

The Dialogue of Extremes:

James MacMillan as stylistic debtor to Igor Stravinsky

"Saying there is a little bit of Stravinsky in a piece is not really saying much at all."¹ The point to this phrase is presumably not to discourage tracing Stravinsky's influence on successive musical generations but rather to remind us that reverberations of Stravinsky's music can be heard to some extent in a broad cross-section of modern compositions. In other words, the influence of Stravinsky has so permeated musical culture that it can be found almost anywhere. Of course, the degree to which this influence is seen varies from composer to composer.

The Scottish composer James MacMillan is one good example of a recent musician in whose works critics and listeners often find a high degree of similarity to Stravinsky. Not only have multiple writers commented on the "Stravinsky-flavoured" character of MacMillan's compositions, but they have done so across a wide array of MacMillan's output.² Oddly, for all the iconoclastic qualities attributed to Stravinsky, critic Stephen Johnson comments on how MacMillan's compositions are reminiscent of "safe 20th-century styles – *The Rite of Spring*..." etc.³ Along with questions as to where and why the music of James MacMillan causes evocations of Igor Stravinsky, therefore, one critical issue is whether such evocations are merely the result of a purely "safe" form of imitation or whether MacMillan extends those appropriations from Stravinsky in a way that develops and renews them in a modern setting.

Before examining the nature of any perceptible relationships between these two composers, the musical legacy of Stravinsky should be clearly defined. Musicologists and theorists may point to specific formal, rhythmic, or harmonic devices whose first successful musical inception may be attributed to Stravinsky, but many if not most of these traits can be

boiled down to a single overriding philosophy. Specifically, it may be said that Igor Stravinsky is known for his extension and expansion of common practices, often to the extent of negation. This pushing of the boundaries – a philosophy of extremes – is perhaps the most succinct summary of the compositional heritage left by Stravinsky.

In looking at the compositional debt of James MacMillan to Stravinsky, therefore, one must expose the way in which MacMillan also has a predilection for exploring musical extremes. Similarities of pitch collections, chord voicings, and rhythmic patterns – while superficial to some extent – are of course factors through which listeners identify MacMillan's indebtedness to Stravinsky. However, the philosophical underpinning of MacMillan's works better reveal whether these similarities are merely imitation or rather part of a more organic compositional process. As will be shown, MacMillan does not simply borrow those surface-level devices of Stravinsky but instead incorporates them into an updated compositional style, at least in part through adopting a philosophy of extremes that parallels Stravinsky's own musical inclinations.

Speaking of extremes, the repertoire of both composers must be delimited for this essay. Since critics tend to often refer to Stravinsky's early ballets when comparing him to MacMillan, the three *Ballet Russes* works from the early 1910s will be used as paradigms of Stravinsky's style, plus the later ballet *The Wedding*. Of MacMillan's compositions, four are used as well: *The Berserking*, a piano concerto; *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* for orchestra; *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* a percussion concerto; and *Epiclesis*, a trumpet concerto. The reason for the choice of these MacMillan works is not only their overt stylistic parallels with Stravinsky's music but also because they were written during a period of MacMillan's life that correlates quite well with the ages at which Stravinsky was writing his famous ballets (see Table 1).

One disclaimer is worth mentioning prior to any musical comparison. Firstly, although many stylistic similarities can be found between MacMillan's works and those of Stravinsky, one cannot assume that these passages in MacMillan were necessarily inspired by their counterparts in Stravinsky. Barring specific testimony from MacMillan himself, we may only guess at the derivation of certain musical devices. MacMillan does cite Stravinsky as an influence, but MacMillan also lists composers such as Messiaen, Berio, Boulez, Birtwistle, and Schnittke as influences as well – composers who themselves have arguably worked under the spell of Stravinsky.⁴ MacMillan's debt to Stravinsky therefore necessarily appears on an invoice that includes charges from a whole host of both modern and classic composers.

In order to begin this itemizing this bill, one might initially examine works from a very high level. Form – the overall shape of a work – would be this starting point since it takes in the entire scope of the composition at once. Unfortunately, the structure of a piece of music is typically not what listeners use to make associations between composers, since form is rarely heard but rather experienced. Brahms still sounds like Brahms whether his music is constructed in rondo, binary, or sonata form. Since perceptible style appears to exist mostly outside the realm of large-scale form, therefore, local formal issues seem more worthwhile for a stylistic discussion than global ones.

In both MacMillan and Stravinsky's music, however, one global form is worth mentioning, yet this form is more of a process than a specific structure. This process is "accumulation," which Richard Taruskin calls *The Rite of Spring's* "governing principle par excellence."⁵ Accumulation can be defined as the slow growth of musical intensity. Often, this growing intensity manifests itself as a continuous increase in the number of instruments used over a given period of time. Taruskin points out that both of the two parts of *The Rite* display

this process, each part starting quietly at first and then slowly building to a loud and orchestrally complex conclusion.⁶

The global process of accumulation appears often as an overarching plan in many of the movements of MacMillan's compositions as well. The entire second part of *The Berserking* (Reh. M to T), for example, can be seen as a gradual yet persistent process of orchestral accumulation. On a similar scale, *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie* seems to show a slow build-up from the beginning to about the middle third of the work. In MacMillan's works, however, this process of accumulation is often accompanied by its antithetical process: large-scale dissipation. Using *Gowdie* again as an example, a general decline of instrumental resources can be sensed in the last third of the work. Often, these linked processes of accumulation and dissipation create arch forms or ABA structures in MacMillan's pieces.

