

<b>Institution:</b> University of Cambridge
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 35 (Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts)
<b>Title of case study:</b> Transcending Quotation: The Music of Robin Holloway
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>This case study focusses on the impact of research carried out by Robin Holloway. As a composer, Holloway has pioneered a sophisticated and multifarious practice based around quotation and reference, which continues to shape both compositional and critical thinking about postmodernism in music. His unique and idiosyncratic approach was initially regarded as controversial before becoming a point of reference and establishing itself as an integral part of a musical mainstream that it helped to form. Through its diversity, allure and referential richness, Holloway's music has reached a large and widespread public and has played a major role in shaping the discourse and terms of reference of new music both nationally and internationally.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>The origins of Holloway's interest in allowing music from earlier periods to feed directly into his creative imagination can be traced back to his seminal scholarly work on Debussy and Wagner. Throughout his career, Holloway's compositional creativity has been informed on the one hand by a compendious practical knowledge of musical history and on the other by his parallel activities as an orchestrator, writer, pianist and teacher. The critical dialogue with the musical past in Holloway's research is complemented and enriched by a didactic dialogue with his students, with which it has been intrinsically linked. Thus, beyond their direct cultural impact discussed below, his music and thought have had considerable indirect impact through the international profiles of the many leading composers (representing an exceptionally broad aesthetic spectrum) whom he has taught: these include George Benjamin, Thomas Adès, Judith Weir, Errollyn Wallen, Jonathan Dove and Julian Anderson. Benjamin comments, 'The man's burgeoning creativity and incomparable cultural knowledge, added to the warmth and enthusiasm with which he shares them, has been a source of inspiration to the generations of young musicians he has nurtured in Cambridge' (Robin Holloway—A Tribute, <a href="http://www.robinholloway.info/pdfs/tribute_george_benjamin.pdf">http://www.robinholloway.info/pdfs/tribute_george_benjamin.pdf</a> [October 2011]), while according to Anderson, Holloway's music 'has been a beacon of inventiveness, liveliness and enlightened exploration for more than forty years...He has continued to resist pigeonholing, uniting contradictory impulses of neo-Romanticism and neo-modernism in unpredictable musical canvases of complexity and beauty which remain vitally important to British composition and culture generally' (programme booklet, Robin Holloway 70th Birthday concert, 27.XI.13).</p> <p>The neo-Romanticism to which Anderson refers is manifest in the allusiveness of Holloway's work and in its pioneering approach to the use of quotation - a practice which broke a longstanding contemporary music taboo and had a profound legitimising effect on subsequent compositional practice. Beyond this, Holloway's research has permitted a highly sophisticated interrogation of what musical meaning might be and the ambiguities inherent in our historical perspective. John Fallas writes that through the use of musical found objects, Holloway's work performs 'an analysis of its chosen materials', enriching and problematising the listener's understanding of the original works and illuminating links and relationships between diverse repertoires: 'who would have realized how close the interlocking thirds from Elgar's "Nimrod" theme are to the ostinato from <i>The Rite of Spring</i>, or that in turn to the opening figure of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, without hearing how Holloway deploys them?' ('Into the New Century: Recent Holloway and the Poetics of Quotation', <i>Tempo</i> 61/242 [2007], 3).</p> <p>Holloway's approach is intensely practical; it has flourished within the ecosystem of Cambridge's live music-making scene. As a composer, his natural element is orchestral music, but (as for the composers of the nineteenth century whose work he cites) this is often refracted through the medium of piano duet. Thus work with composition students who are competent pianists may</p>

become a laboratory in which earlier (sometimes symphonic) repertoire is explored, approaches exchanged, and new ideas road-tested. ***Gilded Goldbergs*** exemplifies this continuum between teaching and research, as well as between past and present: originally conceived as a two-piano rendering of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* to facilitate an understanding of its counterpoint for didactic purposes, the project ramified to become an original work lasting over an hour and a half which incorporates techniques of quotation, commentary, gloss, palimpsest, elaboration and free fantasy on Bach's original material.

This easy conversance of Holloway's composition with music of the past has reached a point of such fluency and virtuosity that, according to Fallas, 'the listening experience rests on an ambiguity as to whether what one is hearing is quotation, and also at certain moments on an ambiguity as to what is being quoted...It is a game with meaning and association'. A continuum can be traced between, on the one hand, orchestrations of pre-existing works (***En Blanc et Noir***) and, on the other, purely original works (***In China***). In between these outposts lie works which quote or invoke the *Zeitgeist* of earlier music (***Fifth Concerto for Orchestra***), or which 'set' pre-existing materials such as songs in between freely composed linking episodes (***Reliquary***, ***C'est l'extase***). Each has had direct impact through live, broadcast, and recorded performance, and together they evidence an approach to musical thought whose impact is pervasive in the world of contemporary classical music.

