

<p><b>Institution:</b> University of Bristol</p>
<p><b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 35 – Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts</p>
<p><b>Title of case study:</b> Cultural gains for amateur performers and audiences through John Pickard's ambitious and challenging brass band compositions</p>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)</p>
<p>Professor John Pickard's brass band compositions, <i>Gaia</i> Symphony and <i>Eden</i>, have been performed, broadcast and recorded nationally and internationally. Written respectively for performance by young musicians and high-level amateurs, the success of the <i>Gaia</i> Symphony led to the commissioning of <i>Eden</i> as the test piece for the final of the 2005 National Brass Band Championships of Great Britain. Through a combination of technical challenge and distinguished musical content, <i>Gaia</i> Symphony and <i>Eden</i> have brought to many of these performing groups innovative musical techniques and fresh ways of thinking about the medium, while brass band audiences in Britain and overseas have gained a new awareness of musical structures and devices more usually encountered in the 'classical' concert tradition.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)</p>
<p>The underpinning research consists of two musical compositions for brass band. During 2001-4, while he was Composer-in-Residence to the world-famous Cory Band, Pickard completed his hour-long <i>Gaia</i> Symphony in collaboration with the band and with the National Youth Brass Band of Wales (NYBBW), both of which were directed by the conductor, Dr Robert Childs. Finished in 2004, premièred at the Cheltenham Music Festival in the following year and subsequently issued on CD, <i>Gaia</i> Symphony is considered to be the longest and most ambitious work yet composed for the medium. Its four constituent movements – <i>Tsunami</i>, <i>Wildfire</i>, <i>Aurora</i> and <i>Men of Stone</i> – may be played independently (and were all premièred as free-standing works by NYBBW), but, when played together, are modified and connected via three movements for percussion ensemble alone (<i>Windows 1, 2 and 3</i>) to form a continuous span. The original version of <i>Wildfire</i> was composed outside the review period, and was subsequently modified for absorption into the single span of the <i>Gaia</i> Symphony. While <i>Wildfire</i>'s impact as an independent work has been significant, it is not being submitted as part of the present Case Study.</p>
<p>The intellectual seriousness with which the <i>Gaia</i> Symphony treats a medium that is often more associated with light entertainment was recognised in <i>The Guardian</i> newspaper's description of the 2004 première as 'a virtuoso performance that broke various barriers of perception'. [a]</p>
<p>On the strength of the work completed with the Cory Band, Pickard was commissioned by the Brass Band Heritage Trust to compose <i>Eden</i> as a test piece for the 2005 National Brass Band Championships final at the Royal Albert Hall, London. A test piece is a musical work that is performed by each competing band in a contest. The composition itself is designed to challenge the performers' individual and collective virtuosity. Performances are given consecutively and anonymously, to a jury whose view of the bands is shielded in order to ensure fair practice. Aware that the Cory Band would be competing in the contest, Pickard demitted his residency with them prior to composing the work. Nevertheless, the experience of working closely with such outstanding musicians was of seminal importance in terms of the confidence and virtuosity with which the medium is handled in the piece. The title, while playing on a long-established tradition of predicating brass band compositions on biblical themes, also references ecological and humanistic concerns symbolised by the Eden Project at St. Austell in Cornwall. The local St Austell Band gave the world première, since they happened to play first at the contest for which the music was written (a process determined by drawing lots). This was the first, and so far the only, time in their history that the band had reached the national final. Reference to the work on the band's website attests to the continued impact of the composition on these performers. [b]</p>
<p>Both <i>Gaia</i> Symphony and <i>Eden</i> have been performed internationally during the review period. They have also been broadcast and received multiple commercial recordings. <i>Eden</i> is firmly established within the brass band repertoire, having been selected as a test piece in the finals of</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

the Belgian, English, Norwegian and European Championships. It has been commercially recorded five times (an unusual achievement for a recent 'classical' composition) and has been the subject of a study day at the University of Durham and of journal articles.

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] *Gaia* Symphony (Duration:62 minutes)

Commissioned by: National Youth Brass Band of Wales/Cory Band

First performance: Cheltenham Music Festival by the Cory Band cond. Robert Childs, 10/07/2005

Publisher: Bardic Edition/Kirklees Music 2004

CD recording: Cory Band cond. Robert Childs, DOYCD188. 'CD of the Year 2005' (Brass Band World) [Materials available upon request]

[2] *Eden* (Duration:14 minutes)

Commissioned by: Brass Band Heritage Trust

First 20 performances: Royal Albert Hall, London by the 20 finalist bands of the 2005 Besson National Brass Band Championships, 15/10/2005

Publisher: Bardic Edition/Kirklees Music, 2005

CD recordings: DOYCD202; DOYCD205, DOYCD209, DOYCD272, DOYCD315, BTMS-CD03 [BIS CD2061 (to be released in 2014)] [Materials available upon request]

*Eden* was a shortlisted work in the British Composer Awards, 2006

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In describing the impact of the research since January 2008, the following narrative makes passing reference to impacts occurring between October 2005 and December 2007 in order to contextualise the claim of the two pieces to 'classic' status within the genre.

