

McGuire's Minstrelsy

by Richard Carder

Edward McGuire was born in Glasgow in 1948, where as a junior student he studied flute at the RSAM with David Nicholson. He went on to study composition with James Iliff at the Royal Academy of Music in London from 1966-70, where he won the Hecht Prize, and the National Young Composer's Competition with his violin piece, *Rant*. He then won an award to study abroad, and chose to go to Sweden to study with Ingvar Lidholm in 1971.

His works now number over 120, and are regularly broadcast, as well as appearing in the major music festivals. His debut in the Proms was in 1982, when Sir Charles Groves conducted *Source* with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra. To keep his feet firmly on the ground (and perhaps tapping?) he still plays flute with the traditional folk group, the Whistlebinkies, who have made several CDs, and became the first Scottish musician to tour China in 1992.

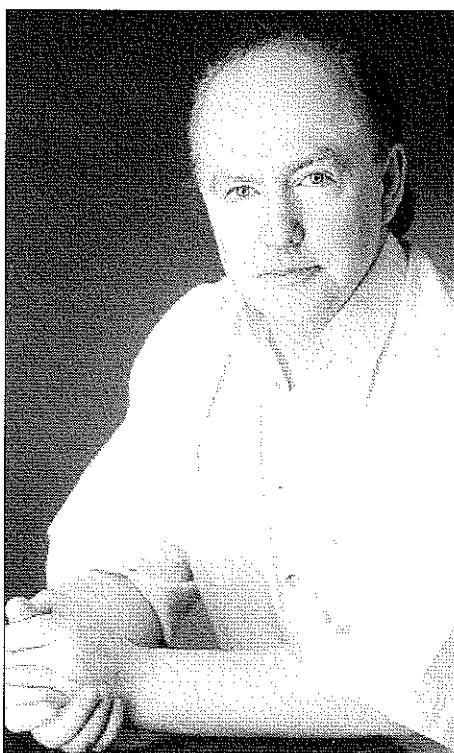
There will not be space enough here to cover the 40 or so works with solo wind or brass instruments, so I shall list only the 22 pieces which are for these forces only, and write in more detail about four of them. Not surprisingly, as a flautist, he shows a preference for the civilised end of the spectrum: the woodwind, though there is a handful of works involving trumpet or trombone!

Though as a student in London, McGuire was an out-and-out modernist, there was a dramatic change of style when he went to Sweden, where, he says, he felt under less pressure to conform with prevailing fashion, 'rediscovered' tonality, and allowed his more lyrical side to emerge: he describes Lidholm as a lyrical composer, and recently went back to Sweden to celebrate that composer's 75th birthday. Although McGuire still uses serial technique, it is used very freely and contains frequent tonal references and even the occasional tune!

Wind Octet

The earliest piece to be considered is the *Wind Octet* of 1980 for pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns and bassoons, which he describes as written in the spirit of Mozart, who wrote for the same instruments in his wonderful *Serenades*. 1980 is the period when, McGuire says, he came closest to being a 'minimalist', and admits to having found the music of Steve Reich 'refreshing' at the time.

The *Wind Octet* was commissioned by Glasgow University, and is dedicated to 'the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in its fight for survival'. I would guess that a third influence might be Stravinsky, since the piece inhabits a similar



sound world to *Dumbarton Oaks*. The 'tone-row' used at the beginning looks more like a scale in the Dorian mode, with a pentatonic one tacked on the end! It goes as follows:

E_b, F, G_b, A_b, B_b, D_b, C; plus, G, B, E, D, A of which Dr Schoenberg would certainly not have approved! The octet is in one movement, which is divided into five main sections: fast; slower; fast; slow; fast.

It starts with a sustained E_b on clarinet crescendo-ing over two bars from *ppp* - *fff* in *Allegro Vivo* tempo. All the other instruments

enter on this 'tonic' note before gradually diverging in lively, dancing rhythms. Thematic ideas are passed from one to another in rapid succession, giving a dazzling display of different colours. There are also periods of long sustained notes, alternating with rapid repeated notes in an almost homophonic texture, and with marked 'solos' for various instruments.

