

# Malcolm Williamson's *Organ Symphony*: An Analysis of Serial Technique

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(A paper presented to the Faculty of Arts Research Seminar,  
University of Southern Queensland, on 21 April 2004)

## ABSTRACT

Australian composer Malcolm Williamson (1931-2003) is known for a widely eclectic style, and yet his compositional idiom is also highly personal. Like almost every composer of his generation, he adopted serial technique for many of his compositions during the 1950s and 1960s. The *Organ Symphony* was composed in 1960 and comprises six movements. With a duration of 45 minutes it is Williamson's most substantial work for the instrument and is probably the largest-scale organ work by an Australian composer. It is interesting for the variety of techniques employed in organising the musical material while maintaining a serial framework. This paper explores the ways in which Williamson achieves unity in this work through diverse means.

## INTRODUCTION

Malcolm Williamson has been described as "a popular St George who would chase away the hideous dragon of modern music" (Walsh 1971, p.1108). Although in 1965 he claimed that all his music was either directly or indirectly serial, by 1971 he would not have made any such claim (Walsh 1971, p. 11108). Rather, he regarded himself as a tonal composer and abhorred the attitude which strove constantly to keep abreast of the latest musical fashions merely for their own sake, and indeed spoke disparagingly of young Australians' attempts to be as up to date as possible (Williamson 1966, p. 71).

Nevertheless, Malcolm Williamson's music is difficult to come to terms with, mainly because of its excessively eclectic nature. Chatterton (1978, p. 147) notes: "In any genre one is likely to hear the strictest serialism, the rhythms of jazz or Latin American music, an expansive romantic melody, or . . . even a suspicion of aleatoricism. In the course of listening one can be reminded of flashes of Stravinsky, Bartok and Messiaen particularly, but also Britten, Richard Rogers, Hindemith, Sibelius, Gershwin, Leonard Bernstein and Honneger." There have been claims that his output is devoid of clear lines of development, and that it shows fluctuating standards (Covell 1967, pp.169-78). Williamson's artistic integrity has been questioned – why does he combine such a contrast of serious and popular idioms? – and yet this in itself must show some integrity, because he continued in this vein for so many years despite constant criticism (Chatterton 1978, p. 155). It must also be pointed out that Williamson was not the first nor the most distinguished composer to have been accused of eclecticism (Walsh 1965, p. 26). On the other hand, Williamson has an ability to "synthesize and turn to individual use what he learns", for example in *Fons Amoris*, where serial methods are "personal, accomplished . . . subtle". (Mason, 1962) In the final analysis, Williamson claims that one must try to be oneself, and that this is not always easy (Williamson 1966, p. 72). We must therefore let the music speak for itself and not judge it on the merits of others.

Perhaps his works have been approached from the wrong standpoint. Williamson's best works, and this includes many of his organ compositions, must be heard first as musical canvases – only then can they be subjected to close analytical scrutiny.

Williamson has been recognised as a fluent composer with a resourceful technique, and capable of building a self-sufficient melody from only a tiny motive (Mason 1962, p. 758). His music often has “a lucid texture, a command of elating dance-like rhythms and an almost defiant insistence on tunes that positively sit up and beg to be memorized” (Covell 1967, p. 267). Williamson believes that Australian composers offer “forcefulness, brashness, a direct warmth of approach, sincerity which is not ashamed, and . . . ‘get-up-and-go’” (Williamson 1966, p. 71).

Williamson was born on 21 November 1931 in Sydney, and died in London in March 2003. He is the only Australian to appointed Master of the Queen’s Musick, which position he held from 1975 (in succession to Sir Arthur Bliss) until his death. He studied at the New South Wales Conservatorium, where his main studies were composition with Goosens and piano with Sverjensky. He also became reasonably proficient on the horn and violin and did some extra-curricular choral conducting. He received a sound but conservative academic training there, but had almost no knowledge of modern music except that of Shostakovich and some English composers. He quickly made up for this lack by moving to Europe in 1950 and undertaking composition lessons with Elisabeth Lutyens and gaining exposure to the music of Pierre Boulez. In 1953 he began studies with Erwin Stein, under whose influence he first turned to serial technique. At about this time, on being converted to Roman Catholicism, Williamson turned his attention to mediaeval music and the work and theories of Messiaen.

