



The first of my piano sonatas, in D flat major, was written very quickly in June, 1945. It was completed on the 22nd of that month and on the same day I started work on my second, in C major. This is, to date, my largest, with five quite sizeable movements, the first being to some extent experimental. But, having written about three pages of that first movement, I ran into a snag. I knew I was not ready to continue. This has happened on a number of occasions; it happened with my fifth, in B minor, although there the gap that intervened before I continued with it was much longer. In the case of the second sonata it was early 1947 before I took it up again, and gradually wrote the rest of the work. This I completed in early October, 1947, and on the 27th of that month I began to write the third sonata, in G sharp minor, using an idea which had been haunting me for some time.

Early in my acquaintance with Havergal Brian he asked me if I composed, and when I said that I did asked me to let him see some of my work. On my next visit, with my wife, I took with me the G sharp minor sonata. In fact, the visit was nearing its end before he spoke about it, and I had been hoping he would not mention it; I had some reserve about letting him see it. However, he did ask and I went to my case to get it. He was talking to my wife. I laid the manuscript book on the table in front of him. Still talking, he opened it, glanced at the first page, closed it, and finished what he was saying. A few minutes later we left.

Some days later I had a letter from him. He said that the morning after our visit he woke up with a musical idea going round in his head. It stayed with him, he could not place it, but knew it was not his. Late that evening he took my sonata to read it, and the first thing he saw, at the opening of the first movement, was the idea that had haunted him all day. He had only glanced at it the previous evening but this theme had lodged there in his mind.

Here is that theme:

Molto Moderato e Cantabile.

1.

It is a double theme, the upper part, fig. a, being used separately as the basis of the whole movement, the lower, fig. b, on its own and in conjunction with fig. a. For the moment the quavers descending from fig. b run on down to the lowest B on the keyboard, and are answered by rising and falling chords:

2.

A short crescendo leads to a sudden drop in volume and Ex. 1 again, this time with a new continuation:

3.

This builds to a climax based on the rhythm of fig. a; the climax brings a quaver theme of significant upper shape, a rise and fall of a semitone, a first derivation from Ex. 2. A few bars later that upper shape leads to a more definite result:

4.

These chords fall directly on to the second group main theme, in E flat minor:

5.

Handwritten musical score for Example 5. It consists of two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with various note values and rests. The lower staff contains a complex harmonic accompaniment with many beamed notes and accidentals. The tempo marking "Pauvito" is written above the first few notes of the upper staff.

Its continuation again builds to a climax, and subsides into the second part of the group, in E flat major, a further development of Ex. 5, with a continuation which emphasises the figure shown in Ex. 4. The counterpoint engendered here leads, over many bars, to the biggest climax so far, made of the chords of Ex. 4 (which go right back to Ex. 2), with contradictory inner harmonies. This subsides, with a grinding of C major against a fundamental B, to B major, which becomes the dominant of E as the music passes into the development, which is short although much happens. It is concerned mainly with Ex. 1, sometimes with fig. a reduced only to a rhythm:

6.

Handwritten musical score for Example 6. It consists of two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with various note values and rests. The lower staff contains a complex harmonic accompaniment with many beamed notes and accidentals. The tempo marking "Pauvito" is written above the first few notes of the upper staff. There are dynamic markings "cresc." and "f" in the lower staff.

The repeated chords that began the second group theme bring in their train a disguised beginning to the recapitulation, for the first time in the movement fully in G sharp minor:

7.

Handwritten musical score for Example 7. It consists of two staves. The upper staff contains a melodic line with various note values and rests. The lower staff contains a complex harmonic accompaniment with many beamed notes and accidentals. The tempo marking "Pauvito" is written above the first few notes of the upper staff. There is a dynamic marking "sempre legato" in the lower staff.

