

The Whirlies

J. Simon van der Walt

For strings and improviser

The Whirlies

Composer's note

What is East Kilbride famous for? I'm not entirely sure how most people would answer that question! For myself, although I'm not exactly Scottish born and bred, there is a big chunk of me which is 'from' East Kilbride; I spent two highly formative periods of my life there, during my primary school years, and again for the last couple of years of high school before university. And one of the things which always sticks in my head about East Kilbride is... roundabouts! Being one of those 60's new towns, it has an elaborate road plan, with sweeping dual carriageways carefully separated from winding dead-end closes; the kind of town where you can see the house you're trying to get to, but there seems to be no way of actually *getting* there...

The biggest roundabout in East Kilbride is known to most residents by name; 'The Whirlies'. In recent times it's been rather travestied by the addition of traffic lights, but in it's heyday it was a madness of a junction, roads spiraling off in every direction...

Of course, a piece of music can't *really* be about a roundabout. More than that, this is a reminiscence of my teenage years, when I first started to become seriously interested in music. There were two strands to this. Firstly, I was starting to branch out from my Father's transcendental but admittedly rather limited listening diet of Bach, Wagner, and, er nothing else, to explore the delights of jazz, experimental rock music, Stravinsky, and Bartók. My second way into music was through the soldering iron, literally getting my fingers burnt hacking together home-made noisemakers using transistors salvaged from broken hi-fi sets and the like.

Commissioned by the Scottish Philharmonic Orchestra and first performed by them on 17/11/2008 at Òran Mór in Glasgow, with conductor Peter Cynfryn Jones and artistic director: Gordon Rigby. The improvised part was taken by the composer, using an amplified banjo ukulele originally belonging to his grandfather through a circuit-bent effects unit. Duration ~10 mins.

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To the performer

When the Great Masters of the Past wrote themselves a work to perform, it was a relatively easy matter for them to notate their solo part for future publication. The *Whirlies* seems more problematic, as the first performance was improvised by the composer on a unique instrument of his own devising. In the original version of the score, a staff was allocated to the soloist, with some sparse verbal indications as to how to respond to the string material. However, not only did I find myself completely ignoring these in the heat of battle, but there seems no good reason why another performer should follow the same path.

The solution has been to remove the solo part from the score entirely, and to leave the manner of its future performance entirely in the hands of a future performer. The written material for the strings now stands as a frame, or a blank canvas; a fixed background for a solo part over which the composer chooses not to exercise control.

To be clear then; the solo part should be as personal and unique to individual performer as it was to the composer on the first performance. The boundaries here are extremely widely drawn; it might be performed upon any instrument or 'instrument', or spoken, or sung, or tap-danced, or...

One would hope for an *honest* performance, although if someone wished to go to the trouble of staging the piece and then deliberately pissing about, one would have to take that as their honest response. More realistically, one would hope that a future soloist would have some interest and investment in the piece, and would want to know more about how and why the composer made the piece in the first place.

The Whirlies, then, hangs upon two poles. The first of these was my desire as a composer to get out from behind the desk and start performing in public again. This insight may seem relatively useless to a future performer, who stands in a different relationship to the work; and another composer would presumably write his or her own piece! However, perhaps there is a useful inversion here; it might serve as a vehicle for a performer tired of a score-based approach, wishing to revisit their own creative approach to music making.

The other fixed point in this piece, as hinted at in the programme note, is a particular kind of nostalgia; in my case for my last years in high school, in a town which I subsequently left, seldom to revisit. The story about driving around the roundabouts of my home town to visit my father is true. The title of the piece and the ruminations upon the roundabouts of East Kilbride are in a sense false, or at any rate a red-herring; the piece is certainly not about roundabouts, although many of the audience for the first performance did choose to read the round-and-round loops of the music and the largely noise-based sounds made by the effects unit as some sort of music-traffic-picture.

Rather, the roundabout journey was the one back to my father. Leaving home after high school also marked a break in our relationship which was not healed for many years; perhaps remains unhealed.

Something could be said about the music in the string parts, which have their own nostalgia, four slices of the musical past being alluded to (but not quoted). The waltz material marked at the opening is a fairly clear reference to Ronald Binge's notorious Radio 4 classic *Sailing By*. (Another cross-reference; the Scottish Philharmonic Orchestra who gave the first performance is largely comprised of BBC musicians, who would of course often be called upon to play this kind of concert-orchestra material.)

