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## Richard Barrett

### Peter Wiegold

The musical activity of Peter Wiegold, both compositional and practical, occupies an unusual position in the contemporary music scene in Britain. The explicit spirituality of his approach, coupled with a profound Eastern influence—deepened by extended visits to India and Indonesia—may be considered unfashionable attributes, but the combination of a constant, unforced flow of musical ideas with a rigorously controlling intelligence has created music rich both in invention and discipline.

Wiegold, born in Ilford, Essex, in 1949, first studied at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth, from 1967 to 1972, and then at Durham University under David Lumsdaine, whose influence on his work is deep and continuing. As visiting composer at the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol (1976-8), Wiegold developed a practical interest in organising workshops where people of all degrees of musical experience (including none) can become creatively involved together in composition and performance. Since 1973 his activities as director of the chamber group Gemini have been increasingly important in determining his attitude towards all practical and creative aspects of music.

The confluence of these concerns and experiences, together with a consuming interest in the development of a 'natural' way of looking at harmony partly inspired by his knowledge of non-Western musical traditions, has played a major part in shaping Wiegold's compositional style. However, his first acknowledged works, composed before his move to Durham, were innocent of any of these formative influences: they are *Dove sta amore* (1971), a setting for soprano and three instruments of a poem by Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and *Rain has Fallen* (1972), five settings of poems by Joyce, for soprano, chorus, and orchestra. Seen in retrospect the freely applied serial technique and relatively complex orchestral textures of the second of these two pieces are uncharacteristic; only its length—at 30' rather ambitious for an early work—foreshadows later, less heavily scored compositions, which have required a broad timespan for the full development of Wiegold's technical and aesthetic precepts. Another piece from this period, *The Circle of Forms* (1972) for electric guitar and amplified double bass, shows more strongly the growth of clear-cut structures and an uncluttered vertical dimension, but the inevitably ungrateful timbre of this duo, and the inclusion of a text spoken in unison by the musicians, make it somewhat offputting.

The next group of works reflects an increasing confidence with the chosen methods, no doubt strongly catalysed by Wiegold's study with David Lumsdaine. Indeed, the insistence on organic harmonic development and on recognisable cadential configurations, as well as the extensive use of matrices in the organisation of pitch material, may be traced to Lumsdaine. Wiegold is perhaps not disposed to reproduce the extraordinary intellectual toughness of Lumsdaine's works, but, beginning with his Durham compositions, he substituted a growing awareness of what is 'fundamental' (in both senses!) in music. The earlier among these pieces show a new linearity of form, cast in a harmonic and rhythmic style of constant development and permutation; this gives way later to a method of generating form by means of

contrasting perspectives on a harmony (implied rather than explicit) based on overtone series, rhythm based (analogously) on a fundamental pulse, and the dramatisation of instrumental roles. Wiegold later expressed his broad compositional aim as follows: 'the central idea of a piece should suggest and work at as many different levels as possible'; the 'philosophical/spiritual meaning', the 'roots of the sound-structure',<sup>1</sup> and other formal levels are linked by their shared basis in a shape or principle of growth that can encompass both musical and extra-musical concerns—a concept of great elegance in its balance of simplicity and complexity.

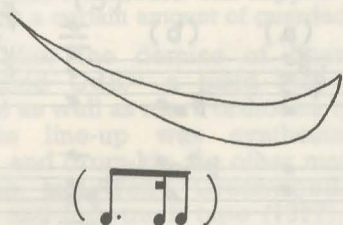
In *The Dancing Day* (1973) for brass quintet, these tendencies are shown in a relatively undeveloped state. The broad form of the piece follows the narration of the life of Christ in the carol *Tomorrow shall be my Dancing Day*; the metrical and gestural structures are unified by their relationship to the movements of dance:

I tried to keep dance always in mind so that the imagining of the musical gestures, rhythms and shapes could always be enriched in my mind by physical gestures, rhythms and shapes.

Dance is associated in the music with shifting accentual patterns in a given metre, usually applied cyclically; the larger sections also depend on the cyclical permutation of events. Wiegold was unhappy about the linearly cumulative form of this work, which (in common with its source material) builds to a single climax; and indeed the timespan (20') is perhaps too long for the listener not to lose his bearings along the way. Also, the intended effect of the shifting accents is partly masked by the lack of a clearly audible metrical frame upon which such relative changes may be projected. The subsequent development of 'relatively static reference points from which to observe long journeys' arose from this dissatisfaction. *The Dancing Day* is basically lacking in the foreground-background relationships that impart the essential depth to musical form.