Because the whole work must stand as the musical example, it is impossible to provide excerpts of this cumulative process for either composer. Therefore, let us take a look at some instances of accumulation on a smaller scale. A short yet classic example from *The Rite of Spring* is shown in Ex. 1 [see Appendix A for a list of musical examples]. Here, we can observe distinct motives piling up – measure by measure and layer by layer – as the instrumental parts accumulate toward the climax just before Reh. #12. Many if not most of the other dances in *The Rite* have similar internal processes as well. Taruskin gives "The Dance of the Earth" as his "paradigm of 'sonic accumulation,'" but the reader is left to find the many other instances.⁷

In MacMillan's works, accumulation on a local scale often occurs not as a piling-up of motives but rather as a gradual increase of more fundamental parameters. Take the opening 34 bars of *The Berserking* for example. As shown in Ex. 2, the ensemble slowly transitions from a few intermittent, non-pitched sounds to the eventual cluster of sixteenth notes at bar 34. During

this transition, the durations between the short rhythmic patterns becomes further compressed and more intense as additional instruments enter the fray. Also, the non-pitched sounds gradually turn into individual pitched sounds, to the extent where in m. 34, the entire aggregate of pitch classes is distributed among the ensemble. This slow increase of rhythmic intensity and pitch density can also be found in the beginning of *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*. Ex. 3 shows the first 19 bars of this piece. In these measures, pitch classes are again added one by one, the {C,D} collection turning into {C,D,E} by bar 4, then to {C,D,E,G} in bar 7, and so on, while the overall rhythmic activity becomes more active and more complex. In both cases, the accumulative process reveals itself at the center of MacMillan's compositional style.

For both Stravinsky and MacMillan, the process of accumulation often results from the successive superimposition of instrumental parts, layer upon layer contributing to the sense of growth. In contrast, both composers also rely on the juxtaposition of separate and often opposing instrumental textures to move between extremes. Jonathan Cross identifies what he calls "block forms" in Stravinsky's early works, where each block is a self-contained set of measures delineated and defined by "durational groupings" and the "organization of repeating units" within these blocks.⁸ In other words, both small and large sections of Stravinsky's music can be differentiated by their self-contained patterns. As an exemplar of block form, Cross points to the first tableaux of *Petrushka*, in which "static" blocks of contrasting musical material occur one after another, each repeated in "exact, varied, or curtailed forms."⁹ The first few pages of "The Augurs of Spring" from *The Rite of Spring* provide perhaps an even starker example. Shown in Ex. 4, the music here clearly alternates heavy sections of loud, eighth-note downbows with lighter sections of pizzicato and woodwind fluttering. The first four bars of Reh. 14, therefore, can be considered a stand-alone "block," whose function, at least partially, is to

heighten the extreme darkness of the surrounding measures. This contrast thereby reinforces the concept that the use of block forms is a process for juxtaposing extremes.

Block forms in MacMillan's works fulfill a similar purpose. Using a small excerpt from *The Berserking* in Ex. 5, we see how mm. 93 and 99 appear as if a different piece of music has been sliced into the piano part. In fact, the on-beat/off-beat rhythm in these two interruptive measures bears an uncanny resemblance to the bar before Reh. 105 in *The Rite of Spring* (Ex. 6). In the case of *The Berserking* excerpt, where the inserted blocks span only a single measure, perhaps another function of this formal process comes to light: ostensibly, the blocks allow the prior musical pattern to continue for a longer period of time without the risk of monotony. Contrasting repetitive figures, each self-contained within its own block, can be thus be extended and repeated without fear of sounding repetitious. On a larger scale, this technique is reminiscent of rondo form, where a basic theme can return over and over again thanks to a stream of dissimilar sections. Unsurprisingly, the organizing principle for this first movement of MacMillan's Piano Concerto is a rondo form – block form on a higher, more abstract level.

Creating an analogy between block and rondo forms is perhaps a stretch, though; in particular, one defining feature of block form is missing from a rondo: the internal "organization of repeating units" mentioned earlier. The static quality of a block is probably its most aurally perceptible trait, and this "static-ness" is due to its construction from repetitive musical figures, i.e. ostinatos. While ostinatos can be seen as taking place in either the pitch or time domains (or both), the rhythmic ostinato is arguably what most strongly constitutes the identity of a block.

Turning again to Ex. 4, the excerpt from Stravinsky showing block form, we should also notice the persistence of the eighth-note pulse common to each juxtaposed block. The regularity of this pulse is perhaps somewhat concealed by the accents between Rehs. 13-14, but the static

rhythmic quality should be very audible in the four-bar block after Reh. 14. Taruskin labels such situations as "immobile" ostinatos while Cross directs our attention to its "hypnotic" effect.¹⁰ Both characterizations aim at the central effect of this technique, which is a suspension of time or a "timelessness" (to quote Cross again).¹¹ It is precisely the lack of rhythmic or motivic development in such passages – a lack so at odds with conventional 19th-century musical styles – that creates this timelessness through pure repetition.

