PORTFOLIO OF COMPOSITIONS

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# Critical Commentary

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Dan Price - Rochdale, August 2018.
Abstract

Volume II, consists of a critical commentary to accompany the six original compositions found in volume I.

The six works presented in this portfolio are composed for brass band and percussion, selected as they show artistic and technical advancements when compared with extant literature and methodology. The accompanying commentary discusses the patronage problems that the British brass band appears to be currently experiencing, deliberating whether its insular persona has been created by the movement’s proclivity for contesting and upholding heritage. The portfolio explores a fresh approach towards compositional practice for the medium, with a view to re-establish a connection with contemporary audiences. It reconsiders this appeal by questioning the fundamental language band music employs, exploring cross-disciplinary collaboration amongst other new approaches, in pursuit of elevating interest.
Chapter 1

Introduction - Research Context

In 2017 it was announced that the long-standing BBC Radio 2 programme, *Listen to the Band* was to be removed from the broadcasting schedules after seventy two years on-air. This is perhaps the most recent example of brass band activity receding from public interest, with Lewis Carnie, Head of Radio 2 suggesting that the demise of the programme was due to substandard ratings and ‘...in response to the listening requirements of an evolving audience.’

Iwan Fox, editor for 4barsrest.com commented that, ‘the killing off of *Listen to the Band* is more a reflection of the insularity of the brass band movement than the attitude to change of the BBC’ (Fox. 2018).

Having been involved with brass bands for over thirty years, I have witnessed a dwindling interest that could be attributed to ‘...persistent institutional insularity’ (Hindmarsh. 2009). I have observed the annual pleas for support from the *North West Area Brass Bands Association* go unanswered, resulting in a reduction in performance opportunities and placing the practicality and sustainability of the annual regional contest in jeopardy. In 2004, Dr. Roy Newsome suggested that there was ‘...a worrying – and growing – shortage of players’ (Newsome. 2006), and many bands at grass-roots level lament dedication worries, poor attendance, problems attracting and retaining ‘young blood,’ all challenges inherent of a demanding twenty-first century culture but arguably, perhaps also a by-product of the movements fixation with tradition over rejuvenation.

Gillian Hibberd’s 2006 paper states that ‘...changing tastes in popular culture have resulted in a decline in the number of bands.’ Whilst I would argue against Hibberd’s suggestion of decline, indicative by the relative stasis of competing bands at the regional qualifiers of the *National Brass Band Championships* (see Appendix 6.1), an ageing demographic providing a majority of participants and listeners is a prevailing trend in the social context of British brass bands. This is tangible through simple observation, suggesting that it is detrimental to uphold a parochial attitude. Previous peaks and troughs in public interest have occurred throughout band history, however if the movement is to survive within

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1 Announcement made by Peter Bates, North West Regional Championships Secretary, prior to the First Section contest at the Winter Gardens, Blackpool on the 25th February 2018.
an ever changing culture and educational system, it perhaps needs to consider its purpose within modern-day society. The Royal Marines Band Service and Corps of Army Music have evolved their practices to maintain audience interest by developing outreach agendas, introducing live-streamed concerts, including non-militaristic pop-groups and, in the case of the Army, brass bands within their ranks. The insular persona brass bands have acquired could be attributed to the movement’s preoccupation with upholding tradition and heritage. The approach to uniforms, protocols, concert programming and proclivity for the contest arena, has remained largely unaltered since the movement’s inception and perhaps herein lies both problem and solution. However, this portfolio does not look to resolve all the issues the movement faces.

Considering the question of insularity from a compositional perspective, the fundamental role of a band remains unaltered - entertainment. Is the decline in popularity therefore simply because brass bands have neglected to stay in vogue? As part of any rejuvenation process, it is recognised that new and original ideas are required to connect a product with its consumer. In the case of the brass band, re-establishing popularity by reflecting current trend and tastes within repertoire is logical and goes some way to reintroduce the brass band as a contemporary entertainment genre.

Denis Wright, Edrich Siebert and Goff Richards all contributed to the modernisation of band literature during their relevant periods in history, an aspect which could be considered overlooked in current practice. Original music is written much as it always has been, in either a commercial or serious vein, with the majority of composer’s writing within the parameters of these extant categories. In the main, commercial music is the domain of the concert hall; light, lyrical and diatonic in nature, often utilising historical templates such as marches, selections or slow-melodies. There is a huge variation in complexity which is a necessity to accommodate the hierarchical structure of the movement.

In contrast, the vast majority of serious music resides in the form of the test-piece, a phenomenon unique to the medium that derives from its contesting heritage. As with commercial music similar disparity exists, with lower section test-pieces largely expanding upon concert music practice, whilst higher section works frequently displaying complex contemporary language that many audiences, and possibly bandsmen, struggle to
comprehend. A trait apparent in both schools is that composers appear to be writing predominantly to the tastes of commissioning bodies and aficionados, seemingly without consideration to the appeal of repertoire on the wider audience.
Chapter 2

2.1: Research Aim

This portfolio considers the notion of brass band insularity, reconsidering elements of functionality in pursuit of increasing brass bands popularity within British contemporary culture. The six works presented explore the following areas of inquiry:

1. An audience development agenda
2. Utilising popular contemporary language to promote recruitment
3. The development of new and/or neglected approaches

The portfolio discusses how the submission challenges existing methodologies, expands upon current practice and how, through practice based research, it introduces new philosophies as a contribution to knowledge. The repertoire’s ‘function’ is effectively summarised by the following quote from Denis Wright’s 1963 book, The Complete Bandmaster:

‘The composer, arranger of light music is, in the main the servant of the performer and ultimately the audience. With more ‘serious’ music the roles are reversed, the performer becomes the servant of the composer who seeks through his music to communicate with the listener.’

With regards to light music, Wright states that the composer is, ‘...servant of the performer and ultimately the audience.’ Composers currently write music that reflects the taste of a commissioning body, demonstrated by the regular commissions for events such as Brass in Concert. Similarly, these works remain attractive to the taste of existing audiences, as they demonstrate the virtuosity of the bands they support. However, it is questionable whether new additions promote the movement to an audience not already directly associated with it.

Wright’s concluding statement describes the performer and audience as, ‘...servant of the composer who seeks through his music to communicate with the listener.’ As Leonard Bernstein once said, ‘Music can name the unnameable and communicate the unknowable’ (Bernstein. 1976), and for many writers the purpose of composition is to convey a message; whether this is an evocation of a story, expressions of emotion or the presentation of more absolute ideas, unravelled through complex dialectic exploration. The fundamental point
here is that the listener must understand the musical journey to comprehend it and I would argue that this is not always the case with more recent art music additions.

It is not my intention to challenge the observations Wright makes, but simply acknowledge them as doctrine, using the principles he outlines to realign the musical content of my work to reflect twenty-first century taste. Retaining the inherent nuances and expectations of the ensemble, whilst providing a contemporary language intended to arouse the interest of younger performers and raise its appeal to a broader audience. As part of this modernisation process, the portfolio utilises the evocative nature of film and video-game music, combining it with popular music trends that have strong rhythmic tendencies. As a consequence, the works within the portfolio begin to explore the natural void between commercial and art music attitudes, each embracing the physiognomies of the other in pursuit of establishing a middle ground.

