

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Queen's University Belfast
Unit of Assessment: 35
Title of case study: Transforming the Musicality of Young Players
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The case study shows how short chamber compositions by composer Piers Hellawell have transformed the musical experience of young musicians within the on-going Chamber Music 2000 project in England. Circles of impact radiate from his provision of practicable new chamber work for ensembles: children from 8 to 16 have explored the challenging demands of performing contemporary music created for them in an individual and exciting idiom. They have participated in new experiences in communal music-making; they have processed new notated instructions and encountered unfamiliar sound-combinations; they have become part of a collaboration with professional artists during coaching. Through these experiences young musicians have been equipped to give a world premiere in an international venue, a life-enhancing experience.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The research insights that underpin this study relate to Hellawell's composition of new classical music specifically designed for use by learner musicians at different levels of technical accomplishment and maturity. The Chamber Music 2000 project has, since 1998, commissioned genuine new pieces, rather than arrangements of popular items, to bring young players to chamber music; during the scheme Hellawell has contributed four works for different levels, from primary to upper secondary age-group – the largest contribution of any composer engaged with the project.</p> <p>Artistic authenticity is at the heart of this ethos: the composer must cast his/her own distinctive 'adult' musical language in a form practicable for an ensemble of young musicians, rather than fall back upon simplistic or stylistically naïve materials. Much contemporary instrumental writing is highly specialized and virtuosic and so outside the reach of most young players; the research embodied in works like Hellawell's <i>Hide in The Attic</i> connects young ensemble players to the fulfilment of being involved in creative practice – involved in the interpretation of new artistic work.</p> <p>This research are concentrated in a series of four projects commissioned for the scheme since 1998, the first being <i>Hall Of Mirrors</i> (1998); this was followed by <i>A White Room</i> (1999), <i>Tidy Your Room</i> (2006) and <i>Hide In The Attic</i> (2009), first played at the Purcell Room, London by primary school children from Hampstead Garden School in February 2010 and again presented live at Kings Place, London, by youngsters from Forest School, in March 2013.</p> <p><i>Hide In The Attic</i> was a radical experiment, seeking to engage younger children than any involved previously; in this sense the undertaking was itself a miniature research project on the back of the previous work, to find material suitable for genuine ensemble playing among the youngest age- group.</p> <p>The core of the research was to evolve the composer's mature musical materials into simple identities with authentic expressive potential suitable for young players; this process (to 'distil' rather than just 'simplify' the composer's style) included seeking the freshest timbral combinations (<i>Tidy Your Room</i>, opening: unpitched string cluster glissandi) and sharpest rhythmic characterizations (<i>Hide In The Attic</i>, opening: repeated motif), within restrictions of register and of metre. The simplest level of non-thematic and improvised materials increased the sense of active creative input from young musicians (<i>A White Room</i>, cello <i>pizz. glissandi</i> and unpitched ostinati beyond the bridge; <i>Hide In The Attic</i>, piano <i>ad lib.</i> figuration</p>

in coda). To contextualize this within Hellawell's work, the means found in *Hide In The Attic* have clear antecedents in Hellawell's clarinet concerto **Agricolas** (2008), finished the previous year. This work's four tightly-drawn 'Bridge' interludes use alternate cluster chord iterations that generated the shifting chords of bb11-22 in *Hide In The Attic*; the fade-out of the piano improvised cadenza, meanwhile, derives from the long diminuendo effects of *Agricolas*' main movement II, with its *ad lib.* marimba sticks and flute whistle-tones. It is common for small works to be fertile ground for larger expansions, but here the small work acts instead as a distillation of the larger one.

These research materials take young players outside their musical learning environment, whose conventional melodic and harmonic bounds usually exclude much stimulus in extended sounds or improvised materials such as are provided in these works. The sum of this series of short works is an expertise in devising music of freshness and challenge for musical children; the circles of impact of this research are detailed in 4.

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

Hellawell Piers, **Hall of Mirrors** for Piano, Violin, Viola (or Violin 2), Cello, 1998. Published by 'Chamber Music 2000' in association with Maecenas Music, 1998 -- Peters Edition Ltd, 2007 -Cadenza Music 2012

Hellawell Piers, **A White Room** for Piano, Violin, Viola (or Violin 2), Cello, 1999. Published by 'Chamber Music 2000' in association with Maecenas Music, 1999 -- Peters Edition Ltd, 2007 -Cadenza Music 2012

Hellawell Piers, **Tidy Your Room** for Piano, Violin, Viola (or Violin 2), Cello, 2006. Published by 'Chamber Music 2000' in association with Maecenas Music, 2006 -- Peters Edition Ltd, 2007 -Cadenza Music 2012

Hellawell Piers, **Hide In The Attic** for Piano, Violin 1, Violin 2, Cello, 2009. Published by 'Chamber Music 2000' in association with Peters Edition Ltd, 2009 -- Cadenza Music 2012

Hellawell Piers, **Agricolas** for clarinet and orchestra, 2008.