When discussing his own compositional techniques, MacMillan offers insights that echoes Cross's observations on Stravinsky. MacMillan says, for instance, "Sometimes I look for a simple idea that could either be repetitive or form patterns that go round in circles. This can focus attention and create atmosphere giving a bedrock of sound from which other things emerge."¹² Considering this sympathy of MacMillan's compositional outlook to scholars' view of Stravinsky's methods, it should be no surprise to find a section like Ex. 7 (from MacMillan's percussion concerto), which bears a striking resemblance to the beginning of "The Augurs of Spring." While the MacMillan excerpt has more harmonies than the single chord used in Stravinsky's music, the persistence of the eighth-note pulse is the same. The consistency of the eighth-note pulse eventually breaks down in Ex. 7, admittedly, yet there is a circular quality to the melodic and harmonic patterns that contributes to the sense of this stasis.

The subject of timelessness brings up Stravinsky's own thoughts regarding time as presented in his Harvard lectures of 1939-40. In his discussion, Stravinsky contrasts "ontological time" with "psychological time," the former defined by the measurable passage of time and the latter as the listener's perception of time.¹³ Timelessness would seem to fall into the category of psychological time, since a lack of time negates the ability to measure time in quantifiable units. On some level there seems to be a contradiction, though, for it is the highly regular and repetitive

ostinatos that Cross and others characterize as creating this timelessness.¹⁴ One might think that the consistent eighth notes at the beginning of "The Augurs of Spring" would be a prime example of where time can actually be more precisely measured due to the metronome-like quality of the rhythms – a situation quite the opposite of timelessness. Of course, it is the lack of rhythmic development and lack of progressive harmonic motion that creates timelessness in these cases. Still more extreme and perhaps literal examples of timelessness can be found in Stravinsky and MacMillan, however.

True timelessness, presumably, would be defined not only by a lack of apparent developmental procedures but also by a lack of any perceivable pulse whatsoever. A prime example of such timelessness can be found in the last 20 measures of *The Wedding* (Ex. 8). In this ending, any sense of a regular beat completely disappears once the vocal part is finished. The entire section further dissolves into nothingness via dissipation – the opposite of the accumulation technique seen earlier. Ontological time has vanished, while the listener is left to only guess at what durational interval the next bell-like chord in the piano will ring.

As sources of "timeless" passages, MacMillan's compositions extend this sense of chronological weightlessness to an even greater extreme. Take for instance the entire "Coda" movement that ends MacMillan's percussion concerto (see Ex. 9). The barlines themselves begin falling away in the trumpet part at Reh. GG. Certainly by measure 605 (if it can rightly be called a "measure"), any sense of a meter is completely absent despite the metrical implication that the triplet figures carry; the music becomes a wash of sound. The ending of MacMillan's trumpet concerto has an almost identical "ametric" quality. As Ex. 10 shows, measures as distinct units disappear at bar 399. In fact, the entire last page is notated as an extension of this final measure. In performance, this single final measure lasts over three minutes. Time, as measured in discrete

beats, has ceased to exist as such. One may conclude, therefore, that the effect of timelessness – which appears to be the goal of those final bars of *The Wedding* – is heightened even further in the hands of MacMillan as compared to Stravinsky.

The effect of timelessness can be identified in yet a third rhythmic category, however. This third category includes neither a highly repetitive pulse nor the absence of pulse. When time signatures are constantly in flux or when syncopations percolate within the metrical grid, the listener's internal clock necessarily becomes suspended to some extent; the difficulty of aligning a steady perception of tactus with the surface of the music becomes too high. "The Glorification of the Chosen One" in Ex. 6 again offers a classic case from Stravinsky's music. Taruskin and van den Toorn divide instances of a highly regular pulse and a highly irregular pulse into two diametrically opposed categories.¹⁵ But although regularity and irregularity are opposites, the net effect is the same: the perception of a downbeat – and thus the perception of meter at any higher level than the moment itself – is lost. We may thus view irregular metrical states as extensions to the blurring of time perception.

Instances of metrical disruptions abound in MacMillan's works. Used previously to discuss other issues, Ex. 5 provides a case of changing time signatures. As well, Ex. 7 shows a plethora of anti-metrical accents. In both examples, interestingly, the consistent pulse and motoric rhythm can be found, both of which contribute to metrical ambiguity as well. Yet another item for consideration is shown in Ex. 11, which is a metrical variation on the harmonies from Ex. 7. The "oom-pah" rhythmic pattern and changing meters seem taken straight out of "The Glorification of the Chosen One," but the effect is entirely different. One can easily tap one's foot every quarter note for awhile without disruption; but because of the subtle shifts in meter and the not-so-subtle intrusions such as the eighth-note shift after 176, regular foot tapping

ranges from slightly awkward to being against the heard beat. It is as if MacMillan has invited the listener to join in this dance while surreptitiously skipping the needle on the record. MacMillan, therefore, sets up expectations and then plays with them, whereas Stravinsky may simply deny expectations from the beginning.