In order better to study Messiaen’s work, Williamson taught himself to play the organ. This new interest resulted in the composition of a virtuoso organ work, *Fons Amoris*, which he himself performed in 1956 at the Royal Festival Hall in London. *Fons Amoris* was the beginning of a constant flow of organ works – *Resurgence de Feu* (1959), *Symphony for Organ* (1960), *Vision of Christ-Phoenix* (1962), *Elegy J.F.K.* (1964), *Epitaphs for Edith Sitwell* (1966), *Peace Pieces* (1970-71), *Little Carols of the Saints* (1971-72), *Mass of a Mediaeval Saint* (1973), two small Fantasies (1975), and *The Lion of Suffolk* (1977) as a memorial to Benjamin Britten (d 1976). It is especially in the large-scale works for organ that the influence of Messiaen is felt, along with mediaeval techniques of organisation such as isorhythm (Covell 1967, p. 171), although these features are present in other genres. It is significant to note here that the organ compositions form a sizeable portion of Williamson’s work, and that many are also key works in his output. Despite this, however, it is extremely rare to hear performances of these works in Australia.

### **THE SYMPHONY FOR ORGAN**

The *Symphony for Organ* was considered, in the 1970s at least, to be perhaps Williamson’s finest work (Walsh 1971, p. 1108). Certainly, after a Festival Hall performance in London, one newspaper critic commented that it was Williamson’s best symphony (Webb 1978, p. 173). It was commissioned by Allan Wicks, organist at Canterbury Cathedral, and given its first performance by Wicks on 21 November 1962 at Holy Trinity, Brompton Road, London. Wicks says of this work: “He poured all he had into this symphony. He is not afraid to be not so much original as to implant his own fingerprints on music rooted in the past. He has absorbed and digested Bartok, Stravinsky and Messiaen and produced something uniquely his own” (Webb 1978, p. 174).

The work, lasting some 45 minutes, is in six large movements (Prelude, Sonata, Aria I, Toccata, Aria II, Paean) and shows a versatility and virtuosity in organising a wide range of material (Walsh 1965, p. 27). The range of styles includes strict serial method, passacaglia technique, isorhythm, simply accompanied melody, and Williamson’s characteristic nervous

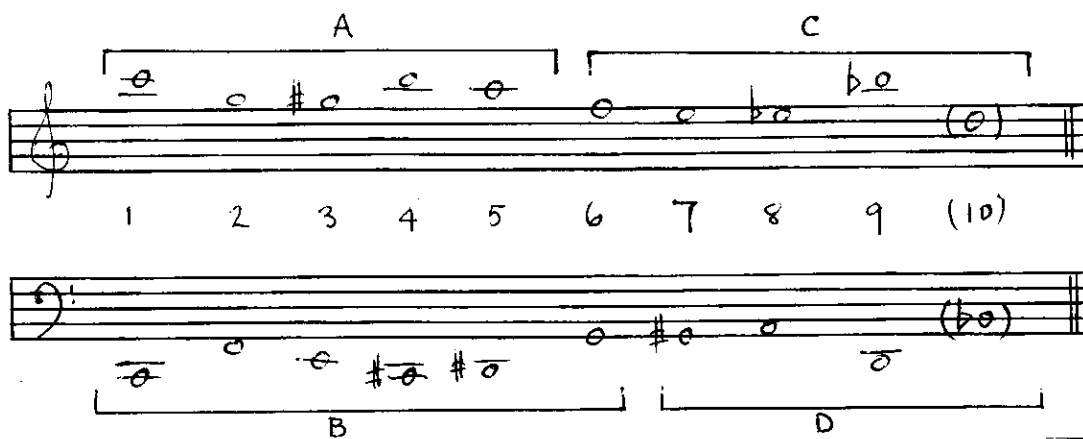
rhythmic idiom. Williamson writes in the composer's note in the Novello edition of the score published in 1971: "A chromatic chant-like melody is the controlling feature of the work. It is used as a series, as a contour, as a mode, and as a rhythmic regulator. The music, while chromatic, is therefore in a modal frame of reference." The third, fourth and fifth movements can be played with the composer's blessing as a separate integral group. The *Organ Symphony* has been recorded in 1978 by Allan Wicks at Coventry Cathedral.