After 70 bars the tempo changes to *Meno Mosso*, and a new section starts of sparer formation. At bar 161 a return to Tempo 1 introduces an ostinato semi quaver figure on bassoons, which soon changes shape as it is passed among the other instruments. This develops until, at bar 197, it becomes a Scottish Reel-tune, doubled on oboe and bassoon! At bar 238 the tempo changes again to *Lento*, and the mood becomes more peaceful with many long sustained notes. In the middle of this there is a *Liberio* section, without barlines, for the oboes and bassoons, who cue each others' entries.

The lively, dancing mood returns for the final, fast section; after which there is a short coda of quiet, sustained notes; ending, as it began with a clarinet intoning a long diminuendo on the 'tonic' E_b. This is technically demanding piece, probably beyond the reach of all but the most advanced amateurs, and lasts for 15 minutes.

Mistral

It is only quite recently that McGuire has written for a full Wind Band, and the first of his two compositions, *Mistral*, was commissioned by the Glasgow Wind Band in 1992. In his introductory note the composer writes that the 'Mistral' is the French name for the violent, cold, dry, northerly wind which sweeps down the Rhone valley. The music explores the emotional and dramatic impact of the "mistral" and its mood-notations. It is a rather melodramatic piece with French & Celtic allusions, and is the

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Wind Octet

COMPOSERS

16 (J) Andante $\text{♩} = 96$

Sirocco

first in a series of works whose titles are derived from the names of winds'

The piece opens quietly, in slow tempo, with a sustained G on alto clarinet (Is this a first for a much-maligned instrument?) 'G' is to be the 'tonic' in this piece, which, incidentally requires some of the more exotic percussion instruments, such as wind-machine, tam-tam, and a tub of water! The tone-row this time is as follows:

G, E, G; E, C, B; then A, F; B, G; D, A

which seems to divide up into two groups of three notes, comprising a falling tone & major 3rd; followed by two pairs of falling 3rds, and a 5th. In this opening section the 'tonic', G, is used as a kind of punctuation mark, in the form of a unison, staccato quaver ('p q') at various points, usually played by the whole band

At bar 12 the alto clarinet is trusted with a more difficult solo for two bars, using more than 10 notes! (take back that malicious slander, TR!) There is a gradual increase of agitation, the 'p q' moves away from G, and there follows a distinctly Sibelian climax at [C], where the horns have an arching theme over low brass chords. A sudden acceleration at [E] to a faster new tempo brings a change of texture with pulsing quaver chords, alternating between cornets and saxophones,

and a new theme on the oboe. At [F] the pulsing quavers transfer to trombones, accompanying a long solo for baritone, with counterpoint from the horns. Then at [H]

the quavers are taken up by flutes and oboes; while the tubas have a long, low theme,

which is joined by the bassoons, weaving a

parallel theme at the interval of a tenth, which forms the climax of this section.

The texture quietens down again until [J], where a 2-bar trill in the woodwind leads to a new, Allegro section, with pp staccato crotchets in the low brass, and 9 bars of crescendoing woodwind. This leads to a long section where the woodwind have loud staccato semiquavers, reaching a climax just before [L], after which things quieten and thin out until [R], where the 'p q' reappears at irregular intervals.

At [S] there is a 9 bar solo for the timpani until, at [T], the 'p q' has returned to the 'tonic', G, after which, excitement starts to build again, with rising staccato quavers in the woodwind continuing up to a final climactic tutti fff at [W], where the 'p q' heralds a sudden drop to ppp semibreves, and the flutes have a weird glissando, produced by removing the head-joints. The mood remains quiet and sustained for the remaining 16 bars until a final unison fff 'p q' on G, at which point the timpani have a falling glissando, while the tam tam is lowered into the tank of water, lowering its pitch!