In other circumstances, admittedly, MacMillan does create more chaotic rhythmic textures. The entire first movement of *The Berserking* contains what MacMillan calls "misdirected energy," the inspiration for the piece derived from the ancient Celtic warriors who would work themselves into a wild frenzy before battle.¹⁶ Ex. 12, an excerpt from early in the first movement of this piano concerto, perhaps more strongly resembles the sound of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* than any passage in MacMillan's work. It is not just the constantly changing meters or the constantly changing grouping structures of simple patterns but also the seemingly random sforzandissimo orchestral hits that are so Stravinsky. It is the non-periodic rhythms within this passage that help imbue the music with such force, much like "the violence of *The Rite* is in part the result of [the] severe and apparently incoherent disruption of regular periodicity."¹⁷ The two instrumental choirs and piano in Ex. 12 seem pitted against one another, each trading off short volleys of sound. MacMillan's orchestral texture may not be as thick here as in parts of Stravinsky, but the effect of brutality and primitive energy are just as strong.

Aside from rhythmic procedures, a main source of this primitive energy for both MacMillan and Stravinsky is the percussion section of the orchestra. MacMillan credits percussion instruments as able to provide "a limitless supply of sounds," and he certainly does not seem to limit himself in their use.¹⁸ The score for *Epiclesis*, for example, requires four separate percussionists in addition to the timpani player. The very existence of a percussion concerto in MacMillan's catalog provides further testament to the central role of percussion in his

pieces. While most of Stravinsky's early Russian ballets call for what seems like "only" two percussionists in addition to the timpanist, *The Wedding* stands out as an extreme case: alongside the four pianos are six distinct percussion parts. It almost seems like an arms race of untuned instruments, which also points in these works to the importance of timbre and rhythm over any specific pitches in particular.

But although Stravinsky can claim the largest number of percussionists on stage for these works, MacMillan has instrumental resources that would perhaps make the young Stravinsky envious. The expansion of the percussion section throughout the 20th century allows MacMillan to call for a much broader and eclectic group of instruments than was available in the early 1900s. In MacMillan's works, gamelan gongs stand side by side with modern innovations such as the vibraphone. The thundersheet, a bell tree, an anvil, and armies of cowbells all combine to create orchestral textures for MacMillan that sound completely modern. Even when using an instrument such as the tam-tam (which Stravinsky often features in climatic moments), MacMillan, in *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*, calls for not one or two but four in various sizes. The underlying pattern emerging here is not merely an affection for percussion instruments but a sympathy between both composers to search the limits of what the orchestra is capable. In this case, the limits of the percussion section are tested.

Not surprisingly, we find both composers testing other types of limits as well. The boundaries of a performer's technical ability is one area in which such limit-testing occurs frequently. Quick evidence of this trait in MacMillan is available through the simple fact that three of his four works under consideration here are concerto works. If the repertoire under consideration may be broadened just slightly for a moment, it is worth noting that even an artist as technically masterful as Mstislav Rostropovich was daunted by the demands of MacMillan's

Cello Concerto (1996).¹⁹ The opening bassoon solo in *Rite of Spring* is one renowned example of a technical extreme for Stravinsky (in this case, range), but other instances abound. The proliferation of irregular meters and strongly syncopated patterns in both composers' works, for instance, attests to the rhythmic and metrical challenges faced by average orchestral players.

Virtuosity, however, is only one facet of how Stravinsky and MacMillan pushed the abilities of instrumentalists to the extreme. Both composers also show a persistent exploration of the variety of sound and color available from each instrument. In fact, an interest in instrumental effects seems a natural complement to an interest in virtuosity. The latter – an extreme of technical ability – may be viewed as the depth of an instrument's possibilities, while the former – an extreme of technical resources – may be viewed as the breadth of these possibilities.

If we believe the words of Igor Stravinsky, we may even posit a direct connection between him and MacMillan with regards to one special effect in particular. Ex. 13 shows an excerpt from *The Firebird* in which the string instruments create a magical effect through a wash of open-string glissandi on the D string. Of this natural-harmonic glissando technique, Stravinsky said, "I was delighted to have discovered this, and I remember my excitement in demonstrating it to Rimsky's violinist and cellist sons. I remember, too, Richard Strauss's astonishment when he heard it two years later in Berlin."²⁰ Stravinsky, as his comment shows, was obviously very proud of what he considered a technical development of his own. Thus, when a passage such as Ex. 14 is encountered in MacMillan, we may say that MacMillan, consciously or not, is indebted to the experimental legacy of Stravinsky.

As Taruskin points out, though, it is apparently doubtful that Stravinsky was the first to use this string glissando effect.²¹ The exact lineage of the technique is moot, however. More important is the recognition that such little "discoveries" excited Stravinsky. Also, we may

naturally assume that Stravinsky was continuously looking for other ways to expand the technical resources of the instruments of the orchestra, both on the level of the players themselves as well as the level of the ensemble as a whole. Further evidence of non-traditional techniques in MacMillan's works, such as the key clicks in the wind instruments or the concurrent palm-slaps in the string instruments from Ex. 2, additionally bolsters this sympathy between the two composers to expand and explore the technical possibilities of each instrument.

The musical function of these special effects is usually a coloristic one. Often, the sonic impression of these non-traditional techniques in Stravinsky's music is a sense of magic, which is a central theme to the plots of both *The Firebird* and *Petrushka*. But new instrumental resources are not the only means by which Stravinsky achieves these coloristic or impressionistic qualities in his music. Harmony and counterpoint both greatly contribute to the almost visual or synesthetic aspect of Stravinsky's early ballets. For example, Eric Walter White writes that Stravinsky's use of chromatic figuration within a tritone span "gives the music associated with the Firebird a kind of iridescent sheen."²² The heritage of Stravinsky, therefore, extends beyond rhythm and virtuosity to the realm of pitches and their organization.

