

Process and doing

**The thinking continues but the act of orchestration begins.
There are questions still to be confronted and memories to be evoked.**

Background:

As with the previous section, this section is based on the rumination as I began to score the work. This portion too, is an edited transcript of the recording I made as I engaged in the process of scoring *My Sister's Tears*. The transcript includes Julie's marginal notes, again informing and illuminating the broad context of this enquiry.

Pressure

The lines and squiggles are in place now; the process of orchestration, that delicate act of fine decision making, commences. The *aide memoir* of the sketch sits ready to enliven and confront.

It is the morning of the 31st March and I am about to start the actual scoring of *My Sister's Tears*. Lots of pressure...I'm feeling an incredible amount of pressure. I just pile up all the stuff in the corner of this desk so I can use the desk for this and other things. (He notes that he is stuck with "interesting")

This is a conundrum – what do I do? I've got so many mallet percussion instruments but in the standard orchestrational set up there is one line. The obvious thing to do is to add extra lines. I'll take out the timpani line, the drums and auxiliary percussion and save them for later – I can't even remember actually using them. I've got some other manuscript paper so all I'll do is cut and paste it. I'm glad I spent all that time drawing up the score paper. The sketch has confronted here!

I write...

I am probably 10 minutes into the process – and I've worked out how I will set up the percussion, but I wonder how many people think that composers start at the top left hand corner of the page and work their way through and yet I know that in the early part of [reviewing](#) this on tape I talked about the tinkling nature at the beginning and reflecting on the fact that it might be my sister dancing or whatever. But what makes it tinkle is the percussion, the piano sounds, the flutes are the flowing tulle of the dance costume (is that assumptive), but the tinkling, the lightness comes from the percussion, I believe. So that's actually where I've started. I've haven't started at the top of the page – I've started right at the bottom with vibraphone, glockenspiel, crotales and with piano, and now I'm going to deal with flute lines.

Those things that get in the way – life and such like

I am only at the end of the first page but Julie has just arrived and there are things to do. It's just put a 'punctuation' in the morning, but it's interesting.

What I've been doing, as I've been doing those things Julie has asked help with (like wandering up the back carrying bags of salt for the pool) is thinking about what's happening in the music and when I reach the fourth bar, there is something where all the flute section and the oboe...there is something missing – it doesn't tinkle any more. Something has to happen – in the piano part probably...yeah, I think so...Anyway, I'll have a little look at it..

The first coffee break arrives.

I am writing again.

It's worked out now – I've worked out exactly what it should sound like...and I am off! Interestingly, I've got no dynamics marked in the sketch but I'm instantly writing them in the score; it is certainly the *aide memoir* I am used to a sketch being.

Writing again...

It's about 10 to 10 in morning.

I find it enlightening when I look at the dynamics. I'm working through this opening still and seeing how the piano becomes part of the orchestral texture. I guess everything is coloured by experience. Most of the piano players that are given to me as the conductor in the wind orchestra have been international students of dubious capacity. That is affecting the way in which I note the dynamics here – I'm actually upping some of the dynamic levels in here because they never project the sound. I can wave my hand at them in an inviting or a threatening way and they just play like they are sitting in their studio – there is no sense of projecting the sound yet the piano, here, is an integral part of this texture and it should be present.

Back to writing...

Knowing without awareness

I'm on the second page of the sketch and I've almost navigated my way through this opening that I've been so concerned about. I'm at bar 7 now. As I move through and consider the sketch and I can remember a [discussion](#) where I was asked about "what's not in the score". I can see an answer to that now as I look at [bar 7 and 8](#). There is so little instruction and yet I can hear the voices playing. (*He laughs*) Of course, I can always 'hear voices', but

it is quite fascinating because I know what instruments are going to play here. I am more aware conceptually than of actual instruments as I look at the sketch but as I go to write on the score the instrument chooses itself. There is little second guessing; there is intrinsic knowing here as the pencil reaches the page.

As I am writing these bars I'm jumping around, all over the score, to drop the 'dots' in.

I suggested that the instruments would choose themselves, and that's exactly what's happening.

Exactly!

That is intriguing because there is an awareness of what should come next as I write. It's as if I am not looking at a part of the sketch. Yes, I am looking at the sketch but I'm leaping around on the score page. Those predominant lines are being drawn in on the score as they are drawn out of the sketch, intuitively. Then, as I move further I'm saying, "OK, how can I balance that line so it's complimented and not covered". This process is repeated over and over.

Again I reflect on dynamics. What I'm doing is going through adding dynamics. There are very few dynamics except the shape of them, the *cresc* and *dim* etc. Further on there are more dynamics but in the opening there are less. I'm not unsure here of what they should be.