The material at letter I is a sort of histrionic hyper-romantic gesture alluding to... a certain personal weakness for hyper-romantic histrionicism in music. (There is a passage in Tchaikovsky's Symphony no 4 in F minor which may have influenced the shape of my phrase, or perhaps Chopin's Raindrop Prelude. No direct reference is intended; if anything this is meant to sound Germanic rather than Franco-Russian.)

The bow scratching sounds at letter H are an ironic reference to a zillion modernist pieces which attempt to 'compose' using the sounds of extended techniques on the instruments to hand. The stop-start repetitions of the waltz phrase are probably a reference to digital sampling and looping of material rather than, as might have been suspected, minimalism.

Or, maybe they are roundabouts after all.

The Whirlies

J. Simon van der Walt

3 $\text{♩} = 100$ Quasi Ronnie Binge A

Violin I A *f*

Violin I B *f*

Violin II A *f*

Violin II B *f*

Viola A *f*

Viola B *f*

Cello A *f*

Cello B *f*

Bass *f* pizz

17

B

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

29 **C**

The musical score is for a string ensemble and begins at measure 29. A box containing the letter 'C' is positioned above the first staff, indicating a common time signature. The score consists of five systems of staves:

- Vln. I:** Violin I, Treble clef. The melody starts in measure 29 with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes, and includes a fermata in measure 33.
- Vln. II:** Violin II, Treble clef. The melody starts in measure 29 with a quarter note, followed by eighth notes, and includes a fermata in measure 33.
- Vla.:** Viola, Bass clef. The part consists of quarter notes and half notes, with a fermata in measure 33.
- Vc.:** Violoncello, Bass clef. The part consists of quarter notes and half notes, with a fermata in measure 33.
- Cb.:** Contrabasso, Bass clef. The part consists of quarter notes and half notes, with a fermata in measure 33.

Measures 30 and 31 contain rests for all instruments. Measures 32 and 33 feature a fermata over the final notes of the first four staves. The score concludes in measure 34.

40 ← 5 → **D**

Vln. I
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vln. II
Vla.
Vla.
Vc.
Vc.
Cb.

53 ← 7 → **F**

The score consists of five systems of staves. The first system includes Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.). Measures 53-56 are mostly rests. At measure 57, the Violin I and Violoncello parts begin with a melodic line, while the Violin II and Viola parts play a rhythmic accompaniment. The Viola part has a fermata over measure 57. The Violoncello part has a fermata over measure 58. The Contrabasso part plays a steady bass line. A rehearsal mark 'F' is placed above measure 57. A double-headed arrow above the staves spans from measure 53 to measure 57, with the number '7' in the center.

66

to sord

F con sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to sord

(sempre f)
con sord

to arco

G

79

senza sord

10 seconds

Vln. I



Vln. I



Vln. II



Vln. II



Vla.



Vla.



Vc.



Vc.



Cb.



H

80 Sul G, sparse scratch tones, very heavy bow sticking to string, indeterminate pitch, string partially damped with LH

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

Ca 40 secs

$\frac{4}{4}$

The image shows a musical score for a string ensemble. It consists of ten staves, each representing a different instrument: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). Each staff contains a series of rhythmic markings that represent 'scratch tones'. The markings are dense and repetitive, indicating a continuous, textured sound. Above the first staff, there is a tempo marking '80' and a performance instruction: 'Sul G, sparse scratch tones, very heavy bow sticking to string, indeterminate pitch, string partially damped with LH'. This instruction is repeated for each instrument. In the upper right corner, there is a time indication 'Ca 40 secs' and a time signature of 4/4. A section marker 'H' is located at the top left of the page.

81 $\frac{4}{4}$ ♩ = 90 Sehr ausdrucksvoll

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3 *meno f* *cresc*

J

94

Musical score for measures 94-100. The score is arranged in a system with eight staves. The top four staves are for Violins I (Vln. I), Violins II (Vln. II), Violas (Vla.), and Violas (Vla.). The bottom four staves are for Cellos (Vc.), Cellos (Vc.), and Double Basses (Cb.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The first four measures (94-97) show a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the upper strings. The fifth measure (98) is marked *ff* and features a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and a quintuplet. The sixth measure (99) continues this pattern. The seventh measure (100) features a triplet of eighth notes. The eighth measure (101) features a triplet of eighth notes. The ninth measure (102) features a triplet of eighth notes. The tenth measure (103) features a triplet of eighth notes. The eleventh measure (104) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twelfth measure (105) features a triplet of eighth notes. The thirteenth measure (106) features a triplet of eighth notes. The fourteenth measure (107) features a triplet of eighth notes. The fifteenth measure (108) features a triplet of eighth notes. The sixteenth measure (109) features a triplet of eighth notes. The seventeenth measure (110) features a triplet of eighth notes. The eighteenth measure (111) features a triplet of eighth notes. The nineteenth measure (112) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twentieth measure (113) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twenty-first measure (114) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twenty-second measure (115) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twenty-third measure (116) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twenty-fourth measure (117) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twenty-fifth measure (118) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twenty-sixth measure (119) features a triplet of eighth notes. The twenty-seventh measure (120) features a triplet of eighth notes.