The *Gaia* Symphony was composed piecemeal over a period of more than ten years, though the bulk of the work took place between 2001 and 2004. All four movements were premièred separately by the NYBBW as part of their summer courses, so the impact on young players (aged 13-18) was in-built from the start. The composer and conductor Philip Harper, latterly Musical Director of the Cory Band, participated in some of the early performances and considers the impact of the experience to have played a key role in his decision to become a professional musician: 'I first discovered John Pickard's music aged 18 and playing with the Sun Life Band in Bristol when we performed *Men of Stone* at the BBC Festival of Brass. Such multi-dimensional music had a profound impact on my development, and I was fascinated to hear the textural and rhythmic possibilities of the brass band, as demonstrated in this work. My own compositions began to develop as a result of further study of John's music, and I'm glad now to be in a position as a professional freelance conductor where I perform John's work regularly, and continue to benefit from further study of the scores.' [c]

Pickard's residency with the Cory Band made the music a central part of their musical lives as they worked on sections of the piece while it was being composed. Separate movements have continued to be performed; for example, Part Four, *Men of Stone*, was given by the Cory Band at the 2011 Royal Northern College of Music Festival of Brass (one of the world's premier brass festivals) and Part Two, *Wildfire*, was played by the National Youth Band of Great Britain at the 2012 Proms (though impact is not being claimed in this case, for reasons explained in section 2). Though the separate movements were not originally intended as test pieces, *Men of Stone* was used for this purpose at the South Australian Band Championships in 2002[d]. Because of its size and unusual complexity as a complete work, the symphony requires extended and detailed preparation to mount it in its entirety. In September 2011, Eikanger-Bjørsvik Band of Bergen, Norway, became the first non-UK band to perform the complete work in public, an event covered in part of a documentary about the band, *Korpsfiksert*, broadcast by NRK Norwegian television [e]. The same ensemble repeated it in March 2013, while preparing the work's second commercial CD recording. The recording took place on 14–16 June 2013 in Bergen with the major classical label BIS Records. A double impact was therefore achieved: the work gave the band an opportunity to record with an internationally renowned label and BIS Records extended its repertoire since, of the 2000-plus recordings it has so far issued, this is the first to feature a brass band (as opposed to a

## Impact case study (REF3b)

symphonic brass ensemble). The project attracted funding of £10,000 from an anonymous benefactor, thereby bringing financial benefit to the band and to the record company.

Since its première, *Eden* has received many performances and has become a staple of the Championship Section of the brass band repertoire. Paul Hindmarsh of the Brass Band Heritage Trust comments that 'once the work became more familiar, it became admired for the quality of the invention, concept and execution. *Eden* remains a very taxing piece in the repertoire – especially in its rhythmic structure. It has been used as a contest piece on a number of occasions since 2005 and is recognised as one of the modern Everests of the medium.' [f] *Eden* has been programmed as the compulsory test piece at the Danish National Championship (2006), the Belgian National Championship (2009) and the English National Championship (2010). In the European Championship, it was the 'own choice' work of two bands in 2006 and one in 2009 and has been played four times at the Norwegian National Championship (2006, '07, '08, '10). [g]

*Eden* has also had a vigorous performance life beyond the world of the brass band contest and is regularly played in public concerts. Following its inclusion in a retrospective of Pickard's music for brass band at Royal Northern College of Music Festival of Brass a study day was devoted to it at the University of Durham in 2007 as part of a postgraduate course for brass band conductors. In 2009 Pickard was invited to give a day-long workshop on the piece in Brussels, prior to its performance in the Belgian National Brass Band Championship. The piece has been issued commercially in five different CD recordings: by the Leyland Band, Black Dyke Band, BTM Band, the Stavanger Band (Norway) and Sandefjord Brass Symposium (Norway). All recordings have been commercially available since January 2008. A sixth commercial recording of *Eden* was made by the Cory Band in May 2013 and a seventh by the Eikanger-Bjørsvik Band in June 2013 for inclusion with BIS Records' disc of *Gaia* Symphony (see above).

Although new pieces for brass band are not uncommon, both the *Gaia* Symphony and *Eden* have been praised for setting new standards of artistic endeavour within the medium. Consequently, they have received unusually wide coverage within the brass band press and have managed to spread beyond the narrow confines of the contesting circuit, penetrating more mainstream musical events. This particular impact is corroborated by the conductor Dr Robert Childs, who described it as 'a wonderful work [. . .] I believe it represents a turning point in brass band composition. John Pickard has found sounds in the band that haven't been heard before and this will be a revelation for the competition.' [h]

