From Blackbirds to Lynyrd Skynyrd: Exploring the Definition and Use of Folk Music in Clarinet Literature

Calla M. Olson
Southern Illinois University Carbondale, calla.olson@siu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/gs_rp

Recommended Citation
Olson, Calla M. "From Blackbirds to Lynyrd Skynyrd: Exploring the Definition and Use of Folk Music in Clarinet Literature." (Summer 2016).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Papers by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact opensiuc@lib.siu.edu.
FROM BLACKBIRDS TO LYNYRD SKYNYRD: EXPLORING THE DEFINITION AND USE OF FOLK MUSIC IN CLARINET LITERATURE

by

Calla Marie Ward Olson

B.A., Luther College, 2010

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Music

in the field of Music.

Department of Music
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
August 2016
RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL

FROM BLACKBIRDS TO LYNYRD SKYNYRD: EXPLORING THE DEFINITION AND USE OF FOLK MUSIC IN CLARINET LITERATURE

By

Calla Marie Ward Olson

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Music

in the field of Music

Approved by:

Eric Mandat, Chair

Douglas Worthen

Richard Kelley

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 9, 2016
AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

CALLA OLSON, for the Master’s degree in MUSIC, presented on MAY 9, 2016, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: FROM BLACKBIRDS TO LYNYRD SKYNYRD: EXPLORING THE DEFINITION AND USE OF FOLK MUSIC IN CLARINET LITERATURE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Eric Mandat

This document will explore the definition and use of folk music in four important pieces of clarinet literature: “Abyss of the Birds” by Olivier Messiaen, Folk Songs by Eric Mandat, Freebirds by Scott McAllister, and Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in B-flat major, Op. 107 by Max Reger. Each of these pieces utilizes another piece or source of music in addition to the composer’s original material, and this paper will determine whether these sources constitute a use of folk music in each case. The different method by which each composer uses the external source material will also be examined. A general analysis of the formal, harmonic and melodic structure of each piece will also be provided.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this paper to my parents, Kimball Olson and Michelle Ward for their unwavering encouragement of all my endeavors, including this degree. You have always known exactly what to say to get me through, whether it was loving support or hard truth. I am incredibly lucky to be your daughter.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to give heartfelt thanks to all the faculty members in the SIU School of Music who have provided me with support throughout the course of my degree. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Morehouse for his constant advice and wonderful critiques of my writing, as well as the countless ways in which he has inspired my growth as a performer and pedagogue. Thanks also to Dr. Kelley and Dr. Worthen for their never-ending encouragement. I am especially grateful to Dr. Mandat, for his unwavering support of my less-than-traditional research interests, the program I chose for my recital, and this paper. I also could not have done this without the support of my wonderful friend and partner in crime Eva Hagan, who has motivated and inspired me as a musician in many ways. Finally I would like to extend my deepest love and appreciation to my parents, Michelle Ward and Kimball Olson, my brother and sister, Mitchell Olson and Andrea Raygor, and my partner, Josh Armbruster; the five of you have kept me sane and optimistic throughout this process and I am so grateful.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTERS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE – “ABYSS OF THE BIRDS” BY OLIVIER MESSIAEN</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO – ERIC MANDAT’S <em>FOLK SONGS</em></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE – SCOTT MCALLISTER’S <em>FREEBIRDS</em></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR – MAX REGER’S <em>OP. 107 CLARINET SONATA</em></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-2</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

One of the most valuable sources of inspiration and material for composers wishing to make a deep connection with their audiences is folk music. While folk music is difficult to define, there are certain musical traits shared by folk music of all cultures and time periods. Historically folk music is music that is passed on orally, so it must be singable and easy to memorize for people with no formal musical training. Because of these constraints, much traditional folk music is repetitive melodically and rhythmically, utilizes a limited range (often within the span of an octave), and the melody is based on a scale and uses largely conjunct motion. Other common elements include call and response, the use of different timbres, and imprecise intonation (by Western standards).

The definition of folk music adopted by the International Folk Music Council (IFMC, now the International Council for Traditional Music) in 1955 is as follows:

“Folk music is music that has been submitted to the process of oral transmission. It is the product of evolution and is dependent on the circumstances of continuity, variation, and selection. … The term can therefore be applied to music that has been evolved from rudimentary beginnings by a community uninfluenced by art music; and it can also be applied to music which has originated with an individual composer and has subsequently been absorbed into the unwritten, living tradition of a community. But the term does not cover a song, dance, or tune that has been taken over ready-made and remains unchanged. It is the fashioning and re-fashioning of the music by the community that gives it its folk character.”

By this definition, folk music, no matter its origins, is music that evolves in an unselfconscious way through people lacking formal musical training. It may have originated as a written composition, but in order to be deemed folk music, it must primarily exist in oral rather than written form. Folk music is also characterized by the lack of any one ‘correct’ or ‘original’ version, which is replaced by constant evolution and variation.

A universal definition of folk music remains elusive however, and there are many questions about the IFMC’s definition. Criticisms of it reject its patronizing tone, interpreting phrases such as “influenced by art music” and “rudimentary” to mean the culture folk music comes from must be separate from, and in some ways is considered inferior to that of the folklorist/analyst who has formal musical training. Other ways of defining folk music involve examining and attempting to identify its key musical attributes, and describing its overall timbre and character. Folk music may also be viewed in terms of how it functions within its society; it is often referred to as ‘the music of the people.’ This latter definition has become especially useful over the past few decades. Musical styles have become both increasingly varied as music becomes more complex, as well as less distinctive between geographical regions and cultures due to increasing globalization. Many questions still remain however: How much evolution is required before a piece of music may be deemed folk music? How much variation is needed between the various versions? How do we define a community as globalization has increased and cultural boundaries begin to blur? Do sound recordings constitute oral media or written?

In this paper I will examine the implications of the IFMC’s definition of folk music in four different pieces of clarinet literature that all directly use some other body of music as a form of source material. I will determine whether the source material in each case constitutes a usage of folk music or not, as well as discussing the different ways in which each composer uses previously created source material, whether folk music or not, as the basis for their works. In addition I will provide a brief analysis of each work. Finally, I will explore how the definition and use of folk music has changed over time due to increasing globalization and changes in music and technology.
Arguably the earliest form of folk music, especially when folk music is considered as
music that helps geographically define a place, and those that live there, is bird song. The birds
native to a particular area largely define its soundscape, and most bird calls, with the exception
of some extreme cases, are relatively short, simple melodic fragments, within the span of an
octave, and often even utilize patterns of pitches similar to Western major and minor scales. For
example, the Black-capped Chickadee’s territorial call is a simple, descending major second.
Some utilize more disjunct motion, large leaps and more complex rhythms than human folk
music, but even these are easy to remember and recognize after only a few listenings.

Birdsongs represent a complex oral tradition as well, as each bird, while it relies partially
on instinct, learns the song of its species through repeated exposure while growing up, as well as
practice. Evidence that birds learn their songs in a similar manner to the way people learn folk
songs may be found in the mockingbird family, whose members do not have their own song, but
learn the songs of many other species through exactly this method. Both birds and folk musicians
learn their songs by absorbing their local soundscape and then practicing, without ever formally
learning the music. Each individual bird also sings its own distinct version of the song of its
species, satisfying the variation requirement of the IFMC’s definition. Many composers have
chosen to turn to birdsong rather than human folk music, using literal transcriptions or simply
attempting to invoke or imitate birds in their music, and none more famously than the composer
and ornithologist Olivier Messiaen.