### 3. References to the research

- ***Gilded Goldbergs*** op. 86 (completed 1997) for two pianos. Duration 1 hour 40 minutes. Published by Boosey and Hawkes. Premiered on 2.I.98 by various pianists in relay at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. Complete commercial recording by Glen Inanga and Jennifer Micallef, Hyperion CDA67360.
- ***En Blanc et Noir*** (orchestration of Debussy's original for two pianos, 2002). Duration 17 minutes. Published by Boosey and Hawkes. Scored for 3 flutes, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 contrabassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, 2 harps, celesta and strings. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony and premiered on 3.XI.04 under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas at the Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco. Commercial recording by Orchestre National de Lyon, cond. Jun Märkl, Naxos 8.572583.
- ***C'est l'extase*** op. 118 (2012). Duration 25 minutes. Published by Boosey and Hawkes. Scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, harp and strings. Commissioned by the San Francisco Symphony and premiered on 10.I.13 by Renée Fleming under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas at the Davies Symphony Hall, San Francisco.
- ***Reliquary*** op. 111 (2009-10). Duration 20 minutes. Published by Boosey and Hawkes. Scored for soprano soloist, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 1 percussionist, harp, celesta and strings. Commissioned by the BBC for the 2011 Proms season and premiered on 9.IX.10 by Dorothea Röschmann and the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of Gianandrea Noseda at the Royal Albert Hall, London.
- ***Fifth Concerto for Orchestra*** op.109 (2011). Duration 28 minutes. Published by Boosey and Hawkes. Scored for 3 flutes, 2 cor anglais, 3 clarinets, 2 contrabassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 4 percussionists, celesta, harp, piano and strings. Commissioned by the BBC for the 2011 Proms season and premiered on 4.VIII.11 by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Donald Runnicles at the Royal Albert Hall, London.
- ***In China*** op. 117 (2012). Duration 20 minutes. Published by Boosey and Hawkes. Scored for 3 flutes, 2 oboes, cor anglais, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, 1 percussionist, timpani, harp, piano and strings. Commissioned by 'Composing China' and premiered on 17.III.13 by the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) Orchestra under the direction of Kristian Järvi at the NCPA, Beijing. First UK performance, BBC Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Garry

Walker, BBC Maida Vale Studios, 14.XI.13.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Holloway's music has had a broad and sustained social and cultural impact through live performances, radio and television broadcasts, CD sales, and internet download or streaming services (iTunes, eMusic, Spotify etc). According to Jonathan Dove, his work suggests 'limitless possibilities for what music could be, how far it can go, how it can be made. It is daring, it is reckless, it is adventurous, it is romantic, it is extraordinary...It shines a light out towards the horizon' (Section 5a, dated 12.XI.11). The 'daring' and 'recklessness' are inextricably bound up with the allusive practices used so widely in Holloway's works: practices which promote accessibility and reach in themselves, since listeners familiar with the sources cited have an immediate key to interpreting the new piece. Along with certain other composers of his generation, Holloway has played an important role in broadening the scope of contemporary concert music and releasing it from the straitjacket of post-war modernism.

**Gilded Goldbergs** has had eight performances since 2008 in the UK, the USA (Carnegie Hall) and Germany, as well as broadcasts on BBC Radio 3 and New York Public Radio (WQXR). It has been issued on partial (Dunelm DRD0243) and complete (Hyperion CDA67360) commercial recordings: recognition of the latter, although pre-2008, as *Gramophone* Record of the Month and *Sunday Times* Disk of the Week undoubtedly strengthened its impact within the assessment period. Ronald Haak's Amazon customer review of the complete CD, from 2013, illustrates the work's enduring appeal to the non-specialist: 'I get a big kick out of this album. It uses the original score very respectfully to give us the grounds for cavorting around and murmuring "w-o-o-o, I didn't look for THAT to be in there!" while it lightens our steps around the house...Simple listening wins me over. Lots of originality and high spirits. And the 2nd CD is free, so it's not a terribly big gamble for breaking into responsibly charted new territory, is it?' (Section 5b, dated 21.V.13). The German performances post-2008 were of a ballet version of the work (choreographed by Nacho Duata for Compañia Nacional de danza de Madrid), further broadening the impact of this work by bringing it to an audience beyond the concert hall. **Gilded Goldbergs'** basis on such a famous and canonic pillar of Western art music – and one that even amateur pianists may access directly through playing – further enhances its reach.