Whilst originality and seeking new creative direction are integral to my research, I am not looking to reinvent common practice per-se, but to enhance existing methods with a forward outlook, updating British brass band repertoire in support its inclusion in twenty-first century culture. Educational Consultant Dr. Estelle Phillips states that originality can be displayed in fifteen definitions, and the works here demonstrate innovation through three of these:

1. Using already known material but with a new interpretation.
2. Bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue.
3. Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies.  

(Phillips. 2000)

2.2: List of Works

Three extended works:

1. **Realms of Asgard** – an Elite-division test-piece commissioned by Jaren Hornmusikkforening and premiered at the 2015 Norwegian National Brass Band Championships. Aesthetic focus is on entertainment value, reintroducing the core ethos of the brass band to its audience, with test elements occurring as a natural derivative.

2. **Soprano Cornet Concerto** - composed in collaboration with the soprano cornet player Steve Stewart. Completed in 2016, the work utilises a bespoke four-valve instrument and begins to explore the plausibility of studio composition.

Three concert works:

4. **Dreamtime** - commissioned in 2013 for the Cory Band’s tour of Australia. The score researches an interdisciplinary approach, combining music, poetry, narration and innovative instrumental techniques.

5. **Mists on the River Wear** - is a second collaborative project, this time working with internationally acclaimed tuba soloist Joseph Cook. It examines the multifaceted capabilities of instrument, providing alternative repertoire to the stereotypical novelty solo.

6. **Starburst** - composed in 2014 for the *Greater Manchester Youth Brass Band*, this fast paced concert opener demonstrates my ongoing contribution to provide music specifically intended to attract younger people and audiences.
Chapter 3

3.1 Literature Review

This literature review provides further context to the portfolio, firstly exploring the nature of decline that has affected brass band numbers over the course of its history. Secondly, it reviews existing literature in the areas of contest, concert and solo repertoire, in which the roots of certain concepts and techniques developed in this portfolio are to be found.

Gavin Holman’s 2018 paper ‘How Many Bands?’, contradicts many previous estimations for the number of brass bands existing in the United Kingdom. It suggests that at the height of popularity (1895), there were 5,045 bands active and that presently, approximately 1,210 brass bands exist, a figure which has remained relatively static since the 1960’s (Holman. 2018).2 If band numbers have remained comparatively constant for almost sixty years, how has the perception of decline, acknowledged by many historians originated?

Both Prof. Trevor Herbert and Prof. Denise Odello suggest that decline was due to the ‘…centrality of contesting’ (Herbert. 2000), as the activity ‘…abandoned its morally-edifying origins and became somewhat insular’ (Odello. 2016). Holman’s data suggests a rapid decline between 1900 - 1910, significant perhaps that it coincides with the establishment of the National Brass Band Championships (Bevan. 1991), but between 1910 – 2010 a much more gradual deterioration is evident and it is feasible to suggest that a growing and continuing preoccupation with contest arena, has retracted the movement from public awareness, implying a more rapid decline than is actual.

In 2005 Alan McLaren3 said that, ‘being in a brass band is a bit like being in a secret society...little wonder our audiences are dwindling away and that even our major events are now struggling to fill seats.’ McLaren also inferred some negativity towards the contest forum, stating that it is ‘... fast becoming a self-indulgent pastime, of interest only to those directly involved’ (McLaren. 2005). Similar sentiments are echoed by Mike Kilroy,4 ‘it is unfortunate yet true that in recent years, brass bands have become increasingly isolated from

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2 Holman’s statistics do not indicate whether there is a variation in the numbers of performers participating in the hobby, or if an increase in the average age has occurred.
3 In 2005 Alan McLaren was the President of the Scottish Brass Band Association.
4 Mike Kilroy, Chairman of Brass Bands England, formally known as the British Federation of Brass Bands.
communities and each other along with an introspective attitude...[losing] sight of their common purpose’ (Kilroy. 2014). Professional trumpeter, John Wallace CBE, makes a suggestion of what this purpose might be; ‘in the 21st century it is my contention that those brass bands which have survived the de-industrialisation of Britain have a responsibility to prioritise this identification with their localities over the holy grail of competing, not only to survive, but also to distribute the beneficial effects of music more widely to a greater number of people’ (Wallace. 2017). Wallace’s response is timely, as many involved within the movement express feelings of pessimism:

‘...as with a lot of the British culture it is being eroded. I can’t see it lasting...It’s all too easy these days to slump in front of the TV, DVD or PlayStation.’

‘It’s only good playing if you have someone to play to, and as more and more of the older generation of listeners are dying off, the younger generation are more interested in other areas of popular music.’

‘...we’ve got to move with the times, we can’t be looking back all of the time.’

When considering the role of brass bands within current society, I share similar views to Wallace, who says, ‘...a brass band is not a musical machine that churns out contest results, but a resource for everyone to enjoy...its existence is to irrigate its locale with live music and help give its local community, young and old alike, some sense of rootedness and continuity in the face of...the global digital revolution’ (Wallace. 2017).

There is a great deal of discussion about the positive and negative attributes of contesting within available literature. Other than Roy Newsome’s outline of popular repertoire in ‘The Modern Brass Band,’ little is observed about the repertoire’s entertainment value or how this connects with its audiences. When considering whether the decline in popularity has manifested because repertoire has neglected to stay in vogue, comparisons can be made with the broader world of Western European Art Music, ‘...Its creators and devotees...stereotyped as unhip and out of touch with popular culture,’ says David Cutler, author of ‘The Savvy

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5 Gillian Hibberd’s 2006 paper British Brass Bands: Their History and Role in the Culture of Britain at the Start of the Twenty-First Century. A response to her questionnaire. - p.64.
6 ibid
7 Statement made by the Jim Davies, celebrated cornetist, taken from a collection of personal reflections made by notable bandsman and published by Arthur Taylor in his 1983 book Labour and Love.
Musician.’ Cutler continues to say that ‘...many view the [orchestral] experience as foreign, disconnected and largely irrelevant’ (Cutler. 2010). When considering the music industry collectively, orchestras, like brass bands, have a relatively ‘...small fan base [that] seems to be limited to two demographics in many communities: other schooled musicians and an increasingly aging audience that is not replenishing itself’ (Cutler. 2010).

As far as can be ascertained, there is no evidence to suggest that composers for the medium consciously write with the intention of engaging the wider audience, setting my work aside from my contemporaries. However, there are examples where composers recognise the need to write for the appeal of a younger generation, denotable by the inspiration behind such works, as in the case of Lucy Pankhurst’s *Mr Sonnemans’ Unusual Solution* (2012), based on the stories of *Making Rain and Other Things Is Our Business* by Tony Smith.

**3.2: Test-pieces**

‘The value of a substantial brass band work is determined more or less exclusively by its potential as a test-piece.’

Paul Hindmarsh

Contesting is an integral element of the band movement and to advocate a removal of this popular component would unnecessarily challenge its long-established heritage. However, comments like ‘...unmusical, technical exercises that lack the substance...[of] older contest repertoire,’ and ‘...audiences find it [bespoke music] difficult and unrewarding to listen to,’ suggest that a change in direction is perhaps warranted, even from within the movement itself. Wallace comments that ‘...with notable exceptions, [test-pieces] seem to be aimed towards a fearsome technical examination...rather than musical communication of universal truths to a music-loving audience’ (Wallace. 2017). It is fair to assume that the comments of Wallace and the others, are directed towards the upper stratum of test-piece writing, but perhaps a little contentious to suggest that all test works conform to this oversimplification. The following discussion revolves around test-pieces in both serious and

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9 A response to Gillian Hibberd’s research questionnaire. - p.61.
10 ibid.
commercial vein and the aesthetic observations made of each can be applied to the subsequent musical categories that follow.

