

<b>Institution: UNIVERSITY of WEST LONDON</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 35   MUSIC, DRAMA, DANCE and PERFORMING ARTS</b>
<b>Title of case study:</b>  <b>Using composition and musicology to inform contextual understanding of specific musical repertoire and its place in the 20th/21st centuries</b>
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>Impact consists in engaging with faith communities, performers and arts bodies, academe, consumers and wider society to contribute to public understanding or perception of how art informs, interrogates, and nurtures spiritual awareness in a secular age; and in developing / enhancing insight into specific musical repertoire and its contextual place in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century. Its focus is both critical interrogation of the creation and reception of music with a sacred or spiritual intent, and actual addition to the existing corpus of such compositional work.</p>
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>The unifying concern is how a listener's reception of music is coloured by belief or doubt, but also by the conditioning of organised religion or of a less defined thirsting after spirituality, rather than by specific faith <i>per se</i>. Key contributors are Professor Francis Pott (Chair of Composition) and Dr Robert Sholl (Reader in Music).</p> <p>Sholl's specialisation in the <i>oeuvre</i> of Olivier Messiaen sits within a wider interrogation of how aesthetics, philosophy and theology meet through particular musics. It embraces the theology of Catholicism, but also the thinking of Adorno and others. Sholl is concerned with a cultural anthropology of the music that embraces critical and analytical discourses, including more recently the discourse of embodiment. Pott's sacred choral music and organ works, heard in nearly forty countries worldwide, seek to align a contemporary aesthetic with rigorous testing of how far sixteenth-century polyphonic techniques can be imported into modern compositional exercise. He has also used large-scale commissions to explore the interaction of 'local' responsiveness to text and image with broader structural imperatives rooted in the canon of 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century chamber and orchestral music. His oratorio <i>The Cloud of Unknowing</i> [2005] has been succeeded by <i>Mass for 8 parts</i> [2011] and <i>Word</i> [2012], commissioned for the Merton Choirbook Project, 2014, a 30-minute choral/organ meditation on the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, cross-cutting verses from St John's Prologue (NRSV) with five poems of R.S.Thomas. Pott's music has been widely recorded and published. In October 2013 he signed an exclusive contract with Edition Peters for publication of his future sacred choral and organ music and of his unpublished back-catalogue in both areas.</p> <p>Sholl has produced a succession of important papers at international conferences, including London [2013; HEA funding awarded], Yale [2013], Hong Kong [2012], Harvard [2011], Boston [2010], Birmingham [2008] and the Southbank Centre, London, where he organised 2 conferences [2008 and 2011]; also chapters towards multi-authored books for Cambridge University Press [2012], Grand Rapids: Eerdmans [2011] and Ashgate [2010]; and peer-reviewed articles for <i>Music and Letters</i> [2012, x 2]. Work in progress/in prospect includes two monographs on Messiaen [Ashgate or Yale, 2015-2016] and co-editorship of a book, <i>Contemporary Music and Spirituality</i> [Ashgate, 2014, including a chapter by Pott on <i>The Cloud of Unknowing</i>]. Sholl's work critically contextualises Messiaen alongside such diverse composers as Tournemire and Pärt. Its focus on</p>

## Impact case study (REF3b)

the nature of spirituality itself, and on locating the beautiful within modernity, finds practical expression through Sholl's profile as an organist, and a natural foil in Pott's preoccupations as a composer (some of whose organ works he has performed).

LCM's wider profile of creative practice has included work for film and concert hall by Simon Lambros and Paul Robinson. Robinson received First Prize in the Tong/Hasegawa Piano Duo competition [UK], Special Prize for the Luxembourg Sinfonietta International Competition, First Prize in the first Hilliard Ensemble Competition and Pierro Pezze Prize in the International Competition 'Città di Udine'. As director of his own ensemble, Harmonie Band, Robinson has composed widely for silent films, receiving commissions from many UK festivals, from the 'Giornate del Cinema Muto' in Italy and from the 'Era New Horizon' Festival in Wroclaw, Poland, for a new score to Dreyer's 'The Passion of Joan of Arc', premiered at Wroclaw Opera house in 2007 by Harmonie Band and the Hilliard Ensemble. Lambros' film scores include 'Blindscape', nominated for Oscar and BAFTA awards, 'Summer Scars' (winner of two Welsh BAFTAs and nominee for best Feature Film) and 'The Last Horror Movie', winner of 11 awards and in the top 20 DVD rentals list in the USA for 2005, reaching No. 2 in the Blockbuster Charts alongside the Benioff/Petersen film epic, 'Troy'.