French theorist, composer, organist, and ornithologist Olivier Messiaen was born in
Avignon, France on December 10, 1908. He began playing piano and composing between the
ages of seven and nine, and was largely self-instructed at first. He studied at the Paris
Conservatoire (1919-30) with Marcel Dupré (organ), Paul Dukas (composition), Jean and Noël Gallon (harmony, counterpoint, and fugue), and Maurice Emmanuel (musical history). From them Messiaen gained his love of Greek and Hindu modes and improvisation. In 1931 he was appointed principal organist of La Trinité in Paris, a position he held until his death. In 1936 he began teaching at the École Normale de Musique and the Schola Cantorum. That same year he cofounded La Jeune France, an organization that rejected neoclassicism as being too constraining, and promoted greater stylistic originality and emotional expression. When World War II broke out Messiaen joined the French Army, but his poor eyesight kept him from the front lines. In 1940 he was taken captive in the Battle of France and held as a prisoner of war in the Stalag VIII camp, near what is now Zgorzelec, Poland. It was there that he composed and premiered what is perhaps his best known work, *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, of which *Abîme des oiseaux* (hereafter referred to by its English translation “Abyss of the Birds”) is the third movement. On his release in 1941 he was appointed professor of harmony at the Paris Conservatoire, where he taught until 1978. Messiaen spent the remainder of his life traveling, performing, composing, and teaching. He died in Paris in 1992.

Messiaen’s wide variety of musical influences led him to develop a unique compositional style that places him outside the Western classical music realm. His music is known for its complex explorations of rhythm and meter, use of modes of limited transposition, and exploration of the Catholic faith. His main sources of musical inspiration were Debussy and Ravel. His harmonies expand Debussy’s use of sevenths, ninths, modality and quartal-quintal harmonies, adding more chromaticism to them. Fascinated by birdsong, he often transcribed the songs of his favorite birds and used them in his music. Many of his rhythms were common to music of other cultures, such as Japan, Hindu, and Javanese gamelan. Messiaen also had
synaesthesia, a condition which causes the individual to see colors when they hear music.

Messiaen said the colors he heard were an important part of his compositional process, and often created and described the harmonies in his music in terms of colors rather than by conventional means. His distinctive composition style inspired few imitators, but his development of total serialism and spectralism, attempts to represent spirituality and nature in music, and rejection of neoclassicism influenced many composers, both peers and students. All of these characteristic compositional elements can be found in “Abyss of the Birds,” and will be discussed shortly.

Messiaen remains the preeminent birdsong folklorist in Western music history. He began transcribing birdsong when he was fourteen or fifteen years old.² His early works show subtle influences of this interest, but “Abyss of the Birds” is the first work where he makes direct use of birdsong. After this piece, he began notating birdsong in much greater detail, and it became an integral compositional source for all his works, particularly immediately following the war in the late 40s and 50s. In terms of compositional process, similar to composers who collected human folk music by making hundreds of field recordings, including many different version of the same tune, Messiaen would begin by selecting a specific bird, and then notate the songs of hundreds of different individuals of that species. Eventually he would evaluate these transcriptions and arrive at a composite version of the song, containing all the ‘best’ elements to create an ‘ideal’ version of that particular species’ song.³ Similar to composers attempting to incorporate human folk song into their music, Messiaen adapted his transcriptions to accommodate the limitations of the


human ear and musical notation.\textsuperscript{4} It is also important to note that many birds develop a ‘regional accent’ and certain characteristic phrases in their calls and songs spread through adjacent territories, but not to others, similar to regional dialects in both speech and music in humans.\textsuperscript{5} In the case of “Abyss of the Birds,” the blackbird song Messiaen uses is an idealized and varied version of the southwest region of the bird’s range.

*Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (“Quartet for the End of Time”), for clarinet, violin, cello and piano was written while Messiaen and the musicians he composed it for were interred in 1940. The quartet was inspired by the following text from the Book of Revelation (Rev 10:1–2, 5–7, King James Version) which describes an angel descending to earth and proclaiming the end of time:

“And I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow on his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire . . . Setting his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land . . . and, standing on the sea and on the land, he raised his right hand toward Heaven and swore by He who lives forever and ever . . . saying: “There will be no more Time; but in the days when the seventh angel is to blow his trumpet, the mystery of God will be fulfilled.”\textsuperscript{6}

It was premiered with Messiaen on piano, Henri Akoka on clarinet, Etienne Pasquier on cello, and Jean Le Boulaire on violin for the quartet’s fellow prisoners and their guards on January 15, 1941.

Although the Quartet was composed in Stalag VIII A, Messiaen began writing what would become the third movement of the quartet, “Abyss of the Birds” for clarinet alone, in

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{6}] Messiaen, Olivier. *Quatuor pour la fin du temps: pour clarinette en si bémol, violin, violoncelle et piano*. (Paris, France: Durand, 1942), 1.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Verdun, where he first met Pasquier and Akoka. Akoka was part of the military orchestra at the citadel of Vaubean near Verdun, and Pasquier was corporal of music there. The three became good friends, and Messiaen often asked to be on watch duty in the early morning so they could listen to the “music” of the dawn chorus. “Here, near Verdun, the chorus of birds that Pasquier found deafening inspired the composition that would later become the third movement,” “Abyss of the Birds.” Messiaen began writing it while all three musicians were still at Verdun. They were captured on June 20, 1940, and the first performance of “Abyss of the Birds” took place during their long forced march to the prisoner of war camp. “While Akoka played and Messiaen listened, Pasquier, who had been unable to bring his cello with him, assumed the function of the “music stand…Akoka sight-read the piece and made many grumbles that it was too difficult to play, Messiaen all the while encouraging him that he could do it.” Messiaen and Pasquier’s later recollections indicate that this first piece was the basis for the final version of the third movement of the quartet, which is far more developed than what was played at this first performance.

In terms of instrumentation, Messiaen was obviously limited in choices while writing “Abyss of the Birds.” However, based on the instrumentation of his later works that incorporate birdsong, it seems that, while no instrument can truly reproduce the timbre of birdsong, Messiaen felt that the upper winds, primarily clarinet and flute, come closest. It also seems likely that Akoka’s particular timbre on the clarinet came closer to mimicking birdsong than that of other

---


8 Ibid, 11.

9 Ibid, 12.

10 Ibid, 16-7.
clarinetists of the day, or of modern day clarinetists. Akoka played a Couesnan clarinet and mouthpiece with a Périer facing, and achieved “a brighter, thinner, more “metallic” sound than that of a modern day clarinet.”

“Abyss of the Birds” is often performed by clarinetists as a piece of solo repertoire, and its beginning as a stand-alone work allows it to work well outside the context of the quartet. Messiaen wrote of the piece: “The abyss is Time with its sadness, its weariness. The birds are the opposite to Time; they are our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows, and for jubilant songs.” The movement has an overall modified ternary form (see Figure 1-1). It opens and closes with the imagery of the abyss, slow and desolate, while the middle of the work depicts the birds, with explosive melodic fragments and lively gestures all based on the real song of the blackbird (*Turdus merula*). There are also several smaller pieces of transitional material between these larger sections.