The complexity of art music aimed for use by the Championship Section has evolved exponentially since 1913\textsuperscript{11}, mainly through the creative input of composers drawn from the broader musical world. Gustav Holst, Harrison Birtwistle, John Pickard, John McCabe and James MacMillan, have all enriched the repertoire with their own contemporary techniques, in-turn influencing the growing body of composers writing almost exclusively for brass band. Embracing a contemporary voice for Championship literature is commonly seen as the doyen in artistic advancement. Rory Boyle’s \textit{Muckle Flugga} (2014), typifies the modern brass soundscape, combining extensive chromaticism, dense, polyphonic and at times, intensely dissonant textures, which can be difficult to understand from the layman’s perspective. Many contemporaries use similar approaches, with notable examples being Simon Dobson’s \textit{Journey of the Lone Wolf} (2014), Judith Bingham’s \textit{Prague} (1996) and John McCabe’s \textit{The Maunsell Forts} (2001). Although McCabe’s work is undeniably contemporary, his approach is more sympathetic to the idiosyncrasies of the ensemble, an attribute found in his \textit{Cloudcatcher Fells} (1985) and also the music of Philip Wilby, particularly \textit{Vienna Nights} (2006) and \textit{Red Priest} (2010). Wilby’s compositional technique, ‘…mediates between past and present, personal expression and musical function, enabling him [Wilby] to write music which amateur performers and non-specialist audiences can enjoy’ (Hindmarsh. 2000). Although Hindmarsh’s comments may be true of works like \textit{Paganini Variations} (1991), I’d argue that Wilby’s musical language on the whole provides significant challenges for unscholarly musicians and audiences to comprehend. Similar approaches to Wilby can be seen in the work of Torstein Aagaard-Nilsen, Johan de Meij and Peter Graham, who uses elements of aleatoric writing, advanced chromaticism, rhythmic complexity and recorded ‘ambient’ sound, in \textit{The Triumph of Time} (2015), within an otherwise light music palette. This ‘softening’ approach to modernist practice demonstrated in Graham’s work, can also be seen in the music of Derek Bourgeois, Martin Ellerby and Philip Sparke, and is where \textit{Realms of Asgard} begins its exploration; using the language of Modernism but exploited it in a more commercial manner than the aforementioned writers, creating a concert item as much as a test-piece.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Labour and Love} - Percy Fletcher, was the first original brass band test-piece and composed in 1913.
During the 1960’s, modern dance orchestras, big bands and music of cinema heavily influenced band repertoire (Hindmarsh. 2000) and throughout the 1970s and 80s Goff Richards and Philip Sparke, amongst others, continued to developed this commercial light music language. Of Sparke, Hindmarsh writes, ‘... accessible, and direct – embodying the traditional values of popular brass band, enlivened by the polished style of jazz, of the cinema and of the Americans like Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland’ (Hindmarsh. 2000). Indicative by works such as London Overture (1984), Music of the Spheres (2005) and Year of the Dragon (1984), the popularity of this prolific writer has, arguably, elevated his music as being ‘the sound’ of the contemporary brass band, with a host of imitators following suit that include Alexander Comitas, Paul Lovatt-Cooper, and Christopher Bond. Elements of Peter Grahams writing, particularly Harrison’s Dream (2000) and Journey to the Centre of the Earth (2005), also bear Sparke’s impact. Whilst Sparke and Graham continue to influence subsequent composers, few achieve the rigorous musical arguments evident in their work, adopting a ‘building block’ approach to writing that adheres to the Test-Piece Check List school of composition (Smith. 2015). This method is comparable to some film music, where melodic development and harmonic diversity appear to be of secondary importance to the manipulation of texture. Dr. Howard Evans observes that much new contest and concert music, ‘... embrace[s] the compositional techniques of film scores...this is in a technical manner, rather than in a developed compositional manner... compositional form does not always appear highly developed, but is often simply a collection of ideas, that sometimes lacks a thematic of identity and process.’ Evans believes that much of the so-called cutting edge music in pursuit of innovation has the air of the Emperor’s New Clothes, suggesting that a middle-ground must be found whereby musical integrity is retained whilst providing appeal for non-specialised listeners. Evans suggests that Realms of Asgard sits firmly in this middle-ground, ‘...whereby the technical elements serve the music along with its programme and development.’

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12 ‘The Test Piece Check List school of composition (TPCL)’ is a term coined by 4barsrest columnist Sandy Smith, in his article Soapbox Opinion-Heading into a musical cul-de-sac? 17th August 2015.
13 Personal correspondence with Dr. Howard Evans. Received 12/07/2018.
14 ibid.
In contrast to the frequently complex world of Championship literature, the majority of lower section test works are often extensions of concert repertoire, commonly written in three or four movement suites, as can be seen in Appendix 6.2.

Eric Ball’s work *Indian Summer* (1950), epitomises the approach for Fourth Section writing. Written in four clear self-contained movements, the music is simplistic both in design and in language. Melodic ideas are developed minimally, utilising repetition and an exploration of instrumental combinations, creating timbral interest rather than expanding the development of motive. The harmonic language is diatonic in nature, again simplistic, using primary chords and closely related modulations. Orchestration is in a light music style, with beat displacement figures supporting a primary melody, voiced on one of the principal instruments (solo cornet or euphonium). ‘Doubling’ is heavily utilised as a practical necessity, to accommodate the anticipated limitations synonymous with the amateur ensemble. Although this is a mature work of over sixty years, it displays the foundations of common practice which are still adhered by today, with similarities seen in Peter Graham’s *Journal of Phileas Fogg* (2012), Dean Jones’ *An English Pastorale* (2013) and Rodney Newton’s *World Tour* (2006).

There are few instances where Fourth Section literature is approached from an art music aesthetic but a good example would be Bryan Kelly’s *Divertimento* (1971), the opening *Prelude* making simplistic yet effective use of sequence, call and response and contrapuntal dialogue. These techniques are comparable to those found in *A Malvern Suite* (1984) by Philip Sparke and John Golland’s *Prelude, Song and Dance* (1980), both of which display a complexity largely absent from more recent additions to the repertoire. Golland and Sparke reject the popular use of four bar phrasing, opting instead for long, sweeping melodies often shrouded with intricate countermelodies and more adventurous harmony. Golland’s finale *Dance*, is light in tone yet includes brisk changes in metre and heavy characterisation, providing a test element which also has entertainment value. Simon Dobson’s *Lydian Pictures* (2002), delivers a diverse work through its use of modality, the sharpened fourth of the mode challenging amateur musicians to understand its uncommon sound, and providing a contemporary edge that is largely absent in Fourth Section literature. *Visions* expands upon the techniques introduced by these writers, exploiting thematic material, *leitmotif*, bi-tonality, and evocative expression, more commonly found in higher grade music. Presented in a single movement, with thematic relationships woven throughout, the work challenges lower section
convention, expanding the genre into more diverse art music territory, yet retaining a level of practicality suitable for developing musicians.

