

Harrison Birtwistle Studies

This collection of essays celebrates the work of Sir Harrison Birtwistle, one of the key figures in European contemporary music. Representing current research on Birtwistle's music, this book reflects the diversity of his work in terms of periods, genres, forms, techniques and related issues through a wide range of critical, theoretical and analytical interpretations and perspectives. Written by a team of international scholars, all of whom bring a deep research-based knowledge and insight to their chosen study, this collection extends the scholarly understanding of Birtwistle through new engagements with the man and the music. The contributors provide detailed studies of Birtwistle's engagement with electronic music in the 1960s and 1970s, and develop theoretical explanations of his fascination with pulse, rhythm and time. They also explore in detail Birtwistle's interest in poetry, instrumental drama, gesture, procession and landscape, and consider the compositional processes that underpin these issues.

DAVID BEARD is Senior Lecturer in Music at Cardiff University. He is the author of *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre* (Cambridge, 2012) and he has published on Birtwistle in *Music Analysis*, *Twentieth-Century Music* and *Cambridge Opera Journal*. He has contributed chapters on Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies and Judith Weir in various books, including *Ancient Drama in Music for the Modern Stage* (2010), *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies* (Cambridge, 2009) and *Dichotomies: Music and Gender* (2009).

KENNETH GLOAG is Reader in Musicology at Cardiff University. His publications include books on Tippett's *A Child of Our Time* (Cambridge, 1999) and *Nicholas Maw: Odyssey* (2008). He is the author of *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge, 2012), and has co-edited and contributed chapters to *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies* (Cambridge, 2009) and *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Tippett* (Cambridge, 2013).

NICHOLAS JONES is Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Lifelong Learning, Cardiff University. He has a specialist interest in twentieth-century and contemporary British music and is co-editor of and contributor to *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies* (Cambridge, 2009) and *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Tippett* (Cambridge, 2013). He has written a number of articles on Birtwistle's closest contemporary, Peter Maxwell Davies, for *Music & Letters*, *Tempo* and *The Musical Times*.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-09374-4 - Harrison Birtwistle Studies
Edited by David Beard, Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-09374-4 - Harrison Birtwistle Studies
Edited by David Beard, Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Harrison Birtwistle Studies

EDITED BY
David Beard
Kenneth Gloag
Nicholas Jones



Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-09374-4 - Harrison Birtwistle Studies
Edited by David Beard, Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107093744

© Cambridge University Press 2015

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2015

Printed in the United Kingdom by TJ International Ltd. Padstow Cornwall

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-09374-4 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-09374-4 - Harrison Birtwistle Studies
Edited by David Beard, Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

In memory of Michael Hall (1932–2012)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-09374-4 - Harrison Birtwistle Studies
Edited by David Beard, Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

List of figures page [viii]
Notes on contributors [ix]
Preface [xi]
Acknowledgements [xiv]
*References to Birtwistle’s scores and note on music examples
and pitch designations* [xvii]

1 ‘Let it drift’: Birtwistle’s late-modernist music dramas
Arnold Whittall [1]
2 Mechanical song: Birtwistle’s rhythmic imagination
Philip Rupprecht [26]
3 Before *The Mask*: Birtwistle’s electronic music collaborations with
Peter Zinovieff *Tom Hall* [63]
4 Birtwistle’s ‘eloquently gestural music’ *Kenneth Gloag* [95]
5 ‘The life of my music’: what the sketches tell us *David Beard* [120]
6 The sound of Raasay: Birtwistle’s Hebridean
experience *Nicholas Jones* [175]
7 Birtwistle and the labyrinthine processional *Edward Venn* [206]
8 On taking a walk *Aleksandra Vojčić* [232]
9 *Gigue Machine* and other gigs: Birtwistle in Europe and
beyond *Mark Delaere* [264]
10 Of shadows and mirrors: reflections on Birtwistle in the new
millennium *Jonathan Cross* [293]

