



NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Passion and Intellect in the Music of Elizabeth Maconchy DBE
(1907–1994)

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Thesis submitted to the National University of Ireland, Maynooth for the degree
of Master of Literature in Music

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National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Maynooth

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July 2010

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and express my gratitude to a number of people for their kind assistance in my research for this dissertation. First and foremost, to my supervisor Dr Martin O’Leary, for his continuous guidance and support. Thank you also to Professor Fiona Palmer, Professor Gerard Gillen and all the staff of the Music Department at NUI Maynooth.

I would like to extend my thanks to the staff of the following libraries and institutions: NUI Maynooth Library, Trinity College Dublin Library, the National Library of Ireland, the National Archives, the British Library, St Hilda’s College Oxford Library and Archives.

The following individuals have also been very kind and helpful with my research: Regina Richardson, Music Librarian at NUI Maynooth, Elizabeth Boardman; Archivist at St Hilda’s College, Oxford; Jennifer Doctor, Sophie Fuller, Samuel Wilcocks at Chester Lending Library; David Redmond, Registrar; Michelle Berigan, Examinations Officer, and all the staff of the Exams Office.

To Professor Nicola LeFanu, I am sincerely indebted, without whose generous assistance this project would not have been possible.

I am grateful to everyone involved in the Elizabeth Maconchy Archive, St Hilda's College, Oxford, for permission to use the material contained in appendices.

A special thank you to Róisín Blunnie, Anne Maxwell, Ciarán Mac an Bhaird, Karen McGrail, John, Ann and Colm Blunnie, Noel McKearney and Louise Flynn.

Abbreviations

BMIC	British Music Information Centre
CMC	Contemporary Music Centre (Ireland)
ISCM	International Society for Contemporary Music
<i>MT</i>	<i>The Musical Times</i>
RAM	Royal Academy of Music, London
RCM	Royal College of Music, London
RL	Rehearsal Letter
RN	Rehearsal Number
SPNM	Society for the Promotion of New Music
<i>TLS</i>	<i>The Times Literary Supplement</i>
WMA	Workers Music Association

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Preface

The purpose of this study is to contextualise the life and work of twentieth-century British-Irish composer Elizabeth Maconchy (1907–1994) in the rapidly-changing world of twentieth-century Europe and the West. The three principal chapters (chapters 2, 3 and 4) follow an early-, middle- and late-period layout, and each chapter is divided into two parts: Part 1 establishes the social, political and historical context of each period, while Part 2 outlines the musical context both in general and in terms of Maconchy's more immediate cultural surroundings. This structure facilitates both a diachronic understanding of specific works, and a synchronic examination of Maconchy's development as her career progressed.

In her short article, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)', Maconchy's daughter, composer and scholar Nicola LeFanu, uses a two-part system of division with Part 1 focusing on the period between 1907 and 1945, and Part 2 addressing the remainder of her life (1945–1994).¹ For an extended study, which by its nature refers in greater detail to a broader range of information, I feel that a tripartite model is clearer, more manageable, and more conducive to a successful overview on a large scale. For this reason, amongst others, I have made the decision to divide this thesis into the following historical periods: Chapter 1: 1907–1939; Chapter 2: 1940–1969; and Chapter 3: 1970–1994.

¹ Nicola LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)', <http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2007/Oct07/Maconchy_LeFanu.htm> [accessed 17 October 2008].

Although Elizabeth Maconchy features as a subtopic of numerous publications, there is as yet no comprehensive full-scale monograph or biography on the subject of the composer. The most substantial work to date is a forty-eight-minute documentary film directed by Margaret Williams of MJW Productions which was made for Channel 4 in 1985. Maconchy's daughter Nicola has stressed that an equivalent of this documentary in written format would greatly enhance Maconchy scholarship.² One purpose of the present study is to address this need.

In spite of the apparent dearth of substantial published material on the life and music of Elizabeth Maconchy, I feel that the various smaller-scale and alternative resources at my disposal, including, most importantly, the kind assistance of her daughter Nicola, provide more than enough material to attempt a presentation of an insightful and informed portrait of the composer. My interview with Nicola LeFanu in Dublin on 29 July 2009 was fundamental to the research for this thesis, providing me with vital access to otherwise unavailable, unpublished information about the personal and professional activities of Maconchy. LeFanu is naturally an invaluable source on the subject of Maconchy, bearing witness to many of the events referred to in this study, and capable of providing insight into opinions and attitudes as well as more concrete events. This interview added greatly to my experience with Maconchy's own articles and recorded interviews in creating a multi-faceted view of the life and career of the composer.

² Interview with Nicola LeFanu [29 July 2009].

In addition to my interview with Nicola LeFanu, the Elizabeth Maconchy Archive at St. Hilda's College, Oxford—compiled and presented by Maconchy herself—has also proved primordial as a source of information for this study. Here, her manuscripts, together with printed matter such as newspaper cuttings and other materials, can be found. Scores and drafts have been catalogued by Maconchy scholar Jennifer Doctor, and while additional material is not yet catalogued, its loosely chronological order allows relative ease of access. The Archive holds a large amount of material pertaining to the middle and later periods of Maconchy's life; earlier material is not so plentiful.

As regards accessing her musical scores, the majority of Maconchy's later works were published by Chester and Faber. Early works were published for the most part by Lengnick, a company subsequently owned by Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG) and now part of the Sony Music corporation. Lengnick's hire library is managed by Music Sales, while many of its study scores – including the first seven string quartets – are available for purchase through Faber. Additional early works were published by Hinrichsen and by Oxford University Press but are since out of print, with the notable exception of 'Ophelia's Song' (1926) which still sells widely.

Catherine Roma includes a significant section on Maconchy in her publication *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers: Elisabeth Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy and Thea Musgrave* (Maryland, Toronto, Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), which is very useful for this study, particularly as most other

material pertaining to Maconchy's music centres on her string quartets. Journal and newspaper articles have proved integral to the shaping of this project, as have BBC audio interviews and the numerous recordings of her works. I was also lucky enough to attend a performance of her dramatic cantata *Héloïse and Abelard* with the London Symphony Orchestra at St. Luke's Church in the Barbican, London, on 9 November 2009, which gave another very valuable perspective to my understanding of Maconchy's compositional style.

Jenny Doctor of the University of York is currently, with Sophie Fuller, in the process of compiling an edition of the fifty years of correspondence between Maconchy and her Welsh contemporary, Grace Williams. This project will without doubt contribute immensely to our understanding of Maconchy and her music, an understanding to which the present study seeks to make its own modest contribution.

For this thesis, I have selected pieces which I consider to be representative of the aforementioned early, middle and late periods of her career, as well as of characteristic aspects of her stylistic language. While the orchestral and vocal genres will feature to an extent, my main analytical focus in this study will be on the thirteen string quartets for which she is best known. As a body of work, the quartet cycle uncovers a wealth of revealing material with regard to technique, influences and process, and it was through these substantial pieces that the composer herself in fact claims she 'worked out [her] musical

development'.³ The purpose of each musical discussion is to elucidate elements of the composer's style with a view to enhancing the listener's enjoyment and understanding thereof. They are by no means intended as comprehensive analytical studies.

When referring to specific sections of her music, I have adopted a procedure whereby I begin by identifying the Rehearsal Number/Letter pertaining to the particular example (if present), and follow by stating the bar number(s) at which the musical event occurs, within the confines of the Rehearsal Number/Letter. For example, there are 168 bars in the first movement of the First String Quartet and 22 specified Rehearsal Numbers: if, for instance, I wish to refer to bars 20–23 of this movement, I will begin by stating the Rehearsal Number under which the bars fall—in this case RN 1—followed by the bar numbers at which the event occurs within this Rehearsal Number—in this case, bars 4–7. The example will therefore be labelled: RN 1, b. 4–7. It is hoped that the works chosen for particular attention may serve as portals through which we can explore the creative artistry of Elizabeth Maconchy.

This thesis conforms to the house style of the Department of Music, National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

³ 'Elizabeth Maconchy', Music Documentary DVD, directed by Margaret Williams, MJW Productions (1985).

Chapter 1

Introduction

The world in which Elizabeth Maconchy spent her youth was one which would scarcely be recognisable to her in her later years. Over the course of the twentieth century sweeping transformations of a magnitude unprecedented in history infiltrated almost every sphere of human activity. Scientific and technological advancement together with social, political and ideological innovation revolutionised the way in which millions of people lived.

At the turn of the century, the Western world was thriving. International frictions were comparatively few since the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, and humankind was ‘moving triumphantly forward in the quest for an improved existence and a more equitable standard of life’.⁴ The economic boom produced as a result of the West’s ever-widening colonial dominion was unrivalled, leading its citizens to believe that the Western world comprised the entire civilised world.⁵ Invention and industrialisation reformed early-twentieth-century Western living conditions with drastic improvements in transportation, communication and overall levels of public service; and with its population increasing, the West also underwent a period of significant urbanisation leading to a further enhanced condition of prosperity and expansion.⁶ It was into this relatively peaceful and optimistic world that Elizabeth Maconchy was born on 19 March 1907.

⁴ Robert P. Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America* (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1991), p. 11.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Born in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, Elizabeth Violet Maconchy was an English composer of Irish parentage. In spite of her English nationality and the fact that she spent most of her life there, Maconchy considered herself Irish.⁷ Her early childhood was spent travelling back and forth between England and Ireland until the family's relocation to Howth in Dublin in 1917. The Maconchy family remained in Dublin for five years, which was the longest continuous period that Elizabeth spent in Ireland. The Dublin years coincided with a particularly volatile period in Irish, British, European and international history on account of the overwhelming pervasiveness of war at this time. In Ireland and Britain, the legacy of the Easter Rising (1916), together with the War of Independence (1919–1921) and the Irish Civil War (1922–23) left a fractured society. On a wider European level, the end of the Great War in 1918 brought the collapse of four of the world's leading imperial powers - the German, Russian, Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires - necessitating a redefinition of the map of central Europe. The 'new' Europe was a radically different place, nursing deep wounds from a conflict whose destructive force was on a scale never before seen: the invention and industrialism that had previously generated such pride and optimism had essentially fuelled a war effort of unparalleled horror and devastation.

In 1922, at the height of the Irish Civil War, the death of Maconchy's father hastened her mother's decision to move the family back to England. They moved this time to London, which enabled Maconchy to attend the Royal College of Music. In spite of having played the piano and composed music since the age of six, Maconchy's experience of music in her youth was limited: this was before the

⁷ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

days of commercial radio and therefore access to music for the wider public was restricted; there was no orchestra, opera or chamber ensemble in Ireland where she had spent much of her time; and aside from her father who played the piano a little, there was no history of music in her family. Consequently, Maconchy's musical aptitude is often regarded as having come 'completely out of the blue'.⁸

During her time at the RCM (1923–1929), Maconchy studied piano with Arthur Alexander, counterpoint with C.H. Kitson, and composition with Charles Wood (1866–1926) and later, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958). It was at this stage that Maconchy became acquainted with the music of Béla Bartók (1881–1945) and Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) amongst others, which was to have a formative influence over the development of her own compositional style. In 1929, Maconchy was awarded an Octavia Travelling Scholarship, which enabled her to visit Vienna and Paris and also to spend time in Prague where she studied composition with K.B. Jirák. Her music provoked much interest and in spring 1930, she returned to Prague when her Piano Concertino (composed 1928) was given its first performance under the conductorship of Jirák by soloist Erwin Schülhoff and the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra. The following August (1930), after her return to London, she received her first major British performance when Sir Henry Wood conducted her suite, *The Land* (1929), at a Promenade Concert. The success of this performance initiated Maconchy's acceptance into the professional domain. In November 1930, three of her songs (Ophelia's Song' (1926); 'Meditation for his Mistress' (1928); and 'Have you seen but a bright lily

⁸ Patrick M. Geoghegan, 'Maconchy, Dame Elizabeth Violet', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <<http://dib.cambridge.org.elib.tcd.ie/quicksearch.do;jsessionid=9A4A7B0F1214CA8C1BD9C0D1DAE7C0EE>> [accessed 11 May 2010].

grow?’ (1929))⁹; were published by Oxford University Press, and her chamber works were heard frequently at public concerts including the Macnaghten-Lemare Concerts, on BBC broadcasts, and at festivals of the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) (Prague 1935, Paris 1937).¹⁰

In 1932, Maconchy contracted tuberculosis, which forced her to leave London and move to the countryside where the air quality would be more favourable. It seems the combination of the fresh air and her own will-power eventually cured her of the disease, which had already claimed her father’s life and was later to take that of her younger sister Sheila. She continued to compose in spite of her ill-health, and by 1936 her works had received performances in France, Germany, Eastern Europe, the USA, and Australia, as well as in Britain.¹¹ The second chapter of this thesis will expand on the key components comprising the early part of Maconchy’s life, and analyses of representative works will investigate the extent to which the basic fabric of her musical style was formed during this period.