---

11 Ibid, 13.

The entire quartet explores the idea of escaping from time, and in this particular movement Messiaen explores the elimination of time through the use of an extremely slow tempo, and reliance on rhythmic duration rather than meter. There are bar lines, but there is no meter, and the number of beats in each barred space is not consistent.\(^\text{13}\) The bar lines instead serve to help the performer feel points of emphasis and phrase endings in the music, and call attention to repeated melodic or rhythmic structures. For example, in the birdsong section (measures 13-24, see Figure 1-2), each ‘measure’ is constructed around the individual phrases of the blackbird’s song, which varies in length from as short as two and a half beats (ten sixteenths) long (measure 16) to nineteen beats (76 sixteenths) long (measure 24).\(^\text{14}\)

\(^\text{13}\) Note: For the purpose of this paper, I have gone through and assigned measure numbers to each barred space in the music, despite the lack of meter, for the ease of referencing specific moments in the music.

\(^\text{14}\) Note: For the sake of simplicity a ‘beat’ is defined as having the value of a quarter note.
Figure 1-2. Comparison of the varying bar lengths present in the birdsong section: measure 1 (top) and measure 24 (bottom)

The harmonic structure of “Abyss of the Birds” has several different levels. At the surface level, the opening section (measures 1-12) representing the abyss, is constructed using Mode 2 of Messiaen’s seven modes of limited transposition, the octatonic scale, specifically t0. Messiaen describes t0 as “blue-violet rocks speckled with little gray cubes, cobalt blue, deep Prussian blue, highlighted by a bit of violet-purple, gold, red, ruby and stars of mauve, black and white. Blue violet is dominant.”

The birdsong section or B section, uses all twelve pitches, but being based on birdsong it does not follow any rules of tonality or any of Messiaen’s modes. The recap of the abyss returns to t0.

On a larger level, the very first note of the piece, F#, appears to serve as its tonal center. In the opening of the abyss section each short melodic phrase returns to F#, usually on a downbeat, setting it up as home base (see Figure 1-3).

It serves as an important transition pitch between the abyss and birdsong sections (measure 13), between the two versions of the blackbird’s song (measure 20), and the recap of the abyss section and the ending of the piece (measure 42). In each of these measures the clarinetist must hold the F# for four beats, while crescendoing from ppp to ffff, and the additional instruction *sans presser, progressif et puissant* (“without pressing, progressive and powerful”) is given (see Figure 1-4).

There are also two other transitional sections (measures 25-26 and measure 43-44, see Figure 1-5), which are inversionally related by a perfect fifth. The first iteration begins on C#, the second on F#, providing a dominant to tonic relationship between the two, and further establishing F# as the tonal center of the piece when this figure is heard for the second time so close to the end of the piece, after the recap of the abyss section has finished.
The opening motive contains the structural material for much of the rest of the piece, as it contains the intervals of a half step, whole step, minor third, major third and tritone, which are used to construct most of the piece. Messiaen tends to avoid the cadential intervals of perfect fourths and perfect fifths, except at important structural moments or when they appear in the melody of the blackbird song. This makes sense, considering much of the piece is dedicated to depicting the abyss, which lacks any sort of resolution, and is meant to be played desole (“sorrowful, desolate”). The tritone is of particular importance in this piece, especially the tritone of F# to C. The very first phrase in measures 1-2 (refer to Figure 1-3) begins with an F#, climbs up to C, and then ends by falling back to F#. When the melody changes in measure 6, the accented note on the downbeat is an F#, and it falls a tritone to a C. Toward the end of this three-bar phrase (measure 8) there is an accented C on the downbeat in the same register as before,
making it clear the overall structure of the three bar phrase in measures 6 through 8 is about F# falling to C. The tritone also appears within many other phrases, between other pitches besides F# and C, but the F#-C tritone is the most fundamental to the piece. It seems to resolve in two places: once in the birdsong section (measure 18) where there is a strong motion from F# to C# on the downbeat, creating a dominant harmony. There is also the long range resolution of C# to F# between the two transitional sections mentioned above. However, this attempt at resolution, perhaps symbolic of attempting to escape the abyss, is thwarted by return of the C-F# tritone as the final two notes of the piece.

The B or birdsong section (measures 14 through 24) represents the birds exploding out of the abyss, filling the air with light and color. Messiaen felt birds existed somewhat out of time, with their rapid short lives and abrupt jerky motions. The measures in this section, as well as the rhythms themselves, reflect this by becoming even less predictable than they were in the opening section. All the melodic gestures in this middle section are based on the song of the blackbird (Turdus merulus). It is not clear why Messiaen chose the blackbird here, but it seems to have been one of his favorite birds, as he later wrote an entire piece, La merle noir, based on its song. It does have an unusually long and complex song compared to many birds, and is very melodious. Its song also uses all twelve pitches found in Western music.

Messiaen’s use of the blackbird song in this piece, even though it represents his very first attempt at incorporating real birdsong into a composition, is identical to other composers’ use of human folksong, strengthening the argument that birdsong is arguably the earliest type of folk music humans ever experienced. When compared with the actual various short calls and gestures Messiaen used in this section of “Abyss of the Birds,” the blackbird song is still recognizably the source material. However, based on repeated listenings to a wide variety of audio recordings of
the songs of many different blackbirds, Messiaen has clearly created an idealized version of the
blackbird’s song based on all the variations he had transcribed over the course of his life thus far.

The birdsong section begins with the full version of Messiaen’s idealized blackbird song
(measures 14-19). The performer is given very detailed instructions in order to reproduce the
song as faithfully as possible: Presque vif, gai, capricieux (“Almost bright, cheerful, capricious”) and ensoleille, comme un oiseau, tres libre de movement (“sunny, like a bird, very free/ full of
movement”). The transitional held F# appears in measure 20, which signifies both the abyss and
the completion of the blackbird’s song and separates it from the next section, which uses the
blackbird’s song as a basis but varies it and improvises on it. However, even in this second
section, it is easy to recognize the melody as that of the blackbird thanks to its general shape,
timbre, tempo, and register, just as it is easy to recognize different versions of the same human
folk song. Despite the variations that exist between individual birds, or within Messiaen’s
transcriptions and intentional variations in his music, it retains its overall character.¹⁶

In the recapitulation of the abyss section (measures 30-41) the material is identical, but
taken down an octave, perhaps to re-emphasize the desolation of the abyss, especially after the
brilliant contrast of the birds. In measure 35, it is transposed up a minor third from the expected
pitch (down a major sixth from the original version) due to the limits of the clarinet’s range. A
few of the phrases are also expanded by a few notes or by one whole repetition of a gesture,
further emphasizing the devastation of having to return to the abyss after experiencing the joy of
the birds.

The coda begins in measure 42 with a return of the held F# transition, followed by the
tonic version of the eighth note = 92 transitional material (refer to Figure 1-5). The Pressez

¹⁶ Eric Brahinsky, “Olivier Messiaen: Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps: An Analysis,” Eric Brahinsky,
brilliant gesture which appeared during the blackbird’s song in measure 19 and measure 24 returns as a retrograde in the last measure of the piece, before the final gesture of the work, which is taken from the very first phrase of the work, but transposed down an octave (see Figure 1-6).

Figure 1-6. Measure 19 (top) and its retrograde, measure 45 (bottom).

This ending could be interpreted by the performer in several different ways. Given the strong presence of tonic (F#), which provides some sense of resolution, the retrograde of the *Pressez* gesture could be heard as one last bird exploding out of the abyss before the finality of the last phrase, representing hope. Conversely, since it is presented in retrograde, creating a falling rather than rising gesture, and followed by the heavily emphasized, darkly final return of the tritone, it could be seen as the end of hope, the brilliance of the birds fading away, descending back into the abyss. Messiaen gives no indication, so the performer must decide how to approach it, and the audience how to hear it. If played exactly as Messiaen notated it, it is likely that some audience members may hear it one way, and some the other.