### PRELUDE

Stephen Walsh has noted that the work is based on a defective series of nine notes (Walsh 1971, p. 1109), maintaining that the series is made up of the five notes C.G.G#.B.A. and its inversion in the left hand (ie C.F.E.C#.D#.)



This is true, so far as it goes. In fact, this is only the beginning of the series, which in its complete form comprises C.G.G#.B.A.F.E.Eb.Bb., and the inversion C.F.E.C#.D#.G.G#.A.D. Although a tenth note is occasionally employed (D in the series and Bb in the inversion), it is easiest to speak of the series as comprising nine notes only. This series forms the basis of the chant-like melody which permeates so much of the symphony. The series and the inversion are frequently divided into fragments (labelled A, B, C and D in the example), particularly in the Sonata movement.



The Prelude of this *Symphony* is structurally simple, in a clear ternary form with a short codetta. This form is displayed not only textually, but is also emphasised by the manner in which dynamics and tone colours are deployed. Bars 1-18 form the A section, bars 19-26 the B section, bars 27-37 the A' section (somewhat varied), with bars 37-40 acting as the codetta.

Bars 1-18:

This section, played on the full Great, is divided into two phrases, the first (bars 1-8) being governed by a chord on a bass of Bb which contains the nine notes of the series. The tenth note is present in bar 2. The second phrase (bars 9-16) is governed by a chord on a bass of F whose notes are derived from the inversion transposed up a perfect 5<sup>th</sup>, and is rhythmically identical to the first phrase; Notes 1 and 4 are present in bar 10.

Largo

MANUAL

PEDAL

Gt. Full

10

1 4

These chords on Bb and F permeate the movement as a whole, and can be seen to have a type of tonic-dominant relationship, which is strengthened by the conclusion of the A section with a statement of the chords in the order of F-Bb (ie dominant-tonic). **Listening Example 1**

Bars 19-26: The contrasting B section is rhythmically more fluent and the texture altered. The density of sound is reduced to 8' and 4' diapasons pf the Choir manual with a soft reed.

Structurally, it consists of four two-bar phrases, the beginning of each succeeding phrase overlapping the end of the preceding one in a kind of stretto. The resultant tension is heightened by the increase in dynamics with each phrase so that the full Great is once again in use by the end to herald the return of A' material.

Rhythmically, the first three phrases are identical. Other similarities are evident. Each phrase begins with the same soprano notes, although with each the texture becomes thicker, changing from the unison C in phrase 1 to an interval of the 7<sup>th</sup> in phrase 2 and the introduction of another note, G#, in phrase 3. The increase in textural thickness is continued throughout each phrase



Tension is additionally created by making the highest pitch of each phrase (excluding the concluding triplet figure) successively higher. Each phrase concludes similarly with a rising C-G-C triplet figure.

The fourth phrase, while not rhythmically identical to the first three, is related. In the manual parts, its rising triplet figure is reminiscent of the concluding figure in each of the previous phrases, and is also harmonically similar.

The pedal part also has a noticeable form. Phrases 1 and 2 are mirrored in phrases 3 and 4 in the way they begin, so that phrases 1 and 3 begin with the same pitches (notes 1, 2 and 3 of the inversion), and phrases 2 and 4 likewise (notes 1, 2 and 3 of the series).



Phrases 1 and 2 conclude on C, and phrases 3 and 4 each conclude with F-E.

These four phrases are serially based, the series or its inversion in various transpositions weaving its way through the chords.

#### Bras 27-37:

Although the variant A section is a briefer version of the original, its material undergoes some further development.

Condensing is effected in the first phrase by removing bars 3, 4 and 5 of the original and then combining bars 6 and 7 by reducing and amalgamating the two triplet figures, and neglecting the semiquaver flourish, to form a simple but similarly balanced quintuplet figure. In this way, bars 27-29 are the recapitulation of bars 1-7.