### 3. References to the research

#### Sholl:

Jeremy S. Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie, eds. *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*. Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. 497 pp.

[http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/resonant\\_witness\\_conversations\\_between\\_music\\_and\\_theology](http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/resonant_witness_conversations_between_music_and_theology)

<http://www.transpositions.co.uk/2012/03/review-resonant-witness/>

- Andrew Shenton, ed. *The Cambridge companion to Arvo Pärt*.
- Cambridge University Press (Cambridge), 2012). Xix. 275 pp.
- Reviews: Arnold Whittall, *Musical Times*, Winter 2012, pp. 110-112.
- Gavin Plumley, *Classical Music Magazine*, 14 July 2012.

#### Pott:

#### **Mass for 8 parts and six short choral works, Naxos, 8.572739:**

- Composition by Francis Pott using traditional liturgical Latin text. 5 movements, 42 minutes.
- CD release: *In the Heart of Things*. Naxos, February 2012.
- Scores: *Mass* unpublished. Scores of the remaining six works all published by Oxford University Press.
- Performers: Commotio / Matthew Berry, conductor.

#### Reviews:

- Malcolm Riley, *Gramophone*, February 2012.
- John Quinn, *Musicweb International*, March 2012.  
[http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Mar12/Pott\\_mass\\_8572739.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Mar12/Pott_mass_8572739.htm)
- Paul Corfield Godfrey, *Musicweb International*, May 2012.  
[http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Apr12/Pott\\_Heart\\_8572739.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Apr12/Pott_Heart_8572739.htm)
- Stephen Pritchard, *Observer*, 12 February 2012.

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**When David heard that Absalom was slain, Naxos, 8.573049:**

- Motet for double chorus *a cappella*. 12 minutes.
- CD release: conspectus of modern British sacred choral music. Title work: Gabriel Jackson *Requiem*.
- Issued 2012. Score unpublished.
- Performers: Vasari Singers / Jeremy Backhouse, conductor.

Reviews:

- William Hedley, *International Record Review*, October 2012.
- John Quinn, *Musicweb International*, October 2012.  
[http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Oct12/Jackson\\_requiem\\_8573049.htm](http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2012/Oct12/Jackson_requiem_8573049.htm)
- Philip Barnes, Choral Journal of the American Choral Directors' Association [ACDA], May 2012.
- Terry Blain, BBC Music Magazine, October 2012.

**4. Details of the impact**

**Sholl's** investigation of contemporary composers is unified by an overarching concern with how musics of the 20th and 21st centuries have reconfigured both aesthetic notions of 'modernity' and traditional notions of spirituality. These themes are informed particularly by his research into the theology underlying Messiaen's oeuvre, though also by his interest in the work of Pärt.

Sholl's work led him in February 2008 to convene *Contemporary Music and Spirituality*, an international conference held at Southbank Centre in February 2008 under the aegis of the University of West London and the Royal Musicological Association. The conference included keynote lectures by James MacMillan, the late Jonathan Harvey and Francis Pott, as well as a lecture by Sholl himself. It was succeeded by a further conference at the same venue on Boulez, in October 2011. The proceedings of the first conference are due for publication in 2014 [Ashgate]. A chapter by Pott examines his own intentions in *The Cloud of Unknowing*, while one by Sholl articulates a thematics of spirituality (embodiment and presence/absence in works by Adams, Birtwistle, Ferneyhough, Feldman, Tavener and Arvo Pärt). Collaboration between Sholl and Pott has also extended into performance, with Sholl performing organ works by Pott on a number of occasions and in significant venues, including St Paul's Cathedral in December 2011. Sholl has also performed music by composers within his research focus and is currently preparing the complete oeuvre of Messiaen for commercial recording on the *Deux-Elles* label.