*Appendix: A selected inventory of Birtwistle manuscripts acquired by
the British Library in 2013* *David Beard* [304]
Index [310]

Figures

- 3.1 *Chronometer* (1971–2), schema in Birtwistle’s hand page [77]
- 3.2 *Chronometer*, sonogramme and overview [85]
- 3.3 *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973–5, 1981–3), Peter Zinovieff’s 1974 configuration of the electronics (Paul Sacher Stiftung, MF 533–0023) [90]
- 5.1 *Pantomime*, a ‘choreographic sketch for three mime dancers and unaccompanied clarinet’, British Library (uncatalogued) [134]
- 5.2 ‘Pastorale Tranquillo’, setting of Walter de la Mare’s ‘Nicholas Nye’, British Library (uncatalogued) [136]
- 5.3 Opening page of *Motet for Three Voices*, British Library (uncatalogued) [138]
- 5.4 Page from the ‘Book of Magic’, British Library (uncatalogued) [145]
- 5.5 Sketch for the electronic music in *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973–5, 1981–3), for the Passing Clouds or Allegorical Flower of Reason interludes [148]
- 5.6 Pre-compositional plan for *Verses for Ensembles* (1968–9); author’s transcription of original held in the Birtwistle Sammlung, Paul Sacher Foundation [149]
- 5.7 Harmonic plan for *Angel Fighter*, Paul Sacher Foundation [170]
- 5.8 Sketch for the opening of *Angel Fighter*, Paul Sacher Foundation [172]
- 6.1 Birtwistle’s former cottage and composer-studio, Eyre, Isle of Raasay, looking out over the Sound of Raasay to the Cuillins (February 2014). Photograph reproduced by kind permission of George and yAnn Rankine, Isle of Raasay [179]
- 6.2 Hallaig, Isle of Raasay (Dùn Cana, the island’s highest point, is in the background). Photograph reproduced by kind permission of George and yAnn Rankine, Isle of Raasay [197]
- 6.3 *String Quartet: The Tree of Strings* (2007), diagram of instrumental stage positions [199]
- 8.1 *Ostinato with Melody*, temporal shaping of the entire O-1 pulse stream with varying IOIs [262]
- 9.1 Birtwistle’s enrolment form to the 1954 Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music, reproduced by kind permission of Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD) [281]
- 9.2 Birtwistle’s enrolment form to the 1957 Darmstadt International Summer Course for New Music, reproduced by kind permission of Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD) [282]

Contributors

Editors

DAVID BEARD is Senior Lecturer in Music at Cardiff University. He is the author of *Harrison Birtwistle’s Operas and Music Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) and has published on Birtwistle in *Music Analysis*, *Twentieth-Century Music* and *Cambridge Opera Journal*. He has contributed chapters on Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies and Judith Weir in various books, including *Ancient Drama in Music for the Modern Stage* (2010), *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and *Dichotomies: Music and Gender* (2009).

KENNETH GLOAG is Reader in Musicology at Cardiff University. His publications include books on Tippett’s *A Child of Our Time* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) and *Nicholas Maw: Odyssey* (2008). He is the author of *Postmodernism in Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), and has co-edited and contributed chapters to *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Tippett* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

NICHOLAS JONES is Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Lifelong Learning, Cardiff University. He has a specialist interest in twentieth-century and contemporary British music and is co-editor of and contributor to *Peter Maxwell Davies Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and *The Cambridge Companion to Michael Tippett* (Cambridge University Press, 2013). He has written a number of articles on Birtwistle’s closest contemporary, Peter Maxwell Davies, for *Music & Letters*, *Tempo* and *The Musical Times*.