The image shows two staves of handwritten musical notation. The top staff is labeled '(bars 6-7)' and contains two measures of music. The first measure has a 9/4 time signature and a 4/4 time signature in parentheses. It features a triplet of eighth notes followed by a semiquaver flourish. The second measure also has a 9/4 time signature and a 4/4 time signature in parentheses, featuring a triplet of eighth notes. The bottom staff is labeled '(bar 29)' and contains a single measure of music. It has a 9/4 time signature and a 4/4 time signature in parentheses. The melody is a quintuplet of eighth notes, which is a condensation of the material from the two measures above. The word 'becomes' is written between the two staves, with vertical dashed lines indicating the mapping of notes from the original bars to the condensed bar. Brackets below the notes in both staves indicate the grouping of notes into triplets and quintuplets.

The second phrase, based on the F chord, retains the rhythmical identity of the first phrase for the first three bars. After this (ie bars 34ff) a development of the pedal idea first introduced in bar 30 is carried beneath a growing sustained manual chord. This pedal development, like its precursor in bar 30, highlights but also synthesises important intervallic relationships inherent in the two framing chords on Bb and F.

#### Bars 37-40:

The codetta which follows is framed by statements of the Bb and F chords, and the manual flourish of bars 37 and 38 also play a part in synthesising intervallic materials exposed already in bar 1. The entire movement is then tied together by a final statement of the “tonic-dominant-tonic” chords, the final tonic being repeated for emphasis.

### **SONATA**

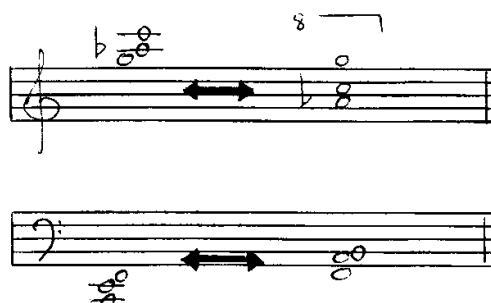
Williamson critic Stephen Walsh has noted (1965, p. 11) that the Sonata movement is written on strict serial lines, yet with a strong tonal bias. Repeated notes, such as those in bar 1, act like the final of a mode in creating a tonal centre (personal comment by Malcolm Williamson to Philip Bracanan, Brisbane, October 1989), thereby using the “chant-like melody” as a mode. [Listening Example 2](#)

Prepare:  
Sw. 16', 8', 4', 2'  
Gt. Fl. 8'  
Ch. 8', 4'  
Ped. 16', 8', soft Reed 16'  
Allegretto

## 2. SONATA

The musical score is written for three systems. Each system consists of three staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and a separate bass staff. The first system begins with a *mp* dynamic marking and a *Gt.* instruction. The music is in 3/4 time. The first system contains measures 1 through 10. The second system contains measures 11 through 15. The third system contains measures 16 through 18. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, slurs, and fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). The key signature has one sharp (F#).

Examination of bar 1 reveals that, by changing G# enharmonically to Ab, the first three notes of the series from a particular chord shape, which when rearranged corresponds with the right hand chord of bar 1 in the Prelude. In a similar way, the first three notes of the inversion can be represented as a chord shape which is like the pedal chord found in bar 9 of the Prelude. These chord shapes are used recurrently throughout the symphony.



The repeated semiquaver figure is also a feature of the movement (first heard as repeated Cs in bar 1), sometimes as repetitions of the same pitch and sometimes with downward octave displacement of the final note in the group. After bar 200 it takes on more varied forms. The motive also appears in various groupings of semiquavers, but mostly in twos, threes or fives.

The title *Sonata* seems to be applied as in the manner of a late 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century sonata – a piece comprising a number of short sections in contrasting styles. One can, however, apply an extremely loose type of sonata form and take bars 1-5 as the first subject (with a strong tonal centre of C) and bars 9-10 as a second subject comprising block chords, being material on which further development is based. Bar 11 finds the first theme being repeated, using invertible counterpoint in bars 13-15 and modulating to E for another statement of the theme at bar 16, followed by the second subject at bar 20. At bar 24 the main theme is sounded once again, in C, but this time with some decoration so that the series is compressed.

Bar 32 features the second subject.