Chapter 3 will focus on the thirty-year historical period beginning in 1939 with the outbreak of World War II. During this phase of her life, Maconchy’s levels of professional success fluctuated considerably. The scale of the public acclaim she had received prior to the onset of war diminished significantly in ensuing years, and personal challenges were numerous. Maconchy continued to compose in spite

⁹ *In Praise of Woman*, Anthony Rolfe Johnson, tenor, Graham Johnson, piano, Hyperion Records compact disc CDH55159, 2005.

¹⁰ Hugo Cole and Jennifer Doctor, ‘Maconchy, Dame Elizabeth’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/17374>> [accessed 8 September 2007]

¹¹ *Ibid.*

of adverse circumstances, and gradually she began to re-establish her reputation as a composer of merit.

Maconchy contributed a wealth of music (200+ works) to almost every musical genre.¹² Amongst her chamber works is the cycle of thirteen string quartets for which she is now best known. Her description of the string quartet as ‘an intellectual art, a balanced and reasoned statement of ideas, an impassioned argument, an intense but disciplined expression of emotion’ gives an indication as to why she was so constantly drawn to the medium, returning intermittently to its composition over a period of more than fifty years (1932–1984).¹³ Maconchy felt that her best work was to be found in her string quartets; this thesis will include discussions also of her other works to paint as full and rounded a compositional portrait as possible.¹⁴

In terms of direct stylistic influences, Maconchy was drawn more towards the Central and East European Modernism of Bartók, Janáček, Berg, and Stravinsky, than to the symphonic romanticism of Sibelius, the strict serialism of Schoenberg or the nationalistic Pastoralism of her British compatriots.¹⁵ She admired the ‘freshness and disregard of convention’ in Bartók’s quartets, which accounts to some extent for the similarities drawn between the compositional techniques employed by both composers, specifically with regard to the string quartets.¹⁶

¹² See Appendix XV.

¹³ Anthony Burton, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2431&State_2905=2&composerId_2905=97 [accessed 1 October 2007].

¹⁴ ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

¹⁵ Anthony Burton, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy: Intense but Disciplined’, <http://www.cmc.ie/articles/article-maconchy.html> [accessed 1 October 2007].

¹⁶ Cole and Doctor, ‘Maconchy, Dame Elizabeth’.

Like Bartók, Maconchy based much of her formal architecture on short chromatic motives, canonic procedures and highly-contrapuntal textures. Harmonically, she responded to numerous aspects of his language, such as his intervallic style of writing, whereby he was drawn to the resonance created by the employment of particular intervals as opposed to traditional tonalities or modes. The driving dynamism associated with his rhythmic language also appealed to Maconchy and is a palpable influence all through her career. Unlike Bartók, Maconchy was not heavily-exploitative of folk music, nor did she harbour the same preoccupation with mathematics-based writing, and generally speaking her quartets are on smaller scale in durational terms.¹⁷

Ralph Vaughan Williams also exerted a significant influence over Maconchy's compositional development, albeit in a more indirect manner. Stylistically, while similarities exist in the musical language utilised by the two composers, particularly in earlier large-scale works such as *The Land*, or the *Oboe Quintet*, they are minimal. Maconchy scholar and friend, Anne Macnaghten, addresses this issue by suggesting that the area in which Vaughan Williams was perhaps most influential was in providing Maconchy with the confidence and inspiration to find her own musical voice, thus 'helping to stimulate her individuality and pursuit of integrity'.¹⁸

Maconchy's career was marked by a number of significant achievements. During her six years as a student at the RCM, Maconchy won the Sullivan and other prizes, the Blumenthal Scholarship (1927), and the aforementioned Octavia

¹⁷ Catherine Roma, 'Contemporary British Composers', in *Women and Music: A History*, Karin Pendle, ed., 2nd edn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 227–251 (p. 231).

¹⁸ Anne Macnaghten, 'Elizabeth Maconchy', *MT*, 96, (1955), pp. 298–302 (p. 299).

Travelling Scholarship (1929).¹⁹ In 1933, her *Oboe Quintet* won the Daily Telegraph chamber music prize.²⁰ She won the Edwin Evans Prize with *String Quartet no.5* (composed 1948), and received the London County Council prize in Coronation Year with her overture *Proud Thames* (composed 1952/53). In 1959, Maconchy became the first woman to chair the Composer's Guild of Great Britain. She became president of the Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM) in 1976, with which she had been associated for many years previous to this appointment (she was also vice president of the Workers' Music Association). She received the Cobbett Medal for services to chamber music in 1960 and a Cobbett composition prize in 1930, and was made a CBE in 1977 and DBE in 1987.²¹ Elizabeth Maconchy died on 11 November 1994.

The following chapters will trace the development of Maconchy as a composer, with each significant stage in her life and work placed in its social and cultural context. The chosen works will demonstrate key stylistic features in each period allowing us to gain an overview of the path she forged from her shy student beginnings at London's prestigious Royal College of Music, through periods of both difficulty and of success, to her eventual status as a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

²⁰ David C.F. Wright, 'Elizabeth Maconchy', <<http://www.musicweb-international.com/maconchy/>> [accessed 1 October 2007].

²¹ Cole and Doctor, 'Maconchy, Dame Elizabeth'.

Chapter 2: The Early Years (1907–1939)

Part 1

Life and Historical Context

In the article ‘A Composer Speaks’, Maconchy recalls her 88-year-old grandfather saying amidst the turmoil of the 1930s: ‘it is a most interesting time to be alive’.²² This observation can be applied to the entire life-span of Maconchy herself, such was the immensely transformational nature of the period through which she lived.

Elizabeth Maconchy was the second of the three daughters of Violet Poë and Gerald Maconchy, a solicitor. Her childhood was spent between the Buckinghamshire countryside in south-east England and the home of her maternal grandparents at Santry Court in Dublin. Her grandfather, Captain Poë, was employed as an agent for the Domville estate, a post which brought with it the child-friendly bonus of providing Elizabeth and her sisters, Maureen and Sheila, with free run of the Santry demesne.²³

Instability in national and international affairs at this time was to play a decisive part in the future of the Maconchy family. The year 1911 witnessed the greatest industrial unrest in British history, with nationwide strikes of railway men, miners and dock workers effectively bringing the country to a standstill. Relations with the colonies were deteriorating, and with the increasing threat of German attack

²² Elizabeth Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, *Composer*, 42 (1971–72), pp. 25–29 (p. 27).

²³ LeFanu, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)’.

the metropolis was at pains to defend the empire while at the same time upholding its policy of ‘splendid isolation’. The Third Home Rule Bill of 1912 compounded the problem, provoking outrage among British conservatives, and the already strained political union of Britain and Ireland was plunged into chaos with the onset of World War I: while the British were faced with the gargantuan task of maintaining an empire on which ‘the sun never set’, the Irish were simultaneously thrust into what was to become one of the nation’s bloodiest chapters. It was during this tumultuous time that the Maconchy family moved to Howth in Dublin where they remained for five years (1917–1922).²⁴

Although a lawyer by profession, Maconchy’s father served in the medical corps during the Great War (presumably in an auxiliary capacity). Like many others he did not sign up for war duties straight away: his decision was prompted to a significant extent by the death of his brother-in-law, Maconchy’s maternal uncle, during combat. Maconchy’s daughter Nicola believes that, following this tragedy, her grandfather felt compelled to play his part in hastening the end of the war.²⁵

The Maconchy family was strongly politically aware from the outset. Interestingly (in light of their Church of Ireland background), the younger generation was

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

‘passionately republican’ while their grandparents were staunchly unionist.²⁶

Nicola recalls tales recounted by her mother’s generation of how they would come across signs of secret camps and hidden ammunition as they played in the nearby woods; and of how a car belonging to one of their relatives was stolen and reportedly used to assist Eamon de Valera on an escape mission.²⁷ These stories and the apparent fervour with which they were recollected would imply that the political consciousness which burned intensely all throughout Maconchy’s life was ignited at a very young age.

Early Education

Maconchy’s earliest schooling was given in large part by shared governesses employed jointly between neighbouring families and friends. This semi-private educational set-up was common practice amongst the early-twentieth-century middle-class European population, especially amongst those living in the countryside where schools were not as accessible as in subsequent years. A considerable drawback to this system was that the quality of education received by the students was subject to the strengths and weaknesses of each individual governess and was therefore potentially erratic. One consequence of this in Maconchy's case was that she had an excellent standard of French, having been taught by a French governess at one point, but her all-round education was poor.²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

In terms of musical education, apart from ‘picking out’ little tunes on the piano, Maconchy had next to no training as a child.²⁹ While in Ireland however she studied piano with Irish pianist and accompanist Mrs Edith Boxwell (née French, 1876–1937) and received a small number of lessons in harmony and counterpoint from Irish composer Dr John F. Larchet (1884–1967), who served as professor of harmony and counterpoint at the Royal Irish Academy of Music from 1920 to 1955 and professor of music at University College Dublin from 1921 until 1958.³⁰ Her musical talent was immediately recognised, and both teachers advised that she further her education at the Royal College of Music in London. Tragic circumstances led eventually to the realisation of this advice: on 21 December 1922 Maconchy’s father died, having contracted TB during his service in the Great War. This prompted her mother’s decision to return to England, moving this time to London in 1923. This gave Elizabeth the opportunity to act on her teachers’ recommendation, and she attended the Royal College of Music for the next six years (1923–1929).

Royal College of Music

Opened in 1883 by the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, the Royal College of Music is one of the world’s leading conservatoires. Its reputation has been built on endeavouring to achieve its fundamental objective of training musicians for international careers.³¹ During Maconchy’s time there, the RCM was under the

²⁹ LeFanu, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)’.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ ‘John F. Larchet’, <<http://www.cmc.ie/composers/composer.cfm?composerID=76>> [accessed 25 November 2009].

³¹ ‘History of the RCM’, <<http://www.rcm.ac.uk/About+Us/History>> [accessed 1 September 2009].

directorship of British organist, conductor and educator Sir Hugh Allen (1869–1946). At just sixteen years of age, Elizabeth was younger than most of the other students at the college. Her shyness, her unfamiliarity with London and the fact that she had never heard a string quartet and only once heard an orchestra (the Hallé in Dublin when she was fifteen), made life more difficult for Maconchy than it might have been had circumstances been different. This left her feeling quite overwhelmed and, in her own words, ‘very much unready’ for the new life upon which she was embarking.³² Once she ‘found her feet’ after a year to eighteen months, Maconchy acknowledges having enjoyed her time at the RCM immensely.³³ For the first four years or so at the RCM, Maconchy took piano as her principal study with Arthur Alexander, but gradually she turned her attention almost entirely to composition, studying first with Charles Wood (1866–1926) and later with Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958).