The emotional power Messiaen is able to create by contrasting the original, dark material of the abyss sections with the light, organic, vivacity of the birdsong speaks to the value of
utilizing any kind of folk song in classical compositions. Folk songs, including birdsong, lend a natural, familiar, and often uplifting quality to the music, because audiences often feel as if they recognize them, whether they have heard them before or not. The only difference between Messiaen and composers who use human folk tunes such as Percy Grainger or Béla Bartók is that in this case we are recognizing not our own songs and sounds, but the soundscape that surrounds us daily, which we would struggle to imitate with our own voices, but can easily recognize and feel comfortable in. The song of Messiaen’s blackbird, even if we have never heard that specific birdsong before, is reminiscent in timbre, gesture, and spirit of whatever birdsongs permeate our own habitats, and provides that feeling of familiarity and comfort, just as folk music typically does, whether it is from our own culture or another.
CHAPTER TWO
ERIC MANDAT’S FOLK SONGS

Eric Mandat (b. 1957) is an active performer, researcher, and composer who serves as Professor Emeritus and Distinguished Scholar at Southern Illinois University. He is internationally known for his contemporary clarinet compositions, which pioneered and standardized the use of extended techniques such as multiphonics, quarter and microtones, and circular breathing, to great musical effect. His work is influenced by jazz and traditional music from non-Western cultures, and often contains repetitive cells and complex rhythms in addition to the aforementioned extended techniques. Mandat received his music education at the University of North Texas (B.M) Yale (M.M) and Eastman (D.M.A). He has studied clarinet with Richard Joiner, Lee Gibson, Keith Wilson, Charlie Neidich, and Stanley Hasty. He also performs regularly with his experimental chamber music group, the Tone Road Ramblers, is part of the Chicago Symphony’s MusicNOW Series, and is a member of the Transatlantic Trio, an ensemble that was born during a faculty exchange program between the Latvian Academy of Music and Southern Illinois University.17

Mandat’s Folk Songs is a five movement work, but each movement is self-contained and could stand alone as an individual work. There is no unifying musical structure, such as a common motive; instead they are alike in their use and exploration of various folk song elements, unified by concept rather than musical content. Folk Songs began as a composition assignment for a class called “Current Practices” taught by Dr. Robert Morris at the Eastman School of Music in the fall of 1985.18 The portion written for the course eventually became


movement III, after Dr. Morris encouraged Mandat to write more movements and turn the project into a complete work. The work was premiered on Mandat’s final doctoral recital at Eastman on May 1, 1986. While he was writing the work he was listening to a lot of folk and world music, including African folk music and Javanese gamelan. While nothing specifically inspired the first movement he wrote, movement III, the other movements are each directly inspired by a specific timbral, melodic, or rhythmic quality associated with a specific type of folk music.

The overall concept of the piece is Mandat’s own exploration of what it means to call something a folk song, i.e. what typifies folk music across the globe. He explores the concept of folk music through the use of repetitive rhythmic structures, repetitive melodic fragments, pentatonic scales, utilizing a limited range of the clarinet (often spanning less than an octave), or a limited range of pitches or intervals. When asked about the relationship between folk music and his Folk Songs, Mandat says there is “Not much [of a relationship], in terms of exact quotation or exact attempt at imitation of particular folk pieces. But in a couple of cases, certainly imitation of folk-like sounds…in general, the restricted pitch content is typical of a lot of folk music pieces that I knew at the time.”

When I inquired about the call and response aspect that appears frequently in Folk Songs, particularly in movements I, II, and III, where the different registers of the instrument seem to be used as two separate voices or characters, Mandat confirmed this was intentional, and was inspired by a lot of the folk music he was listening to when he composed this piece. African folk

---

19 Ibid.

music in particular often features call and response among vocalists and instrumentalists alike, and Mandat said he definitely wanted to use this when he was composing *Folk Songs*. There is often a trading between the upper voice and lower voice, with extended techniques (multiphonics) being used to keep both voices active at the same time. The performer is in charge of trading roles, bringing first one and then the other voice to the fore, while keeping both present.

Movement I: *Spirited, as if from a distant Appalachian hill*, is inspired by American folk music, specifically the fiddle music of Appalachia. When discussing it, Mandat said, “The beginning of [the first movement] sort of reminded me of some fiddle playing, and I certainly didn’t copy any particular fiddle tune.” While Mandat does not quote a specific folk tune, he utilizes many of the defining features of Appalachian fiddle music to create a work that pays homage to that folk music’s particular sound world: open fifths, call and response patterns, fiddle techniques modified for the clarinet, imprecise/flexible intonation, note distortion, and pentatonic scales.

Much of the movement explores the various ways in which the clarinet can be made to sound like a fiddle by exploiting its multiphonic capabilities, asking the player to hold an upper drone while sawing back and forth between several repeated notes underneath. The movement also uses quarter tones and double stops, and the manipulation of the overtone series in the middle section and at the very end, creating a call and response effect between two ‘voices’ represented by the different registers of the clarinet. The quarter tones and multiphonics in this

---

21 Ibid, 18.

movement also alter the listener’s perception of intonation, evoking the imprecise tuning/flexible intonation of many fiddle players.

The overall form of the movement is ABCA with a coda. Brief *Meno mosso* sections (measures 28-30 for example; see Figure 2-1) that make use of double stops (two note multiphonics) help separate the large sections of the piece.\(^{23}\) In addition, each of the large sections of the work represents a note of the Bb major seventh chord. In the A section (measures 1-12) F is tonic, as indicated by the F-C relationship expressed as a fifth (See Figure 2-2). The B section (measures 16-27) is in D minor, as indicated by the A-D relationship expressed as a fourth, which tonicizes D. Within the C section the piece passes through Bb (measures 31-35) and then very briefly Ab (measure 36), before the recap of the A material begins in measure 37. Mandat also describes the A material as being built using a sort of F pentatonic scale, which adds another folk music element to the movement.

Figure 2-1. The first *Meno mosso* section, measures 28-30.

\(^{23}\) Ibid, 41.
Although Mandat’s music differs from folk music at the surface level in that he uses
home base pitches, rather than traditional tonality or any sort of scale, his use of pentatonic
scales in the first movement and a Bb seventh chord on a larger scale to organize the various
sections of music help counteract this difference and strengthen the folk music connection.\textsuperscript{24} The
dominant interval throughout much of the movement, especially in the A material, is a fifth,
which also strengthens the music’s ties with Appalachian fiddle music in particular. Mandat
comments about this, saying “Certainly fifths have to be important if I am thinking of
Appalachian fiddling. For mountain fiddling, it has to be open strings and it has to be fifths.”\textsuperscript{25}

Movement II, titled \textit{Heavily, with a fuzzy, unfocused, breathy tone} is inspired by African
tribal music, but according to Mandat, “It is not even really trying to sound that way. Like the
fourth movement is trying to sound Japanese and the first movement is trying to sound like
mountain fiddling. This is not really trying to sound African, it just reminded me of sounds I
heard.”\textsuperscript{26} The overall form is simple binary with a coda attached.\textsuperscript{27} Despite the composer’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid, 75.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 86.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Ibid, 87.
\end{itemize}
insistence that the movement did not begin as an attempt to sound African, many of its features do recall elements of African folk music. Its use of odd-numbered, uneven feeling rhythms and meters throughout, combined with modified fingerings that alter the clarinet’s timbre and the intonation of each note create this effect, as does Mandat’s use of the whole tone scale in the first section of the piece.

