CHAPTER SIX

Don Banks (1923 -)

Don Banks is a highly respected, dedicated musician who has played a vital role in the contemporary music scenes of both England and, more recently, Australia. The number of commissions he has received from over twenty different bodies[1] is an indication of the reputation he has established for himself over the past years.

Born in South Melbourne in 1923, Banks's first lessons in composition were with A.E.H. Nickson and Dorian Le Gallienne at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium. In 1950, he left for England to study composition with Matyas Seiber "who was acknowledged as one of the finest and most inspiring teachers in the world".[2]

After spending two and a half years with Seiber, he won a scholarship to Salzburg to study with Milton Babbitt at the Seminar in American Studies. He was then awarded an Italian Government Scholarship in 1952 and studied composition and orchestration in Florence with Luigi Dallapiccola "whose influence is most obvious in Don Banks's instrumental craftsmanship ...".[3] Then, in 1956, Youth and Music, London, sent him to study with Luigi Nono.

[1]Philip Bracanin, "Don Banks," *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Frank Callaway and David Tunley (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.97.

[2]James Murdoch, *Australia's Contemporary Composers* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1972), p.16.

[3]William Mann, "The Music of Don Banks," *The Musical Times*, 109 (1968), p.719.

Besides writing his own music in these early years, Banks also worked as a professional orchestrator and composed scores for films, television documentaries and commercials. This provided him with an additional source of income, as well as developing a virtuoso instrumental technique which is a feature of his craftsmanship today.

From 1969 to 1971, Banks was Music Director of the University of London's Goldsmith's College. Then, in 1970, Professor Frank Callaway invited him to direct a Composer's Seminar in Perth which was followed by a lecture tour of Australia and New Zealand. The following year, the Australian National University offered Banks a Fellowship in the Creative Arts in Canberra which he accepted eagerly and then from 1973 - 1978 he was Head of Composition at the Canberra School of Music. At present, Banks is Head of Composition at the N.S.W. Conservatorium of Music in Sydney.

Banks once described Stravinsky as a suitable model for young composers: "With his magpie mind, he would take from anything and learn from anything; but it always came out as 'Stravinsky' music".[4] The above description fits Banks's own writing perfectly. He has utilized a great range of styles and techniques in his own works including both tonal and serial techniques, jazz idioms, electronic music and a combination of all of these. However, an outstandingly individualistic aspect of his work is "his constant search for new sounds and textures that must nevertheless be precisely controlled and neatly ordered".[5]

[4]Don Banks, as cited in Larry Sitsky, "Music at the Tempo of Life," *Hemisphere*, 18 (April, 1974), p.34.

[5]Mann, p.721.

Banks's vocal works cover a variety of styles. They include settings of traditional English folksongs (*Five North Country Folk Songs*, 1954; *Three North Country Folk Songs*, 1955), songs in the jazz idiom for voice and jazz quartet (*Settings from Roget*, 1966; *Three Short Songs*, 1971), and two works: one entitled *Tirade* (1968), for soprano, harp, piano and three percussion; the other an area from *Limbo* (1972) for voice, chamber group and tape.

Perhaps the most interesting of these are the jazz-inspired works which reveal but one facet of Don Banks's many-sided musicianship. His interest in jazz can be traced back to childhood and an introduction to jazz by his father who was a professional jazz musician. This was carried on into his youth when he played in jazz groups which served as a source of income and helped finance his trip overseas. Both *Settings from Roget* and *Three Short Songs* were written for Cleo Laine and the John Dankworth Quartet.

Settings from Roget is an example of third-stream music, a word used to describe a style which is a fusion between jazz and "serious"[6] music. Banks has used his own texts based on Roget's Thesaurus. The first piece, "World", is written in strict, twelve-note technique, "and is based on three four-note chords with jazz associations".[7] The second piece, "Silence", is freer in style and is based on Messiaen's second mode of limited transposition. The mode appears in the improvisatory section in the alto saxophone and bass part, while in the piano "it is

[6]Don Banks, "Third-Stream Music," *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association*, 97 (1970-71), p.59.

[7]Bracanin, p.111.

stated as a series of light-part chords to be used freely".[8] The music ends appropriately: four bars are beaten after the words "silence has come" after which the piece ends with a chord played by the quartet.

In Banks's article "Third Stream Music", he discusses the problems associated with improvisation "within the framework of a larger composition":[9]

> In my next work, *Settings from Roget*, written for Cleo Laine and the John Dankworth Quartet, ..., I was dealing with jazz musicians of the highest calibre, capable of an extensive range of interpretation, so the first two of the three pieces were twelve-note in origin. I devised a series which could encourage improvisation by its not being too unfamiliar in jazz terms ....[10]

Three Short Songs were commissioned by Lord Cheltenham and were first performed by Cleo Laine and the John Dankworth Quartet at the 1971 Cheltenham Festival. Unlike the *Settings from Roget*, they are "diatonic jazz pieces which Banks refers to as a 'kind of twentieth century lieder' ...".[11] The first and last songs are settings of two poems by Samuel Daniel (1562 - 1691), while the second song is a tongue-twister. They are scored for voice with an instrumental combination of alto saxophone, piano, electric guitar, string bass and jazz kit.

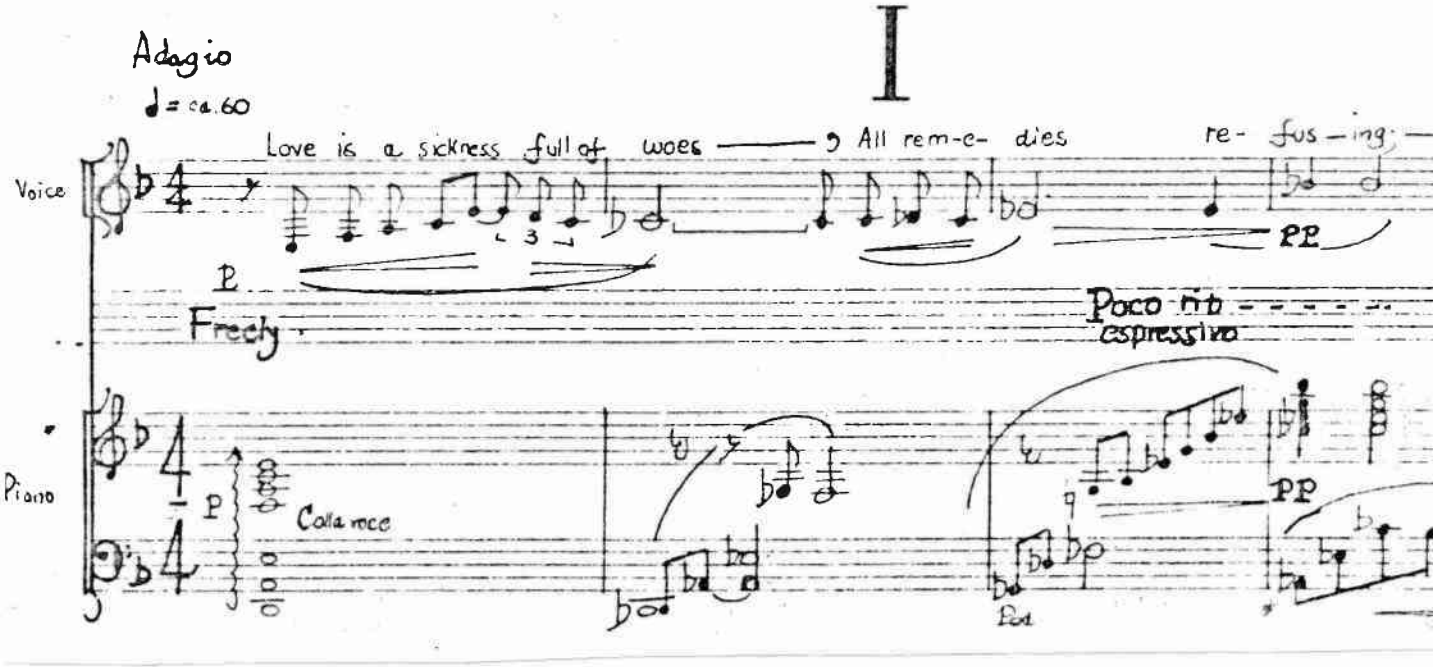
The first song, entitled "Love is a Sickness", begins with a freely moving passage for voice and piano:

[8] *Loc. cit.*

[9] Banks, p.62.

