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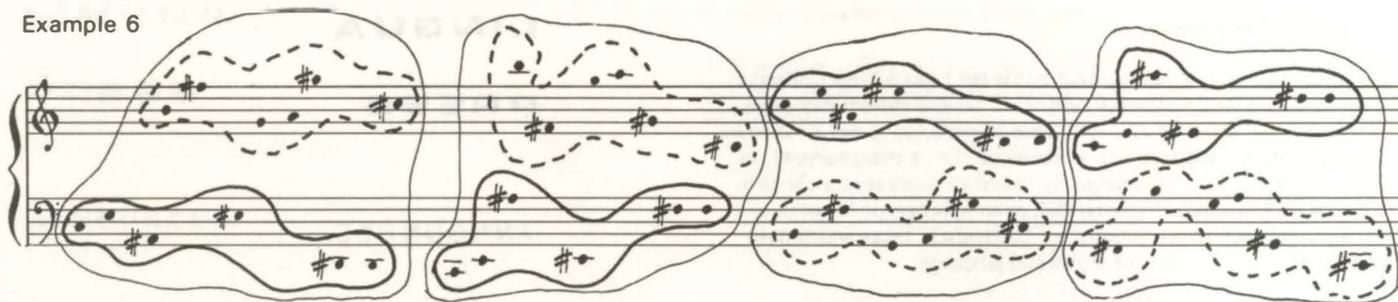
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Goldsmiths
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Example 6



PETER MAXWELL DAVIES: AVE MARIS STELLA
Boosey & Hawkes 20338, 1976 (£2.50)

DARK ANGELS
B. & H. 20296, 1977 (£1.50)

FIVE KLEE PICTURES
B. & H. 20360 (HSS 301), 1978 (£1.75)

MISS DONNITHORNE'S MAGGOT
B. & H. 20337, 1977 (£7.00)

STEDMAN DOUBLES
B. & H. 19964, 1978 (£2.75)

STEVIE'S FERRY TO HOY
B. & H. 20396, 1978 (£0.40)

STONE LITANY
B. & H. 20304, 1975 (£9.00)

SYMPHONY
B. & H. 20390 (HPS 915), 1978 (£8.00)

VESALII ICONES
B. & H. 20286, 1978 (£6.00)

WESTERLINGS
B. & H., 1977 (£3.75)

WORLDES BLIS
B. & H. 20299, 1975 (£12.00)

DAVID ROBERTS

Since this is a rather large batch of scores I have had to talk about most of them in more general terms than I should have liked. However I have attempted to give a more detailed treatment to some of the musical processes involved in *Ave Maris Stella* which I hope will compensate in some measure for the relative superficiality of the remainder.

The most recently published of the batch was in fact the earliest to be written. *Stedman Doubles* was composed in 1956 while Davies was still studying at the University of Manchester and the Royal Manchester College of Music. At that time, and related to his interest in Messiaen, the composer was much preoccupied with the music of India (upon which he wrote his Mus.B. dissertation) and the work is explicitly built upon an Indian model. The title is taken from the well-known change-ringing method upon which, we are told, the serial material of the work is based. (The precise nature of this relationship between bell-peal and set is obscure, at least to me, though I know of several instances in other works where permutation patterns are based on bell changes.) In its original scoring the piece was for clarinet and three percussionists, in which version it was never performed. Davies revised it in 1968, condensing the three percussion parts to a single part and modifying the clarinet part to take account of Alan Hacker's performing capacities, thus producing a highly virtuoso work. The published version, though dated 1968, differs slightly from the one in which the work was given its first performance in that year.¹ On that occasion certain sounds were 'modified electronically in performance' — at least, so ran the programme note; the rudimentary electronics, which contributed little to the overall effectiveness, have disappeared from the published score. *Stedman Doubles* has been performed but infrequently, and together with the Trumpet Sonata (1955) and the Five Piano Pieces (1955-56)

— exciting and energetic works all — is of interest primarily as part of the juvenalia of a composer whose later output is of an immensely greater stature. Clarinetists are likely to find the masterly *Hymnos* for clarinet and piano (1967) (another work that shows affinities for Indian musical techniques) a more rewarding vehicle for their virtuoso proclivities.