Movement III: *Expansive, as if hurtling through space* is the only movement not associated with the music of a specific culture. Instead Mandat says he wrote it “very strict with a limited intervallic collection: little pitch sets. And the sound ended up…there were certain kinds of folk sounds, especially in the middle section…so I just called that piece Folk Song, and, as I played it, I started thinking of some other companion pieces that I might link to it. That’s how that piece sort of grew out of that one movement.”

The first large section of the music features various repeated cells of notes, which are played rapidly while the performer hums slower, simple melodies or drone pitches underneath. In the second half Mandat uses multiphonics and manipulations of the overtone series to create two interacting musical lines reminiscent of call and response features found in folk music of many cultures. Despite not being directly inspired by folk music of any specific culture, there are many moments which strongly parallel specific types of folk music that also tend to use limited pitch sets in repetitive structures.

Movement IV: *With devotion, like a prayer*, was inspired by recordings Mandat was listening to that used a Japanese shakuhachi, and explore the clarinet’s ability to imitate that instrument’s unique timbre. Again however, Mandat uses extended techniques to imitate the overall timbral qualities of Japanese shakuhachi pieces, rather than using a specific melody.

---

“While some of the gestures may sound similar to some shakuhachi pieces, I certainly didn’t transcribe something off the recording and then try and copy it down.”

It is performed by removing the mouthpiece and barrel of the clarinet and blowing across the top of the instrument like either an end blown or transverse flute, whichever the player prefers. When it was written, this was the first piece in the clarinet literature to utilize this technique.

The melody is built of a limited pitch collection, barely spanning an octave, and uses pentatonic sounding scales. For example, the first small melodic section (measures 1-9) uses a pentatonic scale composed of the pitches A, G, D, F, and E. It is in a simple sectional binary form.

Movement V: Like a Flamenco dancer with St. Vitus Dance was inspired, as the title suggests, by Flamenco music and by the St. Vitus Dance syndrome, which the composer describes as “this weird disease where you start twitching [and] progress until you die.”

It begins with a short introduction (measures 1-6) based on a Spanish Flamenco theme, which is to be played with the clarinet bell pointed up into the air. The timbral trills marked on each of the held notes in the introduction recall the castanets of flamenco dancers. The introduction emphasizes the pitches E, F, and G, hinting at the larger structural level of the piece. The large harmonic structure uses “a sort of E Phrygian sound. And so E and F natural and G play a large role not only on the surface, but through time. The whole first section is in E, moves toward a larger section in G, then back down through F, briefly, and finally to E, once again.”

The last section of the piece (measures 96-154) is entirely built around gradual motion from G back down

---

29 Ibid, 18.
32 Ibid, 10.
to E through the repetition of arpeggiated chords that are gradually shifted down pitch by pitch and reduced in intervallic content until measures 150-153 which only contain the repeated pitches g-f-e. All of this recalls the “Flamenco mode” traditional flamenco music uses which is equivalent to the modern Phrygian mode. The E-F-G sequence Mandat uses is actually a typical Flamenco chord sequence, called the "Andalusian cadence": in E the sequence is Am–G–F–E, where E serves as tonic, F functions as a dominant, and Am and G assume the functions of subdominant and median.

Mandat also utilizes driving Spanish rhythms, and the rhythmic irregularity created by the constantly shifting meter is actually another important musical trait of traditional flamenco music. Finally, the movement from the high pitched fortissimo introduction to the pianississimo ending on the lowest note on the clarinet is also a key element in flamenco music. Flamenco pieces display a tendency to descend both in pitch and dynamic level over the course of the piece, just as this movement does.

Besides the specific musical elements Mandat references from each culture he chooses to emulate in each movement of *Folk Songs*, Mandat’s very compositional process is similar to that of a folk musician. He freely admits that the ideas for his compositions almost all begin as little improvisations, very performance-based, and then he turns to musical analysis if he needs an extra tool during the compositional process.\(^3\)\(^3\) His use of microtones in his works is also similar to the use of ornamentation in traditional folk music. In many cultures ornamentation is a common feature in their folk music, and is a traditional way of creating variation and evolution while remaining firmly within the cultural soundscape. Often these ornaments are in the form of slides, glissandos, or other imprecise pitches. Mandat described his use of quarter/ microtones at

\(^{33}\) Ibid, 19-20.
the time *Folk Songs* was composed in a similar manner, saying, “I think for me microtones are by and large not some new scale system or anything like that, but more like decorations or ornaments around equal tempered pitches.”

Mandat’s use of traditional forms as a way to offset his use of extended techniques and allow his music to remain accessible, or at least listenable, to audiences is also a conscious choice and this further helps bring out the folk-like character of his works. Many folk songs follow a simple binary or ternary form, and by utilizing them and giving his audience an easy structure to hold on to in the face of some of his extended techniques, Mandat is able to strengthen the sense of familiarity audiences feel when listening to *Folk Songs*.

Mandat also encourages a folk musician-like approach to performance of his works, saying, “I like it when someone can interpret my pieces in a way that is different than from what I had in mind.” Although his notations are typically quite specific in terms of articulation, dynamics, style and so on, there is still room for flexibility and variation between different performers of his work, or even different performances by the same person over time. While this can be said for most pieces of music, the fact that Mandat is accepting and welcoming of these variations, rather than advocating for each performer to attempt to replicate some ‘original,’ most accepted version of his compositions, sets him apart.

While Mandat’s *Folk Songs* does not use specific folk melodies as Messiaen’s work did, his music is still undeniably inspired by folk material. Rather than referencing an actual folk melody or fragment of a folk song as source material and building on it through variation and

---


improvisation, Mandat has managed, through *Folk Songs*, to use an entire soundscape from a particular culture or region of the world as his source for each movement. He is able to absorb and identify all the defining characteristics of each culture’s music, and then produce original material that speaks to each particular culture’s timbre and important musical traits. While other composers, such as Gordon Jacob in his *An Original Suite*, have done similar things in the past, Mandat takes it to a new level. In a way, he manages to take folk music outside itself, maintaining its overall timbre and character without ever relying on simple, singable melodies. He has provided future composers an entirely new way of using folk material in music, not as a source of melodic material, but as an entire soundworld to explore and play in once they have identified its boundaries.
CHAPTER THREE
SCOTT MCALLISTER’S FREEBIRDS

Applying the IFMC’s 1955 definition of folk music to the music of today is somewhat problematic for a variety of reasons. The oral tradition is declining in the face of recordings, and increasing globalization makes it hard for various cultures to maintain their individual musical identities. Composers and musicologists are grappling with these new problems and struggling to develop a new definition of folk music that incorporates audiovisual sources as part of the oral tradition, and finds a way to use music genre as a type of culture. Through an analysis of Freebirds by Scott McAllister, the validity of one possible new definition of folk music will be examined.