2.2: Solo Repertoire

Although the majority of art music composed for the brass band revolves around the test-piece, there is a small collection of concert items and a growing canon of concerti. *Concerto for Soprano Cornet* could be considered a seminal work, as little original material exists for this colourful, yet seemingly overlooked instrument; with the two existing concertos, Bertrand Moran’s *Concerto for Soprano Cornet* (2004) and Stijn Aertgeert’s *Sunfield Concerto* (2015), use the *lingua franca* of more commercial methods. Other prominent works are succinct, three to four minute concert items also written in commercial vein, like Kevin Ackford’s *Adagio* (1999), Philip Sparke’s *Flowerdale* (2002) or Darrol Barry’s *Soliloquy* (2017), although Barry’s *Concertino in E-flat* (2008) and Edward Gregson’s *Rhapsody for E-flat Cornet* (1970), written under the *nom de plume* Robert Eaves, offer substantially more developed musical language.

*Concerto for Soprano Cornet* ‘... fits in the line of a Gregson work...the whole language and idiom is very accessible, but very developed, and very satisfying,’ suggesting it could easily sit alongside Gregson’s *Cornet Concerto* (2016), Joseph Horovitz *Euphonium Concerto* (1972) and Nigel Clarke’s *Mysteries of the Horizon* (2012). As with *Realms of Asgard*, the concerto falls within a middle-ground, combining contemporary technique and commercial language that enables virtuosic prowess without alienation of its listener. Despite the obvious similarities to existing repertoire, influence for the work is actually taken from a wider sphere of music, most notably Igor Stravinsky’s *Violin Concerto in D* (1931) and Alexander Arutiunian’s *Trumpet Concerto* (1950). The impressionistic sounds of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel are a common influence in my writing, evident here in the central movement *Poem*. The finale, *Scherzo*, has similarities to the ballet music of *Romeo and Juliet* (1935) by Sergei Prokofiev, and also the final movement of his seventh symphony.

The antithesis of the method for *Concerto for Soprano Cornet* can be found in *Mists on the River Wear*, intentionally diversifying the light music attitude with a modern tone and the

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15 Extract from personal correspondence with Dr. Howard Evans. Received 12/07/2018.
inclusion of multiphonics. Despite its capability of achieving a diverse range of emotions, from agile dexterity to profound expression, the tuba has struggled to shake loose its comedic stereotype. Original work for E-flat tuba is limited largely to serious repertoire, with notable concertos from Martin Ellerby, Philip Wilby, and Gareth Wood. Lighter works are on the increase, with prominent additions from Rodney Newton *Capriccio* (1990), Paul Lovatt-Cooper *Song for the Skies* (2010) and Darrol Barry *Impromptu for Tuba* (1991), and it is here that *Mist on the River Wear* best lies. The work expands lyrical tuba repertoire into the realm of cinema, conveying visual representation within its first movement - *Song*, a familiar technique in ensemble literature but less so in tuba repertoire. The work also explores the use of multiphonics within aesthetic context, a technique developed and commonly used by jazz performers such as Adrian Rollini, John Coltrane, and Wycliffe Gordon. The Norwegian tuba soloist Øystein Baadsvik incorporates multiphonics in his popular composition *Fnugg* (2004), as does multi-instrumentalist James Morrison, who has developed the method to virtuosic levels, allowing him to perform intricate lines in parallel movement, seen in the YouTube clip, ‘*James Morrison demonstrates multiphonics*’ (YouTube. 2007). *Mists on the River Wear* uses the technique in a lyrical setting, exploring the possibility of producing multiphonics in contrary motion and how they integrate within the artistic vision without producing novelty.

### 2.3: General Concert Repertoire

When considering how repertoire connects with its audience, David Cutler surmises the problem thus: ‘If the tunes are unfamiliar, the presentation seems sterile, and there are no other clues, how can we realistically expect to connect with new listeners?’ (Cutler. 2010) Brass bands retain a formal approach towards performance and for a twenty-first century audiences ‘…more accustomed to watching concerts, the lack of visual stimulus may seem humdrum and uninspired’ (Cutler. 2010). Entertainment contests such as *Brass in Concert, Wychavon Festival of Brass* and *Bolsover Festival of Brass*, are areas of the movement that continue to flourish, and it is permissible to suggest that this is because they offer a rare occasion when virtuosic musicianship can be combined with an unabashed entertainment. It is this basic concept that influences the creative decisions behind *Dreamtime*, which incorporates narration, poetry and instrumental effects as part of its appeal, as ‘...musical or
programmatic themes that connect with the general public increase perceived relevance while providing a point of entry for new listeners’ (Cutler, 2010).

The inclusion of narration in Dreamtime is comparable to existing works like Elgar Howarth’s Fireworks (1975), Philip Wilby’s Brass (2010), Andy Scott’s Battle of Barossa (2017) as well as my own An American Tale (2008). In the case of An American Tale, the opening music is used as underscore to the narration, fundamentally informative as much as being a creative component. Both Fireworks and Wilby’s Brass have involved narration and at times, particularly in the case of Brass, the narration overbears the musical content and for me, a balance in the collaboration is lost. Similar observations can be made of Scott’s Battle of Barossa, and whilst the inclusion of speech is innovative, using it as a contrasting timbre often working in counterpoint against the instrumental sounds, its use is overzealous, detracting from its overall effectiveness. In contrast, Dreamtime spreads periods of narration evenly across the duration of an otherwise instrumental work. When speech is introduced, the complexity of the music is reduced, so neither component interferes with the other, creating a coherent space for both features to complement one another.

Observing the ensemble’s historical mantra, arrangements of popular music remain a large component of concert repertoire. Over time, these have been supplemented with original material assuming a light music mode, Goff Richards Trailblaze (1982), Alan Fernie’s Prismatic Light (2012) and Philip Sparke’s Orient Express (1986) being good examples. Again, Sparke’s influence is noticeable on composers within this genre, particularly in Christopher Bond’s Spirits & Flares (2015) and Paul Lovatt-Cooper’s Enter the Galaxies (2009). Lovatt-Cooper’s later works Pound the Streets (2010), Wall of Sound (2010) and Road to Run (2014), are all aimed at younger performers, each being commissioned by a national youth brass band.16 Although on the surface these works appear complex, their fundamental language correlates with the simplicity discussed around Indian Summer, and whilst Lovatt-Cooper’s music provides undeniable excitement, Lucy Pankhurst’s Storm (n.d.), Oliver Waespi’s Fanfare and Funk (2006), and Simon Dobson’s Showstoppa! (2008) offer more ‘gritty’ concert repertoire. Starburst combines the excitement seen in Lovatt-Cooper’s music, by way of

16 Pound the Streets was commissioned by the National Youth Brass Band of Scotland, whilst Wall of Sound and Road to Run were both commissioned by the National Children’s Brass Band of Great Britain.
ostinato, angular/ staccato melodies and percussive scoring, with elements of the popular genres that influence Pankhurst and Dobson, namely Funk, House and Dance music. However, Starburst demonstrates this variety within traditional brass band convention, with regards to structure and form, homogeneity and lyricism, providing innovation within familiarity.