Both MacMillan and Stravinsky write music that goes outside the textbook definition of tonality, yet each seems to view tonality from a different perspective. Stravinsky, composing after what is typically considered the end of the Romantic era, inherits the legacy of an increasingly chromatic texture from the 19th century. For composers like Schoenberg or Berg, this continuous trend of heightened chromaticism appeared to naturally lead to a system where no tone held any more sway than another; pitches could be combined in completely non-hierarchical relationships. For Stravinsky, however – at least in his pre-serial years – remnants of the hierarchical nature of tonality remained even within highly chromatic environments.

Stravinsky talks of "poles of attraction" and how "diatonic tonality is only one means of orienting music towards these poles."²³ Consequently, theorists often describe Stravinsky's harmonic style as a "centric" one, where the counterpoint converges on a central note or chord.

Perhaps partially because he is a composer working in the latter part of the 20th century, MacMillan seems to view the role of tonality somewhat differently. Says MacMillan, "Tonality is part of human nature. It is there in the ether and spheres, although manifesting itself in different distentions. It will always be there."²⁴ To MacMillan, tonality appears to be not merely one type of a more fundamental harmonic organizational method as it does for Stravinsky but rather the fundamental basis itself from which other systems arise. In other words, one might say MacMillan refers his music back to tonality whereas Stravinsky refers tonality forward to his.

These differences in philosophical orientation may be trivial, however, and really more a matter of perspective than any true difference, for both composers share a wide array of similar approaches in their harmonic languages. One direct result of Stravinsky's centric view of harmony is the free combination of major and minor tonalities during both consecutive and concurrent instrumental parts. This technique – an extreme case of mixture – can be found in many of the musical excerpts already provided thus far. Take for instance Ex. 1: At Reh. 10, the bassoon parts interlock to apparently create some sort of "E" harmony, but the simultaneous G-natural and G-sharp notes thwart any attempt to differentiate between major or minor. A very similar situation occurs later at Reh. 14 (Ex. 4), where the E-minor triad in the second half of the bar immediately rubs against the implied E-major triad as played by the cello.

Examples of extreme mixture can easily be found in MacMillan's compositions as well. Again, previously used excerpts can be revisited. In both Ex. 7 and 12, which are basically rhythmic variations of one another, the G# and D# perfect fifths in the lower strings give a strong

sense of some sort of G# harmony for the initial bars (mm. 170 & 220). Yet in both cases, a B as well as a B# (spelled enharmonically as C) combine to cause strong conflict between any sense of major versus minor. With the opening theme of the trumpet concerto (Ex. 15), another instance of this major/minor ambivalence can be found. In this case, harmonies from both the key of E major and its parallel key of E minor are freely combined, thereby showing more of a centric approach than a tonal approach.

As an extension to the combination of both major and minor qualities in a single chord, bitonality and polytonality – the combination of two or more key areas at a time – also play important roles in the works of Stravinsky and MacMillan. We may even imagine that bitonality emerged as an outgrowth from this free use of mixture. A good example from Stravinsky is the famous bitonality of the *Petrushka* chord, which consists of an intertwined C-major and F-sharp major chord. Ex. 16 provides an excerpt from the Second Tableau where this bitonality can easily be seen in the piano before and immediately after Reh. 50. The well-used "Augurs of Spring" excerpt (Ex. 4) provides perhaps an even more dissonant situation, where an E-major triad (spelled as Fb-major) is pounded out in the lower strings against the Eb-dominant-seventh sonority in the upper strings. Looking further along in Ex. 4, the music at Reh. 19 in *The Rite of Spring* shows a modal melody in the bassoon contrasted against the harsh dissonance of the strings, each seeming to exist in a separate yet temporally coincident sound world. Perhaps one is not capable of hearing two or more keys distinctly yet simultaneously, but in cases such as these, one is often able to focus on a specific part of the instrumental texture to hear a particular tonality instead of having to reconcile all the pitches into a single harmony. In using bitonality, therefore, Stravinsky is ostensibly testing the limits of the listener's harmonic perceptual abilities.

Further pushing this boundary of harmonic perception perhaps, MacMillan also relies on polytonal effects. Yet in MacMillan's work, these tonal references often appear not in contrast to merely a sole secondary tonality but rather entrenched within a much more chromatic and atonal landscape. Ex. 17 from the second movement of *The Berserking* stands as an appropriate example. At Reh. P, an E-dorian scale is outlined in the crotales and soprano voice of the piano through the end of the second bar (m. 453). In the following bar (m. 454), these same parts shift to a G# pentatonic scale (spelled enharmonically). Along with this juxtaposition of separate tonalities here, we also find a striking superimposition. The tubular bells and bass line of the piano part, for example, outline a D#-dorian scale for the first two bars and then shift to D pentatonic. The extreme dissonance of the halfstep-separated dorian scales followed by the tritone-separated pentatonic scales might be enough dissonance for some composers, but MacMillan inserts within these outer voices what can only be described as further chromaticism. The net effect is an "other-worldly" or supernatural sound, much like the effects of magic and fantasy achieved by Stravinsky. Yet MacMillan's excerpt here is much more freely atonal – much more "21st century" if such a label can carry any real meaning. MacMillan, who holds a PhD in composition, thus appears to draw not only on bi- and polytonal effects but also on devices derived from the serialistic and/or aleatoric techniques of his academic mentors.