Scott McAllister, Professor of Composition at Baylor University in Texas, is a clarinetist, composer, and academic who is well known within the clarinet community. Born in Vero Beach, Florida in 1969, he holds undergraduate degrees in performance and composition from Florida State University, and a doctorate in composition from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University. After a 1994 accident ended his ability to pursue a professional career as a clarinetist he turned his focus to composition and expanding the repertoire of the clarinet. He has written many works for a wide variety of ensembles involving the clarinet, ranging from pieces for clarinet and piano to a piece for soprano, clarinet, string quartet, and chamber choir, and was the 1996 winner of the Ladislav Kubik Competition.

McAllister’s compositional style can be split into two periods, and his well-known works all stem from his later period, which is defined by its incorporation of what he describes as his

---


38 Ibid, 62.
own “folk music,” which he defines as the music of his upbringing. He routinely blends classical, rock, country, and world music in his compositions. McAllister says about the transition between his two periods:

“After I composed X…I began to move away from my more “academic” style. I started to ask hard questions about myself, to find out who I was as a composer and what I wanted to say. I wanted to find my roots, express who I am and my experiences. I wanted to tap into my “folk” music. My experiences are wide with classical repertoire, country, grunge, hard rock, world music…you name it.”

The piece that brought about this change and is mentioned in the above quote, his X Concerto for Clarinet (1997) is an improvisation inspired by builders working on a house adjacent to his, who were “cranking Nirvana and Alice in Chains all day. I decided to improvise with the music and that is what inspired X and the beginning of my “new” style.”

Freebirds was written in 2009, well after McAllister had established his ‘new’ compositional style, and the composer writes of the piece:

“Freebirds takes its title and inspiration from the album by the iconic southern rock band, Lynyrd Skynyrd. Based on the song “Free Bird” it is a driving, ecstatic showpiece for two clarinets and band. The work begins with a cadenza-like passage for the soloists, takes the listener through some high beautiful lyrical passages and amazing extended techniques for clarinet leading to the ending in a virtuosic cadenza. This piece grabs hold of the listener and never lets go with rapid technical passages that emulates a dueling electric guitar of Lynyrd Skynyrd.”

There are versions for two clarinets with piano, wind orchestra or full orchestra. Robert Spring, clarinet professor at Arizona State University, commissioned the piece in 2009. The piece was born out of Robert Spring’s and Scott McAllister’s mutual love of hard rock and roll music.

39 Ibid, 62.
40 Ibid, 62.
“Bob asked for a double concerto for two clarinets and wind ensemble utilizing, in some fashion, hard rock as a starting point.”42

In *Free Birds* the pair of clarinet soloists function as the dueling guitar soloists in *Free Bird*, and are placed on stage in front of the ensemble, one performer on either side of the stage. The piece utilizes many extended techniques, particularly glissandos and extreme altissimo playing, and the clarinetist must try to adopt a tone similar to that of an electric guitar. The first time Scott McAllister used this “virtuoso electric guitar” timbre for the clarinet was in his *Black Dog Rhapsody* for clarinet and orchestra (2002). McAllister actually intended the composition to be played “more legit” or straight in manner, but clarinetists Scott Wright and Robert Spring added improvised slides and other extended technique effects when they performed the work, to make the clarinet sound more like an electric guitar.43 McAllister liked their recordings of his work, and incorporated these improvised effects into his writing of *Freebirds* deliberately. However, he notes to performers of this or any of his works to “Only do the extended techniques if they are solid across the board. It is not for everyone and doing the piece without all the pyrotechnics really works.”44

McAllister’s use of melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, timbral, and formal elements from *Free Bird* in his composition are similar to those used by Messiaen, Bartok, and other composers known for utilizing traditional folk music in their works. Both *Free Bird* by Lynyrd Skynyrd and McAllister’s piece begin as ballads, with a tempo of quarter note = 60, before transitioning into an up-tempo second half. Lynyrd Skynyrd’s new tempo is quarter note = 144, while McAllister’s is quarter note =160, but the overall character created by the tempo change is

---


44 Ibid, 63.
similar. The pieces are even similar in length, with Lynyrd Skynyrd’s album version of Free Bird running for 9:08, and McAllister’s work usually being around 11 minutes. It is likely that Mcallister’s piece is actually supposed to be between 9 and 10 minutes also, but due to the impossibility of playing the up-tempo section at quarter note = 160, in live performance it is always longer (even Robert Spring, the piece’s commissioner, performs it around quarter note = 140 in all his recordings).

To mimic the distinctive sound of Free Bird in his own work, McAllister based his harmonic structure and the scales used to construct all his original melodies on the harmonic and melodic structure of Free Bird. Although the two pieces are in different keys, they share the same harmonic progression. The underlying chord progression of Free Bird is G major: G, D, Em, F, C, D, G. The only place in which this changes in the slow ballad section is right before the solo breaks out and the tempo changes: F, C, D is repeated five times and then a Bb chord appears for the first time, in a sequence of Bb C, G, Bb, C to lead into the up-tempo guitar solo second half. This same IV, vi, V/IV, IV, V, I progression can be heard at various points underneath the dueling clarinets throughout McAllister’s work. Furthermore, the rhythms, chords, and melodies the piano, wind orchestra or orchestra plays underneath the clarinets in many places are identical to the material given to the rhythmic guitar and piano in Free Bird.

Melodically the guitar solo is based almost completely on a G minor pentatonic scale: G Bb C D F G. This explains the appearance of the Bb chord right before the solo breaks out, replacing the earlier Em chord. Similarly, in McAllister’s Freebirds the whole piece is built around Eb minor pentatonic, as well as the full Eb minor scale, both melodic and natural. It seems likely that the reason he chose to do this rather than keeping the piece in its original key was due to the range limits of the clarinet: if he had used G (A on the clarinet) then the altissimo
register would not have extended up high enough to accommodate some of the phrases he wrote, and the entire piece would have been even more difficult, if not impossible, to play.

McAllister uses the main riff of the guitar solo from *Free Bird* as a building block (see Figure 3-1); by transposing it up and down the various registers of the clarinet he is able to construct a longer range melodic trajectory than in present in the rock tune. The first ‘attempt’ at melodic completion runs from measure 89-97 (see Figure 3-2), then the second attempt begins an octave higher in measure 101 and makes it one figure farther towards the climax of the phrase before dropping back down the octave in measure 106. The piece dissolves into new transitional material, all progressively getting higher and higher until finally, in measure 117 the main theme is presented in the highest possible octave on the clarinet, signifying success and leading us into a new section of music.

Figure 3-1. Original riff from *Free Bird* transcribed as the main motive in *Freebirds* (m. 89-90.)

Figure 3-2. “First attempt”: Melodic expansion of original riff from Free Bird guitar solo, m. 91-102.
As with Mandat’s *Folks Songs*, McAllister’s approach to performance is one that seeks to bring more of a folk music character into the concert hall, not necessarily due to the sound of the music, but rather how it is presented and interpreted. In most folk music every performance is different, since the audience knows the music well enough that the performer feels free to put their own individual spin on it. McAllister wants performers of his work to feel this same freedom even if the audience is not familiar with his music or the music it is based on. Folk music is often also thought of as the music of the people, and is associated with musicians who may play with less than a professional level of tone or technique, and may indeed make some technical mistakes, but who are able to convey the true spirit of the music. McAllister’s advice to performers of his work seems to encourage the professional musician to become more like a folk musician in both of these ways. He says,

“My number one goal is to have the performer play my music with passion and tap into his or her own individuality. I often tell performers if they don’t squeak, splat or miss a few notes then they really are not playing my music. I am tired of hearing almost perfect performances that lack passion and energy. We are mainly trained in a male, white European, 19th century styles school of music where everything is criticized. I want my music to loosen that concept a little. I wish more music and concerts could be more of an expression of individuality rather than a packaged, shrink-wrapped audition. A lot of my music needs to be performed on the edge. I want my music to be a joy to practice and perform. I also want to challenge the performer and the audience and hopefully leave them like they have been renewed and invigorated in music and life.”