Here the second subject theme is on top, fig. a of Ex. 1 in the bass, and references to fig. b in the middle. This brings Ex. 3, extended, with references to some of the development material, to avoid the second group theme again (its second part does not come again) and lead on to the climax that ended the exposition, now finishing on a B flat, with B major (really C flat major) grinding above it. The music moves into a coda, starting from E flat minor, which brings new light on Ex. 1:

8.

A handwritten musical score for Example 8, consisting of two staves. The top staff features a melodic line with various intervals and accidentals, including a prominent descending quaver sequence. The bottom staff contains a bass line with large, sweeping notes and a complex rhythmic pattern. A large, hand-drawn bracket spans across both staves, encompassing the majority of the piece. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

Ex. 8 ends with the quaver descent to bottom B which came at the beginning of the movement, this time with fig. a, long drawn out, below it, and a final reference to the quavers which led to Ex. 4:

7.

A handwritten musical score for Example 7, consisting of two staves. The top staff shows a melodic line with a quaver descent towards the bottom of the staff. The bottom staff features a bass line with a long, drawn-out note and a final reference to quavers. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4.

The second movement is a thing of shadows with an occasional flashing blaze. Its main theme:

Andantino

10.

A handwritten musical score for Example 10, consisting of two staves. The top staff shows a melodic line with a quaver descent. The bottom staff features a bass line with a long, drawn-out note and a final reference to quavers. The key signature is two flats (Bb, Eb), and the time signature is 2/4.

Takes a hint from Ex. 4, and nearly everything in the movement grows from this. It makes its own shape as it goes, and it is a shape that would be difficult to pin down to any particular formula. As it comes to its end it is sidetracked into a passage of rising semiquavers which arrive at a climax and react into the third and final movement.

This is in two parts, one passing into the other without a break. Although the middle movement is in F minor and would end in F major if it was not interfered with, the final climax comes to rest on a chord of E flat minor. The result is G major, and in that key the finale begins, with a theme of a character sometimes called "pastoral", although in this instance it does not have that significance for me:

Allegretto semplice.

11.

For some time the music is concerned with Ex. 11 and development of it. We meet a figure:

12.

Poco meno mosso.

which has significance later, and a derivative of Ex. 11:

13.

A Tempo

which grows as the music proceeds.

Gradually the music begins to accelerate and comes to a climax (on F minor) featuring the beginning of the theme from the second movement, and this precipitates an *Allegro* version of Ex. 13 which becomes more and more excited, culminating in a fierce E minor passage in 2/4 outlining a theme extended from Ex. 13. This leads to a rapid rising chromatic scale which comes to rest on a chord of G major and results in a triple *forte* statement of a theme which is the full version of Ex. 13, towards which the latter has been striving:

Tempo Allegretto, con forza.

14.

What follows is a set of variations and it can now be appreciated that the E minor passage which led to Ex. 14 was in fact a first variation prior to the statement of the theme.

The first variation following the theme is quiet, in G major, with similar rhythm; the second even quieter, in D major; the third slower, round F sharp minor, the fourth, 2/4, faster in C sharp major. This reacts into No. 5, a *Presto* B flat minor 6/8, which produces No. 6 in F major, both forming one unbroken passage. This brings a climax on G major, triple *forte*. After a long silence Ex. 12, on C sharp, leads into a development of Ex. 14, and this results in a passage based on the rising chromatic fifths of Ex. 12, preparing for the next and last variation, in B major. This is a slow fugue on a subject derived from Ex. 14:

15. *Poco Adagio*

The fugue is fully developed, turning roughly halfway to quaver movement, and eventually petering out, on a passage built on the chromatic fifths, to a hesitant dominant of G sharp minor. After a pause, a quiet chorale begins on the unexpected harmony of A major, but as it runs its course it gradually falls harmonically so that the movement (and the work) ends at last in the key which has been at the bottom of the whole work - G sharp major - in spite of attacks from B major. A few bars from the end there is a final reference to Ex. 1, fig. a:

16.

which comes as a quite natural cadence to the chorale.

