city inspired the character and form of all 9 pieces; the Italian Baroque, and Scarlatti’s association with Venice in the 1700s, impacted the material in sonatas 26 (the melody of which came to me during a boat ride along the grand canal), and sonatas 34 and 36. Another influence (on sonatas 26 and 31) was Daphne du Maurier’s evocative and disturbing short story *Don’t Look Now*²³ (Du Maurier 1971) and its magnificent film adaptation by Nicholas Roeg (1973), and the curious knowledge that these two versions of the story occurred (chronologically) either side of the burial of Stravinsky (1971) on the cemetery island of San Michele - a visit to which also inspired the entire journey-like form and quasi-biographical content of Sonata 30; these topics also connect to the city’s ancient association with mystery and mortality (see also sonatas 32 and 35) and Wagner’s death there in 1883 (which is the topic of sonata 29). The mysterious motion of water finds an echo in the lugubrious undulations of sonata 35, while the floods in St. Mark’s square (covered in raised duck-boards during our visit in December 2019) inspired the climate-change lament of sonata 37.

Eric Satie’s influence over a sonata project is no doubt surprising but, for me, Satie seemed an essential figure in suggesting a dialectical opposition to the traditional teleological conception of sonata form: a notion of form which is essentially anti-traditional, iconoclastic and anti-sonata: the circularity of the *Gymnopédies*, *Gnossiennes* and *Danses de Travers* (which influenced sonatas 4, 38, 39, 41, 42, 44); the stasis of his *Fils des Étoiles* (which influenced sonata 40); the simplicity and elegance of *Descriptions Automatiques* and *Sports et Divertissement* (which influenced sonatas 43 and 45); the reconstructivist parody of Clementi in Satie’s

²² Quoted from Marina Abramović’s remarks, in conversation with Lauren Laverne on *Desert Island Discs*, December 2023, BBC Radio 4. Accessed 4 January 2024: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001t2y4> (16:43)

²³ From her short story collection, *Not after Midnight, and Other Stories*.

Sonatine Bureaucratique (which impacted my sonata 43, with its references to various pieces of Mozart); and Satie's use of text as a commentary on form (which influenced my own written commentary on form in my sonatas 38 and 45).

Figure 3.1 is an attempt at a graphic overview of these different compositional currents: it is a hand-drawn map, showing how this sonata project is situated at the intersection of different topics, structures and cultural connections. The numbers on the map equate to the numbering of sonatas in the list above. So, for example, the season of Spring has the number 18 next to it because the 18th sonata is Pastoral Sonata I: composed during Lockdown, and inspired by the spring of 2020, with its extraordinary absence of aeroplanes, this piece is replete with birdcalls and other pastoral topics. This also explains why the same number also appears (along with other numbered sonatas) next to the ominous word 'Covid'.

Large categories are colour-coded and often contain sub-groups; these groups overlap Venn-diagram-style where different categories contain elements from other categories.

Figure 3.2 'Map of the Artist's Mind'²⁴



The map reminds me of a famous description in Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*: "As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it may fly open like the lock of a well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response, not to a single key or a single number, but to a combination of numbers" (Adorno 1973, 163). The 'constellations' shown above circle the concept 'Sonata Form', which lies at the centre of the map. Even though every sonata is, in a different sense, composed in sonata form and every category represents a different version of "what sonata means to me", presented in this way, they float ephemerally around a central concept which remains elusive, and beyond their capacity to unlock.²⁵

²⁴ The quotation comes from the artist-poet David Jones who created a *Chart of Sources for Arthurian Legends* (also known as *Map of Themes in the Artist's Mind*) in 1943. (Jones 1943)

²⁵ *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno's 'signature 'concept', are conventionally dialectical as "the mediation of opposites through their extremes" but with the significant difference that (unlike the Hegelian model) there is no significant reconciliation or 'sublation' and conceptual tensions simply remain: thus in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (2002) we find the (unresolved) tension of Myth vs Enlightenment and Mimesis vs Ratio. Later, in *Negative Dialectics*, (1990), a more fully formulated approach culminates in three 'models' which present a constellation of tensions relating to freedom, world spirit and natural history, and metaphysics - apparently Adorno was inspired, in his use of the

My own investigation into formal limitation and its effect upon freedom of invention has involved considerable documentation of the process of composition itself through the keeping of a detailed composition diary - in effect a diary of a diary, since the sonatas are themselves a form of diary (see page 21 above.) The composition diary (some extracts from which appear in the appendix, along with some sonnets that were written alongside the sonatas) archives the various stages of sonata composition from improvisational sketches to final score and informs much of the discussion in the commentary (section 5).

I have chosen fourteen sonatas for consideration in the commentary (section 5). In order to provide the “experiential truth” needed as a basis for “inquiry appropriate for the twenty first century and its music” (Lochhead 2016, 81) and to reveal that composition of sonatas is not ‘abstract music’ but is the work of a “human being, someone who thinks and feels and someone who struggles with the materiality of composition” (Dreyfus 2004, 188), all 14 pieces will be discussed, with appropriate autoethnographic details and reflections from the composition diary. Three representative works (sonatas 1, 15 and 25) have been selected (from the beginning, middle and end of my research journey) for detailed discussion (see sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3). Sonatas 5, 11 and 23 form the basis for more concise observation, focusing on very specific compositional challenges in these pieces (see section 5.4). Finally, the first five and the 12th Venetian sonatas are discussed (section 5.5) along with two of the ‘Homage to Satie’ sonatas (section 5.6). Here then is a list of all 14 sonatas to be discussed in detail in section 5:

Sonata 1. Boulez-Bowie Sonata

Sonata 15. Sonata Enigmatica: *The Well Shuffled Hand*

Sonata 25. *Between the Acts*: a Sonata Pageant

Sonata 5. Sonata in Phrygian Mode: *O Vis Aeternitatis* (after Hildegard of Bingen)

Sonata 11. Sonata Via Crucis

Sonata 23: Sonata Sonata

term ‘model’, by Schoenberg’s use of the 12 note row: a pattern of notes that can be presented in any number of permutations but without any ultimate version of the row. (Jameson 2007, 61)

Sonata 26. Venetian Sonata I: *Venice by Day*

Sonata 27. Venetian Sonata 2: Sonata Barcarola 1 - *Venice by Night*

Sonata 28. Venetian Sonata 3 (on 12 Fixed Tones): Sonata Barcarola II - *Rowing by Twilight*

Sonata 29. Venetian Sonata 4: Sonata Barcarola III - *RW in Venice, 1883*

Sonata 30. Venetian Sonata 5: *Voyage to San Michele*

Sonata 37. Venetian Sonata 12: Sonata Barcarola VI - *...Unheeded Prophecies, Rising waters...*

Sonata 38: Sonata in A minor (after Satie Ia)

Sonata 43: Sonata in F minor: *Mozart's Mirror* (after Satie VII)

4 Literature and Practice Review

4.1 Single-movement Sonatas

My decision to compose single-movement sonatas needs a little explanation in the context of the sonata literature. Musical architecture itself became a fundamental preoccupation in the eighteenth century as the sonata emerged as a form about form: a form in which structure itself is the primary topic. I have already mentioned Domenico Scarlatti, whose 555 keyboard sonatas (between 1719 and 1757) play an essential role in the development of keyboard music, and which have exerted an influence over my own project. Abounding in colourful harmonic and rhythmic gestures, unprecedentedly virtuosic and colouristic instrumental writing and witty and stylish manipulation of diverse musical topics of the period, most of Scarlatti's sonatas are composed as single-movement works in binary form,²⁶ the very limitations of the form, in two symmetrical halves, apparently serving as an inspiration to the composer, enabling him to exploit effects of repetition and symmetry/asymmetry as a means of structuring musical material.²⁷ In an email to Laurence Crane, I explained several reasons behind my decision to limit my sonata writing to single-movement pieces:

I wanted, for the sake of simplicity and concision as much as anything, to take the Scarlatti model of the single-movement piece. And I also liked the idea that you could choose to put them together if you wanted to and leave that combination of pieces to the performer's discretion, rather than imposing 4 movements on a performer... it's so big and somehow too loaded with the Grand Romantic heritage - I mean Beethoven and Brahms and Schumann could do that, and it was absolutely

²⁶ There has long been a tendency, until recently, to view the history of the sonata through the lens of the Austro-German tradition, and to consider Scarlatti, with his more 'colouristic' use of form, relying as it does on frequent use of dramatic and flamboyant juxtapositions, merely as 'an interesting historical figure' In fact these components are essential ingredients in his conception of form. (See Sutcliffe, 2003: 1-25.)

²⁷ John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* of 1949 follow Scarlatti's example in employing binary structures to structure material which, though colourful and rhythmically striking, is very unlike Scarlatti. In his 1959 *Lecture on Nothing* (1968, 109) Cage reflects on form within the lecture, structuring the text by employing the same kinds of numerical proportions employed in the *Sonatas and Interludes* (and other works of the period) and frequently and wittily commenting on progress through the form as it proceeds. My own *Sonata in A minor* (Sonata after Satie Ib) requires the pianist to read a commentary on the form in a not dissimilar manner.

fresh and exciting and radical when they did it, but it doesn't feel quite so fresh to me now, and it makes me think of Tippett and things - which is fine, but I don't really want to do anything so monumental... What appeals about Scarlatti is the scale and the playfulness, and the unpretentiousness of his approach... it's a journey into something, without being too pompous about it! I mean there is something potentially a little pompous about writing a sonata, isn't there... especially a four movement one?²⁸

Paradoxically, although Scarlatti influenced my 'playful' single-movement approach to the genre, he did not ultimately influence my choice of sonata form (binary form is occasionally detectable in my approach to recapitulation as a kind of recomposed symmetry in some of the sonatas).²⁹ This partial influence mirrors history itself to the extent that, whilst Scarlatti exerted considerable influence on the fabric of the subsequent classical style,³⁰ the genre itself moved in a new direction later in the 18th century, as predominantly Austro-German composers began to pioneer the development of sonata form, alongside a preference for works with 2 or 3 movements.³¹ In the 1790s, Beethoven announced his arrival as a composer of significance by composing (for the first time) 4 movements for each of the 3 works in his Op. 2 set, and four movement sonatas became standard in the 19th century. Meanwhile, the single-movement version of the genre disappeared altogether during the classical era, and only re-emerged (in a manner entirely unconnected with Scarlatti) in the wake of Liszt's B minor sonata of 1853, a work that essentially redefined, in the most spectacular manner, what a sonata could be in the mid-19th century. Later single-movement works include the late sonatas of Scriabin and Medtner, Berg's B minor sonata, Sorabji's first four sonatas and the third sonatas of both Szymanowski and Prokofiev. After 1945, the single-movement genre seems

²⁸ Email to Laurence Crane, 30 April 2020.

²⁹ Especially sonatas 17, 20 and 42.

³⁰ (see Sutcliffe, 2003: 1-25)

³¹ Single movement sonatas went out of fashion in the latter half of the 18th century, although Beethoven's Op. 27 (*Quasi una Fantasia* 1 & 2) attempt a single span by running the movements together continuously. In his penultimate sonata Op. 110, from 1821, Beethoven employs a more ambitious cyclical structure with three movements designed to be played without a break. Subsequently, single-movement sonatas only began to make a modest resurgence at the end of the Romantic period.

atomised, cut adrift from the sonata tradition in works as different as John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* (which do, in a sense, revive the Scarlattian formal conception but in a highly idiosyncratic way),³² the brutal 6th sonata of Galina Ustvolskaya and many of the 180 sonatas of the late John White.

I should explain my own pianistic relationship with the sonata literature, which is such an integral part of this composition project. Having played the piano for nearly 50 years, I have had the opportunity to interact first-hand with the instrument's remarkable literature, in which the sonata plays a central role. My knowledge of instrumental form was experiential long before it became theoretical. As a young musician I played through most of the sonatas of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert before later encounters with sonatas by Scarlatti, Clementi, Weber, Chopin, Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, Robert and Clara Schumann, Liszt, Brahms, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Medtner, Ives, Berg, Bartók, Prokofiev, Cage, Tippett, Ustvolskaya, Boulez, Radulescu, John White and others. In general, the diversity of approaches to the genre has always intrigued me, as has the apparently limitless range of musical style, expression and perspective to which sonata composition seems to give rise. My own somewhat expressionistic performance of Liszt's Sonata in B Minor in my undergraduate Finals recital³³ (described by Arnold Whittall as 'a virtual recomposition of the work'³⁴) was, for me, an encounter with a radical, almost volcanic vision of instrumental form, invented afresh in the 1850s in the most vivid way. Preparing it again in 2019, for a recital, I was struck afresh by the force, and modernity of Liszt's compositional thinking, both in terms of the physicality of the piano and the way in which elements of 4-movement and sonata form are synthesized with a kind of concealed Romantic narrative - an approach which has

³² See page 36 for further discussion on Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes*

³³ June 1989, Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, York. Already, at the end of my final year of undergraduate studies at the University of York, I was a member of two contemporary music ensembles, *Jane's Minstrels* and *Icebreaker*. The idea of composing anything as reactionary as a piano sonata would no doubt have seemed anathema within the progressive environment of the York Music Department of that period. However, even then, I was sufficiently steeped in the Western canon to admire the radical approaches to structure in masterpieces of the past.

³⁴ Quoted from Arnold Whittall's external examiner's report on my performance of Liszt's B minor Sonata in May 1989.

had a discernible influence on some of my own more experimental structures (e.g. Sonata Enigmatica: *The Well Shuffled Hand* (15) and *Between the Acts* (25): see commentary (5.2 and 5.3) below.

4.2 Sonatas and anti-sonatas

During Lockdown (the first year of my doctoral project) I decided to engage in a systematic parallel journey of practicing and playing through all 32 sonatas of Beethoven, whose influence on structural thinking, and even on pianistic idioms in my sonatas, is sometimes discernible. For example, Pastoral Sonata I (18) revisits Beethovenian pastoral topics and his wonderful proto-minimalistic use (both in his Pastoral Sonata Op. 28 and the Pastoral Symphony Op. 68) of anti-developmental, static harmonic areas; the Left Hand sonatas, *Neon, Glass and Ashes* (12) and Sonata Flottante (44) (this latter piece was premiered in a recital, at Hatchlands Park in 2022, on an 1822 Nanette Streicher fortepiano that Beethoven himself probably played) both employ a dream-like conception of sonata form, and both use continuous pedalled and half-pedalled textures “to produce a shimmering, softly blurred sonority” which ultimately derives from the famous first movement of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata with its famous “Si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatamente e senza sordini” instruction.³⁵ My various attempts over the years to decode the aleatoric and labyrinthine pathways in the score of Boulez’s 3rd sonata influenced my own very different ideas about open form in *The Well Shuffled Hand* (15) (see commentary [5.2] below) and, grappling with the abrasively radical, mosaic-like single movement of Tippett’s 2nd sonata goaded me towards more experimental, fragmentary approaches to the elements of sonata form in later pieces like *Mystery Play* (16), Sonata Palindromica (22) and *Between the Acts* (25); The opening movement of Radulescu’s 4th sonata with its quasi-traditional opposition of leaping, resonant material (first subject), and a bell-like presentation of a Romanian carol (2nd subject) also influenced similar antique-heterophonic textures

³⁵ “One must play this whole piece very delicately and without dampers” – the instruction in Italian over the score of Beethoven’s Sonata Op. 27 no. 2: *Quasi Una Fantasia*.

in Venetian Sonata 6: (homage to Daphne du Maurier) (31) and *Between the Acts* (25).

I have also been influenced by what I have previously referred to as the anti-sonata literature: during Lockdown, I played through all the piano music of Erik Satie, whose influence on genre, form, pianistic material and compositional thinking throughout the project (see sonatas 38 – 45) has been particularly significant (see commentary [5.6]). Static, bell-like sonorities in the beautiful and poetic piano works of Federico Mompou also had a discernible influence on the harmony and character of several of my sonatas, especially the Sonata in A flat: *2nd July 1798* (9), Sonata Via Crucis (11) and *The Well Shuffled Hand* (15). My presentations on Feldman's *Palais de Mari* and *Intermission 6* for open sessions and seminars at Guildhall, during this period, had a bearing on the material in my Sonata in F Minor (*on Christmas Eve*) (14), a piece composed as a joint homage to Feldman and Kurtág, whose aphoristic and wonderfully intense *Játékok* I have also studied and performed during this period. The relentless descending chromatic line of Lachenmann's *Hänschen Klein* from *Ein Kindespiel* influenced similarly deterministic approaches to chromatic descent (and ascent) in my Sonata via Crucis (11) and Pastoral sonata III: *Puffball* (20), and the cheerful, incantatory folk-style of Pastoral Sonata II: *Summer Games* (19) was influenced by the disarmingly diatonic but elusive piano writing in Niccolò Castiglioni's delightfully picturesque pastoral piano cycle, *Come lo Passo l'Estate*.

4.3 Sonata Form

So (at this development section area of this commentary) to sonata form itself, a topic at the heart of this project: the history of sonata composition has engaged with a diversity of forms (binary, ternary, rondo, variation, fugue, recitative and arioso etc.) but, as the 18th century progressed, a pre-eminent structure emerged, defined - much later on by influential 19th century theorists³⁶ - as sonata form: a structure

³⁶ The three key figures in developing a theoretical 19th century definition of the form were Antonin Reicha (*Traité de haute composition musicale*, vol. II, 1826), Adolph Marx (*Die Lehre von der musikalischen Komposition*, vol. III, 1845) and Carl Czerny (*School of Practical Composition*, 1848). It would appear that Marx was the first writer to use the term 'Sonatenform'. Significantly all three writers were closely connected with Beethoven and, in each case, their definitions of Sonata Form

which, in its exposition, sets up a dramatic and dialectical relationship between two groups of material in related keys, before entering more discursive developmental territory, leading normally to harmonic tensions which find resolution in recapitulation, sometimes (commonly with Beethoven and later composers) spilling over into an extended developmental coda,³⁷ and concluding in the home key. Handled with extraordinary variety and invention, this conceptual framework has been frequently employed for first movements, sometimes for slow movements, occasionally within scherzo structures, and regularly in finales (in which - in the classical tradition - it is often combined with rondo form). On rare occasions - for example Beethoven's Op. 26 sonata - composers took apparent delight in eschewing the form altogether, almost as evidence of its normal dominance and ubiquity. The history of sonata form evolved from a relatively straightforward use of related keys in the 18th century to more remote tertiary relationships, with broader structures, pioneered in the mature works of Beethoven and Schubert.³⁸ Leading composers of the next generation - Berlioz, Chopin, Schumann and Liszt - began to approach the form 'from outside', reimagining the interrelationship of parts, and framing the form in relation to literary or narrative elements, whilst Brahms's contribution, later in the century, though more conservative (and always avoiding a programmatic element), was no less original or imaginative (my own Sonata Autumale pays homage to Brahms – especially the extraordinary mid-phrase recapitulation in the first movement of his 4th Symphony). By the late 19th century, the Austro-German version of the form had become vast, multidimensional, and novel-like in the hands of Bruckner and Mahler. Austro-German composers in the Twentieth Century (e.g. the

occur within composition treatises, written as models for future creative practice rather than as analytical tools for understanding the music of the past (see Rosen 1988, 3-4). Reicha's view of Sonata Form was of an expanded binary structure, a view taken up by later analysts like Tovey. Beethoven himself spoke of the form, according to Barry Cooper's analysis of his sketches, using terms of his own: he called the exposition "first part", the development was *Durchführung* ("working out"), and for recapitulation he used the term *da capo*. He also used the term "second part" for the development and recapitulation together. (Cooper 1990, 99)

³⁷ For a detailed standard description see Rosen (1988, 1-2).

³⁸ Perhaps the problem with a generalised 'evolutionary' discussion like this is that it fails to take into account the immense variety of approaches. The most striking thing of all about Beethoven's 32 piano sonatas, in particular, is their astonishingly variety in terms of scale, character, structure, material and relationship of keys.

2nd Viennese School) continued to respond to sonata form from 'within' the tradition: Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony no. 1, Op. 9 is a striking example, distilling 4-movement form into a single sonata form structure, and Webern (e.g. the first movement of the Symphony Op. 21) and Berg (e.g. the first movement of the *Lyric Suite*) also handled the form with the confidence and ingenuity of composers schooled within Austro-German compositional practice. Early in the 20th century, the cultural association of sonata form with the Austro-German tradition meant that composers outside that tradition reacted against it different ways: Debussy preferred to develop new ways of organising his material, equivalent but distinct from sonata form, Janáček and Scriabin composed sonatas which reconceived the rhetorical framework of traditional sonata design, whilst Sibelius (who deliberately avoided using the term 'sonata') reshaped the structure and proportions in radical new ways³⁹ and Stravinsky, during his 'Russian period' chose to construct his most ambitious forms (e.g. *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, discussed in section 4.2) quite deliberately in opposition to 'Germanic' sonata structure.

In the inter-war years, with the general tendency towards a more 'objective' neo-classical approach among artworks of the period, sonata form continued to be employed in strikingly dissimilar ways by Ravel, Bartók, Schoenberg, Berg, Prokofiev⁴⁰ and even Stravinsky (in his piano sonata and more ambitiously in his Symphony in C). After World War II, it seemed imperative, at such a historic turning point, for many composers to attempt to redefine form afresh, along with the rest of compositional vocabulary. Messiaen stated, with his typically dogmatic subjectivity, "I feel these forms are 'finished'... it's impossible to write... an opening theme that says, 'I am the theme,' and that returns after the development affirming, 'Here I am

³⁹ During my project, I was fascinated by Sibelius's approach sonata form, which is both concise and (almost) concealed: for example, in the first movements of his 2nd and 4th symphonies. The famous merging of movements to create a new form in the 5th symphony influenced aspects of my own approach in *Mystery Play* (sonata 16).

⁴⁰ "In the field of instrumental or symphonic music, I want nothing better, nothing more flexible or complete than the sonata form, which contains everything necessary for my structural purpose." (Olin Downes, *Prokofiev Speaks*, The New York Times, Feb 2, 1930)

again, I'm the theme, do you recognize me?"⁴¹ (1986, 117) Boulez's Second Sonata of 1947-8 represents a remarkable case of an ambitious young composer of the period attempting (in the first movement) to dissolve the intervallic / motivic components on which a classical structure relies for its coherence. He was quite explicit about how he envisaged his second sonata, marking (for him) the end of the tradition:

After the Second Sonata I never again wrote with reference to a form belonging to the past. I have always found one that came with the idea of the work itself (Boulez, 1976, 42)

From precisely the same period, Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* of 1948 (already mentioned above) simply rejected the 19th century conception of sonata form altogether, returning to a notional (and aurally unrecognizable) Scarlattian pattern of binary structure (with two repeating halves)⁴² in order to assemble sonic material (both the 'micro' rhythmical elements as well as the 'macro' structural divisions), using the same numerical patterns on each level,⁴³ and conceived as a showcase for the exotic new percussive sonority of the prepared piano.

It seemed to me, when embarking on my own composition of single-movement piano sonatas, that the issues of 1948 are long past, and the quest for a post-war *tabula rasa*, eschewing traditional form, is itself part of history. All artistic forms are human constructs. Choosing to work within a long-established musical, poetic or artistic form, or alternatively to invent something entirely new, is (and always has

⁴¹ To some extent, French composers have always tended to have an ambiguous relationship to sonata form: is there a more eccentric sonata structure in the 19th century than the first movement of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*? Boulez's comment is of interest: "On the whole Berlioz's forms are utterly preposterous in comparison with a certain classicism, a certain obviousness of form... he clearly proves that there is no 'French tradition' – absolutely none." Boulez (1976, 18)

⁴² For a detailed critique of this notion of Scarlattian form as 'a fixed mould' see Sutcliffe, 2003: 320-324.