The central ideas in the next pieces permeate the planning of every salient aspect of the composition. In *Gemini* (1973) for two clarinets and percussion (two players), the central idea is, not surprisingly, that of the opposition of pairs (of instruments or players), which undergo a process of interaction, meeting, and fusion; the same sequence governs the piece as a whole, which describes an unwinding of tension, the gradual homogenisation of an initial state rich in contrast and conflict. The stylised instrumental drama thus generated is set against a refrain, which returns at the very end to lead the music from motionlessness to a new balance and reconciliation of the elements of its harmonic and gestural vocabulary. *Sing Lullaby* (1974), for soprano and amplified double bass, pushes further the concept of a single idea shaping both the piece and its constituent parts: the overall form, the form of each section, and that of many smaller-scale events may be represented by a single abstract shape—a movement from 'distant, unfocussed, unpitched, complex, high in the harmonic series' to 'close, clear, full-toned, low in the harmonic series', followed by an 'afterbeat period'; the same shape is implied by the archetypal rhythm of the lullaby and by the outline of a cradle (Example 1; after Wiegold). Although the text of *Sing Lullaby* was added to the music after the essential composition had been completed, its content (traditional lullaby verses) determined both the shape and the substance of the music. Tension is generated again by elementary oppositions (mirrored in the imagery of the rhymes, which range from the idyllic to the spitefully

## Example 1



violent—'go to sleep or else . . .'); but the resolution of dualities is here achieved not by fusion (as in *Gemini*) but by the containment of one element within another (symbolically matching the cradling of the baby in its mother's arms, or the subconscious desire of the adult to escape conflict by a return to the safety of the womb). The words are fragmented into syllables, whose arrangement is directed towards clarifying the musical structure rather than the import and meaning of the text. Although this is also true of other pieces by Wiegold, the use of words primarily to satisfy structural concerns is unusual; elsewhere he chooses and sets texts to project a spiritual dimension, and it is perhaps this somewhat alien aspect of *Sing Lullaby* that makes it one of his less satisfactory works.

The harmonic language of these and others of Wiegold's works in this period depends on versions of the 'Gemini matrix', a device evolved by David Lumsdaine to order and control pitch material. Example 2 shows the version of the matrix used for the piece to which it gave its name. Every pitch has a partner, always found in the same hexachord as itself, and each such pair is always symmetrically placed about the centre of a hexachord (the pair B and D are ringed in the example to show this relationship); further, hexachords 1 and 4, 2 and 3, 6 and 7, and 5 and 8 complement each other to complete four twelve-note sets; and each pitch is also a member of a pair that alternates diagonally (see the pairs C sharp and F sharp, and C and D, marked in the example). Hexachords labelled (a) and (b) in Example 2 contain the same pitches in different orders. This type of matrix offers many other possibilities, but Wiegold does not utilise the available symmetries and complementary relationships in a constructivist way; he prefers to use the hexachords as sources of synthetic modal formations, and to treat the matrix simply as a reference grid on which their interrelationships are mapped. In fact the matrix illustrated was fully constructed only after certain parts of *Gemini* had been composed, thus it is not possible in any meaningful sense to separate the source material from the piece itself, conceptually or chronologically. The way in which Wiegold distributes pitches over the matrix to create modal sources, instead of extrapolating the matrix from an initial twelve-note set, demonstrates an attitude that later led to the abandoning of such artificial constructs in favour of working directly with the harmonic series.

The two most important and successful works from this phase are, perhaps, *And he showed me a pure river of water of life* (1975-6) for soprano, three clarinetists, and percussion, and *The Flowers Appear on the Earth* (1977-8, revised 1981) for seven instruments. In both cases Wiegold took as titles fragments of quotations from the Bible—respectively from *Revelation* and the *Song of Solomon*—and extracted from the quoted texts images that determine form on many levels; in both, also, he extends and clarifies the type of verse-refrain structure found in previous works (and also in *The Soft Complaining Flute* for flute and tape, 1974-7). But whereas *And he*

## Example 2

*showed me . . .* represents a summation of the techniques and aims of Wiegold's earlier compositions, *The Flowers* breaks through into a more characteristic and individual domain, aspects of which have come under scrutiny in the subsequent series of Preludes for different vocal and instrumental combinations.