Although *Freebirds* undeniably fits McAllister’s own definition of folk music, and he utilizes many of the same compositional techniques composers using more traditional folk music did, the validity of his definition of *Free Bird* as folk music remains dubious. Can music not typically considered folk music, such as rock, and specifically the tune *Free Bird*, arguably be classified as such? In the case of *Free Bird* specifically, it does meet many of the requirements set out by the IFMC’s definition. Its melody is instantly recognized within a certain community.

---

of people, and that community is even somewhat defined by geography (the American South). The melody itself is relatively simple, as is the harmonic progression, and both are highly repetitive. The song is used to identify not only the sound of the band, but a whole genre (southern rock music) and the geographical area associated with that genre. Many different versions of the song exist as audio and audiovisuals, even as performed by the original band, let alone when all the cover versions of the song are considered. It could even be argued that the song has an oral tradition, if audio recordings are included, because the band lineup has changed considerably since the original version was composed and recorded in 1973-4, which has changed the way the song is played in subtle ways.

While much of *Freebirds* is original melodies inspired by the overall timbre of *Free Bird*, or else a lengthy variation on some of the simple, repetitive riffs found in the guitar solo, McAllister does make a point of including the signature riff(s) from the *Free Bird* guitar solo (see Figure 3-1). This is another important parallel between his treatment of *Free Bird* and the treatment of more traditional folk material; the melody, or in this case the signature guitar riff, must be recognizable at some point in the piece in order for the audience to identify the source of the composition and make the connection to the folk material. This also supports the argument that rock music, or at least certain iconic songs, can qualify as a new type of folk music – even in live performances by the original band the guitar solo is different every time, but the signature riff is always included to make sure the sense of familiarity and the original timbre of the song is retained. Rock music is similar to folk music in this way: it utilizes both a very defined, expected melody, as well as insisting on some degree of improvisation, individuality and change each time the song is performed. *Free Bird* often morphs into extended jam sessions between the two guitarists when performed live, and often runs fourteen minutes or longer in live performance.
Due to the overall structure of *Free Bird*, the tremendous variation possible each time it is played, its evolution since its initial composition, and its unique cultural significance, in this specific case McAllister’s describing his source material as folk music holds up under the IFMC’s definition. However, his implication that the definition of folk music can be as loose as the music a person grows up surrounded by and absorbs, without giving any other boundaries, does not hold up to closer scrutiny, as will be seen in the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR
MAX REGER’S OP. 107 CLARINET SONATA

One of the key characteristics of folk music, and why composers love to use it, is that it is both simple enough musically, as well as open to enough variation that it is possible to quote even the most famous folk tune or traditional hymn and still have room for your own compositional thumbprint. The audience will be able to hear and feel both the original folk material as well as recognizing the composer’s original contribution and the hallmarks of their compositional style as they relate to or contrast with the folk material. However, if a composer tries to quote or even emulate the overall sound world of another composer, particularly a well-known one, they risk their own sound and ideas being lost or obscured from an audience perspective. The simplicity of folk music that enables it to be passed on orally also prevents it from overshadowing the original ideas a composer may blend with it in their works. Thus, while McAllister’s expanded definition of folk music works fairly well in Freebirds specifically, because his source Free Bird, is very simple in terms of melody and harmony, it presents problems if accepted as a new general definition of folk music. The use of the music of Johannes Brahms by composer Max Reger in his Clarinet Sonata in Bb major, Op. 107, will demonstrate this.

Johann Baptist Joseph Maximilian Reger, born on March 19, 1873 in Brand, Bavaria, was a German Romantic composer, organist, and teacher who achieved significant success and popularity during his lifetime, but is now often overshadowed by his influences: Wagner, Brahms, Strauss and Schoenberg. Reger began his formal music education in Weiden at age eleven, studying piano, organ, improvisation and composition with Adalbert Lindner.\(^{46}\)

Violin Sonata in D minor, Op. 1, earned him a spot as one of Hugo Reiman’s private students, and then a spot at the Wiesbaden Conservatory. After finishing at school he forced to complete a single horrific year of compulsory military service that resulted in a lifelong struggle with alcoholism, mental and physical health problems. Initially Reger’s compositions were met with significant criticism while he was living in Munich from 1901-1907, despite his prolific compositions, concert tours as a pianist and conductor and teaching of theory, organ and composition at the München Akademie der Tonkunst. From 1907 to 1911 he held the Professor of Composition and Director of Music positions at the Conservatoire of Leipzig and experienced a career turnaround. He developed his abilities as an orchestral composer, had an active career as a conductor and pianist, and wrote some of his best known and most well-received works, including Violin Concerto in A major, Op. 100, Clarinet Sonata in B-flat major, Op. 107, Symphonischer Prolog zu einer Tragödie, Op. 108, and Piano Concerto in F minor, Op. 114. After his teaching position at Leipzig ended he continued composing and touring until dying of a stroke in Leipzig on May 11, 1916.

Although Reger is best known and esteemed for his organ works, he composed in all genres except opera. He is considered part of the German Romantic lineage that includes Shumann, Wagner, Brahms, Strauss, and pre-atonal Schoenberg. Besides these influences, Reger was strongly influenced by J.S. Bach, especially in his works for piano and organ. He wrote three

48 Easley Blackwood, World Premiere Recording: Clarinet Sonatas by Easley Blackwood and Max Reger, John Bruce Yeh and Easley Blackwood, Cedille Records CDR 90000 022, 1996, compact disc, Liner notes by Blackwood.
49 Christopher Robert Nichols, “138 Years of the Clarinet: Program Notes for a Master’s Clarinet Recital of Works by Reger, Smith, Donizetti, Muczynski, and Schumann” (Master’s thesis, Kansas State University, Kansas, 2007), 1.
clarinet sonatas during his life, as well as a clarinet quintet. Unlike other composers, Reger was inspired to write chamber music for the clarinet by pre-existing works for clarinet and piano rather than by a specific clarinet player. Prior to writing his Op 107, Reger had already composed a pair of clarinet sonatas, his Op. 49, after hearing Brahms’ *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in F minor, Op. 120*. Reger was so moved by the music that he exclaimed, “Fine, I am also going to write two such things.”\(^{50}\) His first two clarinet sonatas were written in 1900 and were deliberately modeled after the more famous Brahms *Sonata for Clarinet and Piano in F minor*.

Reger’s *Sonata No. 3 for Clarinet and Piano in B flat major, Op. 107*, composed nine years later in Leipzig in the winter of 1908-09, is also based on the Brahms F minor clarinet sonata in both character and construction. Reger followed the same overall structure as in his earlier sonatas, and stylistically it represents a continuation of his Op. 49. However, his musical language is more developed, and the overall mood is more relaxed, perhaps reflecting the happiness present in Reger’s professional and personal lives at this time. In October 1908 Max and Elsa Reger had adopted three-year-old Christa, and a month later they also became foster parents to one-year-old Lotti.\(^{51}\) The piece seems to reflect Reger’s happy state of mind, and he described it as “a very light and friendly piece, not long at all, so that the character of the sound of the wind instrument does not tire!”\(^{52}\) The sonata was first performed by Julius Winkler and Max Reger as part of a chamber music festival in Darmstadt. Reger wrote to his publisher: “…the audience went wild and didn’t want to leave the hall. The cheering became especially

---


\(^{52}\) Ibid.
loud when the Duke came on stage in order to thank me and shake hands! In short: Reger topped it all. Even Saint-Saëns, to whom the entire second evening was dedicated, was an anti-climax. Capitalizing on this success, Reger subsequently published alternative versions for violin or viola and piano, just as Brahms had with his clarinet sonatas.

