
SERENADES AND ELEGIES: THE RECENT MUSIC OF HUGH WOOD

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In 1999, both Hugh Wood and Alexander Goehr retired from Cambridge University. *Goehrfest*, a short festival put on to mark this occasion, featured performances of works by both composers (and others associated with the university), but for the most part, as the name suggests, it was Goehr's departure that generated the greater amount of retrospective stock-taking and speculation about the future.¹ Indeed, the focus on Goehr was not surprising, for in comparison Hugh Wood's output and influence have to date been more modest. Nevertheless, the time is long overdue for a critical (re)assessment of Wood's music, which has demonstrated throughout his career an enduring concern with both directness of communication and the upholding of a core set of aesthetic and technical values.²

Characteristic features of Wood's mature musical language, such as pervasive motivic working, are clearly recognizable in his earliest published work, the String Quartet in B flat (1956–7). Nevertheless, it was through encountering the music of the Second Viennese School, and the resulting seismic emotional shock, that Wood was able to find his own voice. This discovery, and the technical and expressive breakthroughs that it stimulated, is demonstrated in the Variations for Viola, op. 1 (1957–8). Although almost contemporaneous with the String Quartet, the harmonic language of the Variations, and in particular the tendency towards chromatic saturation, represents a significant development in Wood's career, and his own recognition of this led him to assign it his first opus number.

Significantly (and characteristically) Wood appropriated for his op. 1 only those aspects of the music of the Second Viennese School that he needed. In particular, there are no serial workings, and only sporadic references to the serial 'method' can be found in later pieces. On those occasions when Wood has idiosyncratically drawn on serial techniques, it is in the service of the rigorous thematism that characterizes his (and Schoenberg's) music. Wood has described thematism as the 'surest, most human form of communication', and when he writes music that might be described as serial, it is with this communicability in mind.³ His music therefore has no place for inaudible serial structures: Wood's approach is empirical, practical and, in its firm grounding in aural comprehensibility, humanist. Thus when Jim Samson states that Wood's orchestral works 'are among the most

¹ Since Hugh Wood's retirement, there have been two events providing mini-retrospectives of his work: an early celebration of his 70th birthday at the Royal College of Music (7 March 2002) and two study days at the University of Lancaster (29–30 April 2002).

² With the exception of dictionary entries, the most recent published study of Wood's music dates back to Leo Black's survey in *British Music Now: A Guide to the Work of Younger Composers*, ed. Foreman, Lewis (London: Elek, 1975), pp. 53–59.

³ Wood, Hugh, 'Hugh Wood on his own Work', *The Listener* (29.10.1970), p. 605.

⁴ Samson, Jim. 'Instrumental Music II', in *The Blackwell History of Music in Britain Volume 6: The Twentieth Century* ed. Banfield, Stephen (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995) 278–342, p. 298.

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intensively “thought-through” serial compositions written in Britain in recent decades’, the emphasis is firmly on the ‘thought-through’ rather than ‘serial’.⁴

The desire to communicate also reveals itself in frequent recourse to traditional compositional rhetoric, in the use of rhythms, gestures, forms and harmonic material that recall or allude to tonal practice. Opposing this, one might cite 12-note melodic lines characterized by wide, expressive leaps, passages constructed from cells that together exhaust the chromatic aggregate, and block forms, all of which are also hallmarks of Wood’s style. The tensions between these progressive and traditional aspects of Wood’s language afford an emotional content of considerable intensity. To do it full justice, an account of Wood’s music ought to engage with this compelling blend of intellectual rigour and emotional directness. For me, it is here that the real essence of Wood’s music can be found.

Alexander Goehr, in his musings on a ‘late style’, noted Wood’s pragmatic approach in this respect, asking ‘what then remains for the old artist to do? Recently, in a series of Cambridge lectures, Hugh Wood proposed quite simply that one should go on as before, and that seems modest and sensible’.⁵ Wood’s recent compositions, from the Variations for Orchestra, op. 39 (1995–7) through to the *Cantilena and Fugue*, op. 47 (2004), exhibit this sense of ‘going on as before’, and as such bear witness to the emotional and intellectual qualities that characterize the best of his work.⁶ To examine, within these pieces, those procedures that inform his distinctive compositional voice can therefore provide a birds-eye view of his career to date, and pave the way for a more thorough consideration of Wood’s considerable artistic achievements.⁷