The articles in the Guardian - ‘Why Brass Bands are back in Vogue’ (Muggs, J. 2013), and Esquire magazine - ‘In Praise Of...Modern Brass Bands’ (Merrett, J. 2013), both suggest brass bands are regaining popularity, with groups like Hackney Colliery Band, Bare Brass and Mnozil Brass reintroducing the medium to mainstream audiences. The success of these groups lies with their repertoire, a fusion of funk and jazz renditions of popular music which reflect the taste of their audiences, further complimented by choreography and humour. Whilst this audience reconnection comes close to what my research aims to achieve, these groups derive from small ensemble traditions, the New Orleans band and the Flemish Septet, so it is therefore difficult to emulate the flexibility achieved by seven or nine instrumentalists, in the repertoire of a conventional brass band. Many of these groups acknowledge the influence Acid Brass\(^\text{17}\) has had on their own approach and similar projects like Just a Vibration,\(^\text{18}\) have done much to elevate the exposure of brass bands to contemporary audiences. However, in context these projects provide relatively short-term exposure, experiencing limited impact which don’t provide a complete solution to the long-term problem that this portfolio begins to explore.

\(^{17}\) Acid Brass was a 1997 collaboration between Jeremy Deller and the Fairey Band, combining the sound of the brass band with Acid House music.

\(^{18}\) Just a Vibration was a collaboration between the Hammonds Saltaire Band and London-based Indian composer Shri Sriram, which won the 2016 Wind and Brass category of the British Composers Awards.
Chapter 4

4.1: Realms of Asgard

Realms of Asgard (2015) is the culmination of approximately ten year’s research, unravelling the intricacies of composing a major work for Championship Section band. It was commissioned by Dr Howard Evans for Jaren Hornmusikkforeningen, a Norwegian Elite-division band looking to perform an original work at the 2015 Norwegian National Brass Band Championships. As with the majority of my work, it is tailored to the commissioning body, taking inspiration from the Norwegian Yggdrasill myth, a colossal Ash tree that contains the nine worlds of the Norse cosmos within its boughs. Each realm is home to a mystical or mythical race including dwarves, gods, demi-gods, giants and elves.

The work has a clear audience development agenda, from both the perspective of performer and spectator that is transparent enough that it can be understood on multiple levels. For the amateur, it is an evocative pictorial representation, using familiarity and semiotic reference to provide a comprehensible narrative. For the aficionado the work provides a complex dialectic argument in need of resolution, exploring the full capabilities of the ensemble through a variety of contemporary techniques. For bandsmen, it creates both individual and ensemble-musicianship challenges that remain practical to resolve, integrating the ‘test’ element within the natural fabric of the music.

Prof. Paul Martin Lester suggests that ‘...we are becoming a visually mediated society’ (Lester. 2006). This is substantiated by considering the array of formats digital media is available in, alongside continual technological advances. The popularity of cinema extends beyond films to their soundtrack, many available on compact disc and receiving frequent live performances globally. When work began on Realms of Asgard, composing from a similar viewpoint was therefore logical when considering the appeal of music to contemporary audiences. A substantial proportion of existing repertoire is approached in a similar vein, yet Realms of Asgard differs from these as its imagery is not created through personal subjectivity, but instead uses existing metaphors that have established visual connotations, ‘...music as a meaningful system of sonic representation’ (Tagg. 2013). In essence, sonic representations are ideas of association, our subconscious creating mental images when stimulated by a suggestive sound. Associations occur naturally - the tolling of a bell...
representing religion, as we experience the sound at church. Others are orchestrated - Gustav Holst’s *Mars: the Bringer of War* evoking conflict, not deriving from the astrological connection, but more likely implanted in modern psyche through its frequent use as underscore in televised documentaries on the subject (Tagg. 2013).

This concept of sound recognition is used throughout *Realms of Asgard* to engage the interest of a non-specialised audience. The Gothic undertone of the opening movement, often symbolic of malevolence, as in Alan Silvestri’s *All Hallow’s Eve Ball*19 or Danny Elfman’s *This is Halloween*,20 here depicts Hell. The image is reinforced with a tolling tubular bell (bar two), suggesting a death knell. The bitonality of *Venus: the Bringer of Peace* and *Neptune: the Mystic* in Holst’s *The Planets*, is commonly associated as the ‘sound’ of space and otherworldly dimensions, influencing John Williams in *Star Wars* and also Howard Shore’s *Rivendell*, from *The Lord of the Rings* scores. Its application in *Realms of Asgard*, is used to evoke the ethereal world of the Elves, *Vanaheimr* (movement three) and *Álfheimr* (movement six). Other images are metaphorical as in *Jötunheimr – Home of the Giants* (bar 230), the main theme appearing initially as a tuba quartet or *Nidavellir* (letter I), where quick, angular figures are used to create impressions of foraging dwarves. In the final movement, timpani and snare drum imitate the galloping hooves of *Sleipnir, Odin’s horse* (bar 448).

Whilst *Realms of Asgard* can be enjoyed purely at this broad level, musical complexity and deeper semiotic reference are included to appeal to more scholarly musicians. The motif for *Gjallarhorn* – a golden horn that can be heard across the nine worlds, appears as a cameo in several movements but most significantly at letter X, written for a quartet to denote the four corners of the world. The lyre, instrument of the gods, is suggested by vibraphone and glockenspiel glissandos (bar 205) and the distinctive timbre of soprano cornet and flugelhorn are chosen to represent the Gods of Purity and of Fertility, bar 191 and 210 respectively.

The majority of the work is based on a twelve-tone row (*figure 4.1*), and other twentieth-century techniques such as quartal and self-replicating harmony, isorhythm and cross-rhythm (*figure 4.2*) feature frequently, having become an integral part of my compositional method.

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19 Cue form Alan Silvestri’s score to *Van Helsing*, 2004.
20 Cue from Danny Elfman’s score to *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, 1993.
The inclusion of contemporary writing techniques is again comparable to existing literature but *Realms of Asgard* does not sound overtly modern. Simon Dobson and Philip Wilby, as well as others, apply similar techniques in an absolute way which give their music a contemporary edge that *Realms of Asgard* intentionally challenges to provide a musical tone with wider appeal, much as John Williams achieves in *Anakin’s Theme*.21

The appeal to bandsmen is the inclusion of twentieth-century techniques which provide the necessary ‘test’ aspect. Although the work was commissioned as a test-piece and functions thus, it was composed from a concert work perspective, exploring both commercial and art music attributes. In this way, it assumes the stance of previous methods, as Paul Hindmarsh observes of Holst’s *A Moorside Suite* (1928); ‘...the writing is clear, free of empty rhetoric. His primary concerns were musical... he produced a work whose considerable difficulties...rise naturally out of the compositional process’ (Hindmarsh. 1991). In essence,

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21 Cue from John Williams score to *The Phantom Menace*, 1999.
the method utilised for *Realms of Asgard* provides a balance of components suitable for a variety of purpose.

The popularity of film and television adaptations such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Game of Thrones*, *Harry Potter*, and the soundtracks which accompany these films is widespread. Applying a similar language to *Realms of Asgard*, enables listeners to understand and enjoy it, regardless of their knowledge about brass band culture. A balance of musical sophistication is achieved by combining commercial and art music qualities that respects the ensembles primary function: entertainment. *Realms of Asgard* is still in its adolescence, and time is needed to gauge what impact the work will have on the development of repertoire. However, since the works premiere, it has been acknowledged favourably and is currently under consideration for use at the coveted *British Open Championships* and several leading European competitions, giving an indication of the works potential stature. In time, I believe the approaches invested will have a significant impact on how future composers write in a cinematic vein for the medium.