Other contributors

- Jonathan Cross, Oxford University
- Mark Delaere, University of Leuven
- Tom Hall, Anglia Ruskin University
- Philip Rupprecht, Duke University
- Edward Venn, University of Leeds
- Aleksandra Vojčić, University of Michigan
- Arnold Whittall, King’s College London (Emeritus)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-09374-4 - Harrison Birtwistle Studies
Edited by David Beard, Kenneth Gloag and Nicholas Jones
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Preface

This book is being published shortly after the eightieth birthday of Sir Harrison Birtwistle (b. 1934) and we hope that it will be seen as an extension of the appreciation of his music that has been inspired by such an auspicious occasion.

The status of Birtwistle as a leading contemporary composer of international stature is widely acknowledged and most obviously reflected in his receipt of numerous awards and high profile commissions, and in the many commercial recordings that continue to be produced. In addition to this public profile, Birtwistle and his music have been well served by scholarly study in the form of six monographs by Michael Hall (1984 and 1998), Robert Adlington (2000), Jonathan Cross (2000 and 2009) and David Beard (2012).¹ All of these books, with the notable exception of Cross's study of *The Mask of Orpheus* (1973–5, 1981–3), are general overviews of Birtwistle's output that provide insights into Birtwistle's development as a composer, specific works and the contexts within which he has worked. However, although this is an impressive body of literature, there is still much more to be written about this music, with many works, issues, ideas and contexts still in need of explication and interpretation. All except one of the books mentioned above focus exclusively on music written prior to 1999, since when Birtwistle has been especially prolific. While these monographs are instructive contributions to Birtwistle scholarship, and there is much detail in all of them that informs the chapters of this book, there is a continuing need for further perspectives on Birtwistle's rich musical output.

Our volume cannot begin to address all the absences in Birtwistle scholarship but it does allow for direct insight into specific works, contexts, concepts or sets of issues. Each self-contained chapter provides a focus on a clearly defined topic. These studies also reflect the diversity of Birtwistle's music in terms of periods, genres, forms, techniques and related issues through a wide range of critical, theoretical and analytical interpretations and perspectives.

¹ Robert Adlington, *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); David Beard, *Harrison Birtwistle's Operas and Music Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jonathan Cross, *Harrison Birtwistle: Man, Mind, Music*

(London: Faber and Faber, 2000) and *Harrison Birtwistle: The Mask of Orpheus* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009); Michael Hall, *Harrison Birtwistle* (London: Robson Books, 1984) and *Harrison Birtwistle in Recent Years* (London: Robson Books, 1998).

xii Preface

Birtwistle's relationship to modernism, particularly in a late stage, provides the context for the first chapter, within which Arnold Whittall situates Birtwistle's 'music dramas' and the notion of 'drifting'. That Birtwistle's music often involves a preoccupation with time is well known, but how this preoccupation is realized within the specific details of individual works demands close scrutiny. In Chapter 2 Philip Rupprecht focuses on the flow of musical time in Birtwistle's music through a structurally precise account of rhythmic mechanisms in relation to three early works (*Chorales for Orchestra* (1960–3), *Three Movements with Fanfares* (1964) and *Tragoedia* (1965)) and one later piece (*The Axe Manual* (2000)) in which a self-evident focus on rhythm takes in wider metaphoric and dramatic meanings. The preoccupation with time is also evident in the studies contributed by Edward Venn (Chapter 7) and Aleksandra Vojčić (Chapter 8). Venn focuses on the processional in Birtwistle's music, a focus that also involves reference to ritual and the idea of the labyrinth. The primary source of inspiration for Aleksandra Vojčić's chapter is Birtwistle's claim that his orchestral work *Night's Black Bird* (2004) begins and ends in the same manner as the earlier work *The Shadow of Night* (2001).² Birtwistle's metaphors of sameness and of journeying through alternative yet related routes lead Vojčić to an analysis of concentric motion, varied repetition and ostinato patterns in these orchestral works and in the piano miniature *Ostinato with Melody* (2000).