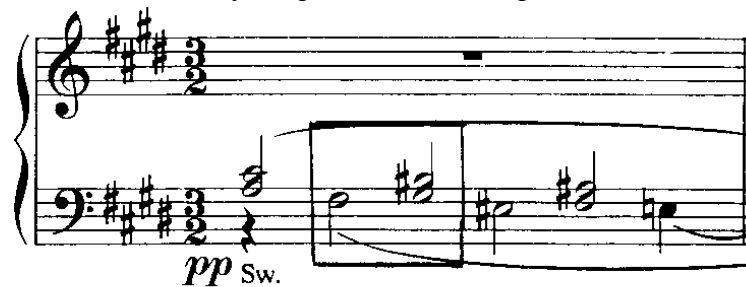
This part of the movement can be considered as the beginning of the development, for here the sonata theme is used as a springboard to more complex material, treating the first subject to begin, and then the second subject, at some length. After the intensity of the development, a welcome resolution of tension arrives with the unison Cs of bar 138 which commence the recapitulation. The recapitulation proceeds along expected lines until bar 162 when the tonal centre shifts to F, instead of C as in the exposition. This indicates a type of sonata form key scheme, albeit in reverse.



The movement is rounded off with a coda, at the conclusion of which the pedal strongly reinforces the tonal centre by a significant five repetitions of bottom C. In the final two bars, all twelve chromatic notes are present simultaneously.

### ARIA I

The first *Aria* brings rather a change to the flavour of the work, described by Stephen Walsh (1971, p.1109) as a “melodic trouvaille”. It takes the form of a long flute melody over a simple one-bar ostinato which contains the outlines of the now familiar chord shape described in the *Sonata*, outlined by a square in the example.



This chord, which is made up of notes 4, 5 and 6 of the inversion is a frequent feature of the movement, but has no clearly discernible connection with the series.

Tonally the movement is written in Dorian F#, but mixed with the Lydian major. This is shown by the frequent juxtaposition of A and A#. However, Williamson has not abandoned the serial base: in spite of the flowing ornamentation, the aria theme is clearly linked to the inversion in its transposition up on semitone.



The *Aria* movement is a type of theme and variations form in that there are a number of statements of the aria theme, but with some type of variation in each instance. This theme is interspersed with two other figures – a two-bar phrase first heard at bars 11-12, and a passage based on 5ths first heard in bars 12-14.

The movement opens with two statements of the chromatic ostinato before the flute melody is introduced in bar 3. The tonal centre is F#. Bar 6 prepares for a change of pitch for the ostinato only (not the melody) to a tonal centre of E, returning in bar 10 to F#. (Refer to Ex 11). **Listening Example 3** Then follow the two subsidiary phrases, twice each, the second time higher in pitch. The use of parallel 5ths lends a mediaeval flavour.

The second broad section of the movement commences at bar 20 with a return of the ostinato, in F#, and the aria theme, this time highly decorated. Bar 24 prepares for a modulation in bar 25 to a tonal centre of C. So far only the manuals have been in use, but now the pedals are introduced. They feature in combination with the left hand, in 6ths instead of 3rds, to provide the ostinato. This, in combination with the higher tessitura of the melody, fills out the texture and gives a lift to the overall mood.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Clarinet (Ch.), Guitar (Gt.), and Swell Pedal (Sw.). The Clarinet part features a chromatic ostinato with a trill at the end. The Guitar part has a melodic line with a trill. The Swell Pedal part has a bass line with notes marked 8, 4, and 2. The score is in F# major and includes a modulation to C major.

**Listening Example 4** With the return of the subsidiary material in bar 29 the pedal is discontinued.

In bar 44 the third section commences. On this occasion the melody is placed in the left hand to an accompaniment of staccato quavers in the right hand. The pedal is reintroduced in marching crotchets and makes use of the inversion transposed up two semitones. The aural effect of this variation is reminiscent of Messiaen.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Clarinet (Cl.), Guitar (Gt.), and Swell Pedal (Sw.). The Clarinet part has a melodic line with staccato quavers. The Guitar part has a bass line with notes marked 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, (10), (1). The Swell Pedal part has a bass line with notes marked 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, (10), (1). The score is in F# major and includes a modulation to C major.

**[Listening Example 5]** The tonal centre is now D. In bar 46 the pedal commences another statement of the inversion, and then in bar 48 a statement of the series transposed up four semitones, heralding a modulation to the E Dorian. Bars 50-51 contain another pedal statement of the series in the same transposition, leading to the fourth section of the movement in bar 52 couples with a return to a tonal centre of F#. The aria theme is now heard in an organum of parallel 5ths. This interval was used earlier in the movement, and their use here gives added coherence to the movement.