Sirocco

Sirocco was commissioned in 1994 for the summer school of COMA (Contemporary Music for Amateurs) in Yorkshire, and received its first public performance in Sheffield on 5th August, for which I had the privilege of playing clarinet. The composer's note says: The sirocco originates, dry and sandy, over N. Africa, picking up moisture on crossing the Mediterranean. It becomes warm and humid, blowing from the south east, bringing

rain and fog. One day in Glasgow, I overheard two men remarking that one had discovered his car coated with wind-blown fine sand. This gave me the idea that the piece should explore musical flavours of the wind's journey from the Sahara, through Spain, France, England and Scotland.

Dry, mysterious origins with an Arabic flavour; a sea passage; Iberian rhythms; a foggy Gallic impressionism; Breton dancing; then urban factories, followed by English pastoral flavours; Scotland appears with a slow, bagpipe-like theme before a dance in reel rhythm builds, then fades away.

The piece starts with none of the players using their instruments except some more exotic percussion: sandblocks; rice swirled in a drum; suspended cymbal, and small shakers on the skin of the timpani. Everyone else is vocalising; the woodwind to 'sh', while the brass have to make a breathy whistling wind sound! This is the first of several *Liberio* episodes without a beat, where players enter freely, cued by their neighbours. In fact there are five such aleatoric episodes before the conductor's beat starts at letter [F] with a pulse of 72, and the bass clarinet leads off with a jagged, wide-ranging theme over soft chords in the lower brass. As other instruments enter, we hear the sound of castanets, tamborines and tom-toms; though the impressive climax which results reminds me more of the frozen wastes of Tapiola than sunny Spain! Another *Liberio* episode follows using whole-tone scales to depict a foggy French impressionism. The percussionists have a chance to go completely over the top in the succeeding industrial section where they are

instructed to play 'random metallic sounds'! In contrast, soft, overlapping, pentatonic motifs announce that we have moved out of the big-smoke and into pastoral England in another Libero

There is no mistaking our arrival in Scotland at [K], where the oboe strikes up with typical dotted rhythms and intervals in the style of a Pibroch. This section has a key signature of 3 flats, and a B₁ drone to denote bagpipes. Everyone (except the percussion) has a go at the theme in the succeeding Libero section, until abruptly, at [M] the unmistakable sound of a dancing reel begins in the woodwind, over the same B₁ pedal note. All the instruments join in until, at [O] it is every man for himself, playing the tune as fast as possible in a Libero episode which builds to a big chord, *ffff*; after which, for the final section, [P], there is sudden silence, apart from the flutes who carry on the tune, at first in unison, then breaking into canon and fading away, while everyone else vocalises as they did at the beginning, down to a niente ending.

Eddie McGuire came down from Glasgow for a couple of days to hear the first performance, and could often be found playing smoochy harmonies on the piano in the lounge at Wortley Hall, where the course was held, which was how we met.

West Wind

Eddie had mentioned *West Wind* in Yorkshire as being a piece he had been commissioned to write 20 years previously by a clarinettist-friend from his college days, but had not got around to putting pen to paper yet, although he had the outline of the piece in his head. As a coordinator for COMA in the South West, I had set up a concert of contemporary amateur wind music for the 1996 Cheltenham Music Festival, so I started nagging him to finish the piece, which duly arrived early that year; the score and parts written out in beautiful calligraphy by hand, as always with his scores, incidentally. The only snag was that the bass clarinet part was to 'low C', which was, at that time, beyond the budget of any of our players; though we managed to borrow an E₃ Contra, which helped.

The piece is scored for clarinet choir, including E₃, an optional B₃ Contra, and a solo clarinet. The title is taken from Shelley's, *Ode to the West Wind*. The texture of the piece emphasises the peculiar acoustics of the clarinet, with much use of intervals of 5ths and 4ths. The feeling of tonality is increased by a pedal B₁, which is present most of the time; and a key-signature of 3 flats.