Also published in a revised version is *Five Klee Pictures*, written in 1960 for the orchestra of Cirencester Grammar School while Davies was Musical Director there. By one of those strange quirks that always makes good copy for a programme note the music was thought to be lost until a set of parts recently came to light, thus allowing the composer to reconstruct and somewhat modify the score in 1976. The five movements are based, logically enough, on pictures by Paul Klee: 1. A Crusader (an interestingly early example of process music), 2. Oriental Garden, 3. The Twittering Machine, 4. Stained-Glass Saint, 5. Ad Parnassum. Without condescension, Davies accommodates the limited techniques and limited emotional and interpretative capacities of children, but otherwise produces what is simply a scaled-down and more robust version of his 'adult' music. For example, the work has a serial basis, but compared with the manifold procedural complexities of the String Quartet, written in the following year, that basis is extremely simple: the greater part is clearly founded upon a three-note cell comprising a minor second followed by a major second. (The same cell is employed in *O magnum mysterium* (1960), another work using young performers, most consistently in the culminating Organ Fantasia.) *Five Klee Pictures* should be well within the reach of good school and other youth orchestras and is certainly worth the effort.

A more recent piece for young players is *Stevie's Ferry to Hoy* (1977), three short pieces for piano solo: 1. Calm Water, 2. Choppy Seas, 3. Safe Landing. In contrast to *Five Klee Pictures* this *does* depart radically from Davies's customary musical language as, it's straightforwardly diatonic, even going so far as to end with a V—I cadence. Metrically it's rather dull and it doesn't reach the standard of, say, Bartók's music for young pianists, but it has great charm. And even I can play it.

1969 saw the appearance of two revolutionary music-theatre pieces based on the Fires of London (then the Pierrot Players) instrumentation: *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Vesalii Icones*. *Eight Songs* is, to be sure, a seriously flawed work, just holding together by the skin of its teeth, but it is nevertheless an indispensable part of my (and I guess many other people's) musical experience. *Vesalii Icones*, which it has tended to overshadow, is a better constructed work with greater musical substance, but scarcely any less harrowing in its dramatic impact. Davies's idea of superimposing Andreas Vesalius's series of anatomical drawings of 16th-century gallows-birds upon the Stations of the Cross was a stroke of imaginative genius. The resulting work is the more disturbing for the persistent uncertainty whether the whole thing is merely a choice piece of grotesquery or really an attempt to discredit Christianity at its very source. If it were clearly one thing or the other it would lose dramatic power: the musical and dramatic question-mark with which the work ends, following the resurrection of the Antichrist, would become merely rhetorical. The rather belated appearance of this beautifully clear score is a particularly welcome adjunct to the recording that has long since been available.²

Miss Donnithorne's Maggot occupies a somewhat anomalous position in Davies's career. It was designed as a companion-piece to the earlier mad scene, *Eight Songs* (Randolph Stow wrote the texts for both), and composed in 1974, after the end of his 'psychological' phase proper and while the series of more reflective Orkney works was under way. A thoroughly craftsmanlike piece of musical writing, less febrile than *Eight Songs*, it's ultimately of less interest than the earlier work due to a fundamentally weaker dramatic point of departure. As well as being an investigation of madness and our reactions to it, *Eight Songs* was a *reductio ad absurdum* of autocracy: under such a system, if the man at the top is off his head there is precious little his subjects can do about it. When the King sings 'I shall rule with a rod of iron. Comfort ye.', the effect is chilling: George III was in fact held in check; not all despots are. But with *Miss Donnithorne* there is no psychological, philosophical or political point to be made: we are simply presented with the unedifying spectacle of a crazy old maid

cavorting about the stage. The thing has the air of a rather sick piece of anti-feminist propaganda: I trust that that was not the intention.

Since 1971, when he set *From Stone to Thorn* (an entirely different treatment of the Stations of the Cross), Davies has drawn extensively on George Mackay Brown's poetry for the texts of *Fiddlers at the Wedding* (1973-74), *Dark Angels* (1974), *The Blind Fiddler* (1976) and *Westerlings* (1976). Brown's prose has formed the basis of the librettos of *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (1976) and *The Two Fiddlers* (1977). The Orcadian poet's stark, unaffected writing has drawn from Davies a matching simplicity and directness in word setting. How effective this paring down to essentials can be is nowhere better illustrated than in *Dark Angels* for voice and guitar, settings of two sombre poems, 'The Drowning Brothers' and 'Dead Fires', with a brief guitar solo separating them. The work has been performed frequently by Mary Thomas and Timothy Walker at Fires concerts, but the recording that was recently issued³ is by Jan DeGaetani and Oscar Ghiglia. More elaborate is *Westerlings* for unaccompanied chorus. It's a largish work in nine movements: movements II, IV, VI and VIII are settings of Brown's verses on the typical theme of migration in search of a fertile land; I, III, V and VII are wordless 'seascapes'; IX is the setting of a Paternoster in Norn (a dialect of Norse formerly used in Orkney). Having missed the broadcast performance earlier this year, I find it difficult to gauge its effectiveness as vocal writing, other than to say that in its treatment of the voices it's utterly unlike anything I've seen before, quite different from the composer's previous choral writing. I should imagine that it's a really tough work to bring off, and only within the grasp of professional singers. The published score, a reproduction of Davies's autograph, is uncharacteristically difficult to read (it rather looks as if it had been written in ballpoint), the only score of the batch that is at all deficient in this respect.