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle staff is in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature has three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score includes notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A large 'ff' (fortissimo) marking is present. Above the middle staff, there is a marking 'Gt. Full - Gt. Reeds'. The music consists of a melodic line in the top staff, a series of chords in the middle staff, and a bass line in the bottom staff.

**[Listening Example 6]** A further unifying element is rendered by the quaver chords in the combined left hand and pedal parts which are heard mostly at the distance of a crotchet, reminiscent of the third section of the movement. At first glance these chords seem to be indiscriminately chosen, but they are in fact carefully considered. When each chord is given its letter name designation, it becomes clear that they are arranged as statements of either the series or the inversion, in various transpositions.

Left hand

Pedal

Musical notation for the first system, showing the left hand and pedal parts. The left hand part consists of chords in the bass clef, and the pedal part consists of a single line of notes in the bass clef.

Letter name designation of chord

Musical notation for the first system, showing the letter name designation of the chord. The notation shows a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a series of notes corresponding to the chord G major. The text "(G) retrograde" is written below the notes.

Musical notation for the second system, showing the left hand and pedal parts. The left hand part consists of chords in the bass clef, and the pedal part consists of a single line of notes in the bass clef. The chords are labeled with letter names: B, Eb, F, D, F#, Bb, G, A.

Musical notation for the second system, showing the letter name designation of the chord. The notation shows a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a series of notes corresponding to the chord G major. The text "(G) retrograde" is written below the notes.

Musical notation for the third system, showing the left hand and pedal parts. The left hand part consists of chords in the bass clef, and the pedal part consists of a single line of notes in the bass clef. The chords are labeled with letter names: A, A, C#, Eb, C, B, E, F, A, G#.

Musical notation for the third system, showing the letter name designation of the chord. The notation shows a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a series of notes corresponding to the chord G major. The text "(G) retrograde" is written below the notes.

Bar 61 introduces the subsidiary material once more, making way for a quiet conclusion.

## TOCCATA

Allan Wicks speaks of this exciting movement as “an extrovert original with sudden clanging sounds” (Webb 1978, p. 174). This excitement is generated by a brilliant use of irregular bar lengths (Walsh 1965, p. 27), the swift alternation between melodic and chordal writing, and the frequent juxtaposition for much of the time of C and Ab as tonal centres.

For the *Toccata* Williamson seems largely, though not entirely, to have abandoned the use of serial technique. It is in ternary form, its outer sections based largely on the interval of the 5<sup>th</sup> and its inversion the 4<sup>th</sup>, and their close relations the 7<sup>th</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

The movement begins with a splash of arch-shaped scalic writing in 7ths followed by ascending chords built of 5ths and 4ths, with C clearly stated as the tonal centre. The soprano and bass lines of the chordal material are closely linked with the opening scale.



The image shows the first few measures of the Toccata. It is written for piano with three staves. The top staff is the right hand, the middle is the left hand, and the bottom is the bass line. The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto' and the dynamics are 'f'. The music begins with a series of arch-shaped scalic writing in 7ths, followed by ascending chords built of 5ths and 4ths.

This passage is repeated twice, each time extended to ascend to new heights of pitch, and suddenly interrupted in bar 7 by three chords with a tonal centre of Ab. **Listening Example 7** In bar 8 C is reaffirmed as the tonal centre, with scalic writing for the left hand and a chord, both in melodic and harmonic forms, made up of a tone with the 4<sup>th</sup> above (ie a “stretched” version of the chord shape encountered in earlier movements, and which is an important feature of the *Toccata*).



The image shows a section of the score where the music transitions to Ab and then back to C. The right hand has a descending sequential melody, and the left hand has a chordal accompaniment. The dynamics are 'f'. The music is written for piano with three staves.

In bar 10 the right hand begins with the notes C-F-E, the opening notes of the inversion. They are used as the basis of a descending sequential melody while the left hand chords move in contrary motion to it.



The image shows a section of the score where the right hand begins with the notes C-F-E, the opening notes of the inversion. They are used as the basis of a descending sequential melody while the left hand chords move in contrary motion to it. The music is written for piano with three staves.