Variations, op. 39

The Variations for Orchestra was commissioned by the BBC for a Far Eastern tour by the BBC Symphony Orchestra. As with so much of his music, impetus came from Wood’s familiarity with the performers and their characteristics, and this work provided him with the opportunity to write a sort of mini-Concerto for Orchestra. This is readily apparent in the way that Wood continually re-shuffles and highlights different groupings and sections over the course of the work.⁸ Such a juggling of the orchestral resources, coupled with the fact that Wood delays the prominence of the strings until the last two variations, points to the influence of Stravinsky. Indeed, the spirit of Stravinsky’s late works in particular hovers over Wood’s Variations, not least in the two fugato variations (V and VII). Of these, the latter is subtitled ‘Homage I.S.’, and is an affectionate allusion to the fugal writing in Stravinsky’s *Agon*.⁹ References such as these provide clues to the general character of the work, which must be counted as one of Wood’s most neo-classical scores in recent years.

⁵ Goehr, Alexander, 1999. ‘What’s left to be done’, *Musical Times* Vol. 40, no. 1867, 19–28, p. 24.

⁶ The op. 41 *Greek Songs* (to poems by Lawrence Durrell), currently incomplete, and the as-yet unperformed *Tenebrae*, op. 46, are the only works from this period not to be considered.

⁷ The liberal number of references in this article to works spanning Wood’s career reflects the continuities within his output; they also serve as significant points of interest within the birds-eye view. Opus numbers and dates are given on the first occurrence in the text.

⁸ There are significant parallels between the use of the orchestra in the Variations op. 39 and that of the ensemble in Wood’s earlier Chamber Concerto op. 15 (1970–1, rev. 1978)

⁹ This is not Wood’s first homage to Stravinsky involving contrapuntal procedures: for *Tempo*’s 1971 memorial issue to Stravinsky (*Tempo* 97, 1972), Wood offered a canon which, as here, makes use of contrasting timbres and textures.

The work consists of an original theme and ten variations, framed by an Introduction and Fugue. The theme falls into two distinct halves, the first of which is presented by the oboe and cor anglais, with counter-melodies in the wind and horns. Within the opening bars, the entire chromatic set is exhausted through the use of chromatic dyads, organized into tetrachords (see Example One).¹⁰ This all-out chromaticism is heard as part of a harmonic language which alludes, Berg-like, to a distant tonal background (for instance, the implied dominant of A at the end of the example). Against such a background, the semitone leanings in the individual lines and the expressive downward leaps are suggestive of appoggiaturas and suspensions, imbuing them with additional poignancy. The generally understated (and barely-repressed) romanticism of passages such as this, which one feels could so often take flight (how telling when they do!), contributes to the often-noted English sense of reserve that can be found in Wood's music.

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THEME

22 Calmo

Tetrachord I

Tetrachord II

Ob. 1+2

Cor. Ang.

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2, Cl. Bsn.

B. Cl.

Vln 2 (Hp. doubles pitches)

sul pont. sempre

Pno.

Tetrachord III (- Bb)

25

Tetrachord III

Ob.

Cl. Bsn.

Hrn.

Tetrachord I

Tetrachord II

Pno.

¹⁰ Early instances of composing with discrete cells that exhaust the chromatic scale can be found in the second movement of his Trio for flute, viola and piano (op. 3, 1961) and, more importantly, given the saturation of motifs derived from four trichord segments, in the First String Quartet (op. 4, 1962).

The ten variations are, in general, short and fast, in which the motivic and tetrachordal components of the theme are subject to constant permutation, fragmentation and interlockings. Thus in the first variation (*Più mosso*), the opening six bars preserve the pacing of events (in the wind, one tetrachord every two bars), but the ordering of pitches and, most crucially, their musical treatment, differs. The switch from 2/2 to 8/8 (often 3+3+2/8) transforms the drooping melancholy of the theme into something more dance-like. The same restless spirit imbues the scurrying *sul ponticello* figure passed between string sections and, later in the variation, the ebullient rhythms of the brass. The result is reminiscent of the equally vital dances that constitute the central section of Wood's magnificent *Scenes from Comus*, op. 6 (1962–5), the progenitor of a series of wonderful orchestral scherzi to which this variation belongs.

