"I just borrowed it..."

New Zealand composers talk about their use of and quotation of **existing musical materials** in their compositions

BY **MARTIN LODGE**

A STUDENT INQUIRY ABOUT my orchestral piece *Hinterland* recently gave cause to reflect on the use I have made over the years of quoted or borrowed material in my music. From this introspective beginning there grew an interest in finding out to what extent other composer colleagues also used recycled materials, and whether the practice was widespread or peculiar to a few. The general question of quotation and borrowing seems to be a subject not previously tackled by commentators on New Zealand music.

To start the investigation off, I contacted by email a number of composers whose work I knew and asked for their comments on quotation and borrowings in their music. The sample of composers contacted was confined to some mature artists with substantial outputs sustained over a number of years, in effect composers over 40 years old. Of course this sample is too small to be considered statistcally representative of all New Zealand composers, and besides, I wrote to those who I knew *had* used quotation in some works in order to begin forming the beginnings of a picture about quotation usage. The sample was further narrowed by being confined to recent music written in the Western art music tradition. In defence of such a direct if unscientific methodology I can say only that it proved a frutiful place to start.

One doesn't have to think for long about quotation in music to realise that this topic is potentially huge. Quotation may consist of a recognisable tune or texture or harmonic progression or rhythm extracted from one work and used in another. Or it may be more subtle: perhaps the quoted material is deliberately hidden from most listeners; or maybe the borrowing is a self-quotation which listeners may or may not be aware of. Proceeding further along this path, one is confronted with the near impossibility of drawing a line between what is quoted material in a piece and what is original. Does using a triad consitute borrowing, since so many others have used every possible triad before? Of course some triads may be identified with a particular work while others are less so: two staccato E♭ major chords for orchestra certainly will suggest the opening of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony to most listeners familiar with the symphonic repertoire. On the other hand, many other triads seem simply to be workaday parts of a musical language, elements in a general vocabulary of tonal music. There are numerous other equally grey areas between *quotation* and *tradition*—some inhabitants of the grey zone are scales (some more than others), harmonic patterns, formal structures and cerain musical gestures. It is self-evident that all music borrows at least some elements or ideas from earlier pieces, usually from pieces within the same tradition. But by 'quotation' we usually mean the use of materials in a new work from one particular earlier piece.

From searching the current literature, it would appear that no monograph history of quotation in Western music has yet been written. However the American musicologist, J. Peter Burkholder, has been doing pioneering work in this field over the past twenty years or so. In an attempt to clarify thinking about the subject, he has developed a suggested taxononomy of musical borrowing.

TABLE I: Elements of a typology of musical borrowing

1. What is the relationship of the existing piece to the new piece that borrows from it?
   type
      of the same genre, medium, style and musical tradition
      of a different genre, medium, style or musical tradition
   texture
      a single-line melody used in a new monophonic melody
      a single-line melody used in a polyphonic work
      a polyphonic work used in a new polyphonic work
   origin
      by the composer of the new piece
      from the same circle of musicians
      by a contemporary from another place or circle
      from a distant place
      from an earlier time

2. What element or elements of the existing piece are incorporated into or referred to by the new piece, in whole or part?
      the full texture
      a combination of parts that is less than the full texture
      a melodic line, gesture or contour
      a rhythmic figure
      an aspect of harmony, such as a chord progression, striking sonority or pitch collection
      the form or a formal device
      texture
      instrumental colour
      other parameters

3. How does the borrowed material relate to the shape of the new piece?
      provides the structure, virtually unaltered, but other features are changed enough to create a new entity
         contrafactum (change of text)
         transcription or arrangement (change of performing forces)
         intabulation or arrangement (change of medium and figuration)
      provides the structure and is varied or altered
      melodic paraphrase
      variation embellishment or ornamentation
      forms the basis of the structure or of a melodic line, with new material added or interpolated
         trope
         refrain
      serves as a structural line or complex to which other parts are joined contrapuntally
         organum (of every kind)
         medieval motet
         cantus-firmus composition
         paraphrase (hymn paraphrase, paraphrase mass)
         setting
         arrangement
      used as a theme, including extension and development
         for variations
         for a dance movement
         for sonata form, rondo, fugue or other form
         for a march
         in a fantasia
         for a cumulative setting
         for improvisation, as in jazz
      provides material (motifs, structural ideas, contrapuntal combinations etc.) that is freely reworked
      used as a motif
      appears once, marking a significant event in the form
      appears once, in passing
      combined linearly with other borrowed (and some new) material
         linear quodlibet (successive, homophonic)
         medley
         patchwork
      combined contrapuntally with other borrowed (and some new) material
         polyphonic quodlibet (simultaneous)
      part of a collage involving borrowings from many works

