

The University of Adelaide
Elder Conservatorium of Music
Faculty of Arts

**Creative exploration of eclecticism
applied to bowed string instruments
with special emphasis on cellos:**

Portfolio of original compositions and exegesis

by

Stephan Richter

submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

**Master of Philosophy
(MPhil)**

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NOTE:

1 DVD containing 'Recorded Performances' is included with the print copy of the thesis held in the University of Adelaide Library.

The DVD must be viewed in the Library.

ABSTRACT

This submission for the degree of Master of Philosophy in musical composition at the Elder Conservatorium of Music, University of Adelaide, consists of a portfolio of original compositions supported by an explanatory exegesis. The central concept for the creative exploration represented by these works is the idea of composing for bowed string instruments, cellos in particular, in a stylistically eclectic manner that will confront classically trained performers with rhythms drawn from a wide range of non-classical and non-European musical traditions. In this sense the project may be regarded as related to a contemporary ‘crossover’ approach, but hopefully without some of the more negative connotations of that problematic marketing term. The five pieces in the portfolio are: *Marimbello*, for marimba and violoncello; *Camino Trio*, for piano, violin and violoncello; *Trilogy*, for an ensemble of 8 to 12 cellos and percussion; *Son Montucello*, for two cellos; and *Kaleidoscope*, concerto for two cellos, string orchestra and piano. In addition to the scores presented in Part A, and the exegesis in Part B, there is a DVD containing live recordings of all the pieces. These recordings are integral to the submission, because they embody the performance practice of interpreting the notated rhythms in the appropriate styles.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Signed:

Stephan Richter

Dated: June 2016

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The 'cellist Janis Laurs has given enormous encouragement, unwavering support, inspiration, artistic expertise, and assistance throughout my entire candidature. His wonderful performances are included in this degree submission. It was he who commissioned the cello ensemble *Trilogy*, which was premièred at the Adelaide International Cello Festival in 2014 (he was Artistic Director of that event). It was he who asked me to compose the double cello concerto *Kaleidoscope*, which had its first performance in April 2016.

In addition to Janis Laurs I also offer my heartfelt thanks to the following performers: Ewen Bramble, cello; David Moran, cello; Michael Ierace, piano; Lachlan Bramble, violin; and Samuel Butler, marimba.

The following members of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra joined their colleagues, Lachlan and Ewen Bramble, for the performances: Shirin Lim, violin; Martin Butler, viola; and Harley Gray, double bass. I thank them all.

I also offer my thanks to current and former students of the Elder Conservatorium who took part in the performances: Emma Woolcock, Sebastian Mansell, Monica Myung, Becky Kim, Mason Stanton, Jakub Jankowski, Aiden Sullivan, and Rachel Richardson.

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Finally, I wish to thank the highly professional staff of Elder Hall for their support, in particular Ms Claire Oremland, and Amanda Grigg, head of the percussion department at the Elder Conservatorium.

Chapter listing of the DVD recordings

Chapter 1	The Meister Stringer's show	
Chapter 2	Introduction by Prof. Charles Bodman Rae	
Chapter 3	<i>Marimbello</i> , for marimba and violoncello	duration 5:00
	<i>Camino Trio</i> , for piano, violin and violoncello	12:43
Chapter 4	1. Camino Ventoso	4:15
Chapter 5	2. El Valle del Dolor	4:49
Chapter 6	3. Tiempo Intemporal	3:41
	<i>Trilogy</i> , for eight violoncelli and percussion	14:45
Chapter 7	1. Waiting for a sign	4:29
Chapter 8	2. More or Lesser Antilles	5:46
Chapter 9	3. Bamboozled	4:36
Chapter 10	<i>Son Montucello</i> , per due violoncelli	6:40
Chapter 11-13	<i>Kaleidoscope</i> , Concerto per due violoncelli	22:51
Chapter 14	credits and acknowledgements	
Total playing time		61:59

INTRODUCTION

The research investigation that lies at the heart of this creative project sits at the intersection between composition and performance. The mode of submission is compositional, with the musical ideas communicated graphically through notated scores; but the submission has also been driven by experimentation through musical performance, and the recorded performances included here are central to an understanding of what is being conceived, composed, and communicated. The performances are not necessarily the end result of a compositional process. Often the process was the other way round, with ideas originating in musical performance, then developed compositionally before being performed and recorded.

In order to explain how these elements of the project interact, and in order to account for the personal dimension of this continuing, creative journey, this exegetical commentary begins with a brief account - necessarily expressed in the first person - of my musical background, influences from many different musical genres, and the essentially eclectic nature and range of my musical experiences.¹

I was born and raised in Zürich, and in my childhood I encountered a variety of musical influences that shaped my appreciation of cultural diversity. At home my parents only listened to classical music, but I also liked to hear popular music on the radio. My primary instrument was the cello, and as a teenager I developed the desire not only to play classical art music but also to be able to join a 'band'. In order to participate in a band setting I played the electric bass guitar, which I learned by myself through aural immersion in the relevant genres.

