The University of Adelaide
Elder Conservatorium of Music
Faculty of Arts

A Creative Application of Traditionalist Aesthetics to the Art of Musical Composition

by

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Abstract

This submission for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, University of Adelaide, takes the form of a portfolio of creative works (musical compositions) supported by an explanatory exegesis.

The Traditionalist School, sometimes also called the perennialist school, was formed by a group of thinkers writing on a number of related topics, including the philosophy of art and aesthetics. The foundational written works of the school were published between 1921 and 1953. The portfolio explores the possibility of developing approaches to the composition of new works in accordance with the doctrinal and aesthetic principles of the Traditionalist School, in particular with the aesthetic philosophy of Frithjof Schuon, one of the founding members of the school. The exegesis explains the origins, central ideas, and aesthetic philosophy of the traditionalist school and proceeds to discuss the ways in which these can be taken as a starting point for developing a compositional approach. This requires a consideration both of general aesthetic concepts, as well as compositional techniques, although the folio focuses more on the former. The completed pieces take these concepts in different directions with each offering a different set of possibilities for further artistic exploration.

The following works comprise the creative portfolio: *The Lights of Ibrahim* for piano trio; *Elivagar* for string quartet; *Road to the Heart*: song cycle for baritone and cello; *Songs of Sorrow and Light*: song cycle for tenor and piano; *Salve Regina* for SSAATB choir.
Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

I give permission for the digital version of my thesis to be made available on the web, via the University’s digital research repository, the Library Search and also through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the University to restrict access for a period of time.

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I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Charles Bodman Rae, for his support and guidance throughout my candidature. His ability to empathise, constructively criticise, and recognise potential pitfalls has been indispensable. I would also like to thank Professor Jennifer McMahon for her comments about philosophy and aesthetics and engagement with the early development of the topic, which was significant in defining the direction of the project. Finally I would like to thank family and friends who have supported me throughout this process.

Signed

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Introduction

The art of musical composition; this term carries with it connotations arising from the European musical tradition dating back to the beginning of the common practice period, and could be extended to refer to the medieval origins of classical music and even to the music of Ancient Greece which formed the basis of medieval musical theory.\(^1\) For the purposes of the following essay, however, our definition must be expanded beyond the narrative of a single musical culture and relatively brief period in musical history. Our terms of reference must be significantly broader both in terms of historical scale and cultural boundaries. Here, then, musical composition will be taken to mean the production of music, both in written and oral traditions, across a range of human cultures dating back to the beginning of recorded history and extending into pre-history, with the intention of discerning the principles which unite the most disparate musical traditions. Of these musical traditions, those that have a prominent role in this project are the Indian classical tradition which is a modal system bearing similarities to the Arabic and Persian traditions,\(^2\) the music of the European middle ages, and to a lesser extent the sacred chants of the Sufis, Byzantines and Jews, as well as the Chinese, Ancient Greek, and more recent (meaning post-medieval) European musical traditions. The prominence of these particular traditions is not due to them being regarded as superior in relation to others, but due to the availability of extensive commentaries, from both traditional and modern sources, on their theory, which allows one to consider how the principles underlying these musical traditions should be understood in their traditional context. Moreover, it is not the intention of this project to provide an encyclopedic account of numerous musical traditions, but rather to use representative examples in the interest of illustrating universal principles.

Music, like language, has its origins in the earliest part of the human story. According to Nils Lennart “It is probably safe to assume that musical instruments are at least as old as anatomically

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modern humans if not much older." This statement does not even account for musical activity that does not require the use of instruments, which almost certainly predates the construction of even the most primitive instruments. Although this music has not been preserved in written form, it is possible that a culture like that of the Indigenous Australians, which has existed continuously for 65,000 years, represents an example of what very ancient music may have been like. Our understanding of the music of nomadic peoples, not to mention their culture in general, necessarily remains relatively fragmentary, since such peoples leave behind less tangible remnants of their passage through this world; this is often mistakenly regarded as a mark of inferiority.

One of the earliest examples of a musical system developed in a sedentary culture is the classical music of India. The Rigveda, the earliest of the Hindu scriptures which dates to the second millennium BC, contains references to Indian classical music. This same period of history also provides us with the first examples of notated music and a wide variety of musical instruments. Whilst discoveries of notated music and musical instruments from the second millennium BC and before are relatively few in number, there are more available examples from the first millennium BC of notated music, musical instruments, and in particular, contemporary commentaries on musical theory and practice. In these commentaries one idea which emerges, and which for Westerners is usually associated with the Pythagorean school, is what is referred to by Alain Danielou as the theory of ‘metaphysical correspondences’, the idea that the tangible relationships between sounds corresponded to metaphysical principles which underlie existence and that therefore the use to which these sounds are put is a matter of great import. Aside from the examples of this concept in the Pythagorean school, which are well known, examples of this understanding in Chinese culture are especially clear, in the Li Ji, which dates from at least the

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8 Li Ji, trans. James Legge, [https://ctext.org/liji](https://ctext.org/liji) [accessed 11 May 2018]
Han dynasty (206BC - 220AD) it is stated that “music is intimately connected with the essential relations between beings”\(^9\), and according to Dong Zhongzu (second century BC):

> “The vital spirits of humankind, tuned to the tone of heaven and earth, express all the tremors of heaven and earth, just as several cithars, all tuned on gong, all vibrate when the note gong sounds. The fact of harmony between heaven and earth and humankind does not come from a physical union, from a direct action; it comes from a tuning on the same note producing vibrations in unison...In the universe nothing happens by chance, there is no spontaneity, all is influence and harmony, accord answering accord.”\(^10\)

One could cite similar examples from classical Chinese texts in which there is a recurring theme of a universal ‘harmony’ which governs both heaven and earth, and that common music is an echo of this harmony. The quotation given above is notable for expressing the idea that it is in fact ‘vibration’ which produces the correspondence between the divine and earthly realms.

A representative of the Indian tradition, Ksemaraja (10th to 11th century AD), expresses this idea thus:

> “The bindu, wanting to manifest the thought it has of all things, vibrates, and is transformed into a primordial sound...Sound which is of the nature of nada (vibration), resides in all living beings.”\(^11\)

In Hindu metaphysics, the bindu, or point, is the central point of unity through which all creation comes into existence.\(^12\) Here Ksemaraja articulates the same idea as Dong Zhongzu, that it is by means of ‘vibration’, or sound, that this creative process is brought about. Here the sound that is spoken of is not physical sound, but that which sound, by its qualities of intangibility and

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\(^9\) Danielou op. cit., p. 2  
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 2  
\(^11\) Ibid., p. 3  
evocative power, corresponds to in the metaphysical domain. The *bindu*, is in some respects analogous to the Logos in Hellenic and Christian metaphysics, which allows us to draw a parallel with the most expressly metaphysical passage of the New Testament.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.”

The Logos, is the central point of unity through which the creation comes into existence just as the *bindu* is in Hindu metaphysics. In both Latin and English Logos is rendered as Word, thus identifying the beginning of the creative process with an utterance, that is to say, with sound.

Fabre d’Olivet describes how these concepts were understood by Pythagoras and his school:

“Several centuries before Plato, Pythagoras, imbued with Egyptian doctrine, requested his disciples to reject the judgment of their ears as susceptible to error and variation where harmonic principles are concerned. He wanted them to regulate those immovable principles only according to the proportional and analogical harmony of numbers.”

The idea that the mathematical relationships underlying musical sounds are connected to universal principles, articulated in the statements above and of which Pythagoras remains the best known Western exponent, was taken up by philosophers more concerned with social order and morality and thus led them to the conclusion that the type of music which is prevalent in a society in both representative of its moral condition, and more importantly actually has a causal influence over the moral rectitude of a society. This idea is an important theme in Plato’s Republic, as evidenced by the following passage:

13 Gospel of John 1:1-3
“...gracelessness, arrhythmia and disharmony are akin to evil speaking and evil temper, but the opposites are the symbols and the kind of the opposites, the sober and good disposition...the poets that we must supervise and compel to embody in their poems the semblance of the good ethos or else not write poetry among us, or must we keep watch over the other craftsmen, and forbid them to represent the evil disposition, the licentious, the illiberal, the graceless, either in the likeness of living creatures or in buildings or in any other products of their art...that our guardians may not be bred among symbols of evil, as it were in a pasturage of poisonous herbs, lest grazing freely (they) build up a huge mass of evil in their own souls.”

Plato’s suggestion that music can influence the moral character of both the individual and the wider society is mirrored in the Chinese tradition, where the relationship between metaphysics and the moral character of society is a recurring theme. This is clear in the following passage from the Yue Ji:

“In periods of disorder, rites are altered and music is licentious. Then sad sounds are lacking in dignity, joyful sounds lacking in calmness...When the spirit of opposition manifests itself, indecent music comes into being...when the spirit of conformity manifests itself, harmonious music appears.”

The preceding passages, taken from a variety of traditions, demonstrate a consistent understanding among the ancients that musical sounds have a significance that goes beyond their immediately tangible effects and are related to metaphysical principles that can also be expressed numerically through the ratios that govern musical intervals. This gave rise, in the civilisations in question, to musical systems that organise these intervals into modes and scales, in which the significance of each interval is given its full due since it can be clearly discerned in relation to a relatively static tonic note. Rhythmic organisation was governed by similar rules, such as the

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16 Yue Ji 29-30, [https://ctext.org/liji/yue-ji](https://ctext.org/liji/yue-ji) [accessed 14 May 2018]
system of Talas in Indian music, a type of rhythmic cycle more complex than the simple meters of European classical music, in which beats are arranged hierarchically in complex patterns.\textsuperscript{17}

The common thread which connects the examples given thus far relates not only to music, but to a way of thinking that was shared by all traditional civilisations. In this way of thinking, the metaphysical Absolute expressed as an anthropomorphic God in theistic religions or Brahman in the Hindu religion, and not man, was at the centre of the universal hierarchy.\textsuperscript{18} The traditional sciences consisted of applications of metaphysical principles to various domains\textsuperscript{19} and their primary concern was not material progress, but a reintegration of the human soul through external objects taken as symbols. The Renaissance, which took place in Europe beginning in the 15th century, marks a development away from this understanding towards a point of view centered on man, in which science consists primarily of experimentation in the material domain in order to seek results which in turn produce material progress. This was largely a result of the, not entirely unjustified,\textsuperscript{20} undermining of the authority of the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{21} This material progress in turn is used to justify the notion of the superiority of modern civilisation, which originated in Europe and which has now become global, absorbing and largely replacing traditional cultures.