A less familiar subject in Birtwistle scholarship is the question of his engagement with electronic music. In Chapter 3, Tom Hall creates a context for this engagement through a detailed study of Birtwistle's friendship and collaboration with Peter Zinovieff. This chapter provides the first account of Birtwistle's early interest in electronic music, an overview of his collaborations with Zinovieff and case studies in the multi-channel tape piece *Chronometer* (1971–2) and Zinovieff's plans for the use of electronic music in the opera *The Mask of Orpheus*, situated in relation to the challenges of collaboration between composers and music technologists at this time.

Birtwistle's collaborations also extend to his work at the National Theatre where, among others, he was assisted by the composer Dominic Muldowney. Reflecting on the time he spent working with Birtwistle, Muldowney has highlighted how gestural Birtwistle's music is, 'and how simple those gestures are'.³ This is an interesting observation and has received some attention in the literature, but here forms the starting point for Kenneth Gloag's chapter in which the gestural in Birtwistle's music, and how it is

² Harrison Birtwistle, composer's preface, *Night's Black Bird* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 2004).

³ Paul Griffiths, *New Sounds, New Personalities: British Composers of the 1980s* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), 161–2.

xiii Preface

both constructed and interpreted, is contextualized through wider theoretical debates around the proposed interface between music and gesture. In contrast to these questions of interpretative response, in Chapter 5 David Beard provides an overview of Birtwistle's compositional processes, in particular his use of random numbers and other permutational procedures, based on an intimate understanding of the mass of documents, sketches and drafts stored at the Paul Sacher Foundation, Switzerland, and the British Library. Although this chapter involves a high level of musical detail, these details are situated in relation to debates on subjectivity, authorship and chance, and the status of the work as a concept is problematized through the multiplicity of information and material that access to the sketches unleashes. As an appendix item, Beard lists and provides details of Birtwistle's manuscripts that were acquired by the British Library in 2013.

Place and landscape are increasingly important intersecting concepts within musicology and in Chapter 6 Nicholas Jones makes reference to both in his study of the music Birtwistle composed during, or in relation to, the time he spent living on Raasay, a remote island situated between the Scottish mainland and the Isle of Skye. This chapter examines Birtwistle's Hebridean experience and provides insights into the three compositions that are explicitly associated with Raasay: *Duets for Storab* (1983), *String Quartet: The Tree of Strings* (2007) and *Roddy's Reel* (2009); it also considers the composer's engagement with the poetry of Sorley MacLean.

Birtwistle, as stated at the outset of this preface, is a successful composer with many important commissions from international centres of culture. The spread of Birtwistle's music across Europe and beyond is documented by Mark Delaere in Chapter 9, with a detailed discussion of *Gigue Machine* (2011) providing an appropriate starting point. The book concludes with Jonathan Cross's contribution, a postlude that sheds light on some substantial works by Birtwistle but also reminds us of some recurring issues, such as melancholy and lament. This chapter also poses the question of a late period and/or style in the Birtwistle *oeuvre* and in so doing provides an appropriate ending.

DAVID BEARD
KENNETH GLOAG
NICHOLAS JONES

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our thanks to Vicki Cooper and the editorial and production team at Cambridge University Press – especially Christina Sarigiannidou and Fleur Jones, whose generous help and assistance has been invaluable. We are extremely grateful to the *Music & Letters* Trust for an award that covered the costs of copyright permissions and preparation of the index. We also thank Hilary Scannell for her careful and attentive copy-editing, and Mark Sambell for his work in preparing the index.