Published by Peters Edition Ltd, 2008; written with an AHRC Major Sabbatical Award 2006; broadcast BBC Radio 3 September 2008 and November 2012; recording issued on Delphian DCD34114 in 2012; "*a gorgeously impassioned work*" (The Scotsman); "*Most impressive, however, is Agricolas, its two movements comprising six main sections connected by bridge passages analogous to the objects and supports found in sculpture, and whose Epilogue is a synthesis of affecting pose*" (The Gramophone); "*the centrepiece, and highlight, is the 'kind-of clarinet concerto Agricolas, completed in 2008'*" (Tempo).

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

"I thoroughly enjoyed playing 'Hide in the Attic' by Piers Hellawell at Kings Place although I was a bit scared performing in front of the audience. I loved the piece and the way that Piers Hellawell created loads of spooky sounds using different techniques. I learnt so much from the experience practising with professional musicians and loved being part of the quartet." Dominic Bury, Year 6

The musicality of a group of young people was transformed by Hellawell's work in the project Chamber Music 2000, to which he has contributed four works, played by school ensembles across England and as far away as the USA. Two concert events have been the focus of this

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365) included Hellawell's **A White Room** for four young players and the world premiere of his new piece for very young musicians, **Hide In The Attic**; ii) on 9 March 2013 the latter piece was given again, by another team of young players, from Forest School, as part of events curated by The Schubert Ensemble at King's Place, London (420 seats). The main circle of impact from Hellawell's work has been on the young players themselves: *"On stage it was amazing, because the actual concert hall had a great atmosphere and I felt like I was a proper musician. That will be a life time memory for all of us."* Angelo Donovan-Maddix, Year 5

The core of the impact was to widen the children's experience of what musical material can offer and their expertise in performing it: as they responded to the interactive environment of small ensemble work, they used their instruments for material that was timbral, percussive or semi-improvised for the first time. The research in these pieces opened the children to the many different constructions taken by music - a revelation usually given (when at all) to more advanced learners. *"My favourite part of the piece is my improvisation section at the end."* Danny Drennan, Year 6

In 2010 **Hide In The Attic** was studied by 8-year-olds from Hampstead GS Junior School, before they gave its world premiere at the concert. Teacher Sarah-Jane Gibson reports: *"As an educator I observed them change from young girls who enjoyed playing their instruments into young performers, and the memory of that still warms my heart today. Soon after the event one of the young girls returned to Japan. Last year, I received a brief message from her through a friend who had been to visit her. She said that she still remembered her experience at the Southbank Centre."*

A White Room had been workshopped in 2010 at both King's College School, Cambridge and at the Junior Royal Academy of Music, London with members of the Lawson Trio, and was then performed by the King's group at the concert. Teacher Simon Brown (KC School) reported: *"I liked the way in which every instrument had to "lead" from time to time – it was an excellent piece for teaching the reality of balance within a mixed chamber group."* The young players were thus highly receptive to their encounter with new materials; these mixed standard (coordinated) time-keeping for four diverse individual parts with more experimental sections. Even the younger age-group of **Hide In The Attic** responded to these new techniques: *"The syncopated rhythm kept changing so required the utmost concentration. I was nervous when I got on stage but when we started it was fine and flew by."* Will Telling, Year 5

Beyond the immediate circle of impact on these young musicians a wider legacy has been delivered to other performing groups, since, by the time of the February 2010 London showcase, the work had already reached as far away as Boston, U.S.A., where (in 2009) Rodney Lister wrote *"I teach at the New England Conservatory. I have a little chamber music group that I coach. They're all nine years old. They just played (25-1-2009) at the NEC Prep School Chamber Music Festival and, a week later, at its contemporary music festival, A White Room by Piers Hellawell."*

Positive impact from this research reached beyond the young generation of musicians via the context of these performances; these were heard by a large adult audience with many players and composers from the scheme present - both those acting as workshop facilitators in this project and those engaged in writing themselves – to whom Hellawell's achievements demonstrated what is possible in this simple framework. Indeed his works have become canonic as instruction on the scheme: founder William Howard wrote *"We play A White Room ourselves whenever we do a seminar for composers about CM2000. The last time was Sept 25th (2012) at Birmingham Conservatoire, where we were launching a CM2000 project for composition students."*

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Bernard Hughes, reviewing the 2010 event at <http://www.bernardhughes.co.uk/?tag=chamber-music-2000> , wrote

*“The composer who has contributed most to Chamber Music 2000 is Piers Hellawell, and he was represented by two pieces for students and two full-scale concert works.... **Hide In The Attic** was the most successful of the pieces for students, played with impressive self-possession by a very young quartet from GSJ School in London. The piece cleverly mixed notated and aleatoric passages without the joins showing, and the young pianist Mina Masuda gave a brilliantly assured performance.”*

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

Performance Management Report to HGS School, 2010 (Email on file)

Report to Kings College School Magazine 2010 (Email on file)

Photographs (2010 HG School ensemble, 2013 Forest School ensemble) on file The Gloucester (Forest School magazine)

Video testimony (2013 Forest School ensemble)

Chamber Music 2000 website <http://chambermusic2000.com/>

YouTube channel https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSYC_xdGfKeRR2ZwaJP3vWA

Individual testimony:

Coordinator of Chamber Music 2000 and professional pianist, Lawson Trio (on file)

Founder of Chamber Music 2000 and professional pianist, Schubert Ensemble (on file)

Feedback statements, Forest Preparatory School junior musicians (on file)