K

107

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

meno f *cresc*

ff 3 3 5 3

L

120

The musical score consists of ten staves. The top four staves are for Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The bottom two staves are for Contrabasso (Cb.). The score begins at measure 120. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The first four staves play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, starting with a dynamic of *meno f* and gradually increasing to *cresc*. The Viola and Violoncello parts have a similar pattern but include triplet and quintuplet markings in measures 122 and 123. The Viola part starts with a *ff* dynamic in measure 122. The Contrabasso part also follows the eighth-note pattern. The score ends at measure 124.

134 **M**

Vln. I *ff* 3 3 5

Vln. I *ff* 3 3 5

Vln. II *ff* 3 3 5

Vln. II *ff* 3 3 5

Vla. *meno f* *cresc* *ff* 3 3 5

Vla. *meno f* *cresc* *ff* 3 3 5

Vc. *ff* 3 3 5

Vc. *ff* 3 3 5

Cb. *ff* 3 3 5

146

$\text{♩} = 100$

3
4

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

meno f *cresc*

N

♩ = 120

O

6

2
4

Vln. I (non sord) *mf* to sord con sord *mf*
 Vln. I (non sord) *mf* to sord con sord *mf*
 Vln. II (non sord) *mf* to sord con sord *mf*
 Vln. II (non sord) *mf* to sord con sord *mf*
 Vla. (non sord) *mf* to sord
 Vla. (non sord) *mf* to sord
 Vc. (non sord) *mf* to sord con sord *mf*
 Vc. (non sord) *mf* to sord
 Cb. *mf* pizz *mf*

177

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla. *con sord*
mf

Vla. *con sord*
mf

Vc.

Vc. *con sord*
mf

Cb.

192 **P**

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4

Q

207

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

222 **R**

2/4 3/4 2/4 3/4 2/4 ← 6 → **S** 3/4

Vln. I

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vln. II

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

Cb.

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score, page 19, containing measures 222 through 228. The score is for a string quartet (Violins I and II, Violas) and woodwinds (Violoncello and Contrabass). Measure 222 is marked with a '222' and a circled 'R'. The first violin part has a circled 'R' above it. The time signature changes from 2/4 to 3/4 in measure 223, back to 2/4 in 224, to 3/4 in 225, back to 2/4 in 226, and finally to 3/4 in measure 228, which is marked with a circled 'S'. A double-headed arrow labeled '6' spans from the beginning of measure 226 to the beginning of measure 228. The woodwinds (Vc. and Cb.) play a steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout. The strings play various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, often with slurs and accents.

238

2/4 **3/4** **2/4** **3/4** **2/4**

Strings tacet al fine

The musical score consists of five staves: Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabasso (Cb.).

- Violin I (Vln. I):** Measures 238-243 feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. Measure 238 is in 2/4 time, while measures 239-243 alternate between 3/4 and 2/4 time signatures.
- Violin II (Vln. II):** Measures 238-243 feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, similar to the Violin I part but with a different melodic contour.
- Viola (Vla.):** Measures 238-243 feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Violoncello (Vc.):** Measures 238-243 feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Contrabasso (Cb.):** Measures 238-243 feature a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

From measure 244 onwards, all instruments are marked 'tacet' (tacet al fine).

255

Musical score for strings, measures 255 to 266. The score is mostly empty, with only a few notes visible in the first few measures. The instruments are:

- Vln. I (Violin I)
- Vln. II (Violin II)
- Vla. (Viola)
- Vc. (Violoncello)
- Cb. (Contrabasso)

267

A musical score for measures 267 through 276. The score is arranged in a system with ten staves. From top to bottom, the staves are labeled: Vln. I, Vln. I, Vln. II, Vln. II, Vla., Vla., Vc., Vc., and Cb. Each staff begins with a treble clef for the violin parts and a bass clef for the viola, cello, and double bass parts. The music consists of a series of horizontal lines (beams) across all staves, indicating a sustained or repeated note or chord throughout the measures. The measures are separated by vertical bar lines, and the system ends with a double bar line.