Another example of this apparently oxymoronic combination of tonality and atonality can be found in another work of MacMillan. Take a look, for instance, at Ex. 18 from *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*, which also starts at Reh. P. Here, the trumpets blare out consonant sonorities while the surrounding instrumental fabric churns away through complicated threads of chromaticism. The effect is majestic – as if purity and salvation have been superimposed over

chaos and confusion. As compared to Stravinsky, MacMillan seems to have expanded the concept of dueling tonalities to encompass dueling organizational methods.

One of the methods by which both Stravinsky and MacMillan make the perception of these polytonal passages easily audible to the listeners is through their use of melodies or melodic fragments that have strong and clear tonal or modal profiles, such that these melodies sharply contrast to and stand out from the surrounding dissonant material. Often, these tonal and modal tunes are appropriated or borrowed. Folk tunes as well as ecclesiastical melodies are a common source of these appropriations. MacMillan, for instance, uses a Scottish folk-ballad along with the *Lux Aeterna* from the Catholic requiem mass as melodic material in *The Confession of Isobel Gowdie*.²⁵ Additionally, in MacMillan's percussion concerto – as its title *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* implies – "all the musical material is drawn from the 15-century French Advent plainchant of the same name."²⁶ Providing evidence of Stravinsky's use of borrowed materials, Richard Taruskin has shown the influence of Russian folk melodies in *The Rite of Spring*.²⁷ As well, *Petrushka*'s themes are well-known to be derivations of "half-pagan, half-liturgical" songs.²⁸ The broad use of these traditional sources arguably imbues the music of Stravinsky and MacMillan, at least to some extent, with the natural lyricism and popular appeal inherent within the traditional sources themselves. As a result, therefore, both composers' works can include relatively high levels of chromaticism and dissonance without perhaps falling prey to the critique of inaccessibility that is so often leveled at other dissonant and contemporary styles.

There may exist simpler reasons for the use of these borrowed melodies, however – reasons derived from extramusical considerations, such as the apparent nationalistic and patriotic stance of both composers for their homelands. The folk tunes, in this respect, serve to ground the music in a style that perhaps feels more personal, more honest. Stravinsky was famous for

declaring his devotion to his native country despite living in foreign lands throughout the vast majority of his entire adulthood. "I have spoken Russian all my life," said Stravinsky, "I think in Russian, my way of expressing myself is Russian. Perhaps this is not immediately apparent in my music, but it is latent there, a part of its hidden nature."²⁹ With MacMillan, who is Scottish, the roots of nationalism have a deeper base, for MacMillan is quick to say pejoratively that Scotland has "shaped itself in London's shadow" and thus created a "feeling of second-bestness."³⁰ MacMillan explains further: "We tend to see no value in our own product, our own people, unless it's been given the rubber stamp of approval from outside."³¹ A glimpse is thus potentially gained into the derivation of this strong nationalistic trend. MacMillan, in reaction to the pervasiveness of English influence in Great Britain, has turned to his Scottish heritage in order to differentiate himself from the majority. Similarly, perhaps, Stravinsky has sought refuge in his own Russian-ness as a reaction to the dominance of Western European music on the traditions of classical music throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. It would seem both composers peer more deeply within their own culture when faced with alien cultural influences.

Folk music, however, is only one source of these borrowed melodies. As was shown previously, examples of liturgical music are also common. Yet during the period Stravinsky was writing his early ballets, he did not seem to display many signs of religious devotion. Stravinsky, according to his own testimony, had apparently given up church-going by the time he had graduated high school.³² The music of these years offers no contradiction, since up until 1926, Stravinsky "had never composed a single note of church music," despite the appropriations of melodies that were perhaps made for purely practical reasons.³³ In later years, of course, Stravinsky was to turn to writing sacred works, while at the same time outward manifestations of his orthodoxy increased in tandem. In contrast, MacMillan's faith in God has played a persistent

role in his daily life. A practicing Catholic, MacMillan has strong opinions about the liturgy and modern issues faced by the church.³⁴ This close involvement with his own beliefs has consequently infused MacMillan's works with a devotional aspect. Says MacMillan: "As far as my music is concerned it's a complexity of technique but in a way that expresses something that is deeply spiritual as well."³⁵ Religion thus seems to occupy a more central function in MacMillan's compositions from this period as opposed those parallel works of Stravinsky.

One final, perhaps more abstract explanation may be intuited from the use of borrowed materials. Both composers may be seen as acting against contemporary trends in musical composition. Taruskin offers the following insight "Stravinsky, by seeking in folk songs something far more basic to his musical vocabulary and technique, was to use them as part of his self-liberation from that artistic mainstream, and as things turned out, its downright subversion."³⁶ The "absolute music" championed by the 19th-century Romantics was part of the musical legacy inherited by Stravinsky; but in order to develop his own voice, Stravinsky needed to forge a new style, and it is partially through the use of folk songs that Stravinsky perhaps felt that he could differentiate and distinguish himself.