4. How is the borrowed material altered in the new piece?
      complete and not altered
      incomplete but otherwise not altered
      minimallyaltered
      embellished or ornamented
      melodically paraphrased or restructured
      substantially reworked
      appears only in fragments
      placed in a new context, changing its effect
      used as a theme, perhaps not greatly altered when presented as a theme but elsewhere developed and fragmented as themes are changed to conform to a new function (e.g. as a cantus firmus in long notes, or a folktune reworked as a theme)
      disguised
      only alluded to, with a similar gesture, without itself being incorporated

5. What is the function of the borrowed material within the new piece, in musical terms?
   initial
      served the composer as a starting initial point for composition (often literally, if the new piece begins like the model)
   structural
      forms the basic structure of a single line
      is incorporated as an element in a principal melodic line
      is the structural basis for a polyphonic work

Table 1 | Elements of a typology of musical borrowing

Burkholder limits his elements in this table to 'the use in a new composition of one or more elements from a specific piece'. Even so, the list of possibilities is quite large. Of course quotation is created by the composer (or improviser) but heard by the listener. There is plenty of room for misinterpretation, mishearing, creative mistakes and so on in this relationship. And the use of quotation in music often involves more than one of the categories suggested in this table.

Does it matter whether quotation is used or not? Is it relevant to distinguish between use of tradition and specific quotation? Is it important whether or not listeners recognise quotation when it does occur? Is the recycling of musical material relevant to appreciating a new piece? I believe these are significant issues, but they also are difficult to get a firm grasp on. The broad picture which such discussion forms part of has been neatly summarised by Edward Said in a sentence in his essay 'On the Transgressive Elements in Music' 'In thinking about or discussing any of the arts we are inevitably led to a discussion about what is intrinsic and what extrinsic to a particular work.'

When we listen to the opening of Jack Body's orchestral work *Pulse* and hear two familiar, staccato E♭ major chords, what is it we really listening to? Is it the opening of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony? Or is it Jack Body? Or should we accept that it is simply Jack quoting Ludwig? Or subverting Ludwig? In a programme note accompanying the CD release of this work—part of a whole disc of what the composer calls 'cross-cultural transcriptions'—Jack wrote:

> [As well as the Baining Fire dance music] this work…refers to…composers who have been fascinated by musical pulse and the 'primitive', almost magical power it can exert: Beethoven, Berlioz and Stravinsky. The 'cut and paste' reassembling of all these diverse sources is designed to create new interpretations and meanings.

So in this case the composer had definite political and aesthetic intentions in this piece, which consists entirely of borrowed material re-assembled into a collage. The 'new meanings and interpretations' must arise from the new contexts in which the quoted material is placed. This is the fundamental premise of all collage technique, and this particular work, *Pulse*, is a case study in the recontextualising of musical materials. But exactly what are these 'new meanings and interpretations' the composer writes of? If we're totally honest, it may not be possible ever to be sure. In her essay on 'The Impact and Ethics of Music Scholarship', Kay Kaufman Shelemay notes: 'charting the relationship between music and context remains a challenging and not always fully realizable goal for scholarship'.

Perhaps surprisingly, an even more extreme example of quotation in recent New Zealand music comes from the pen of our most senior composer, a figure one might reasonably consider well removed from both the avant-garde and from Postmodernism, namely David Farquhar. Yet his *Symphony no.3 '…remembered songs…'*, premiered in 2003, has almost no original material in it. The symphony is, in fact, a fairly straight orchestral transcription of his own song cycle *In Despite of Death*, written 45 years earlier. When questioned about this, David responded that this work arose from 'a special circumstance', namely the death of his wife Raydia, who had been strongly connected with the writing of the original song cycle in the early years of their marriage.

Other self-borrowings by David Farquhar include *Prospero Dreaming* and *String Quartet 3* which use material from the unperformed opera *Enchanted Island*, while the *Moonshine Suite* recycles various older songs and piano pieces. Of his borrowings from other composers, the composer says these 'are more in

the nature of "magpie" stealings of things that I love and want to put my mark on.' That attitude towards quotation probably applies to many composers: it's a highly personal way of engaging not just with a generalised broad tradition, but more intimately with particular works and artistic ancestors.

Whereas David Farquhar claims that his approach to quotation and borrowing is not very philosophical, in contrast, Ross Harris's approach may be considered to bear quite a weight of philosophical thought. He first quoted other music back in 1973 when he used some material from Mahler's Third Symphony in two works: *Five Piano Pieces* and *To a Child.* Says Harris:

> Subsequently I have quoted a Scottish Psalm in *As though there were no God*—the title is from the hymn and the orchestral pieces is a set of free variations on it (It was commissioned by the Dunedin Sinfonia—hence the material). Recently written and still to be performed is my *String Quartet no.3* which is a set of variations on the only dance recording that they had in Hitler's bunker. It was a piece called *Blutrote Rosen*! And the quartet deconstructs it.
>
> But the use of quotation rather than a thematic borrowing occurs in my piece *At the Edge of Silence* which drifts into a few bars of the slow movement of the Schumann Piano Quartet… I quite like the idea of opening a window a window on another world in a piece—perhaps a brief glimpse of something half forgotten, half remembered.