4.2: *Concerto for Soprano Cornet*

*Concerto for Soprano Cornet* is a collaboration with Steve Stewart, soprano cornet player with the Cory Band. Our initial discussions established that the work would demonstrate technical aptitude and versatility, through an amenable style which had broad appeal. Both Steve and I have a fondness of jazz and Claude Bolling’s *Toot Suite* (1981) was a potential template, as was Nathaniel Shilkret’s *Concerto for Trombone* (1942). Influence finally came from Alexander Arutiunian’s *Trumpet Concerto* (1950), as we both wanted to produce a work that embraced the characteristics of Romanticism.

As the project progressed Steve took possession of a bespoke four-valve instrument which I was keen to utilise. As far as can be ascertained this is the first work of its kind to explore the extended compass attainable by this instrument. This extended range is compared with that of the standard three-valve instrument in (*figure 4.3*).

*Figure 4.3: Range comparison between the three- and four-valve soprano cornet.*
The primary aim for this work is similar to *Realms of Asgard*, to achieve a wide audience appeal however, unlike the test-piece and the other works within this portfolio, the technique is largely absolute, with the exception of a few references to reflect Steve’s Scottish heritage; the reoccurring triangular motive (figure 4.4), signifying the Pentland Hills from where Steve originates, and the ‘scotch snatch’ (figure 4.5), a subtle Celtic homage.

Figure 4.4: Footfall on the hillside.

Figure 4.5: ‘Scotch snatch.’

Adopting an absolute method provided significant challenges when attempting to increase music’s attractiveness and despite its light, lyrical nature, the first movement is perhaps the most difficult to comprehend from an amateur perspective, but subsequent movements achieve the aim more convincingly. *Poem*, which explores the instruments lowest register which is notoriously difficult to voice yet dark and sonorous in character, takes influence from Debussy’s *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* (1894) and *Nuages* from his *Trois Nocturnes* (1899). Debussy’s impressionistic style remains popular with audiences through concert performance and also its use in film and television, yet within a band context it is relatively uncommon. The result here is perhaps more akin to Ravel than Debussy in style. *Scherzo*, assumes the traditional stance of a finale, providing a *tour de force* for the soloist. The appeal of this movement lies in its circus-like character, which provides excitement, unpredictability, flamboyance and most importantly humour, engaging with the audience at an entertainment level, rather than perplexing them with mere technical virtuosity.

The level of virtuosity displayed in the work is in itself exploring new ground, pushing beyond the limitations of what has previously been achieved in alternative literature for the instrument, with regards to technical expertise and stamina. This is achieved by way of a
studio composition method, which enabled greater technical freedom from both soloist and ensemble, fulfilling a secondary aim of this portfolio. The inclusion of ambient and electronic elements as part of the creative process had initially been discussed and rejected, feeling it would place the work too far from convention, potentially alienating audiences before any impact had been achieved. Approaching the project from a studio angle has enabled the role of the accompanying ensemble to be redefined, increasing its involvement and expanding its complexity to match that of the soloist, making it an integral component of the overall aesthetic, rather than providing a blank canvas for the soloist to inject colour upon. In solo literature, the soprano cornet is largely overlooked and the concerto provides an opportunity to challenge the instrument’s perceived limitations in persona and technical versatility.

Whilst composing the work from a studio perspective has enabled the level of complexity to increase exponentially, the concept has not been fully embraced. Fully integrating electronic and traditional methodologies could have expanded the artistic boundaries of brass band repertoire to new levels, however the approach shown here has still enabled ‘live music’ to extended beyond current limitations, and is the first step to introducing sound manipulation, ambient and ‘new vantage point’ recording techniques to the compositional processes of band music.

The premiere recording of *Concerto for Soprano Cornet* was released on Steve Stewart’s debut album *Over the Horizon* and has already achieved widespread interest in the international brass band scene.

4.3: Visions

*Visions* was commissioned to celebrate the centenary of Briton Ferry Band, who requested a multi-functional work for contest and concert use which reflected their geographical location. Unlike my previous works, *An Elgar Portrait* (2006) and *New World Sketches* (2007), which assume the prevailing trends of lower section contest music, *Visions* seeks to challenge this method, achieving a higher creative integrity whilst observing the practical needs of developing performers.

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22 *Over The Horizon* – Steve Stewart, Cory Band and Philip Harper. DOY CD376
Almost as a precursor to *Realms of Asgard*, albeit on a smaller scale, *Visions* seeks to achieve a comprehensible narrative again through sonic recognition. Movement one, *Briton Ferry* uses modality to evoke its pastoral setting, similar to Vaughan Williams *The LarkAscending* (1914) and John Powell’s *This is Berk*. The percussive texture seen in Brunel’s *Vision* creates industrial sounds comparable to the effects heard in James Horner in *Hard to Starboard*\(^\text{24}\) and *Coronation Scot* (1938) by Vivian Ellis. *Giant’s Grave* takes influence from Igor Stravinsky’s *Spring Rounds* from *The Rite of Spring* (1913). It is fair to say that the majority of audiences are largely unfamiliar with Stravinsky’s music *per-se*, but his impact on the compositional style of many film and video-game composers, often using his techniques to create drama or mystery is notable, hence its inclusion here. Similarly, the distinct medieval character created in *Hen Gastell* does look to replicate a current musical genre to establish its familiarity, but instead suggests previous historical periods by way of heraldic fanfares, fugato and parallel movement, similar in approach to Ramin Djawadi’s theme for *Game of Thrones* or Michel Legrand’s 1973 score to *The Three Musketeers*.

The second aim for this work was to introduce compositional techniques that are commonplace in higher section repertoire but appear infrequently in works aimed at the Fourth Section, thus diversifying the musical language in literature of this type.

As previously highlighted, a substantial number of Fourth Section test-pieces are suites and although *Visions* has four clear sections it is through-composed. The reasoning for this was partly obstinate, providing an alternative to customary offerings but also artistic, using the physicality of the River Neath, a single constant throughout the town’s development symbolically, by way of a river motive (*figure 4.6*), which links the individual sections of the work together and unifies its musical voice.

*Figure 4.6: The river motive.*

Motivic development is intrinsic to *Visions*, more so than in comparable repertoire which in the main is constructed with multiple themes often presented in sequence, or contained in

\(^23\) Cue from John Powell’s score to *How To Train Your Dragon*, 2010.  
\(^24\) Cue from James Horner’s score to *Titanic*, 1997.
an underlying structure that doesn’t necessarily allow ideas to relate to one another. The above river theme derives from the opening motive of bar one (figure 4.7), which is the basis for a number of other thematic ideas that follow (figure 4.8).

Figure 4.7: Initial motive

The attitude towards textural manipulation in Visions also moves away from common Fourth Section practice, introducing periods of sparse orchestration (bar 159), intricate contrapuntal writing (letter Z) and complex harmonic language (bar 242). These methods develop the simplicity of other literature, elevating Visions into art music territory. The approach also produces naturally occurring challenges, addressing the work’s intended purpose as a test-piece.

