



**A JOHN GAY SUITE**

An invitation to direct the 1972 Canford Summer School Wind Band Course came at a time when a project to make a modern jazz-rock orientated version of *The Beggars Opera* had just fallen through and those marvellous tunes were buzzing through my head in all sorts of crazy versions. I wrote three movements for Canford and was excited by the result, my first work for such a combination, but subsequently disappointed by the rejection by many publishers, and by one retired director of Kneller Hall, as being too difficult for even professionals. I was delighted to recount to the latter how the youngsters of the excellently coached Bedfordshire Wind Band Course were able to give, under my direction, the first performance of the completed work in the following year. The piece remained unpublished until, largely due to the advocacy of Tim Reynish, Novello, brought it out in 1988.

There is no need here to quote the many familiar tunes of the day which a Dr Pepusch got together for John Gay's spoof opera of the 1720s. The performers were a supposed company of beggars, rather than stars of the operatic establishment, and the subject matter was police corruption, street life, prostitution, capital punishment and awkward pregnancies instead of the cosmic deeds of gods and kings. No wonder that twentieth century versions, such as the Brecht/Weill *Threepenny Opera* and Britten's marvellous (and by some I think unjustly denigrated) 1948 version of the original remain a topical option.

The *Intrada* deals entirely with *Lilliburlero* in a metrically 'bent' version, first announced as a two-part fanfare (Ex 1.1).

Ex 1.1



After a series of introductory gestures, a solo alto saxophone states the tune to the accompaniment of fragments of the scalar ideas of the introduction filling in the gaps in the phrasing (Ex 1.2).

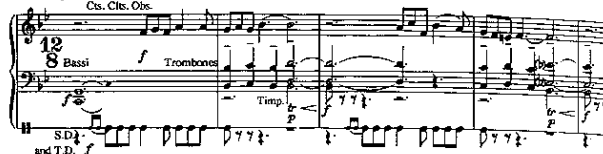
Ex 1.2



My way of notating the 12/8 bar should give a tip to those conductors who find it difficult to time the slow triplets of bars 28, 116 and 141 in the strict tempo they should preserve. In the middle section, the tune is stated in its traditional regular pulse but the complexity is retained by a sort of triple canon - the tune itself, an augmented version in a different key and insistent interjections of the rhythm of the tune, ideally by both side and tenor

drums and in performance seldom as intrusive as I originally imagined (Ex 1.3).

Ex 1.3



The movement ends with the opening fanfare in full orchestral fig. to be heard again at the end of the work.

The *Romanza* uses two tunes. The main one is familiar today as *Golden Slumbers*, but in the opera it is associated with a cynical dialogue between a pregnant Polly and her indignant mother. 'Polly you might have toyed and kissed, by keeping men off you keep them on'... 'But he so teased me, and he so pleased me, what I did you must have done!' I certainly pick up the last words in my coda but the general treatment has been romantic rather than cynical. The tune sits on a chorale-like, hemiola-inflected progression implying the melodic shape of that tune (Ex 2.1).

Ex 2.1



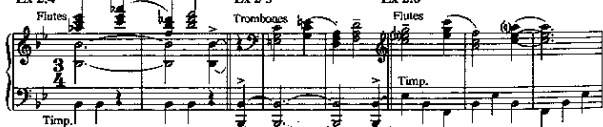
The other tune (*Can Love be Controlled by Advice?*) has a tolling bell (Ex 2.2) which forms a natural upbeat (Ex 2.3) but continues regularly tolling in the 'wrong' place.

Ex 2.2



As mentioned, the coda develops the last phrase (Exs 2.4, 2.5, 2.6) and ends on an indeterminate harmony with bell and timpani taps. I suppose a degree of doubt has eventually found its way into my 'romance'!

Ex 2.4



In the *Intermezzo* (to which I should have added a metronome mark of minim = 88, so slow have I sometimes heard it performed), the scalar movement of the opening phrase of *Over the hills and far away* has suggested the string of scales in thirds (Ex 3.1) which introduce the main tune stated by an oboe solo

Ex 3.1



The tune of the middle section is a skittish contrast, coming from Macheath's *My heart was so free, it rovd like a bee* and needing a light pizzicato string bass, an instrument vital to the texture of the Wind Band but often mistakenly dispensed with (Ex 3.2).

Ex 3.2



# ANALYSIS

Again a movement ends with an indeterminate cadence, here approached by the opening phrase, in thirds and in canon (Ex 3.3)

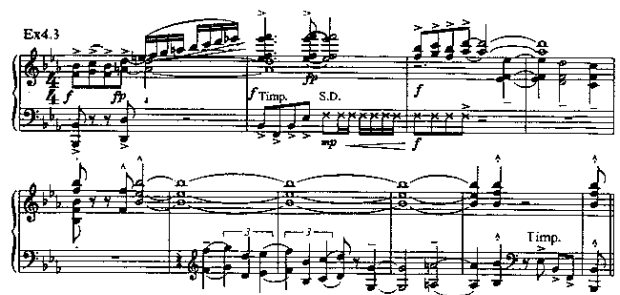


*Fill ev'ry glass* is the main tune of the **Finale** and is supported by a repetitive rhythm (Ex 4.1) whose eventual cadential variant leads to a contrasting treatment of the middle part of the tune (Ex 4.2).