The accumulated rhythmic tension of the first variation is partly dissipated by the second (*Feroce*), which functions as a downbeat to the first's extended upbeat. Here, phrases built from precipitous eight-note figures alternate with melodic dyads (displaced as ninths or sevenths) prefacing abrasive chords. The diversity of material is reflected in the varied means of its derivation. Thus the eight-note figures are constructed from interlocking two tetrachords, the linear dyads are derived from permuting each tetrachordal cell into two pairs of whole-tones and the chords are vertical arrangements of the tetrachords. But the listener is almost certainly going to be unaware of such technical details. Instead, their focus will be the carefully delineated contour of the eight-note figure, ensuring comprehensibility amid the considerable violence of the writing. The resulting intensity, both technically and emotionally, is characteristic of the set as a whole.

The invocation of recognizable musical topics provides Wood with a further means of alluding to identifiable emotional states. In the third variation (*minaccioso*), strings and percussion provide harmonic support in martial rhythms, punctuated by fluid wind arpeggios, over which the brass intone a cramped variation of the theme in largely dotted rhythms. Wood's marches are never jubilant, and this in particular is sinister and threatening. As with the first two variations, the third is linked *attacca* into the fourth. The longest variation to this point, the fourth begins as a *molto più mosso* intensification of the preceding thematic material, particularly the transformation of the brass theme into 12/8. Contrasting material is provided by chorale-like harmonizations of four-note chromatic figures related to the tetrachords (specifically, the contour of the figure is the retrograde of Example One, tetrachord I). Unlike variations I–III, the fourth ends quietly, bringing the opening group of variations to a close.

In the fifth variation, a fugato for the brass section, the transpositional relationship between the first two tetrachords (and the tritone invariance of the third) is exploited so that the answer, presented at the tritone, ensures chromatic and motivic saturation. Moreover, the variation embodies the rhythmic suppleness and insistence that characterise Wood's approach to the fugue, providing a source of great energy and drive.¹¹ The restricted orchestration and leaner textures of the variation distinguish it from the variations that surround it, so that it functions as a buoyant interlude providing a clear point of articulation within the form of the work as a whole.

¹¹ The finale of Wood's Horn Trio op. 29 (1989) is a further example of how he uses the fugal texture in this manner.

Variation VI continues and intensifies the rhythmic impetus of the brass fugato, playfully juxtaposing repeated chords (built from the tetrachordal cells) in groups of four staccato semiquavers with more lithe passages in which the semiquavers are grouped in threes and twos. These juxtapositions recall, in a much more lively and direct manner, the differing metrical organizations of the theme and variation I (see above). The fleeting scherzo mood is interrupted two bars before the end by an enigmatic passage, marked *lontano*, in which the repeated semiquavers are followed by a sustained note, before being brusquely cut off by a *sfz* chord.

The mystery of this ending is not immediately explained by the opening of the seventh variation. The subject of the opening three-part fugato (violas, second violins, cellos) is once again twelve-note, constructed from (at first) the three tetrachords. Unlike variation V, the successive entries are not positioned at the tritone, but rather at successive downward transpositions of a tone. Complementing this 'harmonic descent' is a carefully controlled linear ascent in the second violin, of which the final phrase is given in Example Two.

Example 2

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It is entirely characteristic of Wood that this dramatic, expressive and shapely phrase should be fashioned with such economy of means. The opening four-note motif of the first bar is repeated (with wider leaps) in the second. The three ascending crotchets *x* of this motif are then inverted and repeated three times (each time beginning on a higher note). The final repetition is extended by an extra crotchet in order to delay – and intensify – the arrival of the climax of the phrase on the B.

The directness of expression artfully conceals a sophisticated treatment of the source tetrachords (see the small staff below Ex. 2). Whereas the fifth variation made virtue of the tritone relationships between and within the tetrachords, here the emphasis is on their chromatic nature. Thus the four-note figure of the first bar is an elegant composing out of tetrachord II, arranged so that the pitch classes form a descending chromatic segment. The second bar is an inversion around the Eb and D. The resulting appearance of an E and the F 'demand' the use of Bb and B in order to complete tetrachord III, but while these notes form the penultimate and final melodic goals of the phrase, they are delayed by notes from tetrachord I. These insertions generate three- or four-note groups constructed from alternate descending or ascending chromatic segments, forming a surface parallel with the motivic inversion that occurs midway through the extract.