The development of Western\textsuperscript{22} music to some extent runs parallel to the progress of Western civilisation from the Renaissance down to our times, although these parallels are sometimes exaggerated and do not always account for subtleties, they are nonetheless instructive. The most significant development in the history of Western music, and this it not a qualitative evaluation

\begin{itemize}
\item Powers op. cit., pp. 195-201
\item It is beyond the scope of this essay to examine the ways in which the universal hierarchy was expressed in these and other civilisations.
\item That is to say the many of the critiques of the Church at this time came about as a result of genuine errors on the part of the Catholic authorities, which is not to say that the resultant consequences were desirable.
\item This term is to be understood in the sense that it is used by Rene Guenon, that is to say it refers to those civilisations and attitudes which are opposed to the traditional worldview. Thus the dichotomy of East and West symbolises the opposition between tradition and modernity, despite the fact that this opposition is not restricted to particular geographical locations. These terms also have a symbolic meaning relating to the fact that the Sun rises in the East and sets in the West.
\end{itemize}
but rather a statement of its far reaching effects, was the development of temperament, which concluded with equal temperament, a way of slightly altering the 12 chromatic notes produced by the cycle of fifths in order to make them fit into an octave divided equally into 12 semitones.\textsuperscript{23} This allowed Western music to develop systems of tonality and pitch organisation that are completely alien to any other musical tradition in history, and eventually allowed a total subversion of the musical substance altogether in the form of modernism.\textsuperscript{24} The system of equal temperament expresses a reductive human tendency to rationalise the inherent complexity of a natural system like that of the cycle of 5ths.

\begin{quote}
"The development of twelve fifths, instead of bringing us back precisely to the octave, leaves a difference - the comma - with which we shall have to negotiate. This will complicate every calculation and prevent us from formulating those rigid and simple laws, attractive but inaccurate, in which our vain reason delights. This comma, which the modern world tries so hard to ignore, represents, for those who can understand it, the essential difference between what is finite and what is infinite. The fifths form a spiral whose sounds, coiled around themselves, can never meet. For us, this limitless spiral can be the joint in the structure of the world, the narrow gate that will allow us to escape from the appearance of a closed universe...only by respecting such subtle differences can the edifice of sounds become the image of reality and one of the ways of spiritual realisation...this is possible precisely because, as Plotinus expresses it, this music is ‘a terrestrial representation of the music that exists in the kingdom of the ideal world.’"\textsuperscript{25}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{24} “Equal temperament has had a strange effect on some of the musicians of the present generation. As they have never heard a consonant chord, they know chords only as more or less acute dissonances, and the rules of the old masters, who base everything around consonant chords, seem to them the effect of timidity and ignorance.” Danielou op. Cit., p. 133; “Ultramodern music - “electronic music” for example - is founded on a despising of everything that enters into the very definition of music...There is no possible justification for this puerile mania for “making a clean sweep” of centuries or millennia in order to “start from scratch”, coupled with the inventing of new principles, new bases, new structures - such invention is not merely senseless in itself but also incompatible with any creative sincerity.” Frithjof Schuon, \textit{Language of the Self}, (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom 1999), p. 108

\textsuperscript{25} Danielou op. cit., p. 7
Thus it is only by the acknowledgement of the underlying mathematical structures of sound, which are not easily reducible to a straightforward and rational system such as that of equal temperament, that music can ascend to become a “terrestrial representation of the music that exists in the kingdom of the ideal world.” The additional harmonic possibilities afforded by equal temperament cannot replace the loss of the evocative power of precisely tuned intervals. The development of Western music in the aftermath of equal temperament was, unsurprisingly, characterised by a relatively rapid evolution of styles and techniques, given the wealth of possibilities created by this system.\textsuperscript{26} The emergence of rationalist and humanist tendencies in musical expression are particularly evident in the development of the Classical style which occurred during the period of the Enlightenment. The emergence of sonata form as the preeminent form of musical composition reflected an increasingly rationalist approach to musical composition in keeping with Enlightenment ideals, at the same time it ensured that secular instrumental music obtained the highest place of honour in the Western musical tradition.\textsuperscript{27} In the nineteenth century, romanticism reacted against the rationalist simplifications of the classical period, but rather than being music centred on metaphysical principles it was increasingly music centred upon man, but man in his emotive and sentimental aspect, rather than as a rational being.\textsuperscript{28} Finally the birth of modernism in the 20th century, and particularly in the period immediately following the second world war, sought to break with the tradition of classical music,\textsuperscript{29} itself only a relatively recent phenomenon. Interestingly, one of the key concepts of early modernism, the 12-tone system, would have been inconceivable without the system of equal temperament, itself a relic of the baroque era. Modernist music represents the antithesis of the traditional understanding of music, here the musical substance is simply a plaything to be

\textsuperscript{26} To consider this as a mark of the superiority of this system is to reveal a perspective that evaluates the matter on purely quantitative considerations.


\textsuperscript{28} By these criticisms it is not the intention to suggest that Western classical music of this era is devoid of value, but to draw attention to certain tendencies which must, from a traditionalist perspective, be considered erroneous. Those who wish to criticise musical modernism and do so based on the premise that it subverted the Western classical tradition which reached its highest point of late romanticism are mistaken in not recognising the roots of the modernist tendency in romanticism itself, not merely from a technical standpoint, but in terms of spiritual content.

manipulated by the composer for any purpose they decide and thus becomes ‘art for art’s sake’. The idea that music has a function that goes beyond itself is no longer a consideration.

The effect of modernist music, with its abandonment of tradition, albeit a relatively fragmentary and recent tradition in the form of classical music, was deeply alienating, given that practical result of this approach meant that music essentially lost its capacity to communicate expressive content,\(^{30}\) having been initially severely diminished as a result of equal temperament.\(^{31}\) The reactions to this realisation, taking place in an intellectual environment which no longer had any unifying principles, produced innumerable varied results. Many of these reactions, in one way or another, have taken the form of a return to tradition, although usually only in a fragmentary manner. For many such as the so called ‘holy minimalists’,\(^{32}\) Henryk Górecki, Arvo Pärt, and John Tavener, this has meant reconnecting with the Christian tradition, both in religious terms and musically. Others have looked to the East, such as Terry Riley who mastered Indian classical vocal music.\(^{33}\) The extent to which it is possible to successfully reintegrate oneself into a tradition after the break created by developments in the West since the Renaissance and particularly in the 20th century is a point for further consideration and one which is at the heart of this project.

Music has played a central role in most cultures throughout human history, and the global super-culture of the 21st century is no exception. However, as our culture has become modernised it has shaped music and the other arts into forms which match its outlook and its values, and which are rejected by those who identify, in one way or another, as traditionalists. The following project is an attempt to explore how traditional aesthetic and artistic values might be rediscovered in the composition of new musical works, in particular by adopting the

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\(^{30}\) Music had already been reduced to the evocation of emotional states, but this final development essentially made modern music unintelligible to the listener, and particularly to those who were not initiated into the cult surrounding this artform at the time.

\(^{31}\) It is both a practical fact, and a point of considerable significance, that modernist music could not have been conceived of without the development of equal temperament centuries earlier.


metaphysical and aesthetic perspective of the Traditionalist School, which was a school of thought associated with 20th century writers such as Réné Guénon, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon.\(^{34}\)

This project therefore, consists of an introduction to the history and the central ideas of the Traditionalist School, followed by an examination of their contributions to aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Such an overview is necessary to contextualise the remainder of the project, given that much of this material is relatively unknown in academic circles. It is also important to note that the traditionalists are essentially attempting to discern a common thread that runs throughout all religious, philosophical and artistic traditions prior to the modern era,\(^{35}\) and in accordance with this idea this project seeks to utilise these underlying concepts that are found in various traditions. The particular focus on the work of the traditionalists of the 20th century is solely due to the fact that it is in these works that these concepts are elucidated in a way that is particularly clear to the modern reader and dispels many errors that modern readers may make in approaching traditional sources. Finally, this project discusses the various issues associated with the application of these concepts to the composition of new works, and includes an analysis of works composed throughout the duration of the masters candidature to determine their success in making use of these concepts.

The primary aim of this creative compositional project, at the M.Phil. level, is to produce a body of new work informed by the ideas of the Traditionalist School. In order to achieve this aim it has been necessary to define precisely how the literature in question informs the compositional process. This has involved reviewing the body of traditionalist literature that is relevant to the topic, both directly and indirectly, and deriving from this a set of aesthetic and technical principles that inform the creative process. This project has been conducted primarily through the composition of new works and secondarily through a discussion of creative methods and theoretical principles derived from traditionalist ideas.


It is not the intention of this project to present a complete explanation or justification of the philosophical principles in question. These are presented purely insofar as they form the basis of aesthetic decisions and therefore they function as a premise rather than as an object of the research. In other words the philosophical positions espoused by the traditionalists but which are by no means unique to them form the basis of a project which is primarily compositional and merely takes these positions as a source of creative inspiration.36

According to the authors of the traditionalist school, the purpose of art is to act as a vehicle for metaphysical principles. Taking this position as a starting point, the creative project has been guided and interrogated by the following key research questions:

1. What are the principles of traditional art that are manifested in the aesthetic, theoretical and methodological aspects of traditional musical systems?
2. How can these principles be applied to the conception and composition of music?
3. How can these ideas be realised effectively in the performance of new works and what are the potential obstacles to this realisation?

The first research question is addressed in this project through a thorough review of the relevant literature and an attempt to derive from this a clear set of principles and aesthetic preferences. The second question is primarily addressed through the works themselves and secondarily through the theoretical considerations that preceded their composition, as well as the subsequent analysis. The third question is again addressed through the works, although less satisfactorily given that relatively few of the works have as yet received performances in their final forms. However, the primary obstacles that could be identified by this question, which are related to

36 This point is also relevant in order to forestall a possible objection to the compositions included in the project. The fact that the aesthetic decisions were governed by the aesthetic philosophy of the traditionalist school led me to adopt a musical language which eschewed complexity and works of a large scale, both in terms of duration and instrumental forces. This approach seemed in some sense to be at odds with the aim of composing works for a postgraduate portfolio, but was necessary in order to remain consistent with the principles outlined in the following chapters.
tuning, were identified prior to the works being completed and, in the opinion of the composer, largely avoided. This would however be a point for further exploration in the future.

Chapter 1: History and Ideas of the Traditionalist School

The History of the Traditionalist School

The history of the traditionalist school as a 20th century intellectual movement, though not of its ideas which are derived from traditional sources, begins with Réné Guénon, who was effectively the founder of the school. Born in France in 1886, he had a Catholic upbringing and moved to Paris as a young man to study mathematics. During the first decade of the 20th century, Guénon was linked to a number of spiritualist and occultist groups who were prevalent in Paris at the time, but by the end of this decade he had rejected their ideas in favour of the sapiential esoterisms of orthodox spiritual traditions and later wrote critiques of both Theosophism and spiritism. It was also during this time that Guenon came into contact with a group of Hindus of the Advaita Vedanta school, which became central to his metaphysical philosophy.

Although Guénon had been initiated into a Sufi society in 1912, his first book was an exposition of metaphysics as it is manifested in the Hindu tradition. According to Martin Lings, he chose this subject because he believed that his intended audience, the European intelligentsia, was more likely to be responsive to traditional doctrines as they appear in this form, and not because of any innate superiority. This work, originally titled General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines, was rejected as a doctoral thesis which effectively ended Guénon’s commitment to

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38 The term ‘esoterism’, rather than ‘esotericism’, is the one preferred by traditionalist authors.
39 Ibid.
academia. Guénon’s best known book, *The Crisis of the Modern World*,\(^{42}\) which summarises the traditionalist rejection of modernity as a phenomenon and as an ideology was published in 1927. In 1930, Guenon travelled to Egypt as part of a project for the study and publication of Sufi texts. He never left Egypt and eventually died there in 1951, having remained reclusive for the last twenty years of his life.

The traditionalist school is usually regarded as having two additional founding members aside from Guenon. These are Ananda Coomaraswamy and Frithjof Schuon. Coomaraswamy, born in Ceylon in 1877, was an influential art historian and curator working at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.\(^{43}\) Coomaraswamy was influenced by the writings of Guénon during the 1920s after being introduced to them by fellow art historian, Heinrich Zimmer. In speaking of Guénon, Coomaraswamy stated that “no living writer in modern Europe is more significant than René Guénon, whose task it has been to expound the universal metaphysical tradition that has been the essential foundation of every past culture, and which represents the indispensable basis for any civilization deserving to be so-called”\(^{44}\) and also that he and Guénon were “entirely in agreement on metaphysical principles.”\(^{45}\) Coomaraswamy wrote extensively on topics related to the application of traditionalist ideas in the arts, and by comparison with Guenon was well known outside of the immediate circle of the traditionalist school.