Maconchy analogises the experience of studying with Vaughan Williams to switching on a light.³⁴ Discussing the influence of her teacher with presenter Jeremy Siepmann in a BBC Radio 3 broadcast in 1983, Maconchy says that ‘like most of his pupils’ she ‘caught’ Vaughan Williams’ infectious style and composed in a manner similar to him for about a year.³⁵ This stylistic influence is discernible in a number of Maconchy’s early works, specifically, for example, the hazily pastoral melodic gestures implicit in the slow movements of her early orchestral suite *The Land* (1929). Upon the development of her own individual

³² ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

³³ Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 25.

³⁴ ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

³⁵ Elizabeth Maconchy, BBC Radio 3 Audio Interview, presented by Jeremy Siepmann (24 July 1983), <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/audiointerviews/profilepages/maconchye1.shtml>> [accessed 17 November 2009].

style, however, she soon discovered that her teacher's lasting influence lay in the attitude he inspired in his students towards the art of composition: 'he made one feel that writing music was the only thing that was really worthwhile'.³⁶

According to Maconchy, Vaughan Williams believed that learning things the hard way, as he had done, was the best way, and so he encouraged his pupils to do likewise. On a practical level this involved working on a trial-and-error basis and making one's own mistakes as opposed to relying too readily on lessons learned by others. Maconchy also explains however that Vaughan Williams 'mistrusted brilliance', believing that possessing an adequate technique to express musical ideas in the clearest possible manner was fundamentally more important in one's approach to composition.³⁷ Thus Vaughan Williams supported creativity within a controlled environment, a quality that shines vibrantly through in Maconchy's own compositions, specifically in relation to the clarity of argument and motivic work in her mature music. Perhaps this is an indication that Vaughan Williams' influence was subtly potent, if not clearly identifiable in her musical language.

In 1926, after about eighteen months under the tutelage of Vaughan Williams, Maconchy discovered the music of Béla Bartók. It was the uncovering of a volume of the composer's piano pieces in Chester's lending library that instigated her lifelong appreciation for Bartók's music.³⁸ This discovery prompted her to study musical scores of additional works by Bartók, including some of his chamber and orchestral music, which she would then become familiar with mostly

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ 'Elizabeth Maconchy', DVD.

³⁸ Maconchy, BBC Radio 3 Audio Interview, presented by Jeremy Siepmann.

through sight-reading, as was the norm for composers at the time.³⁹ Bartók was relatively little-known in Britain during the first third of the twentieth century, and Maconchy's experience with his music marked a very significant step in the direction her own compositional style was thereafter to take. When asked by Siepmann to describe the nature of Bartók's influence over her own style, Maconchy replies that 'technically, rhythmically, and [with regard to] the sort of intervals he used', his music was different to that to which she was accustomed and it just seemed to respond to her, as if something inside her 'needed' it.⁴⁰

Maconchy surmises that it was her formative influences, especially those of Vaughan Williams and Bartók, which had the most stimulating effect on her subsequent compositional trajectory: 'I don't think later influences counted nearly so much'.⁴¹ Although the former's influence was perhaps less conventional than that of the latter, a particularly valuable lesson Maconchy learned from her teacher was the importance of receiving constructive criticism. Vaughan Williams encouraged his students to have new works performed for colleagues in order to receive their criticism, something in which he and Gustav Holst engaged regularly. To this end, Maconchy and fellow students Grace Williams and Imogen Holst met frequently to exchange critiques of each other's forthcoming works.⁴² In her 1974 publication on the subject of friend and fellow composer Ina Boyle, Maconchy underscores the value of receiving criticism, and, conversely, the disadvantages accrued when this does not happen:

³⁹ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

⁴⁰ Maconchy, BBC Radio 3 Audio Interview, presented by Jeremy Siepmann.

⁴¹ John Skiba, 'In Conversation with Elizabeth Maconchy', *Composer*, 63 (1978), p. 7, cited in Catherine Roma, *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers: Elizabeth Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy and Thea Musgrave* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow, 2006), p. 66.

⁴² Roma, *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers*, p. 66.

[...] living out of the world, though it suited her temperamentally, had the disadvantage that she made very few musical contacts and that her music remained little known and almost unperformed. All composers need to hear performances of their work, not only for stimulation and encouragement but in order to learn the craft and advance their technique.⁴³

Maconchy travelled frequently to the home of Vaughan Williams in Dorking to seek his advice on her latest works; she valued his opinion and his response, despite the fact that their styles were generally quite far-removed from one another.⁴⁴

Maconchy's time at the RCM led to success on many levels. Academically, she excelled. By the time of her graduation in 1929 she had numerous prizes to her name, among which were the valuable Blumenthal and Octavia Scholarships. The Blumenthal Scholarship, a composition scholarship in memory of Jacques Blumenthal, composer and member of the College Council, was awarded to Maconchy in 1927. Its annual value was £135, which included approximately £90 towards maintenance expenses as well as covering annual tuition fees. The Octavia Scholarship, which she received in 1929, was a prestigious RCM initiative set up to enable recipients to benefit from travelling and studying abroad. The scholarship was also awarded to Maconchy's student-friends Imogen Holst and Grace Williams the following year.

In addition to the prizes she received, Maconchy's academic proficiency was also confirmed by the inclusion of several of her works in the RCM's Patron's Fund

⁴³ Elizabeth Maconchy, *Ina Boyle: An Appreciation with a Select List of her Music* (Dublin: Printed for the Library of Trinity College at the Dolmen Press, 1974), p. 3.

⁴⁴ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

events, a series of rehearsals and concerts by a professional orchestra with a leading conductor of the day, originally set up and funded by Sir (later Lord) Ernest Palmer to encourage new British music. Maconchy had works performed as part of this series both during and after her time at the RCM, and the support of the fund was invaluable both in terms of providing the opportunity to hear her works being performed, and in receiving essential critical feedback from friends and colleagues.

Teachers' terminal reports from her time spent at the RCM, preserved in the Elizabeth Maconchy Archive at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, confirm Maconchy's academic distinction. In her final midsummer term report, dating from 1929, Vaughan Williams writes: 'Very sorry to lose her – I can teach her no more', and Gordon Jacob writes: 'Excellent in every way'.⁴⁵

Success was also achieved on a personal level. Maconchy forged lifelong friendships at the RCM, particularly with Grace Williams and Anne Macnaghten. With the former she corresponded for over fifty years, and a published edition of these letters is forthcoming.⁴⁶ The Irish composer Ina Boyle, who studied privately with Vaughan Williams, also became a lifelong friend, with Maconchy publishing the aforementioned short book in 1974, entitled *Ina Boyle: An Appreciation, with a select list of her music*.

⁴⁵ See Appendix I.

⁴⁶ Edition of correspondence exchanged by Elizabeth Maconchy and Grace Williams, Jenny Doctor and Sophie Fuller (eds.), (Ashgate Publishers, in preparation).

Octavia Scholarship and Promenade Concert

The Octavia Travelling Scholarship, awarded to Maconchy in 1929, presented the composer with a valuable opportunity to study outside England. The decision to study in Prague as opposed to Vienna was due in large part to the influence of Vaughan Williams, who advised that while Vienna was ‘marvellous for the music of the past’, the emphasis in Prague was on new music.⁴⁷ Her daughter Nicola LeFanu notes an additional influence: the fact that Maconchy was already so drawn to the Modernist music of Central Europe meant that the Austro-German tradition would not have appealed to her nearly as much as it might her contemporaries, and so she would not have had any great desire to study with Schoenberg or other exponents of this tradition.⁴⁸

Maconchy travelled twice to Prague to study with Czech composer and conductor Karel Boleslav Jirák (1891–1972). Both visits were of approximately two to three months’ duration. It was not long before she realised the merit of Vaughan Williams’ advice: on 19 March 1930, her twenty-third birthday, her Piano Concertino (1928) was performed in the Smetana Hall by soloist Erwin Schülhoff and the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra, a triumph at this early stage of her career.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

⁴⁸ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

⁴⁹ Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 25. This piece will be recorded for release in the near future.

Upon her return from Prague, Maconchy did ‘the only thing then open to a young composer’, which was to send a score to Sir Henry Wood.⁵⁰ Her orchestral suite *The Land*, based on a poem by Victoria (Vita) Sackville-West, received its premiere at a Promenade concert under Wood’s baton on 30 August 1930. *The Land*, described by Nicola LeFanu as a ‘vivid, assured and individual’ four-movement work, received mixed reviews in the press, some very favourable.⁵¹

Herbert Hughes’ article in *The Daily Telegraph* gives a glowing account of Maconchy’s compositional competence:

[...] the young composer, equipped with a superb technique, has created a work of art which is in every way distinguished and masterly.⁵²

More cautionary in its praise but nonetheless positive, *The Times* notes:

The young composer, who has studied at the Royal College of Music and abroad, has acquired considerable skill in construction and in orchestration, and her four movements, illustrative of the four seasons, have a due diversity of idea and treatment. Miss Maconchy aims high, and rightly so, even if as yet her music seems somewhat arid in the expression. Although there is rather too much reiteration of the material, a favourable impression was created by its general style and character, for it successfully avoids the trivial and the obvious. The greatest degree of imagination was discernible in the orchestration, which is compact, effective, and occasionally showing touches of freshness and originality. Altogether a very promising work.⁵³

The piece will be discussed in detail in Part 2 of this chapter.

In subsequent years, other Maconchy works featured at the Proms with Henry Wood, including her aforementioned Piano Concertino in 1936 with Harriet Cohen as soloist, and her Concerto

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵¹ LeFanu, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)’.

⁵² Herbert Hughes, ‘Girl Composer’s Triumph’, *Daily Telegraph* (1930), cited in LeFanu, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)’.

⁵³ ‘Promenade Concert: A New Suite’, *The Times*, 1 September 1930, p. 8.

for oboe, bassoon and strings (1955–56) in 1959 with soloists Evelyn Rothwell and Archie Camden.⁵⁴

One week before her Proms premiere of *The Land*, Maconchy married William LeFanu (1904–1995), a historian and scholar from a well-known Irish literary family, whose members include gothic horror writer Joseph Sheridan LeFanu. The couple were married in Ireland and spent their honeymoon in Connemara.⁵⁵ LeFanu was born in Bray, Co. Wicklow, and was one of the first in his family to move to England, where he worked for almost forty years as a medical librarian for the Royal College of Surgeons in London (from 1929 to 1968).⁵⁶

New Beginnings: Leaving College

Upon graduating from the RCM, Maconchy, like most recently-conferred graduates regardless of subject area, found herself confronted with the difficult issue of not knowing what to do next. Options were few for young British composers emerging in the 1920s and 30s, and fewer still if that composer happened to be female:

In London in the 1920s no-one had given a thought to helping a composer to establish himself – still less herself – or even to learn the craft of composition by hearing his work performed.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ David Cox, *The Henry Wood Proms* (London: BBC, 1980), p. 107, 181.

⁵⁵ See Appendix II.

⁵⁶ ‘William LeFanu’, Obituary, *The Times*, 10 April 1995.

⁵⁷ Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 25.

For a young composer emerging in Britain at this time, it was an unspoken understanding that writing music had to be its own reward. Even if one had previously achieved considerable musical success, as Maconchy had through her Proms performance, it was not expected that one would receive assistance or encouragement as one did in subsequent years in the shape of commissions, grants, interviews and further performances:

There was no S.P.N.M., no B.B.C. concerts of contemporary music or 'Music in our Time' series, no Park Lane Group concerts, no Arts Council grants or commissions, no platform for new composers at local festivals, and very little interest in new music at the universities.⁵⁸

This stark reality was simply accepted as 'the composer's lot'.⁵⁹

Despite what one might assume, bearing in mind that women composers were still relatively rare in the Western world, the issue of gender inequality had only once truly affected the composer during her time at the RCM. This was in connection with her application for the prestigious Mendelssohn Scholarship. In the documentary DVD directed by Margaret Williams, the composer recounts having had the head of the college, Sir Hugh Allen, congratulate her for winning the coveted Scholarship, to which Maconchy replied 'but I didn't get it, you gave it to David Evans'. Allen then resolved that they must have changed the decision after he had left, and inferred that it was probably a matter of no consequence anyway, as she would only have 'got married and never written another note'.⁶⁰ Maconchy retorts in retrospect that she did indeed get married, but she proceeded 'to write

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁶⁰ 'Elizabeth Maconchy', DVD.

many notes'.⁶¹ Interestingly, along with Maconchy, Imogen Holst was also adjudged to be next in line for the prize.⁶² A significant degree of solace was attained from the fact that in 1973, Maconchy's daughter Nicola was awarded the Mendelssohn Scholarship.