⁴³ Boulez, in his 1949 introduction to Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes*, expressed reservations about this hybrid of structural elements: "...the structure of these sonatas brings together a pre-classical structure and a rhythmic structure which belong to two entirely different worlds; this combination cannot possibly be imagined without recourse to an extra-musical dialectic, a breeding-ground for dangerous ambiguities." (Nattiez (Ed.) 1993, 31.) My own *Sonata Palindromica* mixes together Cagean number sequences, Messiaenesque symmetrical rhythmic structures and Bergian retrogrades to create a rather individual (and anti-Boulezian) blend of elements within a sonata form structure.

been) a matter of personal preference. Back in Mozart's time, a composer could elect to write either a sonata (strict form) or a fantasia (free quasi-improvisational form) or, as in Mozart's case, a combination of the two in his *Fantasia and Sonata in C minor* K.475 & K.457 (originally published together) or Beethoven's even more famous amalgam of strict and free elements in his *Quasi una Fantasia* sonatas.

The tendency, since the 1950s, has been for composers to choose to create their own forms, but it seems to me that the notion of formal (i.e. traditional) and less formal principles of organisation are no less feasible today than throughout history. The idea - commonly held after World War II - that traditional forms have ossified and become fossils of the common practice era, would appear to negate the continuous fecundity of instrumental composition, up to the present day, during which forms have evolved and adapted themselves very successfully to new purposes (Thomas Adès's *Piano Quintet* is a striking recent example of single-movement sonata form, complete with exposition repeat, being adapted to new purposes). If a composer chooses to work within the constraints of such a form, does it therefore follow that the resulting music is *per se* 'academic' in character, that clocks are being reversed, ghosts of a dead past summoned up, or new wine ill-advisedly decanted into old bottles? The very notion of musical form has a traditional association with a certain kind of 'formal' rhetoric: a manner of communication which can be understood to function within a certain framework. Late Modernism has made a strong case against such orthodoxies, and emphasised the importance of individual originality in this regard, thereby creating orthodoxies of its own. Nevertheless, composers today may, with validity, choose to be part of a continuum of creative thinking, finding new possibilities along well-trodden paths.⁴⁴ The tradition itself (e.g. C.P.E. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert etc.) would suggest that sonata form always eschews a respectful or fixed attitude (to do so is

⁴⁴ The attraction of a traditional mode of composition is also perhaps more appealing in our current era of political and cultural instability, in which iconoclastic attitudes towards concepts like democracy, international co-operation, and the liberal consensus have opened up disturbing fissures in our cultural landscape. (See Žižek and Harari (July 29 2022): <https://youtu.be/P0iJ00SXp0g?si=l4CuElpmRpBa2Bgb> (accessed Jan 28 2024)).

really against the tradition, it seems to me!) Composers have always taken the sonata idea in absolutely radical and surprising directions.

4.4 Notions of form and genre

During this project, I have read and reread much of the musicological literature on sonata form. Among the most relevant to my research, Rosen's propositions about aspects of pianism, especially pedalling, and the articulation of form in Beethoven (Rosen 2002) influenced my own ideas of articulating structure with varieties of pedalling and sonority; feminist theories about sonata structure in Susan McClary (2002) have helped me to reimagine the constituent elements of the form afresh,⁴⁵ and to seek out models which would enable me to reconceive sonata structure and meaning away from the frankly male-dominated and perspectives and perceptions of both traditional sonata repertoire and sonata analysis; these insights have been especially relevant to my compositional approach in sonatas which have been directly inspired by female novelists: Daphne du Maurier (Venetian Sonata VI), Isabel Colegate (Sonata Enigmatica II: *Statues in a Garden*), Agatha Christie (Venetian Sonata VII: *'Murder Mystery'*) and Virginia Woolf (*Between the Acts*). Hepokowski and Darcy (2006) helped to confirm my thinking about a freer, less rigid view of sonata structure, with their theories of defaults (more standard approaches to sonata form) and deformations (more unexpected approaches to classical form which deviate from standard practice). Their description of sonata form as "a constellation of normative and optional procedures that are flexible in their realization" (2006, 15) helped to confirm my own thinking about the supple interrelationship of formal procedures in these sonatas and the 'constellations' of ideas that surround them. This is not a philosophical submission, but certain specific ideas connected to negative dialectics and theoretical 'constellations' (see section 3 and figure 3.2) were

⁴⁵ I do not necessarily agree with all her conclusions, especially certain highly debatable interpretations of the operations of form in the classical literature, but any discussion about sonata form that brings a new perspective, and challenges the inherent conservatism of so much thinking and writing about classical music, is surely welcome, especially from a creative point of view.

also confirmed in my reading of Adorno (1973) and Jameson (2007).⁴⁶ In thinking about distinctions between sonata as genre and sonata as form, various texts on genre, especially Derrida's essay, *The Law of Genre* (1980, Vol 7. No 1)⁴⁷ provided an interesting theoretical framework for identifying and interrogating a paradox that lies at the heart of sonata composition which might be summarised thus: the genre of the sonata is/is not the form/content of the sonata (or varied configurations of that statement!) I also read and reread Cage's *Lecture on Nothing* (1999, 126): an elegant example of how form can comment on itself as it plots the passing of time within its own self-imposed, rhythmically structured ephemerality: a commentary that is, in a sense, a musical form.

4.5 Topic Theory

Emerging in the 17th century as a general term for instrumental composition, the word sonata derives from the Italian verb suonare ("to sound") as opposed to the cantata, deriving from the verb cantare ("to sing"). Intriguingly, Rousseau, in his *Dictionnaire* of 1768, complained about the contemporary proliferation of sonatas, *and the inability of instrumental music to match the expressive power of vocal music:*

Instrumental music can animate singing and add to its expression, but cannot take its place. To know what all this balderdash of sonatas with which we are overwhelmed means, it would be necessary to do as the unpolished painter who had to write under his figures: 'This is a tree, this is a man; this is a horse.' I shall never forget the witticism of the celebrated Fontenelle, who, finding himself worn out by this ceaseless instrumental music, cried aloud in a transport of impatience: *Sonata, what do you mean to me?*⁴⁸

⁴⁶ See footnote 20 about Negative Dialectics, page 22-23 (above). On the other hand, on a personal level, while fascinated by aspects of Adorno's writing, I should however make it clear that I am often repelled by Adorno's reading of musical history, and the ideological and cultural arrogance which so frequently obfuscate his musical judgements.

⁴⁷ Derrida's discussion here revolves around one of the many self-referential paradoxes that characterize his work: he argues that the tensions within the definition of genre – is form/type (*genos*) in some sense natural (*physis*), or governed by the lineage of nature's 'others' as culture/artifice (*technē*), proposition (thesis) or law (*nomos*)? – is replete with binary oppositions, and that writing about genre is itself generic: genre is a series of inherent tensions but, in analysing these, one is forced to engage in the same tensions at a metalevel. In order to discuss generic tensions, one needs to be beyond the limits of genre, and yet one is inextricably within the limits of genre: the genre of genre itself.

⁴⁸ Rousseau, *Dictionnaire de musique* (Paris, 1768, 452) 'Sonate:' . . . La Symphonie anime le Chant, & ajoûte a son expression, mais elle n'y supplée pas. Pour savoir ce que veulent dire tous ces fatras de

Rousseau's protest about the lack of explicit meaning in instrumental composition constitutes a direct challenge to any composer of instrumental music: without text, what is the point of it? What does it mean? Leonard Ratner, in his seminal book *Classic Music* (1980) begins with the statement, "expression was an ever-present concern in 18th-century musical thought and practice", and on the same page he mentions Rousseau's *Dictionnaire* as a 'subjective' example of enlightenment discourse on musical rhetoric and expression. Subsequently, Ratner's book presents "a full-scale explication of the stylistic premises of classic music" (1980, xiv) in which he argues that 18th century composers constructed their instrumental works using an array of musical signifiers or topics, which form a "repository of stylistic knowledge shared by composers and listeners." (2014, 1) In a sense, therefore, the answer to Rousseau's (or Fontenelle's) famous question about meaning is partly to be found (according to Ratner) within this substantial repository of signifiers or topics.⁴⁹

This is a compositional project of some complexity. Whilst it is framed in rather austere terms as being about a single instrument and a single form, it turns out that it is simultaneously about both compositional and even cultural plurality. The musical works, emerging from this research are perhaps best understood as a diary-like engagement with musical symbols, cultural signifiers, allusions and illusions, as well as historical and stylistic tropes of various kinds. Consequently, topic theory has become an essential compositional tool in the writing of these sonatas (see page 42 below).

Sonates dont on est accablé, il faudroit faire comme ce Peintre grossier qui étoit obligé d'ecrire au dessous de ses figures; c'est un arbre, c'est un homme, c'est un cheval. Je n'oublierai jamais la saillie du célèbre Fontenelle, qui se trouvant excédé de ces éternelles Symphonies, s'écria tout haut dans un transport d'impatience; Sonate, que me veux-tu?" English translation from Jerold 2003, 151.

⁴⁹ Since the publication of *Classic Music*, more than forty years ago, there has been much debate about Ratner's terminology, but ideas proposed in *Classic Music* have gained considerable traction, developing, subsequently into a distinct field of contemporary musicology. Topic theory has become not only an important analytical means of understanding musical semiotics, but as a potential creative tool which composers can utilise within their own practice today.

Much of the discussion within the existing topic theory literature focuses on works of the 18th century.⁵⁰ Leonard Ratner's *Classic Music* (already discussed above) outlined the theory as a way of examining the "thesaurus of characteristic figures" (1980, 9) which constitute the rhetorical tools of 18th Century musical style. Ratner's categories⁵¹ have been expanded upon by other scholars, most notably Wye Allanbrook, Elaine Sisman, Kofi Agawu, Robert Hatten and Raymond Monelle.

In her introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, Danuta Mirka proposes that topics may be thought of as "musical styles or genres taken out of their proper context and used in another one" (2014, 3) and, in his book *Playing with Signs*, Kofi Agawu has a more technical explanation:

Topics are musical signs. They consist of a signifier (a certain disposition of musical dimensions) and a signified (a conventional stylistic unit, often but not always referential in quality). (1991, 49)

In her book *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, Wye Allanbrook has explained the significance of musical *topoi* in the vocabulary of any composer who seeks to engage, in some sense, with what might be described as the world beyond, through the act of composition:

The accumulation of a collection of *topoi* for expressive discourse is the natural concomitant of an aesthetic which sets as its goal the mirroring of aspects of the universe. Each branch of the arts will develop a storehouse of devices appropriate to its own medium whereby those universals can be represented – or imitated. (1983, 4)

In his *Music as Discourse*, Kofi Agawu has remarked on the primary challenge facing any analyst of music, 'from the point of view of topical content':

⁵⁰ Although *Musical Semiotics: A Network of Significations* (Esti Scheinberg (ed), 2016) broadens the discussion to include Bartók, Stravinsky, Xenakis and John Adams.

⁵¹ Ratner divided the primary topics into two main groups, defined as 'types' and 'styles' with the first group representative of functional types of music (primarily dances and marches) and the second containing broader stylistic categories such as military, pastoral, hunting or Turkish style. Ratner admitted that the two groups were interchangeable. He outlined a third group of musical topics under the category of 'word painting', in which musical shapes or patterns respond mimetically to text.

One needs access to a prior universe made up of commonplaces of style known to composers and their audiences. Topics are recognised on the basis of prior acquaintance. (2009, 43)

Agawu applies aspects of his semiological method to his discussion on Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, a work which has had a significant influence on my own thinking about form (see *Sonata Enigmatica: The Well Shuffled Hand*; Venetian Sonata 5: *Voyage to San Michele*; Sonata Sonata and *Between the Acts*, all discussed in detail in section 5). Agawu, in a comparative discussion about the use of topics in late Beethoven and Stravinsky, proposes a different understanding of Stravinsky's *Symphonies*, in contradistinction to the common view that it is "aloof, cold, and dry, and famously marked by discontinuity,"⁵² (2009, 302) and he ends his discussion by suggesting that elements of continuity and discontinuity, in late Beethoven and Stravinsky, are seen to be held in balance in both cases.⁵³ (2009, 312)

In *The Musical Topic* (2006) Raymond Monelle has suggested that some very old musical topics, dating back several hundred years, remain relevant to contemporary composers:

It seems clear that an understanding of topics is necessary in interpreting classical music. Indeed, such an understanding may be important for a much wider range of music, including Romantic and modern repertoires... Some topics are to be found throughout our culture, from the sixteenth century through the twenty-first; I have elsewhere described the topic of the *pianto*, the falling minor second that signifies weeping, which began its life in Italian madrigals and can still be found today in a piece like Kurtág's *Stele*. (2006, 4)

Monelle gives various examples of 20th century composers making use of traditional pastoral, hunt and military topics, including Debussy, Vaughan Williams, Henze,

⁵² Agawu surveys the score of Stravinsky's *Symphonies* in terms of musical topics and observes that "the (opening) bell motive and chorale serve as anchors; they occur periodically throughout the movement. Although they are subject to recomposition, they mostly preserve their essential form." (2009, 310) Agawu contrasts this with other more fluid topics in the score: Russian folk song, pastorale, scherzo, and dance elements (2009, 310).

⁵³ He proposes further that, "an aesthetic based on the intentional violation of convention, for example is just as amenable to a discourse reading as one marked by the creative enactment of such convention... the idea that Stravinsky stands as a (poetic) repetition of Beethoven is not as outlandish as it might have seemed at first" (2009, 315).

Ligeti and James Macmillan, and proposes the question, ‘what topics may be found in the music of the twenty-first century?’ (2006, 273) More recently Thomas Johnson has explained the challenges which analysts have faced in approaching music beyond the Classical era with its relatively stable collection of sign-functions:

The diversity of approaches, stemming partially from the rise of subjectivity over affectivity during the Romantic era, provide useful, if relatively ad hoc modes of interpretation. Moving to the myriad compositional practices of the twentieth century makes identifying genres and proper settings - and thus topics, per Mirka’s definition - much trickier. (Johnson 2017, 2)

My tentative answer to these challenges, and to Monelle’s question above - as articulated in the current sequence of single-movement piano sonatas - might be as follows: musical topics in the 21st century can certainly connect to a plethora of musical and extra-musical possibilities and stylistic references,⁵⁴ possibly more than ever before, simply because of the huge diversity of musical and cultural material with which we are now surrounded in the era of mechanical reproduction, digital media etc. In my own sonatas, topic theory functions as a creative tool: I employ (deliberately) ‘semiotic objects’ in order to produce a breadth of stylistic tropes, cultural signifiers and interconnected symbolic elements. These function broadly within Ratner’s three classes, with some pieces containing dance rhythms (both ancient and modern), some pieces referring to specific musical genres, such as passacaglia, toccata, canon, fugato, siciliano, gigue, barcarolle, gymnopédie, gnossienne, funeral march, and a third ‘mimetic’ category, which imitates elements of popular song, bell-ringing, birdsong, natural and mechanical sounds, and an intricate mixture of musical references to a raft of musical idioms and styles from the 1100s⁵⁵ to the present day (see broader discussion of these elements in section 5).

⁵⁴ “Being aural sign-systems that develop in time, musical works are by their very nature interconnected with other systems: dramatic, political and social narratives, historical contexts and rhetorical devices. Ignoring that music semiotics is based on intermodality necessarily misleads music interpretation... Musicians writing about music need to be acquainted not only with literature, mythology, poetry, art and history, which so often are an inseparable part of a musical work, but also with a quite expansive array of philosophical, theological, psychological, linguistic and sociological studies.” (Esti Scheinberg 2012, 4).

⁵⁵ My Sonata in Phrygian Mode, ‘*O Vis Aeternitatis*’ (after Hildegard of Bingen).

Among the sonatas in this submission, certain connecting musical topics recur in different works. For example, Boulez-Bowie Sonata and Venetian Sonata I both contain elements of passacaglia, the former in the context of a kind of funeral march which mixes thinly veiled allusions to music by both Pierre Boulez and David Bowie, the latter in a tribute to Venice, referring to the Italian Baroque, to the city's historical associations with triumph, memory, and death, and to its unique soundscape of bells and water. In my 29th and 30th sonatas (*RW in Venice 1883* and *Voyage to San Michele* [see 5.5.4 and 5.5.5]), an array of Wagnerian and Stravinskian topics are used in both works respectively, to evoke very different kinds of dreamlike chronology. In Sonata in A minor (Homage to Satie Ia), as well as other works in the Satie collection, textural, harmonic and melodic patterns, reminiscent of Satie's piano works, are frequently employed to create a sonic environment of symmetrical correspondence, dialogue, echoing and memory, and these gestures are also discernible in other pieces in the collection.⁵⁶ A more detailed discussion of these sonatas, and the use of topics within the fabric of their composition, can be found in the commentary below (section 5).

⁵⁶ Dungeness Sonata II (see Appendix) also employs topics derived from Satie. The entire sonata is built out of mirrored material (the piece contains a mirror canon representing circling gulls, watery retrograde textures and the intimation of distant aircraft in trilling gestures reminiscent of Schubert's final sonata D 960) in order to symbolise the mysterious landscape, with its monolithic remains of acoustic mirrors, at Denge, near Dungeness in Kent.

5 Sonata Commentary

A written commentary presents a challenge: all composers experience the compositional process from an essentially subjective standpoint: for me, much of the decision-making during any compositional process is intuitive and ‘in the moment’ with the sonic material itself. The written language employed to describe the compositional journey is very different from the thought processes that are in operation during the conception of the music. Words describe processes which, in the actual composition of a piece, are undertaken without words. The process of describing the process in this way is really a translation from one mode of thought to another: an attempt at an objective (verbal) account of a primarily subjective (non-verbal) form of creative action. As stated above, the sonatas themselves embody the key aspects of my research and are, in themselves, a commentary on form and content from a number of different perspectives. This written commentary will clarify, in more detail, how this research is embodied in fourteen selected pieces (discussed in 5.1 – 5.6) documenting my compositional approach from a number of angles, with some autoethnographic elements,⁵⁷ and observing, from within the process, the development of my own work, both as composer and pianist.

I have selected three sonatas for more detailed discussion, from the beginning, middle and end of my doctoral research: the first, Boulez-Bowie Sonata, confronts the challenge of how to coherently memorialise two entirely different and broadly incompatible artists and musical styles and genres within a sonata form structure. The second, Sonata Enigmatica: *The Well Shuffled Hand*, presented me with the compositional conundrum of how to reconceive sonata form itself as an open form, thereby emancipating colourful, highly contrasted types of material (replete with musical signs and allusions) from fixed positions in the structure, and enabling them to occur in different configurations, according to the choice of the performer, but in such a way that traditional notions of coherence, meaning, memory, and a vestige of

⁵⁷ See Nelson (2013, 86 – 92).

sonata form itself, remain discernible.⁵⁸ The third, *Between the Acts*, the final sonata of the entire set, presented some unique compositional challenges in terms of the complex interplay of forms in the work, whilst simultaneously responding (with an array of topics) to a potted history of music, and multiple references to the text and narrative of Virginia Woolf's final novel.

I have chosen three more sonatas (5, 11 and 23) for more concise discussion in section 5.4. Section 5.5 considers the topical content and autoethnographic context of six of the Venetian sonatas. 5.6 concludes this section with concise accounts of two of the sonatas 'after Satie.'

5.1 Boulez-Bowie Sonata (sonata 1)⁵⁹

January 2016 began with the deaths of two enormously prominent musicians with oddly similar surnames, from very different spheres, who appear to have been largely unaware of, or indifferent to, each other's work:⁶⁰ Pierre Boulez, who died on 5th January, aged 90, and David Bowie, who died on 10th January, aged 69. In terms of significance and influence both had few rivals within their chosen arenas in the second half of the 20th century. Each career was defined by a very different kind of

⁵⁸ In stark contrast to Boulez's Third Piano Sonata (to which *The Well Shuffled Hand* is a kind of response) where all trace of traditional form is erased c.f. Boulez's statement about the Second Sonata quoted on page 9 (Boulez 1976, 42). See broader discussion in 5.3.

⁵⁹ A video recording of Boulez-Bowie Sonata may be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/idGCNTFigWA?si=MMMFZpjwk8AHjVKx>

⁶⁰ Boulez's collaboration with Frank Zappa, conducting the Ensemble InterContemporain on three tracks, for the album *The Perfect Stranger* in 1984, was a demonstration that he was not entirely indifferent to creative musicians outside his own sphere. In an interview with Rocco di Pietro, Boulez said, "I don't want to be snobbish or snooty simply because I don't belong to the pop world! I think that would be completely stupid and short-sighted. I like the vitality of these people. I like very much that some of them who are the most gifted make these efforts to have a vocabulary, which is more interesting and sophisticated than the vocabulary that they use generally. Zappa was very much aware of that... I prefer people who have vitality and who have the possibility of going above themselves; that, at least, is potential – people who are transgressing their limits. I like people who are transgressing their limits, in any case, and who have the desire to transgress." (Di Pietro 2001, 40 - 41). Bowie was indeed an example of someone transgressing limits, particularly with his more experimental work in the late 1970s, influenced by American minimalism, and he was in turn admired by Steve Reich and Philip Glass, so much so by the latter that he composed two symphonies incorporating material from Bowie's albums *Low* and *Heroes* respectively.

visionary quality and a fearless quest for the new. Both, though international in outlook, had cast a unique shadow over British cultural life, especially in the 1970s.

I had been aware of David Bowie since early childhood: one of my earliest memories is of my older sister, in 1973, festooning the walls of her bedroom, rather provocatively, with posters of Ziggy Stardust and Aladdin Sane. Songs from *Hunky Dory* and *Station to Station* seemed to form a sonic backdrop to the period. The sense of adventure and otherness appeared to deepen in later albums like *Low* and *Scary Monsters*, which also made a vivid impression at the end of the decade. By contrast I first became fully aware of Pierre Boulez with the Proms broadcast of *Répons* in 1982, when exotic arpeggios of pitched percussion and electronic sounds seemed - even through the radio - to open a window onto new vistas of sound. Boulez's impregnable musicianship, the glittering modernity of his music, his unpretentious command of orchestras, the broadcasts of his radical Ring Cycle production with Patrice Chéreau, and his often fiercely doctrinaire written pronouncements, compounded by the paradoxical charm of his actual appearance and speech; these things were sources of fascination to the developing musician I then was.⁶¹

In attempting (perhaps vainly) to distil some sense of equivalence between Boulez and Bowie in the above paragraphs, I realise that my own response to this strange juxtaposition of deaths wasn't measured or rational in this kind of way. It was primarily an emotional response to the sense of loss, the passing away of god-like figures of my youth, who seemed, in their markedly different ways, to represent key elements of the post-war world. Other aspects of that world seemed on the wane in 2016 with the cultural backlash inherent in the alarming growth of nationalist populism, abetted by new digital media, narrowly tipping both the Brexit vote in June and Donald Trump's election victory in November of that year. These different manifestations of turbulence, darkness and loss, compounded by the death of my own father early in 2017, all affected the way I viewed the period, and no doubt

⁶¹ Boulez continues to exert a significant, and both a positive and negative influence (to a virtually equal extent) on this entire project (see footnote 67).

influenced the lugubrious character of the music I subsequently composed, as my composition diary in January 2020 makes explicit:

What is being lamented in this very dark piece? certainly the people referred to, but also the passing of a world. Subsequent events in 2016 are also part of the lament.⁶²

However, since it is part of my intention here to reflect on process, and the actual experience of composing, it's important to note that my own mood, whilst writing this music, was reasonably buoyant, and the handling of musical material, including the combining of Boulezian and Bowiesque elements, could be described as playful, even subversive, despite the serious character of the resulting music. My composition diary reflects further on the origins of this sonata:

The idea of the sonata actually came to me at 3 AM on November 2nd 2019 – after group supervision with JA, LC and RH⁶³ (a very energised session in which I played exposition of Ginger and then whole of MR⁶⁴ was played and discussed in detail). At 3 AM the following morning I woke up and wrote down the idea for a piece, “January 2016 – 1st subject references Boulez’ *Rituel* with monadic RH, LH tapping, 2nd subject references *Life on Mars*. Nostalgic character.”⁶⁵

The sonata (opens with a theme of 12 notes, referencing (somewhat mischievously) the opening monody for oboe, accompanied by tabla (see figure 5.1) from Boulez’s *Rituel*, which was also composed as a memorial piece.⁶⁶ Boulez’s 14-note incantatory

⁶² Extract from Matthew King’s Composition Diary (2019 – 2024).

