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Alan Rawsthorne’s final period of creativity coincided with the heyday of William Glock at the BBC and recognition for composers whose works reflected recent musical developments, particularly those in post-war Europe. Consequently, figures such as Berio, Boulez and younger British composers influenced by the serialist/avant-garde movement came to prominence at this time. Rawsthorne, of course, did not belong to this category, yet he received four further commissions from the BBC in his last years. Three of these, *Medieval Diptych* (1962), the Quintet for Piano and Wind (1963) and the Concerto for Two Pianos (1968), and also other works from this period, are influenced to some degree by serialism, yet the composer’s characteristic hallmarks are present nonetheless. In fact Rawsthorne’s attitude to serialism suggests a certain compatibility with his own compositional instincts: ‘I find the manipulation of small melodic units or cells an interesting method of composition ... but I do not find that the adoption of this technique as a permanent and unique method of writing leads anywhere in particular ... the range of expressive possibilities is extremely limited.’

Although there is no shortage of tonal ambiguity in Rawsthorne’s output prior to 1962 (the final bars of the Symphony No. 2 (1959) and the *Concerto for Ten Instruments* (1961) being but two then-recent examples), it is really *Medieval Diptych* (baritone voice and orchestra), and in particular the first panel, a setting of the medieval allegorical poem, ‘Sodenly Afraid’, that marks a departure and the beginning of a new phase in which serialism plays a role. Whether this is a nod towards current trends and the great and good at the BBC is neither here nor there; Rawsthorne’s sensitivity to the sombre text is a far more compelling factor, devoid of archaism but perhaps recalling the ideals of *ars nova* in the expressive vocal writing and *ars antiqua* in the predominantly austere accompaniment provided by an orchestra without upper strings but including alto flute and bass clarinet. A sense of desolation, of being engulfed, even trapped, by grief is enhanced by the thin, fragmented, yet closely related textures based on small melodic cells derived from an eight-note row (Ex. 1a), as in the first eight bars of the adumbrative orchestral introduction (Ex. 1b).

Example 1a
Each melodic cell and harmony is assigned a specific instrumental colouring and consists only of notes belonging to the eight-note row, the source material for this setting. However, as in other late works, for instance his 1964 Cheltenham commission, the Symphony No. 3, and his last work, the Elegy for Guitar, a penchant for E as a tonal centre with semitonal inflections F and Eb is much in evidence: E, the first note of the row, is firmly established at the outset in the form of a pedal (Ex. 1b); the dark, ‘Phrygian’ F is prominent on solo cello (Ex. 1b); a high Eb is juxtaposed with E in the opening recitative at the start of a free retrograde and melisma on ‘weeping’:
The increasingly flexible vocal writing in the refrains is complemented with serially derived melodic fragments in the accompaniment, providing unity as well as variety through textural variation and a fresh palette of tone colours:

Example 3a

Example 3b

Rawstorne’s fascination with small melodic cells, serially derived or not, also resulted in more subtle, integrated textures; hence a greater degree of mercuriality in rapid tempi and the emergence of the introspective quality we tend to associate with his late output. This is regardless of whether the overall influence is Bartók, as in the first movement of Rawsthorne’s Quintet for Piano and Wind (1963), or Schoenberg, as in the scherzo of the same work, a Quasi moto perpetuo, where the fragmented instrumental interjections are
derived from a row announced in the piano semiquavers (Ex. 4a). In this work, written less than a year after *Medieval Diptych*, the musical language shows a greater commitment to serialism through the variety of permutations deployed (Ex. 4b):

Example 4a

Example 4b

Such textural variety anticipates the sense of 'life below the surface' and 'hints rather than statements' prevalent in both the scherzo and the opening bars of Rawsthorne's Symphony No. 3 (1964), where the single most important source of thematic material and harmony in the whole work is presented in the form of a twelve-note row at the outset (Ex. 5 overleaf).
Example 5

The row starts on an F, perhaps foreshadowing the dark Sarabande’s Phrygian colouring, and contains, in embryonic form, an E/E♭ conflict not resolved until the last bars of the finale. As in Medieval Diptych, the themes tend to emerge from small melodic cells in the row, both in prime order (P₀) and in various transpositions (e.g. P₅ 1–4, P₇ 1–4 and P₉ 9–12):

Example 6

E is again the main tonal centre of gravity, counterbalancing any departure from tonality in the row and structurally underpinning the entire symphony.
However, serialism does not necessarily limit the compositional process; permutations of the row actually permit subtle developmental possibilities not normally available in tonal frameworks. For instance, the wistful first movement coda contains a built-in cadential rallentando which, to the ear, appears to be new and unrelated, but is in fact an inversion (I_{11}) of the row on which the movement is based.\textsuperscript{5}

Example 7

_Tankas of the Four Seasons_ (1965),\textsuperscript{6} Rawsthorne’s setting for tenor voice and chamber ensemble (oboe, clarinet, bassoon, violin and cello) of a poem in an ancient Japanese verse-form, the _tanka_, by the Catalan poet Carles Riba, in a translation by Joan Gili, is undeniably complex. The complexity stems as much from nonconformity, or perhaps sheer originality, as it does from any presence of serialism. As the composer says in his note in the score, ‘no attempt has been made to make the music sound Japanese or Catalan, still less a mixture of the two. The intention has been to integrate the voice part with the instruments so as to produce a texture which can follow the images and moods of the poem ...’ Consequently, _Tankas_ is as much a piece of chamber music as it is a six-and-a-half-minute cantata.