The opening baritone solo initially appears simplistic, but its sparse accompaniment, quiet dynamic, and the addition of a contest environment in performance, creates a significant challenges for the amateur musician to overcome. In Fourth Section literature, the baritone along with some of the other featured soloists, soprano cornet, solo horn, tenor trombone and tuba, are usually viewed as accompanying or reinforcing instruments, but here they are used as alternative colours to the predictable cornet or euphonium solo, and a clear move away from existing practice.

As a concert item, Visions provides a work with as much substance and technical maturity as some higher section repertoire. The filigree textures found at various points throughout
the score, notably in *Hen Gastell*, reach a complexity seldom seen in Fourth Section repertoire. Whilst the collective effect sounds difficult, the individual figures used to create the texture are relatively simple and attainable for most musicians of this level. As a contest work, where *Visions* will most likely have the greatest exposure, it provides the whole ensemble with significant challenges to overcome and despite maintaining an awareness of practicality during the compositional process, ‘...*Visions* was an ambitious choice stretching many of the finalists to the limit.’

This said, the innovative approach to the work is proving popular, to the extent that it is frequently chosen as an own choice test-piece. *Visions* has also gained international recognition, being used as the Third Division test-piece for the *Dutch National Championships* in 2016 and also the *Australian National Championships* in 2017.

### 4.4: *Dreamtime*

*Dreamtime* was commissioned by Philip Harper for the Cory Band’s tour of Australia in 2013. The only stipulation for the work’s content was that it should encourage audience discussion. As with the other works in the portfolio, *Dreamtime* also promotes audience development, achieving this by introducing new attitudes towards modern concert repertoire.

Initial inspiration for *Dreamtime* came from the book *Gadi Mirrabooka: Australian Aboriginal Tales from the Dreaming* (McKay, McLeod, Firebrace-Jones & Barber. 2001), which discusses the spiritual beliefs and vivid mythology of the Aboriginal people, commonly referred to as *The Dreaming Stories, Dream Time or Songlines*. This concept appealed to me for several reasons as it was relatable to the commission, contained naturally evocative material, and provided scope to include narration. As far as I am aware, this is the first time that Aboriginal stories have been used as inspiration for an original brass band composition.

I have been associated with Cory Band since 2008 and an initial popular work to emerge from this relationship was *An American Tale* (2009) which was part of an American inspired programme for the entertainment contest *Brass in Concert*. The success of this piece lies partly in the creative treatment of the folk-tunes within it, but also the work inclusion of

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narration and film as part of its creative concept, as seen in the YouTube clip ‘An American Tale: Robert Childs & Cory Band’ (YouTube. 2014).

Narration is introduced at three points throughout Dreamtime, expanding on its use in An American Tale. Initially in the opening bars it is informative, explaining the origins of the Dream Time and a brief synopsis. A complete story, The Waking of the Sun, is presented at letter G, and finally at letter L, selected lyrics from John Kirkpatrick’s song Dreamtime are adapted to serve as a poetic précis to the work.26

From an artistic outlook, I wanted to integrate narration as a timbral element, contrasting it with the sounds of brass and percussion, yet combining them in such a way that allowed them to complement rather than detracted from one another. This was achieved in the introduction through a sparse orchestration, the voice, solo horn and soprano cornet, working initially in ‘call and response,’ which develops quickly into a more complex contrapuntal texture. At letter G, the harmonic and rhythmic content of the ensemble becomes static, working in a similar manner to how music-loops are employed in video-game underscore, when on-screen activity is limited or when menu screens are displayed. Here, the instruments provide a colourful backdrop for narration to work against but doesn’t inhibit it. At letter L, musical content is more involved than at pervious points narration is introduced. Clarity is maintained as the metre of the poem has been used to influence the rhythmic content of the principal theme, complementing one another although they are not specifically aligned in performance. The addition of narration clearly provides the audience with direct insight into the work’s meaning, increasing its effectiveness from an entertainment perspective.

The work also includes suggestive musical gestures to enhance the Aboriginal theme further. The opening drone on tubas and euphoniums is performed with multiphonics, imitating the sound of digeridoos. Using instruments unconventionally like this, not only enriches the overall artistic effect but also provides a distinct uniqueness, making the work more memorable. Aboriginal music is largely percussive in nature and although Dreamtime does not look to replicate this authentically, percussion has an essential role at several points throughout, as at letter A. Here, percussion is written in compound measure, providing

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26 John Kirkpatrick’s song Dreamtime features on his 1994 album Earthling. Kirkpatrick’s lyrics are not quoted verbatim but adapted into a short poem of my own construction.
excitement and drive whilst the low brass are written in single time, intentionally highlighting the slow, stoic statement of the chorale which was chosen to reflect the spirituality associated with the *Dreaming* concept. This alternative method to orchestration moves away from common practice, adhering to the specific roles of certain instruments, making full use of the available timbres within a commercial approach.

*Dreamtime* adds to the growing number of works that include narration and is being used as an effective case-study for student composers looking to include similar concepts in their own creative output. The work also achieved its primary purpose to stimulate discussion, with the work causing some controversy between Anglo-Celtic Australians on Cory Band’s tour of the country, indicative that it has engaged audience interest.

### 4.5: Mist on the River Wear

*Mists on the River Wear* is the second collaborative project in the portfolio, this time with international tuba soloist and clinician Joseph Cook. The work was completed in 2011 whilst Joseph was principal E-flat tuba with Black Dyke Band, with the aim of demonstrating the multifaceted capabilities of the tuba within a single work. It also looks to introduce alternative compositional techniques not commonly applied in light music repertoire, fully integrating them within its otherwise commercial language.

Few works in existing tuba repertoire make use of the naturally lyrical quality of this surprisingly versatile instrument and in the hands of someone like Joseph, it has a similar ‘vocal’ quality to the euphonium. Aligning with the running theme of the portfolio, the opening movement *Song*, sets out to evoke discernible images; the uncertainty of mist created by a lack of obvious pulse, the undulating tenor horn figure of *letter B* suggesting the ebb and flow of the river, and the blocked, parallel movements at bar 33, evoking the emerging walls of *Durham Castle*. It is also in this movement where multiphonics are introduced as a subtle but innovative addition to the works creative palette.

Expanding from James Morrison’s application of the technique, highlighted in the literature review, the work investigates whether the true and vocalised pitches of multiphonics can achieve a level of independency, allowing the production of both melody and bass line simultaneously. It was established that the vocalised part can change pitch whilst the instrumental tone remains static and *vice-versa*, demonstrated in bars 46 - 48.
Whilst increased flexibility of each voice was possible, the action contradicted the natural cognitive reflex of the performer, which wants to mimic the process of the leading voice. For example, if the leading voice moved in a rapid upward motion, the vocalised voice would naturally copy it, a reflex almost impossible to contradict, hence the simplicity of its use here. Contrary motion was also achievable, when the frequencies of pitch related closely to one another, i.e. between intervals of a third, perfect fifth and octave, but the intervals outside this triadic relationship or chromatic pitches proved difficult to maintain pitch and intonation, again the brain trying to resolve the conflict of sound.

The second movement *Dance*, is more in line with other existing up-tempo repertoire, displaying similar vibrancy and *bravura*. However, the sparse orchestration, mild dissonance, and re-referencing of material, demonstrates a move away from the attitudes of similar light music approaches.