Since 2008, Holloway's orchestral transcription of Debussy's two-piano work **En Blanc et Noir** has been performed on seven occasions (several of which were broadcast on the radio) by five separate orchestras in Holland, France, Spain, the UK and the US. Reviewers' comments pinpoint the qualities that ensure its accessibility to non-specialist listeners: 'The initial opulence of Holloway's orchestration gives way to growling darkness, followed by an uncertain scherzo: unnerving music, beautifully done.' (*The Guardian* [Section 5c], dated 3.II.12); 'The British composer has recast it with the élan of a master orchestrator...By the time Holloway reached the extended central Lento the work's origins were forgotten and a shining coloration had taken hold' (*Classical Source* [Section 5d], dated 2.II.12).

**C'est l'extase** and **Reliquary** are orchestrations of songs by Debussy and Schumann to which Holloway has added linking sections for orchestra. Both received high-profile premieres. In the case of **C'est l'extase**, the soloist was Renée Fleming, an artist whose every performance attracts huge attention, which added significantly to the reach of this work: 'Fleming captivated from the first phrases of 'C'est l'extase.'...Holloway's orchestrations usher you in, linking the songs, illuminating the view and affording the soloist a spacious backdrop' (Section 5e, dated 9.I.13). The *San Francisco Chronicle* described the work as 'a beautiful and often imaginative treatment of familiar material...Holloway's treatment offered a revelatory exploration of Debussy's musical style' (Section 5f, dated 11.I.13). The BBC Proms premiere of **Reliquary** also prompted re-evaluation of Schumann's original song cycle: 'These songs have been so undervalued!...The song cycle appeared transformed' (Section 5g, dated 9.IX.10). This illustrates how, beyond its direct impact, Holloway's music exercises another kind of indirect impact: it changes the way in which familiar items of the classical repertory are experienced.

The same applied to Holloway's **Fifth Concerto for Orchestra**, which references several other

## Impact case study (REF3b)

works, in particular Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces. Again this strongly colours listeners' perceptions of the music: 'To enter Holloway's imaginative world is to delve into an encyclopaedia. There's a large (and acknowledged) debt to Schoenberg here, but also echoes of Strauss, Ligeti, even Holst. Similarly, the harmonic spectrum veers from dark atonality to perky major-chord endings' (Section 5h, dated 8.VIII.11); 'The piece...relishes orchestral textures, superimposing them in densely woven layers. Schoenberg's *Five Orchestral Pieces* are an acknowledged influence. But rather than the confrontationalism of that gritty masterpiece, the idiom is closer to the post-impressionism of Ravel, Zemlinsky and even Bax. That makes for five aurally beguiling studies ...a richly rewarding set of orchestral tableaux, and a fine vehicle for the BBC Scottish to show its agility and refinement' (Section 5i, dated 5.VIII.11).

The 'Composing China' project, for which the orchestral work **In China** was commissioned, was organised by the NCPA. Five composers were invited to write new orchestral pieces in response to two weeks spent travelling in the country. Holloway began working on his contribution immediately, with all the material in the piece being in place by September 2012, as well as some of the orchestration. In addition to the live performance itself (at the prestigious closing concert of the NCPA's Spring season 2013), which was heard by around 1600 people, the screening of a two-part television documentary bears witness to its cultural importance and extraordinary reach: this was shown on 9.IV.12 and 7.IV.13 on Fenghuang weishi (Phoenix TV – a network with an estimated global audience of 300 million worldwide, including 150 million in mainland China [Section 5j]). **In China** formed part of a very high-profile intercultural initiative and so had a political significance beyond the purely musical. It also had considerable impact as the first exposure of Holloway's work and ideas to a mass audience in a country (and beyond this, a global Chinese community) where they had been hitherto unknown.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- a) Jonathan Dove, in interview, <http://www.robinholloway.info/tributes.swf>.
- b) <http://www.amazon.com/Gilded-Goldbergs-R-Holloway/dp/B00006RHQB>.
- c) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2012/feb/03/lso-tilson-thomas-von-otter>.
- d) [http://www.classicalsource.com/db\\_control/db\\_concert\\_review.php?id=9910](http://www.classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id=9910).
- e) <https://www.sfcv.org/reviews/san-francisco-symphony/fleming-shines-in-lustrous-debussy-display>.
- f) <http://www.sfgate.com/music/article/S-F-Symphony-review-Dazzling-Debussy-4187688.php>.
- g) <http://boulezian.blogspot.co.uk/2010/09/prom-74-bbc-ponoseda-schubert-schumann.html>.
- h) *The Times*, 8.VIII.11.
- i) *Daily Telegraph*, 5.VIII.11.
- j) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix\\_Television](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoenix_Television).