On May 5th, 1956, I completed the second largest of my sonatas to date, No. 6 in E major. It had cost me more than usual effort. The first movement was new, but the other three were recast and rewritten from originals which dated back to 1948, to a six-movement suite which I had written then and since discarded - as a single work. But re-writing for a different purpose music already written with another aim in view can cost more effort than straight composition; at least, I found it so. And yet the material was right for my overall design in No. 6. However, it was done and I promised myself a rest from composition. As it turned out, my rest was shortlived, for during 6th May I was seized by two ideas that had been bothering me for some time, and on the 7th May I plunged into No. 7, which was completed on the 20th May. This work, I thought when I started it, would be a three- or four-movement affair, as my others had been. It proved to be a natural one movement sonata - nothing else was possible when this one movement was finished.

Although a fairly short movement it has a large number of themes, four of them stemming from the same root - three rising notes of a scale. Here is the first:

17.

L.H. R.H.
sf in pancia.
sf
 R.H.
 L.H.
 p

and its sequel:

18.

p

The development of Ex. 18 takes it, using Ex. 1, through F sharp minor and C sharp minor, and leads to a third theme, starting around B minor:

19.

ff
Legato sempre.

This results in the first of the four I mentioned:

20.

sf

The lower part of the treble in Ex. 20 is important later. The end of Ex. 20 moves hesitantly to

21.

P sempre legato.
sempre legato possibile.
etc

starting again with a rise of three notes, and bringing a chromatically rising series of harmonies the culmination of which leads to yet another theme:

22.

p
continuing

with the same root beginning, and a murmuring support. Out of this comes the final theme in this plentifully supplied exposition:

23.

mp
(b) F

It is the last of the four, also. It moves in canon with the bass and, having built a small climax, falls lower and lower, until from the depths a rapid figure rises, increasing speed, then falls headlong into the development, which is, in the terms of classical music, an episodic one. This means that its material is new. In F minor it gives us this theme:

Allegro

24.

f

There are a number of corollaries, but references to Ex. 24 are numerous, reaching a climax and falling on to Ex. 24 in full, with parts inverted. It has a new continuation, which moves back, through another new theme:

25

to Ex. 1 speeded up and with new support derived from the bass of Ex. 25. The music regains its original tempo with Ex. 18.

Ex. 18 leads, as before, to Ex. 19, now pitched a semitone higher, and combined with Ex. 24 in the bass, adapted to 4/4 time. Ex. 20 follows, in the bass, the original lower treble part now above in chords. The rhythm of quaver and two semiquavers brings a new version of Ex. 21, the quaver replaced by a rest, with crochet octaves in the bass, and this opens out to a quiet *legato* version, on D flat major, of the same theme. The passage of rising chromatic harmonies ensues, and its climax brings us direct to the coda, which is also at first concerned with the material from the same passage. Out of this come derivatives of Ex. 19, interspersed with Ex. 1, culminating in a version of Ex. 19 again coupled with references to Ex. 24. Ex. 22 follows, with a different murmur for support, and is succeeded by Ex. 23 in a highly decorated version. From this comes the final phase, Ex. 22 heavily in the bass, with excited demisemiquavers rushing against it. At last Ex. 1 is heard in the bass on the dominant of C, the demisemiquavers gathering themselves for a final precipitous scale down to a thundered out low octave of C.

A more decided end there could not be, and the idea of anything to follow it was unthinkable. No. 7 is dedicated to Havergal Brian, who twice described it as a *tour de force*; once, verbally, after he had heard it, and again in a letter to me about the sonata.