*Mists on the River Wear* gave my first real insight into the collaborative process, facilitating the realisation of some early conceptual ideas, but in retrospect it perhaps lacks the compositional finesse displayed by other works in this portfolio. The approach of the first movement alone, demonstrates a readiness to deliver general concert repertoire of a higher intellectual content than is otherwise seen, providing amateur audiences with a greater challenge than other writers are perhaps prepared to afford them. Multiphonics are cohesive in their application, working fluently with other compositional aspects but the technique is uncommon in performers and the opportunity to expand on the ideas presented here has yet to materialise. I feel the technique would work most successfully in conjunction with a studio composition approach as discussed earlier within this chapter.

4.6: *Starburst*

The final work of this portfolio is *Starburst*, which is dedicated to the ‘Greater Manchester Youth Brass Band,’ who gave the premiere performance at the Bridgewater Hall, Manchester in 2014. The work demonstrates an ongoing contribution to the development of twenty-first century band music with the aim of attracting participants from the youth music movement, as well as delivering music with popular appeal.
Rather than composing a work which intends to recreate or imitate the style of an alternative genre, in the way that the Acid Brass or Tubular Brass\textsuperscript{27} projects do, Starburst looks to integrate the prominent characteristics of current popular styles with the common practice of brass band. Herein lies its strength, as the combination preserves brass band heritage yet creates a hybrid genre, appealing and accessible to audiences that remains unique to the medium. The work achieves this appeal primarily through its manipulation of texture.

The use of multiple layered textures, by way of ostinato and riff-based figures, is a common technique found in many popular genres including chart-music, film and video-game music. The work is based on several rhythmically orientated motives (figure 4.9). This style extends to the melody-line (figure 4.10), which is clipped and \textit{staccato} in its construction, a common approach in the thematic material of chart-music but in this case, influence actually comes from Kenneth J. Alford and his march \textit{Colonel Bogey} (1914). When these ideas are combined, it creates a dense musical sound which relies heavily on pulse and beat to provide navigation and maintains interest, again similar to many other popular music genres. It is this rhythmic identity which, for me defines twenty-first century musical trends and a fundamental aspect absent from a large proportion of current brass band repertoire.

\textit{Figure 4.9: Opening ostinato in cornets.}

![Opening ostinato in cornets.](image)

\textit{The bass-line motive (letter C).}

![The bass-line motive (letter C).](image)

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Tubular Brass} is Sandy Smiths 2017 realisation of Mike Oldfield’s iconic 1973 \textit{Tubular Bells} album, for brass band.
The repetitive, multi-layered rhythmic techniques more commonly associated with R&B, funk, dance, house and chill-out anthems are integral components to the approach of *Starburst*, and whilst it provides a contemporary sound on its surface, its underlying structure is highly developed, harmonically and melodically, firmly rooted in the band tradition.

Figure 4.10: Principal theme.

Since its publication, *Starburst* has already firmly established itself as an important addition to modern repertoire, receiving many performances on both concert and contest stages by some of the leading youth ensembles in the United Kingdom including Greater Manchester Youth Brass Band, Elland Silver Youth, National Youth Brass Band of Scotland, University of Salford Brass Band, University of Nottingham Brass Band and Lancaster University Brass Band. The work has also been used internationally, most notably by Victoria Brass and Darebin City Brass of Australia and Jaren Hornmusikkforening from Norway.

Elland Youth Band conductor, Samantha Harrison said of *Starburst* that, ‘...from the first rehearsal, it was clear that they [the players] enjoyed the sounds they were making, creating a buzz in the room.’

Of *Starburst*’s effect on audiences, she stated, ‘...[its] been well received by our audiences...who enjoy the beat and the big sounds.’ And on a personal note, Samantha concluded by saying, ‘It’s clear that this kind of music and writing is engaging for the players and audiences and I would encourage bands to perform this music.’

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28 From personal correspondence with Samantha Harrison, via email on - 19/01/2018.
29 *ibid.*
30 *ibid.*
Chapter 5

Conclusion

This portfolio sought to explore various issues arising from the belief that brass bands have become disconnected from the societies they were once created to serve. Their insular approach to contesting and repertoire choice having a detrimental effect on the attractiveness, sustainability and ultimately the existence of the brass bands as a contemporary pastime in the long term future. The works presented in this portfolio explore three research aims, each of which looks to seek possible solutions or instigate a further area of enquiry to the underlying issue. The works and their aims are effectively shown in the following table.

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It is clear to see from this visual representation that the primary focus of each of the works is the reconnection of the medium with twenty-first century audiences. Whilst the works retain their own unique voice, they all address this research aim through an exploration of the natural void that exists between art music and commercial attitudes. Combining attributes from each of these groups to provide music of dual-purpose;

1. Appealing to audiences by providing music with entertainment as its core ethos, utilising accessible, familiar language that contemporary audiences can relate to.
2. Developing and expanding existing practices, providing bands with the means to preserve tradition and heritage, whilst reconnecting with its audiences.

In addition to audience development, **Starburst** seeks to promote the movement specifically to a younger generation who can relate to the musical language it utilises, whilst **Concerto for Soprano Cornet, Visions, Dreamtime** and **Mists on the River Wear**, each introduce new or neglected approaches that are not commonly utilised in current repertoire, providing alternative methods for this field of composition.
The approaches presented in this research have the potential to revolutionise the attitudes in existing compositional methodology as they highlight a need for a change in pursuit of sustainability and, with similar developments in other areas of the movement, encourage a regrowth of interest in brass bands within their locales. The approach undertaken in *Concerto for Soprano Cornet*, studio composition and the development of this technique as discussed, has the potential for the movement to fully embrace the digital revolution, extending the medium’s capabilities beyond current boundaries.

Developing a compositional approach which infuses traditional techniques and advanced studio practices is an area that I feel requires further exploration and is an area I intend to focus on more within my own research, both as a composer and educator. This practice could be expanded beyond composition for performance or record production, developed for educational purposes, to enhance the standard instrumentation of the ensemble or as an alternative medium to printed music. I also want to investigate why brass band music appears to flourish and revered by its audiences in Scandinavia and Japan, and whether adopting approaches from these countries has a positive impact on the popularity of brass bands in the United Kingdom.

The works contained within this portfolio are all still relatively young in relation to the wider brass band repertoire. Their increasing popularity is an early indication that the suggestions to change of existing methodology has aroused interest to suggest it provides a contribution to knowledge. The new attitudes introduced by the six works presented here, requires the support of likeminded additions, before their full potential is realised and can be gauged.
Appendices

Appendix 6.1

Numbers of the Participating Bands at the North West Area Regional Championships


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Section</th>
<th>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Section</th>
<th>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; Section</th>
<th>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Section</th>
<th>Championship</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>18</td>
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n.b. These figures do not indicate the variances created by promotion/relegation or any withdrawals from contest which may have occurred.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Movements</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tr>
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<td><em>World Tour</em></td>
<td>Rodney Newton</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td><em>St Andrew’s Variations</em></td>
<td>Alan Fernie</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td><em>An English Pastorale</em></td>
<td>Dean Jones</td>
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<tr>
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<td><em>Three Spanish Impressions</em></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Eric Ball</td>
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<td>Frank Hughes</td>
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</table>
Appendix 6.3 – Study Scores


Appendix 6.4 – Bibliography


Hibberd, G. (2006). *British Brass Bands: their History and Role in the Culture of Britain at the Start of the Twenty-First Century*. University of Brighton - p.55, 61, 64