*And he showed me . . .* is based upon the 'river' and 'tree of life' ideas mentioned in the text. The overall form is 'like a series of tiny, distant tributaries gradually coming together to form a wider, fuller, faster-flowing river that eventually dissipates into the open sea'. The pitch matrix in this piece—constructed from pentachords (which reduces the possibility of the occurrence of chromatic aggregates)—is still more modally orientated than before: two structurally important and distinctive pentachords are G-F sharp-D-A-C (pentachord 1 in Example 3—an Indian-sounding pentatonic D mode) and G-E flat-D-F sharp-C (pentachord 2). The pitch D, specifically the one above middle C, forms the focus of many of Wiegold's works; he feels it to be 'central' in several ways, preferring the tonal reference point to occur in

## Example 3

a median register, rather than in the bass as the foundation of a hierarchy. Consequently, consonant material (low in the harmonic series) is often found in this register, while chromatic activity increases towards the outer limits of the registral spectrum; this assures a 'completely fluid bass', concentrates clear harmonic working in the area where the ear is most sensitive to relative and absolute pitch, and establishes a true centre which may be contrasted with complementary extremes. (This concept of centricity and balance also has resonances in the political and philosophical/spiritual spheres.) The well-differentiated modal areas in *And he showed me ...* are mediated by graduations between them, made available automatically by the construction of the matrix; moving through the pentachords in the order 1-10 produces this gradually changing modality. The text, as in *Sing Lullaby*, was applied to the musical structure in fragmented syllables, except at the pivotal points in the structure where the singer walks forward from the ensemble and announces a section of the text in a recitative-like manner, which shows one or other of the principal modal areas in its barest form (the first of these, using pentachord 1, is shown in Example 4). These points are separated by more or less complex development sections, which mostly tend towards unity of gesture and rhythm, the D mode being associated with an explicit presentation of the work's fundamental pulse, semiquaver at crotchet = 90—the confluence of tributaries into a single flow.

#### Example 4

ten. (tempo rubato)

And he showed me a pure ri-ver  
of wa-ter of life, clear as crys-tal,  
pro-ceed-ing out of the throne of  
God, and of the Lamb...

*The Soft Complaining Flute* introduces a natural consequence of the harmonic thinking of the preceding works—the inclusion of justly tuned intervals. *The Flowers* uses a single chord for the basis of almost all its harmony (Example 5a), which is coloured by the presence of the non-tempered seventh partial (that is,  $c''$  a  $1/8$ -tone below its tempered equivalent), and to which the guitar is tuned. This chord is then 'multiplied' onto each of its own pitches to produce a set of chords more or less rich in flattened pitches, and this set constitutes the 'harmonic structure or summary' of the piece. *The Flowers* is scored for flute/piccolo, clarinet/bass clarinet, viola, cello, harp, percussion, and twelve-string guitar or *santūr*. The *santūr* is a Middle Eastern dulcimer, and Wiegold regards it as preferable to the guitar in this piece, since the part consists almost entirely of natural harmonics, which even on a twelve-string guitar are too faint to compete with the ensemble. The guitar or *santūr* and the harp are tuned in such a way as together to make available all the non-tempered pitches required, and thus to lead the intonation of the other instrumental parts.

#### Example 5

It will be noticed that the notes of the guitar chord are the same as those of the D mode in *And he showed me ...*; and just as the D mode in that work has a complementary mode, the harmonic summary of *The Flowers* is supplemented by a 'harmonic opposite' chord, C-A flat-B flat-D-E flat, in the tenor register (Example 5b), and a symmetrical tempered twelve-note chord (Example 5c); the last constitutes 'the main focus of the tempered side of the piece'. Unlike *And he showed me ...*, however, the differentiation in timbre of the instruments used here allows the dramatic relationships between them to function as a formal determinant, as in earlier works. This increase in 'vertical' clarity is matched by a harder-edged alternation of contrasted materials 'horizontally'—that is, in the sequence of ideas; moreover the constant reference to a basic pulse and harmony is made much more explicit.

*The Flowers Appear on the Earth* is a 'rite of spring' (and a comparison with Stravinsky in the areas of form and rhythm would not be inappropriate). The text obviously suggested the idea of flowering, but it also suggested the relationship between the earth and the flowers it brings forth, which Wiegold interpreted as implying a piece 'firmly rooted harmonically, yet reaching up from this into distant, delicately-related regions'. The characteristic shape is that of a preparation in stillness for a spiralling and joyous growth, a celebration of a principle common to both organic processes and the act of meditation.