Of the three founding members of the traditionalist school, the most significant in terms of their direct, personal influence, as opposed to the influence of the ideas found in their writings, is undoubtedly Frithjof Schuon. Schuon was born in Switzerland in 1907.\(^{46}\) As a young man he studied the various traditional doctrines, in particular the Indian scriptures such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita. He also came into contact with the work of René Guénon.


\(^{44}\) Ibid.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.

whose influence was decisive in his intellectual formation. During an obligatory posting with the French army he met with a group of Yemeni dervishes (a member of a Sufi order who has taken vows of poverty) which resulted in him travelling to North Africa where he was initiated into the Shadhili Sufi order by Shaykh Ahmad al-Alawi. One significant result of this encounter being that Schuon was invested with the right to initiate his own disciples. Through his own branch of the Shadhili order, known as the Maryamiyya, Schuon is known to have initiated several disciples who themselves became significant contributors to the traditionalist school. Among these are Martin Lings, Titus Burckhardt, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, with the latter being, at the time of writing, probably the most significant living proponent of the traditionalist school. The school of Frithjof Schuon represents the mature flourishing of the ideas that were introduced by Guenon. Of the three aforementioned disciples, Titus Burckhardt is of the greatest significance for the purpose of this study, given that much of his work focuses on the topic of sacred art and the application of traditionalist principles to the domain of aesthetics.

The influence of the traditionalist school in Western academia has remained limited due to their condemnation of its intellectual premises and their assertion of the superiority of traditional doctrines, a thesis that has never been widely accepted in Western academic circles. On the other hand, the traditionalists have had a considerable influence on the intellectual life of the Islamic world in the 20th and 21st centuries, due to the fact that this is the tradition with which many of the members of the school were and are affiliated. Of the aforementioned disciples of Frithjof Schuon, Martin Lings authored perhaps the best known biography of the prophet Muhammad \( \text{مولد خداوند } \) in the English language, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr is widely recognised as a significant scholar whose contributions include numerous books on Islamic philosophy and mysticism, as well as a recent English edition of the Quran which brings together multiple traditional commentaries.

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47 I include myself in this statement, having ‘reverted’ (this term is preferred to ‘converted’) to Islam approximately six months before the commencement of this project.
In Western academia, the traditionalist school was perhaps most influential within the sphere of comparative religion, which is unsurprising given that this subject forms the bulk of the work of Schuon and his disciples. It is also within this discipline that it has received its greatest share of criticism. Generally speaking the criticism of the traditionalist school comes from two main perspectives. On the one hand, those who are committed to a particular religious perspective tend to criticize it on the basis that it does not affirm the truth of a single religious form to the exclusion of others, on the other most academics tend to see these concepts as pseudo-intellectual, with little or no objective foundation. From this latter perspective, the traditionalist thesis that there is an underlying common thread between the various traditions of humanity seems simplistic and reductive, and their assertions seem to be made in the absence of sufficient evidence. A third criticism that is sometimes made of the traditionalist school comes from a more political perspective, and this is a criticism from some left wing intellectuals that the traditionalist school has an association with fascism and the far-right. This is due to the connection between Réné Guénon, and Italian author Julius Evola, who took some traditionalist ideas and combined them with contemporary fascism. Evola’s subsequent influence on far-right politics is well documented however he has never been regarded as a genuine traditionalist by those who subscribe to the philosophy as articulated by Guénon, Schuon and Coomaraswamy.  

It is beyond the scope of this introductory background to address any of these criticisms, and they are provided here merely to contextualise the school within the wider academic community.

The Ideas of the Traditionalist School

The central thesis of the traditionalist school is what is known as the perennial philosophy. Alternative terminologies sometimes employed are the latin *philosophia perennis*, or simply *sophia perennis*, and also in the writings of Schuon, *religio perennis*. The perennial philosophy is an underlying truth hidden beneath the veils of form in various religious and philosophical traditions. The content of this perennial philosophy is essentially metaphysical, and refers to the

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50 Fabbri op. cit.
knowledge of the non-dualistic, non-contingent nature of absolute Reality and the illusory nature of human subjectivity and contingent realities. In the following passage Frithjof Schuon gives an introduction to the traditionalist understanding of the perennial philosophy and outlines some of the ways in which it contrasts with contemporary philosophy:

“Philosophia perennis’ is generally understood as referring to that metaphysical truth which has no beginning, and which remains the same in all expressions of wisdom. Perhaps it would here be better or more prudent to speak of a “Sophia perennis”, since it is not a question of artificial mental constructions, as is all too often the case in philosophy; or again, the primordial wisdom that always remains true to itself could be called “religio perennis”, given that by its nature it in a sense involves worship and spiritual realization. Fundamentally we have nothing against the word “philosophy”, for the ancients understood by it all manner of wisdom; in fact, however, rationalism, which has absolutely nothing to do with true spiritual contemplation, has given the word “philosophy” a limitative colouring, so that with this word one can never know what is really being referred to. If Kant is a “philosopher”, then Plotinus is not, and vice versa.

With Sophia perennis, it is a question of the following: there are truths innate in the human Spirit, which nevertheless in a sense lie buried in the depth of the “Heart” — in the pure Intellect — and are accessible only to the one who is spiritually contemplative; and these are the fundamental metaphysical truths. Access to them is possessed by the “gnostic”, “pneumatic” or “theosopher” — in the original and not the sectarian meaning of these terms — and access to them was also possessed by the “philosophers” in the real and still innocent sense of the word: for example, Pythagoras, Plato and to a large extent also Aristotle.

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52 Ibid.
The fundamental content of the Truth is the Unconditioned, the Metaphysical Absolute; the Ultimate One, which is also the Absolutely Good, the Platonic Agathon.”

The last sentence of this statement addresses the question of what the actual content of this knowledge is. A particularly clear statement of this content occurs in the philosophy of Adi Shankara, founder of the Advaita Vedanta school of Hindu philosophy, which states that Reality (Brahman), is a single unchanging entity, and the appearance of change is an illusion created by the spatio-temporal, and psychological, limitations of human subjectivity. This philosophy is also clearly articulated in Sufi metaphysics and is perhaps best summarised by Ibn Ata’illah in the following statement:

“God did not veil Himself from thee by some reality coexisting with Him, since there is no reality other than He. What veils Him from thee is naught but the illusion that something outside Him could possess any reality.”

All further investigations and concepts in traditionalist literature proceed from this premise. That absolute Reality alone is real and the appearance of changing entities is essentially a kind of illusion. The ‘realisation’ of this knowledge, such that one’s perception is fundamentally altered in such a way as to be permanently fixed on the unchanging Reality is considered to be the ultimate goal of all religious and spiritual traditions. It is for this reason that this is not simply an intellectual theory, but requires an element of spiritual praxis in order for these truths to be realised by the individual.

The traditionalist understanding of cosmology is essentially that the universe is on the one hand a kind of illusion caused by the limitations of our subjectivity, and on the other hand the domain in

which the limitless possibility inherent in absolute Reality is manifest. This occurs through a process of “metaphysical descent,” whereby the qualities inherent in the One are at a more relative degree of existence differentiated into archetypal principles. At a degree of reality that is more relative and more outward still, this process culminates in the manifestation of qualities through particular and contingent instantiations in the universe, without these relative degrees of reality ever actually departing from the absolute non-duality of the Real except in an illusory manner.\footnote{Frithjof Schuon, \textit{Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism}, (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2000), p. 17} This cosmological conception is present in the monotheistic traditions as the idea of theophany,\footnote{Ibid., p. 47} or the self-disclosure of God, in Hinduism as the doctrine of Maya, and also in Platonist philosophical traditions as the idea of emanation. This cosmological conception is of particular significance for the purposes of this study, since it is this understanding of the nature of the universe that informs the traditionalist understanding of aesthetics and the purpose of art.

Having mentioned the way in which traditionalist cosmology draws upon numerous traditions both religious and philosophical, it is necessary to examine the way in which traditionalists understand the role of tradition, as it is of central importance both to the doctrine. The traditionalists recognise the possibility of metaphysical truths being articulated by philosophy and they generally recognise the Platonists as an example of this.\footnote{Frithjof Schuon, ‘The Dialogue Between Hellenists and Christians’ in \textit{The Fullness of God}, edited by James Cutsinger, (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom 2004), p. 61} However, religion is considered to be a more significant phenomenon for a number of reasons. Firstly it proceeds from revelation, a point in time in which the Real manifests itself directly within the framework of a particular human society.\footnote{Seyyed Hossein Nasr, \textit{Knowledge and the Sacred} (New York: SUNY press, 1989), 67} This phenomenon establishes a particular mythological framework through which Reality is to be addressed, and which itself is addressed to all people, not merely those with an aptitude for philosophy.\footnote{Frithjof Schuon, ‘Frithjof Schuon-extended interview on metaphysics,religion and poetry,’ \url{https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9T90GWfk40} [accessed 29/01/2018]} This latter point means that a religion necessarily has multiple levels at which it can be interpreted, depending upon the nature of the one to whom it is addressing itself. At the highest levels of esoteric interpretation, most of the major world religions are regarded by the traditionalists as converging upon the same essential
metaphysical truths, without this ever abolishing their differentiation at the level of form. This theory was named in the title of Frithjof Schuon’s first book, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions*.\(^{61}\)

One final point that must be made in introducing the key ideas of the traditionalist school relates to their understanding of the nature of history. In contrast to the progressive ideals that were in vogue at the time when Réné Guénon began writing, he regarded history as a story of continuous decline, culminating in the modern era which represents the most decadent and spiritually poor society that humanity has yet produced.\(^{62}\) The traditionalists see the immense material progress of modernity as confirming this thesis, insofar as it represents a humanity that has turned all its attention to concerns related to matter and the outward and has no regard for the development of the inward faculties of man.\(^{63}\) Guénon was particularly influenced by the Hindu doctrine of the four Yugas, or ages, which states that history passes through great cycles known as manvantaras. These cycles consist of four Yugas, the first age being the most spiritually elevated and the final age, the Kali Yuga or dark age, being the most spiritually deprived.\(^{64}\) Guenon’s best known book, *The Crisis of the Modern World*,\(^{65}\) is an examination of the way in which modernity corresponds to the final phase of the Kali Yuga. It is notable that this doctrine is not confined to Hinduism, but similar doctrines are common in ancient literature, and virtually all traditions view history as both cyclical and subject to entropy rather than progress.

**The Traditionalist Doctrine of Art**

The traditionalist doctrine of art draws upon the cosmological conception outlined above. This can be summarised as the idea that the qualities inherent in ultimate Reality are, at a more relative level of existence, differentiated into archetypes which at a still more relative level of

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63 Ibid., p. 81
64 Ibid., p. 7
65 Ibid.
existence, that of the manifest universe, are differentiated further into distinct objects. The arts then, are the sciences of perceiving archetypal qualities in forms, and distilling those forms in such a way as to retrace those qualities. Their essential function is to create an ambience that is conducive to contemplation and to returning to consciousness of the Real. This ambience is nearly ubiquitous in the natural world, but in the case of human civilisation, the artistic sciences are necessary to create an ambience that is conducive to sanctity. The traditionalist understanding is that art has functioned in this way in all traditional civilisations, with the notable exceptions of post-Renaissance Europe and the Classical Greek and Roman civilisations. One possible objection to this idea is that if every form has as its source ultimate Reality, then why is it necessary to distinguish certain forms as having particular merit in the arts? The traditionalist response to this once again draws upon a concept that is articulated by Hindu philosophy. This is the idea that within the domain of relativity, there are three metaphysical ‘directions’, these are Sattva (upwards, towards Oneness), rajas (expansive, remaining on the same plane of relativity), and tamas (downwards, drawing one further into multiplicity and away from unity). Certain forms correspond to a greater or lesser degree to these directions, in other words, certain forms directly realise archetypal qualities within particular existential limitations, and therefore are directed upwards, whereas others are distinguished their opposition of form to essence and tend downwards, remaining within multiplicity. It is the traditionalist understanding that the aesthetic of modern urban societies are essentially ‘tamasic’.

