

Scoring *Jessie's Well*

Stephen and I had a great chat today and he expressed his concerns about my lack of focus. We talked on that and I told him my aim to really focus on My Sister's Tears (MST) and that in doing so I would draw together much of what I was discussing previously etc. Well, one of his concerns was that I didn't give a real unpacking of craft in the 3rd chapter draft. I told him it was my intention to do so in respect of MST and he understood. I have given that thought during the day and I have decided to act on something that has been in my mind for some time.

Jessie's Well was written over the last part of 2004 but has never been fully scored. I began doing so in Finale and I had wanted to do a portion of it that way and then compare by doing the same portion on manuscript, given a suitable delay to 'rid' my mind of what I had done on the computer.

Given Stephen's concerns I have decided to use the scoring of *Jessie's Well* as a laboratory.

Without trying to concern myself with what I may or may not have said about scoring in the MST journals, I will describe this process as fully as possible, even if a little dryly.

First entry:

I have sat down to score the work now and my first comment is not about craft – sorry Stephen! It's about the physical act of putting pencil on paper. I enjoy it, the touch of the pencil, the feel of the paper and the art of writing the key signatures and time signatures and all the associated instructions. It is related to the craft as I am preparing the template to receive the information I have to place on it but it is something more than that!

Placing the instructions and other notes and directions as noted above, not only gives me a template to write on unhindered but it also allows me to check structure, to re visit form and to consider once again the resources I have conceived the work for.

Unpacking those points:

1. A template means I do not become bogged down in drawing up pages with writing the key signatures and time signatures etc. I can just write notes and concern myself with the orchestration.
2. Structure is not form in the sense that we might consider it in a musicological way. It is more to do with coherence of flow and fullness of concept. It seems logical that it leads to form though.

3. Form here is as we would conceive of it in the theory room. This work is like a song form with an introduction and a coda. I have reviewed that to see that it is what I want it to be and I am satisfied that it can present my ideas well.
4. The wind ensemble is the resource here but how large or small is it to be. I am sure there is no piccolo and that there is little bombastic percussion. Am still a little unsure about double reeds but.....

Second entry:

I am reminded of conversations I have had with both Stephens (Emmerson and Cronin) about the amount of annotation on my sketch. I don't write much about instruments, it seems, unless I am a little (or a lot!!) unsure about what is to play in a particular place. As I peruse this sketch I see the same thing. I have given scant direction here and yet I look and know that this or that voice will be playing this or that line and sense when I was unsure. The sketch is like an aide memoir at that time, both of when I was and wasn't quite sure of what I was doing.

Interestingly, the reminders of lack of surety are more potent and I can only assume that is because I had to consider them and decide. It was about decision then and that is why they appear to stand out for me now. This is also compelling and that I want to read on as I prepare the score. I seem to go forward and then have to bring myself back to prepare the score pages yet again. I am drawn forward but I don't edit, except for tempi. I have not put a great deal of instruction in about tempi. I wonder if that is because it is decided to. I shall see.

Third entry:

I'm not getting much done! I have reviewed the tempi markings and variations and I was drawn in again. I have read through and even reconsidered orchestration instructions and form but rejected anything new. It's getting late (for me!) and I want to spend time talking with the kids before bed so I will leave this to do more in the morning.

Day two - first entry:

I have been thinking about this process all night and now that I have sat down to score and journal again I am lead to consider the process of composition from the beginning more fully. If not I have then considered only the final part, the scoring of the work onto manuscript – what of the fullness of creativity in the musing and dallying over thoughts and things?

As I peruse the sketch I am reminded of when it began its journey into being. I was adjudicating at the Australian Academy Festival of Music (D grade Primary schools, if I remember correctly) and the melody began to overwhelm me. I

barely recollect that I had a sense of wanting to write before I went to adjudicate but time took over and I set out for the festival.

I am not usually one to sketch ideas to come to a final draft; I usually write the final draft and make little alteration. Given the nature of the environment I found myself in (primary school D grade bands) I found that I could not get the melodic idea down the first time as I wanted. The sketch displays evidence of a number of workings through. In fact, there are two attempts at a melody and then the final melody as I wanted it with not alterations. Then there are three versions of the melody with harmony (two) and counter melody (one). The harmonised versions display scant evidence of 'working out' and though the counter melodic version is similar I have used only small portions of it in the final piece where as the fullness of both other versions is quoted in their entirety.

I sense that what is at work here is my "normal" process and the alien action of writing sketches and 'working out' came about because of the situation I found myself in as it had not allowed me to 'hear' it internally. It seems I have endeavoured to write it down before I lost it and thus have committed more to paper than I normally would at that stage of the compositional process.

Yet, having done that and having produced the basic material for what has become the song form of the work, I am aware that the process from the on is as I have usually done. I have mused and mulled over the ideas and fiddle with the harmony at the margins and then I sat down and wrote the work in two or three short sittings.