An Orkney work *without* words by Mackay Brown (it is in fact a setting of Viking graffiti) is *Stone Litany* for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (1973). It is one of Davies's most approachable scores and has deservedly received quite a number of performances. The timbral combinations are beautifully judged: I always fall for the last section, 'Max's signature' as it were, with the crooning vocal line emerging out of a background of tremolando marimbas and strings, with rubbed wineglasses on pedal timpani casting a shimmering halo about the whole.

I'm a great believer in music that is hard to listen to, that, to use Charles Ives's dictum, makes you 'Stand up and use your ears like a man!' (always setting aside Ives's anti-feminism). It is for this reason that I have a particular admiration for all Davies's orchestral music, especially *Worldes Bliss* (1966-69), an awesome listening experience. The people who walked out of the original Prom performance in 1969, even if they were musical softies, certainly got the point: it's not music that's meant to be likeable. The Symphony (1975-76) is, in terms of the complexity of its musical argument, every bit as uncompromising as *Worldes Bliss*, but the unremitting pessimism of that work is entirely absent. Most obviously, it is the orchestral surface that has changed: *Worldes Bliss* is alternately gloomy and shrill; the Symphony maintains in its tone of utterance an almost perfect equilibrium. Indeed, in this problematic score, the lucidity and precision of the instrumental handling is one of the few elements about which there can be little controversy.

The hoo-ha that attended the first performance of the Symphony by the Philharmonia under Simon Rattle earlier this year (February 2, RFH) was at times more than a little reminiscent of the medieval nominalist/realist controversy, with a totally disproportionate amount of attention being paid to the work's title. One of the more silly comments about the work was: 'a lot of us have long known an important secret: a composer reaches maturity exactly when he stops writing things called *Synthesis Two* — and starts writing Symphonies.'⁴ Silly because at this neck of the historical woods neither 'Symphony' nor *Synthesis Two* (not that Davies ever *has* ever used a title remotely like that) can be taken as implying anything at all in themselves. What musical conservatives of course hope for is that by writing a so-called symphony Davies is showing signs of settling down to become the respectable figurehead of British music. And I write 'so-called symphony' because,

debts to Schumann and Sibelius notwithstanding, Davies's work is not a symphony in any pre-existing sense: it is too original for that. The *Second Taverner Fantasia* (1964) came much closer to traditional symphonic forms and gestures; the Symphony in its turn might legitimately have been called something like *Fantasia on Ave Maris Stella* — but more of that anon.

Davies has, in recent programme notes and public pronouncements, referred a number of times to his use of 'magic squares' in compositions, yet has avoided describing them other than in vague and allusive terms. Since I find an understanding of the working of these squares helpful in coming to terms with the music behind which they lie, I thought it would be of use to give a brief description of the operation of the square in *Ave Maris Stella* (1975), an instrumental sextet for the Fires of London, to be played without a conductor. I should stress that the following account is my own deduction from the music and may well differ from the composer's own interpretation.

In his programme note to the work, Davies writes: 'The well-known Ave Maris Stella plainsong forms the backbone of the music ... "projected" through the Magic Square of the Moon.' Ex. 1 gives the result of this process; *Ave Maris Stella* is based virtually in its entirety upon this matrix of pitch-classes and durational values.