This incident aside however, Maconchy did not feel that the issue of gender was a consideration at the RCM as by and large one was judged on the quality of one's music.⁶³ Once she left the college however, she became all-too-aware that there was in fact a great prejudice against female composers, particularly amongst publishers and concert promoters. She outlines how the prevailing attitude was that women could only write 'little things like piano pieces and songs', and could not be considered 'serious' composers; and so the task of gaining recognition through publication and performance was therefore an arduous one for Maconchy and her female counterparts.⁶⁴

In response to the difficulties faced by Maconchy and her fellow-student female composers, particularly surrounding the issue of securing performances, it was decided that they would set up a series of concerts of their own. The initial idea was that of composer Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–1983); Iris Lemare (1902–1997) was interested in conducting; and the idea was proposed to Anne Macnaghten,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² 'Occasional Notes', *MT*, 70 (1929), pp. 623–24; 630–31 (p. 631).

⁶³ 'Elizabeth Maconchy', DVD.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

who lent her name to the series of concerts and, according to Maconchy, ‘really did all the work’.⁶⁵

Macnaghten-Lemare Concerts

The first series of concerts organised by Anne Macnaghten and Iris Lemare began towards the end of 1931. The aim of the concerts was to promote contemporary British chamber music by young composers. The concerts took place in the old Ballet Club Theatre on Ladbroke Road, later known as the Mercury Theatre. The first series of concerts was advertised as follows:

Three Chamber Music Concerts (one with orchestra) at the Ballet Club Theatre, Notting Hill Gate. Subscription ticket: 9s. Programmes will consist mainly of works by young English composers.⁶⁶

Composers whose works featured in this series of concerts included Imogen Holst, Elisabeth Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy, Arnold Foster, Patrick Hadley and Gordon Jacob. Non-contemporary composers to feature in the programmes were little known at the time: Purcell, Vivaldi and Stamitz.⁶⁷

The concerts received favourable reviews by most newspaper critics, in turn increasing the level of attention shown to the new composers. Frank Howes applauded the concerts in *The Musical Times* saying:

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Anne Macnaghten, ‘The Story of the Macnaghten Concerts’, *MT*, 100 (1959), pp. 460–61 (p. 460).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

There is an artistic belt of territory which runs across western London from Chelsea, through Kensington (including of course the R.C.M) to Notting Hill and W.11. The young ladies of these parts have banded themselves into an anonymous group which includes composers (Imogen Holst, Betty Lutyens, Elizabeth Maconchy), conductor (Miss Lemare), string players (the Anne McNaughten [sic] Quartet and others), wind player (Sylvia Spencer), and a whole galaxy of talent, whose abilities and competence are fully commensurate with their by no means modest ambitions.⁶⁸

Following a concert of 22 January 1934, the *Musical Times* contributor M.M.S. went so far as to say:

When Miss Macnaghten or Miss Lemare come in at the door, pedantic music flies out at the window. There is nothing quite like these concerts in London; the concert-givers get to grips with the real thing in a most delightful, unconventional way, and after an evening spent with them, one feels music is gloriously alive'.⁶⁹

Women played prominent roles in the Macnaghten-Lemare concert series in a compositional, performing and organisational capacity. They did not, however, discourage the involvement of men, and many works by male composers were represented across the series. Anne Macnaghten stresses that the concerts were not planned as a deliberate feminist statement: 'it just so happened that the first people [to have expressed an interest in the organisation thereof] were young women'.⁷⁰

Macnaghten attributes a great deal of the success of the concerts to the fact that they were a 'co-operative affair': composers agreed to sell no fewer than ten tickets each, musicians accepted relatively low fees, overheads were kept to a minimum, and friends and relatives made up a large portion of the audience as a

⁶⁸ Frank Howes, 'London Concerts', *MT*, 73 (1932), pp. 263–66 (p. 265).

⁶⁹ M.M.S., 'London Concerts', *MT*, 75 (1934), pp. 262–66 (p. 266). According to Pamela Blevins, M.M.S. was the musician and writer Marion Scott, see 'Marion Scott (1877–1953): Critic, Champion of Contemporary Music and Women', <http://www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2002/May02/Scott_Marion.htm> [accessed 10 May 2010].

⁷⁰ 'Elizabeth Maconchy', DVD.

general rule.⁷¹ Perhaps more important was the continued support of leading composers and music critics, above all that of Vaughan Williams, who assisted in several ways, not least financially. Macnaghten, in her 1959 article in *The Musical Times*, goes so far as to say that ‘but for [Vaughan Williams], the concerts would not be in existence today’.⁷²

The 1931 series of concerts was advertised under the title ‘Macnaghten’, while from 1932 to 1935, the concerts became known as the ‘Macnaghten-Lemare’ concerts. There were fourteen Macnaghten / Macnaghten-Lemare concerts given in total between the years 1931 and 1935, in which works by twenty-seven unknown or little known contemporary British composers were performed.⁷³ Macnaghten states that of these twenty-seven composers, at least nine (Britten, Cooke, Finzi, Hadley, Jacob, Lutyens, Maconchy, Rawsthorne, Grace Williams) went on to achieve national and even international acclaim, a fact which bears witness, in some measure, to the ‘stimulating effect’ of the concert series.⁷⁴

From 1935 to 1937 Iris Lemare continued to organise the series on her own with the financial assistance of W.W. Cobbett and Sir Robert and Lady Mayer, during which time they were known simply as the ‘Lemare’ concerts.⁷⁵ The aim of these concerts remained the same: the promotion of new British music; and the opening concert of her first series (December 1935) included works by Alan Bush

⁷¹ Macnaghten, ‘The Story of the Macnaghten Concerts’, p. 460.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 460.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

⁷⁵ Ernest Bradbury, ‘Iris Lemare’, *MT*, 93 (1952), pp. 444–46 (p. 445).

(*Dialectic*), Michael Tippett (Quartet in A), and two songs by Maconchy ('The Thrush' (Keats), and 'The Arab' (Meredith)).⁷⁶

After the war, the concerts were revived as the 'Macnaghten' concerts under the direction of a new committee, the officers of which had been closely associated with the original concerts: Vaughan Williams became committee president and members included Lemare, Hadley, Lutyens, Maconchy, Rawsthorne and Grace Williams.⁷⁷ By 1955, however, the increasing financial and administrative strain of the concerts caused the committee to consider its position, and a final concert was announced. The unexpected success of this 'final' concert prompted Vaughan Williams to strive to inject greater enthusiasm into the series, and together with an enlarged committee and a new voluntary organising secretary by the name of Grace Barrons Richardson, the concerts continued for a further two years.⁷⁸ In the twenty-eight concerts given between 1950 and 1957, works by sixty-two contemporary British composers were performed, and of these composers, forty-two were unknown or little known at the time.⁷⁹ The concerts continued (generally advertised under the title 'Macnaghten concerts') right into the 1970s before their final dissolution.

The 'Macnaghten' concerts served as a vital arena for young composers and performers and furthered the careers of many who may otherwise have fallen by the wayside. Young female composers benefitted particularly, though not

⁷⁶ Lemare Concert', *The Times*, 13 December 1935, p. 12.

⁷⁷ Macnaghten, 'The Story of the Macnaghten Concerts', p. 461.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

exclusively, due to the fact that the musical mainstream was generally more geared towards their male counterparts.

Maconchy's career profited dramatically from the post-war 'Macnaghten' concerts: not only did it offer a valuable platform for the performance of her works, it also provided her earliest commissions, thereby encouraging some degree of productivity during an otherwise gloomy and difficult period in her life. Professionally, socially and personally, the concert series was an enriching addition to British musical life, in an era when opportunities were few and far between. In Maconchy's own words:

It was probably the best thing that ever happened for young composers here, and it was the only thing that happened for a long time.⁸⁰

Contracting Tuberculosis

In 1932, during the early days of the 'Macnaghten' concerts, it became apparent that Elizabeth, like her father, had contracted tuberculosis. TB, a highly infectious disease usually affecting the lungs (respiratory/pulmonary TB), was the single greatest cause of death in males and was second only to heart disease in females in the first decade of the twentieth century in Britain.⁸¹ As the decades progressed, and medical treatments and immunisations were developed, it gradually loosened

⁸⁰ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 25.

⁸¹ Linda Bryder, *Below the Magic Mountain: A Social History of Tuberculosis in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), Introduction, p. 1.

its fatal grip on the British population with heart disease and cancer far exceeding it as a major cause of death by the middle of the century.⁸²

Nowadays the combination of better living conditions, antibiotics, and the BCG vaccine has dramatically reduced the incidences of TB in the Western world.⁸³ At the time of Maconchy's contraction of the disease, however, little was known regarding appropriate treatment. Sufferers were encouraged to rest and ensure good nutrition, and fresh air at high altitude was recommended with a view to strengthening the weakened immune system. Numerous sanatoria were established across the globe in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, many of which were situated in Switzerland, following the belief that clean mountain air proved beneficial in the treatment of lung conditions.

Although it was advised that she move to Switzerland to maximise her chances of recovery, Maconchy, recently married and with the prospect of an impressive musical career ahead of her in London, refused to do so. Instead, she and her husband moved to the English countryside, first to the seaside in Brighton, then to Kent, where she lived almost completely out of doors. As was quite common amongst TB sufferers at the time, Maconchy slept in an open-sided revolving hut so as to allow her lungs every chance of regaining their previous strength. She had a piano in this hut and as her health gradually improved she began to compose

⁸² *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 1.

⁸³ Gill Jenkins, 'Tuberculosis', <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/health/>> [accessed 1 September 2009].

outdoors, enlisting friends—Benjamin Britten amongst them—to copy music for her when she felt too ill.⁸⁴

Due to a combination of good care and sheer willpower, Maconchy eventually overcame the disease. Her lengthy convalescence (of approximately three years) did, however, have a considerable impact on her career. Geographically, for example, Maconchy's move to the countryside meant having to withdraw from the vibrant musical life to which she had been accustomed in London, and this in turn left her largely cut off from the new music scene within which she had previously flourished.

Physically, the disease also took its toll. Her weakened health resulted in a significant deceleration on every front: starting a family had to be deferred, compositional endeavours had to be granted a much lengthier timescale, and involvement in extra-musical affairs had to be delayed or done from afar. Her daughter Nicola suggests that the disease would also have exhausted her of the energy needed to pursue any additional work outside of composing: teaching or performing, for example. This essentially meant having to depend almost entirely on her husband for financial support.⁸⁵

One can only speculate as to the levels of psychological hardship endured by the composer as a consequence of the condition. TB was a social disease as well as

⁸⁴ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

⁸⁵ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

anything else, and with her independence compromised on almost every front, the accompanying sense of frustration and despair must have been debilitating. In the documentary DVD, however, Maconchy's friend Anne Macnaghten hypothesises a number of positive consequences of her illness: for example, the fact that it strengthened her resolve, resulting in increasing levels of determination and confidence. Macnaghten believes also that the reality of being so cut off from contemporary musical affairs in fact seemed to result in a solidification of her own individual style. Further to this, it may also have given her an elevated drive to make up for lost time in her subsequent compositional endeavours.