**Pott** has acquired a reputation mainly as a composer of organ and sacred choral music, but has moved gradually to a broadly agnostic, humanist position. He has found value in viewing the Crucifixion in an emblematic light, as a symbolic phenomenon perpetuated in the human atrocities and man-made tragedies of successive ages and conflicts. This has afforded a prism for contemplating the state of the modern world, rather than meditating on the possibility of another beyond. That preoccupation is demonstrated at length in his oratorio *The Cloud of Unknowing*, submitted for RAE 2005. Currently realigning himself as a composer through increasing outputs of chamber and orchestral music, Pott has already produced a succession of substantial choral works (both accompanied and *a cappella*).

A particular concern is interrogating in practice how far 16th-century polyphonic technique can adapt to a modern idiom with an expanded harmonic/tonal frame of reference. This informed his 12-minute motet for double chorus, *When David heard that Absalom was slain* (2008), commissioned by the St Louis Chamber Chorus as part of its commitment to perform modern and ancient settings of the same texts alongside one another. It was carried further in his *Mass for eight parts* (2011), in which hocketing, cantus firmus technique, antiphonal homophony and sustained imitative motivic counterpoint co-exist with cyclical concerns relating to the 20th century.

## Impact case study (REF3b)

The transmuting of ancient into contemporary represents common ground with Sholl's pursuit of modernity and tradition. Present activity sits within a department with a widely varied focus, the history of which is expanded within REF 5.

Pott was a nominated finalist in the choral section of the annual BASCA/BBC Composer Awards in both 2006 and 2011, the latter occasion concerning his *Mass for eight parts*, returned for REF 2014. Winner of national and international composition awards including the Prokofiev Competition, Moscow 1997, in 2004 he received Honorable Mention for two major choral works in the Barlow Competition, USA, placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in a worldwide field of 362 professional composers behind the British composer Judith Bingham: the first time in the award's history when any British composer had been recognized. His work has become known to a wide audience on commercial CD (some twenty separate releases) and has been broadcast widely, including simultaneous broadcasts to 22 separate countries and the Vatican by BBC Radio 3 and separate transmissions in many further nations. Major artists in nearly 40 countries have given performances worldwide. Critical reception has been widespread and positive, noting both the subject matter's preoccupations and the revisiting of received techniques with new ends in mind. In 1992 *Musical Opinion* cited *Christus*, Pott's Passion Symphony for organ solo, as 'clearly one of the most important organ works in our [the 20<sup>th</sup>] century'. The Times described the work in April 2001 as 'Not a work beholden to any other: rather, an astonishingly original composition, compelling in its structural logic and exhilarating in performance'. In November 2007 Pott's oratorio *The Cloud of Unknowing* was described in *International Record Review* as '[a] passionate and apocalyptic masterpiece, ...a tour de force', a view echoed across the national and parts of the international press.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

#### Pott:

- Professional Conductors.
- Promotion department, Oxford University Press.
- Managing Director, Peters UK.
- BBC Radio Three: *Kyrie* from *Mass* has been broadcast. *In the Heart of Things* was discussed and reviewed on *CD Review: Building a Library*, BBC Radio 3, 21 April 2012.
- Executive Producer to the BBC Singers.
- Conductor, St Louis Chamber Chorus
- Critics (2)
- Professional Conductor; consultant editor for Novello & Co./Music Sales).
- Eminent performer of Pott's 'Cello Sonata.
- Pianist, organist and foremost exponent of Pott's organ works over 30 years.

#### Sholl:

- Messiaen scholar and organist (Boston University)
- Professor (Cambridge and Duke).
- Professor, University of Hong Kong - PhD supervisor
- Prof. Emeritus KCL
- Professor and Messiaen colleague