⁶³ Julian Anderson, Laurence Crane and Rolf Hind.

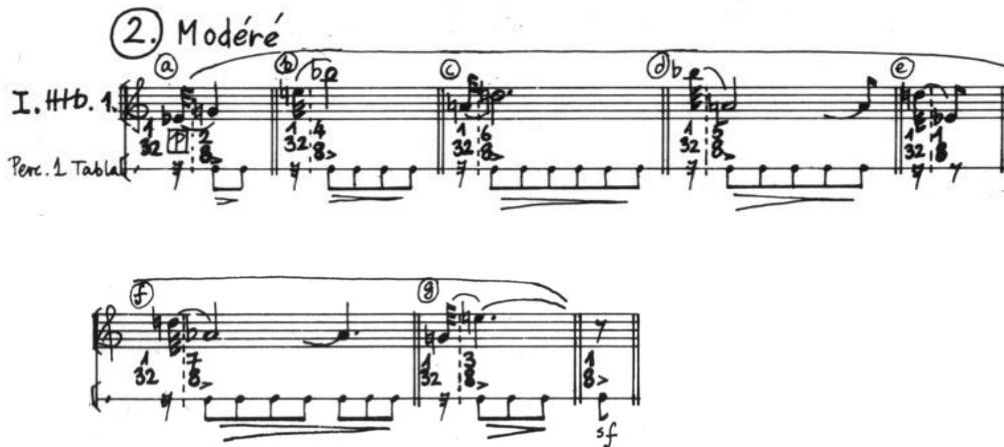
⁶⁴ ‘Ginger’ refers to Sonata Infernale: *Goodbye Ginger Baker*. ‘MR’ stands for ‘Mountainous Regions’, my working title for Venetian Sonata 6 (homage to Daphne du Maurier).

⁶⁵ Extract from Matthew King’s Composition Diary (2019 – 2024).

⁶⁶ *Rituel* also seems to be a memorial work on several levels: the work was composed following the death of Bruno Maderna who, like Boulez, was a composer-conductor and a central figure in the Darmstadt milieu of the 1950s. As Paul Griffith has pointed out, the work “seems to throw a wreath over the whole enterprise of the 1950s and 1960s”. (2002, 217) The seven note row, with its emphasis of the note E flat – or Es in German - was originally conceived in 1971-72 by Boulez as a memorial for Stravinsky, and was used subsequently in several major works including *Rituel* (1975), *Memoriale* (1985) and *...explosante-fixe...* (1971-1993). Boulez himself acknowledged another connection with Stravinsky, in an interview with Rossana Dalmonte, “Because I was working at the same time on *...explosante-fixe...* and *Rituel*, the two works have parallels. The first idea was taken from Stravinsky’s *Symphonies for Wind Instruments*, in which there is a clarinet call in the high register, and then those chords - a long one followed by a short one - always the same.” (Boulez 2004, 399). I recall hearing Boulez discuss this same gesture in Stravinsky’s *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*

theme is made out of a 7-note row (essentially consisting of 3 shuffled tritones and an extra note G) reconfigured in a sequence of 2-note motifs, with each pair of notes presenting a different interval.

Figure 5.1 Extract from the original 1975 score of Boulez's *Rituel in memoriam Maderna*: the duo for oboe and tabla on the first page



In Boulez's theme, five of the notes are repeated, the D is heard three times and the A flat only once. Each long note has a different duration (between one and seven beats) tapped out on the tabla. In my sonata, the theme consists of an arching phrase of twelve notes in six short / long pairs, each with a different interval. The phrase contains ten pitches with E at the beginning and end, and a third E at the apex of the phrase, two octaves higher (see figure 5.2). The left hand, like Boulez's tabla, marks out different durations, in the sequence 4, 6, 2, 5, 3, 7.

(itself written as a memorial piece on the death of Debussy in 1918) in a pre-concert talk before a performance of both *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and *Rituel* in the 1980s, in which (to paraphrase his remarks) he suggested that Stravinsky's long/short reiteration of the chorale chord seemed like a symbol of death, with the long note representing life and the short note death. Strikingly, *Rituel* begins and ends with this gesture on the note E flat, and is replete with rhythmic units made up of short and long elements.

Figure 5.2 Extract from Boulez-Bowie Sonata: opening theme of 12 notes over tolling bass A naturals in left hand

The musical score is titled "Moderato e funereo" and is marked "pp" (pianissimo). It consists of two systems of music. The first system shows the opening theme, with a bass line featuring a tolling A natural (8vb) and a melodic line in the right hand. The second system starts at measure 8 and continues the melodic and bass lines. The bass line is marked "sim." (sostenuto).

However, despite notational similarities, the sonic character is very different. The repeating A at the bottom of the piano has a tolling effect, grounding the music over a drone-like bass note, the melodic line rising and falling above it in a stately processional manner, reminiscent of a funeral cortege. Although the melodic line is angular and incantatory in character, there are tonal implications of changing harmonies over a pedal point and even a suggestion of resolution in A major (tierce de Picardie) at the end of the phrase. My sense that Boulez would not have approved of the effect was, frankly, part of the fun of writing it.⁶⁷ Figure 5.3 shows a harmonic reduction of the opening 12 bars into a smooth chorale-like progression over a pedal point. This is a collision of topics: the incantatory melody suggests (as in Boulez' original oboe) the voice of the individual, as if speaking for the community (and this is the effect it makes on first appearance, when the pedalling is more

⁶⁷ Whilst acknowledging Boulez's many gifts, and his spectacular musicianship (see comments above) I am not alone in having being repelled by his frequently dogmatic pronouncements. These contributed to some of the most rigid and egregious 20th century orthodoxies, resulting in the exclusion of many talented composers from performance. His apparent inability to distinguish personal taste from ideology resulted in the brusque and absurd dismissal of some composers of the past (e.g. Verdi, Tchaikovsky), an unbending refusal to acknowledge certain contemporaries (e.g. Shostakovich or Dutilleux) and the cherry-picking of specific works by favoured composers like Stravinsky, Ravel or Messiaen, only when their music happened to align with his historicist notions of what music should be.

chromatic lament, with accelerating descent, and sonata form transition: material on its way to somewhere else.⁶⁸

Figure 5.4 Harmonic reduction of bars 13-25

The arrival point of this descent is the second subject (bar 26). Here, chords pulse, cross-rhythmically in swung rhythm with tolling bass pedal note B alternating with C.⁶⁹ Remarkably, two days before he died, Bowie had released his extraordinary final album *Blackstar* on 8th January 2016 (his 69th birthday) and the haunting title track also has a similar bass line alternating B and C.⁷⁰ The harmony of my second subject (like *Blackstar*) is modally orientated towards a B Phrygian cadence⁷¹ with a major and minor third.⁷²

⁶⁸ A first subject over a pedal note, followed by a descent, through the circle of fifths into the second subject is a very similar procedure (but very different character) to that in Beethoven's *Pastoral* Sonata Op. 28, which was apparently also the model (see Adès 2012, 50) for Thomas Adès *Piano Quintet*, also written as a (considerably more elaborate) single movement sonata form structure.

⁶⁹ Coincidentally, in the light of Ratner's comment above, I noticed, after composing it, that my use of the opening pedal point on tonic A functions (as he describes) in the context of 'statement' while the second pedal on (dominant of dominant) B 'builds cadential drive', essentially towards an imperfect Phrygian cadence.

⁷⁰ My original note at 3 AM on November 3rd 2019 (see above) had instructed that the second subject refer to Bowie's famous 1971 sci-fi ballad, *Life on Mars* but in fact this material is derived from the song *Black Star* from his final album.

⁷¹ coincidentally the same Phrygian cadence that constitutes the mysterious Adagio of Bach's third Brandenburg Concerto

⁷² or perhaps, more accurately, E harmonic / natural minor but located on a dominant pedal.

Figure 5.5 Mode of the second subject (and Bowie's *Blackstar*)



In my composition diary, I wrote the following in January 2020:

When the pulse hits the low B the 2nd theme begins, based on a continuous dominant (of E minor) scale (like Bowie's *Blackstar*) so the 1st theme is on A, the 2nd on B, the (dominant of dominant minor) but never resolving to E.⁷³

Blackstar's mysterious opening (played by a group of jazz musicians Bowie had met not long before in Greenwich village)⁷⁴ is in the same B Phrygian dominant modality (see 5.5), also with a major and minor third, and has a similar descent, and emphasis of the 7th (the note A).⁷⁵

My second subject is underpinned (like the first) by six pulsing patterns in the left hand. The tolling character is ubiquitous but now with a more measured tread (still broken up occasionally by the little Boulezian semiquaver glitches). The prevailing lugubrious Phrygian dominant harmony combines with lament-style (*passus duriusculus*)⁷⁶ falling lines, and various false relations. The exposition therefore

⁷³ Extract from Matthew King's Composition Diary (2019 – 2024).

⁷⁴ See Jim Farber 2016: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/oct/04/donny-mccaslin-david-bowie-blackstar-interview>

⁷⁵ Leah Kardos (whilst questioning the mythology of "ideas of lateness and greatness" and its associations with "a grievous kind of erasure: history's 'greatest' and most venerated geniuses are overwhelmingly white and male") has proposed that Bowie's final albums (especially *Blackstar*) can be framed within the notion of 'late style' as originally outlined in Adorno's discussion of late Beethoven (Adorno 1998, 123) in which, "no longer capable of bearing the intentions and expressive urges of subjectivity, harmony takes on "something mask-like or husk-like." Edward Said's final book, *On Late Style* develops this idea of late style as "a moment when the artist who is fully in command of his medium nevertheless abandons communication with the established social order of which he is a part and achieves a contradictory, alienated relationship with it." (Said 2006, 78) Kardos argues, in the context of the strange unresolved tensions in Bowie's late works, that they are "characterised by a complex, contrary and questioning spirit, more agitated and restless than serene or reconciliatory, going against what one might expect from artists of advancing age." (Kardos 2022, 3)

⁷⁶ The *passus duriusculus* (which might best be translated "difficult passage") describes a downward progression of semitones from tonic to dominant (i.e. a chromatically descending perfect fourth) and is therefore one of the most outstanding lament topics in musical history. Prominent examples occur in Purcell's *Dido's Lament*, Bach's *Crucifixus* from the *B minor Mass*, the lamenting coda of the first

establishes 'serious' musical topics: heavy treading bass evocative of the Baroque chaconne,⁷⁷ tolling pedal notes establishing the structural character, and borrowed material from Boulez and Bowie, absorbed into the continuous processional style of a funeral march, redolent of lament and descent, with rhythmic regularity broken up by semiquaver anacruses and varied metrical elements.

Some of my sonatas contain exposition repeats, and I have attempted to find different solutions to the problem of how structural repetition can function effectively, emphasizing, clarifying and varying thematic material so that the device doesn't become over-literal or boring. In this case, variation is in the hands (and feet) of the performer: the first time employing restrained dynamics and relatively dry sonority; the second time, increasing dynamic range, and replacing *una corda* with more sustaining pedal, creating a more resonant (and consequently more harmonic) effect. In this sonata, application of sustaining pedal, on the exposition repeat, has a significant role in shifting the character of the main theme from a subdued and solo incantatory line to a grander, more sonorous, harmonic, public, chorale-like statement.

The development explores the chromatic territory between the two pedal points (B and A) of the exposition (the lament topic in slow motion). The swinging, bell-like figures dropping in parallel with the bass, suggestive of harmonic spectra, alludes symbolically to the doppler effect flattening of a 2-note emergency siren, thereby combining elements of traditional chromatic lament with a modern topic, suggestive of catastrophe (see figure 5.6).

movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony etc. As a theoretical term, it can be traced back as far as in Christoph Bernhard's *Tractatus compositionis augmentatus* of 1649.

⁷⁷ In childhood I remember being amazed and thrilled by the sombre, treading motion of the Andante of Bach's A minor violin concerto BWV 1041.

Figure 5.6 Cross-rhythmic doppler effect with 'slow motion lament' of bars 46 - 52

46

—(ominously)—

f sonoro

sempre con ped.

8th

50

8

Through bars 59-70 the intention was to revitalise the traditional device of expanding harmonic tension with a crescendo over a dominant pedal. The music here combines elements of both subjects; the metrical structure from bar 58 – 69 follows the original pattern on page 1 (4, 6, 2, 5, 3, 7). The reiterated chord (first heard at bar 59) has a monumental character (consisting of all the notes of the E harmonic minor scale). Intervals, between these chords, augment with each rising anacrusis; percussive quintal chords in the LH ricochet off the treading pedal note, in swung rhythm, stifled ('etouffez'-style) by re-pedalling (almost like a 'gating' effect). At bar 70, the right hand leaps a 16th as the bass note drops climactically to low A and subsides, continuing its funereal pulse in 1- 4 note patterns, with gong-like⁷⁸ chords, now resonating fully with pedal⁷⁹ as if gradually going into the distance.

⁷⁸ Boulez's *Rituel* uses gongs, written in a different tempo from the rest of the orchestra.

⁷⁹ Pedal is used throughout the piece to articulate structure in a dialectical opposition of dry and wet sonorities (see also Dungeness Sonata I).

Figure 5.8 Boulez-Bowie Sonata: Wakeman's material transposed to A major, with pitch and rhythm altered, in the 'intermezzo' (from bar 77)

recurring 3-note pattern with octave displacement and notated rubato rhythm

Descending chromatic (lament) bassline with octave displacement and expanding metre

Bar 86 is the only moment in the entire piece when the dominant (E) is heard, the D above it, forming a dominant 7th and leading (absolutely conventionally!) to recapitulation. Here traditional structural topics of memory and homecoming are explored whilst substantially varying the content of both subjects. The theme arises quietly out of the *Life on Mars* intermezzo but now in retrograde (the pitches here reverse the order of original notes from bar 1 – 25 (and the original long notes become short and vice versa) climbing to a sustained E in bar 94 before sinking into the dark chords of the 2nd subject, while the left hand descends the ladder of 5ths from A to E flat. The pulse in the left hand is now in decreasing metrical units.

The 2nd subject is revoiced, producing a rootless, unsettling octatonic C minor/major in first inversion. At 104 the hands swap over so that the right hand takes on the treading pedal material for the first time, as the harmonised line, in the left hand, subsides towards A minor, the key of the sonata. Bar 111 is the first time we hear the triad explicitly (I was aware of the irony in paying tribute to Pierre Boulez in this

way). In my composition diary (January 2020) there is a brief description of the ending:

At 111 (as JA⁸² noticed) there is, for the first time, a tonic triad, followed by rising triads in whole-tones: B-D flat-E flat-F. This happens 3 times, the chords containing a different clashing component each time. The final time, crescendo to extreme ff F major, the bass pulse dies away, and there is a (Debussian)⁸³ reminiscence of *Life on Mars* in its original F major (also Phrygian A minor against the low pedal note).⁸⁴

The sonata is a double portrait of two extremely different musical figures who worked in entirely dissimilar musical cultures and styles. The subject groups of sonata form have been used in a symbolic way to represent the two artists, but in such a way that the musical material feels coherent, and not disjunct. In order to avoid any hint of cross-over, the stylistic disparity is ironed out so that the Boulez and Bowie elements do not crash into each other but, rather, are absorbed into a unified stylistic context and compositional structure, in which musical quotations function as a form of musical topic. If Danuta Mirka is correct in suggesting that musical topics are essentially “musical styles or genres taken out of their proper context and used in another one” (2014, 3) then this process of adapting “a conventional stylistic unit” (Agawu 1991, 49) is essentially a matter of compositional ingenuity: when Bach or Couperin wrote gigues, they transformed certain melodic and rhythmic characteristics of the original dance genre into their own compositional structure and idiom. In a not entirely unrelated way, my sonata refers to the dichotomous worlds / musics / meanings of Boulez and Bowie who, as musicians, appear to be so entirely incompatible, and yet are summoned into a sonata-like relationship with each other in this ‘third’ musical context: my sonata, which fuses them together while maintaining a stylistic distance from both.

⁸² Julian Anderson, who heard the sonata during a supervision on 17th January 2020.

⁸³ This is a reference to Debussy’s consummate skill at fragmentary quotation, a striking example (and probably the one I had in mind) was the reference to a passage near the end of the French National Anthem, in the final phrase of his last piano prelude, *Feux d’artifice*.

⁸⁴ Extract from Matthew King’s Sonata Composition Diary (2019 – 2024).

Boulez-Bowie Sonata is also, to some extent, an exercise in simplicity: sonata form is shorn of intricacy; there is much two-part writing, often in the form of a single line over pedal points and repeated notes; the incantatory melodic material (derived from Boulez's *Rituel*) establishes a primal character from the outset; the music abounds in rocking figures, simple augmentations, downward circles of fifths and simple diatonic reminiscences; unadorned textures, combined with pedal notes create a monumental effect (as befits a piece conceived as a kind of monument). The sustaining pedal is used to delineate structure, to amplify expressivity and to elicit the past. As traditional divisions between high and low culture erode, different forms of musical expression, once considered incompatible, seem much less so today. By alluding to two very different musicians within an apparently integrated sonata structure, this piece attempts, beyond the funereal tropes and lamenting figures, to ask broader, open-ended questions about memory and our musical environment: what is our tradition? How do we judge significance? And where is our culture heading, as the ideologies, certainties and absolutisms of the twentieth century (to which Pierre Boulez himself contributed) recede into the distance?

5.2 Sonata Enigmatica I: *The Well Shuffled Hand* (sonata 15)⁸⁵

This sonata originated in discussion with Julian Anderson, as recorded in my composition diary, on the 5th March 2021:

Discussed the possibility of composing an open form sonata form where the traditional ritual of the form could be disrupted by the possibility of reshuffling the different parts of the structure. JA liked the idea and suggested that E.T.A. Hoffmann's

⁸⁵ Video recordings of 6 different versions of *The Well Shuffled Hand* Sonata may be heard here:

Version 1. https://youtu.be/mhO_n8CHF5U?si=2G9HX0tE8gviYE_j
Version 2. <https://youtu.be/TVHf6HU0EdQ?si=Q8OoYTP1kOrBxfAA>
Version 3. <https://youtu.be/bvBwsnW4t3Q?si=K6B-nxNv533VR73N>
Version 4. <https://youtu.be/bg9d5Giib5k?si=METwbO7d-RbHYid6>
Version 5. <https://youtu.be/bdibaJEqRE4?si=dzmRQWoJj9MzqN34>
Version 6. <https://youtu.be/szLNORiqQg0?si=14nNIEnv9Z-zJYlb>

*The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*⁸⁶ might provide a useful example of reshuffled form.⁸⁷

It is perhaps surprising for a composer, ostensibly working with traditional form, to admit that I am not especially attracted to orthodoxy – to any prescribed notion of ‘how things should be done’. The most exciting thing about working with sonata form, for me, is the possibility of making it do things it has (possibly) never done before: to interrogate the form, to see how far it can be stretched to accommodate new possibilities, to make the form interact with other elements that are not normally connected with sonata composition. I would argue that this is essentially how composers have always used the form – not as the repository for orthodox practice but as the means for experimentation: Haydn, constantly, dramatically and playfully, reimagined sonata form,⁸⁸ and when Beethoven’s sonatas were first disseminated, how many listeners could really follow the plethora of different approaches to structure, proportion and content from work to work: something akin to a continuous set of variations on a form?⁸⁹

⁸⁶ *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr, together with a fragmentary Biography of Kapellmeister Johannes Kreisler on Random Sheets of Waste Paper (Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr nebst fragmentarischer Biographie des Kapellmeisters Johannes Kreisler in zufälligen Makulaturblättern)*, originally published in two volumes in 1819-21, was Hoffmann’s final novel, a humorous and experimental double-narrative, written as if pieced together accidentally from two different authors, the musician, Kreisler, and his cat who has been using the reverse sheets of his master’s biography to write his own memoirs.

⁸⁷ Extract from Matthew King’s *Composition Diary* (2019 – 2024).

⁸⁸ For example, in his late two movement D major piano sonata H. XVI: 51 it is hard to believe that the same form underpins both the expansive first movement and the extreme concision and rhythmic disruption of the presto which follows it. Charles Rosen gives a striking case of Haydn expanding a variation on a simple binary-form melody into a complete sonata form micro-movement in his piano trio in G minor H. XV: 19. (Rosen 1997, 83-88)

⁸⁹ The critic for the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*, wrote after hearing Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony, on 13 Feb 1805, “the reviewer belongs to Herr van Beethoven’s sincerest admirers, but, in this composition, he must confess that he finds too much that is glaring and bizarre, which hinders greatly one’s grasp of the whole, and a sense of unity is almost completely lost.” (Thayer 2001, 187) There is, incidentally, an example of undetectable influence from the first movement of Beethoven’s *Eroica* Symphony halfway upon the development of my *Dungeness Sonata II*. Through bars 31 - 36 there is a contrapuntal moving in of lines in inversion (‘like a distant flock of gulls’) closing in on the mirror point: the note F, after which a new gymnopedie theme appears at 38 (where the lower two staves exactly mirror the upper two staves). I realise this is nothing like Beethoven, and yet the effect was inspired by the moment when Beethoven’s E minor melody (bar 284) arises from the ashes of

The decision to combine sonata and open form resulted in a more playful and iconoclastic approach to structure than anything I had written hitherto. In fact, the structure of the piece does not resemble any existing sonata compositions that I am aware of. Nor does it have much in common with the open form literature for piano, the most well-known examples of which date from the 1950s: Morton Feldman's *Intermission 6* (1953), Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* (1957) and Boulez's *Third Sonata* (1955-63). All three works allow the pianist to choose their own route through the score: Feldman's piece is extremely simple, consisting of one page of single, 1-4 note vertical musical events, played very quietly, in any order. Stockhausen's piece is a denser, more labyrinthine work, requiring the performer to choose their own path through nineteen fragments of intricately composed serial material, with instructions at the end of each passage determining the tempo and dynamics of the next, ending only once a fragment has been played thrice. Boulez, having finished with sonata form in his second sonata, composed his third using his own, tightly controlled aleatoric conception, influenced by Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés*, in which the performer chooses prescribed, intricately notated routes through the two published movements, so that "structures based on ever-changing resonant aggregates"⁹⁰ give rise to striking oppositions of pianistic colour and varieties of touch.

Highly individual though these aforementioned pieces are (they are all strikingly different in terms of aesthetic, piano writing and extent of compositional control) they share a common characteristic: whichever route through the form a performer chooses to take, the effect turns out to be virtually indistinguishable from any other (even if two different performances occur back to back) because of the athematic, registrally disjunct material, giving rise to a succession of striking sonorous gestures, as effective in one order as another (no doubt a determining factor in choosing the open form structure in the first place). However, my own approach was very

crisis, at the centre of the *Eroica* development section. In both cases, the 'new melody' returns in the coda.

⁹⁰ Pierre Boulez's own description, quoted in Charles Rosen's article on Boulez's piano music. (Glock [Ed] 1986, 95)

different. For me, the interesting thing about the operation of open form in this sonata was to use highly contrasting types of recognisable (and therefore memorable) thematic material so that the audible perception of sonata elements could be reconfigured differently with each performance, thus affecting the way in which the ordering of structural events is perceived.