As stated above, the traditionalists regard the arts as being governed by traditional ‘sciences’, which do not correspond to the sciences of the modern world but rather are applications of

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67 Ibid., p. 65
68 Ibid.
metaphysical principles to particular domains.\textsuperscript{71} The foundational science that governs the arts is the science of the correspondence between a form and its archetype or essence.\textsuperscript{72} This is what is known as symbolism. It is important to note that, according to this definition, a symbol is not merely a convention but a ‘manifestation’ of a higher level of reality within a more relative one. In other words, the relationship between a symbol and what it conveys is an objective reality and not simply a subjectively defined relationship. This is articulated by Titus Burckhardt thus:

“Every form “vehicles” a particular quality of being....there is a rigorous analogy between form and spirit. A spiritual vision necessarily finds its expression in a particular formal language. If this language has been forgotten—with the result that a so called sacred art draws its forms from absolutely any kind of profane art—it means that a spiritual vision of things no longer exists.”\textsuperscript{73}

These sciences can vary according to the civilisation in question without difference in essential principles.

“Sensible forms therefore correspond with exactness to intellections, and it is for this reason that traditional art has rules that apply the cosmic laws and universal principles to the domain of forms, and that, beneath their more general outward aspect, reveal the style of the civilisation under consideration, this style, in its turn, rendering explicit the form of intellectuality of that civilisation. When art ceases to be traditional and becomes arbitrary, that is infallibly the sign - and secondarily the cause - of an intellectual decline…”\textsuperscript{74}

\textsuperscript{74} Frithjof Schuon, ‘Concerning Forms in Art’ in \textit{The Transcendent Unity of Religions}, (Wheaton: Quest Books 1993), p. 62
The traditionalists are draw a sharp distinction between civilisations in which art is conceived in this manner, and the modern world in which aesthetic choices are regarded as arbitrary. This is not considered by the traditionalists to be a matter that is inconsequential, but rather as Schuon states, it is both a sign, and a cause of intellectual and spiritual decadence.

Another way in which the traditionalists distinguish the arts of traditional societies and those of the modern world, is that an art was traditionally regarded both as a vocation and a craft. Ananda Coomaraswamy points out that for traditional societies, the distinction between art and craft did not really exist, whereas in modern post-industrial societies, the element of art has been removed from the crafts, which have been replaced by mass-production whose products are inhuman and ugly, and the element of craft has been removed from art, which has turned in on itself to such an extent that it no longer maintains any significant connection to the lives of the majority of people. The modern artist essentially manipulates their chosen medium in an entirely subjective manner in accordance with whatever desire or passions happen to motivate them. The traditional artist on the other hand, submits firstly to the traditional rules of the craft, which transmit something of the science of symbolism related to that particular medium. In addition to this, the traditional artist engages in an inward discipline, attempting to attain contemplative states in which the qualities of the forms that they intend to convey are realised within their own soul.

“True form is thus neither limitable nor mutable; it is like a ray of the creative Spirit which, descending into matter, fleetingly lends it form. An analogy for this is artistic creation: just as the artist may more or less completely...imprint on a material the spiritual picture that he carries within himself, so the essence of a thing may manifest itself more or less perfectly in that particular thing.”

76 Ibid., p. 131
Chapter 2: Application of the Ideas of the Traditionalist School to Musical Composition

Application of Traditionalist Doctrine to Musical Composition: Part 1 - Schuon’s ‘Principles and Criteria’

The question of how the traditionalist doctrines relating to art would be applied in the context of musical composition, and specifically in this project, requires an approach that encompasses both aesthetic philosophy, artistic method, and technical considerations. In the context of this project, the first two of these are of primary significance. The reason for this is that it is not the intention of this project to develop a closed theoretical system based on the principles outlined in the previous chapters, but rather to compose new works which are influenced by these principles. As such, the development of specific techniques will remain a secondary consideration, although certain theoretical principles will naturally arise in the compositional process. With these considerations in mind, the remainder of this chapter will outline the aesthetic philosophy of the traditionalist school, in particular the mature form of this philosophy found in the works of Frithjof Schuon and Titus Burckhardt. It will also briefly address the question of the working method of the artist as described by Schuon, Burckhardt and Ananda Coomaraswamy.

The most comprehensive statement of Schuon’s aesthetic philosophy \(^{78}\) is found in his essay ‘Principles and Criteria of Art’. \(^{79}\) Schuon begins this summation of his position on aesthetics by establishing the following categorisation:

“Human art, like Divine Art, comprises both determinate and indeterminate aspects, aspects of necessity and of freedom, of rigor and of joy.” \(^{80}\)

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\(^{78}\) One may regard this as a comprehensive statement of the traditionalist school in general since Schuon represents the most precise expression of the principles of the movement.


\(^{80}\) Ibid., p. 79
The significance of this statement, and in particular the fact that Schuon makes it the first principle in his summation of his aesthetic philosophy, is that it establishes that one cannot reduce art to something that is produced through a completely rationalised system, but that it also contains indeterminate aspects. This is of central importance in a project such as this one since it immediately precludes the idea of producing a closed theoretical system and producing works in accordance with this system. This statement is therefore the foundation of the folio itself which includes varied theoretical approaches and ideas without the works contained therein being composed in a systematic manner.

Schuon then applies this initial principle in the following way:

“This cosmic polarity enables us to establish a primary distinction, namely the distinction between sacred and profane art: in sacred art what takes precedence over everything else is the content and use of the work; whereas in profane art these are but a pretext for the joys of creation.”

So in sacred art, defined by Schuon as traditional art which has a specifically sacred subject, the emphasis is on rigor and precision of symbolism, whereas in profane art, traditional art which does not have a specifically sacred subject, the emphasis is on the element of indeterminism and creative freedom. It is important to note that in the latter case this does not preclude a strict formal discipline which Schuon clarifies by saying:

“...such art is thus profane through the absence of a sacred subject or a spiritual symbolism but traditional through the formal discipline that governs its style.”

The formal discipline in question is ensured by the traditional models and systems with which the artist works. Schuon emphasises this point by saying that traditional art does not actually pursue beauty as a direct objective, but rather that beauty is guaranteed by tradition and the

81 Ibid., p. 79
82 Ibid., p. 80
actual objective of the artist is either to directly communicate a spiritual truth, in the case of sacred art, or to express creative freedom in the case of profane, though still traditional, art.\textsuperscript{83}

The considerations detailed up to this point are not particularly problematic when determining how they work in the context of composing music. The first point of particular importance is that a faithful application of these principles cannot involve an extremely rigorous systemisation of the compositional process. Given that the works in the folio would fall into the category of what Schuon calls ‘profane art’, the emphasis here is placed on creative freedom. It is also noteworthy that Schuon specifically refers to the ‘indeterminate’ and ‘free’ qualities of art as ‘musicality’, implying that music in particular expresses this tendency. One could infer from this that the rigorous formalisation inherent in classicism and also modernism, is an excess that should be avoided. On the other hand, it is also clear that one must work within the confines of traditional musical systems, and whilst it is not possible as such to work ‘within’ a living tradition in the way that a composer of the middle ages would have, it is possible to incorporate elements of their theoretical approach and to a lesser extent their spiritual discipline. More will be said on these subjects in the discussion on working methods and compositional technique.

Schuon goes on to identify three elements that constitute a work of art which then form the basis of his aesthetic criteria. These are: content, symbolism, and style. These can be defined in the following way: content constitutes what the art intends to communicate, symbolism is the use of forms corresponding to the supraformal dimensions of the content, and finally style consists of the particular techniques used to realise these symbols in a tangible work.

Schuon goes on to outline how these elements form the foundation for aesthetic criteria for traditional art in the following passage:

“Now if we start from the idea that perfect art can be recognized by three main criteria: nobility of content - this being a spiritual condition apart from which art has no right to

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 80
exist - then exactness of symbolism or at least, in the case of profane works of art, harmony of composition, and finally purity of style or elegance of line and color, we can discern with the help of these criteria the qualities and defects of any work of art whether sacred or not."**84**

This passage summarises all of the aesthetic considerations that Schuon takes into account when evaluating a work of art. There are also a number of implications in this passage that need to be addressed.

The first condition that Schuon proposes is ‘nobility of content’. This means that what the work expresses must in itself be of spiritual value. This does not preclude art from expressing seemingly everyday forms or emotions, provided that they are integrated into a perspective that conforms to the criteria of nobility, uprightness, and rectitude. This criterion does exclude any work of art that expresses what is base and ignoble, when it does so simply for the sake of expressing these things and not by way of contrasting them with nobility.

The second criterion, ‘exactness of symbolism’, relates to the science of forms. Thus, the work of art must express its content using forms which actually correspond to that content. It is on this condition that the traditionalists condemn the religious art of the Renaissance and later periods, given that its subject matter is religious but its formal language is humanistic and in some cases grotesque.**85** Schuon adds to this criterion, that “in case case of profane works of art,” in other words art which does not address the sacred directly, this criterion can be replaced by “harmony of composition.” This still relates to the science of forms but in this case rather than the requirement being that the form express an archetypal reality through a metaphysical correspondence determined by the sacred science of symbolism, it is only necessary that the different elements in the work are not in irreconcilable conflict with each other, that is to say that the work is internally coherent. It should be recalled that in this latter case, it is still necessary

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**84** Ibid., p. 99

for the art to meet the requirement of nobility “which is a spiritual condition apart from which art has no right to exist,” and therefore the fact that work does not directly express a sacred reality does not mean that it can express just anything.

The third and final criterion Schuon gives is “purity of style or elegance of line and colour.” The essential quality expressed in this statement is elegance, which requires a degree of facility and skill in the treatment of materials on the part of the artist. The relationship of elegance to “purity of style” is that it is the style, transmitted by tradition, that is the guarantee of aesthetic qualities. In a case like the 21st century, where stylistic choices are made by the individual rather than determined by tradition, it is necessary to revert to this criterion of elegance in determining how one approaches stylistic considerations. With the above mentioned considerations in mind, the criteria of art, as defined by Schuon can be summarised as nobility, harmony, and elegance. These qualities then, will form the basis of the aesthetic approach for the compositional content of this project.

It is only necessary to briefly summarise here how these qualities of nobility, harmony, and elegance are to be considered in relation to the composition of music. Firstly, nobility precludes the expression of sentiments that are excessively individualistic or expressionistic, and do not possess a degree of detachment or objectivity. Whilst one could infer a critique of classicism from Schuon’s assertion of the need for a degree of indeterminism in art, particularly in music, one could infer from this criterion (nobility) a critique of certain trends in late romanticism and particularly in expressionism. The second quality, harmony, requires that one does not introduce irreconcilably contrasting elements, be they stylistic or otherwise. One could consider here the specifically musical meaning of the term harmony and suggest that the introduction of dissonances which are not subject to any form of ‘treatment’ in order to clarify their relationship with the harmony should be avoided. This is not necessarily a critique of the highly dissonant works of the late 19th century, where dissonance still possesses a relationship to a harmonic structure, even when it is unresolved, however 20th century works which treat harsh dissonances in the same way as the most harmonious intervals are undoubtedly problematic from this point of
Finally the quality of elegance, which relates to style, one again requires a modicum of detachment and avoidance of needless excesses of contrast, dissonance, or sentiment.