This is a very interesting insight into Ross's aesthetic from the horse's mouth. But it also raises the vexed issue of nostalgia in music. Nostalgia was the greatest of all evils for the priests of High Modernism. For my own part, I recall with undimmed clarity the moment during an interview with Pierre Boulez in 1988 when he said to me: 'I have no nostalgia.' This was more than just an observation he was making, more than a statement of fact: it was the vehement expression of a deep personal and artistic conviction. In his published writings Boulez waxes more polemical: using quotation in new music is, he thunders, 'a shrunken and accepted form of death'. But that is a peculiarly twentieth-century view. Earlier composers up to and including Bach would have found such a notion simply bizarre.

However it is tempting, at least initially, to think that quoting a past work in a new one must be an act of nostalgia. To the Modernists, that equated with weakness at best, artistic treason more likely. The whole notion of nostalgia in music is so deliciously interesting that David Metzer, in *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth Century Music*, devotes a whole section to the history and meaning of the word nostalgia.

But in fact, while the use of quotation implies a necessary negotiation between the past and the present, that relationship need not necessarily be one of nostalgia. Memory and nostalgia are not the same thing. One can remember without being nostalgic. And why should nostalgic be considered wicked anyway?

Ross Harris suggests that 'no composer works in complete isolation from other music and must (even if intuitively) draw on elements of language(s) that are part of the community or society'. The community, I would suggest, is a broad corpus that includes the historical as well as the contemporary. The past is always with us: how, as composers, we negotiate with it is a matter of temperament, belief and artistic judgement. The link between past and present is a hugely important cultural relationship, and it is the role of quotation to act, as Metzer defines it, as 'a cultural agent—that is, it participates in and shapes cultural discourses'. Quotation creates an interaction between the original and the new, recontextualised materials, and thus between the original and the new cultural associations.

For some composers, quotation appears to be an uncomplicated matter. David Griffths, for instance, happily used quotes an Orlando Gibbons song as a left hand ostinato in the third of his *Piano Excursions*, and admits to various other self-quotations. Peter Scholes notes that his use of quotation has been confined to film and theatre projects which called for a special use of borrowed material, notably Verdi in the film *Desperate Remedies*.

Similarly, Anthony Ritchie says his use of quotation has largely related to theatre music. He says of *Quartet*, a comic chamber opera premiered in 2003:

> This work quotes from Brahms' String Quartet in A minor, Op.51. Initially, the reason for quoting this work is functional: the opening scene of the opera has the quartet players ending a concert, so we hear them playing the last minute or so of this Brahms quartet. However, once the real action begins (following the 'end' of the quartet [concert]) motifs from the Brahms quartet are woven into the texture, and permeate the rest of the scene. They are made to fit into a contemporary style through modal adjustments and use of contemporary harmonies. While there is a 'distance' between the style of the original Brahms and my own style this is lessened (a) by the drama on stage and (b) by integration into the texture by motif development.

Later in this opening scene the players argue over who to play in their next concert. The viola player loves Brahms, the second violinist loves Mozart, the first violinist loves Shostakovich, while the cellist loves his own compositions—which are truly awful. Quotations from all these make appearances in the opera, and the disparity of styles is part of the humour. Other composers also quoted are Rachmaninov, Purcell and Schubert. These quotations also add another layer of appreciation for an audience.

In Anthony's new opera *The God Boy*, premiered in 2004, several Catholic hymn tunes are quoted but with new harmonies, chosen to enhance the emotional tenor of various situations in the opera.

John Psathas's new string quartet is based on the creative transcription of some recorded clarino playing by a Greek musician, Manos Achalinotopoulos, revered by the composer. When he borrows Achalinotopoulos's *Taximi Kartsigar* as the basis for the quartet's first movement, the Greek music is not just quoted but transformed and refitted for the new medium and new musical context.

John says that in his experience, works based on transcription, a particular kind of borrowing, arise from three objectives:

> …to unlock specific secrets of [some one else's] music making in order to escape one's own cage (or at least expand it).
> …a powerful need to step outside the systematic process of music-creation in the art–music world.

> …to be in some sad, pathetic way, a part of this incredible music which (to me at least in this case) is so much greater than anything I will ever achieve. Does it make the composer a parasite? A voyeur?