¹ In Schuller's autobiography, he writes in the first person beginning with his childhood, musical journey, and development of 'third stream'. Schuller, Gunther 2011, *A life in the pursuit of music and beauty*, Rochester University Press, Rochester.

At the time of my youth, during the 1970s, the only formal musical training available in Switzerland was within the traditions of European 'classical' art music. The European conservatoires had not yet embraced the broad range of non-European and non-classical traditions that they cater for now. There was one exception, however, the Swiss Jazz School in Bern, which was the first college of its kind in Europe, founded in 1967.²

My main cello teacher at the Zürich Konservatorium, Rolf Looser, was also a prolific composer, and had been a composition student of Frank Martin.³ As a cellist he had studied with Pablo Casals and Pierre Fournier.⁴ One of his qualities was that during cello lessons he often used his cello (instead of the piano) to play orchestral or piano parts in a unique, guitar-like, chordal fashion. As far as I was aware at the time he never explained to anybody how he developed this manner of transferring the essence of a full score onto the cello. Being exposed to his approach it became natural for me to try and figure out how to transfer and condense different parts onto the cello in a chordal fashion. After the completion in 1980 of a combined six-year diploma in cello performance and teaching at the Zürich Konservatorium (these were the days before the European conservatoires adopted the 'first cycle' Bachelor degrees following the Bologna declaration) I went to study electric bass in New York City.⁵

This experience in New York deepened my understanding of Jazz, Afro-Cuban⁶ and electric Jazz-fusion music. The practical interaction with diverse music styles, and the professional engagement with musicians who embodied these qualities, helped me further to strengthen the notion that music can be created and

² The first tertiary-level jazz programme in the United Kingdom - at Leeds College of Music - followed shortly after this.

³ Martin worked as a teacher of improvisation and rhythmic theory at Dalcroze Institute Geneva.

⁴ Fournier was also a teacher of the Australian cellist, Janis Laurs, who is featured in this submission, not least as soloist in my double cello concerto.

⁵ At the Drummers Collective and Rhythm Section Lab, at West 42nd st. NYC

⁶ Uribe, Ed 1996, *The Essence of Afro-Cuban Percussion & Drum Set: Includes the rhythm Section Parts For Bass, Piano, Guitar, Horns & Strings*, Alfred Publishing, Van Nuys.

Ed Uribe taught at the Drummers Collective and I have used his drum/percussion publications as valuable sources.

experienced in ways that embrace interpretation, creation, and improvisation, in a unified way and in approximately equal measure.

One of the musicians who I felt manifested these qualities was Chick Corea. His approach is revealed, for example, in the following comments about Bartok: "He is [sic] a kind of jazz musician who does not improvise. There is an adventure in it, and a jazz about it".⁷ Corea was no doubt attracted by certain jazz-like features of Bartok's harmonic vocabulary (such as the pervasive presence of major-minor chords containing both major and minor thirds), but it is likely that he was also attracted by Bartok's use of irregular folk-derived metres and rhythms. Corea senses the presence of a 'jazz sound', but realizes that Bartok's music is strictly scored, and excludes the element of improvisation.

When I moved to Australia in the late-1980s I accepted a contract to write bass guitar tuition manuals.⁸ This work enabled me both to build on my jazz training in New York and to explore in greater depth the various technical and genre-specific applications of how to explain and to create music for bass.⁹ This activity was developed in parallel with teaching bass students how to draw upon an extended range of music that included material and techniques derived from my experience as a cellist, and from the cello repertoire. Over the years I also composed music for mixed ensembles on one hand and applied implementation of eclecticism with special attention for cello on the other hand. On the performance side, I toured extensively overseas and performed a mix of popular and eclectic music in a small group, creating roles for the cello that tried to combine my impulses for expressivity (through performance) and creativity (through composition).

Eugene Friesen, the inspiring cellist, educator, improviser and composer states in his book about creativity and expression: '...it's the composers who have the

⁷ Spurling, P 2008, *In conversation with Chick Corea*, viewed September 12. 2013, <<http://www.jazz.com/features-and-interviews/2008/5/30/in-conversation-with-chick-corea>>.

⁸ For the Koala publishing company

⁹ Richter, Stephan. *Learn to play Bass Manual*. Adelaide: L.T.P, 2011. As well as many other volumes, dating back to the late 80's and 90's already.

exclusive ability to create and alter forms, shape notes into expression and inspiration. Players largely forfeited that incredible elation of making their own music.’¹⁰ During the Adelaide International Cello Festival in 2014 I had the opportunity to meet, work and share the stage with Eugene Friesen. This direct contact with one of the foremost practitioners of my instrument has certainly had an influence on the works that are included in this submission.