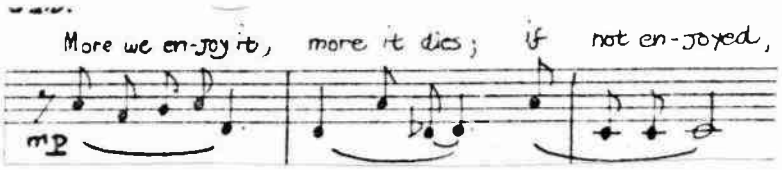
[10] Banks, pp. 62-63.

[11] Bracanin, p.111.



Ex. 1

The saxophone then takes up this melodic fragment "in tempo" to lead into the second part of the verse. Banks uses the same basic melody with slight variation for the second verse and fills out the accompaniment. Most noticeable in this song is the recurrence of falling intervals in the vocal part:

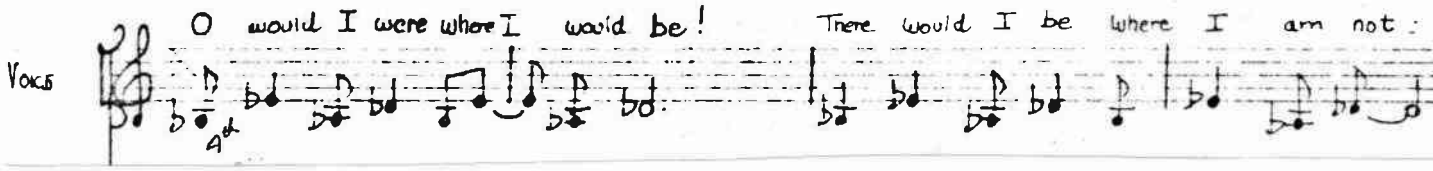


Ex. 2

"Suspira", the second song, acts as a complete contrast to the first in that Banks has chosen a more "up tempo" beat involving syncopations as a basis for the piece. This, coupled with his choice of text, makes this song an ideal centrepiece for the work. The text is as follows:

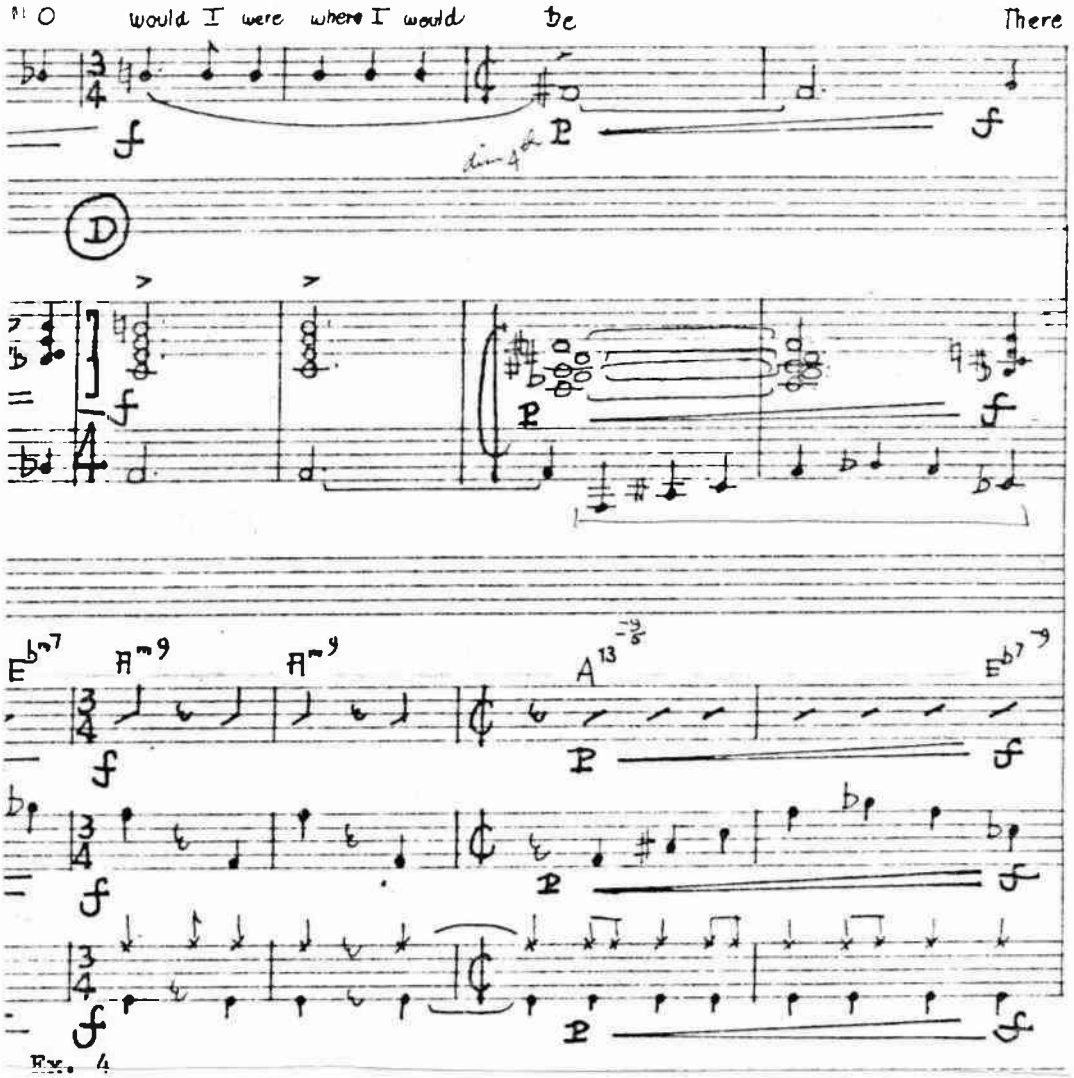
O would I were where I would be
There would I be where I am not
For where I am would I not be
And where I would be I cannot.

Banks uses improvisatory sections featuring different instruments to divide the song into four sections, the last of which acts as a coda. Each section consists of a four-bar introduction which is repeated, followed by a verse consisting of the whole text:



Ex. 3

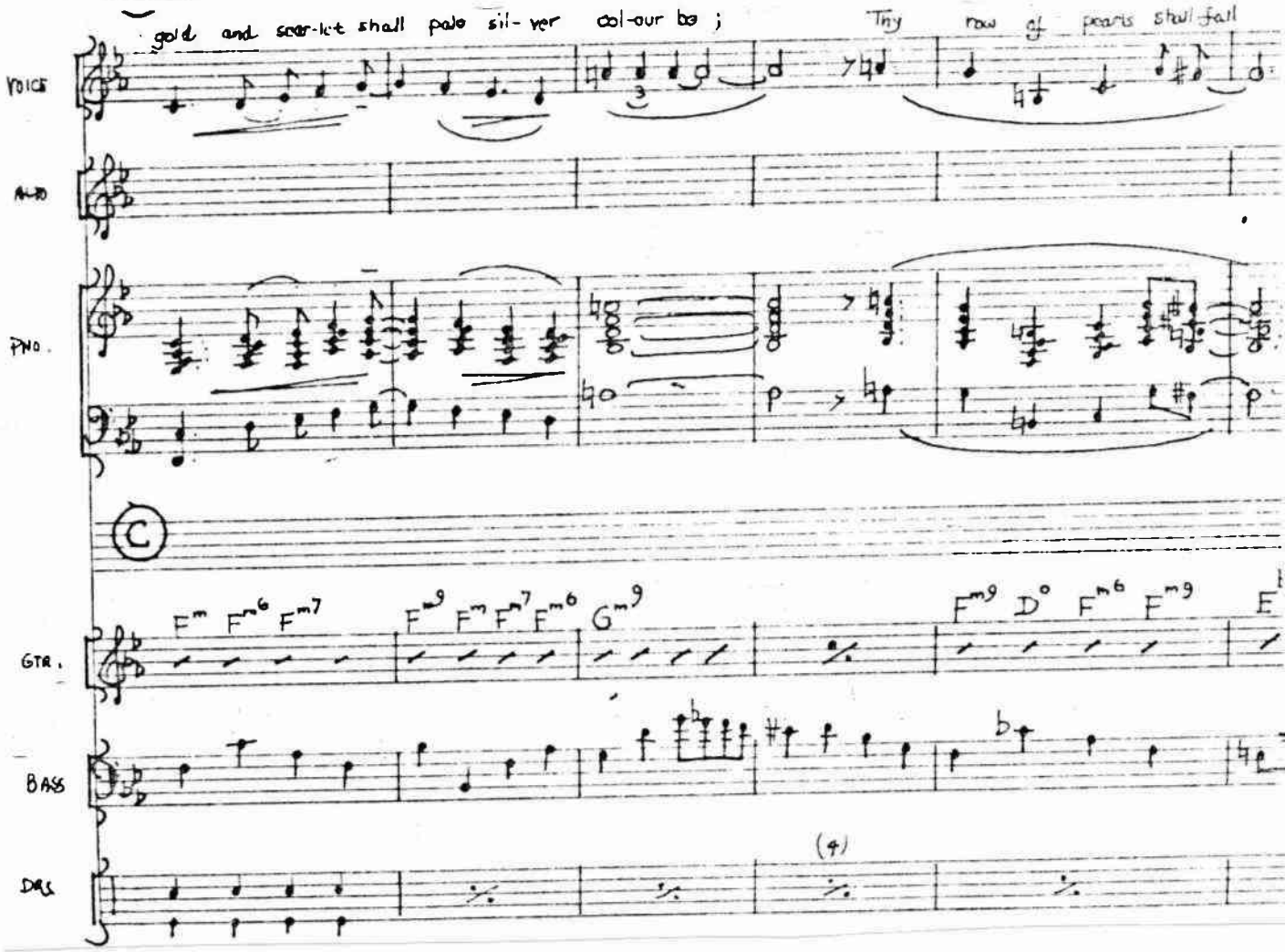
However, in the third section, a contrasting motif is introduced:



Ex. 4

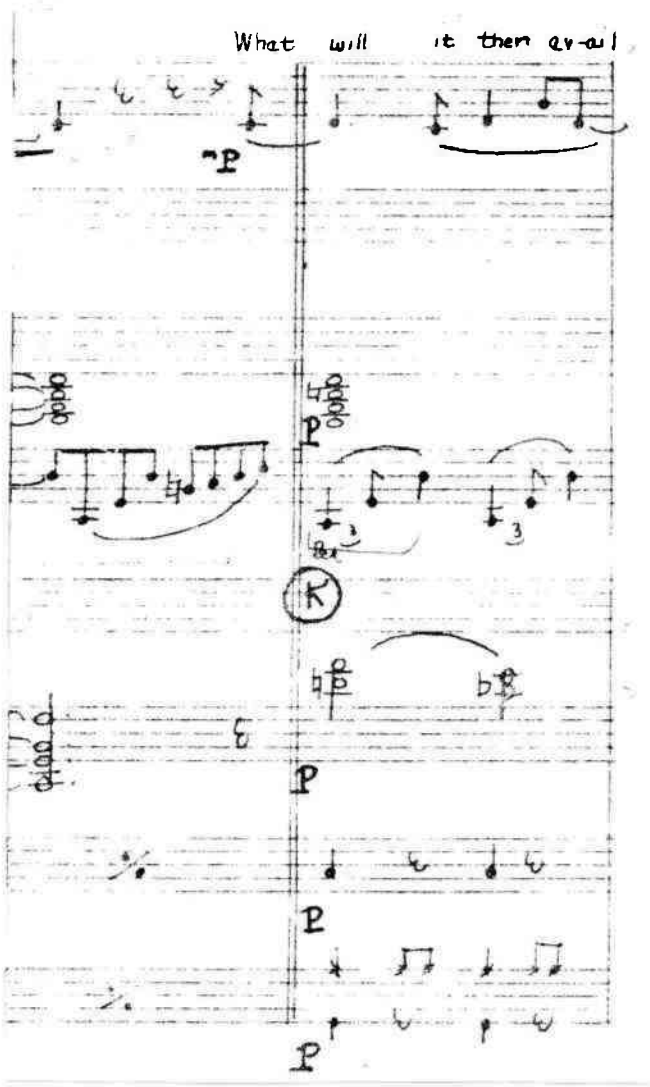
The fourth coda-like section then returns to the first melody.

"Enjoy thy April Now" is the title of the third song and it is similar in mood to the first song. It consists of five sections: the first two are basically the same with a few variations in the melody of the second:



Ex. 5

A saxophone solo based on the melody used in the first two verses heralds a third contrasting section. Following this, the melody of the first two verses is repeated after which, another mood change occurs involving the use of a different melody again:



Ex. 6

In all three songs, Banks utilizes the theme and variations structure so common to jazz and, in the second and third songs, interpolates the theme and variations with contrasting sections.

Not only is Banks a highly successful composer but he has been associated with many musical organizations in both Britain and Australia. Since his return to Australia, he has occupied various lecturing positions. He has always been concerned with the development of the up-and-coming young composers and has worked for better educational resources

in both institutions with which he has been affiliated: during his time in Canberra, he set up an electronic music studio at the Canberra School of Music. Australia is extremely fortunate to have Banks's formidable talents at the helm of compositional development in electronic music.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Malcolm Williamson (1931 -)

Another Australian-born composer who, like Don Banks, has been a vital force in the English musical scene, is Malcolm Williamson. He has lived in Britain for the past twenty-odd years and has enjoyed much success: receiving many commissions, serving on many committees, lecturing at many tertiary institutions,[1] as well as appearing as a soloist with some of the leading orchestras in England. Quite a number of his compositions have been published by various houses including Chappell and Co., Boosey and Hawkes Ltd., and Novello and Co.; many have been recorded also.

Born in Sydney in 1931, Williamson's formal music education was undertaken at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, where he studied piano, french horn and composition under Sir Eugene Goossens. In 1950, he travelled to Europe and, while in London, took composition lessons with Elisabeth Lutyens, a relatively unknown pioneer of serial writing in England. During this time, he also visited Paris, encountering there the music of Pierre Boulez and Messiaen.

On returning to England in 1953, Williamson decided to settle there indefinitely, taking further lessons with Elisabeth Lutyens and Erwin Stein, one of the more distinguished pupils of Schoenberg. These lessons resulted in a number of compositions employing the Schoenberg

[1]James Murdoch, *Australia's Contemporary Composers* (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1972), p.205.

twelve-note technique. Williamson finally obtained recognition in 1956 after the performance of his *Piano Sonata No. 1*.

Williamson's manner of writing is uninhibitedly eclectic and his compositions cover a wide range of differing styles.[2] He has always been fascinated by the memorable melodies of Richard Rogers, and has continued to write in two distinct veins: serious, intense pieces such as the organ work *Vision of Christ Phoenix* (1962), and light, bouncy, popular music evident in his piano concertos[3] and hymn settings.

Williamson has probably gained most success in music mainly for the theatre which includes a number of children's operas. These, together with the Helpman-Nolan ballet *The Display*, have established his reputation in Australia, as well as overseas. Another significant area is that of choral music: one of his better-known choral works is *Symphony for Voices* (1962).

A most profound influence on Williamson has been the theories and music of Messiaen (especially his organ works) which he studied early in his career. These influences are especially evident in Williamson's organ works. On the other hand, his orchestral works and works for orchestra and soloist exhibit a certain light-heartedness typical of much of his writing.