After her illness, Maconchy quite quickly began to re-establish herself, and in fact this pre-World War II period was a particularly fruitful one in the composer's career. Numerous choral, orchestral and chamber works were premiered at this stage and she composed works for many of the foremost performers of the time, including Sophie Wyss, Kathleen Long, Harriet Cohen, Andre Mangeot, and Bernard Shore.⁸⁶

Maconchy also became actively involved in various extra-musical endeavours, particularly those which were politically motivated, as a result of the increasing threat of fascism on the Continent. Having campaigned for the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939, she turned her attention towards supporting socialism back home in Britain, running a section of the Left Book Club, a left-wing UK institution founded in 1936 and dissolved in 1948, which

⁸⁶ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

aimed to educate the British Left in an attempt to resist the rise of Fascism and Nazism by circulating political books among its 50,000 members.⁸⁷

Part 2 of this chapter presents an exploration of some of the key musical considerations of this historical period, and three representative works by Maconchy are examined in finer detail so as to note the main features of her compositional style at this time.

⁸⁷ Margaret Drabble and Jenny Stringer, 'Left Book Club', *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 2003, <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O54-LeftBookClub.html>> [accessed 11 November 2009]

Chapter 2: The Early Years (1907–1939)

Part 2

Music of the Early Years

Western art music of the twentieth century is commonly referred to as ‘modern’ music or simply ‘twentieth-century music’. It is impossible to determine precisely when the aesthetic phenomenon of ‘twentieth-century music’ began; however, it is generally accepted among music historians that its roots were established in the late nineteenth century when basic constructive forces such as tonality, rhythm, orchestration and form were challenged by ‘transitional’ composers whose musical maturity was reached under the influence of nineteenth-century ideals.⁸⁸ Figures synonymous with this ‘transitional’ paradigm include Gustav Mahler (1860–1911), Richard Strauss (1864–1949), Claude Debussy (1862–1918) and Alexander Scriabin (1872–1915), each of whom is recognised as having established paths to a radically new future through the transformation of that which was inherited from the past.⁸⁹

Apart from its temporal implications, the distinguishing factor between ‘twentieth-century music’ and that of the so-called ‘common practice’ period of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, is its basis upon considerably different

⁸⁸ Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, p. 18.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

aesthetic and technical assumptions.⁹⁰ ‘Twentieth-century’ composition in its formative state (pre-World War I) was a self-conscious quest for a musical language which was ‘adequate to and reflective of’ the contemporary world in which its earliest proponents lived; a world of unprecedented scientific, technological and industrial development as well as one ‘dominated by [...] positivism, mechanization, urbanization, mass culture and nationalism’.⁹¹ In other words, inspired by an increasingly changing global environment, early twentieth-century composers became engaged in a conscious endeavour to broaden the spectrum of possibilities within the musical sphere.

‘Modernism’ in a musical context alludes categorically to the ‘multi-faceted but distinct’ movement roughly spanning the 1880s to the 1970s, after which time the focus of classification shifted towards what is commonly known as ‘Postmodernism’.⁹² The main proponents of the early-twentieth-century Modernist aesthetic were Ferruccio Busoni (1866–1924), Arnold Schoenberg (1874–1951), Franz Schreker (1878–1934) and Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971).⁹³ A common denominator underlying all four composers was their individually unique contribution to defining the principal lines of stylistic evolution for the first half of the century.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, Preface.

⁹¹ Leon Botstein, ‘Modernism’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40625>> [accessed 24 September 2009].

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

As with its counterparts in other arts, ‘Modernism’ in music is a term which encapsulates a multitude of subsets. Musicologist Leon Botstein outlines five distinct strands of Modernism which had emerged by 1933: the first and perhaps most significant was that of the Second Viennese School, which consisted of Schoenberg and his followers, predominantly Webern and Berg; the second was the French-Russian axis, in which Stravinsky was dominant; the third strand was that of German Expressionism with which Busoni and Hindemith were associated; the fourth was that of indigenous Modernisms, typified by Ives in America, Bartók in Hungary, Szymanowski in Poland, Janáček and Martinů in post-war Czechoslovakia and Carlos Chavez in Mexico; and the fifth was that of experimentalism, which was epitomised by Varèse, Hába and Cowell.⁹⁴ Composers often brought a number of these strands together in their compositions, a classic example being Stravinsky who freely experimented with the Second-Viennese-School-inspired serialism characteristic of the first strand, as well as folk-derived materials more in keeping with the ‘indigenous Modernisms’ of the fourth strand.

Unlike its arts counterparts, particularly those of art (painting) and architecture, Modernism in music did not fundamentally revise the tastes and practices of twentieth-century mass culture.⁹⁵ This can be attributed in large part to the dramatic advances in the technological field, principally those concerning media and communications. The advent of recording and radio broadcasting in the early twentieth century facilitated the distribution of music to the masses, thereby

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

converting it from an elite art to one which could be availed of and enjoyed by a broad spectrum of individuals, and during this time it was the popular music genres of jazz, Tin Pan Alley and swing, rather than the endeavours of Modernist composers, which proved to be the people's choice.⁹⁶ To this end, the divide between popular music and art music deepened and would continue to do so, generally speaking, throughout the remainder of the twentieth century and indeed into the twenty-first.

National Trends

The musical fertility of the Tudor and Elizabethan eras (1485–1603), which had produced such renowned composers as Thomas Tallis (1505–1585), William Byrd (1543 – 1623), Thomas Campion (1567–1620), and later, Henry Purcell (1659–1695), gradually diminished, and not a single British composer of international reputation emerged in the two-hundred-year-period between the death of Purcell and the beginning of the twentieth century.⁹⁷

The emergence of Sir Hubert Parry (1848–1918) and Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852–1924) in c1880, in conjunction with the establishment of the RCM in 1883 and the Proms in 1885, went some way towards instigating a revitalisation of the British music scene. Sir George Grove (1820–1900) was also a key figure in facilitating this so-called 'English musical renaissance': the first edition of the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, of which he was editor, was published

⁹⁶ Marcel Danesi, *Popular Culture: Introductory Perspectives* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), p. 22.

⁹⁷ Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music*, p. 128.

between 1879 and 1899; and for eleven years, Grove also served as first director of the RCM.⁹⁸ Such developments played a vital role in ripening the conditions for emerging composers like Sir Edward Elgar (1857–1934), whose acclaimed works including *Variations on an Original Theme* (‘Enigma’) (1899), *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900) and the *Pomp and Circumstance Marches* established his international reputation as the foremost British composer of his generation. Initiated by the success of Elgar, music in Britain underwent a period of unprecedented fruitfulness with numerous internationally-renowned exponents such as Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst and Frederick Delius coming to the fore in the first two decades of the twentieth century.

After the Great War, an onset of nationalism and natural conservatism amongst Britons led to widespread rejection of overseas cultural developments. This impelled the naissance of English pastoralism, a musical style epitomised in works by composers including Vaughan Williams, Ireland, Holst, Butterworth and Finzi.⁹⁹ English pastoralism was a significant compositional style inspiring many composers and poets which sought to evoke a location particular to the artist in question through the use of a specific, often folk-derived language. The idiom has habitually been shunned by musicologists and is generally perceived as being a ‘lesser’ school of composition than those of Germanic, Russian or Scandinavian origin.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Simon Heffer, *Vaughan Williams* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2000), p. 3.

⁹⁹ David Hamilton, ‘The Neglect of English Classical Music’, <http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/44183/sec_id/44183> [accessed 21 November 2009].

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

The 1920s and 30s saw a significant enrichment of British compositional talent and much of this talent was to be found at the Royal College of Music. Michael Tippett (1905–1998) and Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) were both students of the college during this period, as were Grace Williams (1906–1977), Imogen Holst (1907–1984), Constant Lambert (1905–1951), Elisabeth Lutyens (1906–1983), Dorothy Gow (1893–1982), Patrick Hadley (1889–1973) and Elizabeth Maconchy. Young British composers attending colleges outside of the RCM, many of whose works featured as part of the Macnaghten concerts, included, for example, Alan Rawsthorne (1905–1971), Alan Bush (1900–1995), Priaulx Rainier (South African composer of English-Huguenot parentage, 1903–1986), Phyllis Tate (1911–1987), Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987) and Arnold Cooke (1906–2005).

Maconchy's Approach to Composition

In Maconchy's view, composers belonged to one of two principal schools of composition: one either wrote the Mozart and Schubert way, 'with an apparently effortless stream of music flowing down your pen onto the paper'; or the Beethoven way 'with heartbreaking effort, endless re-shaping, wholesale scrapping and starting again'.¹⁰¹ Maconchy belonged firmly to the second school.

Benjamin Britten quantified the job of a composer as ninety per cent manual labour which, according to her daughter Nicola, was something Maconchy often quoted on account of her own personal struggles with continuous 'writing and

¹⁰¹ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 27.

scrapping and writing and scrapping' as she strove 'to save time from all other activities in her life to make composition the first priority'.¹⁰² In her typically dignified manner Maconchy confesses: 'I have always used up a great deal of manuscript paper'.¹⁰³

Michael Tippett, on the other hand, was more representative of the Mozartian manner of composition. Although he could be viewed as a slow starter, composing for approximately fifteen years before producing the first works which were to constitute his official published output, when it came to articulating musical ideas, Tippett did so with relative ease:

In 1944, Michael Tippett wrote to a friend: "I never seem to write 1 letter but I write 3." The same could be said of notes, because ideas and thoughts poured forth from the composer like molten lava, both in speech and in music.¹⁰⁴

Maconchy perceived the historical process of compositional development as 'a river in a continuous stream', in which one could not 'arbitrarily isolate one period from another'.¹⁰⁵ She believed that a composer was engaged in a constant musical exploration which was dictated, through one form or another, by the general compositional trends of the time:

A composer's own development moves parallel to the general development of music taking place throughout his lifetime: he is profoundly aware of it, and so is influenced by it, and yet independent of it.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² 'Elizabeth Maconchy', DVD.

¹⁰³ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ Michael Berkeley, 'Joyful Oblivion', *The Guardian*, 26 August 2005.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Maconchy, 'String Quartet No. 6', unpublished talk, Oxford, 3 February 1952, manuscript held at St. Hilda's College Library, Oxford, cited by Jennifer Doctor in 'The Texture of Silence', *Silence, Music, Silent Music*, Nicky Losseff and Jennifer Doctor (eds.), (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 15–36 (p.22).

¹⁰⁶ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 28.

Maconchy herself always kept abreast of new music and remained open to musical influences all through her life.

Maconchy critics frequently apply the terms ‘intellectual’ and ‘passionate’ to the manifestation of musical ideas implicit in the composer’s musical style. The first of these terms, ‘intellectual’, is not intended to denote the conscious working-out of musical ideas—‘If I have a complaint against many composers to-day, it is that they ignore or mistrust their own instinctive processes and rely too exclusively on conscious calculation’¹⁰⁷—but rather in the way in which these ideas are articulated. Maconchy’s music is intellectual only to the extent necessary to articulate clearly the ideas which lie behind. The composer was ruthless in her quest for clarity of expression, a trait that reflects her teacher Vaughan Williams’ influence. She was all-too-aware of the temptation ‘to be side-tracked by the felicities of sound and colour’,¹⁰⁸ but believed firmly that ‘when one is dealing with the very bones of music, with none of the endless variety of colour of the orchestra, or the extra-musical expressiveness of the human voice – everything extraneous to the pursuit of the central idea must be excluded – scrapped.’¹⁰⁹

The terms ‘intellectual’ and ‘passionate’ are ones of which she was consciously aware in her approach to music:

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Maconchy, cited in Anne Macnaghten, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, *MT*, 96 (1955), pp. 298–302 (p. 299).

¹⁰⁹ Maconchy, ‘String Quartet No. 6’, unpublished talk, 3 February 1952, cited by Doctor in ‘The Texture of Silence’, p. 22.

The passionately intellectual and intellectually passionate musical discourse is what I seek...to express in music.¹¹⁰

Intellect and passion were engaged primarily by the composer as vehicles to facilitate the delivery of the elemental driving force behind her music: the expression of emotion: ‘the expression of emotion has always been [...] the underlying stimulus for writing music’.¹¹¹

She believed in being succinct in one’s approach to composition, ensuring herself that all the material used in a piece was drawn out of an initial idea, or *donnée*. (The word ‘*donnée*’ is a French term whose usage in English is defined as ‘a set of literary or artistic principles or assumptions on which a creative work is based’,¹¹² which is almost certainly the meaning implied by Maconchy.)