All this forms the basic material of the A section until bars 29-30 when a pedal statement of notes 1-5 of the series (ie fragment A) is heard as a predominant melody, and repeated in bars 32-33. Another interruption of the Ab tonality occurs in bar 34; then in bars 35-36 notes 6-9 (ie fragment C) are heard as melody in the pedal, followed by Bb and C (the first and last notes of the series) used as a type of “signing off” for the pedal melody.

This is a technique frequently used by Williamson, occurring in other movements as well: the first and last notes of the series are deployed either to introduce or to farewell a statement of the series. Quite often, as seen in bar 35 of the *Toccata* and in the main theme of the *Sonata*, the two fragments of the series are separated by a reiteration of note 1 of the series.

A dramatic fall in tessitura and the introduction of a mysterious-sounding trill usher in the B section, which is based on the series transposed up one semitone. In bars 58-59 fragment A is used, followed by fragment C in bars 63-65.

## FRAGMENT A.

to stesso tempo  
prepare Sw. Reeds R' 4' Gt. Diaps. 6' 4'

reduce Gt.

Ch. simile

Gt. to Ped. on

5

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piano and guitar ensemble. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for the piano, the middle for the guitar, and the bottom for the piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins with the instruction 'to stesso tempo' and 'prepare Sw. Reeds R' 4' Gt. Diaps. 6' 4''. The piano part features a melodic line with a trill in the first measure, followed by a scale passage. The guitar part provides accompaniment with chords and a 'simile' instruction. A '5' is written above the first measure of the piano part. Performance instructions include 'reduce Gt.', 'Ch. simile', and 'Gt. to Ped. on'.

## FRAGMENT C.

8<sup>p</sup> cresc.  
Sw. mf

Detailed description: This musical score is for a piano and guitar ensemble. It consists of three staves. The top staff is for the piano, the middle for the guitar, and the bottom for the piano. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score begins with the instruction '8<sup>p</sup> cresc.' and 'Sw. mf'. The piano part features a melodic line with a trill in the first measure, followed by a scale passage. The guitar part provides accompaniment with chords and a 'mf' instruction.

**[Listening Example 8]** This constitutes all the material for the B section.

In bar 98 a trill develops into scale passage which lead to a conventional reprise of the A material commencing at bar 99 and terminating with a final ascending flourish which disappears in two widespread unison As.

### ARIA II

The fifth movement bears the superscription "... he lifted up his eyes from London pavements and beheld Christ walking on Thames water, and Jacob's ladder shining over Charing Cross", said by Donald Davidson of Francis Thompson. According to Williamson's note in the published score, this quote applies to the whole *Symphony* to some extent, but refers principally to the poetic impulse behind the *Aria II*. The text seems to find expression in the gradual build up through the *Aria* of increasingly dense texture and more and more massive registration, reaching a peak at bar 56. This is followed by a complete silence before returning to a tranquil mood to conclude the movement, suggestive of the awe inspired by the visions of Christ and Jacob's ladder described in the superscription. The concluding B major

chord, appearing without warning after an obvious Eb tonal centre, lifts the atmosphere to complete the ecstatic image.

*Aria II* is an isorhythmic passacaglia formed from a complex and tight-knit interweaving of four major components: (i) the color and (ii) the talea (the two isorhythmic elements which derive from the passacaglia ground); (iii) the aria theme; and (iv) the accompaniment to the aria theme. Each of these elements will be examined in turn.

The use of isorhythm in this movement allows Williamson to control the musical material more tightly. His use of isorhythm and organum in this and other works such as *Vision of Christ-Phoenix* is symptomatic of the general concern he felt in the late 1950s and early 1960s for close organisation of his material (Walsh 1965, p. 26). The passacaglia ground contains 16 notes, of which the first 15 represent the color. The rhythm of the entire ground represents the talea. The color comprises three groups of five notes, these being the first five notes of the series (fragment A) stated each time in a different transposition.

The musical score shows a piano accompaniment for the passacaglia ground. It is in 4/4 time and marked 'Largo'. The right hand plays a sustained *ppp* chord with the 3<sup>rd</sup> note omitted. The left hand plays a melodic line consisting of 15 notes, divided into three groups of five notes each. The first group starts on note 1, the second on note 2, and the third on note 3. The score includes fingerings and dynamics such as *ppp* and *pp*.