What then of craft in this activity?

I know that it underpins the thoughts and I know that I have conceived this work so it can be played by high school students; so the construction of lines, harmony, and even motivic and structural considerations are such that the music is not only approachable by the players and conductor but approachable at a level that allows them to engage with it musically and not just technically. Too often I have heard high school groups who are scrabbling to execute the notes and thus execute the music! I cannot allow that to happen to this.

Why?

Where did *Jessie's Well* from?

Here is the autobiography that again defines a work of mine!

Russell Bauer was the band teacher at Kingaroy State High School and a very capable and efficient teacher he was. He has now moved on to another school in Toowoomba. Russell, for some reason known only to him, thought I did not like him and that I actively worked against him and his success. I was angered by this!

Much to my amazement, when I became a Christian my anger turned to sadness. What had I done that would turn a fine young musician so viciously against me? I was moved to deal with this problem but had no understanding of how I might do so. I was deeply distressed by this.

Circumstances were that I had the chance to adjudicate his group (something that had caused him angst in the past – little did I realise that) and at the conclusion of the performance, which was first class, we chatted and I broached the subject of the apparent division between us. We talked halting that night about matters around and about that problem.

I visited his school twice after that and we shared dinner in a restaurant the second time and he invited me to his home for dinner with his family the third time. It was a wonderful night of openness, frank discussion and much joy and some tears. His second child, Jessie, made me a place mat for my position at the table. It said how it was good that I was there with them and especially with her Daddy. It was an honest child's comment on what had been a sad adult's dilemma.

We spoke of me writing something for his group that first night. We spoke more the second time we met, when I worked with his ensemble and I decided that I would write something about places on the journey from Brisbane to Kingaroy, his town. One such place is off the road, a little after Blackbutt – Jessie's Well. The title created itself that day as I drove past and thought of a pure child's simple and gentle summation of what is now a lasting friendship and a blessing to both families.

Enough of this tear jerking tale! But, it will be interesting to see if the music represents the story in any major way – in any way actually.

Back to the score!

I have told of the works genesis but how is craft emergent in that tale?

Simplicity is represented in the melody, without a doubt! This is Jessie, the teller of joy and answered prayer? The music is lyrical and singable so it is approachable. My wife sings and plays it now and is taken by it. Yes, I could give an analysis of what makes it simple and I would assume that I might need to if that is the unpacking that needs to be done for this study but for now it is simple and song like.

Harmony is evidence of a number of things really. The simple harmony of the complete first version I wrote at first (found two thirds of the way through the work at bar 60) is mostly diatonic with no offensive and approachable chromaticism that is related to modality present. The second version is more divergent in nature and might well be representative of something else in the narrative but I

think it is just lushness I was after. "What was the composer striving to produce here" I can hear the teacher asking. The answer might be fraught with conjecture and supposition when what he was trying to produce was a lovely sound!

Architecture and other components might be dealt with as I journey through the scoring process. Let's see!

Day two – second entry:

Am I reading too much into this simple piece?

I alluded above to the fact that the first entry of the complete melody, based on the first version of the 'song' is found at 60, two thirds of the way through the piece. Fractured or partial statements of the theme happen previously and incomplete settings or settings as precursors of later things present themselves as well. Is this the relationship between Russell and me? Is this incompleteness in relationship or is it just development in a musical sense?

I wonder at this potential to be autobiographical in a more complete way here. I am sure that the composer inside me mulls and muses over these things at a subconscious level but is this development or organic growth of an idea actually representative of something other than craft based cleverness?

Day two – third entry:

This is an intriguing time!

I am working my way through the middle and into the first full presentation of the theme (noted above) and I find that I am revisiting the concepts of scoring. It must be remembered I have not actually begun to score the work, only to mark up the pages to facilitate scoring later.

I am not deciding against any former ideas more confirming them in my mind and adding dynamics to ensure the intensity is well represented. It cannot be overstated how much the sketch is almost a complete realisation of my idea and therefore a representation of my craft based knowledge. I am looking at concepts realised in all manner of musical construct. For example:

- I see melodic ideas made to suit both narrative and instrumental idiosyncrasy – e.g. the full blossoming of the melodic ideas at 60
- I observe harmony that is both relevant and approachable by listener and player at this level of ability and combinations of sounds to produce affective communication and not just intellectual appreciation – e.g. the harmonisation from 60 to the end
- I consider orchestration that is transparent and complex and which is evidence of my understanding of the acoustic capacities of the

- instruments I utilise – e.g. not only simple antiphony or counter melodic orchestration (76) but complex mingling of timbres (36 – 76)
- There is simple structure that allows for telling a simple story. The form is song like and there is little evidence of major developmental ideas outside those alluded to above – e.g. the two versions of the ‘song’ are presented from 60 onwards to 93, and represent the full essence of the work with previous and following sections alluding to and not completely presenting the narrative.