Since 2006 I have been working with the performing group Akoustic Odyssey, of which I am a founding member, and for which I am one of the composers. Eclecticism became the trademark of the group. Written parts are designated for a mixed range of instruments, including bowed strings, woodwinds, guitar and percussion. The concept behind the group's approach is to create music that integrates various cultural influences. For example, Josh Tsounis (also a founding member and a composer for the group) has a Greek heritage, which is often reflected in his music. The group has performed, recorded and toured in Australia, and school projects for Musica Viva Australia form a regular part of our activities. Our performances at the WOMAD world music festival (WOMADelaide) have been indicative of the inclusive approach towards integrating cultural influences.

This MPhil project in composition has been creative rather than theoretical, hence the approach to research method followed the sequence of steps that one would expect as part of a creative process. The following steps can be identified:

- a) Analyzing influences/techniques sourced from audio and DVD recordings of composers/performers
- b) Applying these techniques
- c) Synthesizing the influences in original pieces
- d) Testing the new works in rehearsals
- e) Revising the works once they have been tested
- f) Finalizing the scores and parts of the new works
- g) Performing and recording the final versions

¹⁰ Friesen, E 2012, in *‘Improvisation for classical musicians: Strategies for creativity and expression’*, Berklee Press, Boston, pp. vi-vii.

The influences and techniques referred to include, in particular, Latin American rhythms and extended techniques for the cello. The musical source materials on which the investigation has drawn have included video clips of live performance, performance workshops, and attendance at live performances that engaged with the notion of 'groove'¹¹ expressed through extended techniques on the cello. The list below outlines these techniques, some of which I encountered through the work of particular cellists such as the splendidly eccentric Rushad Egglestone.¹² Some of the ideas and techniques have been incorporated into my compositions, albeit in a modified manner.

- The use of different vibrato techniques - these may be influenced by guitar and electric guitar vibratos.
- Vibrato styles such as side bending. This effect may be executed on the cello by using rapid vertical motion.
- 'Power chords' (perfect fifths) – easily adapted to string instruments as they are tuned in fifths using double stops.
- Imitation of electric guitar effects by the manipulation of bow pressure and closeness to the bridge, producing colours ranging from harmonic textures to distortions.
- Emulation of feedback noises.
- 'Chop'¹³ techniques using back beat percussive strokes derived from guitar techniques, e.g. Django Reinhardt.
- Incorporating 'slap bass' right hand techniques.

¹¹ Driessen, Casey 2013, *The Singularity*, Driessen Casey, audio CD, Asheville. ASIN: RSR 213.01. I also attended a live performance by Casey Driessen when he came to Adelaide in 2014.

¹² Egglestone Rushad, Dec 2, 2011, *Rushad- Witching hour* video, viewed July 11 2013. < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oOesZbb2rTA>>. I also attended a live performance and workshop with Rushad Egglestone at the 2014 Adelaide international cello festival.

¹³ Friesen Eugene, April 17 2009, *Chop on Cello 2009*, video, viewed May 5 2013, < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kj7shbePMN4>>. I also attended a live performance and workshop with Eugene Friesen at the 2014 Adelaide international cello festival.

- ‘Pull off’ (left hand), e.g. as applied by double bass players playing swing ‘walking bass’ lines.
- Ghost notes (muted strings with left hand) - percussive effects in conjunction with pizzicato, col legno or ricochet (also striking strings).
- Use of plectrum
- Guitar style finger picking using thumb, index and middle fingers to play chords and/or arpeggios.

These elements add 'colour' or timbre to the overall sound palette and also serve to enhance the rhythmic dimension.

The research questions (RQ) that have guided this creative investigation can be grouped in three categories.

RQ1 Questions relating to harmony and improvisation:

- 1.1 How can one reinstate the seemingly lost art of figured bass in a modified way to suit the vernacular setting? (The figured bass played a pivotal role in the past and was the basis to develop and apply the practical skills for accompaniment and improvisation.)
- 1.2 How can one apply this concept (see 1.1) to bowed string instruments in general and to cellos in particular?
- 1.3 How can one work with abbreviated harmonic notations and elaborate them in performance into patterns of accompaniment?
- 1.4 How can one work with abbreviated harmonic notations and elaborate them in performance to make melodic lines?

RQ2 Questions relating to rhythm patterns, 'grooves', off beats and syncopations:

- 2.1 How can one apply the concept of 'groove' to bowed strings?
- 2.2 How can one transfer rhythms and lines from different instruments (e.g. keyboard Cuban montuno rhythms) onto bowed strings?

- 2.3 How can one incorporate percussion effects into the bowed string parts?
- 2.4 How can one transform traditional string lines into new groove-based lines?