The sonata was written quickly, most of it in a single week in March 2021. One influence on the compositional process was my recollection that Stravinsky had assembled his *Symphony in Three Movements* in a surprising way, composing the first movement from the middle backwards, breaking off occasionally to work on the finale (see Craft 1999, 2), and, with a typically pragmatic attitude, reusing (ad hoc) scraps of material from unfinished pieces and film scores (see Stravinsky & Craft 1982, 50-52) and pressing them into service, with typical boldness, within a new architecture of carefully balanced juxtapositions. I followed this example by adapting and refining three unfinished sketches of my own: 1. an assertive, angular passage, contrasting rising major sevenths with swinging chords and a drumming rhythmic pattern on the note F (this became A4); 2. a slow, stepwise melody with a parallel accompaniment, reminiscent of Mompou,⁹¹ and consisting of different permutations of a quintuplet pattern (this became B1); and 3. a short 'Romantic' passage in E flat minor, with mirrored arpeggios in both hands converging on an 'inner melody' (a tetrachord of octatonic seconds) in the middle of the piano. In fact, this sketch is really a sort of Chopinesque variation on Bernard Herrmann's famous title sequence music (also in E flat minor) for the opening of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (this became B2) which I had originally sketched for a projected (and unrealised) Hitchcock-Herrmann sonata.

I realised that these ideas were strikingly unlike each other, and that their juxtaposition would result in a strange collision of tonal and non-tonal, Romantic and modernistic elements, but I liked their topical potential to produce an element of semiotic frisson in the context of a somewhat surrealistic version of sonata form: I decided to gather together material that could constitute a first subject (A) group,

⁹¹ Aspects of its harmonic character derive from Mompou's *El Lago* from *Paisages*.

and more lyrical material that I felt could work well as a second subject (B) group. Both A4 and its 'twin', A5 had an assertive, rhythmically propulsive character that I felt would serve well for first subject material, while I could see that the more melodic, even nostalgic style of the other two fragments might fit into a notional second subject group, where their topical potential would unleash a rich network of symbolic undercurrents. B2 evokes not only the Romantic piano repertoire but also – through Herrmann - a magnificent cinematic repertoire with its associations of glamour and suspense, while B1 has a languorous, exotic quality, with a hint of finger-picking guitar and Spanish style.)

I continued by composing complementary fragments: A2 continues and develops topics from A1, inverting and reharmonising the motifs and restructuring the original couplets into a micro-ternary structure. A1 was composed as a complementary, assertive/rhythmic idea: a Hammerklavierish gesture which becomes a resonant, bell-like groove. A2 and A3 are free variations on A1. The various A fragments may be assembled in any order by the pianist. They constitute the first subject group.

B3 (the third component in the second subject group) is a short passacaglia: a six-bar progression with two variations. To enhance memorability, I decided that each of the B sections should be repeated (with specific alterations) and interleaved in any shuffled sequence.⁹²

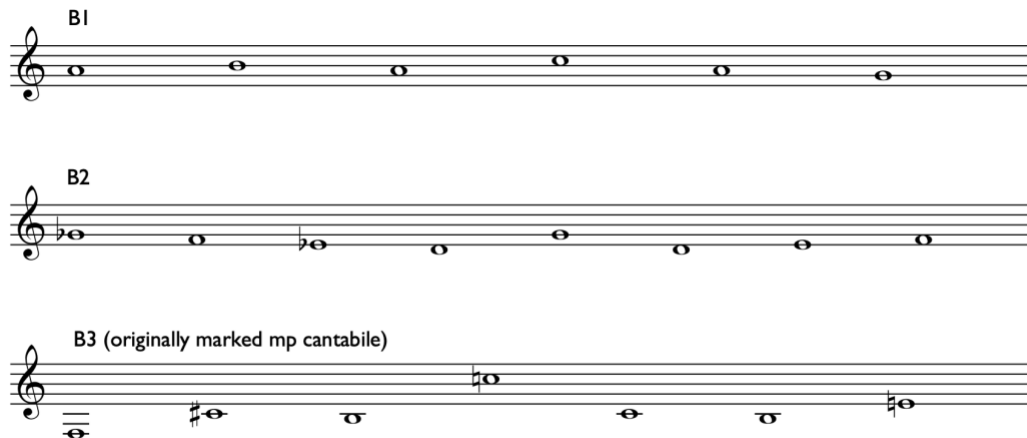
The C fragments constitute the development section and can be played in any order. They are all linear, connective and somewhat propulsive and ritualistic in character.⁹³ C2 and C3 are freely developmental, but, at the same time, static and incantatory - although it may be undetectable, they were conceived as miniature responses to the ritualistic pedal-point character of late Stockhausen pieces like *Inori* and Vivier's *Bouchara*. These fragments combine melodic elements of second

⁹² A trace of the old idea of sonata form exposition repeat was the principle behind this shuffled repetition (along with the repetitions in A1 – A3).

⁹³ In fact C3, with its melody and bass moving far apart, and moving in parallel, was an obscurely miniature response to the ritualistic textures of Stockhausen's *Inori*.

subject material with the pedal-note rhythmic pulsing of A1 and A2. By contrast, C1 and C4 - C6 derive their melodic content strictly from the melodic lines of all three components of the 2nd subject: B1, B2 and B3 (see figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9 Melodic material in B1, B2 and B3, presented afresh in C1 and C4 – C6



The D fragments have the function of a varied recapitulation, and may be played either as a discreet final section (in any order), or mixed in with the C fragments, so that development and recapitulation are shuffled together. D1 is an extended variation of B1; D2 is a bell-like chorale derived from A2; D3 is a free variation on rhythmic and intervallic patterns in the A fragments; D4 combines first and second subject elements by having the character and texture of the Mompou fragment (B1) with the pitch material of A1-3. D5 also mixes the subjects by combining the harmonic material of B3 with the angular texture and rhythms of A5. D6 is a free variation on the harmonies and rhythms of A1 – A3. At the suggestion of Julian Anderson, I composed an enigmatic extra fragment, X which may either be played at the end of the exposition or at the conclusion of the piece, or not at all (i.e. it may be omitted altogether).

Sonata Enigmatica: The Well Shuffled Hand is an idiosyncratic, and highly individual amalgamation of hitherto opposed structural ideas, combining the freedom of open form with the rigor of predetermined sonata construction. In handing significant aspects of structure to the performer (the sequence of events in each section) the

piece nevertheless maintains the traditional dramatic dialogue between assertive, rhythmic first subject, and lyrical, linear second subject thematic ideas. There is developmental forward momentum through the C fragments, and a sense of variation and return in the recapitulatory D material. The decision to allow the C and D fragments to freely interact (if the performer so chooses) is the result of my playing through the piece in many different configurations, and discovering, in the process, that the combination seemed to work – after all, the principle of incorporating elements of development into recapitulation (or vice versa) is a well-established principle in the history of sonata form.

It is intriguing that the compositional process behind Stravinsky's *Symphony in Three Movements* was in my mind at the outset,⁹⁴ because the resulting structure has some affinity with other aspects of Stravinsky's practice, particularly in his *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (a work that has already been mentioned in this commentary) with its remarkable sequence of juxtaposed thematic ideas, giving a surface impression of discontinuity, whilst manifesting, on a deeper level, such powers of continuity and logical coherence, that the final chorale, and indeed final cadence, seem to grow inevitably out of the music initiated in the first bar. I have also been fascinated to see Stravinsky's original sketches⁹⁵ for *Le Sacre de Printemps*, in which thematic, rhythmic and textural ideas (some notated on a single stave, some almost fully scored) are notated as a free collection of individual fragments, awaiting the composer's decision to assemble them, at a later stage, in the final order of the completed ballet score.

My *Well Shuffled Hand* does not await a comparable 'final decision'. Fragments are assigned to groups A, B and C/D and are composed in such a way that they can be joined to other fragments within their group, in any sequence (for example the B fragments of the second subject begin and end in such a way as to be harmonically

⁹⁴ Stravinsky's piecemeal approach to assembling the first movement (apparently from the centre outwards [see Craft 1999, 2]), from scraps of material, runs the risk of become an incoherent mix of non-sequiturs. Sheer force of invention seems to win through somehow.

⁹⁵ From the holograph manuscript held by the Sacher Foundation, viewable on Imslp: [https://imslp.org/wiki/The_Rite_of_Spring_\(Stravinsky,_Igor\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/The_Rite_of_Spring_(Stravinsky,_Igor))

compatible with each other), leaving the final internal ordering of pages - and therefore the progression of thematic, developmental and recapitulatory content - to the pianist. In doing so, the sonata proposes (in a manner that is very different from the existing open-form literature) several questions about the rhetoric of form: here, for example there is no fixed opening idea, since the pianist can choose between five options, ranging from grand and assertive (A1) to delicate and impressionistic (A3).

My concluding observations are supplemented by a table below (5-1) which presents the different fragments of the sonata in a clear form, with a summary of topics and characters. *The Well Shuffled Hand* sets up various kinds of tension, especially between material of an apparently more assertive, traditionally teleological type, and other more static components. Paradoxically, the more rhythmic and assertive material, characteristic of the A group, tends, from a harmonic point of view, to be more static and block-like, whereas the fragments more suggestive of stillness (in the B group and later developments thereof) actually contain a more overt sense of harmonic progression. Formal processes indicative of development and transition are set in an overall context of abrupt transitions, between shuffled fragments. Issues of macro and micro temporality are also explored through different approaches to rhythm: sections that are highly metrical in character contrast with rubato passages that appear to float free from metre (even if, paradoxically, like B3, they are held together by a rhythmic process). This dialectic corresponds to the harmonic tension in the exposition (and subsequently) between material that is clearly tonal and functioning as a topic in its own right (e.g. the use of E flat minor as a reminiscence of *Vertigo* in B1, recurring elsewhere, e.g. violently in D6 and wistfully in X) and harmony that is not (e.g. A2 or A5) coupled with related stylistic tension between elements suggestive of Romanticism and Modernism. The illusion to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* has significance: his run of masterpieces from 1958 to 1964, all with scores by Bernard Herrmann, not only manifest a rich convergence of Modernist and Romantic elements; they also reconfigure cinematic approaches to

narrative.⁹⁶ This Hitchcockian influence (compounded by my encounter with the enigmatic short stories of Daphne du Maurier,⁹⁷ and even by my recreational delight in Agatha Christie⁹⁸) collectively underpin the manner in which this sonata functions as a kind of puzzle, a mystery, a problem to be explored.

In *The Well Shuffled Hand* there are five options for the starting material, and six for the ending, ranging from slow and melodic (D1) to fast and volcanic (D6). There are ten possibilities for the centre of the movement (if C and D are amalgamated). In addition, fragment X has the unique role of providing (or not providing) a wistful close to the exposition, or indeed to the sonata: a musical character, alternatively present or absent in the form. The sonata thus proposes questions about contrast and continuation (since different fragments connect and/or juxtapose in a huge number of possible varieties) and about perceptions of form, particularly the function of material as a structural signifier at key points (beginning-middle-end) in a musical structure, and the possibility of ‘playing with’ these perceptions, in a manner that echoes a comment by Kofi Agawu:

It seems clear that in Classical instrumental music . . . certain *topoi* occur characteristically at beginnings of pieces, while others are used in closing situations. . . To recognize this normative congruence – to say, in short, that *topoi* give a profile to more fundamental structural processes – is in part to recognize the possibility of *playing* with them (1999, 156).⁹⁹

⁹⁶ At its structural centre, *Vertigo* brutally disrupts traditional notions of romance and suspense by revealing that Madeleine, the object of the protagonist’s fetishistic obsession, is not only dead, but never existed at all (see Wood 2002, 121). There is much critical debate about the intensity with which Hitchcock plays, and subverts, traditional cinematic tropes in films of this period.

⁹⁷ For an interesting, interpretive discussion of Du Maurier, see Žižek’s essay, ‘Are we allowed to enjoy Daphne du Maurier’, originally written as an introduction to the Virago Modern Classics edition of *The Birds and Other Stories* (Žižek, 2004).
<https://www.lacan.com/zizdaphmaur.htm>

⁹⁸ Both authors inspired sonatas of their own: Venetian Sonata 6 is a homage to Daphne du Maurier and Venetian Sonata 7 is a homage to Agatha Christie.

⁹⁹ see also William Caplin 2005, 113 – 124.

The term ‘deconstruction’¹⁰⁰ is not inappropriate in describing a version of sonata form in which each performance plays with fundamental structural processes in such a way that “tensions and contradictions between the hierarchical ordering’¹⁰¹ are explored, traditional oppositions altered, and relations between them reassigned. In this way, my Sonata Enigmatica: *The Well Shuffled Hand* may be viewed as a (distinctly non-Boulezian) response to an observation by Pierre Boulez in his 1963 article about his Third Sonata, with the same title as my Doctoral project:¹⁰²

The artist creates his own maze; he may even settle in an already existing maze since any construction he inhabits he cannot help but mould to himself... the very physical appearance of the work will be changed; and once the musical conception has been revolutionised, the actual physical presentation of the score must inevitably be altered.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ cf. Jacques Derrida: “What is called ‘deconstruction’ ... has never, never opposed institutions as such, philosophy as such, discipline as such... I think that the life of an institution implies that we are able to criticize, to transform, to open the institution to its own future. The paradox ...is that, at the same time that it starts something new, it also continues something, is true to the memory of the past, to a heritage, to something we receive from the past, from our predecessors, from the culture. If an institution is to be an institution, it must, to some extent, break with the past, keep the memory of the past, while inaugurating something absolutely new.” (Derrida, 1997, 4-5) This is not unlike the discussion of genre earlier (footnote 36, page 29): there will always be self-referential blindspots or aporia, points of contradiction within any discursive framework, which must both be inside and outside the given text.

¹⁰¹ See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/deconstruction>

¹⁰² ‘Sonate, que me veux-tu?’ (Boulez 1986, 143 – 154)

¹⁰³ Ibid, 145

Table 5-1 Open-form Structures and Topics in Sonata 15: The Well Shuffled Hand

1 st subject: A	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5
Topics	Grand rhetorical Assertive- repetitive Beethovenian 'Hammerklavier' resonant/ harmonic Drum- kit-style-rhythm	Chime-like Inversion of A1 Resonant/ harmonic Clock-like Obsessive- repetitive	Arpeggiated Repetitive- mysterious Resonant-harmonic impressionistic Question/answer Downward/upward	Astringent Dissonant upward leaps (7ths) dialogue chorale-like answers with insistent pedal Rhythmic dry/wet	Response to A4 Inversion of A4 Inversion of dynamics Astringent leaping 7ths Ternary form with A4-style- chorale-like centre descent/ascent

2 nd subject: B	B1	B2	B3
Topics	Lugubrious Mompou- style slow melody over quintuplet arpeggiated watery harmony	E flat minor Vertigo-style Etude-like arpeggios-in- inversion lament-style thumb-melody Hitchcock/ Herrmann	Passacaglia revolving still-static bell-like tala-like rotations

Development C	C1	C2	C3	C4-6
Topics	RH pulse-like melodic line over LH 7ths. Theme and double	Lugubrious chorale with bell-tolling rhythmic medal point	Vivier-style melody and bass in a kind of parallel movement with rhythmic pedal point at centre	Melody and bass moving in inversion with rhythmic pedal point at centre. Ritualistic

Recap D	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5	D6
Topics	Same as B1 (but wider range)	Upward arpeggiated figures derived from A3-5 Resonant Bell-like	Leaping 9ths Wet/dry rhythmic drum-kit- style patterns like electronic bleeping	Combines arpeggiated A1-3 with melody and character of B1	Combines B3 and A5 Angular and rhythmic. Drumming patterns	Variation on A1-3 Massive fierce rhetorical gestures dialogue with delicate arpeggios

Coda (to exposition or to sonata or neither)	X
Topics	Wistful E flat minor Enigmatic melodic (Agatha Christie-style) present or absent

5.3 *Between the Acts*: a Sonata Pageant (sonata 25)¹⁰⁴

In June 2023, I read Virginia Woolf's final novel *Between the Acts*. The novel struck me immediately as a magnificently ambitious idea and structure, if perhaps slightly under-finished (Woolf took her own life within months of completing the book in November 1940, and without editing the text prior to publication). It is one of Woolf's history-in-a-day structures, in which poetic/psychological stream-of-consciousness observation about the interactions of a group of people, in an old English manor house on the eve of WWII, frames the performance of a rather diffuse amateur-dramatic historical pageant which is performed in the garden, during the course of the novel.

The structure is therefore rather complex, involving an interplay of randomness / fantasy within a more formal 'complete whole' (Woolf 1973, 278), and it incorporates a play within a novel. The central characters are revealed through glimpses of their thoughts and lives during the course of the day; meanwhile, a more dispersed assemblage of village people appear in the centre of the book and comment on the play as it is performed, and in scenes which take place in the intervals between its acts. Thirdly, a group of play-characters appear in a variety of historic scenes (presented as literary pastiches) from the pageant itself, representing different periods of history from Elizabeth I to WWII. In this way, 'the present' is in constant dialogue with 'history'; modernist poetic observation is also in dialogue with a rather stylised collection of literary pastiches, and the novel contains humorous and satirical observations, numerous pastoral images, and vivid descriptions of wildlife, landscape etc. As the book progresses, there is an atmosphere of approaching war and night, and an almost apocalyptic sense of things drawing to a close, all of which are deeply poignant in the context of historical events and Woolf's own suicide. The book is therefore an evocative and idiosyncratic vision of a rural England which, like its author, feels poised on the edge of an abyss.

¹⁰⁴ A video recording of *Between the Acts* may be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/0j5NzkA4Wdc?si=FsmGyNOvnIx6VtS2>

The whole thing seemed very vivid to me whilst reading it in the summer of 2023. On completing it, I went for a walk and felt compelled - almost against my better judgment - to 'complete' my doctoral investigations with a large piece in which all the main components of my practice, during the composition of these sonatas, could be brought together in a sort of jamboree of elements, taking the novel as a source of inspiration. Since 2019, I had wondered about writing some kind of 'historical sonata' – a piece that might start in a Scarlattian manner and move forward through musical history, but I couldn't imagine a way to do such a thing convincingly without creating something contrived and irritating. But Woolf's late masterpiece offered a possible solution: the exercise of stylistic pastiche could somehow be brought into a more complex and playful interaction with various additional elements: I chose quotations from Woolf's text to appear (in an almost Satiesque way) above the staff, constantly informing the musical structure. I also decided, in Woolf's spirit of randomness / fantasy and 'complete whole'¹⁰⁵ to include musical material from a variety of older sketches, including earlier ideas for sonatas, and a rather eccentric suite of tiny miniatures, most of them only a few bars long, that I had created in May 2020, during Lockdown, as an alternative 'scrapbook' form of musical diary. Since the idea of 'Musical Diary' is one of the topics of my on-going research, I realised that these fragments could perfectly reasonably (and appropriately) be incorporated into this piece.

My compositional process began by adapting an earlier sketch for a sonata (from 2019) in which Romantic tropes engage in a kind of dialogue in two different tempi (rather like Beethoven's Op. 109:1): elements of Italian opera alternate with a nocturne in a monothematic sonata form structure, the alternating tempi and characters cutting across the form, thereby concealing it. This material forms the basis for bars 247 – 372 of the final work but the whole thing has been completely altered now with interpolations of other material, and stylistic alterations adapting it to Woolf's text. My Lockdown 'scrapbook' miniatures are similarly adapted and incorporated into the sonata in various passages: the siciliano from bar 10 – 21 (and

¹⁰⁵ Woolf recorded in her diary the first idea of *Between the Acts* on April 11, 1938: "Last night I began making up again: summer night: a complete whole: that's my idea". (Woolf 1973, 278)

variants elsewhere); the canon in bars 22 – 39; the bell-like passages (e.g. from 58 and 314 etc.); the quasi-Baroque suite of miniatures from 85 – 246 conceived loosely as a self-contained sonata form structure, and finally a pastorale with birdsong, which also comes from this 'Lockdown Suite' (bars 282 – 298 and 320 – 325). Like the novel, the sonata has recurrent preoccupations with pastoral and landscape elements, birdsong, bells, and nursery rhyme.

Overall, the structure of the sonata is complex. Narrative elements from Woolf's novel are superimposed upon a large and diffuse 'Sonata Form' where the constituent parts of the form (first subject, second subject, development, recapitulation) correspond to a 4-movement structure, and each of these 4 movements is itself composed in (a smaller version of) sonata form which also contains 'nested' movements-within-movements (in the 3rd movement, this takes the form of an entire quasi-Baroque-suite-in-miniature). In this way, internal structures interact constantly with Virginia Woolf's text so that an apparently diffuse and episodic, at times, almost cubist surface, turns out, in the end, to have a kind of overall sonata-like 'unity' because of the network of thematic correspondences, developments and cross-references which traverse the sonata. The following account of the divisions of the overarching sonata-form structure into separate movements with their own 'nested forms' and allusions to Woolf's text is supplemented by a table of structures and topics on page 75 below (table 5-2):

Movement 1: the first subject of the entire piece is also a self-contained miniature sonata form in its own right - this corresponds to the opening Elizabethan scene of Woolf's play within a novel. It is a sort of mock-Tudor opening, presenting a very short 1st subject (bars 1 – 9) with a drumming pattern in the LH and a Lydian-inflected theme, evocative of English virginalist music (this is also the main theme of the entire sonata); a Greensleeves-style siciliano 2nd subject at bar 10 (representing Queen Elizabeth 1 herself who makes a grand opening speech in Woolf's pageant); a development section (the Lydian canon from 22 – 39 [itself a miniature sonata form structure] which also represents the swallows swooping around the old barn where the performance takes place in the novel) and a reverse recapitulation, with a

variant of the siciliano 2nd subject (from 40 – 49) followed by a (Bergian) note-for-note retrograde of the 1st subject (from 50 – 57).

Movement 2: this second subject of the entire piece is also in a self-contained miniature sonata form structure, but this time broken up and scattered throughout the sonata in the form of various bell-ringing interpolations - corresponding to various references to the ringing of bells throughout Woolf's novel. It consists of quasi-bell-ringing, permutational patterns with a 1st subject (58 – 72) and a 2nd subject (73 – 84) which brings a change of harmonic colour, after which subsequent parts of the movement appear, later in the sonata, in interpolated bell-like passages (at 174 – 186, 215 – 248, 307 and 315) forming fragments of development, and a recapitulation (elegiac reminiscence) at the end of the sonata (bars 414 – 417).

Movement 3: this functions like a development section of the entire piece, but is also a miniature sonata form structure containing a micro-quasi-Baroque-Suite: French overture, siciliano/air, gavotte, sarabande, musette, passacaglia, nursery-rhyme-gavotte II, siciliano II, passepied with echo, and nursery-rhyme-gigue. This entire section corresponds to the 'play within a play within a novel' at the centre of Woolf's novel: a restoration comedy, with the individual movements of the Baroque suite corresponding to characters and episodes in the novel. The whole suite simultaneously forms a very loose sonata form pattern with the first 2 movements corresponding to 1st and second subjects (and thematically derived from the original 1st and 2nd subjects of the opening movement, of which these are variations or 'doubles'), the next 4 movements of the Suite form a kind of development section, while the 2nd siciliano (bar 177) and passepied with echo (bar 187) are a rather free reverse-recap. The nursery-rhyme-Gigue is a noisy, bell-like coda.