For Schuon the role played by art, and therefore the significance of the science of forms, is central to the preservation of tradition. It plays this role by infusing the formal language and ambience of human society with metaphysical truth, thereby ensuring that individual members of a human collective are not deprived of contact with the sacred, even if they are not consciously aware of its metaphysical foundations. In this way traditional art is an essential complement to theological dogmas which preserve the sacred within systematic, albeit limited formulations. This is the reason why art must play a role in all human productions, and also why the decline of the arts and the neglect of the artistic dimension of the production of everyday items and our architectural surroundings is not merely the result of spiritual decadence but is also a secondary cause of this decadence. With these considerations in mind the artist has a duty to attempt to communicate something of beauty in a world which is increasingly deprived of it.

**Application of Traditionalist Doctrine to Musical Composition: Part 2 - Application of Schuon’s Principles to Composition**

The extent to which this folio addresses the question of compositional technique, rather than more general aesthetic principles, is informed by Schuon’s framework in which formal discipline

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87 “Beauty is a reflection of divine bliss, and since God is Truth, the reflection of His bliss will be that mixture of happiness and truth which is to be found in all beauty...Beauty mirrors happiness and truth. Without the element of ‘happiness’ there remains only bare form - geometrical, rhythmical or other - and without the element of ‘truth’ there remains only a wholly subjective enjoyment or, it might be said, luxury. Beauty stands between abstract form and blind pleasure, or rather so combines them as to imbue veridical form with pleasure and veridical pleasure with form.”, Frithjof Schuon, *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts*, trans. Mark Perry, Jean-Pierre Lafouge, James Cutsinger, (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom, 2007), pp. 24-25
88 “This feeling for beauty, and so also a need for beauty, is natural in normal man and is indeed the very condition behind the detachment of the traditional artist in regard to the aesthetic quality of sacred work; in other words a major preoccupation with this quality would for him amount to a pleonasm. Not to feel the need for beauty is an infirmity, not unrelated to the inescapable ugliness of the machine age, which under under industrialism has become widespread; since it is impossible to get away from industrialism people make a virtue of this infirmity and calumniate both beauty and the need for it.”, Frithjof Schuon, *Language of the Self*, (Bloomington, Indiana: World Wisdom 1999), p. 81
and technique is significant, but without the work thereby becoming totally formalised and deprived of ‘free’ elements. This concept underlies the compositional approach, which attempts to balance the development of theoretical techniques, derived from traditional models, and the relatively free application of more general aesthetic principles. Aside from the question of compositional technique, it is also necessary to discuss the traditionalist position on the actual working methods and preparations of the traditional artist. For example:

“In the ancient Church and in the Eastern Churches even down to our own times, iconographers prepared themselves for their work by fasting, prayer, and sacraments, adding their own humble and pious inspirations to the inspiration that had fixed the immutable type of the image.”

This comment is made in relation to icon painters but the more general principle is that in order to approach art in a traditional manner, one must take account of the condition of one’s own soul before the creative process even begins. Although it is not problematic to approach a work that is not specifically sacred with greater freedom than the icon painter has in relation to his model, one is still required to approach the work with humility and with a soul that is subject to the disciplines imposed by a sacred tradition.

The considerations from the previous section form the basis for a general framework that governs the principles underlying the works contained in the portfolio. This framework is a general overview. It consists of the following points:

1. Self discipline of the artist through the spiritual methods of sacred tradition
2. Formal discipline through derivation of technique from traditional models
3. Aesthetic discipline through application of principles derived from traditionalist literature

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90 The question of compositional techniques will be addressed in greater detail in the next section.
As for the first point, it is the concern of the artist and does not directly relate to the actual product. Therefore it is not necessary to disclose details of this aspect of the project here. The second point will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. The third point, concerns aesthetic principles derived from traditionalist literature, in particular the works of Frithjof Schuon. This subject has already been addressed and the following is a summary of some related considerations not yet discussed.

The first principle is the derivation of technique from traditional models without thereby depriving the artist of creative freedom and the ability to deploy intuition. Considerably more freedom may be allowed than might be the case if one was working in the field of liturgical art. In the case of this portfolio, even the pieces that use liturgical themes and texts are not intended to be used in that context. Another point of interest here is that Schuon warns on numerous occasions against art becoming excessively grandiose. This is particularly relevant to music which was subject to a massive change in proportions in the 19th century, where it, from a traditionalist point of view, vastly exceeded its traditional parameters. One could apply Schuon’s principle here of understanding the intrinsic nature of an artform. Music, and what it conveys, is dynamic, ephemeral, and abstract. Nineteenth century romanticism seems to confuse music with architecture by trying to force this dynamic substance into large scale, static structures. This development takes place in parallel with a multiplication of the instrumental forces necessary to perform the works. What results is a music that is excessive in its dimensions and does not conform to the intrinsic nature of the artform. These pitfalls are avoided in the portfolio by an emphasis on small scale, succinct movements, even within larger scale works. The longest single movements are the first and last movements of the string quartet, Elivagar, which are approximately 8-9 minutes each. There is also an emphasis on a smaller scale in relation to the use of instrumentation, with the string quartet being the largest instrumental group used.
“What lies at the very heart of all the arts is chiefly an application of the science of rhythm under its different forms, a science which is itself immediately connected with that of number. It must be clearly understood that when we speak of the science of number, it is not a question of profane arithmetic as understood by the moderns, but of that arithmetic to be found in the Kabbalah and in Pythagorism (the best known examples), whose equivalent also exists, under varied expressions and with greater or lesser developments, in all the traditional doctrines...

...As for music, it will surely not be necessary to insist on this, since its numerical basis is still recognized by moderns themselves, distorted though it is through the loss of traditional data; formerly, as can be seen especially well in the Far East, modifications could only be introduced into music in consequence of certain changes occurring in the actual state of the world in accordance with cyclical periods, for musical rhythms were at once intimately linked with the human and social order and with the cosmic order, and in a certain way they even expressed the connections between the one and the other. The Pythagorean conception of the “harmony of the spheres” belongs to exactly the same order of considerations.”

This passage, taken from Réné Guénon’s essay ‘The Arts and their Traditional Conception’ outlines the way in which traditionalist principles are applied specifically to music. The principles at work in music are chiefly understood through their correspondence with numbers, which in turn correspond to metaphysical principles. This understanding forms the basis for all the traditional sciences of music, and is particularly evident in certain musical systems, such as the classical music of India. Alain Daniélou, in his work, *Introduction to the Study of Musical*
Scales,\textsuperscript{92} undertook a detailed study of how these concepts for the basis of traditional musical theory.

“All music is based on the relations of sounds, and a careful study of the numbers by which these relations are ruled, brings us immediately into the almost forgotten science of numerical symbolism. Through musical experience it is easy to see that numbers correspond to abstract principles and that their application to physical reality follows absolute and inescapable laws.

It is in music only that this connection between physical reality and metaphysical principles is evident. Music was, therefore, justly considered by the ancients as the key to all sciences and arts, the link between metaphysics and physics, through which the universal laws and their multiple applications could be understood\textsuperscript{93}

It is only possible to provide a very brief summary of Daniélou’s main points here. Firstly, he declares that, due to the rudiments of music being governed by the metaphysical correspondences produced by numerical ratios, it is a grave error to alter these ratios, even slightly, thereby destroying their symbolic function. Daniélou thus regards the modern way of dividing the octave into twelve equal parts to be based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of music, and a reduction of a natural, supra-rational order to a human, rational, system.

“...on account of the imperfection which is at the very basis of the world existence, because if it were perfect it would immediately be reabsorbed into the infinite perfection, just as the heart of man is not in the centre of his chest, as the axis of the Earth is oblique, as the solar year does not coincide with the lunar year and thus are created the cycles by which all existence is conditioned and human destinies measured; so, in the same way, the development of twelve fifths (as that of the twelve months), instead of bringing back the octave, will leave a difference, the comma, with which we shall have to

\textsuperscript{92} Danielou, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., p. 1
negotiate, which will make every calculation complicated, and which will prevent us from formulating those rigid and simple laws, attractive but inaccurate, in which our vain reason delights. This comma, which the modern world tries so hard to ignore, represents, for those who can understand it, all the difference between what is finite and what is indefinite.”

Daniélou then demonstrates how the traditional methods of tuning, either by deriving tunings directly from a harmonic series, or from a cycle of fifths, produce scales which are capable of expressing the metaphysical correspondences in question and therefore do not deprive music of its most potent means of expression. For Daniélou the additional possibilities afforded by equal temperament, such as remote modulations, are insignificant compared to the inherent power of correctly tuned intervals.

The framework provided by Daniélou raises numerous problems in determining how to approach composition in a context where the use of equal temperament, and equal tempered instruments, is widespread. The approach to this problem in the context of the portfolio, given that the concern is not the development of theory or technique but rather a creative application of these principles, is to solve these problems in the most direct and simple way. This simply involves avoiding the use of instruments that are restricted to equal temperament, such as the piano, and using modal systems to govern pitch which encourage the instrumentalist to conform to natural tunings without specifically instructing them to do so. In other words the treatment of pitch is kept within relatively diatonic modes, chromaticism is largely avoided, and modulations and harmonic progression are minimised. The folio contains exceptions to the rules outlined above but they nonetheless form the basis of how the problem of tuning is resolved without having to ask musicians to learn new techniques or having to develop complex tuning systems.

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94 Ibid., p. 7
95 The piano is used is two of the smaller scale works (*The Lights of Ibrahim* and *Songs of Sorrow and Light*) which were composed at an early stage of the project.
So the general approach to treatment of pitch in the folio may be defined as ‘modal symbolism’, in which different modes are employed as the primary means of defining the expressive character of a section of music. This approach is particularly emphasised in *The Lights of Ibrahim*, which was composed early in the candidature and thus uses a piano which was abandoned for most of the later works. Contrapuntal textures are occasionally employed although complex counterpoint does not form a major component of the works.

The approach to the treatment of rhythm is given particular attention in some of the pieces in the folio. Aside from the conventional use of rhythmic cycles, additional techniques that are used are the construction of thematic rhythmic ideas from rhythmic modes, and the use of various ways of creating ratios between rhythmic layers that relate to the ratios governing pitch. As for the latter technique, this can be done through the well known technique of polyrhythms, or through the larger scale process of repeating rhythmic cycles of different lengths occurring simultaneously (a type of cross-rhythm), or through both of these processes occurring simultaneously. Greater detail on how these techniques are employed will be given in the analysis of the pieces from the folio.

