

<b>Institution:</b> University of Southampton
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
<b>Title of case study:</b> 35-04 The Music of Michael Finnissy
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research by Professor Michael Finnissy at the University Southampton into the development of musical notation and works of extended duration has resulted in the composition of more than ninety new musical works, which have been publicly performed hundreds of times in classrooms, concert halls, at international music festivals and on radio, by both amateurs and professionals, to audiences totalling more than 700,000. Through concerts, recordings, public lectures and media coverage, Finnissy has disseminated his research insights and creative approach to a growing audience, contributing to popular knowledge of contemporary music and compositional practice, the democratisation of new music performance, and the involvement of new music in social and political debate.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Michael Finnissy, Professor of Composition at the University of Southampton since 1999, has been a key figure in British contemporary music since the 1970s and an internationally recognised leader of the 'New Complexity' movement (<i>Grove</i>, 2001). This study focuses on his research into notation and 'extended duration' and highlights his engagement with contemporary music performance practice and wider cultural critique.</p> <p>Finnissy's work draws attention to the significance of notation beyond utility. He employs notational practices featuring complex rhythms, microtones and a high degree of detail [3.1,3.4-3.6]. The underlying motivation is largely expressive: complexity provides interpretative stimulation, which is needed in a post-tonal context stripped of an aural tradition informing the notation (he has referred to it as a form of 'notated rubato'). His approach combines and extends a range of practices, including those of the late Romantic piano repertory (e.g. Busoni, Godowsky); Modernist approaches (e.g. Schoenberg and Boulez); and Experimental and graphic-score innovations (e.g. Cage and Bussoti).</p> <p>He has explored how information is communicated from composer to performer, for example in his Second and Third String Quartets [3.1]. The compositional process involved extensive work with the Kreutzer Quartet, and the interaction between composer and performers was itself the subject of ethnographic research resulting in published articles and a digital resource. Insights included the revelation of the tension that can exist between notation used to prescribe a specific sound and its potential for diverging interpretations, contributing to better understanding of the interplay of composer intentions and composer-performer interactions than can be ascertained merely from notes and instructions on the page.</p> <p>Finnissy has developed other forms of notational practice in works for amateur musicians [3.2,3.3]. For example, <i>Molly-House</i>, for musicians of mixed ability, contains two sets of pages to be performed in any order. One uses aspects of graphic notation and incorporates electronic gadgets (hairdryers, drills, vibrators); the other is conventionally notated and based on Handel arias. Through an accessible mode of notation Finnissy both creates complex sonic and aesthetic results and generates a 'community' in which players with differing levels of expertise can creatively co-exist.</p> <p>Finnissy has written several 'extended duration' works since 1999. He describes the sense of time in his five-hour solo piano work <i>The History of Photography of Sound</i> [3.4] for example, as being like a painter scaling up a postage-stamp design to fill the side of a building. Such time scales engage perception and memory in novel ways, especially in his use of cinematic editing techniques to unfold different musical 'narratives' and trajectories over extended periods.</p> <p><i>The History of Photography in Sound</i> also considers how we understand and misunderstand historical and cultural imagery through juxtaposing and combining disparate musical practices such as South African children's songs, Mozart and 1940s popular music. Similarly, Finnissy's <i>The Transgressive Gospel</i> [3.4] weaves together passages from St Mark's gospel, Tyndale's New Testament and Rimbaud's poetry with music alluding to Bach, Beethoven, Coptic Chant and</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

American spirituals in a 120-minute exploration of Christ's Passion. Ivan Hewett (*Telegraph*) described how he keeps all these influences 'in play at once, but just out of sight, trembling under the surface of his own musical language. His piece is a model of integrity, which is why it is so powerfully moving.'

### 3. References to the research

Finnissy's catalogue includes more than 325 works for a wide range of instrumental (solo, chamber, orchestral) and vocal forces, published by organisations including Universal Edition; United Music Publishers; Oxford University Press; and Composers Edition. Examples cited here were written since Finnissy took up his post at Southampton (1999).

**3.1** *Second and Third String Quartets* (both OUP, 2012). Written 2006-2007 and 2007-09; 14 and 45 minutes respectively. [declared REF 2014] See also Bayley, A. and Clarke, M. (2011) *Evolution and collaboration: the composition, rehearsal and performance of Finnissy's Second String Quartet*. PALATINE. Software DVD; A. Bayley, 'Ethnographic research into contemporary string quartet rehearsal and performance', *Ethnomusicology Forum* 20 (2011): 385-411; A. Bayley, 'Enquete sur la genese du Deuxieme quatuor cordes de Michael Finnissy,' *Genesis* 31 (2010): 37-54. and A. Bayley and M. Clarke, 'Analytical Representations of Creative Processes in Michael Finnissy's Second String Quartet', *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies* 3 (2009): 139-157.

**3.2** *Molly-House* (OUP, 2005). For unspecified instrumentation. Written 2004. Unspecified duration. Winner of the 2005 British Composer Awards in the 'Making Music' category.