The musical language is neither tonal, notwithstanding the presence of a sustained D at the beginning and end of the work (as well as other tonal centres) nor freely atonal – for the same reason; neither is the musical language strictly serial, since there is no clearly defined row as such, though Rawsthorne incorporates elements of serial technique in his treatment of the source material, much of which unfolds in the first few bars, expanding from
a semitone above and below pitch class D to a rising and falling figure in the oboe:

Example 8

The quaver figure in the clarinet (bars 4 and 5) contains the essence of the accompaniment, with its minor third framed by an ascending and descending semitone (intervals so characteristic of this composer), followed by a diminished fifth, which seems to encapsulate the overall angularity in Tankas.

As in Medieval Diptych the elements of serialism are more apparent as permutations in the instrumental introduction and accompaniment. Ex. 9a shows the initial bassoon entry at bar 9, a combination of an inversion (I₁₀) of bars 1 and 2 (clarinet ‘x’) and transposition P₁₀ of bars 5 to 7 (oboe ‘y’). The writing in bars 15 to 18 (Ex. 9b) illustrates just how complex Rawsthorne’s musical language had become: the bassoon plays two rhythmically free versions in transposition P₁₁ of bars 5 and 6 (clarinet), the last F♯ of which serves, in terms of pitch class, as an axis of symmetry with the clarinet in bar 17. Meanwhile, another mirror image based on the melodic fragment in bars 5 to 7 (Ex. 8) in diminution is played by the oboe. In similar fashion to ‘Sodenly Afraid’ the vocal part emerges from the instrumental introduction with the same material in original note values, albeit slightly modified (Ex. 9c):

Example 9a
Two unrelated, yet compatible, art forms are present in Tankas of the Four Seasons, one a twentieth-century compositional technique, the other an ancient Japanese verse-form. Their compatibility lies in their inherent artificiality and narrow parameters, which serve as a backdrop to impassioned vocal writing. This is perhaps the most significant role of serialism in Tankas.

The Concerto for Two Pianos (1968) called for an altogether different compositional approach: extended solo passages, contrasts displaying the characteristics of the solo instrument, and attributes of the performers, economy of texture and so on. Here serialism is rather less present, its purpose perhaps less exalted and more practical: expanding and developing a group of quavers in the first movement (Ex. 10a), providing an angular slow movement theme consisting of irregular note values (Ex. 10b), and a gentle but distinct clarinet melody for a set of variations in the finale (Ex. 10c).
The musical language as a whole suggests pantonality, in that a number of tonalities coexist, as opposed to atonality where there is an absence of tonal centre, or indeed serialism, which is altogether more systematic.

The late Oboe Quartet (1970) combines recent influences with much earlier traits, as if in retrospect. The prominent perfect fourths in the slow
movement oboe recitatives recall the language of early works such as the Sonatina for Flute, Oboe and Piano (1936) and Four Bagatelles for Piano (1938), as do the intervals in 0134 pattern (semitone, tone, semitone), a source of harmony generally (Ex. 11a), as well as thematic material (Ex. 11b).

Example 11a

Example 11b

Unlike the Concerto for Two Pianos, an underlying unity is achieved with a common row for all three movements, though there is some flexibility in the presentation of the row in its various permutations. The repetition in the violin at the outset (Ex. 12a) and free retrograde in the slow movement (Ex. 12b) reflect the quartet’s essentially lyrical character, while the finale’s contrasted moods are captured in contrapuntal and homophonic statements of the row (Ex. 12c). As in the Symphony No. 3 (Ex. 7), some of the themes seem at first to be unrelated.

Example 12a
Application is not strict, however, and usually a segment of the row is interpolated as source material, for instance at bar 11 of the first movement (Allegretto), where five notes of the row are stated and pitch class E inverted to create a sequence of minor thirds (Ex. 13a); or as a structural device, for instance at bar 87, where the row is presented in a more homophonic texture serving as a built-in cadential rallentando to round off a section (Ex. 13b).
The note rows Rawsthorne tended to select included intervals prevalent in his non-serial works: the semitone and, as in the 1970 Oboe Quartet, the minor third. Thus, his highly individual voice was not compromised by combining serially derived melodies, latterly melodic fragments, with trademark bitter-sweet harmonies.