How to get into this – and out – depends on a conductor who can negotiate the metrical change. Here, as in the tenor saxophone at bar 34, the secret is that the basic pulse *never* changes throughout the movement; half a bar is always at c. 76, whatever the time signature. A brief hunting horn quote from Handel's *Rinaldo* (as quoted, no doubt satirically, in the original opera) leads to the middle tune of bar 34 (*If the heart of a man is depressed with care, the mist is dispelled when a woman appears*). Finally the cadential bar of Ex 4.2 leads in to a repeat of the fully scored fanfare that concluded the Intrada. This time, however, the penultimate pianissimo chord leads into yet another

brief fanfare in which both *Lilliburlero* and *Fill ev'ry glass* are featured (Ex 4.3)



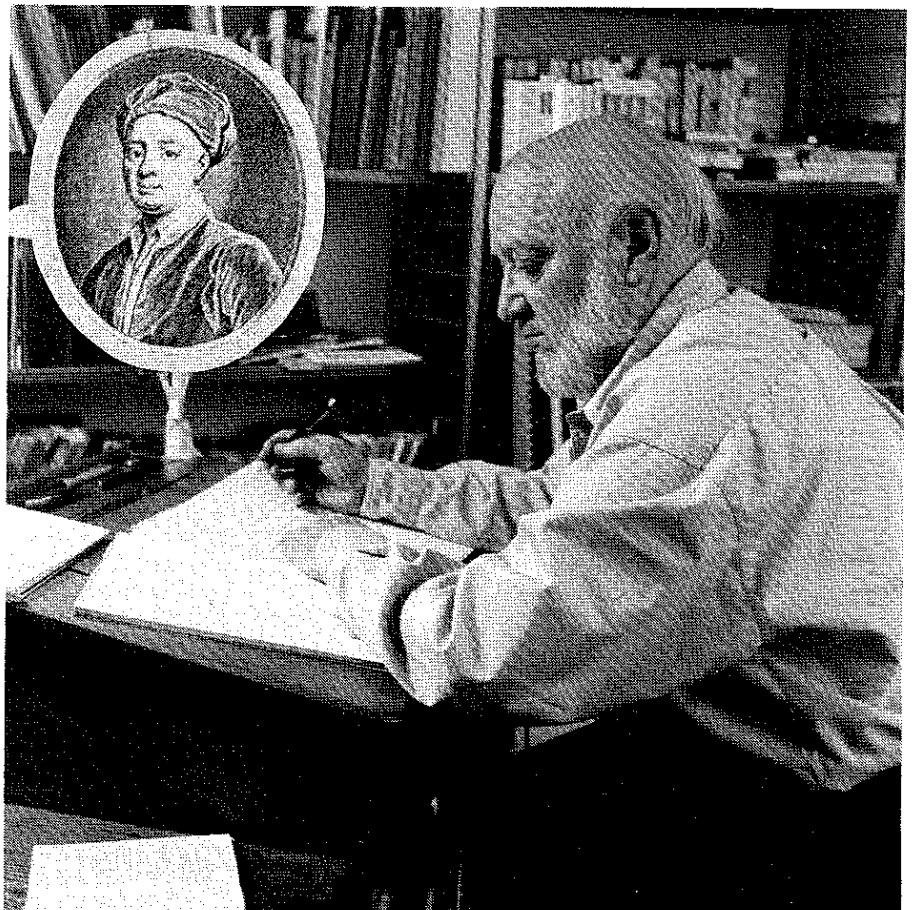
In the last two bars, how about prolonging the side drum roll in the crescendo so that it ends with the timpani, enabling the conductor ever so slightly to delay the penultimate chord, and allow the timpani, solo without side drum, using hard sticks, *fff* and *poco ritenuto* to make the end work as I imagined and *should* have written it? I have heard first rate performances where only the end has disappointed . . . *mea culpa!*

In fairness to the early history of the piece, it was probably a glance at the metrical complexity of the opening pages as well as my mathematically correct but no doubt ill-advised marking of quaver = 324 that put people off. I like to think the metrical variations are musically valid rather than merely perverse and it has been my experience that players find no difficulty as long as the man on the box knows what he is doing

*A John Gay Suite* is published by **Novello** to whom we are indebted for permission to reproduce extracts from the published score

**Buxton Orr**, born in Glasgow in 1924, was set for a medical career which relinquished some 40 years ago to study musical composition and conducting. His first compositions to receive recognition were for films and the theatre, an association he has continued over the years to include his own one-act opera, *The Wager*. He has received considerable acclaim for his chamber music, songs and orchestral music with much work for brass and wind bands. For many years he was on the staff of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama where he has an award of the FGSM, where he founded the Guildhall New Music Ensemble and conducted the *avante-garde* improving London Jazz Composers' Orchestra which toured Europe and took part in the 1972 Berlin Jazz Festival. He has been Composer-in-Residence with the Banff Music Theatre Ensemble in Canada and has applied his scholarship to the composer Benjamin Frankel with an article for the *New Grove Dictionary* and the realisation into full score of Frankel's opera *Marching Song*, left in short score on the composer's death. Among recent commissions is *Sinfonia Ricercante* for full orchestra. Since its appearance twenty years ago, *A John Gay Suite* has proved immensely popular with wind bands and is programmed with great regularity.

Buxton Orr now lives in the Wye Valley, having given up regular teaching to devote more time to composition.



Buxton Orr (Photo Philip Price). Inset: John Gay