

## **Background to the composition of *Moments of Plastic Jubilation***

In 1999, I was approached to write a work for solo piano, for the outstanding and virtuosic Australian pianist, Michael Kieran Harvey. The ABC commissioned five new works from a variety of Australian composers. We were not given any particular brief for this piece, other than it was to be around five or so minutes long, and would be recorded by Harvey before the 1 Jan 2000, and possibly even broadcast on that day (with a possible performance as part of the worldwide broadcast!).

Not long before starting to write this work, another work of mine, *Speed*, was performed by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra as part of its Meet the Music series. The audience response to this work was excellent, creating a real sense of excitement and enthusiasm - at least, that's how it seemed to me. *Speed* is one of my works that is strongly influenced by techno music. I have become reasonably well known for integrating aspects of popular music into a classical music context, and *Speed* would be one the pieces in which this integration is most obvious. In particular, I love the sense of energy, vitality and extroversion in much techno music, and these were certainly aspects that I was aiming to convey in *Speed*.

The review of the performance of *Speed* in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, on the other hand, did not present a positive view of the work. The author of the review took issue with both this piece and the music style that influenced it, i.e. techno music. He used terms like "schlock" to deride the piece and its influences:

“...Techno music, nominated by Hindson as his stylistic starting point, is the sort of music you make when you want to grind your heel — ever so nonchalantly — on the old idea of music as a nobly expressive, humane activity.

“Its mechanical repetitiveness of figuration and beat is a finger sign to musical as tradition — and, in case you feel like raising a red flag in sympathy, it means the same for the idea of music as revolution. This is music which goes with the spurious sense of immunity a hoon might feel while revving-up a wreck on the way to a fast-food joint; its **moments of plastic jubilation**, faithfully echoed by Hindson, at best fit the closing shots of the latest action picture schlock”

So the review was very harsh, particularly as it seemed to be really having a go at an entire music genre. How to get back at a critic like this? I thought to myself, "you hear moments of plastic jubilation, I'll give you moments of plastic jubilation!". So I decided in this new piece for solo piano to take the idea of plastic jubilation, of some sense of artificiality, of being 'fake' and writing a work around it.

## **Overall Structure**

As noted in the introductory notes to this piece, I decided to take a somewhat modular approach to its structure. This means that each section follows on from another as if it were a module just slotted in beside the next one. Such an approach can lead to a sense of disunity, so I was very careful to plan things like the overall harmonic centres of each section. In addition, the rhythmic patterns in the piece and the overall sense of virtuosity serve to create a unifying element throughout. It's much easier to do this in a short work as opposed to a longer one.

Other composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen used similar modular techniques in the 1960s, though to a much greater degree. For example, they might write a series of musical fragments (i.e. modules) and it would be up to the performer to decide which order to place them in. Personally, I wanted to have a little bit more control than this, and so wrote out the work in its entirety.

## **Musical Influences in Moments of Plastic Jubilation**

In writing *Moments of Plastic Jubilation*, I was aware of making reference to a number of different musical genres. The material of the main theme at Letter B, together with the surrounding material at A, C and so forth, relates very strongly to that of techno music. The oscillating octaves in the left hand could be seen as a pumping bass-line in a dance piece. The lower notes provide a strong sense of beat much like that of a bass drum playing on every crotchet. Against this, the syncopated right-hand figures use rhythmic patterns very typical of techno music, particularly the rhythmic organization into groups of three and two semiquavers across the beat. The idea of such syncopation being

placed against a constant pulse is very common in techno and other forms of electronic dance music.

The influence of techno music is easy to find throughout the score. For example, the rhythmic figures at Letter K and its surrounds come from some typical drum patterns found in dance music. The rough and percussive nature of the clusters at Figure L reinforce this - it's like the piano doesn't even exist any more, morphing into a percussion instrument. The syncopated rhythms of dance music are very common in *Moments of Plastic Jubilation*.

Another musical influence that is strongly stated occurs at the opening of the piece. The musical indication, "Clayderman-esque", states that the following material should be played in the manner of that by the French popular pianist, Richard Clayderman. When a school student, I would be trying to study in the library, and the librarians would broadcast recordings of Richard Clayderman throughout the whole study area, driving me absolutely crazy in the process. I therefore became intimately acquainted with his style of pianism, including his typical gestures of arpeggios up and down the piano, as well as mid-tempo, inoffensive melodies in the high register, played with an almost saccharin-sweetness. The idea of paying homage to Richard Clayderman and his 'plastic' style of pianism at the beginning of the work was one that appealed. It was like I was setting up a very sweet, delicate sound-world at the start of the piece, only to be rudely interrupted by a violent thud (the cluster at Letter A) - in essence announcing "hey, that's not what this piece is about - this is!".