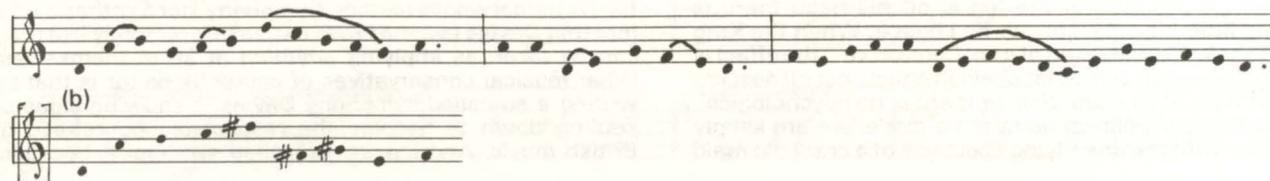
Example 1

C#	F	C	E	B	G#	A	F#	D
1	6	2	7	3	8	4	9	5
A	G#	C	G	B	F#	D#	E	C#
6	2	7	3	8	4	9	5	1
D#	B	A#	D	A	C#	G#	F	F#
2	7	3	8	4	9	5	1	6
G	E	C	B	D#	A#	D	A	F#
7	3	8	4	9	5	1	6	2
G	G#	F	C#	C	E	B	D#	A#
3	8	4	9	5	1	6	2	7
D#	C	C#	A#	F#	F	A	E	G#
8	4	9	5	1	6	2	7	3
A#	F	D	D#	C	G#	G	B	F#
4	9	5	1	6	2	7	3	8
D	F#	C#	A#	B	G#	E	D#	G
9	5	1	6	2	7	3	8	4
C#	D#	G	D	B	C	A	F	E
5	1	6	2	7	3	8	4	9

Expanding upon Davies's note, the matrix comes about in the following way. Ex. 2(a) shows 'the square of the Moon'.⁵ To quote the classic text on the subject, W. S. Andrews, *Magic Squares and Cubes*:⁶ 'A magic square consists of a series of numbers so arranged in a square, that the sum of each row and column and of both the corner diagonals shall be the same amount'. In addition this square is a member of the class of 'associated or regular magic squares, in which the sum of any two numbers that are located in cells diametrically equidistant from the center of the square equals the sum of the first and last terms of the series'. The square of the Moon is not used in this form, but transformed into Ex. 2(b) by repeatedly subtracting 9 from each cell until only the integers 1 through 9 remain. This new square retains the properties of addition possessed by the previous one, though it of course violates the convention that all the cells should contain different, consecutive numerals. These numbers govern durations in the work.

Accepting Davies's note as an accurate statement of the case, the pitch material of the matrix is drawn from the plainsong hymn *Ave Maris Stella* (Ex. 3(a)). However, it is clear that there is some considerable distance between the hymn and the nine-note series (Ex. 3(b)) that underlies the

Example 3(a)



Example 2(a)

37	78	29	70	21	62	13	54	5
6	38	79	30	71	22	63	14	46
47	7	39	80	31	72	23	55	15
16	48	8	40	81	32	64	24	56
57	17	49	9	41	73	33	65	25
26	58	18	50	1	42	74	34	66
67	27	59	10	51	2	43	75	35
36	68	19	60	11	52	3	44	76
77	28	69	20	61	12	53	4	45

(b)

1	6	2	7	3	8	4	9	5
6	2	7	3	8	4	9	5	1
2	7	3	8	4	9	5	1	6
7	3	8	4	9	5	1	6	2
3	8	4	9	5	1	6	2	7
8	4	9	5	1	6	2	7	3
4	9	5	1	6	2	7	3	8
9	5	1	6	2	7	3	8	4
5	1	6	2	7	3	8	4	9

matrix. A possible midway stage may be seen in the alto flute melody at the beginning of the second movement of the Symphony, in which fragments of the hymn are successively transposed by a major third. Ex. 3(b) would appear to be a 'condensation' of this melody. The 'projection' of this nine-note series into the matrix may be conceptualised in the following way.

(1) Ex. 4(a) read row-by-row shows the result of taking in turn the notes of the series as the first notes of successive transpositions of itself. (This is one of Davies's favourite structuring devices, particularly in his earlier compositions, e.g. *Stedman Doubles*.)

(2) If we label the columns of the matrix in Ex. 4(a) 1 through 9 and then re-order them as 1,6,2,7,3,8,4,9,5 (i.e. the top row of Ex. 2(b)), the result is Ex. 4(b).

(3) Successively rotating each row of the matrix backwards by one position, Ex. 4(c) is obtained.

(4) If we now rotate Ex. 4(c) through 180° along its vertical axis and superimpose these pitch-classes upon the durational values of Ex. 2(b), we obtain Ex. 1. Quod erat demonstrandum.