RQ3 Questions relating to extended timbre techniques:

- 3.1 How can one apply extended techniques for bowed string instruments to emulate various types of sound effects?
- 3.2 How can one broaden the sound spectrum (and techniques applied to bowed string instruments) into vernacular settings?
- 3.3 How can one designate new roles and functions to bowed instruments?

Most of these research questions were addressed directly, but in the case of the questions relating to harmony and improvisation (in the first group) the approach tended to be indirect in its application. During the process of testing and finalizing the cello ensemble work, *Trilogy*, which was premiered in a concert given as part of the Adelaide International Cello Festival in 2014, there were rehearsals and workshops for each of the three movements, and this unusually extended process allowed for some experimentation and revision. For practical reasons, and due to time constraints in rehearsal, a decision was made not to apply all the improvisatory elements in the notation of the scores, but to explore these elements through unwritten aspects of performance. On reflection, one might observe that the development of refined skills in this area would require an intensive sequence of interactive workshops whereby all the performers involved would have the opportunity to explore the necessary improvisatory skills.

Obviously, not all the research questions applied in equal measure to all the compositions that are contained in this portfolio. Each piece has a different balance and explores different things in different ways. The duet *Marimbello* for marimba and violoncello addresses the idea of stylistic eclecticism through references to the flamenco (or Cante Jondo) tradition, and this can perhaps be

detected in the cello's pizzicato chords and lines. The metre, however, is predominately in 7/8, which is not part of the flamenco tradition. There are also the montuno-like patterns that are mainly assigned to the marimba, while the cello plays expressive melodic phrases (obviously with the bow rather than pizzicato).

In the *Camino Trio* there are aspects that demonstrate another angle of stylistic eclecticism. The opening (unaccompanied) cello chords outline harmonies and chord voicings that relate to the baroque tradition. With the entry of the piano, however, the respective roles of the three instruments start to shift, and the rhythmic and melodic roles are interchanged in such a way that they involve all three players in turn. There are various changes of metre throughout the piece, and these present their own challenges. The results in performance were quite gratifying, and I was grateful to the performers for their musical insight and considerable skill in dealing with the challenges.

The *Trilogy* piece for cello ensemble encompassed most of the research questions incorporated extended techniques. It was a privilege to be able to perform this piece on three occasions: twice during the Adelaide International Cello Festival of 2014; and then again in April 2016 together with all the other compositions contained in this portfolio. The last movement 'Bamboozled' presented particular metric and rhythmic challenges due to its 15/8 time signature and the various subdivisions and groupings of the 15 quaver pulses. These challenges were handled well by the performers during a relatively long rehearsal process, and the use of bamboo sticks (instead of bows in designated sections) seemed to help with the articulation and coordination of the rhythmic patterning.

Son Montucello for two cellos also encompassed most of the research questions. For example, the introduction to the piece starts with a chord motion that is played with guitar-style right hand finger technique - with some rubato flexibility towards the rhythm - before it changes to a strict rhythmic patterning articulated by chords played *col legno*.

Kaleidoscope, which is a concerto for two cellos, string orchestra, and piano, is the longest, most extended composition in the portfolio, and has a performance

duration of over 20 minutes. It explores the ideas articulated by the research questions but in one respect goes beyond them. It takes its cue from the various implied references (in the research questions) to musical procedures characteristic of the baroque era and applies them not only to the techniques of the musical moment but also to the overall concept of form. The familiar dance movements that we would expect to encounter in a baroque suite, such as the Allemande, the Courante, or the Sarabande, are here replaced by sections that focus on Latin American dance rhythms, such as the Salsa, the Tango, and the Samba. And the treatment of the relationship between the two soloists and the orchestra owes much to the textural contrasts - between concertino and ripieno groups - that lie at the heart of the concerto grosso medium.

At the personal level perhaps the most interesting and unexpected aspect of this creative journey has been the gradual realization that my music owes far more to the musical traditions and compositional techniques of the baroque era than I had previously understood. The double cello concerto, with all its concerto grosso characteristics, made this clear to me. Perhaps it had been there all the time, but I had taken it for granted, overlooking its significance. Once I realized how important the techniques and textures of the baroque era were to my eclectic manner of music making I began to see it in all the other pieces, not only the double cello concerto. Instead of thinking of my music as a stylistic fusion of Latin American rhythms, jazz syncopations, jazz improvisation on popular song forms, and rock-based influences, I was able to see and to hear these elements fused with the European music of the early eighteenth century that had formed such a strong and enduring element of my musical upbringing in Switzerland. It would seem, on reflection, that those structural models had been embedded more strongly in my musical psyche than I had appreciated. This new awareness, and the sense of musical identity that it represents, has been one of the most rewarding aspects of the entire creative, musical journey.