Maconchy explains:

The initial idea of a new work, the *donnée*, often comes almost of its own accord: it may be a few bars or half a page, or only the germ of an idea – a few notes. I have found that there then follows a period of gestation which takes place at a fairly deep unconscious level, and may take some time – though not normally the full nine months. The result of this is that when further ideas emerge they bear a close relationship to the original idea – a parent-child relationship.¹¹³

The analogy made by Maconchy between the process of composition and pregnancy is an interesting one, and one which has historically emerged sporadically in discussing art or the artist. It echoes, for example, an idea expressed by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in the essay, ‘What is

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹¹¹ Maconchy, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy on Writing String Quartets’, sleeve notes for *Complete String Quartets*, compact disc FRC 9301, 1989.

¹¹² ‘Donnée’, <<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/donn%C3%A9>> [accessed 2 February 2010].

¹¹³ Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 27.

the Meaning of Ascetic Ideals?’, from his 1887 publication *On the Genealogy of Morals*, wherein he refers to the artist as, amongst other things, the ‘womb’ out of which a work of art grows.¹¹⁴

It is certainly best to separate an artist from his work so completely that he cannot be taken as seriously as his work. He is after all merely the presupposition of his work, the womb, the soil, in certain cases the dung and manure – on which and out of which it grows...¹¹⁵

Overview of Works of this Period

Maconchy’s earliest output consists predominantly of pieces for solo voice with one instrument, usually piano. One of her best-selling vocal pieces to this day, ‘Ophelia’s Song’ (1926), a haunting work based on a text from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, dates from this formative period. Chamber and orchestral works make up the majority of the remainder of Maconchy’s pre-1930 output. The year 1927 was one of particular significance in terms of Maconchy’s musical language, in that it was the year in which she composed her first violin sonata and began her Piano Concertino (later premiered by Schülhoff with the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra), with both pieces betraying the influence of new European music in much greater degree than that of her homeland.¹¹⁶ These works, together with her 1929 suite *The Land*, were among the first of her compositions to establish her national and international reputation. In the 1930s her compositional scope expanded to include four stage works (of which three are ballets), numerous choral pieces, and, crucially, her first three quartets.

¹¹⁴ Kelly Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy’s Relation to the ‘Feminine’* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 40.

¹¹⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Horace Barnett Samuel (New York: Dover, 2003), p. 70.

¹¹⁶ LeFanu, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)’.

During this early part of her career, Maconchy achieved a substantial degree of success. As well as being awarded numerous prizes and scholarships, performances of her works were becoming more frequent. Many of her works were premiered at the Macnaghten-Lemare concerts, including her first String Quartet (Macnaghten Quartet, May 1933), her ballet 'Great Agrippa' (Feb 1935) and her Divertissement for 12 stringed instruments (Feb 1937).¹¹⁷ A large number of her works were broadcast by the BBC and her oboe quintet (1932) was recorded for HMV by Helen Gaskell and the Griller quartet.¹¹⁸ Her works were included occasionally at ISCM festivals, her second quartet receiving its premiere at the Paris ISCM festival in 1937 (Brosa Quartet, January 1937). Also in 1937 a concert of her chamber music was given in Krakow, and additional performances of her works took place across Europe in Budapest, Brussels, Paris, Warsaw, Dusseldorf, Lausanne, Edinburgh, Birmingham, Belfast and Dublin.¹¹⁹ Further East European and Austrian concerts which were due to take place over the 1938/39 period were unfortunately cancelled as a result of the deteriorating political situation in Europe.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ M.M.S., 'London Concerts', *MT*, 78 (1937), p. 266.

¹¹⁸ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

¹¹⁹ 'Notes and News', *MT*, 80 (1939), pp. 373–75 (p. 375).

¹²⁰ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

Genre	Number of Works
Solo vocal with instrument(s)	19
Chamber (of which solo instrument: 4)	14
Orchestral	12
Stage Work	4
Vocal-Orchestral	3
Unaccompanied Choral	3
Choral, with 1-9 instruments	1
Total	56

Table 1: Overview of Early Period Works

Maconchy herself did not comment greatly on the constructive forces underlying her compositions, believing that ‘the natural way’ for a composer to express him or herself was ‘not with words but with notes’.¹²¹ In fact, when it came to describing musical ideas, she considered words to be entirely unequal to the task: ‘to describe a musical concept in words is like trying to paint a picture of a good smell’.¹²² Composing, for Maconchy, was largely a subconscious endeavour and she was content for it to be left this way:

One of the things I have learnt in half a century of listening to other people’s music and writing my own is that it pays to let your unconscious work for you.¹²³

¹²¹ Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 25.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

This viewpoint is redolent of Freudian theory, specifically that expressed in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), wherein Freud upholds the notion that there is a ‘deep unconscious structure of the mind that shapes the workings of consciousness’.¹²⁴ Maconchy deemed it impossible to tell from the analysis of a finished work ‘how much of its intricate structure, the interrelation of the themes and so on,’ had been consciously calculated by the composer, and how much had ‘worked itself out at a deeper level of consciousness’.¹²⁵

Accordingly, undertaking analyses of her completed compositions was not something that Maconchy enjoyed, the whole process being altogether too similar to ‘cutting up your own body on the dissecting table’.¹²⁶ However, on one occasion, when the composer had no choice but to make a detailed analysis (of the Clarinet Quintet (1963) for the purpose of a pre-premiere talk), she was quite taken aback at her findings:

It was not till I made this post-mortem examination that I found I could relate *everything* in the piece to the first paragraph. I discovered numerous tie-ups and derivations I had not known were there [...].¹²⁷

This intuitive aspect of composing is an area also addressed by Halsey Stevens, author of *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, in relation to the motivic tautness in Bartók’s string quartets:

¹²⁴ Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1993), p. 62.

¹²⁵ Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 28.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27–28.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

No doubt many motivic manipulations which seem carefully calculated were brought about intuitively: the line between reason and intuition is never sharply defined, but the compact thematic logic cannot be denied.¹²⁸

Due to the impossible nature of scientifically assessing the workings of the unconscious mind, one must focus one's commentary on the product of this intuitive process as manifested in the layout and detail of a work, and it is in this manner that I approach the three selected works of this period: *The Land* (1929), String Quartet No. 1 (1932/33) and String Quartet No. 2 (1936).

The Land

The Land is an orchestral suite based on an epic poem of the same title by Victoria (Vita) Sackville-West (1892–1962), for which she won the Hawthornden Prize for imaginative literature in 1926. The poem is divided into four sections, representing the four seasons, and this layout is reflected in Maconchy's four-movement suite. The work is scored for large orchestra and was given its premiere at a Promenade Concert on 30 August 1930 by the BBC Symphony Orchestra under the conductorship of Sir Henry Wood.

In the original score the following lines from the Sackville-West text were quoted by Maconchy:

I. Winter

Here is no colour, here but form and structure,
Bare bones of trees, the magpie bark of birches,

¹²⁸ Halsey Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, 3rd edn, prepared by Malcolm Gillies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 173.

Apse of trees and tracery of network,
Fields of snow and tranquil trees in snow
Through veils of twilight, northern, still and sad,
Waiting for the night, and for the moon.

II. Spring

Then broke the spring. The hedges in a day
Burgeoned to green

III. Summer

Jacob, seven years to win a maid
Drove out his flock into the stony place,
Ringstraked, speckled, pied;
Peeled the green poplar switch, and dreamed of Rachel's face

IV. Autumn

The young men strained upon the crank
To wring the last reluctant inch.
They laughed together, fair and frank,
And threw their loins across the winch
...While round about the worthless stood
...And still resolved, with maundering tongue,
That cider could not be the same
As once when they were young;
But still the young contemptuous

Sackville-West's text (2,500+ lines) is an old-fashioned, unsentimental representation of the pastoral landscape around Kent. It reflects her fascination with the 'alternating conflict and collaboration between man and nature' whose 'mutual malevolence' can result in something so profoundly beautiful as a garden or a field:

She looked Nature straight in the eye, reacting against the romanticism and prettiness of nineteenth-century poets and painters, and found the land spiteful. Her

labourers are peasants, little removed from serfs, their lives brutal and their manners loutish, taciturn and grave.¹²⁹

Unlike Maconchy, Sackville-West was not a 'modern' artist. By her own admission, her poetic gears 'would not mesh with Eliot's or Auden's'.¹³⁰

Consequently, her literary style and particularly that contained within her two epic poems *The Land* and *The Garden* (1939–1945) had less in common with works by her contemporaries than with those of two centuries previously, with eighteenth-century Scottish poet James Thomson's *The Seasons* gaining mention as being particularly influential.¹³¹

Maconchy's musical interpretation of *The Land* adheres to a slow-fast-slow-fast format, its four movements contrasting completely with one another. Although the layout of this work relates to a symphonic blueprint in its four-movement structure, non-traditional aspects are many and varied. The inclusion of two slow movements, for example, is uncharacteristic of the Classical format; and while it was common to include a slow introduction to the first movement, that the entire opening movement be slow would traditionally have been unusual.

The work's basis upon a non-musical source also suggests a degree of similarity with the tone or symphonic poems epitomised by the likes of Liszt and Strauss in the second half of the nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century. Again however, non-traditional elements obtain: one of the chief

¹²⁹ Nigel Nicholson, 'Introduction', in Vita Sackville-West, *The Land* (William Heinemann, 1926, repr. London: Frances Lincoln, 2004).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

aspirations of a tone/symphonic poem, for example, was to integrate multi-movement forms, ‘often by welding them into a single movement’, a formal convention with which, on account of its four-movement-format, *The Land* is instantly at odds.¹³² According to musicologist Hugh Macdonald, the term ‘poematic symphony’ is sometimes used to describe a ‘kindred form’ of the tone/symphonic poem that is written in more than one movement; however, by virtue of the fact that Macdonald cites Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral’ Symphony and Berlioz’s *Symphonie fantastique* as chief derivative essays for subsequent works of this description, it seems that this term implies a larger-scale work than Maconchy’s twenty-minute suite.¹³³ Thus, in line with many twentieth-century compositions, *The Land* does not easily fit into a prefabricated classificatory template. At its most basic, it can be considered programme music resembling a large-scale tone/symphonic poem, or small-scale poematic symphony.

An immediately striking attribute of *The Land* is the strident confidence with which Maconchy handles its orchestration: sparse vacant textures in the first movement are followed by playful scurrying passages in the second, passionate lyricism in the third and vociferous buoyancy in the fourth. All of this suggests that the composer, even at this early stage, possessed a significant level of control over her sonic intentions.

¹³² Hugh Macdonald, ‘Symphonic poem’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27250>> [accessed 5 July 2010].

¹³³ *Ibid.*

Movement I: 'Winter'

In speaking about Maconchy's late vocal works, her daughter Nicola LeFanu said that the underlying text generally suggested to some degree the direction that the composer would take musically.¹³⁴ In the case of a more programmatic work like *The Land*—in which the text is physically more arbitrary to the music as it is voiced only through musical means—it is more difficult to ascertain the degree to which the text may have inspired the piece, but it is apparent that some measure of tone-painting is present in the work. The grave, deliberate two-bar opening motif on E of the first movement, for example (see Ex. 1), could be construed as evoking a colourless, bare tranquillity suggestive of the winter landscape depicted by Sackville-West in her poem.

fifth: A natural) imprinting a distinct sense of harmonic uncertainty onto the discourse.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), and Viola (Vla). The score is in 2/4 time and begins with a forte (f) dynamic. The first three measures show a consistent rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dotted quarter note, and a similar harmonic structure. The fourth measure introduces a change in the harmonic structure, with some notes marked with a fermata (o) and a natural sign (>), indicating a shift in tonal ambiguity. The Viola part is written in bass clef and follows the same rhythmic and harmonic patterns as the violins.