Is there to be a manipulating of the scoring sometimes; such as in [bar 9 and 10](#)? Will that answer the dynamics questions?

There is a suggestion in the sketch that I want to address this in an orchestrational manner. This emanates from the writing. It is alluded to in the sketch and I am aware of the sound to be constructed; the *aide memoir* again. It's an almost subconscious thing. The slight variation in the scoring, just slight from what I actually wrote in my descriptions; by adding horns and trombones, that come in at different times, I am making dynamic changes as well as timbral and

Here I am on page 3 of the score now – it's taking forever. It's 10.30 am and I love this process; it is so very satisfying. The multiple percussion things have disappeared now and I don't need them or the piano because the 'sound' has changed. Now what we are getting to is a more pure wind orchestral sound – pure is the wrong word – a more traditional wind orchestral sound – in fact it's an orchestral sound, the sound I have here at bar 11, is the trombone section of an orchestra.

Given balance considerations now as I write, the sketch is so much implication, suggestion and allusion. I'm balancing differently now; the

trombones are different. (If anybody who hasn't got a life wants to look at the [sketch](#) and compare it with the [score](#) – they are welcome)

From before

When drawing up the score pages I reflected on elongating the phrases. It has to do with a certain paranoia born of hearing so many people just chop phrases in a real mongrel, unsophisticated, unmusical and awful way. Some of my own early recordings attest to that!

I also reflected on the use of tenuto. I think I'm using the tenuto to make sure the notes aren't chopped short and I wonder whether I over use it sometimes – like I use interesting – oh no not in that unsophisticated way.

I also use a process when I'm scoring when what I do is I put a bar's rest in front of the first entry of an instrument and then when their entry is finishes I put a bar's rest after the last note they play (I think this came from having found that I actually left things out of the score at some stage). I don't put rests in every measure, and what it makes me do is look to see if I've actually forgotten something or something should have entered, when I compare across the score. For example, I found out, I've just left out the 3rd and 4th horns in something and it's because I went to check those bars' rests. That is like the reflection on architecture I made on drawing up the score. It's a check; just making sure I have done everything.

Just because I can...

As the chorale moves along, around bar 20, I started to get, I think a little 'clever' and wanted to score more instruments in; more voices. I think this is because I could. I know how to do it; I can balance it and 'colour' it and all that stuff because I'm a reasonable orchestrator. But it's not supposed to be that way – it should be open and pure. I don't want to thicken the mix just yet.

I note down at 27 it says change voicing and a little slower, so I know I'm going to do something there and I'll wait and see whether it's as obvious to me as measure 7 was.

I've just changed a time sign – just before that changed voicing at 27. There was a 5/4 bar and it's just too long, too pretentious. If I want to make the sound build to that point at bar 26, I can't make the brasses hang on that long. The shape of everything can make them intensify the phrase and give the effect of hanging on without hanging across the line too far.

I am going to stop with a tea break with Julie...

It's now about 10 past 11 and we stopped for about 20 minutes – so I've probably not spoken on the tape for about 40 minutes because I am

engrossed. I am on page 12 and I've just enjoyed this process so much! I'm starting to reflect back on the beginning now because I'm at measure [46](#) and it's got resonances from the beginning. I'm very pleased I've done what – those small phrases I've done at the beginning – I think it fits very well with what is here and the next section is that brass chorale that leads to a triumphal sort of effect – it says "*becoming animated and proclaiming*", so it will be very informative to see if I've made it too melodramatic. Let's see.

In the 'flow'

So I'm an hour on from where I was (well actually about 50 minutes) and all I've done is worked out the end of that *accelerando*. That section I mentioned in the last entry has been worked out too – the section between 43 through to about 50. Isn't that incredible, 7 bars has taken me 50 minutes! Anyway this next section has got a lot of minims and crotchets in it so I should be right – but it's scoring it strongly that is most important.

I'm another 10 minutes on, quite interestingly battling to balance this brass chorale. I should never ever battle to balance a brass chorale; I should know exactly what I am doing, because it is my bread and butter! It's a different sense here – I have to be thinking more orchestrally here because I'm so used to balancing wind band score, with its multiple parts, and maybe I'm thinking battling because I am thinking more orchestrally. I don't know.

So I've almost finished this brass chorale, up to 59 and getting close to that reflective part that I talked. My concern is that it is a little melodramatic, so I'll spend a few moments considering whether it's what I really want. I'm still a little unconvinced about it especially the accompaniment but definitely going to get rid of all the cymbal crescendos – I mean that's cheesy muck!

My head is tired. I am going to have to have a coffee and something to eat – it's 1.30. Look at how much has been done!

Bad oboes and bad saxophones

I've had a bit of a break.