The talea is played 15 times, and, being one note longer than the color, begins the second time on note 2 of the color, the third time on note 3 etc until it has gone full cycle through all 15 notes of the color.

In its initial hearing the color is played by the pedals and accompanied on the manual by a sustained *ppp* chord with the 3<sup>rd</sup> omitted. The color is then repeated twice, completely given to the pedals. Thereafter it can be found weaving its way through both hands and pedals in a somewhat tortuous path.

The talea is presented straightforwardly in company with the color with two exceptions only. A minor change occurs in bar 56 where the right hand rhythm is three minims and a dotted crotchet followed by a quaver rest, rather than the four minims which are anticipated (the quaver rest is a dramatic break from the foregoing build up of texture and musical tension which prepares the listener for the *piano* recurrence of the passacaglia ground in the following bar). The other instance is in bar 71 where the beginning of the talea is upset by the first two notes occurring simultaneously as semibreves; however, since the rhythm is properly two minims, the talea corrects itself from the third note onward.



The aria theme is based freely on the series, initially transposed down one semitone. At other times the theme merely follows this general outline or uses the inversion, or Williamson makes use of the motive bracketed in the Example 23.

**-[Listening Example 9]**

The last of the four components is the accompaniment. Its serial base is clearly seen in bars 1-13 where it is based on the series, transposed up three semitones.

**PAEAN**

A glissando from bottom to top of the entire manual immediately encapsulates the title of this movement with an “outburst of joy” which gives way, in bars 2-3, to a disjunct idea based on the notes of various transpositions of the series. The two chords which constitute the contrasting material of bar 4 are founded on the transposition of the series up two semitones. The disjunct theme reappears momentarily and is succeeded by a melody in the left hand which is accompanied by *acciaccatura* chords in the right hand, based largely on the inversion transposed up six semitones .

## 6 PAEAN

### Listening Example 10

This material is immediately repeated another three times, each time with some slight modification or extension. For example, the chords of bar 4 remain consistent in future repetitions, but the disjunct material, whilst maintaining its character, is different with each successive appearance. Additionally, the material is extended by using a phrase of chromatic chords in bar 16. This phrase is itself extended in bar 29 and later in bars 43ff.

This constitutes the A section of the *Paeon* which is loosely in a binary form with coda, thus: A (bars 1-54); B (bars 55-141); A' (bars 142-151); B' (bars 152-180); coda (bars 181-end).

Sustaining further interest with the same musical material would have proved difficult, so Williamson digressed at this point and reverted to the theme from the second movement (*Sonata*) to commence section B. (As the *Paeon* continues to unfold, the listener becomes aware that the musical material is somewhat overworked.) Whilst recognisable as a quote from the earlier movement, in its new guise the altered right hand figuration and the jaunty left hand accompaniment render a distinctly Bacchanalian character. **Listening Example 11** At this point the texture is still clear, yet in the accompaniment Williamson uses concurrent multiple transpositions of the series and/or inversion. Later this will result in considerable musical tension. The remainder of the B section alternates between the *Sonata* theme and two chordal motives. It will be perceived that Williamson shows a fondness in this *Symphony* for alternating juxtapositions of tonally contrasting chord pairs, as already discussed in the *Prelude* and in the *Toccata*.

The *Paeon* concludes with a rather lengthy coda whose main feature is the use of fragment A of the series transposed up three semitones as a melodic ostinato. The coda also goes some way to summing up not only the *Paeon* but the *Symphony* as a whole: the spiky opening of the *Paeon* is recalled in bars 183-189, whilst bar 190 is reminiscent of the glissando; the

chords with gradually augmenting time values from bar 191 onward have a parallel in the climax of *Aria II*; while the chords of bar 198 are recalled directly from the *Prelude*. If one heeds Williamson's note at the beginning of the score in which he explains the superscription to the fifth movement as descriptive of the *Symphony* as a whole, then this majestic conclusion can be imagined as the musical expression of the revelation of "... Christ walking on Thames water, and Jacob's ladder shining over Charing Cross". The final shaft of revelatory illumination is given by the final chord which sums up the whole work by sounding the entire series.



### Listening Example 12

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