Ex. 3: Maconchy: *The Land*: I: RN 2, b. 1–4

The presence of tonal ambiguity is a significant and defining characteristic of *The Land*. In the first movement for example, the tonal centre on which the principal motifs are based shifts repeatedly, as is apparent in the tables below:

Opening Motif	RN 1 b. 5	RN 3 b. 5	RN 4 b. 2	RN 5 b. 1	RN 5 b. 3	RN 5 b. 3
Beginning on E	D	B	E	C	C, F, E	E

Table 2: Maconchy: *The Land*: I: Tone Centres of Opening Motif

Counter melody	RN 3 b. 5	RN 4 b. 5	RN 5 b. 3	RN 5 b. 5	RN6 b. 2
Beginning on D	B	D	C	C, F	B

Table 3: Maconchy: *The Land*: I: Tone Centres of Counter melody

The harmonic language employed by Maconchy in this early work is in many ways quite removed from that of her British contemporaries, who were by and large working within a more tonally-grounded sphere during this period. Diary entries dating from this time by perhaps her best known contemporary, Benjamin Britten, suggest a decided measure of incomprehension at the direction in which new music was going: he ‘could not make head or tail’ of Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*, and found Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring* ‘bewildering & terrifying’

(diary entry dating from January 1931).¹³⁵ Another British contemporary, Michael Tippett, was at this time developing his early mature English Romantic style, based on ‘diatonic and modal melodies and the juxtaposition of distantly related triadic sonorities’.¹³⁶ Up until the 1960s, with the exception of Beethoven, Tippett’s musical inspiration was rooted principally in musical and aesthetic conceptions from the distant past, particularly those underlying the English Renaissance and Baroque styles.¹³⁷ It is apparent therefore that both Britten and Tippett, arguably the most recognised exponents of twentieth-century British music, were constructing their basic musical architecture on considerably different assumptions to Maconchy.

In spite of the pronounced contrast between *The Land* and works by her best-known British contemporaries however, there are snatches of the work which are redolent of the previous generation of composers in Britain, specifically of elements from Holst and Vaughan Williams. The second movement, ‘Spring’, for example, is distinctly reminiscent of the ‘Mercury’ and ‘Jupiter’ movements (Movements III and IV) from Holst’s *The Planets* (1914–1916), which is an area that will be addressed more keenly in the following sub-section.

Movement II: ‘Spring’

The second movement of *The Land* fizzles with life and energy from the outset.

The presence of tone-painting is again admissible: a proliferation of new life

¹³⁵ Philip Brett et al., ‘Britten, Benjamin’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/46435pg2>> [accessed 14 December 2009].

¹³⁶ David Clarke, ‘Tippett, Sir Michael’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/28005>> [accessed 15 December 2009].

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

‘burgeoning to green’ is strongly suggested by the squirreling, imitative triplet-sets against which strong steady crotchet/quaver interplay is articulated, imposing thoroughly polyrhythmic sonorities on the texture:

The image displays a musical score for five instruments: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), Violoncello (Vc), and Contrabass (Cb). The score is in 3/4 time and consists of three measures. The Vln I and Vln II parts feature melodic lines with accents and slurs. The Vla, Vc, and Cb parts are characterized by a steady, rhythmic pattern of triplets, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic and the instruction *spiccato*. The Vc and Cb parts also include a *spiccato* marking. The overall texture is polyrhythmic, combining the imitative triplet patterns of the lower strings with the more melodic lines of the violins.

Ex. 4: Maconchy: *The Land*: II: b. 12–14

The first performance of Holst’s *The Planets* took place in 1920, nine years before Maconchy’s composition of *The Land*. Although it is unclear whether Maconchy had heard this or subsequent performances or broadcasts, or had studied the score, stylistic elements presented at various points throughout *The Land* suggest that she had at least some familiarity with the work. The spirited triplet pattern first heard in the lower strings of the opening of the second movement, for example, (see Ex. 4) is markedly evocative of the opening violin passage in Holst’s ‘Jupiter’ movement (Movement IV) (see Ex. 5):

Ex. 5: Holst: *The Planets: IV, 'Jupiter'*: b. 1–5

The serpentine effect created by this scurrying triplet pattern is also strikingly reminiscent of a Mendelssohnian idiom, specifically his fairy music in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (see Ex. 6). This similarity could be attributed in part to the fact that Mendelssohn was a central influence on the earliest music of Holst, before the latter's interest in Wagner, English folksong and Sanskrit literature had fully manifested itself.¹³⁸

Ex. 6: Mendelssohn: *A Midsummer Night's Dream Op. 21: Overture*: b. 8–11

The rhythmic language inherent in *The Land* reflects Modernist influences, and is particularly evocative of Stravinsky and Bartók. The irregular accent-placement (see Ex. 4) recalls Stravinsky, in particular, his ballet music, while Maconchy's tendency to manipulate metre for the sake of fluidity echoes a Bartókian

¹³⁸ Colin Matthews, 'Holst, Gustav', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13252>> [accessed April 14, 2010].

paradigm. Like Bartók, Maconchy did not like to force melodies into strict rhythmic moulds, preferring instead to allow the melody to dictate the metre to a certain extent. This compositional trait generally had the effect of producing a continually-changing metre, a notational characteristic which is applicable to Maconchy at each juncture of her career. From the point of view of sight-reading, this metric flexibility creates initial difficulty, but as the performers become more attuned to the central premise of Maconchy's musical argument, it becomes apparent that the work's manifestation on paper is a necessary medium through which the composer communicates an otherwise abstract language. It is for this reason that Anne Macnaghten affirms that Maconchy's music is, as a general rule, 'more easily mastered by feeling than arithmetic'.¹³⁹

Movement III: 'Summer'

The 'Summer' movement of *The Land* is characterised by an infusion of delicately romantic and deeply passionate contours. Like the opening movement its tempo is slow; the cold sepia tones of the first movement however are suffused with iridescent hues in the third. Maconchy's 'Summer' movement is highly expressive and tenderly evocative of the text on which it is based: the biblical image of Jacob as he 'dreamed of Rachel's face' is beautifully reflected in the romantic nuances of this section, and is particularly apparent in the woodwind section on which much of the melodic interest of this movement is centred. The viola solo at RN 16, bars 10–11 (see Ex. 7), constitutes the emotional climax of the movement, and is indicative of Maconchy's keen regard for the viola and flair

¹³⁹ Macnaghten, 'Elizabeth Maconchy', p. 301.

for writing for it. Of all the stringed instruments, Maconchy favoured the viola: ‘I always seem to give the best bits to the viola [...] and it really is my favourite instrument’.¹⁴⁰

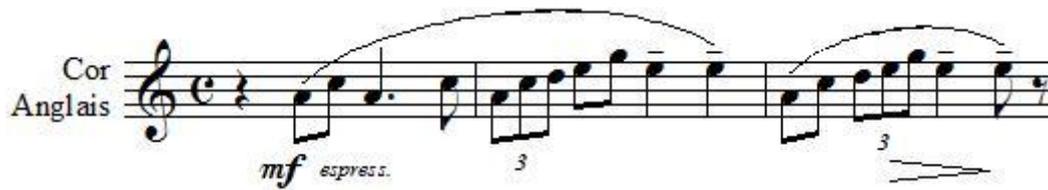


Ex. 7: Maconchy: *The Land*: III: RN 16, b. 10–11

This particular viola passage recalls elements of Vaughan Williams’ musical language: the folk-like beginning and pentatonic gestures, for example, are strongly suggestive of the latter, especially pieces such as *The Lark Ascending* (1914, revised 1920), his *English Folk Song Suite* (1923), or *Flos Campi* (1925). There are in fact numerous instances in this work which call to mind the musical architecture of Vaughan Williams, and generally, the pastoral idiom popular with so many British composers of this era. Maconchy’s emphatic use of pentatonicism, particularly in the slow movements, is perhaps the most obviously implicative manifestation of this influence. An especially transparent example of Maconchy’s overt use of pentatonicism is seen in the cor anglais line shortly after the opening of the third movement (see Ex. 8). At RN 14, the cor anglais introduces a three-bar melodic pattern which derives solely and incontestably from the minor pentatonic (A, C, D, E, G). Because much of the subsequent melodic interest of this movement—including the aforementioned viola line (see

¹⁴⁰ ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

Ex. 7)——stems from this short gesture, the sonic prevalence of the pentatonic is unmistakable.



Ex. 8: Maconchy: *The Land*: III: RN 14, b. 1–3

The folk-like passages and pastoralist gestures implicit in *The Land* betray perhaps more of the influence of Vaughan Williams and the English pastoral school than Maconchy may consciously have been aware. However, certain hallmarks remain which dilute the impact of this influence somewhat, giving the work a distinctive edge. The D natural introduced by Maconchy just after the shift to the treble clef in Ex. 7, for example, gives the passage an exotic essence which is quite removed from the melodic language more closely associated with the pastoralist school, thereby imposing uniquely Maconchy-derived sonorities onto the discourse.

Movement IV: ‘Autumn’

The ‘Autumn’ movement is a joyous and uplifting finale and elucidates the complex, integrated and assured nature of Maconchy’s orchestration, even at this early stage of her career. The emphasis on brass is considerable, its powerful presence extrapolating every shred of drama, defiance and pride from the motivic material. The acutely-skilled contrapuntal string-writing which comes to the fore between RN 27 and 28 plays a somewhat antidotal role (see Ex. 9), softening the

movement's sharp edges to an extent, and injecting a degree of lyricism into an otherwise extrovert discourse.

The image shows a musical score for four string instruments: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Cello (Vc). The score is written in a single system with four staves. The Violin I and Violin II parts are in treble clef, while the Viola and Cello parts are in bass clef. The music features a mix of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. There are several dynamic markings such as accents (>) and hairpins ($\hat{>$ and $\breve{>$). The overall texture is dense and rhythmic, characteristic of the composer's style in this movement.

Ex. 9: Maconchy: *The Land*: IV: RN 27, 1–7

The level of technical proficiency evident in the above paragraph illustrates Maconchy's adeptness in writing for strings even at this early stage. It is not surprising therefore that it was around this time that her musical trajectory expanded to include more string-based compositions: her first quintet (two violins, two violas and cello) was written in the same year, and over the course of the next decade she wrote her Oboe Quintet (1932), her first three string quartets (1932/33; 1936; 1938), and began work on the Fourth (1939–42).

The fourth movement is also illustrative of Maconchy's signature employment of canonic imitation. The central climactic episode which occurs between RN 24 and RN 25, for example, is replete with canonic material, entangling every instrument up into its web, with the exception of the harp and slide drum. The boisterous orchestration in this and subsequent sections, and the clamorous confidence with which these episodes are executed, are in fact somewhat remindful of Wagner.

The valiant brass melodic statements which are set against a frenzied backdrop of repeated quavers (heard very clearly in the first eleven bars of RN 30 for example) distinctly recall the textural qualities implicit in Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* (1856). This sound-world is also again reminiscent of Holst's *Planets*, particularly the aforementioned 'Jupiter' movement, which may account in part for the Wagnerian feel, Holst himself being intensely influenced by the former in his earlier years.

Summary

Among the most notable aspects of this early work is the fluency with which Maconchy handled the orchestral medium: even at this formative stage of the composer's career, the essential characteristic elements of intellectualism, passion, discipline and intensity are perceptible. The intensely emotional writing heard, for example, in the wood-wind section during the third movement, combined with the intellectualism implicit in Maconchy's extensive use of canon in the fourth movement, exemplifies the 'passionately intellectual and intellectually passionate' approach sought by Maconchy in her music.¹⁴¹

Numerous aspects relating to the musical architecture of *The Land* are present all through her career: the *donné* idea, for example, occupies a central position in Maconchy's overall output, as will become clear in subsequent musical discussions. A defining difference between the way in which it is treated here and in later years is that in the composer's more mature works the *donné* generally

¹⁴¹ See quote at n. 109.

permeates not just single movements but entire pieces, illustrating the formal tightening that occurred as her musical language evolved.