Movement 4: this functions as a recapitulation (in terms of the overarching sonata structure) but is also, in its own right, a quasi-Romantic sonata form movement in B flat major, combining elements of sonata form and variation, and containing the Chopinesque genres of waltz, polonaise, mazurka, barcarolle and nocturne. The 1st subject has the same theme as the original 1st subjects of movements 1 and 3,

beginning as a waltz in bar 247 and becoming a polonaise in 252. The 2nd subject (in F) is a nocturne, beginning at 276, but, in fact, this too is a variation on the original 1st subject. The 2nd subject is interrupted by a pastorale and a fragment of bell-ringing, and the exposition concludes at 338, at which point the short development (polonaise) begins, and the truncated recap at 353 immediately gives way to the 2nd subject at 355.¹⁰⁶ The 4th movement has an incongruous dance-band-style conclusion from 365, as ‘modernity’ breaks in on Romanticism, in response to Woolf’s comment, “The tune changed; snapped; broke; jagged. Foxtrot was it? Jazz?” (2008, 164)

Coda: this rather complex section ties together (or recapitulates¹⁰⁷) various elements at the end of Woolf’s novel. Canonic swallows return at 373 (darting swallows recur several times, like a refrain throughout the novel). Then (at 384) a mirror gymnopédie of the main theme begins: here all the harmony plus melody and bass line takes the form of a huge mirror (where the left hand mirrors the right) – a technique first used in Sonata 4 (Dungeness Sonata II: *Sound Mirrors*). This moment represents the climax of Woolf’s pageant when, suddenly and disquietingly, the actors in the play turn mirrors on the audience to reveal that they, the audience (and, by implication, we the readers) must complete the pageant within their/our own lives, since they/we too are part of the historical continuum (Woolf 2008, 165). A serial ostinato interlude then commences (391), symbolically representing the ominous flight of 12 aeroplanes overhead (itself an apocalyptic symbol in the novel, interrupting the end of the pageant); there is a chaotic fragment of the National Anthem (at 397) sung (cursorily) by the discombobulated audience, after which fragments of the sarabande and musette return in quick succession to represent the writer of the pageant (and in a sense Woolf’s alter ego), Miss La Trobe who, at the end of the novel, is left contemplating her own sense of artistic failure (Miss La

¹⁰⁶ The first movement of Beethoven’s sonata Op. 109 is a striking case of a first subject instantly giving way to the second (an example of canonical practice that seems to deviate from Susan McClary’s assessment of the functions of sonata form).

¹⁰⁷ The idea of the coda functioning as a recapitulation is one that fascinates me in the first movement of Beethoven’s A minor Quartet Op. 132, the recapitulation having occurred in the ‘wrong’ key (E minor) and the coda functioning as an abbreviated 2nd recapitulation in the home key. Beethoven’s unprecedented, experimental approach brings a rich and dramatic sense of ‘return’.

Trobe is a struggling spinster-artist-visionary figure, at the margins of the novel, who has written and directed the village pageant); Fragments of Giles’s lugubrious passacaglia (405) and Isa’s air (408) are recapitulated in a grandly expressive manner, as the tensions between them are partially reconciled in the nocturnal final scene of the book; these themes dissolve into the bells, and the Lydian B flat motif, which is, in fact, an expanded version of the main theme at the very start of the piece. The final gesture therefore recapitulates the opening one: the novel itself suggests a circularity of form as if the main event of the book is about to begin all over again... “Then the curtain rose. They spoke”. (Woolf 2008, 197)

In summary: *Between the Acts* is an experimental piece which fuses ‘stream of consciousness’ literary elements with musical forms and styles in an attempt to create a rather eccentric form of dream-like historical fantasy. It is a sonata that makes extensive use of the following topics: Baroque genres, ‘learned style’, pastorale, bell patterns, nursery rhymes, birdsong, serialism, Romantic genres, Tudor idioms, 20th century English pastoral & mock-Tudor styles, and various pastiche elements, along with the free interplay of literary and musical structure, and macro and micro forms. The following table attempts to represent the complex interplay of structures and topics in the sonata as clearly as possible.

Table 5-2 Structures and Topics in Sonata 25: Between the Acts

Movement 1 (1st subject) Pageant scene 1	1 st subject Elizabethan- style	2 nd subject Siciliano (10)	Development canon (22)	2 nd subject variation (40)	1 st subject retrograde (50)
Topics	RH Virginalist LH drumming consecutive 5 th patterns	Pastoral English-style Virginalist polyphony	‘Learned style’ modality folk- style echo-like ‘swooping’ patterns drum- like figures	8ve displacement marimba-style	Retrograde RH Virginalist LH drumming consecutive 5 th patterns

Table 5-2 continued

Movement 2 (2nd subject) Bells	1 st subject (58) Quasi-B minor	Transition (64) More chromatic 2 nd subject (72) Quasi- G major	Development (interpolated throughout sonata) (174 – 186, 215 – 248, 307 and 315)	Recap (valedictory at end of sonata) (414 – 417)
Topics	Bell-ringing (permutation) Resonance	Bell-changes	Reduced permutational fragments	Bell-like reminiscent fragments

Movement 3 (Development) Baroque Suite Restoration comedy Portraits	1 st subject: (85) French- Overture + fugal allegro	2 nd subject (94) Siciliano Aria	Development (120-173) Chiffchaff- Gavotte Sarabande Musette Passacaglia Nursery-rhyme- Gavotte	Reverse Recap (177 – 224) Siciliano- metrical canon Passepied with echo	Coda (225 – 248) Nursery- rhyme-Gigue
Topics	Dotted Fr. Overture style learned fugato style	Pastorale Diatonic sequential Aria-style Virginalist polyphony	Chiffchaff Gavotte 'Thematic' legato LH Sarabande bagpipe-style ground bass with baroque- style variation Nursery rhyme Tempo dislocation	Radulescu-style superpositionsic iliano echoing mirror patterns	Nursery rhyme resonant bell- like patterns

Movement 4 (Recapitulation) Victorian scene	1 st subject: (249) Waltz- Polonaise	2 nd subject (278) Nocturne with pastoral interpolations	Development (340) Victorian Policeman polonaise	Recap (354-365) Waltz-Nocturne	Coda (366-373) Jazz-era-style close
Topics	Bel Canto Romanticism Waltz polonaise Ornamental duet	Chopinesque Nocturne Pastorale birdsong	Grotesque polonaise elements	Fragmented Bel- Canto Chopinesque Nocturne	1920s dance- band-style swung patterns

Table 5-2 continued

Coda Concluding scenes from the novel	Swallow Canon (374-384)	Mirrors (385-394)	Aeroplane ostinato	National Anthem- Sarabande- Musette- passacaglia	Adagio Amoroso
Topics	Canon 'learned style' Pentatonic modal echo-like. Swooping patterns	Mirrored harmony. Inverted hands	Serial ostinato permutations low-register rumbling	Fragmentary quotation pedal-note musette, lament-style transitional	Resonant valedictory melodic fragments with bells

5.4 Three Sonatas: Medievalism, Religious Symbolism and Self-Quotation.

5.4.1 Sonata 5 in Phrygian Mode: *O Vis Aeternitatis* (after Hildegard of Bingen)¹⁰⁸

This short work was originally written for the 87th birthday of my mother, Tessa King (she celebrates her 90th birthday on the 27th February 2024, as this project comes to its conclusion). The dedicatee's own musical taste played a part in the character of this piece, since she doesn't especially enjoy contemporary music, and has a general preference for early music, especially Gregorian chant. Hildegard of Bingen seemed a very natural choice, as a source of melodic material, since she had some things in common with my mother: both were/are women of faith, with a naturally ascetic tendency, both have a certain strength of personality, both are poets, and both, happily, are blessed with longevity.

¹⁰⁸ A video recording of this sonata may be heard here: <https://youtu.be/otsdyILDwiw?si=qqz8LTrKST7tvvX>

The sonata was written in the certain knowledge that its dedicatee would neither notice (nor be especially interested in) whether it was in sonata form or not, but I did want its relationship to Hildegard's original chant (*O Vis Aeternitatis* – which itself seemed quite a good description of my mother) to be clear and audible and to give rise to a general sonic atmosphere redolent of an imaginary Medievalism. I decided to make the sonata monothematic (both 1st and 2nd subjects derive from Hildegard's chant) with each subject exploring the melodic contour of Hildegard's chant in an entirely different way: the first subject presents the chant in the left hand, in a non-metrical style with upward-floating flourishes in the right hand (in which the 'open' sonority of 4ths and 5ths are predominant). The second subject presents Hildegard's chant in siciliano rhythm, with 4-part polyphony and Machaut-style voice leading, Ars-Nova-style cadences and quite dense rhythmic activity growing out of Perotin-style organum triplets. Intriguingly, despite all these quasi-medieval elements, the resulting music is harmonically not far from Hindemith. With the exposition repeat, the first subject is further coloured by mirror-like flourishes in both hands at the end of each phrase.

The rather concise development section is also derived from Hildegard's chant but, this time, the rhythmic character of Perotin's *Viderunt Omnes* has influenced the way that the right hand dances polymetrically over the gentler, uniform pulse and parallel writing in the left hand. At bar 50, right in middle of all this activity, a 'concealed' recapitulation begins, with Hildegard's chant appearing in the left hand, beneath development-style upper voices. At bar 66, a varied form of the second subject returns in the tonic, and at 84, a tiny coda resumes the non-metrical style of the opening for two bars before disappearing in a 'halo' of harmonics.

In a very straightforward way, the sonata explores monothematic sonata form through the 'stained glass' of quasi-medieval style. Hildegard's melody is subjected to chant-like (non-metrical) and polyphonic (rhythmic) writing. The piece therefore proposes a dualistic version of monothematic sonata form in which 1st and 2nd subject derive from the same musical object (as if viewed from entirely opposite

perspectives) and in which recapitulation is partly concealed within development, throwing the weight of 'return' onto the second subject (bar 50).

The sonata is an example of how compositional style can be adapted to the musical preferences of its dedicatee.

5.4.2 Sonata Via Crucis (sonata 11)¹⁰⁹

The composition of this music began, very simply, on April 8th 2020, with improvisation. I had been thinking about the unique harmony of Federico Mompou (especially in early pieces like *Cants Magic* and *Charmes*) with his striking use of sonorous colour, enabling both pianist and listener to bask in its evocative soundscape. My own Mompouish improvisation began with the opening Cm6/9 arpeggiated pattern containing 'open string' 5ths elements, with pedal, running between the hands in a resonant wash of sound (this material appears here, pretty much as first improvised). Right from the beginning, I thought it would be interesting to create a form that consisted of the simplest possible material: a descending chromatic line, passing through 'standard' tonal regions, and reversing its trajectory in the second half of the piece. Like the Boulez-Bowie Sonata, there is a solemn pulse to the music with various repeating notes, ricocheting from middle to upper register. Emerging from this opening sonority was something quite stark, intense and almost ritualistic in character. The rhythmic arrangement of rising and falling figures with 'treading' crotchets in a 5+3+4 pattern (bars 1 - 3) suggested the possibility of a repeating ostinato which could be taken on a harmonic journey, somewhat in the tradition of a Bach prelude or a Schubert song, whilst the strange, sighing effect of the falling semitone (the D flat in bar 2) - 'ein fremde stimme'¹¹⁰ - suggested a chromatic descent in the tradition of the lament.¹¹¹ At the same time, something

¹⁰⁹ A video recording of this sonata may be heard here:
https://youtu.be/1XQyipYvbHc?si=h3AbAueBb_-0FeEZ&t=5

¹¹⁰ In 1803 Beethoven wrote 'ein fremde stimme' ('an alien voice') over his sketch for the chromatic coda of his scherzo to the *Eroica* Symphony. (Swafford 2014, 355)

¹¹¹ See Caplin, 'Topics and Formal Functions: The Case of the Lament', Mirka, Danuta. (Ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory* (2014, 415)

about the texture seemed very much outside the German tradition: the impressionistic wash of arpeggios, the idea of a simple, unadorned, descending chromatic line, floating down over a lyre-like accompaniment, all seemed to evoke a variety of Italianate textures from Monteverdi's *Lamento della Ninfa* to Liszt's *Lugubre Gondola* pieces, while the technical challenge of composing an inexorable chromatic descent for piano may also have been subconsciously suggested by Lachenmann's *Ein Kinderspiel*.

The first challenge was how to use such stark material as the basis for a sonata structure, but it occurred to me that it might be possible to present this chromatic descent as if passing through two very specific harmonic regions, and to locate these regions in the simplest and (perhaps unexpectedly for a piece written in 2020) the most conventional of classical tonal relationships: the tonic and relative major of a traditional sonata form exposition. What emerged quite rapidly from this initial impulse was a rough sketch of an exposition with a general plan for the simplest possible formal scheme, which I described in the following note above the initial sketch on the evening of April 9th (Maundy Thursday):

1st subject continues chromatic descent against rocking accompaniment motif, then to relative major, continuing descent towards middle B flat with E flat minor elements; then continuing into repeat with two Locrian bars to bottom C. General plan to continue development using 5:4 ratio and chorale shifting enharmonically; then recap by reversing opening process, starting with B flats and working chromatically up and past opening to top of keyboard with Lydian mode at end (to balance locrian mode at end of exposition). The challenge is to make a design that seems so simple, and mechanical, into something expressive and musically interesting.¹¹²

For all its simplicity, I can't remember anything in the existing sonata literature that resembles this basic scheme. One obvious difficulty with such a plan was clear from

¹¹² Extract from Matthew King's Composition Diary (2019 – 2024).

the beginning (and I am always somewhat perversely drawn to challenges of this kind): that a descending chromatic line is the most banal and predictable musical object imaginable and, in addition, I aimed, in the exposition, to accompany this line with just three basic harmonies (tonic, dominant of relative major, relative major). I realized that this scheme was extravagantly reductionistic, but I hoped that, if handled intelligently, the simplicity of my approach would give the music a certain intensity, and I planned to offset these elements with various embellishments and interferences, which would mitigate any potential obviousness in the musical process. To start with, the baldness of the descending chromatic line contrasts with the radically different information of the accompanying material, with the intention that the descending line would be rendered more mysterious, and more enigmatic, and that its irregular rate of progress would destabilize what might otherwise become an over-predictable trajectory. Additionally, I was attracted to the manner in which, as I composed, the 'stark' descending line began to interact with the more florid 'accompaniment' so that different kinds of interference began to occur between these two elements. Although, conceptually, the texture existed in my mind as a simple descending line with accompaniment, the sonic result that began to emerge had frequent crossing of lines, and collisions of various kinds, blurring the distinction between foreground and background in such a way that the chromatic line sometimes becomes obscured by the tendrils of the arpeggiated material, rather like a trellis gradually becoming obscured by a burgeoning vine.

The exposition reduces harmonic content to just three simple elements: Tonic (embellished C minor) in bars 1 – 14, dominant of relative major (from final beat of bar 14 to bar 18) preparing for the arrival of the 'second subject' (embellished relative major) from bar 19 – 34. However, once again, the blatancy of these conventional tonal regions is tempered by the extended character of the harmony, employing fluid, arabesque-like arpeggiation, suggestive of the circle of 5ths in various stages of openness or distortion. The opening C minor contains tritones, 6ths and 9ths, the transitional dominant of E flat (from bar 15) is the most dissonant and unstable, and the arpeggios are altered by interference with the descending chromatic line passing through them, while the 'second subject' contains the most

open harmony, made up initially of 5ths, but again subject to chromatic interference as the descending line passes through it (throughout the piece, for the sake of clarity, I notate the descending chromatic line in the top stave, and where it is in fact played by the left hand, arising from these collisions with the accompanying material, it is notated with smaller note-heads). In this way, the starkness of the basic material is acted upon through various processes of embellishment in order to create music that, for all its inexorability, has a certain ambiguity.

At bar 35, with the arrival of the repeating B flats, the left hand falls into the abyss with a Locrian scale leading back to the opening, or alternatively forward into the development. The decision to repeat the exposition grew out of the sense of the 'inevitability' of returning to the opening material which, the second time, is played an octave higher.

The rest of the sonata was composed in draft form on Good Friday (April 10th 2020) and it was only towards the end of the process that I began to think about the curious serendipity of writing a piece on Good Friday which contains such relevant musical symbolism: the suggestion of death and resurrection within the inverted arc of the form: a continuous plunging line in the exposition, leading to the strange dark mechanism at the centre (development section) with its bottom A and grinding 5:4 rhythm, and then the 'resurrection' of the ascending recap, climbing to the top of the piano. It also seemed to me that the 'exotic' colours of the harmony, the lamenting character of the chromaticism, and the treading quality of the repeated crotchets which run through the work, seemed cumulatively evocative, as if of the procession to Golgotha. When I revised the sonata in July 2020, I revised the steady pulse of the crotchets, disrupting their regularity and introducing elements of faltering. At any rate, at the risk of pretentiousness (and conscious that Liszt also used the title for his visionary and wonderfully chromatic late masterpiece) I decided to use the ancient liturgical idea of 'Via Crucis' in the title. This decision also ties the work into an older tradition of instrumental works which utilise specific aspects of musical symbolism to overtly represent aspects of the biblical narrative (Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* are a striking example).

The passage from bar 38 to 45 was added in July 2020, when I substantially revised the sonata. A colleague¹¹³ had suggested that the plunging gesture at the end of the exposition seemed to call out for further expansion, and so I introduced a stretto-like canonic development, with four voices falling from the centre to the lowest point on the piano in a kind of vortex, out of which the main material of the development proceeds (46 – 59). Here, in 5/4 time, the ‘tread’ of crotchets takes the form of a relentless interplay between the upper two parts, in a syncopated duet, with the upper line falling chromatically down from a high C. Simultaneously, the bottom staff derives its cross-rhythmic arpeggiated shapes from the accompanying material of the exposition, but in a 5:4 rhythmic ratio against the upper parts. The more turbulent, modulatory character of the traditional development section manifests itself here in the change of harmony every bar. On the other hand, this development seems like a stripping back of the texture to reveal grinding ratios and inexorable descent. In my choice of dynamics for this section I was, quite consciously, influenced by Beethoven’s characteristically radical preference for dramatic crescendos with subito pianos, as if dropping from a precipice.¹¹⁴

The ‘reverse-recapitulation’ begins at bar 60 and starts with the ‘second subject’ E flat region, moving into the transitional (D flat 13) harmony in bars 69 – 71, before reaching C minor at bar 72. Although I didn’t consciously have Berg’s retrograde forms in mind, this approach resembles the kind of narrative structure he employs in the Allegro misterioso of the Lyric Suite, the adagio of the *Kammerkonzert*, and the cinematic scene at the centre of *Lulu*, but unlike Berg there is no literal retrograde here (I do however employ Bergian note-for-note retrogrades in sonatas 25, 30 and 41), even though the harmonic journey is reversed and the chromatic line ascends, again with frequent expressive interferences between the primary line and its arpeggiated accompaniment. In the final bars, the melodic line breaks free of its chromaticism, the final six notes becoming the Lydian mode – the opposite of the

¹¹³ The composer Peter Longworth.

¹¹⁴ See Barenboim and Said (2003, 62)

Locrian descent at the end of the exposition, and the brightest of scales – quietly ascending to a final point of light: the C at the very top of the piano.

5.4.3 Sonata Sonata (Homage to César Balduccini) (sonata 23)¹¹⁵

In February 2023, Julian Anderson suggested an idea for a ‘final piece’ (as it turned out, this was not the final piece but it was written near the end of the project): he wondered whether it might be interesting to try to compress material from all the sonatas, thus far, into a single piece. We discussed the compressed sculptures of César Balduccini, wondering whether such an approach might somehow be brought to bear on a process of musical composition in such a way that chronological self-quotation from numerous pieces could be pressed into a notional sonata form structure.

I was fascinated by this idea, and devised a plan which derived from my own approach in a much earlier piano miniature called *Sonatas*, from 20 years ago, in which I had compressed a single bar, from each of Beethoven’s 32 sonatas, into a minute-long piano piece. As it turned out, Sonata Sonata became more expansive and structurally complex. Three short passages have been freely extracted from the exposition, development and recapitulation of each of the 41 sonatas. These passages are then arranged in three chronological sequences of quotations, forming three sections which equate to the exposition, development and recapitulation of the current sonata (although these terms are really only symbolic: in reality they do not function in any way that could conceivably be heard or understood in terms of the tradition of sonata form composition). The piece is therefore simply made out of a triple sequence of quotations. There is no newly composed material. The passages were originally selected with an ear to how they might sound in relation to the quotations that surround them, either coexisting in stark juxtaposition or, because of common characteristics, appearing to evolve from one quotation to the next. (As I

¹¹⁵ A video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/V4wJLUW-bow?si=kbqbQOsYhPAhc6aW>

explained, in a supervision with Laurence Crane, sometimes I chose a fragment that seemed to flow 'naturally' out of the previous one, but sometimes the fragments were chosen in opposition with each other to create a more jarring contrast.) There is a slight error, which I allowed to remain because of the musical result (at bars 78 and 79, two sonatas have swapped over but I quite like the result!) The dreamlike character of the resulting music, always floating in and out of different thematic states, is slightly unsettling. There is no 2nd subject, simply because the quantity of musical ideas and tonalities seems to prevent that possibility, since the quotations crowd in thick and fast, sometimes overlapping with each other, and each demands attention, in its own right, so that the traditional hierarchies of sonata form no longer function. In effect, moment form has invaded sonata form. There are, however, the vestiges of what might be described as a fragmentation of sonata form topics: motivic correspondences, moments of repose / partition, developments / variations, memories and recapitulations. Perhaps there is a certain kinship with the open sonata approach in the Well-Shuffled Hand – a sense that musical material is being shuffled into a somewhat surreal sequence. The music has a cinematic character - perhaps because quite a lot of the quotations have a hint of Film Noir about them: the quantity of Satiesque or Venetian material means that the whole piece has a nocturnal mood. Because of the somewhat mercurial way in which I selected the three quotes from each sonata, some ideas recur and others do not... this was a capricious approach really (with all the randomness and the appearance of interconnectedness that we experience in life itself!) and not really dependent on the quality or memorability of the original quoted material.

My supervisors have remarked on the mysterious functioning of the form in the piece, which is experienced as a kind of phantasmagorical continuum, with some ideas reappearing, others not. Within the flux of material, the listener waits for the re-emergence of the familiar, and although this happens from time to time, often ideas simply disappear. Julian Anderson suggested that these atomised quoted fragments sometimes function almost like Stockhausen's conception of moment form, and that, like *Kontakte*, the material seems starkly contrasted at the outset, and becomes more evened out in the final section. Along with *Mozart's Mirror* (see

5.4 above) and *The Well-Shuffled Hand* (see 5.2 above) Sonata Sonata represents a particularly radical version of (or departure from) Sonata Form, where the notional structure is exploded from within by the sheer disruptiveness of its own interacting quoted material (itself a sort of three-stage compositional diary). In seeking to represent the entire project, and employing a chronological structure organised inside the traditional divisions of sonata form, the piece ends up becoming a strange and surreal improvisation on themes from sonatas: a *Sonata Quasi una Fantasia*, in fact.

5.5 Six Venetian Sonatas

The six selected Venetian sonatas (sonatas 26 – 30 and 37) explore the landscape, cultural and musical topics of Venice in a variety of ways. Table 5-3 (below) shows how Venetian topics are explored in the first 5 sonatas. The accounts below derive much of their discussion and autoethnographic character from my composition diary.