**3.3** *Mankind* (OUP 2012). For solo voices, chorus and instruments. Written 2007-2008. 74 minutes.

**3.4** *History of Photography in Sound* (OUP, 2003). For solo piano. Written 1995-2001 [vast majority composed after 1999]. 320 minutes. [declared RAE 2008]

**3.5** *The Transgressive Gospel* (OUP, 2009). For two voices and ensemble. Written 2008-2009. 120 minutes. Shortlisted for a British Composer Award in 2010.

**3.6** *Gedächtnis-Hymne* (OUP, 2012). For SATB and saxophone quartet. Written 2010. 20 minutes. [declared REF 2014]

### 4. Details of the impact

As a direct result of Finnissy's research and the close links he has forged with amateur and professional musicians internationally, performers themselves, major arts organisations, and audiences have benefitted from his creative work. His music has had significant cultural impact by enhancing the repertory of new concert music, enriching audience experience and stimulating performers, critics and audiences to commentary, dialogue and debate.

Internationally active musicians have made Finnissy's work a core part of their repertoires and professional identities, and their engagement with his music has changed their thinking and enhanced their careers as well as disseminating his research to a broad range of audiences. Highly skilled performers are attracted to Finnissy's work because they want to participate at the cutting edge of contemporary music innovation and are drawn to his engagement with political and social issues. The Kreutzer Quartet provides an excellent example of a prominent group who have made a longstanding commitment to Finnissy's music: first violinist Peter Sheppard Skærved confirms, 'Michael Finnissy has been central to my development and work as a musician for the past decade and a half. My collaboration with this great composer has impelled me to radical re-thinkings of structure, expression and sound' [5.1]. The Kreutzer's recording of Finnissy's Second and Third String Quartets was released on the NMC label in 2012 and named among the Sunday *Times* Top Albums of the year [5.2]. The recording contributed to the group's profile and to NMC's economic activity: according to figures obtained from NMC (August 2013), 345 CDs and 1033 downloads of *Music for String Quartet* (NMC D180) have been sold since the 2012 release [5.1]. Similarly, many leading pianists have benefitted from performing and recording Finnissy's works, including Nicolas Hodges, Stephen Gutman, Marilyn Nonken and Ian Pace, who recorded *The History of Photography in Sound* (5-6 CDs) for release on the Metier/Divine Art label in 2013 [5.3].

Major public performances of Finnissy's post-1999 music have extended the reach of his work to varied international audiences and underpinned the professional practice and economic and cultural activity of arts organisations and venues. Since 2008 Finnissy has been featured

composer at many international music festivals, for example *Borealis* Festival in Norway and Finland's *Time of Music* Festival (both 2009). Finnissy's *Molly-House* headlined the *Time of Music's* concert series, for which a total of more than 700,000 tickets were sold. Other major performances of post-1999 music include Concertgebouw Bruges (3/8/08), Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam (18/12/08), Ensemble KORE, Montréal (April 2009, including an Emerging Composers workshop led by Finnissy), Tanglewood Festival (2009), Spitalfields Festival (2009), Boston University (02/2011, 11/02/2013, 3/5/3013), Wigmore Hall (21/10/12), Oslo International Church Music Festival (March 2013) and London Ear Festival (March 2013) [5.4]. We do not include here major performances of pieces written before Finnissy's appointment at Southampton, but note that his music represents a body of work whose impact is difficult to slice neatly by chronology, and that his earlier (pre-1999) music has also had hundreds of performances since 2008.

Important commissions since 2008 also testify to the impact of Finnissy's creative work on performers and arts organisations who have found his music compelling, and who wish to engage more closely with his insights. These include *Mankind* (2009, London Festival of Church Music), a stage work for mixed professional and amateur performers using accessible notations Finnissy developed at Southampton; *Gedächtnis-Hymne* (2010, a joint commission by the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and the New London Chamber Choir) premiered at the November Festival in the Netherlands and broadcast on Radio 3's *Hear and Now* (15/01/11); and a new vocal and two new piano works jointly commissioned in spring 2013 by the Huddersfield and Belgium's Transit Festivals [5.4, 5.5].

Finnissy has been particularly influential in composition for amateur musicians, bringing contemporary music to new performing constituencies and inspiring other professionals to emulate him. James Weeks, artistic director of the leading vocal ensemble EXAUDI (who have performed and recorded several premieres of Finnissy works) said: '[Finnissy] is as interested in working with students, amateurs, churchgoers, children - in fact any constituency that might be touched and brought together by the activity of making music, as he is with high-flying professionals..... Hundreds, perhaps thousands of us have seen the example set by Michael Finnissy and attempted in some way to follow his lead' [5.6]. Finnissy has been an active member of Contemporary Music for All (CoMA) - the organisation dedicated to enabling amateur musicians to become involved in contemporary music - since its formation in 1993. As a teacher at CoMA's summer school (1996-current) he has mentored in excess of 150 amateur music students - subsequently maintaining close and supportive relationships with many of them - and *Molly-House* and other works were composed with their benefit in mind. CoMA director Chris Shurety confirms that '(Finnissy's) steadfast belief in the contribution the amateur musician can make to contemporary music ... has had an enduring impact for CoMA musicians, many of whom continue to be inspired and to directly draw on their experience with him and his exploration of notation, social and aesthetic issues in developing their own work' [5.7].