In accordance with Schuon’s concept of music being a dynamic substance that is better suited to compact forms. The forms utilised in the folio aim for succinctness and simplicity. *The Lights of Ibrahim* provides an example of how the use of short, simple forms can be combined with a developmental approach by utilising the same material in multiple movements. The string quartet *Elivagar* uses somewhat more extended forms which are effectively fantasias in the sense that they do not follow a rigid form but develop emotively and were composed in an improvisational manner. The preference for smaller scale works also extends to the instrumentation, which is deliberately minimal. It is worth noting that the composer has always had a preference for chamber music over orchestral music, however this approach is also informed by Schuon’s commentary on the nature of art and music in particular.
Chapter 3: *The Lights of Ibrahim* for Piano Trio

*The Lights of Ibrahim* was composed early in 2016 for the Endeavour Trio (Paul Dean, Trish O’Brien, and Stephen Emmerson) as part of a competition run by the Accompanists Guild of South Australia. The piece placed equal first and was recorded by the Endeavour Trio during a live performance on the 31st of July, 2016. The name of the piece is a reference to a passage in the Qu’ran in which the prophet Abraham apparently identifies God with a star, the moon, and the sun, before recognising that God cannot be identified with any finite object. This passage is understood in Sufi literature to be an analogy for progressive stages of spiritual realisation, and the piece intends to utilise modal symbolism to convey this inward journey towards spiritual realisation.
The Lights of Ibrahim

1. The Vision

Score in C

Misterioso con rubato \( \approx \) ca\( \text{m}\)2

Thomas Devereux

Andante \( \approx \) \( \text{J} \)

Piano

Clarinet in Bb

Violoncello

Ppp

mp

ppp

mf

pp

mp

mf
3. The Moon

Con brio $q = 120$

...
4. The Sun

Maestoso \( \dot{\text{p}} \) = 72

Redo

attacca
Treatment of Pitch Material

The modal symbolism of the piece is partially informed by information given by Daniélou on how particular intervals are understood in the modal system of Northern India, although the modes do not deliberately refer to any particular ragas. The modes that are used in each movement, along with their significance, are as follows:

Movements 1 and 5

Figure 3.1 *The Lights of Ibrahim: Mode derived from harmonic series*

![Mode derived from harmonic series](image)

This mode is derived directly from the harmonic series and is intended to symbolise both the beginning and the end of the spiritual journey.

Movement 2

This mode is a minor pentatonic used frequently in East Asian music, although the remaining two notes of the standard minor mode appear occasionally as passing tones and other non-emphasised notes.

Figure 3.2 *The Lights of Ibrahim: Minor mode*

![Minor mode](image)

The technique of placing emphasis on specific notes in a mode, and of including certain notes only in specific types of melodic movement is derived from the modal techniques used in Indian
music. This is a simple example of this technique which is one aspect of the more nuanced and complex treatment of modes in that musical system (in comparison with Western classical music).

**Movement 3**

This mode is intended to evoke the moon. In order to do so it emphasises the interval of the fourth, which is understood to have a ‘lunar’ quality in the modal system of Northern India, whereas the fifth has a ‘solar’ quality. The emphasis of the perfect fourth is reinforced by the gesture in bars 72 and 92.

### Figure 3.3 *The Lights of Ibrahim: Mode derived from 4ths*

![Mode derived from 4ths](image)

**Movements 4 and 5**

The fourth movement uses a Lydian mode in F-sharp, whereas the fifth movement uses the mode derived from the harmonic series (of C) that was used in the first movement. The intention of this harmonic and modal shift is to make the fourth movement as ‘bright’ as possible, since it evokes the sun. The Lydian mode is inherently ‘brighter’ than the natural harmonic mode due to its raised seventh, and here it is in the ‘sharpest’ key in relation to C. The key of F-sharp was also chosen for dramatic effect given that it is the most remote key from C, harmonically speaking, and is therefore a logical choice of harmonic region to create the greatest dramatic tension.

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Non-modal material

The modes given above form the basis of most of the melodic and harmonic material in the piece. One notable exception to this is found in the first 15 bars of the piece. The movement begins with a gesture in the piano that consists of a sequence of chords built from alternating tritones and fourths, with the roots of the chords moving down in minor thirds. Note that each pair of chords contains all 12 notes of the chromatic scale.

Figure 3.4 The Lights of Ibrahim: Harmonies based on tritones and fourths

This type of voicing was influenced more by Scriabin’s mystic chord than by Schoenberg, although the influence of Schoenberg becomes clear from what follows.

This piano gesture is followed by melodic (clarinet) and harmonic (piano) material derived from the following 12-tone row.

Figure 3.5 The Lights of Ibrahim: Tone Row

The first five notes of this melodic line also form a motif which recurs throughout the piece, adjusted to fit within the respective modes. The significance of this motif is underlined by its use at the very beginning of the piece here, and at the beginning of the third and fourth movements.
The use of these harmonies and a tone row may seem to run counter to many of the statements made in regard to the treatment of musical material in the second chapter. The purpose of deploying these techniques here was to create a maximal contrast with the modal material which immediately follows it. Thus these techniques are only employed fleetingly and for dramatic effect. This is an example of how certain modernist techniques may be used, sparingly and with caution, when a certain effect is required.

**Treatment of Form and Thematic Material**

**Form**

Both the treatment of form and thematic material are deliberately kept simple enough so as to not require significant comment. The individual movements are often small enough in their dimensions that it is somewhat misleading to use the term ‘form’ given that it implies an internal structure consisting of multiple parts. Despite these reservations the following observations can be made about the formal structure of the movements:

- **First Movement (The Vision)** - A (Bars 1-15) B (Bars 16-25) A (Bars 26 - 35). Note that the repeat of section A uses the original material in retrograde rather than being an exact repetition.

- **Second Movement (The Star)** - A (Bars 36 - 56) B/Coda (Bars 57 - 64)

- **Third Movement (The Moon)** - A (Bars 65 - 73) B (Bars 74 - 92)

- **Fourth/Fifth Movements** (These movements combine to form an extended coda consisting of repeated statements of the main thematic material)
Thematic Material

The piece utilises two main motivic ideas, the first of which (motif A) appears for the first time with the first entry of the Clarinet in bar 4 as was stated above.

Figure 3.6 The Lights of Ibrahim: Motif A

Motif A consists of the first five notes shown in Figure 3.6. In this example the motif is extended to form a twelve tone row, however in subsequent appearances the melodic line is extended with pitch material from the mode being employed in the movement in question. Figure 3.7 shows the next appearance of motif A in bar 18 now using modal pitch material to continue the melodic line.

Figure 3.7 The Lights of Ibrahim: Motif A extension

The second movement, despite being based entirely on the second motivic idea (B) opens with motif A in inversion.
Motif A returns at the beginning of the third movement, which combines both of the major themes.

Here the theme is also extended using a sequential pattern made up of the first four notes of the motif. Note that the intervals are altered in the second repetition of the sequence to accommodate the mode.
The fourth movement begins, in the Lydian mode on F#. Firstly recalling the twelve tone row from the first movement, although it is left incomplete. This is then followed by an extension of motif A which is stated twice before the transition to the fifth movement.

Figure 3.11 *The Lights of Ibrahim*: Motif A in F# Lydian

Motif A forms the basis of the final movement of the piece. This statement recalls the treatment in the first movement although with a different texture being provided by the piano.

Figure 3.12 *The Lights of Ibrahim*: Motif A variation

The following sequential pattern prepares the final climactic statement of the theme:

Figure 3.13 *The Lights of Ibrahim*: Motif A sequence
The final statement in the clarinet is extended with a fast run that leads directly to the conclusion of the piece.

**Figure 3.14 The Lights of Ibrahim: Motif A variation**

![Motif A variation](image)

The second main thematic idea (motif B) consists of a melodic figure rising by a major second and then a fourth, followed by a turn with a triplet rhythm. This idea is introduced in the first movement in bar 25.

**Figure 3.15 The Lights of Ibrahim: Motif B foreshadowing**

![Motif B foreshadowing](image)

This idea forms the basis of a more extended melodic theme played by the clarinet in the second movement.

**Figure 3.16 The Lights of Ibrahim: Motif B extended melodic theme**

![Motif B extended melodic theme](image)
This theme reappears once more in the third movement with the piano and cello providing an accompaniment as well as ornamentation for the main melody.

Figure 3.17 *The Lights of Ibrahim*: Motif B variation
Treatment of Rhythmic Material

The rhythmic dimension does not, for the most part, play a thematically significant role in this piece and thus does not require significant comment. The frequent use of quintuplets (and triplets), as well as the extension of phrases across barlines, is intended to give the melodic material a sense of freedom and fluidity which is not conducive to a careful systemisation of rhythm. One feature of note is the isorhythmic accompaniment in the piano in the second movement. This isorhythm is a recurring pattern of nineteen beats.

Figure 3.18 The Lights of Ibrahim: Isorhythm
Chapter 4: Élivágar for String Quartet

This piece combines ideas accumulated over the duration of the candidature and which were mostly composed on the guitar, reworked as a solo piano piece and finally arranged for string quartet. The melodic and harmonic language of the piece is relatively simple, being related to earlier influences such as certain subgenres of heavy metal and folk music. This treatment of pitch is however still aligned with the principles underpinning the folio, being primarily modal with minimal harmonic movement. The treatment of form is determined intuitively, corresponding to the needs of the thematic material. Of perhaps greater interest is the treatment of rhythm, which was only incorporated into this final version of the piece. The rhythmic language, particularly in the first movement, combines short rhythmic modes with larger cross-rhythms which correspond to ratios derived from the harmonic relationships in the thematic material.
Allegro quasi violino

Più mosso

rit.
Lento ma non troppo, flessibile

Allegretto
Lento ma non troppo, flessibile

Maestoso

Meno mosso
Treatment of Rhythmic Material

First Movement

This piece incorporates the use of rhythmic modes as well as cross-rhythms, primarily to increase the complexity of the texture of the accompaniment. The first movement in particular relies heavily on this approach. The rhythmic motif, or mode, which underlies most of the material in the first movement is shown here:

**Figure 4.1 Élívágar: Rhythmic Mode**

![Figure 4.1 Élívágar: Rhythmic Mode](image)

This mode forms the basis of both the nine and four beat patterns which create the following cross rhythm:

**Figure 4.2 Élívágar: Cross rhythm 9:4**

![Figure 4.2 Élívágar: Cross rhythm 9:4](image)

The nine beat cycle is later altered so that a triplet falls on the final beat. The ratio 9:4, or 9:8, is related to the interval of the major second, or major ninth, which is prominent in the thematic material that opens the movement.

Bar 58 marks a change to a 5/16 metre, with a 3+2 feel. The entry of the viola in bar 90 contrasts this with phrasing that primarily groups the semiquavers into groups of four, creating another
cross rhythm. This time however, the ratio 5:4 does not possess the significance of being related to the pitch material.

**Figure 4.3 Élívágar: Cross rhythm 5:4**

The 9:4 ratio returns in bar 185 with a different rhythmic cycle of nine beats.

**Figure 4.4 Élívágar: Cross rhythm 9:4 variation**
Bar 218 introduces a 7/16 metre which forms a cross-rhythm with a 7 against 4 ratio.

**Figure 4.5 Élívágar: Cross rhythm 7:4**

This 7:4 idea is then augmented so that the units are crotchets rather than semiquavers. Forming a texture similar to the 9:4 patterns seen earlier. This ratio also foreshadows the prominence of the minor 7th in the harmonic texture of the final section of the movement.

**Figure 4.6 Élívágar: Cross rhythm 7:4 augmentation**

The final use of this type of rhythmic texture, although slightly simplified, in the movement occurs at bar 258. This time the sixteen semiquavers in the bar are grouped differently in the cello and viola. With the cello playing an asymmetrical pattern: 4+3+3+3+3.

**Figure 4.7 Élívágar: Asymmetrical rhythm**

This closing passage also uses a simple rhythmic augmentation in the melodic line, which is a variation of the melodic material from the beginning of the movement.
In contrast to the strict metrical techniques discussed so far, stand a number of sections which are notated without bar lines and often with any indication of rhythm. These sections are essentially meant to be unmetered and play a significant role in forming a contrast with the rhythmic texture of the passages analysed above. These sections include the opening of the piece, which contains some indication of rhythmic values:

**Figure 4.8 Élivágar: Unmetred passage**

![Unmetred passage](image)

And sections which are notated solely in whole notes where the durations are left entirely to the performers:

**Figure 4.9 Élivágar: Free durations**

![Free durations](image)

These sections continue to play an important role throughout the remaining two movements.
Second Movement

The second movement eschews the rhythmic complexities of the first. It is for the most part a simple, European folk music inspired melody in 3/4 time. One feature of note is the accompaniment at the beginning of the movement.