In 1950 I started what I thought of as a sonatina for piano. I finished the first movement, a quiet, thoughtful piece of music, and then found I had no satisfactory idea for continuing. I put it away. At intervals I took it out, looked at it, decided I really must continue it, and put it away again. At last, in June, 1964, when I was once more considering it, the idea I wanted came to my mind, and I was away. The work was my 11th piano sonata, and was completed in July, 1964. The first movement, in two parts, could almost be heard as an introduction to the rest, although only the first two bars are connected with the second, or main movement:

26

Molto Andante, quieto

This moves slowly into triplet movement and statements in the bass of fig. a, partly overlapping each other. The triplets grow into semiquaver sextolets and reach the only major climax in this introduction, from which the music subsides into the second part, geared by mood to the first, but with no thematic connection. Themes grow one out of the other in one connected line. At last, a long quiet scale on C sharp, rising from the depths, climbs to the top of the keyboard and closes on E in the treble and C in the bass. This is the place at which I was initially stuck.

The second and main part of the sonata breaks out with fig. a of Ex. 26, inverted in the bass, direct, with slightly different intervals, in the treble:

Moderato, alla maestà, con anima

27.

Handwritten musical score for Example 27, measures 27-32. The score is in treble and bass clefs with a common time signature. It features a melody in the treble and a bass line with triplets and sextolets. Dynamics include 'f' and 'p sempre'.

and for the first time a key is definite - A minor. The jerky rhythm is developed to a point at which it merges into an energetic waltz, which immediately begins to climb in an *accelerando* to A flat major and *Allegro molto*:

(Allegro molto)

28.

Handwritten musical score for Example 28, measures 28-34. The score is in treble and bass clefs with a 3/4 time signature. It features a fast, rhythmic melody in the treble and a bass line with a large sustained chord. Dynamics include '(ff)' and 'staccato'.

where fig. a is developed to a *Presto*, with feverish cross-rhythmed activity. The harmony has gradually reverted to A minor, and the music arrives at a 3/4 *Quasi Prestissimo*, with fig. a dancing for its life, at last falling on to the waltz rhythm, which gradually slows down to resume the jerky rhythm. This regains its original tempo and is just going nicely when it runs straight into an unexpected *fortissimo* chord, as though it had been hit in the face.

An *Adagio* ensues, leading in spasms to this sombre theme:

(Tempo Adagio) sf quasi trombe

29.

Handwritten musical score for Example 29, measures 29-35. The score is in treble and bass clefs with a common time signature. It features a melody in the treble with triplets and a bass line with triplets. Dynamics include 'P', 'mp', and 'sf'.

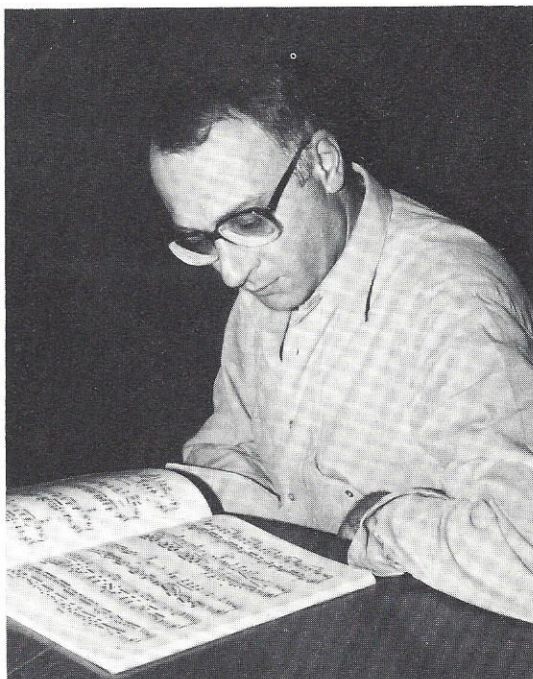
which is developed at some length, with sundry references to Ex. 1, fig. a. This too runs into a lesser brick wall, which sorts itself out into the final stage, a sort of minuet:

So.

The sonata ends with a final reference to fig. a, adapted to the minuet rhythm and mood, and peters out round a chord of A major.

ERRATUM Page 5 Paragraph 1 Line 3 : For 'minor' read 'major'

Peter Jacobs



Recording Engineer: Anthony Howell

©1984
ALTARUS RECORDS LTD