The arrival, in *The Flowers*, at a convincing simplicity and the viability of natural tunings has had important consequences for Wiegold's work. The ensuing series of Preludes ('short pieces exploring limited areas that seem to me in some way "elemental"') may be seen as amplifying facets of this approach that could not be accommodated in that piece. (The original length of *The Flowers* was over 40'—no doubt the result of Wiegold's enthusiasm at having discovered a mode of utterance more completely consonant with his thinking than any he had previously achieved; it was reduced drastically by revision, which resulted in a return to the greater structural tightness of the earlier works.) The use of ostinatos in *Prelude I* (1978; for four instruments and percussionist-conductor) and *Prelude II* (1980; for piano), and of drones in *Prelude IV* (1979; for soprano, clarinet, cello, and piano), which also exploits the 'natural third' between the tempered major and minor thirds, further reinforces the 'stillness at the centre', found in previous works, and the connection with non-Western and non-classical musics. Further, the development of clear ritualistic forms is exploited in an actual liturgical context in *Ritual of the Light* (1978), a 'participatory' event devised for musicians with the clergy and congregation of Liverpool's Roman Catholic Cathedral, the shape of which is itself an important compositional factor.



# Peter Wiegold

## SELECTED SCORES:

### *INSTRUMENTAL ENSEMBLE WITHOUT VOICE*

**The Flowers Appear on the Earth**  
for Fl., Cl., Vla., Vcl., Perc.

**The Dancing Day**  
for Brass Quintet

**Prelude I**  
for Alto Fl., Cl., Vla., Vcl., Perc.

**Prelude II**  
for Piano Solo

**Prelude III**  
for Wind Quintet

**Prelude V**  
for String Quartet

**Birthday Prelude**  
for Fl., Cl., Bn., Hn.

**Gemini**  
for 2 Cl., 2 Perc.

**The Circle of Forms**  
for Elec. Guitar, Amp. Db.

### *INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC WITH VOICE*

**The Peace of God**  
for 2 Fl. (1 doubling Sop. Sax), 2 Vcl., Tpt.,  
Narrator, Children

**And He Showed Me A Pure River of Water of Life**  
for Soprano, 3 Cl., Perc.

**Dove Sta Amore**  
for Soprano, Cl., Tpt., Db.

**Prelude IV—Snow Melting!**  
for Soprano, Cl., Vcl., Pno.

**Sing Lullaby**  
for Soprano, Db. (Amp. & Wa-Wa)

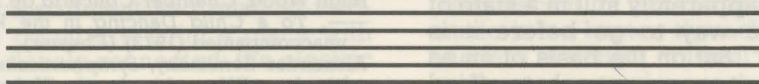
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# UNIVERSAL EDITION



The most recent larger work has been the *Grimm Songs* for voice and piano, commissioned and first performed (in 1983) by Jane Manning, to a text by Nick Otty. Otty had worked previously with Wiegold on *Saving the Sun* (1980) for tenor and tape (which dramatises the performer-tape relationship in a more convincing way than most such pieces), and has also co-directed music-theatre workshops with him, including the 1983 SPMN Composers' Weekend. The text consists of two alternating elements: a series of 'songs' exploring in a mock-structuralist vein the recurrent situations found in the folk-tales of the Brothers Grimm; and episodes in which the singer takes on the character of an old woman who chastises a young girl for being frightened by the stories, on the grounds that they are after all only stories and may be reduced to a small number of simple (and by no means scary) structures. (The tongue-in-cheek attitude of the old woman's explaining-away was perhaps lost on some critics at the première.) The keyboard is intended to behave as an instrument in 'folk-tuning': the group of pitches used is restricted and remains constant throughout the piece, and once again intervals are consonant in the centre and chromatic at the extremes. The rhythmic language of the work is more refined and simplified than ever, and harmonic repetitions abound, though the material is necessarily richer than in the short Preludes; as in recent works of Stockhausen, for example, familiar harmonic material is deployed in unexpected ways, here tending strongly towards jazz and rock music and occasionally Stravinskian harmony. The combination of eclecticism with Wiegold's unifying intuition, however, results in a work whose originality in the field of pieces for voice and piano is unquestionable: one never feels that the composer is frustrated by the restrictions of this medium, and the refinement of the sound of his music, its individuality and attractiveness—developed in *The Flowers*... and subsequently—continues seemingly effortlessly in these songs.