*Eden* breaks new technical ground for the medium, through its use of complex rhythmic devices that are more frequently encountered in works for specialist contemporary music ensembles. Musicians from both the Cory and Eikanger-Bjørsvik bands attest to the positive effect these challenges have had upon their musicianship: 'Dr Pickard has written technically challenging passages that have, even after 30 years playing at highest level of brass banding, required me to extend my technique still further'; '[*Eden*] has made me more aware that sometimes you need to go beyond the traditional techniques and think more outside the box'; 'Eden has developed my ability to understand and perform contemporary music.' [i]

The musical challenges these innovations present are particularly significant since the British brass band movement remains entirely amateur and largely associated with some of the most socially and economically deprived areas of the UK: the South Wales Valleys; industrial East Lancashire; South Yorkshire; the North-East. The educational element of these challenges is therefore significant, since they expose amateur musicians (some of them of school age) to musical innovation in a manner that nevertheless respects the traditions of the brass band movement. That tradition is embodied in the 'narrative' underpinning of *Eden*, together with allusions to the classic works of the repertoire that are familiar to all bandsmen and women. Ray Farr, conductor of the Vardy Band in Durham, attests not only to the work's impact on performers and listeners, but to its contribution to developing the technique of conductors: 'The musical language, form, structure [of *Eden*] has an engaging quality which is instantly appealing to musicians and listeners. This helps a great deal to overcome the technical challenges in performance...My performance, from the Royal Albert Hall was video recorded, and I have used it several times to demonstrate advanced

## Impact case study (REF3b)

conducting techniques in my lectures. ... Both pieces [*Gaia* and *Eden*] are massively important as they take brass band repertory a step forward' [j]

The technical complexities of *Eden* have been addressed in two web-based instructional videos created by the Cory Band between January and May 2013 and presented on their YouTube channel. The videos (complementing a third video featuring a complete performance) are designed for use by ensembles that are in the process of preparing the work.[j] Impacts from this initiative are still in the early stages, but the videos were viewed by members of the Eikanger-Bjørsvik Band in preparation for their CD recording, one player commenting that 'Seeing the YouTube video of Cory was really helpful for preparing this [recording].'[k]

*Eden* has therefore benefited musicians outside the UK. Luc Vertommen, conductor of the Buizingen Band in Brussels, states that: 'The band playing *Eden* and John commenting on the playing and giving insight in the construction and ideas behind the piece - very worthwhile for us... Everybody involved in this workshop was extremely please[d] with John's background information. ... *Gaia* is a landmark in modern day brass band writing mainly because it's length [sic] but also because of its great musical quality. The same can be said about *Eden* - a modern classic in brass band repertoire' [l]

The standard brass band has 28 musicians, so 560 musicians worked almost exclusively for several months to prepare the first 20 performances at the Royal Albert Hall in 2005. Anticipation of the event was considerable, with *British Bandsman* (established in 1887 and the most respected of the numerous brass band journals) devoting a four-page cover-article to the composer and the work in the week of the contest. In his analytical article on the piece, Professor Philip Wilby commented that 'it is vital that the movement seeks to encourage new works from composers such as Pickard. They refresh our repertoire, build up our wider credibility and keep us all in touch with new trends in contemporary music'. [m] At the première, the audience numbered approximately 4,000 and the winning performances were broadcast nationally.

Though smaller in scale, a similar pattern pertains for the later appearances of the work in contests. The five commercial CD releases (with a further two recorded for release outside the review period) have spread the work's reputation worldwide and *Eden* continues to be performed in contests and concerts in the UK and abroad.

In 2006 *Eden* was shortlisted in the British Composer Awards [n] and the reputation of both works and its composer has also influenced several current students in their choice of Bristol University as their study destination for degrees ranging from BA to PhD.

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[a] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2005/jul/13/classicalmusicandopera1?INTCMP=SRCH>

[b] <http://www.staustelltownband.co.uk/#/history/4562713243>

[c] Philip Harper – conductor [philip@philipharper.co.uk](mailto:philip@philipharper.co.uk)

[d] <http://brassbandresults.co.uk/pieces/men-of-stone/>

[e] <http://tv.nrk.no/serie/korpsfiksert-english-subtitles/dvfj69004111/sesong-1/episode-1>

[f] Paul Hindmarsh- Brass Band Heritage Trust [pehindmarsh@btinternet.com](mailto:pehindmarsh@btinternet.com)

[g] <http://brassbandresults.co.uk/pieces/eden/>

[h] *British Bandsman* Issue No.5373, 8 October 2005 p.12

[i] Questionnaires completed by Cory Band (May 2013) and Eikanger-Bjørsvik Band (June 2013)

[j] Ray Farr – conductor [ray@rayfarr.com](mailto:ray@rayfarr.com)

[k] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Z6H8jpd1fU>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1EUurZ4s98>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UP7A2dIONG4>

[l] Luc Vertommen – conductor [luc.vertommen@telenet.be](mailto:luc.vertommen@telenet.be)

[m] *British Bandsman* Issue No.5373, 8 October 2005 pp.16-19

[n] <http://www.4barsrest.com/news/detail.asp?year=2006&offset=350&id=4398>