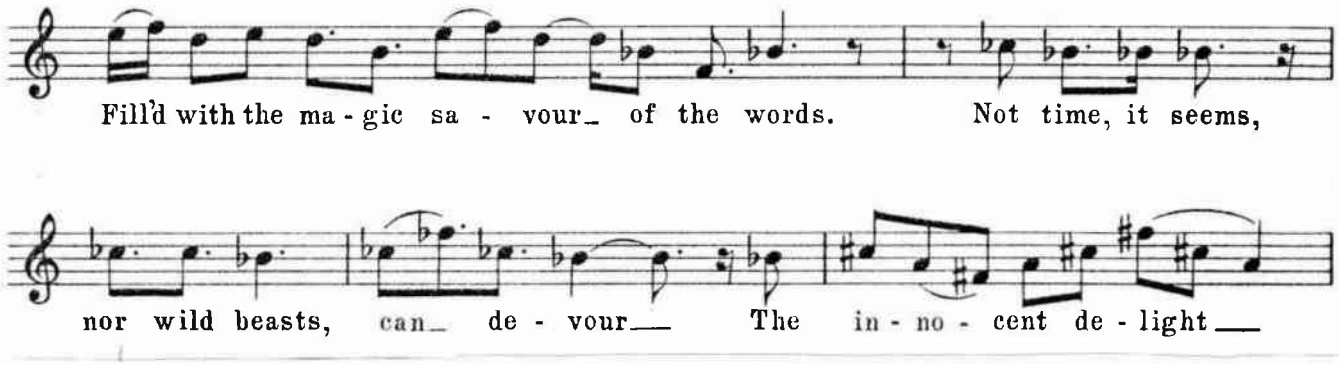
[2]Andrew Porter, "Some New British Composers," *Contemporary Music in Europe: A Comprehensive Survey*, ed. Paul H. Lang and Nathan Broder (New York: Schirmer, 1965), p.19.

[3]Brian Chatterton, "Malcolm Williamson," *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Frank Callaway and David Tunley (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.148.

Williamson's output for the solo voice is small and includes the *Celebration of Divine Love*, a solo cantata for high voice and piano, and *Three Shakespeare Songs*, both written in 1964. The former was composed for performance at a Park Lane Group concert and reflects the pious, Roman Catholic side of the composer's character (he was converted to Roman Catholicism in 1953). Set to a poem by James McAuley, *Celebration of Divine Love* exemplifies Williamson's natural feeling for the setting of the English language and his ability to produce a close marrying of musical and literary moods. In actual fact, the structure of the work is suggested by the changing moods of the poem, although some repetition of musical material is involved.

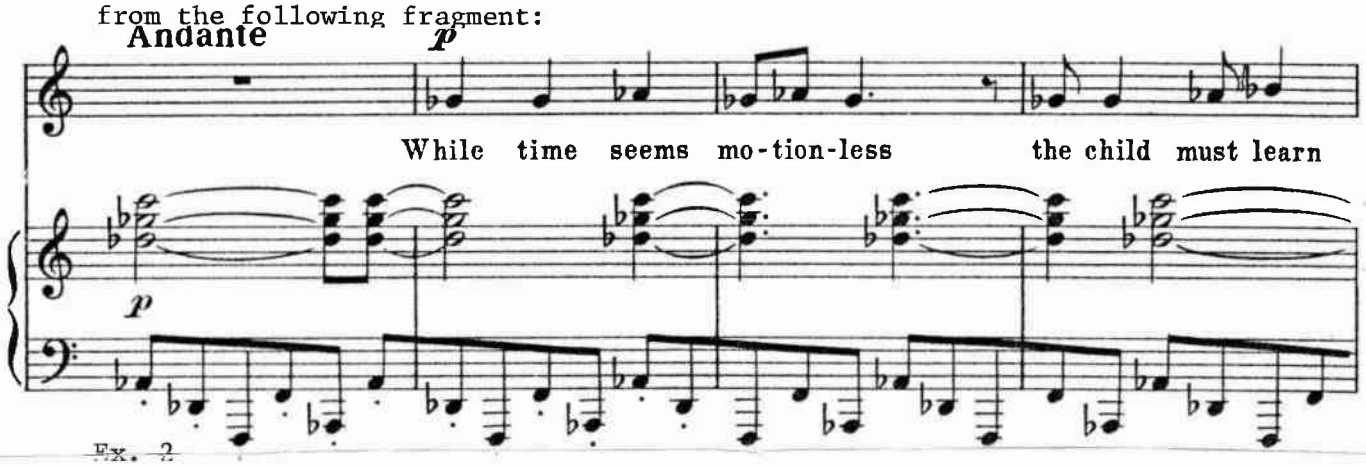
Throughout the work, the influence of Messiaen is apparent in the use of (i) notes of "added value", and (ii) arpeggios and appoggiatura figures in the piano part of the type used by Messiaen in his piano works. The piece is essentially tonal and is made up of contrasting sections representing different moods. Each section presents a different accompaniment constructed from a single motivic fragment which is then repeated and/or transposed throughout the section. The vocal part, in turn, follows the transposition.

The work opens with an introduction for piano followed by a monopoly for voice in which notes of "added value" are used a la Messiaen.



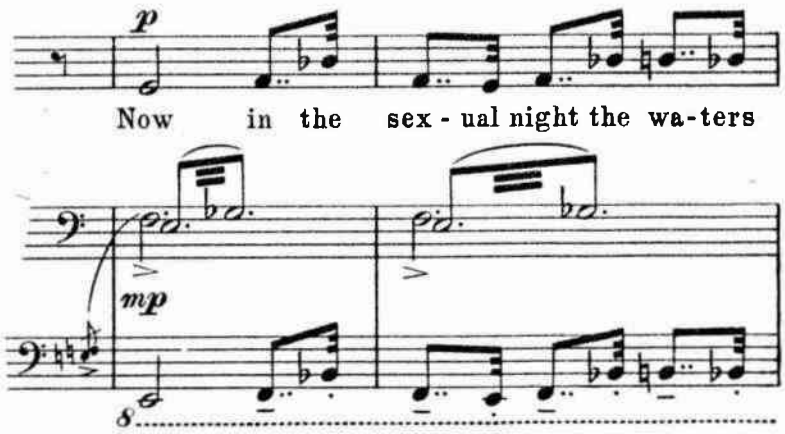
Ex. 1

A new segment is then introduced, the accompaniment of which is fashioned from the following fragment:



Ex. 2

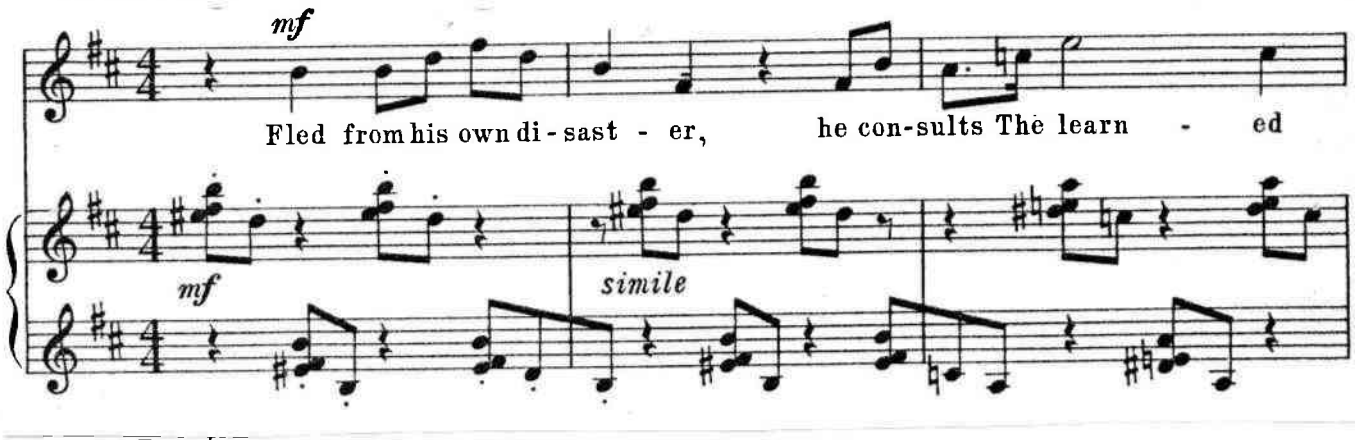
There is then a gradual increase in intensity which paves the way for a contrasting passage in which the left hand of the accompaniment doubles the vocal line three octaves below:



Ex. 3

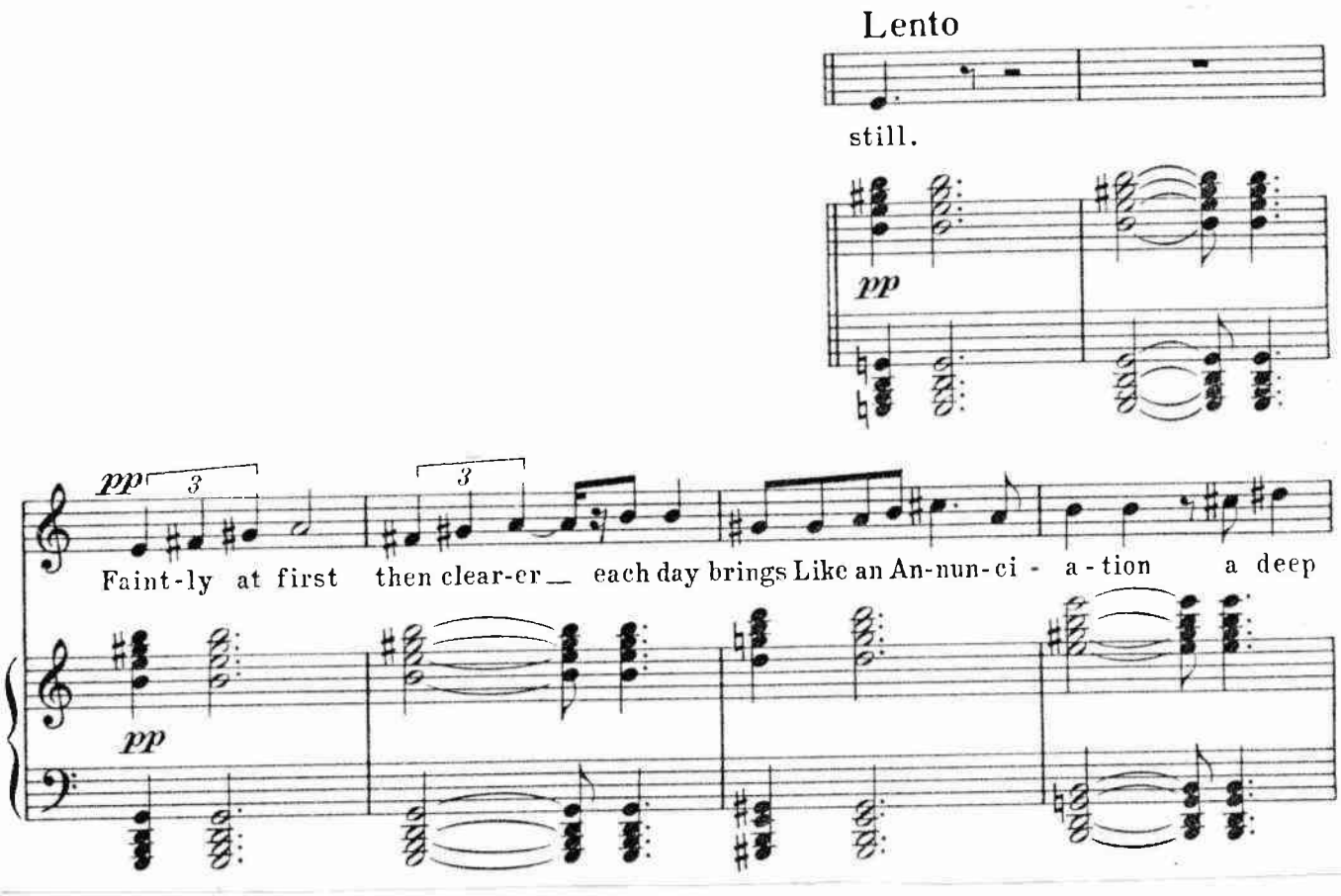
This passage is then repeated in a varied form after which the piano introduction returns, suitably ending the first section of the work. It is worth noting that Williamson employs neither time- nor key-signature in the first section.

For the remainder of the composition, Williamson presents a kaleidoscope of ever-changing sections, which, although seemingly different, are at the same time closely related thematically. Section two is based on the theme shown in Example 4. This theme is repeated throughout in the piano part:



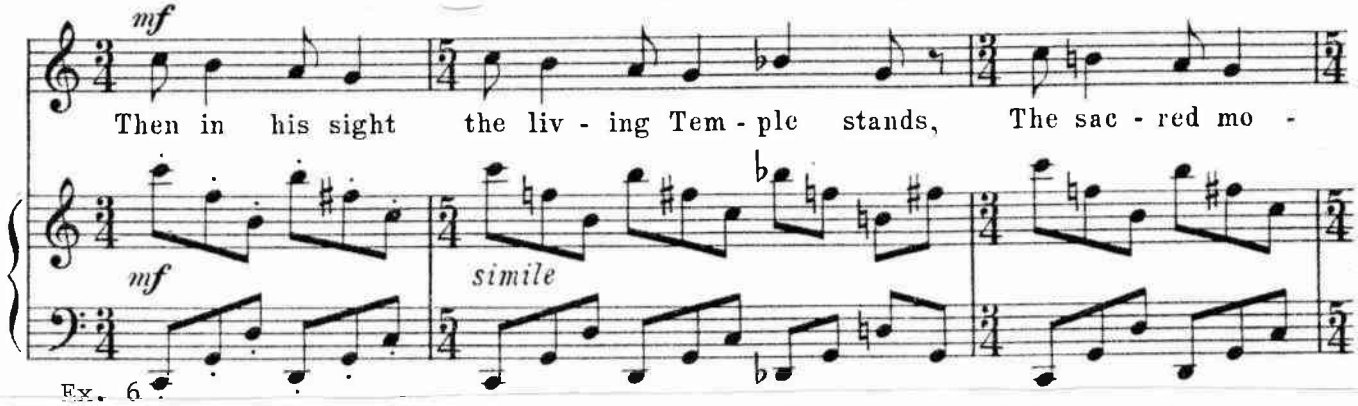
Ex. 4

Then follows an "Andante ritmico" passage, reminiscent of the one in the first section in which the left hand of the piano doubled the vocal line, a recitative-like section ensues, acting as a transition leading into the next section which exhibits a type of extended bitonality. The vocal part is accompanied throughout by different transpositions and inversions of a single chord consisting of two major triads a minor third apart:



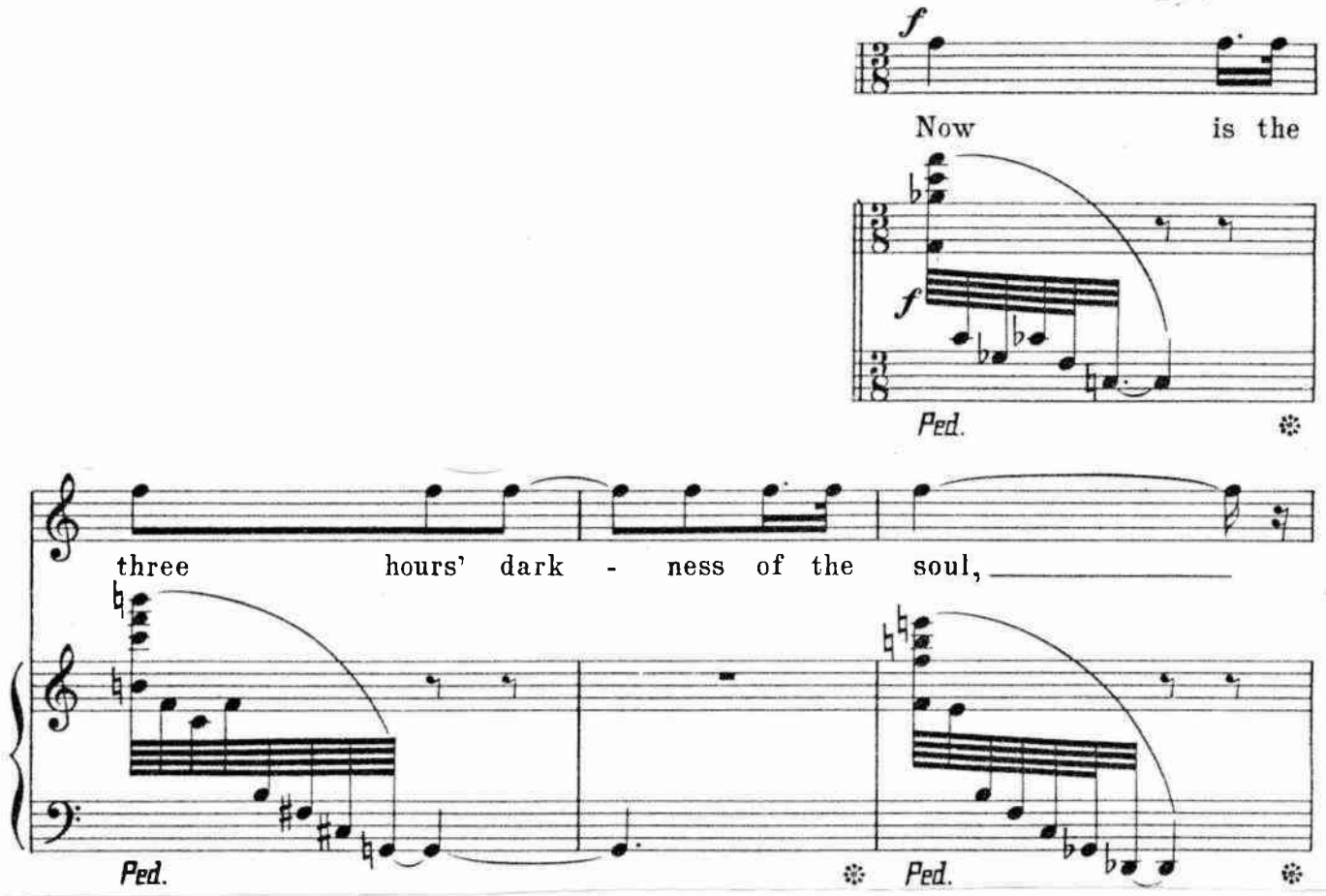
Ex. 5

A brief announcement of the coming of Christ is given:

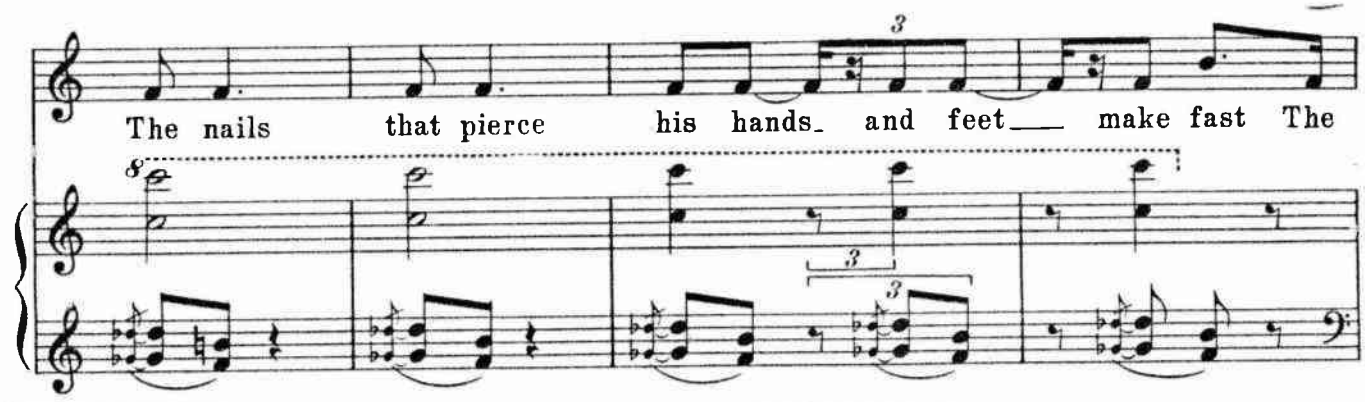


Ex. 6

before the bitonal section returns, ending with a chord reminiscent of the initial piano introduction. A description of the crucifixion follows, in which the influences of Messiaen are again evident in the use of appoggiatura and arpeggio figures:

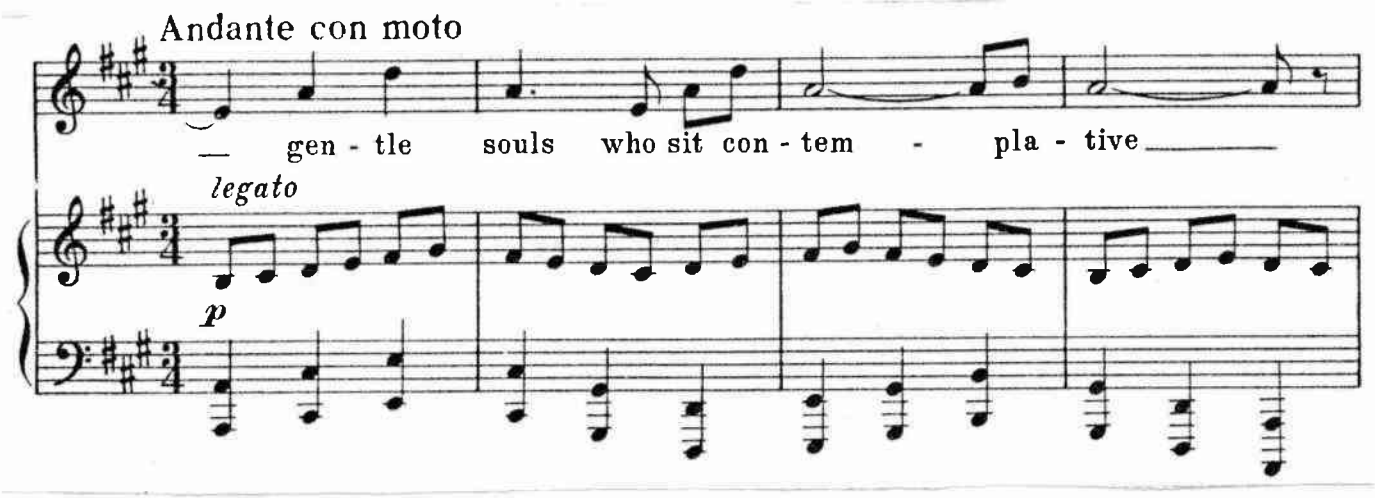


Ex. 7(i)



Ex. 7(ii)

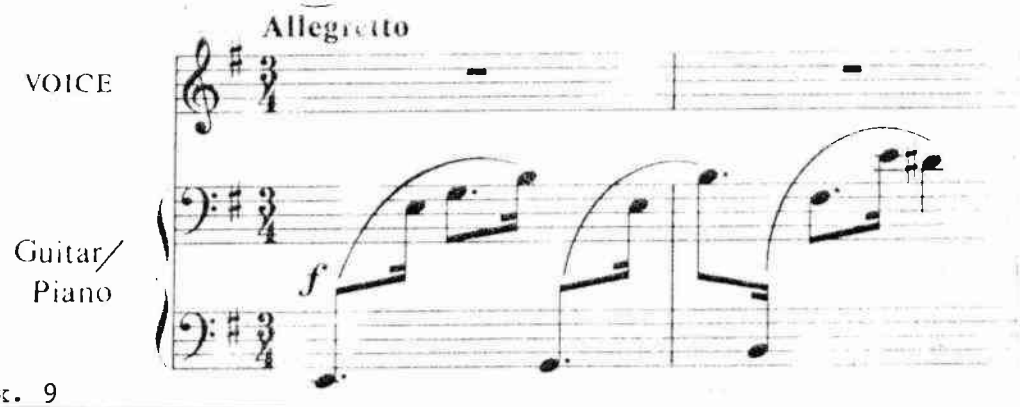
The work ends with a section in which yet another new fragment is introduced in the accompaniment:



Ex. 8

The *Three Shakespeare Songs* for high voice and piano or guitar, written in 1964 for April Cantelo, have been set more traditionally than *Celebration of Divine Love*. Instead of employing phrases of different tonalities, each song adheres to the main tonality. Continuity is achieved through repetition.