To conclude, a few words concerning Peter Wiegold's participatory workshops. Experience shows that these are now almost invariably successful, in that they provide for both musicians and 'non-musicians' an adventure in what may be totally unfamiliar domains, an expansion of the individual's perception of his or her imagination and abilities, and (more urgently for participants who are composers!) a welcome perspective on the roots of music in physical gesture, spontaneity, and conviviality. The lack of the composer-performer-listener hierarchy in these events, and the substitution of an unassuming invitation to collective work might even afford participants some useful social awareness (or is that hoping too much?).

Naturally, Wiegold has learned more than most from these events, if only through continuity of attendance, and equally naturally he has begun to put the experience to work in his role as composer. For some time he and Gemini have been involved in sessions without other participants, working on collaborative compositions and improvisation; the resulting repertory has not yet found its way into the concert hall, but it has been performed to small audiences with some success. The music on the whole leans towards Wiegold's preoccupation with modal melodic material, from which harmony is generated by canonic superimposition with an energy and abrasiveness more commonly met with in rock music. This work is apparently still in a state of gestation, and has some way to go before it is traditionally 'presentable'. But on the basis of an as yet cursory acquaintance, it seems not only to afford

genuine opportunities for the composer's craft, but also to be unaffected in its return to musical basics—unlike a great deal of other experimental work; the absence of compositional domination undoubtedly plays a part here. What it shares with much experimental music in this country is a simplicity of musical means, and the tendency (also evinced by Vinko Globokar among others) to re-establish regional musical activity distinguished by a compact and economical organisation of creative and performing forces; this approach may lead to a more 'folk'- or 'community'-orientated musical subculture than those that exist in the socially less important 'centres of excellence'.

At a stage in life where many composers, having all but come to terms with the problems raised by their education and subsequent casting adrift into professional activity, are settling into the habit of producing what is expected of them, the sincerity and directness of Peter Wiegold's approach has led him to divert his attention away from the concert hall; a new work, to be given its première by Dreamtiger in early 1984, promises to carry to a new stage this still-embryonic process of interchange, which by now constitutes an indispensable element of the originality and vitality of Wiegold's work.

<sup>1</sup> Quotations are taken from Peter Wiegold's commentary on his portfolio of compositions submitted for the degree of PhD at Durham University in 1979, and from numerous conversations between Wiegold and the author over the period 1980-82.

## Material Received

### Scores

- George Benjamin, *A Mind of Winter*, for soprano and orchestra (1980-81) (Faber)
- Petar Bergamo, *Musica concertante: studi per orchestra sinfonica* (1961-2) (Philharmonia/Universal)
- Pierre Boulez, *Messagesquise*, for 7 cellos (Universal)
- Benjamin Britten, *Young Apollo* op.16, for piano and string orchestra (1939) (Faber)
- Barry Conyngham, *Mirages*, for orchestra (1978) (Universal)
- Peter Maxwell Davies, *Black Pentecost*, for mezzo-soprano, baritone, and orchestra (1979) (Chester)
- , *Piano Sonata* (1981) (Chester)
- Jonathan Harvey, *String Quartet* (1977) (Faber)
- Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, *Song*, for solo percussion (1978) (Universal)
- Josef Matthias Hauer, *Violinkonzert* op.54 (1928) (transcr. for violin and piano by Bruno Hauer) (Universal)
- Mauricio Kagel, *Hallelujah*, for voices (1967) (Universal)
- Oliver Knussen, *Ophelia Dances*, Book 1, for 9 instruments (1975) (Faber)
- Zygmunt Krauze, *Suite de danses et de chansons pour clavecin et orchestre* (1977) (Universal)
- Frank Martin, *Le vin herbé*, for 12 singers, 7 strings, and piano (Universal)
- Richard Meale, *Interiors/Exteriors*, for 2 pianos and 3 percussionists (Universal)
- Arvo Paart, *Credo*, for solo piano, mixed choir, and orchestra (1968) (Universal)
- Wolfgang Rihm, *Musik für drei Streicher* (1977) (Philharmonia/Universal)
- Alfred Shnitke, 2. *Streichquartett* (1981) (Philharmonia/Universal)
- Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Schlagtrio, für Klavier und 2 x 3 Pauken*, no. ½ (1952, rev. 1974) (Universal)
- John Tavener, *The Lamb*, for SATB chorus (1982) (Chester)
- Kurt Weill, *Der Silbersee* (vocal score) (Universal)
- Hugh Wood, *Chamber Concerto* op.15 (Chester)
- , *To a Child Dancing in the Wind*, part-song for SATB, unaccompanied (1973) (Chester)
- Alexander Zemlinsky, *Symphonische Gesänge* op.20, for baritone/contralto and orchestra (Universal)