This search for one's own compositional style and voice is something with which many young composers wrestle. Stravinsky, however, seems to have wrestled with his compositional identity throughout his entire career. While every piece by Stravinsky certainly seems to have something inherently "Stravinskian" about it, his adoption of a variety of styles at various points in his life is perhaps a testament of his reticence to fully align himself with any one compositional school. In the Harvard lectures, Stravinsky expressed regret that music critics appeared to "pigeonhole" new music into one of either two categories: modernism or academicism.³⁷ It may be surprising, therefore, to hear almost identical sentiments echoed half a

century later. When discussing his own compositional style, MacMillan laments, "I do feel sometimes that I'm under attack from both directions – from the high modernists for dereliction of responsibility, but also from the neo-romantics and fashionable minimalists who still hear elements of modernism in my music."³⁸ MacMillan confesses further that he does not feel "hemmed in by any ideological style" and that he enjoys a "pluralistic position."³⁹ Both Stravinsky and MacMillan, therefore, find themselves embanked on neither side of the musical mainstream but rather navigating their own course through these waters.

It is thus perhaps particularly ironic that Stravinsky and MacMillan, in both of whom's works can be found ample evidence of the desire to search out musical extremes, have made their stamp on the document of musical history with a blend and balance of musical styles. A variety of contemporary as well as traditional musical techniques combine in both composers' pieces in a way that gives each their own unique voice. In Stravinsky, the early *Ballets Russes* are a *mélange* of folk, impressionistic, primitivistic, and modern styles. The same combination can be found in MacMillan, but added to this amalgam is also a fusion of serialistic, minimalistic, aleatoric, and other 20th-century techniques. In this sense, MacMillan can be seen as a composer who has expanded the musical language descendent from Stravinsky.

Yet we also have two composers – whose works during their first mature phases straddle the beginning and end of the 20th century – who share many basic sympathies of compositional approach. Both composers seek the limits of not only their own technique but that of the ensemble for which they are writing. Through a conflation of major and minor keys, polytonalism, complex rhythms, and capricious meters, Stravinsky and MacMillan consistently test the boundaries of the listener's perception as well as the performer's ability. It is this "dialogue of extremes," to use MacMillan's own phrase, that thus connects the two composers.⁴⁰

Stravinsky is well known to have once said, "Lesser artists borrow, great artists steal." Stravinsky's implication, of course, is that all artists appropriate musical techniques and devices from previous generations. One central distinction between the lesser and greater artist, however, is whether these appropriations are awkwardly copied or rather more seamlessly incorporated into a new style. To translate and interpret Stravinsky's quote: the great artists steal – i.e. they make it their own – while the lesser artists borrow – i.e. they do not make it their own. Of course, only time will tell what level of greatness historians will attribute to James MacMillan. Yet by making not just those surface qualities but also the core philosophies of Stravinsky his own, MacMillan appears a prime candidate for inclusion into the latter half of Stravinsky's aphorism.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1: Comparison of compositional dates

N.B. ages are approximate

Igor Stravinsky (b. 1882)			James MacMillan (b. 1959)		
work	year	age	work	year	age
<i>The Firebird</i>	1910	28	<i>The Berserking</i>	1989	30
<i>Petrushka</i>	1911	29	<i>The Confession of Isobel Gowdie</i>	1990	31
<i>The Rite of Spring</i>	1913	31	<i>Veni, Veni, Emmanuel</i>	1992	33
<i>The Wedding</i>	1914-1923	32-41	<i>Epiclesis</i>	1993	34

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Ex.	Composer	Work	Movement	Reh.	Mm.	CD Times
1	Stravinsky	<i>The Rite of Spring</i>	Introduction	9≤12	n/a	2:17-2:50
2	MacMillan	<i>The Berserking</i>	I	n/a	1-34	0:00-0:58
3	MacMillan	<i>Isobel Gowdie</i>	n/a	n/a	1-19	0:00-1:50
4	Stravinsky	<i>The Rite of Spring</i>	Augurs of Spring	13≤22	n/a	0:00-1:28
5	MacMillan	<i>The Berserking</i>	I	n/a	89-100	2:15-2:31
6	Stravinsky	<i>The Rite of Spring</i>	Glorification One	104≤111	n/a	0:00-0:32
7	MacMillan	<i>Veni, Veni, Emman.</i>	III-Dance-Hocket	M+	220-239	2:29-3:00
8	Stravinsky	<i>The Wedding</i>	n/a	134-end	927-949	22:00-23:13
9	MacMillan	<i>Veni, Veni, Emman.</i>	VIII-Coda-Easter	~GG	585-606	0:15-2:57
10	MacMillan	<i>Epiclesis</i>	Allegro	n/a	385-end	4:53-8:32
11	MacMillan	<i>Veni, Veni, Emman.</i>	III-Dance-Hocket	J≤L	170-199	1:08-1:55
12	MacMillan	<i>The Berserking</i>	I	D+	113-126	2:50-3:07
13	Stravinsky	<i>Firebird</i>	Introduction	n/a	13-15	1:35-1:57
14	MacMillan	<i>Veni, Veni, Emman.</i>	V-Gaude-Gaude	~U~V	386-418	2:21-4:33
15	MacMillan	<i>Epiclesis</i>	Allegro	n/a	231-264	0:00-1:02
16	Stravinsky	<i>Petrushka</i>	Second Tableau	49≤51	n/a	0:13-1:02
17	MacMillan	<i>The Berserking</i>	II	P+	450-461	5:47-6:41
18	MacMillan	<i>Isobel Gowdie</i>	n/a	P≤Q	275-295	16:48-17:16