On the other hand, in the case of his recent *Piano Concerto*, in which there's an obvious quotation of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto, the composer says this borrowing happened as the result of a force of gravity exerted by semi-buried music in the composer's psyche. As he was writing the third movement of his own concerto John felt 'the material was inexorably developing towards what I consider to be one of the landmarks of innocent positivism in the concerto repertoire'. As work progressed on his concerto, his own work and the Prokofiev Third (first movement) seemed to 'gravitate' together, resulting in quotation, and he accepted that as a natural part of the compositional process.

Further pursuing a speculative vein and venturing into the cultural implications of quotation, John says 'I can't ever imagine myself working with music that is not Greek'. This must surely rate as one of the more provocative statements by a born-and-bred New Zealand composer.

Ken Young's *Piano Concerto*, premiered by the Auckland Philharmonia and Michael Houstoun in 2004, embodies a number of quotations. There are some verbatim quoted passages from specific earlier works, and on the other hand clear, but non-thematic, stylistic references as well. The composer wrote in his programme note:

> The subconscious element of creative endeavour will always have its say, no matter what…The opening [of the concerto] has an obvious and deliberate allusion to Shostakovich, whose resounding cries and warnings against despotism, imperialism, prejudice and greed remain largely unheeded to this day, with the latter two being especially relevant to our own country. This movement, then, largely my reflection on this particular "state of affairs".

Ken notes that the 'unashamedly romantic' slow movement of the Piano Concerto includes a quote from Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*. This was used, he says, to reflect his belief in the need for both personal and global redemption, inspired initially by the passing of his mother through terminal illness to death. Beyond confines of this particular work, the composer says that he considers the supposedly negative term 'derivative' to be meaningless when applied to new music, since our relationship with the past is so closely involved, the relationship so alive in its constant renegotiation. We are all, he believes, constantly quoting or referring to the musical past, whether consciously or subconsciously.

Of her attitude to quotation as a composer, Eve de Castro-Robinson says: 'If I think of my output as being on a continuum from borrowed (ie. derivative) to original, I'd like to think it was nearer to the latter end'. However she goes on to qualify that, noting:

> Each work has its unique context…In *Len Songs* I referred to dance styles (rumba, Charleston, the blues, even rap) as the most suitable musical ways in which to convey Len Lye's texts. Stylistic references aren't really a staple of my musical language, but tools only used when I deem it appropriate to best illustrate, as in this case, a specific personality or, as in the Len Lye opera currently in progress, an historical time and place.

Michael Williams's opera *The Prodigal Child* (2002) is permeated with a deliberately borrowed ancient Scottish lament *Pi li li*. Michael says the text of the lament has no semantic meaning but imitates the call of the redshank seabird in coastal areas of Scotland. The song is traditionally sung at the graveside during burial ceremonies. Because *The Prodigal Child* is concerned with the loss of a child by Scottish pioneering folk in colonial New Zealand, the use of this old lament is thematically linked and loaded. Michael says: 'This quotation undergoes many permutations throughout the opera (key changes, inversions, augmentation, etc) and is used as a *Leitmotiv* at times…Although it is often present in the foreground, it [also] can often be found in the background or middle ground in various guises.'

Finally, I have used quotation and borrowing extensively in my own music, not just in *Hinterland*. My *Symphony no.1 'Flowers of the Sea'*, for instance, includes quotation embedded into the fabric of the symphonic structure. It opens with a timpani outburst based on the All Black haka *Ka mate ka mate* and concludes with most of the work's significant thematic material, both quoted and original, locked into the unifying power of a Bach chorale. It's a genuine Bach chorale, but 'filtered' into a new scale, so that the strength of the Bach's functional harmony remains but the surface relationships are new. In contrast, *Pacific Rock* for solo viola includes a short verbatim quotation from Anthony Watsons' *Sonata for Solo Viola*, intended as a fraternal acknowledgement of Watson's artistic integrity and achievement against the odds.

In conclusion, in the light of the examples discussed today, it would be fair to say that quotation and borrowing are powerfully significant, but hitherto unexplored, aspects of New Zealand composition. Without doubt there is much more to unearth. Douglas Lilburn's use of, and attitude to, quotation alone, for instance, would make a fascinating study—especially if one were to trace how his practice in the instrumental and vocal music may have carried over to the electroacoustic.

That is but one of many possible specific studies awaiting investigation in this field. As John Psathas puts it—and I would totally agree—'we art music composers borrow and quote most of the time'. In future years it will be fascinating to see what researchers discover about quotation and borrowing by our composers. ■

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All quotes from composers are sourced from email communications with the author. This article grew out of the paper 'Aspects of quotation in recent New Zealand music' presented at the New Zealand Musicological Society conference Musicology '04 in Dunedin, 27 November 2004.