All score extracts are reproduced by kind permission of the publishers, as follows:

- Exody* '23:59:59' © Copyright 1998 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
Pulse Shadows © Copyright 1998 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd and Universal Edition (London) Ltd. Text for 'White and Light': *Poems of Paul Celan*, translated by Michael Hamburger © 2002 revised edition (New York: Persea Books; first edition, 1988), reproduced with kind permission of Johnson & Alcock Ltd
Ostinato with Melody © Copyright 2000 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
The Axe Manual © Copyright 2001 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
26 Orpheus Elegies © Copyright 2003 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
Theseus Game © Copyright 2003 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
The Shadow of Night © Copyright 2003 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
Night's Black Bird © Copyright 2004 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
String Quartet: The Tree of Strings © Copyright 2008 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd
The Minotaur © Copyright 2008 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd, libretto: © Copyright by David Harsent
Angel Fighter © Copyright 2009 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd, text: © Copyright 2009 by Stephen Plaice

xv *Acknowledgements*

Roddy's Reel © Copyright 2009 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd; the quotations from 'An Cuilithionn' by Sorley MacLean are reproduced by permission of Carcanet Press Ltd

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra © Copyright 2010 by Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd

Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Chorales for Orchestra © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Dinah and Nick's Love Song © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Duets for Storab © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Earth Dances © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Grimethorpe Aria © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Melencolia I © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Refrains and Choruses © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

The Triumph of Time © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Three Movements with Fanfares © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Tragoedia © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Verses for Ensembles © Copyright by Universal Edition (London) Ltd, London. Reproduced by permission. All rights reserved

Every reasonable attempt has been made to identify and contact copyright holders of material printed here. Facsimile copies of extracts from *Pantomime*, 'Pastorale Tranquillo', *Motet for Three Voices*, *The Mask of Orpheus* and *Secret Theatre* (on the cover) and transcriptions of sketches for *Secret Theatre* are reproduced by kind permission of the British Library and Harrison Birtwistle. Transcriptions from *Three Sonatas for Nine Instruments* and from sketches for *Verses for Ensembles*, *Nenia: The Death of Orpheus* and *Carmen Arcadiae Mechanicae Perpetuum*, and facsimile copies of sketches for *Angel Fighter* are presented by kind permission of the Paul Sacher Foundation, Basle, and Harrison Birtwistle. The schema for *Chronometer* in Birtwistle's hand (Figure 3.1) is reproduced by kind permission of the composer. Peter

xvi Acknowledgements

Zinovieff's 1974 configuration of the electronics for *The Mask of Orpheus* (Figure 3.3) is reproduced by kind permission of Peter Zinovieff.

The Britten–Birtwistle correspondence cited in Chapter 3 is © Britten–Pears Foundation (www.brittenpears.org) and is used by permission. The extract from Walter de la Mare's poem 'Nicholas Nye' quoted in Figure 5.2 is reproduced by kind permission of the the Literary Trustees of Walter de la Mare and the Society of Authors as their representative. In Chapter 6, all quotations from Sorley MacLean's poems are used by permission of Carcanet Press. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 are reproduced by kind permission of George and yAnn Rankine, Isle of Raasay. Figures 9.1 and 9.2 are reproduced by kind permission of Internationales Musikinstitut Darmstadt (IMD). All quotations from archive documents in Chapter 9 are by permission of Archiv des Internationalen Musikinstituts Darmstadt. In Chapter 10, the extracts from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, translated by Stephen Cohn (2000), are used by permission of Carcanet Press Limited.

Finally, Nicholas Jones would like to thank his family, particularly his wife and children, for their loving support and patience throughout this project, and David Beard would like to thank Danijela for her support and encouragement.

References to Birtwistle's scores and note on music examples and pitch designations

In scores that use rehearsal numbers, reference to specific bar numbers are given if they occur prior to the first rehearsal number. After that point, identification takes the following form: fig. [rehearsal number]:[bar number after rehearsal number]. For example, 'fig. 2:10' means '10 bars after fig. 2' (taking the first bar to be that in which the figure itself appears).

Unless stated otherwise, all transposing instruments in the music examples are written in C. The registral designations used in the text adopt the pitch notation system which identifies C_4 as middle C, C_3 as the pitch C an octave below middle C, C_5 as the pitch C an octave above middle C and so on.