I'm just playing with 59 at present. I'm trying to keep the brass out of it because the woodwinds haven't had much to do – it's very brass heavy so far. Well, the opening is pretty rich in woodwinds and those 'tinkly' bits but what I am trying to do is get the beautiful sounds of the saxophones to accompany the oboe. That's fraught with danger because, if it's bad oboes and bad saxophones there is hardly anything worse in the world, is there!

Compare the [sketch](#) and the [score](#) around 68. I've scored the section that comes into the tutti at 68, putting in trumpets and trombones. I didn't take notice of the notes I've written! I say that I write specific notes and I've written trumpets and trombones and I say "Oh yeah, their specific notes" and

"I know what I'm doing" and then I didn't follow the instructions! In come the horns and they're not meant to come in because they're supposed to play the melody! Interesting moments here...

For the moment this section at 68...

When I look at how sometimes, especially in less mature bands, you have to overscore because you have to take account of the fact that they don't like to 'hunt' alone, they like to 'hunt' in packs – it's that 'everybody doing everything together' mentality. They don't like to be heard by themselves so it's a multi-scoring situation, a thicker scoring. The more advanced the ensemble, such as middle and high school, they can 'hunt' by themselves, they don't have to 'hunt' in packs. Then you still have to be careful of how you score an idea so, even there, you can't be as transparent as you might like to be. I think often composers put too much percussion in, though they may be addressing an educational imperative to do so. I know I have been very conscious in the last four or five years of diminishing the amount of percussion I use. Just because I can use it doesn't mean I have to. I am considerate of that here, very much so.

And too much percussion

It's 25 to 3 now.

There's hardly any percussion in this. At this section at 68, I've taken out the cymbals which I would normally use in a big crescendo, like in bar 67. There is no need to do that. Yet, I still wonder about what I might do spice it up. No, not spice it up; add more colour to the sound at 68. Do I need too? I wonder whether the simplicity of the melody and accompaniment needs a richer texture in the orchestration; will the percussion need to do something? What do I do? I'm being pulled both ways here.

I think of so many pieces I've heard, especially the Europeans, they over-orchestrate in this situation, and they turn drama into melodrama. I'll probably be told that my scoring is too much like a German wine; too austere. But I don't think we need to over-orchestrate here – plain, melodic material, simple accompaniment, and simple counterpoint. O.K. – decision's made and it's what I wrote in the first place. I'm quite pleased about that.

The old fashioned way

Using my prehistoric technology, there's no 'cut and paste' in [manuscript](#), this is where I do my *cols* (*col* = with). I'm writing them in as I go through into

bar 69 so that I can see the things that are common across the score. I know how to fill in around them.

At 79 I've added in the vibes, the same sound as they make at the beginning. It comes in again soon but I thought that this will be something that unites what happens at 79, connected to what happens after 35, at bar 40; it unites that whole section really. It's a good connection too. There needs to be a similar idea, a unifying 'sound' when we get to 87; a pedal point. The low woodwinds hold through the bar before 87 with a diminuendo that comes out of the brass dim and overlaps the anacrusis for the melody.

Reflection

The commentary here is much more sparse than it was at the beginning. I become engrossed in this. I've probably commented 4 times in the last hour and a half whereas at the beginning of the day and process I probably commented 4 times in the first 10 minutes. These changes, the unifying ideas/scoring, are just timbral changes. They're just hints, almost like memory. A pedal point could be almost like memory. That may be the woodwind thing that happens here. Does that memory fade?

I have finally found a place where I can have the cymbals and stuff. There needs to be a great big fat, yummy cymbal that leads up to bar 94; then a very, very gentle bass drum and gong in 95 and 96 – very, very gentle.

In one day

I'm on the last stages of the score. It's quite some time since I began, 6 pm now, and I'll have this finished today. All I have to do is photocopy two pages because the beginning, the first 8 or 9 bars, is re-stated and I'm not going to write it all out again – old technology!

The ending needs to have a little more of the beginning and I've played with it a little bit – with the [sketch](#) from 112 to 118 will show how I played with it just a little bit; it has to tinkle just that little bit more – after dinner though.

It's 7.45 pm and I've come down and in the last 20-25 minutes I've finished the piece. I've just that little bit to do; I'll go through and have a look at some things and make sure I know what I am talking about – the last check of things. I'm quite happy with the way it looks so far. There's a couple of balance things that I'm not sure of and I'm a little concerned about how the piano thing will go – I guess its conductor's role really. All finished!

(As a marginal note, the reader may like to look at the [review journal](#) I made of this process. It was made after I had completed the Jessie's Well journal which had sharpened my awareness of what might be gained from such an enquiry. There is also a [reflection](#) from me after the first rehearsal (a quite

rough and unrefined response) where I mull over many of the matters that come up here.)