Figure 4.10 Élivágar: Folk-like violin part with 4:3 pattern in accompaniment

The accompaniment is a four beat pattern, forming the ratio 4:3 with the primary metre, and echoing the important role of the perfect fourth in the first violin part.

Third Movement

The textures of the third movement are closer to the first. Although it does not continue the frequent use of cross rhythms that occurred in the first movement. One means utilised to enhance the texture of the accompaniment is the use of polyrhythms which occur in the first part of the movement without being a prominent feature. The example given below is the most frequently occurring and once again has a numerical link to the harmonic material. This time the ratio implied is 16:15, being related to the minor second given that the harmonic material in this section is moving between C and D-flat. The idea of actually using this ratio strictly, ie. 15 in the time of 16 in the viola part was considered, but it was dismissed as unnecessary and excessively difficult.
This polyrhythmic texture obtains another layer in passages such as the following in bar 447:

Bar 503 marks a shift to a 6/8 metre. The texture of this passage includes a flowing melodic line in the first violin, whilst the second violin has the dual role of playing a fast semiquaver accompaniment, and doubling the first violin part an octave below by accenting these notes. It is perhaps worth noting the continued use of textures where the accompaniment is rhythmically ‘energised’ whilst the movement in the melodic line tends to be slow. This is a relic of the style in which these pieces were originally conceived, in which the drums and the right hand of the guitarist tend to play fast, whereas the left hand of the guitarist, in other words the melodic and harmonic material, moves at a slower pace.
This rhythmic ‘energy’ is created in a different way in the climactic final section of the piece, with the frequent use of tremolo bowing.

Before the return of this type of texture shown above, there is one final polyrhythmic passage, this time a simple 3 against 4, to provide a moment of contrast with the surrounding material.
Form and Thematic Material

These movements do not follow a rigidly defined formal structure. The first and third movements in particular have something of the nature of a fantasy about them, with one idea being presented after another with the connections between them being determined more by their emotive character rather than by thematic material. A detailed analysis of the internal structures of all three movements is given here for reference.

First Movement

Bars 1-2: Improvisatory introduction in C minor
Bars 2-4: Violin II establishes ostinato on C and Eb
Bars 5-24: Theme A in viola (c minor), Violin II plays 9 beat rhythmic cycle
Bars 17-24: 9 beat cycle in Violin II creates rhythmic counterpoint with 4 beat pattern in cello and violin I
Bars 25-26: Cello plays C-Eb pattern unaccompanied in preparation for re-entry of theme A
Bars 27-48: Theme A in violins I and II, separated by two octaves
Bars 27-48: Cello plays variation of 9 beat cycle, ending with a triplet. From bar 35 viola plays 4 beat pattern.
Bars 50-54: Material from bars 1-2 in violins I and II in octaves.
Bars 55-57: Material from theme A, in long note durations, unmetred.
Bars 58-172: Material from theme A, new tempo and 5/16 rhythm.
Bar 74: Cello entry
Bar 90: Viola enters with an accompanying figure that creates a 5 against 4 feel.
Bars 122-138: Rhythmic unison.
Bars 138-172: Rhythmic counterpoint in viola.
Bars 173-178: Transitional material moving towards new key (f minor)
Bars 179-184: F minor ostinato established in violin II.
Bars 185-192: Theme B in violin I. 9 against 4 pattern in cello and viola, with new 9 beat cycle.
Bars 193-217: Transitional material returning to C minor.
Bars 201-217: Foreshadowing of melodic material from third movement in violin I.
Bars 218-221: Cello enters in C minor with 7/16 figure.
Bars 221-225: Viola creates rhythmic counterpoint with of 4 against 7 with the cello.
Bars 226-233: Theme B in c minor played by violin I in octaves.
Bars 234-253: Rhythmic and harmonic material from Theme B continues to form climactic section of movement.
Bars 258-283: Variation on material from Theme A forms coda section of movement.

**Second Movement**

Bars 284-318: Introductory theme in A major
Bars 319-321: Transitional material in violins, foreshadowing of material from main theme
Bars 322-341: Cello ostinato and main theme in d minor
Bars 342-357: Repeat of theme with viola counterpoint
Bars 358-381: Second theme, tremolo in upper strings
Bars 382-414: Main theme played twice with counterpoint
Bar 415: Flessibile transitional passage
Bars 416-423: Coda using new material in d minor
Bars 424-432: Introductory theme in D major
Third Movement

Bar 433: Flessibile introductory material
Bars 434-441: Ostinato theme with shifting triplet group in viola
Bars 442-445: Pizzicato accompaniment in cello, 15 semiquaver notes in violin I
Bars 446-449: Seven against eight pattern in second half of bars in violin I
Bars 450-477: Theme moving between C minor and D flat major continues with shifting quintuplet pattern
Bars 478-502: Transitional material modulating to f minor
Bars 503-538: Theme B in f minor with accompanying figure in Violin II
Bars 539-547: Transitional passage moving to C minor
Bars 548-583: Theme B in C minor
Bars 584-665: New theme and variations in C minor
Bars 666-699: Coda
Chapter 5: *Road to the Heart* for Baritone and Cello

This piece also consists of ideas accumulated over a long period of time. It is also of significance in the context of this project as it is a setting of poetry written by Frithjof Schuon, whose writings on aesthetics form the foundation of the understanding of how to arrive at an approach to art and music that is determined by the intellectual principles of the traditionalists. Thus the piece makes use of several ideas that are directly connected with Schuon’s prose work, most obviously, that the dimensions of music should remain relatively small. This is achieved here both through the relatively short duration of the songs (although this idea was taken further in *The Lights of Ibrahim*), and also with the minimalistic accompaniment, which consists only of solo cello. The significance of the use of the cello is also that it is not limited to the slightly detuned (from harmonically ‘natural’ tunings) intervals of the piano. The way in which the cello part is composed is intended to encourage the performer to play harmonically natural intervals, without placing the burden upon them of trying to determine these for themselves. It is accepted however that some of the more complex parts for the cello may result in the cello player reverting to something closer to equal temperament.

This piece brings together two distinct approaches, which are correspond to the songs and the solo cello interludes between and within them. The songs are based on simple modal melodies which utilise the natural rhythm of the text. Several of these songs were originally written with piano accompaniments which contained a variety of harmonies, including extensive use of chords built from fourths. The harmonic texture for the cello accompaniments has been simplified, focusing primarily on establishing the tonic note of the mode with embellishments being derived from the natural harmonics. Occasional harmonic movement in the cello part underlines moments of musical significance. The solo cello sections of the piece explore the concept of building modes that extend beyond the octave, by adding additional tetrachords, or in some cases trichords or hexachords.
Road to the Heart

Shaykh Isa Nur al-Din Ahmad

Lento flessibile

Baritone

Violoncello

Lento flessibile

pp
mf
pp
mf
pp

2

mp

7

mf
p

With-out be-gin-n ing

mf
dim.

j = 60

With-out be-gin-n ing

j = 60

mp
dolce

mp

is the ri-ver's start
it flows from the moun-tain's un-
known-ground

mp
p
mp
p
And seeks the endless

so the wise man's heart

in the river flows its end is never found

Neither the mountain

Nor the sea can limit

the river's song

love flows from God to God
Forms have an end yet time-less
time-less is the spirit.
They think that out of no-thing God has made the uni-verse and
that it is His shade less than re-al-i-ty more than a play the
world is real and un-real so to say They think that out of no-thing God has made
the uni-verse and that it is His shade less than re-al-i-ty more than a
play the world is real and un-real so to say The hid-den trea-sure
never had been shown God made the world He wanted to be known
One Word

There is one word it is the saving key. Dwell thou in_

God and God will dwell in thee out of compassion to our

world he came. His are two homes on earth our heart His Name___
She____ she____ my be-lov-ed is a won-drous day_____

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>197</th>
<th>mp</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>mf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|       |                | And I_______ I_____ who love Her I am life____ life___

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>207</th>
<th>4:3</th>
<th>mp pp</th>
<th>pp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|       |                | and death____ and death___ And storm____ and light ning____ and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>216</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>mp</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|       |                | light - ning____ and my word is wine___ is wine____ the world___

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>225</th>
<th>pp</th>
<th>mf</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|       |                | lies___ in my blood____ my blood and in my breath___
O thou who seek-est

me do never ask which is my home land

nor what is my name

The universe

is made of light and love and from this light

and from this love I came
I came
Remembrance

O Thou whose Name is sweetest

sweetest remedy And whose remembrance

heals our soul's disease With thee With thee each moment

moment moment each moment is Eternity a drop from Heaven

Heaven That consoles and frees That consoles and frees a
drop from Heaven

soles and frees
I love because I love this word is more than just a feeling, it is wisdom's core love.

God without conditions love God the most high will love thee too.

_and will not ask thee why_
Moderato flessibile

Say yes say yes

Moderato flessibile

to God God will say yes

mf
to thee

To Heaven's gate this is the golden key

pp
a - bout my earth - ly road I do not care,

it may be long_____

short is God's road to me_____

molto sul tasto
molto espress. flessibile

Moderato flessibile

Moderato flessibile
Treatment of Form and Thematic Material

The internal structure of the songs does not require a great deal of analysis. Provided here is simply an overview of the placement of songs and cello interludes.

1. The River (Song) - Includes three solo cello sections not given the status of individual movements. At the beginning, between the two verses, and at the end.
2. Creation (Song)
3. Creation II (Interlude)
4. One Word (Song)
5. Confession (Song)
6. Confession II (Interlude)
7. Remembrance (Song)
8. The Core (Song)
9. The Road (Song) - This final song also concludes with a relatively lengthy solo cello passage.

As for the internal structure of the songs, for the most part they follow one of two schemes, the shorter songs consist of a single verse. The longer songs usually consists of one verse, followed by another in which the character of the song changes to accommodate the text. The song ‘One Word’ is an example of the first type, whereas ‘Remembrance’ demonstrates the latter approach. In this case, the change in the character of the song, occurs at bar 359 and only for the final line of the text, which is repeated several times to extend this passage and underline its poetic significance.
**Treatment of Pitch/Rhythmic Material**

The treatment of pitch material is relatively straightforward in the songs, which mostly utilise melodies in the minor mode occasionally shifting to the major with a bare minimum of harmony provided by the cello. Ventures into other modes are found in ‘The River’ which uses a major pentatonic, and ‘The Road’, which uses a synthetic mode best described as a phrygian mode with a raised third. The cello part is more adventurous, particularly in the solo cello sections. During the songs the cello is mostly confined to establishing the tonic note of the mode and providing ornamentation with harmonics, these are considerably more adventurous in the song ‘Confession’ than elsewhere, and the cello has a more rhythmically intricate part here as well. The more complex character of the solo cello sections is evident from the very beginning of the piece, where the cello uses essentially three major pentatonic modes, one in C (red), one in A (blue), and one in F# (green).

**Figure 5.1 Road to the Heart: Pentatonic modes**
The solo cello parts also utilise rhythmic layers. In the example below, which uses the same modal structure as the one shown above, the low C in the cello recurs after every three quavers, establishing a secondary rhythmic layer in addition to the primary 4/4 metre.

**Figure 5.2 Road to the Heart: Rhythmic layers**

The first cello interlude, ‘Creation II’, uses a similar modal technique to the sections from ‘The River’ shown above, although this time it is built from a minor tetrachord instead of fragments of the pentatonic scale. The full mode is shown below.

**Figure 5.3 Road to the Heart: Non-octave mode**

The final cello interlude, ‘Confession II’ uses the mode of the greatest complexity.