Another musical influence that is used in the score occurs after Letter O, where the right hand material is marked "bombastic, arrogant". It was not my original intention to have this apply pictorially to the review, though it could perhaps be seen that way. I wanted to make reference here to an overbearing, uncompromising musical style: that of musical modernism, which basically says that all music created should aim to be brand new. One way that this can be achieved (according to modernists) is through mathematical procedures, and it is only through this search for newness that "proper" music can be

created (i.e. as opposed to music that makes reference to other sorts of music, as mine does). I find such arguments to be pompous and maybe even prententious, thus made the musical material at this point fit this scheme.

## **Structure and Key Areas**

It may be useful to examine the key areas into which the different sections of *Moments of Plastic Jubilation* is organized.

Opening: F# major.

Bars 12-31: F# mixolydian mode (like F# major but a flattened 7th).

Bar 32 - E mixolydian. Consecutive major triads between hands and between bars.

Rhythm based upon typical percussion form from techno music.

Bar 47 - D major, with flattened 7th (C natural) used to contrast with C#.

Bar 59 - A Phrygian mode. Based upon a two-beat syncopated rhythmic pattern.

Bar 65 - F major. Repeated ostinato pattern oscillatiing between chords I and IV of F major above with a melody is placed. Rhythmic pattern based on a slightly altered repetition of material from bar 32.

Bar 94 - Rhythm pattern again coming from bar 32. Alternating tritones between hands. Series of oscillating chords enters at the "mechanistic" marking at bar 100. These chords move in parallel motion.

Bar 110 - The dissonant nature of the previous section is taken to it logical extreme but the remove of all functional harmonic sequences: a series of tone clusters in the low regions of the piano.

Bar 124 - Repeat of material from bar 47 transposed to C major, together with an oscillating semiquaver pattern placed above. Interruptions marked as "Clayderman-esque" refer to the opening but with more ambiguous harmonies.

Bar 133 - Repeat of material from bar 59, but transposed to Bb Phrygian mode.

Bar 147 - Clayderman-esque figures become extended, outlining a whole-tone mode.

Bar 151- end - return to F# mixolydian material from main theme at bar 17. The return of this material from the opening (including the material from bar 147) creates a arch-like structure over the whole piece.

### **Biography: Matthew Hindson**

**Matthew Hindson** (b. 1968) studied composition at the University of Sydney and at the University of Melbourne with composers including Peter Sculthorpe, Eric Gross, Brenton Broadstock and Ross Edwards.

Hindson's works have been performed by ensembles and orchestras throughout his native Australia, including most of its professional symphony orchestras and chamber groups. Overseas, his compositions have been presented in New Zealand, Germany, France, Austria, the UK, Holland, Portugal, the USA, Japan, Malaysia, Canada and Thailand, and have been featured at such key events as the 1994 and 2000 Gaudeamus Music Weeks in Amsterdam, the 1997 ISCM Festival in Copenhagen and the 1998 Paris Composers Rostrum.

His music often displays influences of popular music styles within a classical music context, and, as a result, musical elements such as driving repeated rhythms and loud dynamic levels are typically found in his works. Indeed, directness and immediacy are common features in the much of his music.

In 1999 Matthew was the attached composer to the Sydney SO. Works written during this attachment include *Boom-Box* and *In Memoriam: Amplified Cello Concerto* (the latter was subsequently nominated for an APRA-AMC award for Best Orchestral Work of 2001). He was also the attached composer with the Sydney Youth Orchestra in the same year, for whom he was commissioned to write a *Violin Concerto*. In 2002 he was the featured composer with Musica Viva Australia for whom he has written a number of new commissions for Kristjan Järvi's Absolute Ensemble, baroque violinist Andrew Manze, the Australian Virtuosi, Diana Doherty and the Belcea String Quartet, and Duo Sol.

In May 2002, the Sydney Dance Company toured Australia to much acclaim with a new 90-minute production, *Ellipse*, choreographed by their Artistic Director, Graeme Murphy, and danced entirely to Hindson's music. Playing to packed houses it broke box-office records for the SDC. They tour it to the USA in 2004.

In December 2002 the London Philharmonic Orchestra gave the European premiere of *Boom-Box* in London's Royal Festival Hall, whilst in the same month *Speed* received its European premiere in Germany, with the Jenaer PO and Andrey Boreyko.

Other recent achievements include works for the Australian Youth Orchestra,

commissioned by Ars Musica Australis (*A Symphony of Modern Objects*), West Australian SO (*Auto-Electric*), the Goldner String Quartet (*Industrial Night Music*), and *Love, Death, Music and Plants*, a music theatre work based on the life of Baron Ferdinand von Mueller, founder of the Royal Melbourne Botanic Gardens.

In September 2003, Matthew was a featured composer at the Vale of Glamorgan Festival in Wales, during which fourteen of his works were performed by a variety of ensembles. He is the attached composer to the Queensland Orchestra in 2003/2004. In addition, his music is being set to dance by the Ballet Schindowski in Germany in January, 2004.

Future works include a number of works for the Queensland Orchestra and a flute concerto entitled *House Music* for American flautist, Marina Piccinini.

Matthew's music is published by Faber Music (UK).

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