Table 5-3 Table of Venetian topics in Venetian sonatas 1 – 5

Venetian Topics	Venetian Sonata 1: <i>Venice by Day</i>	Venetian Sonata 2: Sonata Barcarola I - <i>Venice by Night</i>	Venetian Sonata 3: Sonata Barcarola II - <i>Venice by Twilight (on 12 fixed tones)</i>	Venetian Sonata 4: Sonata Barcarola III - <i>RW in Venice, 1883</i>	Venetian Sonata 5: <i>Voyage to San Michelle</i>
Bells	Throughout score in all registers, as if representing the clamour of church bells in Venice on a Sunday morning	Bell-like sonorities at key moments in the form	Distant bells are evoked in the coda (which itself is a distant recollection of Schoenberg Op. 19, no. 6)	Various bell-like chords, derived from Wagner's own harmony in his symphonic sketches, and also in <i>Tristan and Parsifal</i>	Bell-like evocations of Stravinsky's music (e.g. <i>Les Noces</i> and <i>Requiem Canticles</i>)
Siciliano	Adagio episode in siciliano rhythm		The 'serenade' episode from bar 72		A siciliano quotation from <i>Pulcinella</i>

Table 5-3 continued

Venetian Topics (cont.)	Venetian Sonata 1: <i>Venice by Day</i>	Venetian Sonata 2: Sonata Barcarola I - <i>Venice by Night</i>	Venetian Sonata 3: Sonata Barcarola II - <i>Venice by Twilight (on 12 fixed tones)</i>	Venetian Sonata 4: Sonata Barcarola III - <i>RW in Venice, 1883</i>	Venetian Sonata 5: <i>Voyage to San Michelle</i>
Water effects	Submerged textures (with pedal)	Repeated notes with pedal	Rocking patterns	Submerged textures (with pedal)	Wet/dry effects
Barcarolle		Lugubrious 12/8 rhythmic pulse. Nocturnal character	Rocking figures, suggestive of water	12/8 pulse and barcarolle accompaniment patterns	Atmospheric use of repeating arpeggiated patterns
Italian Baroque	melodic fragments evocative of Corelli etc.				quote from <i>Pulcinella</i>
Composers	Corelli, Vivaldi etc.		Schoenberg	Wagner	Stravinsky
Danger/ mystery/ Death	The catastrophic ending with its cascade of bells inspired by <i>Don't Look Now</i>	Dark, watery, mysterious character throughout	The final bells are valedictory. Traces of Mahler-Mann-Schoenberg	The piece reflects on the death of Wagner in 1883	A visit to IS's grave and a chronology of his work
Journey	The whole piece is composed as if touring Venice on a Sunday morning	A night journey by boat	Shifting landscapes throughout.	A biographical journey/ momento mori	A voyage in a vaporetto to San Michele
Passacaglia	Baroque chaconne structures throughout and a 'submerged passacaglia' near the end	Repetition of a fixed pattern of pitches	The entire piece is made of fixed pitches.	Parts of the piece involve a cycling harmonic pattern derived from a sketch by RW	Various ostinati
Gondola Song		folk-like melody throughout	Undulating patterns reminiscent of gondola motion	<i>A Lugubre Gondola</i>	Funeral gondola elements

5.5.1 Venetian Sonata 1: *Venice by Day* (sonata 26)^{116 117}

The first Venetian sonata is a combination of sonata form and passacaglia, with allusions to the Italian Baroque and the intermingling sounds of bells and water. The piece contains a mysterious siciliano in its coda, in which the passacaglia is 'submerged'. The sonata was composed immediately following a family trip to Venice in December 2019, and is really a postcard piece (the original version was completed on Christmas Eve 2019). The main idea (from bar 67) was in my head while we were in Venice: a sort of neo-Baroque motif with a melody in thirds, and expanding triplet patterns, moving autonomously over a revolving bass-line; Italian baroque in style, like Corelli or Vivaldi or Monteverdi even. Scarlatti – a Venetian who embarked on a project somewhat like my own - was also in my mind quite a bit. The bright sunshine of the city seemed to require this kind of texture, this simple (playful) melodic response, but with a hint of something melancholic and dream-like (since Venice itself is always dream-like).

The sonata was radically revised in 2021. The opening (bars 1 – 66) is now substantially extended with the passacaglia element presented as an evolving sketch, with pedalled hockets and tiny scraps of what will eventually become thematic material, gradually increasing in quantity until the 'piece' in its original form comes into focus at 67. This is also the moment when the repeat mark appears, so everything before, I suppose, is introductory: not in the traditional sense of introduction (e.g. like Schumann's F sharp minor sonata Op. 11) but simply in the sense of something emerging - a boat on the horizon drawing closer. Bells above and below the passacaglia peel out to create a strange, layered effect (quite hard to play). It is monothematic: the 2nd subject (bar 97) is really the same as the first, modulating via C sharp minor (over F sharp minor tenths in the low bells) to E major and faster note values. In the revised version, the 'first time bar section' is now very

¹¹⁶ A video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
https://youtu.be/nOCO0s8ONeg?si=rlkfcMR_5wH_23NQ

¹¹⁷ This account freely adapts ideas about this piece from Matthew King's Composition Diary (2019 – 2024).

long (22 bars!) and, on repetition, is replaced by inverted (mirror) material which takes the piece in a different direction harmonically before dropping into slower F sharp major/minor material (2nd subject) and concluding this second exposition at 139. The development section is now extended with a sort of slowing down and reduction of material to stillness at bar 155 and then building up into a bell-like climactic C sharp minor climax, which dissipates until recap (a semitone up to D at 181). The 2nd subject is recapitulated immediately in B minor (189) and then (unexpectedly) a new episode seemed necessary – to break up the regularity of the form and bring in a fantastical element, appropriate to its setting: a strange ‘submerged passacaglia’ emerges as if from the deep, in which the notes of the bass line can be still be heard within a more chaotic jumble of scraps. 215 marks a slow return of the normal material, and this builds slowly towards a fast and clangorous ending – harmonically more surprising than in the first draft of the piece. The coda seems caught in a sort of E minor⁹ harmony with bells bonging and clanging around. Gradually the melodic material recedes and only the passacaglia line, with its welter of bells, is left, getting louder and faster: a gesture that is almost comedic, and also somewhat disturbing! This final revision of the sonata represents one of the more substantial rewrites in the entire set of pieces.

5.5.2 Venetian Sonata 2: *Venice by Night* (sonata 27)^{118 119}

The second Venetian sonata is an investigation into continuity: the traditional partitions of sonata form are dissolved (whilst regions of the form remain recognisably present). The piece also maintains a continuously pulsing pedal A, and a two-bar (tonally disruptive) ostinato pattern, throughout. The compositional process began as a kind of technical exercise: how to write a piece in sonata form with a repeating 2-bar 12/8 ‘barcarole’ accompaniment pattern (originally improvised on a

¹¹⁸ A video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/7BfAG2PsVd8?si=ceWpceE6p5IS8Qui>

¹¹⁹ This account freely adapts ideas about this piece from Matthew King’s *Composition Diary* (2019 – 2024).

piano at Guildhall) containing 3 continuous dissonant pedal elements: A, B flat and E flat. In terms of piano writing, there is a sort of etude element, with the repeating A pulse and the melodic lines embedded in the right hand beneath (and sometimes above) the repeating pedal note, and a continuous restrained texture with both pedals freely deployed. The 2nd subject (bar 17 - A Lydian) floats over a dominant pedal. The development section (from bar 31) starts over F sharp pedal with more angular modality and climbs the circle of 5ths to A. The recapitulation (from bar 43) occurs, surprisingly, over a B flat pedal. The 2nd subject, in D Lydian, has the bass line rising chromatically from D to A and ending in 8ves. Overall, the atmosphere is nocturnal and silvern, with perhaps hints of Italian style or imaginary folk-music in the melodic writing, composed, in conjunction with the continuous pedal A, in the right hand. There is a connection with similarly obsessive nocturnal pieces in the piano repertoire (like Ravel's 'Le Gibet' from *Gaspard de la Nuit* and Suk's 'How Mother Sang at Night to the Sick Child' from *About Mother*, Op. 28). The sonata was written after a fabulously atmospheric night-time boat-ride down the Grand Canal with the full moon sparkling on the water.

5.5.3 Venetian Sonata 3 on 12 fixed Tones: Sonata Barcarola II - *Rowing by Twilight* (sonata 28)^{120 121}

The third Venetian sonata explores traditional barcarolle topics, with a suggestion of different motions of water in its arpeggiation and, at the end, the sound of distant bell. The harmonic content of the piece is constructed entirely out of a row of twelve fixed notes (fixed in terms of pitch and register, throughout) and the result is an enigmatic quasi-12-tone piece which, paradoxically, refuses to abide by anything that might be described in terms of a Schoenbergian system, but instead employs triadic elements in a static, sonorous field (in a sense, an anti-12-tone piece). The initial idea was to create a resonant object, arranging all 12 notes of the chromatic

¹²⁰ A video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
https://youtu.be/zAE53d_N6ZA?si=MBRhYrOMOTRiNwL

¹²¹ This account freely adapts ideas about this piece from Matthew King's Composition Diary (2019 – 2024).

scale in absolutely fixed registers: a chromatic arpeggio with a bell-like sonority, and to employ this fixed set of pitches as the basis for a drone-like improvisation, which could be moulded into a somewhat static form of sonata structure. Although the pitches are absolutely fixed in register, there is no limit to their ordering. The approach is closer, in spirit, to Messiaen's 'mode' with fixed registers and dynamics in his *Canteyodjaya*, although this music has no stylistic resemblance to Messiaen's score. My sonata attempts to be more crepuscular and aquatic in character: triadic and euphonious (Venetian, in fact) despite the total chromaticism. The original title, "Wie ein Hauch" was intended to be a kind of homage to Schoenberg's Op. 19, no. 6 (Mahler's funeral and the bells of Vienna) and the final 2 notes are almost a direct quote from the sighing figure at the end of that tiny elegiac piece. Venice is also a city connected with the deaths of composers!

Although the sonata is conceived in opposition to his compositional practice, Schoenberg was somehow in the back of my mind (and along with the music's enigmatic references to Schoenberg, there are, I suppose, distant 'ghostly' associations with Mahler and Thomas Mann). Once I started notating the music, a rocking 5/4 barcarolle idiom began to emerge. I sketched out an improvisation, on the 21st June 2020, with very concise 1st and 2nd subject ideas (distantly inspired by Beethoven's *Appassionata*: the 'second subject', beginning in bar 7, freely inverts the first). As I went on into the development section, I explored canonic possibilities around the mirror-like symmetries of the row (I'm not sure whether these symmetrical properties were deliberately present when I first sketched out the 12 notes. I seem to recall that the spacing and arrangement of notes originally just fanned out in an intuitive way). The development section builds towards a climactic passage (from 43) in which the full 12-notes of the arpeggio charge up and down the keyboard. This transitions gradually into a more concise, serenade-like recapitulation with ornaments and guitar-like arpeggiation. In an extended coda, the notes are presented, for the first time, in bell-like block chords (the final 'pitched' section of Varese's *Ionisation* – another piece apparently conceived in sonata form – had a distant influence on this effect).

5.5.4 Venetian Sonata 4: Sonata Barcarola III - *RW in Venice* (sonata 29)^{122 123}

The fourth sonata derives its material from two sketches which Richard Wagner left incomplete when he died in the Palazzo Vendramin Calergi in Venice on 13 February, 1883. It explores fragments of material composed during his brief final residency in the city. The piece alludes to the nineteenth century pianistic idioms of nocturne and barcarolle, and engages with Romantic ideas of fragment, ruin and the unfinished.¹²⁴

There is quite a complicated story behind this music: at the end of his life Wagner seems, in the wake of *Parsifal*, to have decided to retire from operatic work and focus exclusively on instrumental composition. In her diary, Cosima Wagner frequently mentions her husband's new preoccupation. On 22 September, whilst Wagner was working on *Parsifal*, Cosima recorded her husband's desire to write a new kind of symphony with her usual painstaking detail:

He complains with indescribable humour that now he has to compose Kundry nothing comes into his head but cheerful themes for symphonies... He says he will call his symphonies "symphonic dialogues", for he would not compose four movements in the old style; but theme and countertheme one must have, and allow these to speak to each other. There is nothing of this sort in the whole of Brahms's (first) symphony, he says. (1980, 184)

The diary mentions a discussion about symphonies with Cosima's father, Franz Liszt on December 17th 1882 in which Wagner makes the following observation:

If we write symphonies, Franz, then let us stop contrasting one theme with another, a method Beeth. has exhausted. We should just spin a melodic line until it can be spun no farther; but on no account drama! (1980, 184)

Cosima describes several occasions on which, in the final years of his life, Wagner was in the habit of playing a new melody to her at the piano On 19 March 1878 the

¹²² A video recording of this sonata may be heard here:
https://youtu.be/sMeIrXl5eCs?si=5J0oT9beN_2fUFLx

¹²³ This account freely adapts ideas about this piece from Matthew King's *Composition Diary* (2019 – 2024).

¹²⁴ See Rosen (1996)

diary records Wagner's proclamation that he wants to write "many more things like the *Siegfried Idyll*" (1980, 44) and he speaks of wanting to use "an orchestra more or less the same as that of the *Idyll*". Another entry (20 March 1881) mentions that he wants them to have the title "From my Diary". (1980, 643) It would seem therefore that *Siegfried Idyll* was intended to be the first of a series of similar works of an intimate character: single movement compositions, employing sonata form in a new, free and poetic manner, and scored for chamber orchestra.

My own interest in these sketches dates back several years, when I first read these tantalizing descriptions in Cosima's diary. Subsequently, when I saw the sketches reproduced in John Deathridge's book, *Wagner, beyond Good and Evil*, I was struck by their beauty. They are fragments which seem to burst with possibilities. In a separate composition for chamber orchestra (*Symphony: Richard Wagner in Venice*), I have elaborated several of these sketches into an extended sonata form piece in a free imitation of Wagner's late style, modelled broadly on the structure of *Siegfried Idyll*.¹²⁵ I view this work as an example of what might be termed 'speculative musical archeology': an attempt to construct an imagined work out of Wagner's final compositional fragments.

At the suggestion of Julian Anderson, I decided to undertake a more personal kind of compositional project with this present sonata, incorporating Wagner's melodic fragments as 'found objects' within my own compositional idiom, and mindful of his comments (quoted above) on form and thematic dialogue. The sonata uses just two of Wagner's symphonic sketches, one in A flat (hinted at throughout the opening exposition but only revealed fully in the recapitulation from bar 98 - 111) and the other in E flat (a circular theme which appears "as if from the mist" in the development section, at bar 38. At 45, and again at 51, the two melodies are brought together simultaneously. Both are associated, in Wagner scholarship, with the 'Porazzi Melody', mentioned several times in Cosima's diary during the final year of Wagner's life (see Deathridge 2008, 199). At key moments in the form, the music

¹²⁵ The Album recording of my *Symphony: Richard Wagner in Venice*, by the Mahler Players, conducted by Thomas Leakey may be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/xm2D1nmOQA4?si=oR4jUTMtcDXpJ-B>

quotes from the extraordinary, iconic, music-changing chords in Wagner's operas: bar 66 quotes from *Tristan* Act 3 and in bar 71 the *Tristan* chord emerges "from the mist" with the rhythm of Siegfried's funeral march in bar 72. Bar 80 is a paroxysmic version of the Kundry chord from *Parsifal*, and the sinister Hagen chord from *Götterdämmerung* appears in bar 82, and continues in the nocturnal arpeggiation that follows. The piece ends with a quotation from the end of *Das Rheingold*: according to Cosima's diary (see below) Wagner played this music on the piano in his Venetian apartment the evening before he died. The Siegfried funeral march rhythmic motif (in my music, a symbol of Wagner's own heartbeat) also extends the effect of the ending (133-4) and the final RH chord slowly disappears note by note.

The final entry in Cosima's diary, on February 12 1883, ends with these words:

He goes to the piano, plays the mournful theme "*Rheingold, Rheingold*," continues with "False and base all those who dwell up above." "Extraordinary that I saw this so clearly at that time! – And as he is lying in bed, he says, "I feel loving toward them, these subservient creatures of the deep, with all their yearning". (1980, 1010)

The following day Wagner had a heart attack and died in Cosima's arms. She accompanied the corpse in a funeral gondola down the Grand Canal, and by train back to Bayreuth where Wagner was buried in his garden at Wahnfried in an undecorated marble tomb with no inscription. Between Liszt's bleak and visionary *Lugubre Gondola* pieces of 1883 and Thomas Mann's novella *Death in Venice* of 1912, various convulsive post-Wagnerian shock waves seemed to emanate from these events. Below (figure 5.10) is a photograph that I took of the Palazzo Vendramin Calergi, as I floated past it with my family, on our journey along the Grand Canal in December 2019. It is the magnificent edifice pictured on the left – the sort of building that most composers could only dream of dying in!

This sonata works with fragile material from another time and place. It felt right to treat Wagner's unfinished sketches with a certain delicacy almost as if listening to an offstage performance of a transcription of Wagner by his father-in-law: Wagner's music floating from a distance, as if filtered through late Liszt (whose *Lugubre Gondola* pieces are hinted at in the left hand at times) and echoing through more than a hundred years of subsequent music. There is a portrait element to the sonata

- like a faded sepia photograph that has been recovered from the Grand Canal after many years underwater.

Figure 5.10 Palazzo Vendramin Calergi in Venice (left)



5.5.5 Venetian Sonata 5: *Voyage to San Michele* (sonata 31)^{126 127}

The fifth Venetian sonata was written in the summer of 2021, when I was thinking about how to write a sequel to *The Well Shuffled Hand*. Eventually, I thought it would be fun to build a Lisztian travel piece – half journey, half biographical sketch – inspired by a boat journey in December 2019, involving a visit to Stravinsky's grave on the cemetery island of San Michele. Some photos (see below) were taken on the day of the trip. It was fantastically cold. Members of my family were not especially well dressed for the occasion, and my children had such cold feet that they felt like blocks of ice. Pictured below are Stravinsky's and Diaghilev's tombs (next to each other). Vera Stravinsky and Robert Craft are also nearby.

¹²⁶ A video recording of this sonata may be heard here:
https://youtu.be/X7n4JM_sbBk?si=gwg3U0LM032RsTJI

¹²⁷ This account freely adapts ideas about this piece from Matthew King's *Composition Diary* (2019 – 2024).

Figure 5.11 Photographs of the trip to San Michele, December 2021. Clockwise from top left: Approaching the Island by vaporetto; Diaghilev's tomb; The cemetery tower; Matthew King by Stravinsky's grave.



My original idea for the piece was to map a free, symmetrical sonata form structure (1st Subject, 2nd Subject, Development, 2nd Subject, 1st Subject) onto a kind of Lisztian *Années-de-Pelerinage*-style travel piece: A musical version of the voyage out to the island and back, on a cold, wind-and-wave-buffed vaporetto, would constitute a very free form of exposition and recap, bookending the main part of the piece which would be an enormous, rhapsodic, episodic ‘development section’, representing the experience of wandering around in the absolute stillness and silence of the cemetery, and the visit to Stravinsky’s and Diaghilev’s tombs. This general scheme is still discernible in the final piece. But what took over inevitably, was a sort of topic-related, labyrinthine, rather obsessive chronological journey through Stravinsky’s music. It struck me that an aspect in his music, which seems quite unique, is his capacity to invent musical sound with a very specific weight and memorability: precise icon-like musical sounds (for example, the chords in *The Rite of Spring* or

Petrushka or *Symphony of Psalms* or *The Rake's Progress* or *Requiem Canticles* etc.)

All these pieces contain vivid sound images which define the era in which they were written. My idea was to reflect on these extraordinary cultural objects as the musical form wanders, as if pensively roaming around the island of San Michele.

The following is a narrative account of the form and its use of Stravinskian topics:

The opening ladder of thirds derives from its use in *The Firebird*. The notes E flat to A (in the bass and in the subsequent ostinato) are the musical notes corresponding to S and A, the two musical notes in Stravinsky's surname. The melody from bar 14 derives from the opening melody in *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (also a memorial piece and, itself, an ongoing topic in these sonatas); the octatonic harmony (with a preference for 7th chords) and off-and-on-beat accents, is my own version of Stravinsky's popular rhythmic style (e.g. *The Rite* or *Symphony in Three Movements*). The chords from 40 derive from *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. The alternation of E flat and E, at bar 53, refers obliquely to the famous *Rite* chord (although the procession of 7ths here is also a reference to *Boris Godunov* and, distantly, to Tchaikovsky's harmony, with his preference for ambiguous relationships between dominant 7ths and augmented 6th chords). From bar 61, the melody of *Symphonies* returns again like bells over water. The left hand moves freely through modulating modes.

From bar 87, the 2nd subject is made of angular melodic phrases and gentle arpeggiated ostinato. The harmony is not entirely remote from Stravinsky's early Russian style but the warmth and relatively lush, impressionistic sonority of my pianistic style (with lots of pedal) is deliberately unlike Stravinsky – the opposite of his dry mechanical pianism.

Bar 115 marks the start of the development: a 'wandering among the graves', during which ghost-like reminiscences of Stravinsky's (and Diaghilev's) works, followed by Stravinsky's later pieces, mostly associated with Venice, are presented in a quasi-biographical chronology. The incantatory melody from bar 115 is a refrain - a sort of

Mussorgskian 'Promenade'.¹²⁸ The opening of *The Firebird* is quoted in the LH, at bar 130 and again at 137, mixing with the 'Promenade' melody and elements of the 2nd subject. Bar 140 is an echo of the first subject (and the melodic line quotes *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*). The Shrovetide fair theme in *Petrushka* (with its famous 7:8 ratio) appears from bar 144, and the sostenuto pedal activates resonance from the bottom E flat to A cluster of harmonics, generating a ghostly resonance for the rest of the graveyard development.

Various harpsichord arpeggios, from the graveyard scene in *The Rake's Progress*, articulate this ghostly section. The first arpeggio occurs at bar 148. At 151 the famous accents from *The Rite of Spring* occur in the LH. but are concealed beneath a melody made up of bits of earlier material. and the final chord of *Les Noces* which emerges, as clear as day, at bar 162. The siciliano from *Pulcinella* appears at 163. The 'still centre' of the piece (169 – 173) is the final chord of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. The opening fanfare of *The Rake's Progress* (from 175) collides with the fanfare-like chord of its Venetian sequel, *Canticum Sacrum* (177). More harpsichord graveyard arpeggios occur at 182-183, *Pulcinella* returns (184) and fanfares reverse (186-7). Then *Threni* appears at 188 and *Requiem Canticles* begins and ends (197 – 203). These fragments recur and lead to a climactic passage, reminiscent of the climax of movement 1 of *Symphony in Three Movements* (from 214), and concluding with the final chord of the *Requiem Canticles* (221). The harpsichord-graveyard-Rake motif leads back into a sort of inverted recap: a compressed 2nd subject emerges (225) underneath folk-like melodies (forgotten peasants!). From 241, a huge, transitional archway of fragmentary Stravinskian topics (see figure 5.12 below) leads – as if out of the graveyard - and back to the 'boat journey' in the form of a quasi-Bergian reverse presentation (from 249) of the 1st subject (the vaporetto journey away from the cemetery). On the final pages, the music floats off into the distance. The final chord is a revoicing of the first 'chorale chord' of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*: a memorial chord.

¹²⁸ from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*. Mussorgsky also occurs at 123 where the arpeggiated ostinato from the coronation scene in *Boris Godunov* can be heard in the LH.

Figure 5.12 Stravinskian topics in the 'archway'

...(like an archway made of monumental blocks of stone)

The musical score is divided into three systems, each with a Stravinskian topic label in a box above it. The first system (measures 241-243) is labeled 'Canticum Sacrum', 'Symphonies of WI', and 'Les Noces'. The second system (measures 244-246) is labeled 'Requiem Canticles', 'Rake opening Fanfare', and 'Symphonies of WI'. The third system (measures 247-249) is labeled 'Canticum Sacrum' and 'Rake-Graveyard-Harpsichord'. Performance instructions include dynamics like *p pesante*, *mp dolce*, *mf*, *f*, *pp delicatamente misterioso*, and *espress.*, as well as articulation like *senza ped.* and *ped.* markings.

