

1989

Reflections for piano and percussion (Ross Edwards)

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Compact Disc 2 (CSM 2)

Ross Edwards

Reflections (1985)

Reflections for piano and percussion is the most recent of a series of works which Edwards refers to as his sacred music. Whereas its predecessors, *Shadow D-Zone* (1977), *The Tower of Remoteness* (1978), *Kumari* (1980) and *Etymalong* (1984) demonstrate an increasing concern with compositional austerity, *Reflections* uses a much more expansive palette of sonorities. This is not to suggest that it is out of character with its companion pieces. Indeed the qualities of its gestures and their unique repetitive organisation are unmistakable trademarks of the series. Nonetheless it is surprising that *Reflections* should follow chronologically

from *Etymalong* which is an extreme example of reducing the musical material of a piece to just a few characteristic motivic gestures.

Reflections, by contrast, involves a complex interplay of a considerably greater number of sonorities, especially since the two pieces are of comparable length. New material is introduced consistently throughout the piece, and it is only at its very end that there is any obvious reiteration of previously stated material. Table 1 shows the organisation of the distinct musical ideas of *Reflections*.

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Table 1. Motivic organisation of *Reflections*

Sections (by bars)	Motive	Brief description
1-8	A	first appearance in bb. 1-2
9-15	B	first appearance in bb. 9-10
16-18	A & B	motives combined
19-21	A	
22-6	B	
26-32	A	
33-4	C	piano motive appears only once
33-57	M	vibraphone melody constructed of two major sevenths
35-9	D	minor seventh in piano used to accompany beginning and end of M
51-9		
41-9	F	piano motive first heard in bb. 41-3
55-6	G	appears once
57-63	E	highest tone of G combined with three tone cluster of B and new vibraphone phrase, first heard in bb. 57-9
67-76		
64-6	I	involving piano, gong, vibraphone and glockenspiel, first heard in b. 64
75-88	L	piano solo accompanied by bass drum
88-104	N	piano and cowbell motive first heard in bb. 88-9
99-128	Q	vibraphone chord progression serving as backing for other ideas
106-8	P	complex motive involving piano, glockenspiel, gongs, tam-tam, heard only once but includes low three tone cluster from B
112-25	R	marimba solo initially related in its pitch material to M
132-60	S	motive group mainly involving vibraphone and marimba or vibraphone and piano
166-75		
161		low three tone cluster from B
166		
162-4	I	repetition of material from bb. 64-6
175-180	R	close variation of R (bb. 112-25)
179	N	single reiteration of N
180-90	F	reiteration of F accompanying middle section of M
	M	
190-7	M	reiteration of first section of M
	D	accompanied by D and bass drum material from L

Most of the motives listed in Table 1 are given a characteristic repetitive treatment within the sections in which they appear. In the opening thirty-two bars of the piece, for example, the sequence of motives is:

- i) A
- ii) a small part of A
- iii) a larger part of A
- iv) A
- v) B
- vi) B (shorter duration of final attack)
- vii) B (longer duration of final attack)
- viii) B and A combined
- ix) the larger part of A
- x) A
- xi) B
- xii) B (longer duration of final attack)
- xiii) the small part of A
- xiv) the larger part of A
- xv) A

The patterns of repetition and variation of the material in this short section are typical of Edwards's structural approach in the sacred music.

Less typical in *Reflections* is the overall pattern of repetition and variation. As stated above a considerable number of new motives is introduced as the piece progresses, but there is little reiteration of material until the last fifth of the work. Still less typical is the piano solo (bars 75-88) which evokes a strong sense of stylistic coherence, but without the repetition of a single musical idea. This seems alien to the fundamental concept of Edwards's sacred music idiom, which depends for its trance-like effect upon the insistent repetition of short motivic gestures.

The different motives of *Reflections*, though numerous, have a similarity of construction which creates a feeling of stylistic cohesion. Apart from similar intervallic constructions there is a persistent pattern of motives or sections of motives which involve three closely spaced attacks. Some examples of this trend are given in Figure 6: the three relevant attacks in each case are numbered.

There are further examples of motives with three closely spaced attacks in *Reflections* but, apart from the piano solo referred to above, almost all musical ideas in the work consist of some small number of closely spaced attacks which are subjected to repetitive treatments along the same lines as previously described for the opening of the work.

The intervallic construction of the various motives also contributes to the stylistic uniformity of the work. Most chords involve one or more major seventh intervals although several other intervals, notably the major

Figure 6, Motives A, B, F, I, M, N

1 Pno. $\text{♩} = c 63 \leftrightarrow 72$

2 3 Gongs

3 Vib.

4 Glock.

cowbell

mp

p

ppp

motor off (always)

M 1-2

Motive A

1 Pno.

2 Gong.

3 Vib.

4 Glock.

pp

ppp

pp

M.64-65

Motive I

1 Pno.

2 Tam tam

3 Vib.

pp

ppp

M 22-23

Motive B

Vib.

4-3

M. 36-37

Motive M

mp

5-3

5(4)

5(4)

5

5(4)

5(4)

8

2

4

5

3D

M88-89

Motive N

Pno.

mp

p

8

2

8

3

16

M41-43

Motive F

Figure 6, Motive S

M 133-134

ninth, minor seventh and major second, are also prominent. Edwards has established for himself an identifiable harmonic language in his sacred series, and there are even sonorities which are common to two or more of the works. The low three tone cluster, for example, is found in each of the five works.

Reflections employs four players. One plays piano, another vibraphone, another plays three gongs, tam-tam, cowbell, sandblocks and marimba, and the fourth plays glockenspiel, cowbell, two temple blocks and bass drum. The scoring is dominated by the piano, as it is in all the other works of the series. Chordal attacks by piano and vibraphone are often heard simultaneously with soft gong, tam-tam or cowbell strokes, a technique which yields subtle timbral modifications. Even though the piano seems to dominate most of the motives, it is the sound of the vibraphone which lingers at the end of many of the complex sonorities.

The opportunity of using a wider variety of timbres than in the previous three works of the series has enabled the composer to explore to a greater extent his idea of the randomness of the intersecting rhythms of nature. Yet the expansion of the textural field in *Reflections* and the associated proliferation of musical ideas can in some ways be regarded as a regression from the austere compositional perfection of *The Tower of Remoteness*, *Kumari* and *Etyalong* to the richer textural concepts of *Shadow D-Zone*. The piano solo in *Reflections* may even be considered as reminiscent of the flamboyant *Monos II* (1970). Considering the mixture of old and new compositional approaches in *Reflections* it will be interesting to see how the sacred

series develops should Edwards choose to continue it.

Reflections was commissioned by Synergy, who first performed the work in the Sydney Opera House on 7 July 1985.

Michael Hannan