What then is the compositional application of Ex. 1? *Ave Maris Stella* is quite literally an exploration of this matrix: various pathways through it give rise to the musical material. Movement I is the most straightforward. Using the quaver as durational unit the cello plays through successive rows of the matrix (the path shown in Ex. 5(a)): this line forms the structural basis of the movement rather in the manner of a cantus firmus. Various pitches of the cello line are picked out by the marimba and sustained to form a kind of harmonic aura about it; other pitches give rise to unmeasured melismas on the alto flute (drawn more freely from the matrix). The viola and piano play retrograde mensural canons with this main voice (5:3 and 4:1 respectively). This kind of orientation around a principal line is typical. In Movement II it is the clarinet that holds the cantus firmus; this time it is the diagonals of the matrix that are traversed (Ex. 5(b)). The main line in III, handed between

Example 4(a)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
D	A	B	C	C#	F#	G#	E	F
A	E	F#	G	G#	C#	D#	B	C
B	F#	G#	A	A#	D#	F	C#	D
C	G	A	A#	B	E	F#	D	D#
C#	G#	A#	B	C	F	G	D#	E
F#	C#	D#	E	F	A#	C	G#	A
C#	D#	F	F#	G	C	D	A#	B
E	B	C#	D	D#	G#	A#	F#	G
F	C	D	D#	E	A	B	G	C#

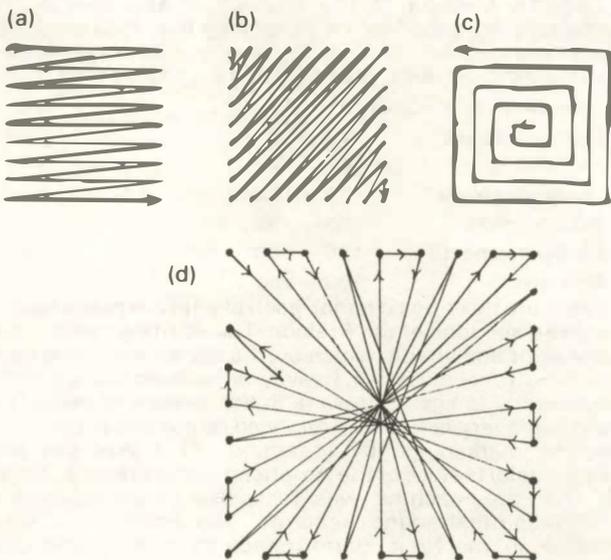
(b)

1	6	2	7	3	8	4	9	5
D	F#	A	G#	B	E	C	F	C#
A	C#	E	D#	F#	B	G	C	G#
B	D#	F#	F	G#	C#	A	D	A#
C	E	G	F#	A	D	A#	D#	B
C#	F	G#	G	A#	D#	B	E	C
F#	A#	C#	C	D#	G#	E	A	F
G#	C	D#	D	F	A#	F#	B	G
E	G#	B	A#	C#	F#	D	G	D#
F	A	C	B	D	C	D#	C#	E

(c)

D	F#	A	G#	B	E	C	F	C#
C#	E	D#	F#	B	G	C	G#	A
F#	F	G#	C#	A	D	A#	B	D#
F#	A	D	A#	D#	B	C	E	G
A#	D#	B	E	C	C#	F	G#	G
G#	E	A	F	F#	A#	C#	C	D#
F#	B	G	C#	C	D#	D	F	A#
G	D#	E	G#	B	A#	C#	F#	D
E	F	A	C	B	D	C	D#	C#

Example 5



marimba and clarinet, describes a spiral path from the centre of the matrix (Ex. 5(c)). The pattern is more complex in IV (in which the durational unit is the semiquaver); by means of an elaborate hopping motion the path works from the outside inward (Ex. 5(d) gives the beginning of this process). The interested reader should have no great difficulty in discovering how the matrix is used in the remaining movements, which work along similar lines.

The use of this particular square is not confined to *Ave Maris Stella*: material derived from it is employed in *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* and it is a fundamental basis of the Symphony. Orthodox Babbittians will doubtless question the methodological coherence of this kind of serial writing (though interestingly there is at least one work by a Babbitt follower that uses similar procedures).⁷ Even if the principle of working with this kind of matrix were lacking in theoretical cogency (and I'm not sure that it is), it would find ample empirical justification in the amazing work that *Ave Maris Stella* is, a work packed with textural and gestural invention and having an uncanny sense of formal balance: the marimba cadenza and the nail-bitingly slow final movement are for me among the most extraordinary things in all music.

NOTES:

¹The first performance did not, as the note in the score erroneously claims, take place at Cardiff University, but in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.
²Unicorn RHS 307.
³Nonesuch H71342.
⁴Hugh Wood, *Radio Times*, July 26, 1978, p. 44.
⁵I have taken this from John Michell, *The View over Atlantis* (London: Abacus [Sphere Books], 1973), p. 103.
⁶New York: Dover Publications, 1960, p. 1.
⁷Charles Wuorinen's *The Politics of Harmony*; see William Hibbard's review in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Spring-Summer 1969), pp. 155-166.