Craft I had thought of as just how to harmonise and how to develop but it is all of these matters and more, interwoven into the vast tapestry that is composition.

Day two – fourth entry:

I have finished the drafting of the score pages and I will begin to write the orchestration now. The moment by moment consideration of all of these matters is somewhat distracting. I find myself thinking of what I am doing and at times second guessing. Is that wrong for this purpose? I think not, but still it distracts.

Now this is like the colouring in. It is not that the piece hasn't been conceived with the instrumental timbres in place it is more that the act of orchestrating is like I described at the beginning about pencils and paper, it is a satisfying emotional experience and it is more a visceral mission than an intellectual accomplishment.

I am not sure what others find and it is difficult to verbalise. I am not sure what it is about this but the visceral best describes it. Or does it? Maybe it's more than that; it could be an act of communion beyond the page. Hang on!!! This is getting a little too ‘spiritual’ now!

So, some objectivity; what is it that is enthralling, because that's what this process is.

I find there is almost a pushing of me into to writing the score. I want to get to it quickly. I am entranced with the interweaving of the instruments, the balance and blend and the contrast of timbres and the colours that can be created and manipulated. I don't think in terms of ‘if I put this with this I get that’ it's more an intuitive decision. I write X, Y or Z because it will work.

My background lacked theory and orchestration training. I listened to music and then looked at scores to see what had been done so I had no instruction in how to blend colours to make other colours. So, I guess the sound I make is unique. There have been many conductors who have said that. In fact, on my recent US trip Larry Gookin at Central Washington University said that very thing. Along with John Bell (Southern Illinois University) and Marvin Eckroth (University of Saskatchewan) he noted that there was a unique quality in the timbre and the musical language.

The sounds are different I know but how different is hard for me to tell because I am hearing with my ear and that is like not knowing the twang in your own accent. I can't hear it the way they and others can.

I have trawled through some of my notes for journal articles and found the following that describes well what I mean.

A Global Perspective

Ralph Hultgren

This article was originally written for Kjos Band News and also co-published in NOTES, an Australian music education newsletter.

"It doesn't sound American!"

Thus began a most interesting discussion with a band director at the Midwest conference a few years ago. He had listened to a CD of Australian band music and he had come back to give me his evaluation.

"It doesn't sound American!" I was pleased. The last thing a composer wants is to be stereotyped and to be culturally stereotyped could be even worse on our growing global environment.

"Thank you." I said with a satisfied smile.

"I said," he replied more gruffly. "It doesn't sound American!!"

It was obvious Mr. Band Director was not pleased with the results of his investigation of Australian repertoire and had decided to let me know of its shortcomings. As always, I am interested to know how to improve my work. I asked him to tell me what he meant. How had the works fallen short of, what I thought was, his artistic benchmark.

"It just doesn't sound American. It doesn't sound like an American band should sound".

Ahh. I had it. The band on the CD didn't sound American! That was good too. It was my university group doing one of those "read it and weep" publisher recording sessions.

Sadly, I was wrong. After a few more minutes I ascertained that Mr. Band Director was really annoyed that I could expect him to play music that didn't sound like he expected it to sound. Funnily, I had often heard my

band play music that didn't sound like I expected it to sound! He obviously had in his mind what band music would sound like and that as what he had become used to in school, college and now as a teacher.

It makes me think of what makes the music different now if craft is the same all over the world then how does my music sound different? That's another PhD, not this one!

What it leads to though is, that without a background in orchestration and theory how can I make those judgements that allow the music to sound "OK" and to be accepted?

I know certain sounds will work. For example:

- If I have four part harmony I can double all of the top three parts an octave above and it will sound more full.
- I can take the top part down an octave without crossing the bass (I call it not compromising the bass when I teach composition) it will add fullness and depth.
- If I do the second change (top part down an octave) it can add a sense of integrity to the sound. It's like the timbre of a confident voice (the tenor in an opera)
- I know that when I add the bass in two octaves it can sound full and resonant or lumpy and stodgy. It depends on the tonal context
- The use of orchestral timbres can mitigate the effectiveness of all of the above methods!

But, I am not aware of any of those things being specifically Australian in sound or intent!

It must be said that I am aware of acoustic properties that also impact on the effectiveness of orchestration. For example:

- Placing flutes below trumpets in a loud section will render them unheard
- Adding bass drum rolls to tuba and double bass fortissimos can produce depth of sound or obscurity in tonality, depending on context
- Adding oboes to violins can aid in cutting through the texture but with young players can aid in destroying the intonation

The list could go on. These matters are all about awareness and as Denisov notes, alluding to mathematical creativity, it is about the judicious selection of what to add or take out.

I will now work on the score after digressing yet again Stephen!