The sonata, like Reger’s earlier works and the work of Brahms, is composed of long legato phrases built of smaller motives. It is often described as sounding heavier than Brahms, thanks to Reger’s thick, complex harmonies and use of chromaticism, but despite this it still remains clear, lyrical, and charming throughout. All four movements are very closely related, with material from the first and second movements conspicuously returning in the fourth movement to tie the entire work together. The motivic-based compositional process Reger and Brahms both use creates a sense of unity through the transformation of many short characteristic motives over long phrases, and throughout each movement. Their overall layout and choice of forms for each movement, as well as their long range harmonic motion, is quite similar as well, as shown in Figure 4-1. Like Brahms, Reger also uses little to no staccato or other harsh articulation, but long, flowing legato lines, which helps him coax the same timbral qualities from the clarinet that Brahms did.


There are several moments where Reger’s source of inspiration is particularly obvious at the musical surface, as well as in the broad compositional techniques he uses. The very first phrase in Reger’s sonata contains many similarities to the opening phrase of the clarinet in Brahms’ sonata, as shown in Figure 4-2.

Figure 4-2. A comparison of the first phrase of the clarinet in Reger’s Sonata (top) and in the Brahms’s F minor Sonata (bottom).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Reger Op. 107 Sonata in B flat major</th>
<th>Brahms Sonata op. 120, No. 1 in F minor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I.       | Moderato  
Sonata allegro form  
6/4 meter  
Bb major | Allegro apassionato  
Sonata allegro form  
3/4 meter  
F minor |
| II.      | Vivace – Adagio – Vivace – Più Adagio  
Scherzo and trio/ ternary form with a slow outro  
2/4 meter  
Bb major | Andante un poco adagio  
Ternary form  
2/4 meter  
Ab major |
| III.     | Adagio  
Ternary song form (ABA(reprise)coda)  
3/4 meter  
Eb major (Bb major B section) Eb major | Allegretto grazioso  
Ternary form  
3/4 meter  
Ab major |
| IV.      | Allegretto con grazia (vivace):  
Sonata-rondo (ABACABA)  
6/4 meter  
Bb major | Vivace  
Altered rondo form  
(ABA’CB’A”)  
4/4 meter  
F major |
The rhythmic contour is almost identical, as is the length and feel. The two phrases also contain similar intervallic and harmonic content. There are many other instances throughout Reger’s Op. 107 where he comes very close to quoting Brahms directly, as he does in this case. In these moments something of Reger’s originality is lost, supplanted by the sound of Brahms.

However, Reger’s sonata also differs from Brahms’ in several important ways. Reger changes tempo much more often, and intends there to be specific relationships between both tempo changes within movements, as well as the dominant tempo of each movement. Reger is also almost constantly changing dynamics, making extreme use of them in all his work, as exemplified by this sonata. Brahms’ notation of dynamic changes is much more judicious.

Overall there are many compositional similarities between Reger’s Op. 107 and Brahms Op. 120, No. 1. Both composers utilize long, lyrical phrases built of smaller motivic cells. Their phrases often end on weak beats, make use of elision, and are fairly equally divided between clarinet and piano. The piano takes over the melody in many places in both works, with the clarinet playing an embellishing role. They both even divide some of the motives between the two instruments, so that in order for the motive to sound complete to the audience the piano and clarinet must be on equal footing.

Since Reger’s motivic source material for each movement is his own original invention, even when it shares certain intervallic traits or directional tendencies with Brahms, this work manages to avoid sounding too much like a copy of Brahms. It is its own work, able to stand on its own and be appreciated by audiences unaware of the source of its inspiration. Upon its premiere the piece was described by the press as the “…return to classical simplicity with regard
to its form and musical content...[a] beautiful and deeply felt sound-idyll.\textsuperscript{56} No comparisons to its inspiration, Brahms, were made. In the few places where, in the author’s opinion, Reger comes close to quoting Brahms, the originality of his own work is diminished as the audience members who can recognize Brahms’ influence may find themselves thinking of that piece instead, and beginning to wish for or hear its melodies in their minds.

Under the IFMC’s definition, Brahms’ clarinet sonatas cannot be classified as folk music, even though their motivic construction allows Reger to use them in a similar manner to the way the composers previously discussed in this paper used folk music. Brahms’ clarinet sonatas are composed and passed on in a written format, and cannot be varied in a manner that allows for true evolution over time. In addition, they do not represent any sort of community or cultural group. However, since Reger grew up exposed to the music of Brahms and other German late-Romantic composers, under McAllister’s looser definition of folk music, Brahms would likely be included as part of the ‘folk music’ Reger grew up with. This demonstrates why McAllister’s looser concept of folk music requires refinement; it currently allows for the inclusion of written art music that does not fulfill any of the requirements of the IFMC’s definition of what constitutes folk music.

CONCLUSION

One of the hallmarks of folk music is that it is highly recognizable by audiences both within the culture it is from, as well as outside of it. Even if the audience does not know the particular tune, or even which culture the material is from, they can usually tell it is folk music of some kind based on the aforementioned common traits: singability, simple repetitive melodies and rhythms, and a ‘traditional’ sound based on some sort of scale. When examining Reger’s Op. 107 clarinet sonata as a whole, if an audience member was not intimately familiar with Brahms’ clarinet sonatas it seems unlikely they would make any association between the two works or the two composers, but would hear this piece simply as Reger’s own. In the three other works examined here, all the above characteristics are present, and the principle of recognizability holds true. From questioning various audience members and colleagues who either attended my performance of these works or who I requested listen to them without knowing anything about the history of the piece first, all were able to guess the source material for each. Many were unfamiliar with the specific rock tune Free Bird, but were nonetheless able to immediately recognize that Freebirds was rock-influenced in some way. All heard the flourishes in the Messiaen as reminiscent of the spirit of birds, even if they did not guess that they were actually transcribed birdsongs. And even with the various extended techniques used in Mandat’s Folk Songs, which many people were unfamiliar with and found somewhat disorientating, they all felt some sort of non-Western influence to be present in the work, describing it as having a sort of ‘world-music’ sound. Thus the IFMC’s definition, although it undoubtedly has many flaws, is still a valid starting point for assessing what does or does not constitute folk music. It does not seem to matter whether the folk material is quoted directly, varied heavily, improvised upon, or even only alluded to through general timbral, rhythmic, and harmonic characteristics; if the
source is truly folk music, it will retain a sense of familiarity for audiences while allowing the composer space for their own original material as well.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Calla M.W. Olson

olsoca07@luther.edu

Luther College
Bachelor of Arts, Music, magna cum laude, May 2014
Bachler of Arts, Biology, May 2014

Research Paper Title:
From Blackbirds to Lynyrd Skynyrd: An Exploration of the Use of Folk Music through the Clarinet

Major Professor: Eric P. Mandat