The fugato is abruptly cut off at the end of Ex. 2 by chordal fanfares that recall the last two bars of variation VI, revealing them to be in fact pre-echoes. Such bold – Stravinskian – juxtapositions are crucial to Wood's language: what impresses most is the controlled means by which he uses this effect to build larger structures. Thus the fanfare is used to frame and divide two lyrical (and imitative) wind episodes that look ahead to variation VIII. But one is not allowed to dwell on these episodes, for the fugato returns in five parts and inverted, as an extended close to the seventh variation. As with Ex. 2, the fugato is cut off at its climax by a fanfare, which here closes the variation. Nevertheless, by following it with the tiny variation VIII, eight bars of fugitive arpeggios orchestrated for wind and cymbals alone, Wood makes an allusion to – or a development of – the central section of variation VII. The result is a blurring of the boundaries between variations: all is transitory, in flux.

The formal instability and uncertainty of variations VI–VIII prepare, by way of contrast, the expansive lyricism of variations XI and X. Characterized by their generosity of spirit as well as their duration, these final two variations together constitute the emotional core of the work. The harmony of both of these variations makes frequent use of sonorities based on seventh chords, which, coupled with the predominant string tone, signifies a change of mood. Of particular note is the tune for the cellos that forms the tenth variation, in which Wood's romantic impulse is finally, unreservedly, unleashed.

The fugue follows straight on from the final variation, with the scoring at first continuing to emphasize the strings, with wind and brass adding weight to entries. The opening subject demonstrates the rhythmic suppleness of much of Wood's writing, the inherent energy of the lines coming from a further permutation of the tetrachords, making use of wide expressive leaps that mark Wood at his most insistent. In all, there are four complete entries, at symmetrically strategic transposition levels (the entries are, in turn, at P_0 , P_6 , P_3 and P_9), followed by a short 'codetta' focusing on the original transposition and that at the tritone. After this 'exposition', there follows a sort of jazzy brass chorale, superimposed over further fugal entries (on P_9 , P_0 and P_6) in the strings. However, these entries are now restricted to the first six notes of the subject: indeed the full fugal theme does not recur in the work. Yet motivic fragments from both subject and counter-subject continue to be heard and elaborated in free counterpoint – or, following the brass chorale, in pre-cadential wind and brass gestures that precede the coda. The coda draws together the various gestures of the fugue, and ends with a reference to the opening flourish of the Introduction.

By ending the Variations with material – at the original pitch – from the opening, Wood is making use of a formal gesture that appears in much of his music. On a larger scale, the various groupings that emerge in op. 39 – such as the macrorhythmic 'up-beat' and 'down-beat' effect within the first four variations, the interpenetrations of the middle variations and the shared emotional world of the final variations – suggest innovative solutions to formal problems that go beyond, but are intimately concerned with, surface events. Such compositional responses are reflections of Wood's enduring concern to balance the demands of local detail within the global architecture of a work, a concern that typically results, as here, in coherent end-weighted structures that are both intellectually and emotionally satisfying.

Clarinet Trio, op.40

Wood's preference for chamber music genres (represented above all by his string quartets) has typically resulted in works in which the emphasis is placed on the musical structure, and on the contrapuntal working-out of the material. Accordingly, neither (explicit) extra-musical titles and programmes nor musical portraiture are commonly found in his *oeuvre*. Nevertheless, one frequently finds that the qualities and virtues of the players that Wood is writing for, or particular biographical details, are both reflected in and integrated into the music. So it is with all three movements of the Clarinet Trio, op. 40 (1997), which was commissioned and premièred by the Trio Gemelli. Wood notes in the score that the opening movement 'concentrates on the members of the trio as solo instrumentalists'.¹² In addition to the character of the material, the players seem to have inspired the musical procedures and structures that shape the movement. Although the nature of the extended canonic writing, internal symmetries and interaction between the two melody instruments is firmly rooted within Wood's style, the particularly intense manner in which it is realized mirrors the fact that the original players (John and Adrian Bradbury) are identical twins.¹³

The first movement opens with a lyrical 12-note melody in the cello (followed in canon by the clarinet a bar later and a tritone higher: Example Three).

Example 3

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¹² This, and subsequent quotes relating to the Clarinet Trio, were taken from the composer's note in the score. A recording of the Clarinet Trio by the Trio Gemelli has been released on CD (Divine Art 25009).

¹³ Mirrored in, but not predicated by.