In many cases Finnissy has engaged directly with audiences to discuss his compositional practice, and international media coverage has brought further consideration of his work and its significance into the arena of public musical knowledge and debate. For example, in a special festival talk for *Time of Music*, Finnissy spoke to approximately 250 musicians and members of the public about his use of accessible musical notation in *Molly-House*, calling on his audience to re-evaluate their relationship to music and its performance [5.4]. Other performances of *Molly-House* have similarly been framed to draw attention to Finnissy's cultural critique: for example those by Ensemble Amorphia at Handel House (4/10/11, including a talk by Finnissy) and at the Institute of Contemporary Art (9/6/11, woven into a programme exploring 'deviancy' in classical music) [5.4]. In June 2009, 400 people attended the sold-out premiere of Finnissy's *Transgressive Gospel* at the Spitalfields Festival. Finnissy's insights on extended duration were then further disseminated through reviews in the *Guardian* (17/6/09) and the *Daily Telegraph* (16/6/09) and through the full performance and an interview with Finnissy broadcast on *Hear and Now* (BBC Radio 3, 22/8/09) [5.8]. The *Guardian* review claimed: 'It's a rich mix, bound by his take on modernism, highlighted in some frenetically tangy instrumental writing, beautiful lyricism, and the odd stinging theatrical gesture', and the *Telegraph* awarded it five stars. Other examples of media coverage include a profile and links to his music in the *Guardian's* 'On Classical' guide (23/07/2012) and published interviews in *What Else* (2010); *Limburgs Dagblad* (2010) and the art magazine *Trebuchet* (2013) [5.9, 5.11].

Finnissy's compositional practice and his engagement with social and political issues inspire heated debate in the musical world outside the academy, drawing both passionate admiration and intense dislike. Finnissy's impact on musical and cultural discourse has increased substantially since 2008, as his work has become increasingly visible within new media through postings on the internet of interviews about and performances of his music. The activity of his fans in posting recordings (for example, multiple extracts from *History of Photography in Sound* in both commercial and private recordings, mounted on a dozen different YouTube channels) testifies to public engagement with his work beyond 'official' music criticism in traditional media. Some of these videos have been viewed over 30,000 times and they often spark animated discussion in the 'comments' sections: interlocutors express a gamut of reactions from admiration ('No composer I've encountered has made me think so much' 'Finnissy is the UNIVERSE!!!') to dismissal ('This isn't music'), and there are several lengthy discussions about his music's notation, meaning and worth [5.10]. Social media comments support the evaluation of Finnissy's cultural impact offered by Tom Service in the *Guardian's A Guide to Contemporary Classical Music* (2012): 'Few composers face up to the cultural, creative, and political responsibilities of the freight of musical history as sensitively as Finnissy does – and few composers working today have managed to connect contemporary music's expressive power as convincingly with its critical, intellectual potential' [5.11].

## 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 Peter Sheppard Skærved, 1<sup>st</sup> Violin, Kreutzer Quartet, email correspondence

5.2 <http://www.nmcrc.co.uk/recording/second-and-third-string-quartets>;  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/feb/16/finnissy-kreutzer-quartet-cd-review> (Kreutzer Quartet recording *Finnissy: Music for String Quartet*)

5.3 David Lefeber, Director of Metier Productions and CD label (recordings of Finnissy's music and their economic and professional impact)

5.4 Ollie Fitzgerald, Repertoire Promotion, Oxford University Press Music Department (dates, venues, audience figures, reviews and other data on performances of Finnissy's works)

5.5 <http://www.lfccc.com/church-times-review-may-2009/>; (coverage of Finnissy commissions)

5.6 James Weeks, Artistic Director of EXAUDI, email correspondence

5.7 Chris Shurety, Director, CoMA (Contemporary Music for All), email correspondence

5.8 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00m8b6f>;  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2009/jun/17/transgressive-gospel-wiltons-music-hall>;  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/ivan-hewett/5549605/Michael-Finnissy-premiere-Spitafields-Festival-review.html> (media coverage of *Transgressive Gospel*)

5.9 <http://stevekilpatrick.wordpress.com/2010/11/17/writing-with-light-and-time-michael-finnissy-interview-for-what-else-magazine/>;  
<http://www.limburger.nl/article/20100708/CULTUURENMEDIA01/7080337/1030>;  
<http://www.trebuchet-magazine.com/complex-classical-michael-finnissy/> (sample of media coverage)

5.10 <http://youtu.be/9W8cYK5RwY>; <http://youtu.be/0V9ZEIkKGak>;  
<http://youtu.be/0sMVrmnufPo> (sample social media commentary)

5.11 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/tomserviceblog/2012/jul/23/michael-finnissy-contemporary-music-guide> (*Guardian* guide to contemporary music)