241

Canticum Sacrum Symphonies of WI Les Noces

Rake-Graveyard-Harpsichord

p pesante *mp dolce* *mf* *espress.*

pp delicatamente misterioso *senza ped.*

244

Requiem Canticles Rake opening Fanfare Symphonies of WI

f *mf* *mp dolce*

247

Canticum Sacrum Rake-Graveyard-Harpsichord

p L.V. *pp delicatamente malizioso* *espress.*

secco (come un cembalo)

5.5.6 Venetian Sonata 12: Sonata Barcarola VI - ...*Unheeded Prophecies, Rising Waters...*¹²⁹

In December 2019, when I visited Venice with my family, the weather was cold and damp, and the water levels very high. St Mark's Square flooded while we were there, and sirens consequently sounded in the early morning. This piece gradually evolved out of a sketch, originally entitled 'A Prophecy' which is constructed over a 7/8 ostinato on a diminished triad with prominent use of tritones throughout the entire piece. The notes of the ostinato contain the musical letters CASSAD which are a musical cypher for the name Cassandra: I wanted to evoke the ancient Trojan prophetess as a symbol of unheeded warning – a somewhat arcane comment on the environmental crisis that increasingly threatens the Planet.

This is therefore a sinister barcarolle, steeped in an atmosphere of impending catastrophe. In a supervision, on November 21st 2022, Julian Anderson suggested that it might be interesting to distil the symbolic weight of the tritone into a single piece, and I subsequently built this sonata quite quickly out of the earlier ostinato sketch. The final piece is a somewhat loose, rhapsodic conception of sonata form with three subjects. The opening idea consists of huge intervals in the right hand, like ominous droplets of water plinking about, while the left hand continues to play its undulating tritone ostinato; at bar 16 a second idea emerges: a repeating phrase with an inexorable, expanding character as the intervals move apart chromatically; at bar 22 a third idea appears: a lugubrious lullaby-style melody, in chords, over the ostinato accompaniment. A central development section begins at bar 35 with the 3rd subject ushering in a polyrhythmic presentation of the ostinato with a minim scale, rising and falling (against dotted minim 5ths in the LH). Different versions of the ostinato then break out in different speeds, intervals and registers, with weird combinations of voices (almost like organ mixture stops). These lead to recapitulation at bar 59 (at least, this is how I see this moment which is, in fact, a dramatic octave displacement of the ostinato) followed by strange fragments of

¹²⁹ A Video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/v3ab1Rfru3w?si=dILNEKoGby3Ng0Pl>

material, suggestive of the original 'plinking' droplets. The 'poco piú mosso' at 79 – 81, presents the expanding intervals of the 2nd subject with rising quintuplet ostinato patterns in the right hand, a cascade of tritones at 82 and the return of the lullaby 3rd subject at 84, with a lugubrious Coda from 92 and spiralling 'endless' chromatics from 102 to the end.

The piece is an attempt to construct an entire sonata form structure out of a single symbolic 7/8 ostinato figure of unstable diminished character, dominated by the tritone interval. The various partitions of sonata structure are essentially static in character, like tableaux: they provide the changes of scenery through which the various lamenting elements in the music unfold.

5.6 Two Satie Sonatas

5.6.1 Sonata in A Minor (after Satie Ia) (sonata 39)¹³⁰

Originally sketched in 2016, just before my father died, and revised in February 2020, this rather gloomy piece journeys from A minor to E flat minor. The original idea was simply to respond to the wonderful Satie Gnossiennes, almost like a composition exercise, and to structure my homage as a through-composed (with none of the standard sense of partition), non-teleological sonata form, with mysterious, circular, modal, Satie-style material, often containing cross-rhythmic patterns, and with gnomic text written, from time to time, above the staff, as a self-referential commentary on the form and content of the work: for example, in the development section: 'by moonlight', 'more effort required', and 'as if lost in a snow globe' and, at the recapitulation, 'is this the way?' The brooding descent in the coda drags the music down lugubriously from its original tonality to E flat minor (a tritone away).

¹³⁰ A video recording of this sonata may be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/o4QzYG1cZeY?si=HfU57PHOG67QacC6>

A second version of this sonata (1b) is also included in the submission. In February 2021, I attempted a more expansive approach to the piece, with a clearer, more partitioned approach to sonata form, including new second subject material and an abbreviated exposition repeat (with the 2nd subject reduced to a single bar). This second version of the sonata is grander, more formally ambitious, and possibly bleaker in character although, in the process, I think some of the spontaneity of the original conception was lost. 1a is therefore probably my preferred version.

5.6.2 Sonata in F minor: *Mozart's Mirror* (after Satie VII) (sonata 44)¹³¹

In the summer of 2022, I began thinking about composing a response to Satie's *Sonatine Bureaucratique* – a piece that I don't especially like, although I was intrigued by the idea of recomposing someone else's music in this way (Satie takes the original structure and rhythm of Clementi's C major sonatina and recomposes much of the pitch material). Since Satie himself had, by now, become a topic within this sonata project, I decided to make another 'after Satie' sonata by applying the *Sonatine Bureaucratique* procedure to Mozart's famous 'easy sonata' K.545. I began by turning the entire exposition upside down, but subsequent events took the form in a number of surprising directions.

Table 5-4 (below) shows the interaction of structure and topics in the sonata. It might be one of the strangest (and most experimental) in the set of 45 sonatas. The progression from parody to homage to a sort of blank, wintry music box is a very odd emotional journey. In terms of sonata form, it is organized (and this itself is a homage to Mozart!) in a deliberately operatic way: 'Scene 1': (as if 'through the looking glass') inverts the entire exposition of K.545, note for note.¹³² In this musical mirror, C major becomes F minor which, alongside the inverted second subject, now has an unsettling pull towards modal B flat minor with weird 2nd inversion

¹³¹ A video recording of this sonata may be heard here:
https://youtu.be/rDgUy5saMFE?si=Fuv_CaWWwpWvZ0-b

¹³² The opening octave of Mozart's sonata, although it sounds the same as the original, has actually been flipped over so that right hand becomes left and hand, and vice versa; all the notes thereafter are inverted. The result is something that seems like an oddly surreal alternative to classical tonality.

harmonies. This is followed by 'Scene 2': a re-statement (exposition repeat) of Mozart's exposition, but this time in the form of childishly banal chromatics at the extremes of the piano, followed by ladders of thirds in contrary motion. Mozart's original, formally arpeggiated cadences from K.545 conclude each 'subject group', at bar 39, and again at 54 – 56. Scenes 3 – 5 constitutes the episodic 'development section': 'Scene 3' is a maritime passage with tango material, adapted from Satie's *Sur un Vaisseau* ('On a Ship') from his *Descriptions Automatiques*. This begins the development (as Mozart himself often does) with new material - the rocking of a boat in the left hand and tear-like falling scalic patterns in the right, containing ladders of thirds (also based on a pattern from Satie's *Sur un Vaisseau*) with the bass line descending the locrian mode. 'Scene 4' (F major) is a 'Reminiscence of *Così fan Tutte*' (I had recently taken my daughter to see a production at the Royal Opera House) with its memorable 'farewell scene': this material is really an improvisation on the repeating harmonic sequence from Mozart's beautiful quintet, 'Di scrivermi ogni giorno' in Act 1, presented as a sort of pizzicato passacaglia, into which fragments of Satie's tango frequently intrude. Another intruder is the little oscillating triplet figure (in 98 and 101, based on the semiquaver pattern that introduces the 2nd subject of Mozart's original sonata K.545). The heightened emotional character of bars 108 – 110, with the gradual application of the pedal, opens a new curtain to 'Scene 5' (from bar 111): a more serious representation of the climax of Mozart's quintet in a quasi-Busonian manner, as if Mozart himself has appeared as Romantic hero at the centre of the piece. A downward (Satie's) scale (118 – 120) transitions to 'tragic' F minor (as if Mozart's premature death has itself become a topic) with a free quotation (120 – 132) from his F minor Fantasia for Musical Clock K.594 – itself a memorial piece – containing, within it, the syncopated rhythm of the Adagio from the *Gran Partita* and 'angelic' versions of the Satiesque scale, now reversed and floating upwards. A huge, cathedral-like acoustic seems to open up (128 – 132). The tango-transition returns (133 - 4) with Satie's falling scale over a dominant pedal, leading to 'Scene 6' and recapitulation (bar 135): the *Lacrimosa* from the Requiem over a pulsing (Mozartian) accompaniment (again rhythmically derived from the *Gran Partita* adagio) and cluster-like F minor chords in the left hand. This ushers in (at 141) Mozart's famous K.545 melody for the first time (displaced by a quaver and

at half speed), presented in 'Tragic' clothing, with its original pitches, reharmonized ('underneath') in F minor. The 2nd subject from K.545 appears 'simplice' (bar 149) in a similar manner. Finally, the coda ('Scene 7') introduces the Queen of the Night (from bar 157): her famous coloratura arpeggios happen to resemble the arpeggiated cadential patterns in K.545, already quoted in bars 54-55, and so the sonata concludes with a version of 'Der Hölle Rache',¹³³ as if played by a music box, gradually running down, into silence.

Parody here is partly aimed at the Mozart industry: the absurd Salzburg-Chocolate-box-Mozart who never existed. But, rather like Venetian Sonata 5: *Voyage to San Michele* (see above) this is also a weird kind of biography: Mozart is present throughout the piece in a variety of characters. The expositions are parodies (but surely K.545 is itself a kind of parody?) However, from the development onwards, the mood becomes more subdued and ultimately religious / reverential. All these characters are, to some extent, portraits of Mozart: Mozart the joker, the scatologist, addicted to puns and obscene word games; Mozart the iconoclast, the revolutionary; Mozart the operatic genius, the composer of sacred music, composer of elegies and masonic ceremonials; Mozart, the lover of games, composer for mechanical instruments and musical toys; Mozart, master of the sublime, the deepest and darkest manifestation of Sturm und Drang; Mozart, the unfinished, prophet of Romanticism, composer of fragments. All the quoted material comes from his late works (1788 – 1791) and therefore, a topic of the piece might be said to be 'late style' – music that comes from the autumn of his extraordinary, brief life. The valedictory, and indeed religious or quasi-religious character of some of this material (including the fragmentary 'Lacrimosa' from the *Requiem* – a musical idea from his deathbed) has a mysterious, monumental, gothic quality.

Even though I composed (as always in this project) with a sonata form 'archetype' in my mind, any notion of sonata form, in its traditional sense, can only be perceived with foreknowledge of Mozart's original material (particularly K.545) since neither of

¹³³ from Mozart's final opera, *Die Zauberflöte*.

the 2 expositions appear to resemble one another, and the recap is different again, presenting the original melodies for the first time, but at a tempo, and in a harmonization that render them unfamiliar. The reminiscence of *Così fan Tutte* in the development section leads to quotations from other late works - a kind of late-style pantheon that runs through to the end. In this way, the piece, oddly, also incorporates another genre/topic: the Lisztian Paraphrase (or its 20th century version: the Busonian transcription) and therefore progresses from Satiesque parody to Romantic homage.

Memory is functioning on an unusual number of levels in this sonata. Echoes of K.545, one of Mozart's most popular and, to some extent, irritating masterpieces, can be heard, filtered through (a) inversion, (b) rhythm only and (c) reharmonization (in the recap) with the original pitches rhythmically displaced and augmented. Additionally, there is reminiscence of opera (of an actual performance) and various quotations from Mozart's late pieces, which drift past the listener in a dream-like manner. Sonata form dissolves into a kind of fantasy-biography in which memory itself is a key component. The sense of how this form may be perceived depends on the extent to which a listener is able to understand the music's relationship with the original quoted material.¹³⁴ This is a piece in which the primary elements (exposition, exposition repeat, development, recapitulation, and coda) of sonata form derive from different versions (memories) of other works, by another composer, presented in a quasi-operatic manner. Sonata form itself (like Mozart) is both present and absent.

¹³⁴ From this point of view, the sonata can be viewed as a response to Kofi Agawu's observation that 'one needs access to a prior universe made up of commonplaces of style known to composers and their audiences. Topics are recognised on the basis of prior acquaintance. (2009: 43)

Table 5-4 Structure and topics in 'Mozart's Mirror'

Exposition (farce / parody)		Development (love scene / farewell)			Recapitulation (tragedy / lament)	Coda (music box)
Scene 1	Scene 2	Scene 3	Scene 4	Scene 5	Scene 6	Scene 7
<p>Mozart's K.545 (1st movement) exposition inverted ('Through the Looking Glass').</p> <p>F minor 1st subject with pull towards subdominant version of 2nd subject (modal B flat minor) and strange 2nd inversion harmonies (a surreal alternative to classical tonality).</p>	<p>Mozart's K.545 exposition repeat. Extremes of piano.</p> <p>Original rhythm recomposed as childish chromaticism and 'ladders of 3rds' scampering up and down the full length of the keyboard in contrary motion.</p> <p>Mozart's original arpeggiated cadential 'fanfares' formally articulate structure.</p>	<p>'Maritime scene'.</p> <p>New material: Satie's <i>Sur un Vaisseau</i>: rocking habañera in the LH with falling 'ladders of 3rds' scales in RH (like tears) over locrian falling bassline.</p>	<p>'Reminiscence of <i>Così fan Tutte</i>.</p> <p>Pizzicato passacaglia on Mozart's 'Di scrivermi ogni giorno' with variations of pulse and resonance and fragments of K.545 and Satiesque 'ladders of 3rds'.</p> <p>Becoming more 'serious' with transition to pedalled sonority and allargando (bars 107 – 110).</p>	<p>Busonian transcription of climax of 'Di scrivermi ogni giorno', transitioning to 'Adagio in F minor for Musical Clock' K.594.</p> <p>Mozart appears as 'Romantic hero' and dies.</p> <p>The rhythm of the <i>Gran Partita Adagio</i>. Salzburg cathedral: weeping angels ('ladders of 3rds') Dominant pedal with 'falling leaves'.</p>	<p>'Requiem'.</p> <p>F minor syncopated cluster chords in LH (<i>Gran Partita Adagio</i> rhythm). Sighing 'piano' motifs from Mozart's 'Lacrimosa' in RH.</p> <p>Themes from K.545 (1st movement) emerge in sequence for the 1st time but are displaced, augmented and reharmonised in static F minor.</p>	<p>The Queen of the Night: music box elegy.</p> <p>Coloratura arpeggios from 'Die Hölle Rache' (which resemble the cadential 'fanfare' arpeggios from K.545).</p> <p>The music box winds down.</p>

6 Coda (Concluding Remarks)

'Sonata, what do you mean to me?' is a question which (like the open form of *The Well Shuffled Hand*) gives rise to almost limitless possibilities. As Danuta Mirka has pointed out, "stylistic cross-references remain important factors [in the music of our own time] but the spectrum of such references and complexity of their sociocultural meaning exponentially increases." (2014, 47) The enduring significance of the sonata idea (which has, after all withstood considerable compositional interrogation and musicological analysis over centuries) is perhaps due to its dialectical structure, through which sound and meaning may be mediated, and through which non-verbal ideas continue to communicate, to the listener, with all the rhetorical power of the rich and immense tradition to which they belong.

Music is organized sound, apprehended in time; each musical form is a container for a network of signifiers, and the more complex and multidimensional the form becomes (as, for example in my final sonata, *Between the Acts: a Sonata Pageant*) the more diffuse and elaborate its meanings appear to be. In my own practice, the components of sonata form have been increasingly stretched in all kinds of directions, as the concept of sonata has been filtered through a diversity of compositional approaches, and subjected to all kinds of influences.

I suspect that I could (and may yet) compose another 45 pieces on my own journey into sonata but, as the notional template of form in my compositional practice has combined with (or mutated into) other forms, and other genres, 'sonata' itself, for all its weight and significance as a cultural entity, has been subjected to all kinds of rough and irreverent treatment! At this stage, having lived inside this material for 4 years, it is virtually impossible for me to view the results objectively, and it is gratifying now to step back and allow other observers to consider the results, and assess the extent to which 'sonata' as a concept and a form remains intact at the end of these 45 pieces, or whether the term itself has become a floating signifier.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ See Livingstone (2012, chapter 2, 265-94.) In deconstructive terms, the distinction between signifier and signified, without disappearing, is problematised since what we imagine we refer to as signified (in contradistinction to signifier) is not and cannot be clear given that it is itself structured by

At the end of this project, in which I have responded, in various contexts, to Fontenelle's famous question, "Sonata, what do you mean to me?" the answer continues to reveal new possibilities. I have journeyed into sonata and new routes and vistas have opened out. Sonata itself has become the primary topic in a plethora of cultural topics, genres and signifiers. Theoretical concepts have arisen from this research, and different sub-groups and intersecting categories have emerged, and these appear, from the vantage point of this commentary, to circle around the idea of sonata, like constellations. In the process, four years of experience have, to some extent, been examined from various angles, whilst composing through and around and inside 'sonata', both as a form and a genre, and as a repository for a multitude of other forms and genres, in an abundance of expositions, developments and recapitulations. In this way, I have interrogated sonata; in the process, sonata has interrogated me.

differential networks of signification in the first place. By these lights, language – in terms of discursive signification - is always in excess of concrete reality (the signified) and therefore this surplus of signification over the signified creates what are known as floating signifiers (since they 'fail to signify anything specific [ibid., 70]). Examples might include massively overdetermined notions such as 'freedom', 'justice', 'right', 'democracy', 'education', 'will of the people' etc., slogans that can seemingly be invoked by anyone at any time to defend almost any social formation or policy whatsoever.

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8 Appendices

8.1 Extracts from Matthew King's Sonata Composition Diary 2019 – 2024

A composition diary has been kept during the four years of this project, in which I have documented the progress of each of the sonatas. Some pieces have been discussed in a relatively formal (objective) way, whilst other pieces are outlined through various informal comments and diary entries, with scraps of notation, photographs etc. plotting compositional progress, revisions, dialogues with supervisors etc. The following examples are typical.

Sonata (7) in A minor (*Musick for a While*) after Purcell¹³⁶

(using sonata structure as a means of recomposing material by Purcell; with various forms of registral displacement to conceal familiar melodic lines).

15/08/20: This sonata was composed between July 25 and Aug 2nd 2020, initially as a response (lament) to the silencing of the Stour Music Festival (due to Covid) which normally takes place in the ancient Pilgrim Church of All Saints Boughton Aluph, a few fields away from my house (Alfred Deller – who founded the festival – is buried in the old churchyard there).¹³⁷ The original idea came from listening to my daughters practising 'Musick for a While'. The song (in Purcell's masterful use of ground bass with modulating developmental centre and reprise) contains elements that hint at a structure not unlike sonata form. Dryden's original text is a paean to Music's healing powers, arising from its place in a rational (Pythagorean) order governing the universe, ultimately overcoming irrationality and madness (represented in the song by the fury, Acteo). Elements of the song's text had an influence on how the sonata developed (see description below, written for supervisors in 2020).

¹³⁶ A Video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/bVGzrGxkwl?si=zNmX58ZmXgMIVLRF>

¹³⁷ Stour Music was founded in 1962 by Alfred Deller. The festival continues to the present day, and still attracts leading performers of early music.

The sonata continues to investigate certain technical features explored in other recent pieces (*Sonata Barcarolla (Venice by Twilight)* and *Sonata for Left Hand (Neon, Glass and Ashes)*): a concern with the kind of effect Beethoven once described as “si deve suonare tutto questo pezzo delicatissimamente e senza sordini”¹³⁸, in which the resonant effect of continuous pedalling is tempered (on a modern piano) by judicious use of half and quarter pedalling at the pianist’s discretion. Furthermore, this sonata (like the *Sonata for Left Hand*) makes use of somewhat concealed or distorted existing material and (like the *Sonata Barcarolla*) refers momentarily to the last piece of Schoenberg’s Op. 19, and, not for the first time in these sonatas, Webern is not far away in my frequent use of wide intervals, octave displacements, symmetries, contrary motions, ubiquitous hand crossing and pun-like internal pitch correspondences between the hands. Nevertheless, the essential concern of this music is Henry Purcell himself, whose “pow’r of harmony”¹³⁹ remains as fresh and idiosyncratic as ever, more than 300 years after his death.

I began to sketch a ghostly version of the original material in which the ground bass and melody are broken up registrally, and shift all over the piano with octave displacements, using a lot of pedal to create a hazy distancing effect. The traditional relationship of melody to ground bass is eroded as the two lines frequently cross each other, and there is a profusion of large intervals such as 7ths and 9ths. Aside from the registral displacements, the basic pitches and rhythms of the original song remain unchanged. In this way the music both adapts and conceals Purcell’s original music all the way up to the falling slurred pairs (‘eased, eased’ in the original song) in bars 13 - 14. Here, Purcell’s ground bass then shifts to the dominant, rather like a transition to the 2nd subject but here the cadential passage in the original is elided with a sudden shift up to E, at which point a second subject appears, very different in character, consisting of chordal material taken from another magnificent Purcell aria with ground bass, *Oft she visits this lov’d mountain* from *Dido and Aeneas*. The passage I quote is not from the vocal part of the song but from the wonderful climax of string instruments which, in the original song, enter as the singer concludes with the words, “Here Acteon met his fate” and play a magisterial epilogue in 4 parts, in which all the emotion and energy of the song seem to overflow into Purcell’s richest contrapuntal harmony. In the sonata this material is reduced into just 5 bars of high delicate material (*pianissimo* and *una corda*) with the ground bass removed, and the original string lines compressed into high right hand chords, while the LH maintains a pedal E tolling figure. The ‘distant baroque’ character of this material is further enhanced through the use of double dots and the measured trill in thirds in bar 16.

¹³⁸ ‘The entire piece should be played with the greatest delicacy and without mutes’ – the instruction written above the first movement of Beethoven’s ‘Moonlight Sonata’, Op. 27, no. 2.

¹³⁹ from Dryden’s Ode on the Death of Mr. Henry Purcell, 1696.

The development section, which follows immediately, juxtaposes elements from the middle of 'Musick for a while' ('Till Alecto free the dead' in bars 19 - 20) with the Acteon material, now superimposed onto the *Musick for a While* ground in bars 21 – 23 (along with a sort of mythological conceit that both characters suffer a change: Alecto is overwhelmed by Orpheus' music and the snakes drop from her head, while Actaeon is torn to pieces by his own hounds for gazing upon the naked Artemis). This leads to a thinning out of material in bars 24 – 26 at the famous 'drop, drop, drop' passage, rendered here in terms of off-beat staccatos ('like water droplets') dropping down to the sighing 9th ('wie ein hauch') at the bottom of the piano.

The 'recapitulation' (bar 27) occurs at exactly the point at which Purcell brings back the original refrain, 'Musick, musick for a while' but it seemed appropriate to reflect the topic of transformation in the texts of the original songs by creating a change of character and texture at the moment of recapitulation: as the ground bass continues, a newly composed free 5-part contrapuntal variation emerges in the manner of a Purcellian lament, with lute-like descending arpeggiated triads and descending sighing appoggiatura figures in the right hand with the left hand moving up in contrary motion. As it reaches the dominant in bar 29, the dense texture of falling and rising appoggiaturas finally bursts into a fortissimo statement of 2nd subject (*Oft she visits*), this time presented in a rhythmical setting with the pedal A marching up and down the piano in syncopated, cross-rhythmic dotted crotches against the Purcellian harmony at the top of the piano. This quiets to a pianissimo open 5th ending as the left hand reaches up to top A. The two halves of the piece are approximately symmetrical, and the structure, in its collision of sonata form and ground bass, with a new variation at the point of recapitulation, is similar in proportion to a baroque binary form.

The dedication 'at the grave of Alfred Deller' is both metaphorical and literal: Deller's recording of *Musick for a While*¹⁴⁰ is justly famous, and so the sonata is written in tribute to his significant contribution to the performance of both early and new music in the mid 20th century. He also happens to be buried approximately quarter of a mile from my house, in the beautiful graveyard of All Saints, Boughton Aluph, where I often go for a morning run! The Stour Music Festival (which Deller founded in 1962) normally takes place at All Saints every summer, but sadly not in 2020, because of the Covid pandemic.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Purcell: *Music for a While*. Alfred Deller, Harmonia Mundi, 1979



All Saints, Boughton Aluph and the grave of Alfred Deller.