Wood follows this melody with the first five pitches of its inversion, not for serial purposes, but as a means to generate further motivic relationships. The opening augmented triad is thus re-ordered in bars 4–5 (to become C–E–G#), with the climactic G#–A figure referring back to the same appoggiatura-like motivic shape in bars 2 and 3. (The use here of serial operations on melodic fragments to generate further motivic material recalls Ex. 2.) A distant D major/minor tonal background is suggested by the first piano chord, and is intensified by the descent to the dominant in the bass (the opening chord returns as the final chord of the movement). Against this first chord, the clarinet entry can be heard as an elaborated D major triad, and the C#–D in the cello as a poignant appoggiatura (compare with Ex. 1). Yet it is entirely characteristic that such moments are as elusive as they are allusive: the shifting harmonic contexts in which these linear materials are presented ensure that their meaning is never stable.

The canonic introduction to the movement is mirrored by a coda. Together, these canonic passages frame the main discourse, which consists of two extended solos, the first for clarinet, the second for cello, each of which is followed by a duet between the two. In the middle of all of this is a section for solo piano. In general, the pitch organization eschews the tight motivic development of short row fragments (as in the Variations) for a greater emphasis on longer lyrical spans. The main melody on which the central section is based is given in Example Four.

[Comodo]

NB. Accompaniment omitted

Example 4
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The line is derived (unusually, for Wood) from the retrograde of the opening twelve-note canon (Ex. 3), rotated so as to begin on D. The dyad D–C# thus forms the head of the melodic line, and it is brought back at the end of the first phrase to close it. In the third phrase, Wood uses RI_3 (similarly rotated) so that this dyad is reversed; the final cadence is extended to initiate a duet with the cello. Although predicated on serial operations, the aural emphasis is on the leading note-*tonic* relationship implied by the semitone dyad, providing further allusion to the background 'tonic' D. Another noteworthy correspondence between the two phrases resulting from this particular choice of row is that the dotted crotchets in bars 26 and 27, which are given emphasis by the quaver motion leading into them, are answered in bars

38 and 39 by the notes which, when considered altogether, spell out a diminished seventh (C, A, Eb, F#). Such relationships, which can often be found in Wood's music, are indicative of underlying structures, though the precise nature of these structures is rather more difficult to determine. Nevertheless, Wood is far more concerned with aural properties of his material, with their musical significance, than with abstract theoretical notions. This concern, a *sine qua non* for Wood's music, ensures that it communicates with a rare directness, for those that are prepared to listen.

Such a concern can be detected, for example, when the contrasting middle section to this melody (bars 32–34) abandons complete lyrical statements of the 12-note line for a rapid succession of motivic fragments. Whilst there exists an oblique relation to serial procedures, Wood's emphasis is on melody, rather than row, which stems from the same concerns that motivated the pre-serial Webern to cross out each note of the chromatic scale as he went along, without repetition. In other words, Wood's employment of certain serial operations results from an aesthetic, not technical decision. His practice of using 12-note melodies referentially, at specific transpositional levels (usually the original) as a means to articulate structure, belongs to the same set of concerns.

Wood describes the middle movement as a *scherzo*-march. There is certainly a processional element to it, for within the first couple of pages, five different 'characters of material' swiftly pass by, 'at first to be identified with particular instruments'. A more lyrical sixth character is soon added (b. 17). The playful way in which these jostle with one another marks Wood at his most impish: at one point (b. 71), the pianist is instructed to play 'like Chico'¹⁴ Despite the fluid shifting between blocks, not to mention the continued development of the ideas (as they pass between instruments), a loose ternary structure can be detected. The middle section takes the lyrical sixth character as a basis for another canon between cello and clarinet: one wonders again the degree to which the personal qualities of the Trio Gemelli have shaped the movement. Whatever the specific impetus might be, the youthful vigour of the writing is recognizably Wood's, and can be found much of his music.

The lively interplay of different characters and general high spirits of the *scherzo* is starkly juxtaposed with the slow elegiac mourning of the finale, which pursues its emotional topic with remarkable intensity.¹⁵ A sonorous passage concentrated in the lower registers of the instruments and rich in (vertical) thirds and fifths opens the movement. These ever-shifting harmonies result from the interaction of polyphonic lines built from short fragments consisting of chromatic clusters; the resulting tension between the melodic chromaticism and warm harmonies is deeply expressive. The subsequent section is projected against the background of a funeral march. This background is sometimes explicit, such as with the 'funeral drum-beat on the piano' that accompanies two extended solos, first for cello (b. 15), then for clarinet (b. 45). More often, though, it is indirectly alluded to through the use of stark textures and a continued focus on the instruments' lower registers.