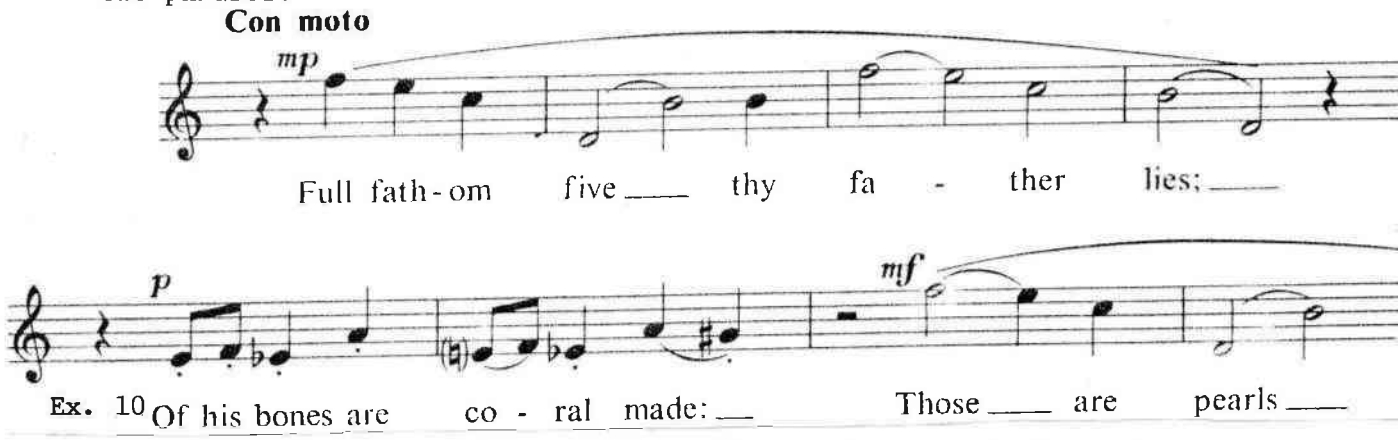
The first song, entitled "Come away, death" (*Twelfth Night*) features the following repeated motif in the accompaniment:



Ex. 9

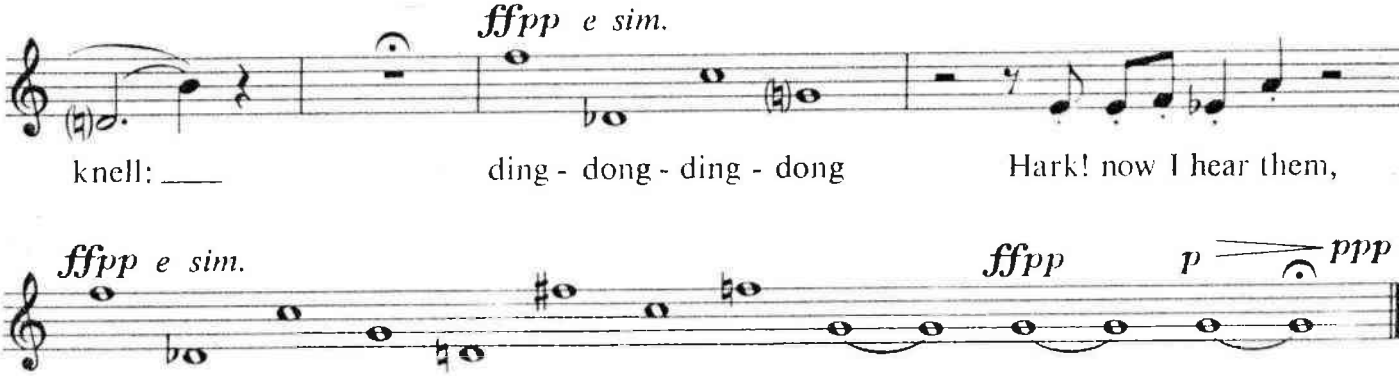
Williamson employs strophic form--both verses begin in the key of E minor, move through a number of uncertain tonalities in the middle of the verse, and return to E minor at the end.

In "Full fathom five" (*The Tempest*), the unaccompanied second song, Williamson uses neither key- nor time-signature, giving the impression of greater flexibility for the singer. It begins with the alternation of two phrases:



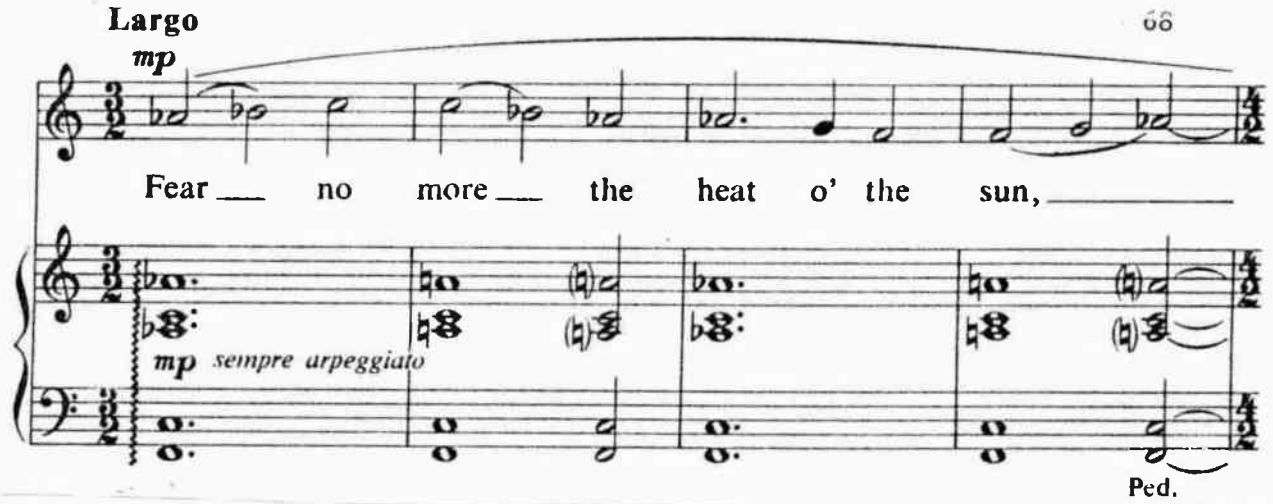
Ex. 10

the alternating continuing, accompanied by an increase in intensity, which culminates in an effective rendition of bell sounds:



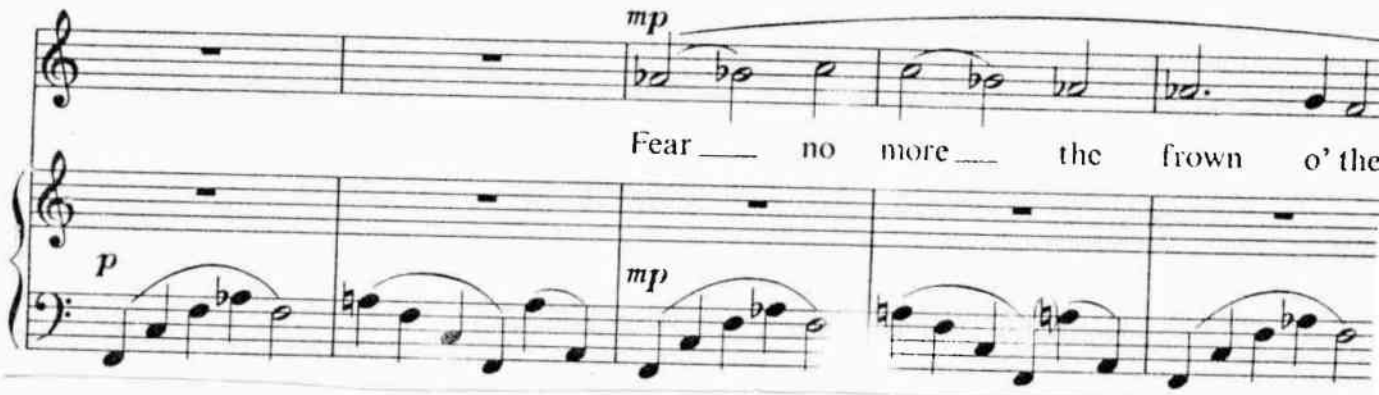
Ex. 11

"Fear no more the heat of the Sun" (*Cymbeline*), the third song, contains another example of Williamson's fondness for bitonality (used extensively in the section shown as Example 5 of *Celebration of Divine Love*). The whole of the vocal part is in one key only, while the accompaniment alternates between major and minor chords. This results in a semitone dash as occurs between a♭ and a♯ in Example 12.