It opens quietly with the basses playing a sustained B₁, which soon moves up to F, and continues up in quaver movement through the open 5ths to a high F on the E₃ clarinet, and returns again by the same route back to the low B₁, producing a wave-like appearance on the score. This pattern of rising and falling intervals is repeated throughout most of the piece, with the 5ths being expanded, a semitone at a time, until we reach the next F, one octave higher, always over a pedal B₁ in the bass.

Meanwhile, the solo clarinet has a free part, ranging over the entire compass of the instrument

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West Wind

in a thematic line which has many tonal references. McGuire points out that a true minimalist would have omitted this free part! This progression takes us as far as letter [B], where the pattern is broken, and a 4th-based chord starts on a high F for the E₃ clarinet, and proceeds down to a low E₃ for the Contra; after which comes a Libero passage, with solos for the alto(!) and bass clarinets.

At [D] the solo clarinet starts a theme rising by chromatic minor 3rds over a sustained chord in the choir, which blossoms into a distinctly romantic melody. At [F] there is a new slow tempo where the bass clarinet takes up a varied version of the melody against a falling chromatic line in minims. Then at [G] we return to Tempo 1, where the solo clarinet takes up a further variation of the melody against a rising chromatic line over the pedal B₁ in the basses. This melody is then repeated by the first clarinets; a gesture certain to bring about banishment from the circles of serious serialists!

At [H] begins the recapitulation, with the difference that the 'wave' figure is now in semiquavers rather than quavers, so that the harmonic movement is twice as fast, i.e. with a new chord in every bar, rather than every two bars. This leads into a final Libero section, characterised by multiple trills over a pedal G, which McGuire describes as a 'magical' chord, fading to *pppp*.

After analysing this delightful piece, I was still puzzled by the key signature of 3 flats, so I phoned Eddie for an explanation. He found the score, and the first two minutes of the call were silent, with occasional interjections of, "I'm still thinking". He then divulged that the drone-note of the bagpipe is B₁ (of which the standard clarinet reminded him); BUT, the bagpipe scale contains an A₁; so it looks like E₃ major.

Thus, as soon as he had decided to have a B₁-drone in the piece, the 3 flat key-signature came instinctively; although it is not in the key of E₃ at any point!

It is refreshing to find such an instinctive

composer working in these modern times of predominantly cold, mathematical calculation; and undoubtedly his roots in folk music are the source of this process. Although all his compositions are available through that wonderful institution, the Scottish Music Information Centre (see below) it is quite incredible that he still does not have a publisher; which he puts down to living in Glasgow, rather than London. Several of his pieces are now on CD.

McGuire's works for Wind Instruments:

Celtic Knotwork	(4 flutes)
Lament	(8 bassoons)
Mistral	(Wind Band)
Music for Low Flutes	(3 flutes)
Music for Saxophones	(SATB)
Orbit	(2 trumpets)*
Prelude	(bass clarinet)
Prelude	(flute)*
Prelude	(cor anglais)
Prelude	(horn)
Prelude	(oboe)
Prelude	(piccolo)
Prelude	(3 clarinets)
Remembrance	(2 oboes & cor anglais)
Sirocco	(Wind Band)
Songs of New Soundweft	(fl; ob; cl; bsn; hn: sop)*
Spring Sound	(clarinet)
3 Dialogues	(clarinet & tape)
Trio	(flute & oboe)
West Wind	(flute, oboe, bassoon)
Wind Octet	(clarinet choir)
	(2 ob; 2 cl; 2 bsn; 2 hn)

* recorded

All available from:
S.M.I.C. 1 Bowmont Gardens, Glasgow, GL12 9LR, UK Tel: 0141-334 6393

Richard Carder is a freelance clarinettist and conductor of the Zephyrian Woodwind Orchestra. His recent compositions have been published by Phylloscopus and Harlequin.