A respite is found in the warmer, *cantabile più mosso* section, in which the melodic chromatic clusters open out with seemingly effortless lyricism. Wood describes this as 'the climax of the movement', but the references to the first movement (amongst others, the prominent use

¹⁴ Chico Marx, that is.

¹⁵ The use of two slower movements to flank a central faster one is unique in Wood's output, although slow valedictory final movements can be found in a number of his works in a variety of genres.

of augmented triads and canonic writing) suggest that it is also the climax of the entire work. Yet the respite is short-lived: the return of the 'drum-beat' signals the start of a drastically compressed recollection of material, in which the extended cello and clarinet solos are reduced to just three notes each. A longer version of the opening polyphonic passage concludes the movement; against the background of the funeral march, the chromaticism is imbued with a greater sense of loss, concluding one of Wood's most affecting tributes.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the extramusical factors that give rise to various musical procedures, characters and genres in the Clarinet Trio are ultimately of biographical, not musical, significance. Through his response to such stimuli, we might learn something of Wood as man and musician, but nothing of the music itself.

Serenade and Elegy, op.42

The *Serenade and Elegy* for string quartet and string orchestra (1999) was written in memory of Wood's daughter. The basic pitch material of the first movement (Serenade) is given in Example Five:

Example 5

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As with the Variations for Orchestra, the parsing of the chromatic scale into a number of smaller cells provides Wood with a variety of melodic and harmonic combinations. At the same time, however, he emphasizes the linear qualities of his material, so that the first eight notes in particular function as a 'motto theme' for the movement as a whole. This motto – which opens the work – is a quotation from Kurtág's *Játékok*, bearing the words 'Virág, virág az ember' ('Flowers we are flowers'), both words and music pointing to the character of the work as a whole. Wood gives this motto to the solo violin: the remaining four notes of the chromatic scale (cells E and F) are introduced in the opening notes of a two-part dialogue that follows in the orchestral violins. A second dialogue follows in the lower strings, presenting the motto theme once again, now integrated into the prevailing 6/8 of the serenade.

Although the motto theme remains recognizable in all of its appearances in the movement, there is greater variety of contrasting material based on the remaining cells. Thus the two orchestral dialogues mentioned above are interrupted by a chord in the solo quartet built from cells E and F, in contrast to their previous linear appearance. A similar thing happens at figure 2, when the quartet interrupts with a new 12-note idea, derived from vertical rearrangements of the original dyads (see Example Six; the letters under the first system refer to the dyads in Ex. 5). As with many of Wood's themes, the opening is 12-note, with the continuation a free development of this material. This new idea remains dormant for the rest of the movement (to return in the next) but the blocks involving the quartet, juxtaposed with serenade-like ideas in the orchestra, retain the elegiac mood. Nevertheless, the intrusions into the serenade atmosphere cast a shadow over the first movement; a shadow that deepens into the second.

¹⁶ The finale was written as a memorial tribute to a friend of the composer's who died in 1997.

2

non vib. poco vib.

Vln I *pp* *ppp poss.* *pochiss.* *poco*

Vln II *pp* *ppp poss.* *pochiss.* *poco*

Vla *pp* *ppp poss.* *pochiss.* *poco*

Vc. *pp* *ppp poss.* *pochiss.* *poco*

ppp poss. *pochiss.* *poco*

E-F B+C A+D E-F F B+C E+F B C A D A D

3

Vln I *p* *ppp (eco)* *cant.* *niente*

Vln II *p* *ppp* *mp* *niente*

Vla *p* *ppp* *niente*

Vc. *p* *ppp*

Example 6

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The opening of the movement therefore presents fragments of material developed in the course of both movements. For the first movement, the most important are the two main serenade ideas which derive ultimately from the orchestral two-part dialogues at the start; it is to the orchestra that the first extended section, and climax, is entrusted (figures 5–7). The solo quartet emerges from this climax (over a chord containing three of the four combined pitches of cells E and F) with ‘concerto-like’ entrances, lead to a stylized birdsong passage.¹⁷ This passage – and its subsequent return at figure 16 – frames a central section in which quartet and orchestra, individually and together, develop the serenade themes. The heightened lyrical expression of the central section is accompanied, as so often in the more romantic vein of Wood’s music, with rich chords derived from triads and seventh chords. The movement concludes with a compressed section that ends with a recollection of the opening motif; another instance of Wood using pitch and theme to articulate form.