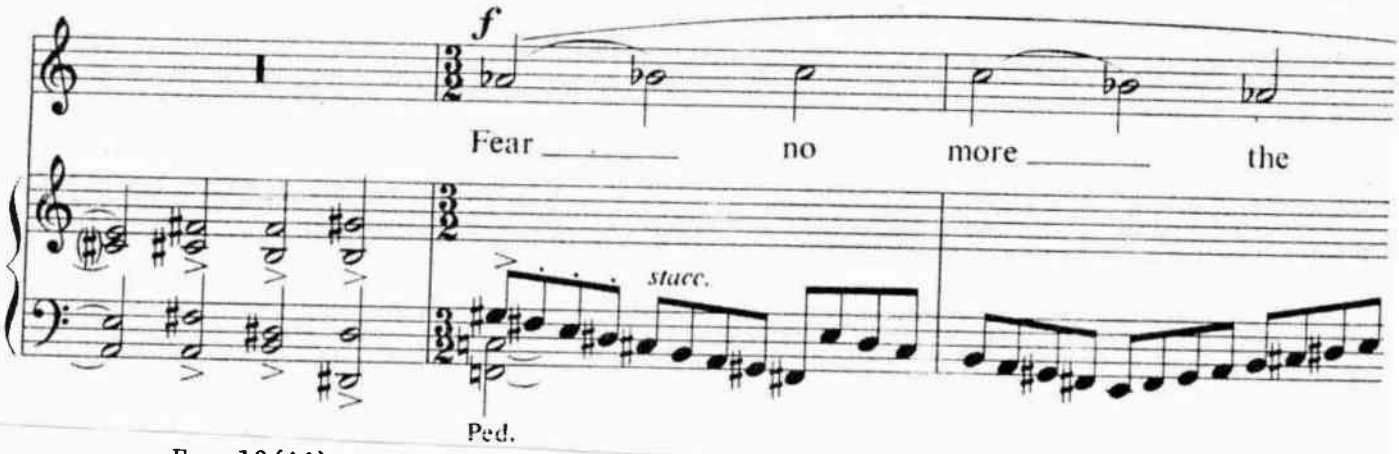


Ex. 12

In each of the three verses, the vocal part is the same, whereas the accompaniment for each verse is different. However, the bitonal effect is still retained:



Ex. 13(i)



Ex. 13(ii)

A coda-like section follows the third verse, the song ending with a reference to the first song.

Over the years, Williamson has been the focal point of much criticism, due mainly to the fact that he has continued to write music of two distinct types. On the one hand he produces,

> ... music that is tightly organized, that reflects a finely tuned control of the time dimension, and that is always inventive and resourceful in the generation, growth and mutation of musical ideas, without ever losing a distinctly personal and identifiable lyricism, ...[4]

while on the other hand he writes music,

> ... which smacks of derivativeness, unashamed in its reliance on cliche and effect, and which at best is only ever likely to enjoy a short-lived appeal at the shallowest of popular levels.[5]

Only Williamson can provide the answer to why this is so.

[4] *Ibid.*, p.155.

[5] *Loc cit.*

CONCLUSION

Much of Australia's early musical composition ensued from "the imported English organists and pedagogues",[1] who were the early music educators and administrators. Their music, reflecting the established European styles, was a by-product of the unavoidably provincial nature of Australian society. These factors, combined with the time-lag in musical awareness, contributed to by Australia's geographical remoteness from the dominant sources of its musical culture, helped give Australian musical creation a tendency to be not merely out of date but to be out of date by the span of two or three generations.

This resulted in the development of a number of talented Australian composers being crippled by the limitations of the musical experience available to them in their youth. Inextricably tied up with this were the feelings of cultural inferiority inescapable in a neo-colonial or provincial society. Therefore, it became one of the first tasks of able musicians, such as Sutherland, Hughes, Antill, Douglas and Le Gallienne, to demonstrate that they could write fluent and grammatically acceptable music in established idioms. This group, best described as the "middle generation" composers,

> sought direct communication with their audience through a musical language, often personal and subtle, yet readily acceptable to ears familiar

[1]Roger Covell, *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967).

> with the music of Holst, Walton, Hindemith, Bartok and Stravinsky ...[2]

A third generation of composers, a number of whom were discussed in the foregoing chapters, emerged in the early 1960's, which represented a time of unusual economic and cultural growth in Australia. This resulted in an increase in support of composers: there was a growth in the number of commissions offered[3] as well as an increase in the performance of works both at home and overseas.[4] A number of these composers now occupy positions in various educational institutions around Australia.

Their music covers a wide range of contrasting styles. Dreyfus's music belongs to the central European tradition, whereas the works of Sculthorpe, Penberthy and Butterley are largely outside this tradition: Sculthorpe and Penberthy have both written works employing Australian-inspired subject matter. Butterley's music has been described thus:

> In the music of Nigel Butterley, Australian music gains an individual voice. Though his name may be associated by the public with contemporaries such as Sculthorpe and Meale, his work has little in common with theirs.[5]

Both Williamson and Banks have lived for a time overseas where they have gained considerable success. The former is based in London whereas the latter has recently returned to Australia.

[2]David Tunley, "Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century: A Background," *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.3.

[3]*Ibid.*, p.4.

[4]*Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

[5]David Swale, "Nigel Butterley," *Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.201.

The post-war generation of composers have the formidable task ahead of them of consolidating and extending the achievements of the above composers. A characteristic of this generation is both its foresight and hindsight. The former represents its interest in the prospect of an East-West musical acculturation, the latter, its growing involvement with creative media and techniques revived through increasingly penetrating studies in medieval and renaissance music.

One can only be optimistic about the future. In the past, the fact of Australia's small population and its distance from the main cultural centres of the world inhibited the development of vigorous creative tradition. Both these factors are changing and a number of composers have already established for themselves world-wide reputations.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX ONE

Discography

Work	Performers	Record Details
From Within Looking Out	Marilyn Richardson (sop.), Margaret Crawford (fl.), John Glickman (viola), Kay Lucas (celeste) and Glen Davies (vibraphone)	W.R.C. A/601

BIBLIOGRAPHY

List of Works Cited

Australian Composition in the Twentieth Century. Ed. Frank Callaway and David Tunley. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Banks, Don. "Third-Stream Music". *Proceedings of the Royal Music Association*, 97 (1970-71), 59-67.

Butterley, Nigel. "Butterley on Butterley". *Music Now*, 1 (February, 1969), 29-34.

Contemporary Music in Europe: A Comprehensive Survey. Ed. Paul H. Lang and Nathan Broder. New York: Schirmer, 1965.

Covell, Roger. *Australia's Music: Themes of a New Society*. Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967.

Henderson, Robert. "Peter Sculthorpe". *The Musical Times*, 107 (1966), 594-95.

Mann, William. "The Music of Don Banks". *The Musical Times*, 109 (1968), 719-21.

McCredie, Andrew D. *Musical Composition in Australia*. Canberra: Government Printing Office, 1969.

_____. *The Composers and Their Work*. Canberra: Government Printing Office, 1969.

Murdoch, James. *Australia's Contemporary Composers*. Melbourne: Macmillan, 1972.

Sculthorpe, Peter. "Sculthorpe on Sculthorpe". *Music Now*, 1 (February, 1969), 7-13.

Sitsky, Larry. "Music at the Tempo of Life". *Hemisphere*, 18 (April, 1974), 30-35.

List of Scores Consulted

Banks, Don. *Three Short Songs*. Unpubl. M.S. London: 1971.

Butterley, Nigel. *Child in Nature*. Unpubl. M.S. Sydney: 1957.

_____. *Carmina: Four Latin Poems of Spring*. Unpubl. M.S. Sydney: 1968.

Dreyfus, George. *From Within Looking Out*. Melbourne: Allan's, 1968.

Penberthy, James. *Love Song*. Unpubl. M.S. Perth: 1973.

Sculthorpe, Peter. *Song of Tailitnama*. Sydney: Faber, 1974.

Williamson, Malcolm. *Celebration of Divine Love*. London: Weinberger, 1973.

_____. *Three Shakespeare Songs*. London: Weinberger, 1973.