Sonata (12) for Left Hand: *Neon, Glass and Ashes*¹⁴¹

Composed May 1 – 4 2020.

Background:

On 30 April, Laurence Crane sent a write-up about the pieces he'd seen so far. There was a dialogue and I asked him to set me 5 rules for the next piece (see below).

Thu 30/04/2020 11:00

...but on a different and potentially more interesting topic, I woke up last night with a weird idea.

Have you ever seen a film by Lars von Trier called *The Five Obstructions*?¹⁴² It's an interesting film in which von Trier commissions an old friend and mentor of his - also a film maker - to remake one of his earlier short films five times, and each time Von Trier imposes five 'obstructions' on the film-making process. It's really interesting because his friend responds to the challenge in very creative ways. (Von Trier 2003)

So... I'm wondering if we could try something similar: would you be willing to set me the task of writing a sonata with 5 instructions. They can be anything you like - it could be a topic: (e.g. a sonata about King Kong or Judy Garland or Braques or Bob Dylan or whatever) or it could be technical (e.g. it has to have 25 triads in it, or it

¹⁴¹ A Video recording of this sonata can be heard here:

https://youtu.be/IP_0u0hf7a0?si=bl0E8_82sfPOe8h1&t=1

¹⁴² Von Trier's 2003 documentary film in which Von Trier challenges his friend and mentor Jørgen Leth to recreate his film, *The Perfect Human*, five times, each time with a different "obstruction" imposed upon the film-making process.

mustn't contain the note A or whatever) or it could be conceptual or, well anything you choose really...

5 instructions.

What do you think?

Matthew¹⁴³

Laurence Crane

Fri 01/05/2020 09:42

OK, here are my 5 instructions:

1. All material is monodic
2. The piece is written entirely within a 3 octave range; between G an octave and a fourth below middle C and G an octave and a fifth above middle C
3. Some or all of the material is derived from any of your favourite pop/rock music when you were a teenager. You may engage with more than one pop/rock artist
4. There must be at least one tempo change
5. At some point there must be some quite specific pedal markings

L¹⁴⁴

On completion, a few days later I sent Laurence the following message:

So here it is. As it turned out, I added two more limitations to your original 5:

1. a perpetuum mobile
2. for left hand only.

Here's a little explanation of how it works and how I followed your rules.

1. All material is monodic

So I followed this strictly (except the final bar I guess) in that the whole piece is a string of single notes, but of course the application of the pedal throughout means that it's awash with harmony that the monody generates, - hopefully that isn't breaking the rule!

2. The piece is written entirely within a 3 octave range; between G an octave and a fourth below middle C and G an octave and a fifth above middle C

¹⁴³ Email from Matthew King to Laurence Crane, 30 April 2020

¹⁴⁴ Email from Laurence Crane to Matthew King, 1st May 2020

Yes. I used those outer limit Gs. Quite tricky because there were times I wanted to go higher and lower but I like the limitation - it helps give the piece it's restrained character.

3. Some or all of the material is derived from any of your favourite pop/rock music when you were a teenager. You may engage with more than one pop/rock artist

I won't tell you what these were - I thought it would be a fun part of the game to see if you can work them out! There are 3 (fragments of) songs. Whether or not they were absolute favourites, I chose them because they belong to a particular period and have a haunting, almost Romantic quality that was fun to play with.

4. There must be at least one tempo change.

The development section is 1/3 quicker than the exposition and recap.

5. At some point there must be some quite specific pedal markings

I made a feature of this instruction by bathing the whole piece in pedal. There is a very specific pedal instruction at the start in boxed text. The final bar has a very specific non-pedal instruction.

A final comment of the form: the exposition has 3 subjects in 3 keys, each in the original song's key. The development takes the form of a passacaglia-style series of variations on the first song; the recap presents the material differently, starting with the 2nd subject. The final page is like a kind of epilogue: it has a new melody which is in fact the chorus of the first song.¹⁴⁵

19/05/20: Laurence's rules have provided quite specific spurs to imagination – constraints which forced me to find imaginative solutions. It was a very interesting process, all written very fast, almost like a stream of consciousness. The 3 octave range limited my options to go too high or low, and sometimes I had to rethink things that initially came to me outside the range, but I ended up preferring the more restrained register, and the LH fitted nicely into this compass. The monodic element forced me to think seriously about writing for one hand and discipline my writing in terms of a single line of notes, and to discover a way of engaging with harmonic thinking in a different way. The *sempre* pedal effect (along with the *perpetuum mobile*) grew quite naturally out of evoking – as if in a haze, or a dream-like reverb - a particular period of music from my early adolescence, the sound of it, the 'urban Romanticism' of its character, and the slightly dangerous, subversive quality it had in those days. I derived thematic material from 3 songs, chosen, primarily for the haunting quality of their melodic material: Bowie's *Ashes to*

¹⁴⁵ Email from Matthew King to Laurence Crane, 5th May 2020

*Ashes*¹⁴⁶ – but only the opening B flat minor 7 riff – as the 1st subject (and also as a dominant element throughout the development) and then we hear the chorus like a kind of epilogue in the final coda of the piece. Blondie's *Heart of Glass*,¹⁴⁷ not such a favorite, but, with Debbie Harry's face and voice, a song that seems iconically representative of the period, and for the 3rd subject, *Neon Lights*¹⁴⁸ by Kraftwerk, a richly textured soundscape with its marvellous raindrop-like electronic interlude in E major. I wanted all 3 songs in their original keys so that they could haunt the piece appropriately from their original sonic location, and so that their contrasting tonalities could generate an element of classical harmonic tension.

The piece is really about memory. A meditation on things that are in some sense lost: youth, my younger self, friends of that time with whom I have lost touch, relations who have died, the world of the late '70s and early '80s, a world that seemed so 'modern' at the time, and now seems so - a strange period really with all the bleakness of those far-off post-punk, early Thatcher years. Not a particularly happy period, but a fertile period in terms of popular culture, and a period enmeshed with my own emerging adult mind, personality, and taste. The sonata is a sort of reflection, almost on the edge of consciousness – a gentle wandering over the terrain of that era, with an element of lament or valediction, not at all inappropriately as it turned out because Florian Schneider (unknown to me at the time) had died the night before I began writing the piece.

Pastoral Sonata III (20) (*Puffball*)¹⁴⁹

07/10/22: Surprised last week to see on Google Maps that Boughton Lees (the green near my house) is in fact a green triangle - I'd always thought of it somehow as circular. But the reason for the confusion is that there is a great big circle of cut grass that forms the cricket green, with 3 promontories poking out of each end. This is the green where I walk the dog every morning, but also, in the summer, we sometimes watch cricket and even play cricket occasionally, and so it has become (for me) a sort of pastoral, meditative space in daily life. A homeless man described it to me over the summer as his "Spiritual Home" and that description impressed me because, in some sense, I feel the same way. It's a sort of ancient oasis in the middle of quite busy traffic thoroughfares, but, despite the bustle and traffic, and the flow of cars,

¹⁴⁶ from Bowie's 1980 album *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*.

¹⁴⁷ from Blondie's 1979 album, *Parallel Lines*.

¹⁴⁸ from Kraftwerk's 1978 album *The Man Machine*.

¹⁴⁹ A Video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/Gf9oQ7S5buw?si=ZFbg1ia2r9jbM-FB>

motorbikes, lorries, delivery vans, rubbish collections etc., there on the green all is peace with the smell of mown grass, and the charming layout of the space with a cricket pavilion and pitches near the centre. The triangular corner nearest our house has a large tree that my children used to climb; the far corner of the triangle is where I always walk the dog, and it has cricket nets where we sometimes practice, and an avenue of beautiful trees: oaks, beeches, sycamores. The far corner has the war memorial and a little garden area of tulips, and paths leading from there to the Stour Valley Way, and the ruined church at Eastwell, where the son of Richard III is buried. The realisation that the whole space is a large triangle enclosing a circle struck me last week as interesting, and I started to imagine constructing a piece using that simple (Platonic) idea of a circle inside a triangle.

And then two days ago (Wednesday 5 October), when walking the dog, I found two puffballs near the oak trees on the green. I took them home and cooked and ate 3 slices of one of them. They had a slightly tangy, earthy flavour and I decided to check that I'd not made a mistake. Alarming, websites pointed out that it was easy to confuse a puffball with an immature deathcap and in photos the appearance was worryingly similar (the deathcap has tiny gill patterns at the edges). I suspect, if I saw a deathcap, I'd see that there is quite a clear difference (and I've since been informed that they are very unlikely to grow on Boughton Lees) but the fact they are often found near oak trees did not fill me with confidence, and so I had to spend a few uneasy hours waiting to see if I was either (a) fine or (b) dead. It was an interesting and salutary lesson in the potential fragility of life as well as a reproof about the dangers of eating wild fungi without checking carefully beforehand. I had a Zoom supervision with a rather concerned Laurence Crane in the afternoon and we joked about a 'puffball sonata' but then today (Friday 7 October) I suddenly thought (again while walking the dog) that it would be easy to write such a piece: just a huge slow clock-like chromatic scale dropping the full length of the piano, and back again, like a huge circle (and also in a sense like a huge puff-ball) and, at the same time, a circle of 5ths: very simply a sequence of 12 triads starting with A minor and then climbing up: E, B, F sharp, C sharp etc. Then, if arranged in three groups of 4 triads (corresponding to the primary parts of Sonata Form), the piece could structure itself like a circle within a kind of triangle, corresponding to Exposition (A minor), Development (D flat), Recap (F minor) with a tiny coda. Then within these circling elements, various short motifs, or melodic elements, could function like symbolic markers: a slightly fateful motif, a more innocent Lydian idea, some octatonic material with a tritone (with a reference to Sibelius 4) and a simple syncopated idea which is a quote from 'We are the Village Green Preservation Society' by the Kinks.¹⁵⁰ All of this was turned quickly and spontaneously into a short, rather intense

¹⁵⁰ From the 1968 album, *The Kinks are the Village Green Preservation Society*.

piano piece. Certainly the fastest compositional process in the whole set (3 hours). And the piece itself: a curious mixture of lugubrious elements with some pastoral things and quite a stern, rigid architecture. A dark comedy. The ending (staccato at the highest and lowest points) is a sort of death, so perhaps a comic tragedy...



The green at Boughton Lees.

Statues in a Garden (Sonata 42 after Satie VI)¹⁵¹

Work on Cocteau's chapel, in August 2022, was interrupted (before the development section) by a return to this piece, originally a short binary form *Gymnopedie*, written as a sort of 'Verdi meets Satie' study, constructed on Verdi's famous 'Enigmatic Scale'.¹⁵²

August 2022: elaborated and rendered much more extreme with much more interesting harmony and a slightly vertiginous quality. Also the 2nd half (F minor is expanded into something more like a sort of static development section and I've now introduced a slightly concealed recap with floating Ivesian 3rds above it). The piece makes melodic and bass line use of Verdi's enigmatic scale, and although the style is reminiscent of Chopin/Satie filtered through Poulenc, with hints of Messiaen, some element of Italian melodicism/virtuosity/expressivity remain discernible.

¹⁵¹ A Video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
https://youtu.be/H69sMvaO4Gc?si=x1C_5WFQG0_I04K

¹⁵² In August 1888, Ricordi's *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* challenged its readers to compose a piece using a new 'enigmatic scale' created by Adolfo Crescentini, a professor of music at the Bologna Conservatory. Giuseppe Verdi responded by using the new scale in his *Ave Maria* which later became the first of his *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*.

As I worked on this, I read Isabel Colegate's marvellous 1962 novel, *Statues in a Garden*, The book is like an exquisite sepia photograph of a lost world, on the brink of catastrophe, as the First World War looms. It is like a Greek tragedy unfolding inexorably in an English idyll. The scene in the garden, at the centre of the book, (Colegate 2021, 80) describes a languorous afternoon of flirtatious activity in which young people decide to symbolise key members of the household in a kind of Edwardian tableau, which ultimately becomes prophetic of the terrible events at the end of the book. It is a very striking device, and the mood of my music couldn't avoid being affected by its atmosphere. But the piece also has a statuesque character: something still and monumental, in the *Gymnopedie* tradition.

Slightly modified on 8 Jan 2023. Playing through, I didn't like the dissonant thinness of bar 39. I've consequently filled out a larger sonority in the left hand with changes in counterpoint in 39 and 40. Also put bass line down 8ve at recap (bar 51) and also final bar.

Sonata (44) for Left Hand II (after Satie VIII) *Sonate Flottante*: 'Like an Ever Rolling Stream'¹⁵³

10 September 2022: The Queen died in the afternoon of the 8th September 2022 and the sonata was written quickly. In the evening, I spoke to my daughter in Nice, and afterwards, played Satie's marvellous *Danses de Travers* in which ES manages to spin out a 3 panel piece with no bar lines a continuous regular pattern of 4 quavers, but he manages to keep the monotony interesting somehow: a melancholy character, the use of (ragtime influenced?) syncopations and surprising harmonic shifts, and the (as always) beauty of his simple but elegant pianism. Anyway, it struck me that the design of his piece with its return of the material in the final panel is almost like a contrast-less kind of sonata form, and around the time I went to bed that evening, I began to think, wouldn't it be interesting to emulate his approach: a sonata form with no contrast. I started to mull over how the melody and accompaniment might interact in rhythmic patterns of 5, as a Left-Hand piece, and I came back downstairs, around midnight, to sketch the exposition. As I did so, the melancholy atmosphere in the wake of the Queen's death inevitably came to bear on the material. The second subject became a sort of parallel 5ths presentation of the National Anthem. On the morning of the 9th, I altered some of this, creating a 2nd voice to the National Anthem (a sort of canon at the 7th) and I also introduced quotations from Isaac Watts' Anglican hymn 'Oh God our help in Ages past' into the first subject because I've

¹⁵³ A Video recording of this sonata can be heard here:
<https://youtu.be/rkFFIQWaGE4?si=OzGq2EqSXdnd2Th&t=9>

always been moved by the verse about 'Time like an ever-rolling stream Bears all its sons away. They fly forgotten as a dream Dies at the opening day.'¹⁵⁴ So these symbols of Church and State, time like a stream and the dead being borne away and ultimately forgotten seemed interesting to interconnect in a Satie-esque meditation. The development and recap were written quickly today (afternoon of the 10th September). The development section begins almost rhetorically (cf. Beethoven's Tempest, 1st movement) with a simple presentation of the hymn tune in crotchets, twice, and then subjects it to a sort of watery/reverb-influenced triplet treatment similar to some of the writing in my other sonata for Left Hand, Sonata 11 *Neon, Glass and Ashes* (for Laurence Crane). This transitions quite neatly back into a reharmonised recap in which (again, like the first Left Hand Sonata) picks up on a later passage in the National Anthem: 'Send her Victorious etc.' (cf. the great Sarabande theme in Ravel's LH concerto which is split into 2 parts like enormous orchestral pillars, framing the centre of the concerto.) In the sonata, the National anthem doesn't finish but just drops down to E flat (a traditionally regal key) and then down into the depths of the piano. Part of my thinking in the sonata is to explore the idea of memory fading (they fly forgotten as a dream dies...). Themes don't quite finish, melodies are presented as half remembered things.

The motion of the piece is quite interesting: it's the only sonata in the set with no barlines, and I wanted a non-metrical rhythmic character with a free, supple character, almost like speech or Gregorian chant. The inevitable small hiatus between the melody notes and the bass notes, because of the leap, is meant to create a slightly irregular kind of movement.

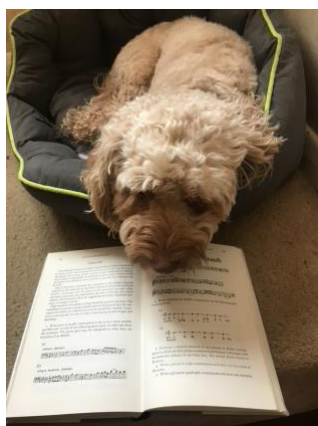
Like many people, my surprisingly emotional response to the death of the queen is hard to explain. I'm not a monarchist, and the institution, replete as it is with vestiges of Empire etc. seems (to me) broadly unsustainable. However, there is no denying, for people of my generation, that the Queen was, in some sense, a parental (or even God-like) presence, hovering over one's life from earliest childhood. Her passing is also the passing of my parents' and the wartime generation, and that wartime generation has (for me) a certain nobility. The Queen seemed, in many ways, an admirable person, whose consistent and benevolent public life touched the lives of staggering numbers of people.

But I don't see this piece as a public response or anything. It's a concealed response really: a private reflection. It's not a celebration of monarchy. It's a kind of lament.

¹⁵⁴ 'Oh God our Help in Ages Past', text by Isaac Watts, tune by Croft (Vaughan Williams [Ed.], 595)

This Sonata was performed by me at a piano recital at Hatchland's Park in September 2022. It was rather extraordinary to play on an 1822 Fortepiano that had belonged to the Queen. It was originally given to George IV by its maker Nanette Streicher.¹⁵⁵ Most exciting of all, Beethoven – a close friend of NS, almost certainly played the piano in her workshop in the early 1820s.

Sonata (45) of Games and Diversions...for a Dog (Sonata after Satie IX)



Begun on Halloween and completed on Bonfire Night 2022. The broad context is Satie's various preludes 'pour un chien' and his *Sports et Divertissements*, one of which (*Le Yachting*)¹⁵⁶ provided the rocking figure which is present throughout much of the piece. A challenge had been issued (from within my family) to write a sonata about our dog, Loki. I couldn't imagine how such a thing was worth doing, until I saw the way that Satie does it, within the context of something rather understated, objective, restrained, texturally light but full of charm, somewhat classical in character, unafraid of expressing a kind of detached simplicity, a little absurd, gently humorous/ironic (there is surely some connection between Satie's piano music of this period and Debussy's more 'sophisticated' etudes). An interesting comment about Satie by Žižek also interested me: "Imagine the clarity of a minimalist order sustained by a gentle freely-imposed discipline?" (Žižek 2017, 278) He asks the question, partly in the context of Satie's interest in Communism:

Satie used the term "furniture music (*"musique d'ameublement"*)", implying that some of his pieces should function as a mood-setting background music. Although

¹⁵⁵ Hatchlands Park is a National Trust property in Surrey, housing the Cobb Collection: a unique collection of artworks and historical keyboard instruments, many of which once belonged to famous composers. Nanette Streicher was a very gifted piano maker in Vienna in the early 19th century, and an intimate friend of Beethoven's, on whom he appears to have relied for the running of his household. It is virtually inconceivable that he would not have admired and played on the magnificent piano that she built for George IV in 1823, around the time he was composing the *Diabelli Variations*.

¹⁵⁶ Satie's *Sports et Divertissement* is a 1914 cycle of 21 short piano pieces in the composer's own exquisite calligraphy, originally published with illustrations by Charles Martin in 1923.

this may seem to point forwards to the commercialized ambient music (“Muzak”), what Satie aims at is the exact opposite: a music that subverts the gap that separates the figure from the background – when one truly listens to Satie, one “hears the background”. This is egalitarian Communism in music: a music that refocuses the listener’s attention from the big Theme to its invisible background, in the same way that Communist theory and politics refocuses our attention from big Heroes to the immense work and suffering of the invisible ordinary people. (Žižek 2017, 278)

This idea of egalitarianism is still relevant, particularly now, in an era of such monstrous wealth disparity, and rampant commercialism! The idea of a quietly egalitarian music remains appealing... at any rate, my musical material has formed itself in the context of this idea of minimalist order and gently imposed discipline: simple diatonic material, scales arpeggios etc. various kinds of simple gestures, simple changes of momentum are used to suggest a doggy world, without much sentimentality: little descriptions of ‘pastoral activity’ (this is in effect Pastoral Sonata IV). There is a little exposition with 1st & 2nd subject tonal areas in A and E major (the D flat – B flat minor digression/transition towards the 2nd subject comes from older sketches, introduced when I sensed that the material was in danger of becoming too dry and generalised, and this breaks up the ostinato driven exposition in a quasi-‘ternary’ manner). Development at 49 (a sort of fugal fanfare, descriptive of Loki’s frenzied digging up of bulbs in the garden etc.) extension of D flat material, a lost episode in triplets and the pond, all tending to make use of descending topoi, with hints of lament and fall and immersion (various kinds of pedalling). Recap at 115 with barking episode, restatement of rising and falling scales as a sort of barcarolle, principal ideas varied and presented in a different order. D flat material recurs in C, leading to return of little “Loki, come back!” canon (originally on the dominant – E major – now in the tonic A minor). All this in an intentionally melancholic character, partly to contrast with the general light-spirits and the comic tropes of the piece. The coda extends in a sort of bell-like counterpoint with the melody originally heard in the middle of the piece (from bar 69) in a cross-rhythmic interplay with the main motif of the piece (in the RH) giving rise to new permutations of the suspensions that naturally arise between the colliding materials. It’s a gently minimalist lament, followed by the return of the triplets (originally bars 15 – 16) for the abruptly ‘triumphant (?)’ conclusion.

8.2 Seven Sonnets

I have written a sequence of sonnets during this project, documenting the journey of the sonatas. The following seven examples were written about the first seven sonatas.

January 2016 (Sonata 1)¹⁵⁷

Time stared backwards, dared not meet the baleful year,
The fainting sun, hanging, gong-like, the sky was iron,
The bleakest time, when all the trees were bare,
The earth frozen. No one would choose to die in
Such a month.

When Boulez burst through his final screen,
And Bowie's Black Star fell to earth ("Look up here,
I'm in Heaven" ...)

Life's ritual is done. The plaintive oboe keens,
the bell tolls, the muffled drum thuds the gloomy air
Till key, and gate, and mode, and piano's pulse
Subside. For here, tonality and atonality collide.
Here, neither Ziggy nor the Thin White Duke repulse
Their double shadow...

So, unwitting Gemini, they died
In that fixed-exploding dawn of a monstrous year
When headlines rang out gravely on the ear.

Goodbye Ginger Baker (Sonata 2)¹⁵⁸

A drum solo: what more is there to say?
And so the final thunderous tattoo
Now fades away. The dog has had his day
The primal pulse is stilled. And it is true
He wasn't nice: "Hey Ginger, I just wonder..."
"Fuck off!" he'd grunt, his eyes like thunder.
Many a bass drum pedal yielded under
That mighty foot, many a skin was split asunder.
Many a crash buckled; many a stick snapped.
At length, the endless thrashing limelight dims -
He's shuffled off to the wings. The crowd has clapped

¹⁵⁷ This poem refers to the deaths of Pierre Boulez and David Bowie in January 2016 (see section 5.1)

¹⁵⁸ This poem refers to Peter Edward "Ginger" Baker, drummer for *Cream* and other 'supergroups' (famous for his long and virtuosic drum solos, and aggressive off-stage behaviour) who died in 2019.

*Musick for a While (Sonata 7)*¹⁶³

Hush! Here, in the country churchyard, near the yew trees
Alfred Deller sleeps - now all his pains are eased,
His pipes are stilled, and music, for a while,
(From my front door not half a mile)
Falls silent. Here, among these stones,
The gorgon vanquished, only these few bones
Await their English resurrection now.
Alecto and Acteon - both have changed
In the blinking of an eye, and near this bough,
Where buttress, bench and headstones are arranged,
This pilgrim church from Chaucer's world stands still
While larks hover overhead, twittering like fire,
And doves blend all their cooing with the trill
Of wren. So, in this silent acre, sings the ascending choir.

¹⁶³ This sonnet refers to mythological elements in a poem by John Dryden's, set to music in Purcell's *Musick for a While* from his incidental music to *Orpheus*. The sonnet also alludes to the ancient churchyard of All Saints Church, Boughton Aluph, near where I live, where Alfred and Peggy Deller are buried, and where Stour Music occurs every June (except during the Covid pandemic, when Sonata 7 was composed).