The expansive Elegy that concludes the work, belonging to a distinguished line of weighty Adagios in Wood’s output, is something of an oddity, both formally and thematically. It consists of three independent sections that are loosely connected by a shared E–D dyad, but more closely by a shared emotional world. The first of these sections continues the constant development of the first movement’s primary material to provide its harmonic resources; the melodic material chiefly comes from the elegiac theme quoted above in Ex. 6 above. After an orchestral introduction, the emphasis is firmly on the string quartet, which at figure 2 begins to engage in a series of tightly-wrought imitative duet pairings. By figure 5, this becomes four-part counterpoint, alternating with orchestral passages based on six-part chords derived from free combinations of the dyads in Ex. 5. Underneath increasingly elaborate writing in the quartet, the harmonic argument presented in the orchestra intensifies, reaching the

¹⁷ Stylized birdsong is something of a rarity in Wood’s output; his Third String Quartet, op. 20 (1978) features the other prominent example of this device.

first climax of the movement at figure 11. At this point, the E–D dyad first appears, as the top voice in *pesante* complementary chords (the first built from cells A–C, the second D–F). Further repetitions of the E–D dyad are harmonized by increasingly thin and softly scored chords, until only a gently oscillating E–D in the solo violin remains, acting as a transition to the second section. Although the importance of the E–D dyad is unclear at this stage, its arrival coincides with the last use (for now) of material based on the dyads of Ex. 5.

The departure from the primary pitch material of the work as the basis of the second section in the *Elegy* is unexpected, when compared with the use of cells in the *Variations* op. 39, the 12-note melody of the first movement of the *Clarinet Trio*, or even the practice of the *Serenade*. (The stylized birdsong in the first movement, whilst not derived from the primary material, provides only local contrast.) The tune on which the second section is based – ‘very much in slow movement character’¹⁸ – was first heard in the duet pairings at figure 2. This tune, like the *Elegy* theme (Ex. 6) with which it has motivic connexions, was originally accompanied by chords derived from the primary material, but it is otherwise independent of this material. This procedure establishes, within the boundaries of Wood’s style, large-scale expectations of the return of the primary material in some form.

The E–D dyad crucial in the transition between first and section sections returns in the string quartet at the start of the third section, a ‘virtual transcription’ of Pfitzner’s setting of Eichendorff’s ‘Zum Abschied meiner Tochter’. Both the subject of the poem, in which ‘a father is bidding farewell to his departing daughter’, and its original setting prompted Wood to state that these ‘expressed what I wanted so very much better than anything I could write’.¹⁹ To this there is a final heart-rending stroke, in which Wood layers over the transcription recollections of the pitch material, and particularly the motto theme, from the first movement (see, for example, the solo orchestral violin two bars before figure 29). Against the C major of Pfitzner’s setting, the chromaticism of the motto assumes an achingly poignant bitter-sweet quality, before it is eventually absorbed once again into pure diatonicism. Nevertheless, the recall of this material fulfils the ‘tonal’ expectations established by the second section, and provides coherence across the work as a whole.

By bringing together allusions to the motto theme with the delicate Pfitzner transcription, Wood highlights the different functions of the quotations. Although both have deep personal resonance, the motto theme from Kurtág is used as a means of generating further material, whereas the Pfitzner is used for ‘conclusive emotional reference’.²⁰ Both types of quotations can be found throughout Wood’s career: witness, say, the emergence of the jazz standard ‘Sweet Lorraine’ in the second movement of the *Piano Concerto*, op. 32 (1990–1) or the programmatic – and deeply affecting – quotations from Wagner and Mozart in the *Symphony*, op. 21 (1974–82). In all cases, Wood’s use of borrowed material is far removed from the ironic detachment of certain postmodern composers. Rather, it serves a direct communicative purpose, intensifying and casting new light on the existing musical and emotional argument provided by Wood’s own music.

(to be concluded)

¹⁸ Composer’s note to the score.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*