**Figure 5.4 Road to the Heart: Non-octave mode**
Although not conceived of in this way, this mode can be analysed as a Lydian tetrachord on C, followed by a Phrygian, or Aeolian, tetrachord on G, and finally an Aeolian tetrachord on D-flat. This mode is the best example of this approach to creating modes that extend beyond the octave on display in this piece.

Another feature of the cello accompaniment occurs in the penultimate song, ‘The Core’, where the cello, in addition to the drone, accompanies the voice with a harmonisation that is deliberately reminiscent of organum. The term ‘1st species counterpoint’ is used to designate the note-against-note texture, although the intervallic relationships between the voices are derived from organum and therefore contain parallel perfect consonances. In the song this appears thus:

**Figure 5.5 Road to the Heart: Organum style 1st species counterpoint**

To make this clear one can reduce this material to the two melodic lines:

**Figure 5.6 Road to the Heart: Analysis of counterpoint**
Chapter 6: *Songs of Sorrow and Light* for Tenor and Piano

This piece is a setting of texts written by the composer. Once again these are in the form of miniatures. This piece mostly uses techniques already discussed, although it uses a different kind of piano writing than *The Lights of Ibrahim* as well as some rudimentary functional harmonies. In accordance with the considerations related to tuning made in chapter 2, the piano accompaniment could be replaced with another instrument with less restrictions on its intonation.
Songs of Sorrow and Light

1

Andante con rubato $\frac{j}{4} = c. 96$

Thomas Devereux

Tenor

Piano

Win.-er came soon.-er
than ex.-pec.-ted

fro.-zen leaves

lay

life.less on the
for.est floor

the

sky a.-bove a
black-ened void

in-fin.-ite
though it cannot

contain

my sorrow

a drop fell upon the ocean floor

swallowed by the abyss

it cried out— I am nothing but my longing for you—
III

like the song of the whis-pering breeze your love reaches in-every place

74

to the blood that flows in my veins and will re-main when the world is naught but ashes

81

-96

stretched and bro-ken

49

cried out his voice echoed

96

through the dark-ness re-turning to him
spoke

"am I not your savior?"

poco più mosso

\( \frac{d}{dt} = 96 \)

pp
like the light of the breaking dawn your presence is my beginning and my
end before now I was not
nor will I ever again
Analysis

The opening section introduces one of the key themes of the piece in C minor. It is heard twice, the second time including broken chords in the right hand of the piano.

Figure 6.1 Songs of Sorrow and Light: Theme

Also note the conclusion of this section with a highly chromatic progression in bar 14. This progression is used to denote structurally significant moments in the piece.97

The entry of the voice immediately introduces two of the three key motivic ideas in the piece, motifs A (red) and B (blue).

Figure 6.2 Songs of Sorrow and Light: Motifs A & B

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97 This is another example of a case where a musical language that is generally rejected in this project is used in a limited fashion and for a specific purpose.
These two motifs form the basis of the melodic material in the first, second, and fourth movements. Of particular significance are the final three notes of motif A, which are echoed in the piano part throughout the remainder of the first movement. The following examples, from the second and fourth movements respectively show a number of variations on motifs A and B.

**Figure 6.3 Songs of Sorrow and Light: Motivic analysis**

![Motivic analysis example](image1)

**Figure 6.4 Songs of Sorrow and Light: Motivic analysis**

![Motivic analysis example](image2)
The third movement, in E-flat major, introduces the third key motivic idea (C - green), which forms the basis of both the melody and the piano accompaniment.

**Figure 6.5 Songs of Sorrow and Light: Motif C**

The fourth movement returns to the material from the first two movements, the tonal centre is shifted to G but the key signature remains the same, resulting in a Phrygian mode. The movement concludes with a recapitulation of the thematic idea from the opening of the piece, now in G minor, followed by a transitional passage which moves to E-flat major in preparation for the final movement.

**Figure 6.6 Songs of Sorrow and Light: Theme**

The final movement is similar to the third, also in E-flat and also being based on motif C. Here the piano writing is more expansive and a simple IV-V-I progression is used to conclude the piece.
Chapter 7: *Salve Regina* for SSAATB Choir

This piece is a conventional choral piece in the tradition of sacred choral music, utilising conventional counterpoint techniques and melodic ideas from plainchant, as well as occasional extended harmonies. This piece is not intended to have a liturgical function, but was inspired by certain forms of liturgical vocal music as well as the traditions of Marian spirituality in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions which retain a personal significance despite the fact that I do not follow either of these traditions. In this connection the following passage written by Frithjof Schuon describing the role of the Virgin Mary as a link between Christian and Islamic spirituality is significant:

“Mother of all the Prophets and matrix of all the sacred forms, she has her place of honor within Islam even while belonging *a priori* to Christianity; for this reason she constitutes a kind of link between these two religions, whose common purpose is universalizing the monotheism of Israel. The Virgin Mary is not merely the embodiment of a particular mode of sanctity; she embodies sanctity as such. She is not one particular color or one particular perfume; she is colorless light and pure air. In her essence she is identified with merciful Infinitude, which—preceding all forms—overflows upon them all, embraces them all, and reintegrates them all.”

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Salve Regina

Salve Regina mater misericordiae vitae dulcedo et spes nostra salve

Salve Regina mater misericordiae vitae dulcedo et spes nostra salve

Ad te clamamus exspectantes filii eius Hevae

Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes

Ad te clamamus exspectantes

Ad te suspiramus

Ad te in hoc loco Emmanuel
Soprano I

E - ia er - go ad vo - ca - ta nos - tra il - los tu - os mis - ser - i - cor - des

Soprano II

E - ia Er - go ad vo-ca-ta nos-tra il - los tu - os mis-er-i-cor-des ocu-los ad nos con-ver-te

Alto I

ad vo-ca-ta nos-tra il - los tu - os

Alto II

ad vo-ca-ta nos-tra il - los tu - os

Solo Alto

Ex - sum Je - sum Je - sum be - ne - dic - tum

je - sum Je - sum Je - sum be - ne - dic - tum fruc - tum

Ex - sum Je - sum Je - sum Je - sum

je - sum

ver - tris tu - i no - bis no-bis post hoc ex - sil - i - um

no - bis post hoc ex - sil - i - um

no - bis post hoc ex - sil - i - um

no - bis post hoc ex - sil - i - um
Analysis

The piece consists of three sections, clearly divided by plainchant interludes. The opening section (A) introduces the first melodic idea and its development as a canon, the second section (B) introduces a second thematic idea and develops this together with the first. The third and final section is a relatively brief coda using material from section A. The piece opens with the well known plainchant melody:

Figure 7.1 Salve Regina: Plainchant Melody

The first five notes of this melody are then taken as the basis for the following variation which in turn is the most significant motivic idea throughout the remainder of the piece:

Figure 7.2 Salve Regina: Motif derived from plainchant

The introduction of this idea is extended into a longer melodic line which mixes the major and minor modes and is accompanied with a simple counterpoint.

Figure 7.3 Salve Regina: Two voice counterpoint
This idea is then taken as the basis for a canonic passage:

Figure 7.4 Salve Regina: Canonic development of motif A

This concludes section A, which is followed by a repeat of the plainchant melody, this time in the minor mode. This shift of mode does not occur in the traditional melody. The following section (B) begins with the same motif as section A but then immediately introduces new material.

Figure 7.5 Salve Regina: Secondary material
This passage (at bar 22) can be analysed as follows:

A: I7 IV9 I7

The use of seventh and ninth chords introduces a harmonic language that is foreign to more traditional forms of sacred choral music.\footnote{But not necessarily precluded by the aesthetic aims of the project, given that these harmonies are perfectly intelligible within traditional modal systems.}

The following passage return to the canonic texture, which is repeated in the key of B minor. This is the only change of tonality in the piece and is only briefly established before a return to the key of A.

\textbf{Figure 7.6 Salve Regina: Canonic passage in B minor}
The conclusion of section B combines the two main melodic figures, the male voices taking one and the sopranos the other, and the alto providing harmony.

**Figure 7.7 Salve Regina: Alternating male-female voices**

After another plainchant passage the final coda is heard, based on the original plainchant derived motif.

**Figure 7.8 Salve Regina: Coda**
Conclusion

This project contained several inherent challenges that had to be continuously addressed throughout the process. The first to arise was the problem of how to balance the two aspects of the project; on the one hand the investigation and analysis of traditionalist literature, and on the other using this to derive inspiration for the composition of new works and the actual compositional phase itself. Given that the last of these is supposed to be the creative focus of the project, it was necessary to avoid becoming mired in philosophical debates which were likely to arise when addressing traditionalist literature, given the contentious nature of many of the ideas in the context of modern academia. This problem was essentially solved simply by bypassing these debates altogether. Rather than attempt to address these issues, the project simply takes the traditionalist literature as a starting point from which to derive aesthetic principles and these in turn inform the compositions. There is never any question of entering into the debate over the fundamental ideas themselves, which would have constituted an entirely separate project. A related difficulty was the problem of the project becoming more about creating technical and theoretical systems in accordance with the traditionalist framework, which could have become a distraction from the actual work of composing music. This problem was again bypassed by simplifying the theoretical and technical aspect of the work. A temptation could have been to attempt to create complex theories and means of applying them based on the work of Danielou, for example, but this would have been unnecessary to achieve what the project set out to do, which was to compose works informed by the aesthetic philosophy of the traditionalists. In fact it would not really be in the spirit of the writings of Schuon, for example, to over-intellectualise the compositional process. As such, when concepts such as tuning systems did arise, the simplest solution was sought, in this case trying to avoid the use of instruments such as the piano which is restricted to equal temperament and composing in such a way as to encourage the use of natural intonation.

Given that the primary aim of the project was to compose works which expressed the aesthetic ideals of the traditionalist school, how does one evaluate the success, or otherwise, of the work?
Some degree of subjectivity is inevitable here. On the one hand many of the pieces successfully integrate several of Schuon’s key ideas, such as clarity of expression, elegance and the lack of excess in dimensions of time and instrumentation. At other times there was a departure from these concepts, particularly in Élivágar, without the spirit of contemplation or reverence ever being considered of lesser importance. Some of the more musically successful moments in the project, in my estimation, came as a result of these departures, whereas some of the less satisfying moments were the result of an attempt to ‘intellectualise’ and create theoretical techniques that expressed philosophical concepts in an abstract way. This in itself is a lesson, that musical intuition is superior to excessive abstraction in determining the use to which to put the various materials at the composers command.

The difficulties described above of this project have led to my being reluctant to seek to expand it in any way. Attempting to forge a direct connection between philosophical ideas and music was a greater challenge than originally anticipated. Nevertheless, there are a number of avenues hinted at by this project which yet remain unexplored. The first of these is a further exploration of how to derive a musical language from the aesthetic and metaphysical statements of the traditionalists. In effect, this is what Alain Danielou did with his work, Introduction to the Study of Musical Scales, however, this work only addresses the treatment of pitch, and only does so in an abstract way and not with a view to how such scales may be used in the composition of new works. Therefore there is significant room to do more work in this area.

In addition to this area there is room for expansion upon some of the musical ideas which arose in the project. In particular the inclusion of counterpoint techniques derived from organum, as well as the use of modes which extended beyond the octave, built from smaller units such as tetrachords. Rhythmic features of organum also offer possibilities for further exploration. In addition to this there remain possibilities of numerical symbolism and rhythmic relationships which were present in Élivágar but which could be significantly elaborated in future works. At the present time it is envisioned that my own direction will expand upon the stylistic approach

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100 Danielou, op. cit.
featured in Élívágar. Despite this apparent departure from the ideas presented in this project, the work of the traditionalists will remain the intellectual and spiritual inspiration of my work for the foreseeable future.
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