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- ¹ I read something along these lines recently, although for the life of me I cannot recall the source.
- ² See for instance: Calum MacDonald, "MacMillan, Stevenson and other Scots," *Tempo*, no. 188 (Mar. 1994), p. 33; "The fast central section of *Gowdie*...seemed more derivative (of Stravinsky especially)." Also: Stephen Johnson, "James MacMillan," *Tempo*, no. 185 (June 1993): 2-5; "The Piano Concerto *The Berserking* (1990) again pits contemplation against *Turangalila/Rite of Spring* violence" (p. 4); "In MacMillan's *Sinfonietta* (1991) the broad pattern is reversed... with strutting, militaristic Stravinsky-flavoured figures on brass..." (p. 4); and regarding *Gowdie*: "The trombones' heavy, Stravinsky-like dance figures..." (p. 2).
- ³ Johnson (1993), p. 2.
- ⁴ Shirley Ratcliffe, "MacMillan," *Choir & Organ*, vol. 7, iss. 3 (May/June 1999), p. 38.
- ⁵ Richard Taruskin, *Stravinsky and the Russian Tradition: A Biography of the Works Through Mavra*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1996), p. 957.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 957.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 957.
- ⁸ Jonathan Cross, *The Stravinsky Legacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1998), p. 19.
- ⁹ Cross, p. 29.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85-86.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- ¹² Ratcliffe (May/June 1999), p. 38.
- ¹³ Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music: In the Form of Six Lessons* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U. Press, 1970 [1942]), p. 31.
- ¹⁴ Cross, p. 83: "Stravinsky creates a new kind of 'musical time', a 'virtual' time which can never be confused with clock time. Only in those relatively rare passages where there seems to be little else occurring than regular repetition of an unchanging object, is the effect for the listener the suspension of memory because time appears to 'stand still'. The effect is of a non-directed 'timelessness' – that is, something quite the opposite of a sense of the mere measurement or division of an objectively perceived temporal flow."
- ¹⁵ See Cross's summary of their categories on pp. 85-6.
- ¹⁶ From the liner notes to: James MacMillan. *The Berserking: A Concerto for Piano and Orchestra*. Martin Roscoe, BBC Philharmonic, Yuri Torchinsky. *MacMillan: Into the Ferment etc.* Chandos CHAN 10092, p. 5.
- ¹⁷ Cross, p. 87.
- ¹⁸ As quoted by Shirley Ratcliffe in: "MacMillan 2," *Choir & Organ*, vol. 7, iss. 4 (July/Aug. 1999), p. 39.
- ¹⁹ Ronald Weitzman, "Review: *Triduum*: MacMillan's Easter triptych," *Tempo*, no. 204 (Apr. 1998): p. 34.
- ²⁰ White, p. 150.
- ²¹ Taruskin (1996), p. 311: "But Stravinsky had 'discovered' the effect is *Rapsodie espagnole*, where it appears in the viola and cello six bars into the last movement. And where had Ravel discovered it? In Rimsky-Korsakov! It appears in the suite from the opera *Christmas Eve*, in the section called 'Demonic Carol'."
- ²² White, p. 149.

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- ²³ Stravinsky, p. 35.
- ²⁴ As quoted in: Kenneth Walton, "Atonal Truths," *The Scotsman* (Nov. 23, 1999), p. 16.
- ²⁵ Timothy Michael Rolls, "James MacMillan: An Analysis of Selected Works (1983-1997)" (DMA Thesis, University of Houston, 2000), p. 41.
- ²⁶ James MacMillan himself, in the Composer's Note to: *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel: Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1994 [1992]).
- ²⁷ Richard Taruskin, "Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*." *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 33, no. 3 (Autumn 1980), pp. 501-543.
- ²⁸ White, p. 162.
- ²⁹ Taruskin (1996), p. 13.
- ³⁰ As quoted in: Potter, p. 15.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Walsh (1999), p. 91.
- ³³ Ibid., p. 431.
- ³⁴ MacMillan as quoted in: Ratcliffe (May/June 1999), p. 38. "I have strong and complex feelings about it [the modernisation of the Roman Catholic liturgy and of congregational involvement] mainly because I am a practising Catholic....I'm all for simplicity in the liturgy. The most congregation-friendly music there is can be found in the less complex Gregorian chants. Plainsong works. People remember it from school and it has even entered the charts. I'd love to see a refinding of that particular style of Roman worship."
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Taruskin (1980), p. 543.
- ³⁷ Stravinsky, p. 83: "To these critics, whatever appears discordant and confused is automatically relegated to the pigeonhole of modernism. Whatever they cannot help finding clear and well-ordered, and devoid of ambiguity which might them an opening, is promptly relegated in its turn to the pigeonhole of academicism."
- ³⁸ As quoted in: Stephen Johnson, "James MacMillan: Harnessing Extremes," *Gramophone*, vol. 72, no. 864 (May 1995), p. 14.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ratcliffe (July/Aug. 1999), p. 39.