Experimenting with serialism was a logical step for Rawsthorne in his last years; he was undoubtedly seeking to expand a musical language already highly chromatic and tonally ambiguous, to the extent that much of the thematic material could have been treated serially anyway, as in the opening of the Piano Quintet (1968) and fugato from his last orchestral work, Triptych (1969). The following three examples share the same intervallic content and contour (indicated by brackets above the stave), yet only the 1970 Oboe Quartet can be said to be influenced to any degree by serialism, and even this is tempered by tonal centres and devices found in much earlier works. Incidentally, the origin of these examples can also be traced to a rotation of the 0134 pattern (indicated by brackets below the stave) referred to above:
The evidence so far suggests that the deployment of note rows was, as Peter Evans writes, essentially a rationalization of tendencies already present. At any rate, this composer was certainly not prepared to allow his creativity to be restricted by a set of rules. Much the same is true regarding form, as in the late Oboe Quartet and the unfinished Elegy for Guitar, where the structure seems to evolve from the theme itself. The Elegy again might be seen as a synthesis of old and new: the source material, an eleven-note row (Ex. 15a), begins on familiar pitch class E, introduces Phrygian colouring in bar 2, prominent perfect fourths in bars 2 and 3, and an E/E♭ conflict in bar 5. Rawsthorne typically focuses on segments rather than the whole row, not
for serial treatment on this occasion, but for variation in the Bach/Goldberg sense (Ex. 15b–d):

Example 15a

Example 15b

Example 15c

Example 15d
There are of course practical advantages in selecting a prominent pitch class (E) and main interval (perfect fourth) of guitar tuning, for instance in bars 90–7 (Allegro di bravura) where two segments of the row are combined: the E strings sound the main tonal centre followed by F#, G and F, as the G, D and A strings facilitate the execution of rapid semiquavers based on the perfect fourth sequence in bars 2 and 3 (Ex. 15d).

Serialism, or rather elements of serialism, unquestionably played an important part in a process of reinvention, engendering a new approach to the deployment and development of themes. This in turn resulted in more integrated textures and structures which seem to evolve as the music unfolds. As we have seen, there were also hints of much earlier Rawsthorne in the last works, hence perhaps a sense of yearning for the past coupled with quiet resignation. It is a curious paradox that an abstract method of composition should have proved so effective in shaping personal statements.

Notes

1 Birtwistle, Goehr and Maxwell Davies (The ‘Manchester School’) were among those who benefited.
2 Triptych for Orchestra (1969) being the other commission.
4 The composer’s description, quoted in John McCabe’s sleeve note for the 1968 BBCSO/Del Mar recording.
5 The same technique is deployed by Schoenberg pupil Roberto Gerhard (1896–1970) in his Concerto for Orchestra, written for the 1965 Cheltenham Festival. See pp. 71–2 of my analytical essay ‘Structure in Roberto Gerhard’s Concerto for Orchestra’ (pp. 49–90 of ‘Portfolio of Compositions with Supporting Materials’ PhD 1997), available from British Library EThOS, or as a free download at http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk. Roberto Gerhard was a member of the 1938 ISCM panel which selected Rawsthorne’s Symphonic Studies for performance.
6 Premiered at Cheltenham on 13 July 1965, just four days after Gerhard’s Concerto for Orchestra.

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IAN WHITE began his musical career as an orchestral trombone player with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Having received encouragement from Herbert Howells in the early 1970s he returned to composition in 1992 with *Spire Studies* (wind quintet) and *Renaissances* (brass sextet). The latter was performed by the London Mozart Players conducted by the composer. *Undertones (in memoriam Tony Hancock)* for tuba and string quartet won the prestigious Clements Memorial Prize in 2000 and *Island* was premiered by the Orchestra of Opera North in 2002, subsequently becoming a set work in the Leeds Conductors’ Competition. The BBC has since recorded *Island* for Radio 3’s contemporary music programme ‘Hear and Now’ and commissioned *Strata* (symphony orchestra) which was premiered by the BBC and later broadcast on BBC Radio 3. His more recent *Grey Abbey Echoes*, a Whitgift Foundation commission for brass octet, was enthusiastically received by London audiences last year. He is currently writing *Spirals*, a string quartet. *Strata*, *Grey Abbey Echoes* and *Spirals* all reflect Irish heritage in various shapes and forms.

Other activities have included designing and leading composition workshops, lecturing, writing on subjects ranging from new editions of baroque music for trombone to number-crunching in relation to Roberto Gerhard’s *Concerto for Orchestra*, the subject of his doctoral thesis, and exploring other cultures. He is also a member of the Bar of England and Wales (Lincoln’s Inn).