In terms of harmony, the octatonic gestures employed in *The Land* pervade much of Maconchy's output all across her career, proceeding to constitute a significant component of her harmonic architecture. The pentatonic and modal allusions, on the other hand, become less pronounced as her language evolves, and accordingly so too does the echo of Vaughan Williams and the British pastoralist idiom.

The type of canonic-writing most readily apparent in the first and fourth movements of *The Land* is employed repeatedly throughout Maconchy's output: many of the movements in the quartets, for example, open in this manner.

Contrapuntal procedures such as this are adopted habitually by Maconchy as a means of effectively presenting music as an 'impassioned argument'. However, it is important to note that the role of counterpoint in this work is minimal compared to that of later works. The composer began using the procedure in earnest from her Second String Quartet onwards, and as her career progressed, counterpoint came to permeate multiple constructive processes, occupying an elemental position in the work's formal and harmonic structure as well as its rhythmic and textural framework. In this work however, the underlying text occupies such a prominent position that its pictorial quality could be understood to relieve the necessity for elaborate technical intricacies such as the extensive use of counterpoint exploited in subsequent works.

The String Quartet in Context

Composers of the early part of the twentieth century, and especially post-World War I, expressed a renewed interest in chamber music. This was due in considerable measure to a reaction against the large-scale ensembles and emotional excesses of late Romanticism.¹⁴² Writing for smaller forces made compositional sense on numerous fronts: fewer musicians were required which made rehearsals and performances more viable, therefore offering composers a practical and economical outlet for their creative energies.¹⁴³ It was also a suitable vehicle for the musical pluralism which existed all through the twentieth century, making it a very flexible musical genre. Serialism (Schoenberg), neo-classicism (Stravinsky), and (later) aleatoricism (Cowell) and minimalism (Nyman) all found a place in the various chamber music media.

Several initiatives were introduced in the early twentieth century to encourage and support the composition of chamber music. The International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM), founded in 1922 by the Internationale Kammermusikaufführung Salzburg, is an example of a hugely influential initiative to this end, and indeed much of Maconchy's earliest success can be attributed to performances secured through the assistance of this initiative. In England, W.W. Cobbett, a successful businessman, became a very important figure in promoting chamber music, commissioning new works from composers and financing numerous awards and medals for services to chamber music, one of

¹⁴² Christina Bashford, 'Chamber music', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05379>> [accessed 12 October 2009].

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

which Maconchy received in 1930, and another, in 1968.¹⁴⁴ Festivals, societies and competitions were established to promote new chamber music or new music in general, all of which affected the position of the genre to some extent. Despite the substantial support for twentieth-century chamber music on a British and European level, however, it remained by and large on the fringes of the mainstream concert repertory.

The string quartet was a medium of chamber music which did, however, receive significant public attention during this period, with those of Bartók and Berg often achieving almost immediate acceptance into the repertory.¹⁴⁵ The appeal of the string quartet intensified substantially as the twentieth century progressed; this is not to say, however, that there was any scarcity of quartet composers at the beginning of the century. In the pre-World War I period, for example, Reger, Schoenberg, Webern, Berg and Ravel were highly influential quartettists; and in the interwar years, Bartók, Berg, Shostakovich and Janáček were notable figures on the world stage. There was also a proliferation of quartet composers closer to home in Britain including Frank Bridge, John Foulds, Alan Bush, Benjamin Britten, Michael Tippett, and of course Elizabeth Maconchy.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Frank Howes and Christina Bashford, 'Cobbett, Walter Willson', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06006>> [accessed 12 October 2009].

¹⁴⁵ Cliff Eisen, et al., 'String Quartet', *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40899>> [accessed 10 September 2007].

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Maconchy's String Quartets of this Period

Maconchy's first three string quartets are among her best-known compositions dating from this period. The string quartet is a medium for which Maconchy had a lifelong affinity, and the following quotation, taken from the self-penned sleeve notes of the 1989 recording of her *Complete String Quartets*, conveys her view as to what it was, in her experience, that essentially set the string quartet apart from other musical media:

The expressive quality which strings possess in greater degree than any other instrument, the unity of the four balanced voices which at the same time are capable of immense flexibility and variety of texture and colour – their corporate strength, the economy and clarity with which they can carry on a musical argument, these are the basic qualities of a string quartet.¹⁴⁷

Maconchy returned to string quartet composition all through her career and regarded it as the medium best suited to the expression of the kind of music she wished to compose – 'music as an impassioned argument'.¹⁴⁸ The following quote by musicologist Gerald Abraham illuminates Bartók's similar relationship to the medium:

There have not been many 'series' of quartets since Beethoven at all . . . It is quite rare to find, as we do in Bartók, a composer who has turned to the string quartet at every stage of his creative career and put into his quartets the very best of himself.¹⁴⁹

Like Bartók, Maconchy too poured into her quartets the 'very best of [herself]'.

It is a long-established fact that the precise and economical nature of the string quartet renders it a difficult and challenging medium for both the composer and

¹⁴⁷ Maconchy, 'Elizabeth Maconchy on Writing String Quartets'.

¹⁴⁸ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 28.

¹⁴⁹ Gerald Abraham, 'The Bartók of the Quartets', *Music and Letters*, 26 (1945), pp. 185–94 (p. 185).

the players. It was the weight of writing under such limitations, however, that ultimately intensified the allure of the genre for Maconchy:¹⁵⁰

The pursuit of the argument, its shaping into a satisfying musical form, the cut and thrust of the counterpoint – these all stimulate the imagination and stretch the intellect – there lies the perpetual challenge of writing a quartet. It combines the instinct, concentration and skill of writing a sonnet with the excitement of driving a four-in-hand.¹⁵¹

In spite of having written a great deal of music for strings, Maconchy herself did not play a stringed instrument. A few violin lessons from Anne Macnaghten when she was young enabled her to feel her way around the instrument, but most of her compositional work was done at the piano.¹⁵² This, Maconchy explains, was simply ‘a question of making a physical sound’ to help create a sound-world in which she could grant her ideas room to manoeuvre; she did not listen to what she was playing, nor did she consider it to be piano music.¹⁵³

To illustrate her views on the place occupied by each of the four instruments in a string quartet, Maconchy uses the analogy of ‘four characters engaged in an impassioned debate’.¹⁵⁴ In this debate, an initial statement is declared by one of the characters which is then responded to/interrupted by the second; the third then offers a conflicting opinion, and so on. The nature of the debate allows for the original statement to be challenged or distorted, which in turn leads to the manifestation and further distortion of new ideas, instigating an oscillation of

¹⁵⁰ Maconchy, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy on Writing String Quartets’.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Maconchy, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy on Writing String Quartets’.

dramatic tension as the discourse progresses. Towards the end of the debate, the essential ‘threads’ will be drawn together, and there will be a summation of ideas, leaving the four characters with a sense of having resolved the problem.

But the forms that a musical discussion can take, like a discussion in words, are infinite – and music always has this advantage over words – several voices can speak at once and be perfectly understood – four points of view can be presented simultaneously to make an intelligible many-sided statement. This is the kind of thing I most want to write, and though I have written in many other forms – orchestral, string orchestra, vocal music, opera and so on – I am always drawn back to chamber music and above all to writing string quartets.¹⁵⁵

Maconchy’s first three quartets were written between the years 1932 and 1938, a period of considerable personal difficulty for the young composer, due not least to its concurrence with her contraction of TB. Despite adverse working conditions, Maconchy is credited with handling the medium with ‘complete assurance’, writing in a ‘fully-formed’ musical language, even at this early stage.¹⁵⁶ From Baroque-like technical precision and Classical format and lyricism, to lush Romantic textures and daring Modernist harmonic and rhythmic vitality, the ‘passionate intellectualism and intellectual passion’ sought by Maconchy in all of her compositional endeavours are evident in her cycle of quartets from the outset.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Rickards, [untitled], p. 40.

Quartet Number	Year of composition	Movements
String Quartet No. 1	1932/33	I. Allegro feroce II. Scherzo (Allegro molto) III. Andante sostenuto IV. Presto
String Quartet No. 2	1936	I. Molto lento II. Poco presto III. Lento sostenuto IV. Allegro
String Quartet No.3	1938	One continuous movement

Table 4: Early Period Quartets

Maconchy's first two quartets adhere to the traditional four-movement scheme which was first adopted by Haydn in his op.9 (1769–70) and has by and large remained the structural norm for the majority of subsequent quartet composers.¹⁵⁷ By the Third Quartet, Maconchy experiments with this traditional form, opting to complete the work instead in one continuous movement. Interestingly, it is not until Maconchy's late quartets, namely the Tenth and Eleventh, that this one-movement structure is again adopted, although Maconchy often asked that selected movements run continuously into one another. The Second Quartet, for example, exploits the latter formal mechanism, wherein the second movement continues into the third, and the third continues into the fourth. This device was by no means unique to Maconchy or even to twentieth-century composition: continuously-running movements were a formal feature at least as far back as the early 1800s, when Beethoven began including them in his symphonies (namely

¹⁵⁷ Eisen, et al., 'String Quartet'.

his Fifth and Sixth).¹⁵⁸ In a more contemporary context, Schoenberg's First Quartet (1904/05) is written as a continuous whole, as is his First Chamber Symphony (1906), and Bartók's Third Quartet is written to run without a break.

The thematic and motivic material woven into the fabric of Maconchy's early quartets is typically less dense than that of their successors. The aural emphasis is slightly more horizontal than vertical, by which is meant the individual lines can be audibly followed with greater ease in the earlier quartets than in those of subsequent periods. This perhaps accounts in part for the relative accessibility of these early works over their successors.

The First Quartet comprises four movements which are broadly independent of each other. From the second quartet onwards, Maconchy began developing a type of cyclic form whereby thematic material from one movement recurred in another. This structural device enabled Maconchy to create a sense of musical unity not dissimilar to that achieved by Romantic composers such as Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner through use of the *idée fixe* or *leitmotif*. Maconchy subsequently expanded the scope of the device even further by quoting material not just from movement to movement but from quartet to quartet: the 'interruption- motif' concept exploited in the Second Quartet, for example, appears again in her Fourth, bringing cyclic form into a wider context whereby it unifies entire works (see Ex. 27, 28).

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Kerman, et al., 'Beethoven, Ludwig van', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40026pg15>> [accessed 3 February 2010].

In terms of harmony, Maconchy's early output is generally more tonally-oriented than in her later career. With regard to the quartets, this is evidenced by the inclusion of a key signature in the second movement of the First Quartet, the only specified key signature in her entire cycle of quartets. Broadly-speaking, it would be more accurate to say that Maconchy's quartets are 'on' as opposed to 'in' keys. Like in Bartók's cycle of six quartets, 'key notes serve as orientation points: [...] the music is organised around them, modally or chromatically, freely fluctuating, using the key-notes as points of departure and points of repose, affecting modulation from and back to them'.¹⁵⁹ In many ways, Maconchy's harmonic language reflects that of an 'intervallic' composer, whereby considerable emphasis is placed on the sonic manifestation of specific intervals, rather than that created by traditionally-recognised modes or keys.

A closer look at aspects of the actual works in question is required to explore the finer points of the musical characteristics outlined in this section. The First and Second Quartets serve as useful examples, as they provide insightful comparative reading into the rapid stylistic development which took place at this early stage of the composer's career.

¹⁵⁹ Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, p. 173.

String Quartet No. 1

String Quartet No. 1 was composed in 1932/33. It was written for the Macnaghten Quartet, by whom it was premiered as part of the Macnaghten-Lemare concerts in the Mercury Theatre in May 1933. It is divided into four independent movements:

- I. Allegro feroce
- II. Scherzo (Allegro Molto)
- III. Andante sostenuto
- IV. Presto

It is said of Bartók's First Quartet that there are times when it could almost conceivably have been written by Ravel, so closely reminiscent are its compositional procedures of French Impressionism.¹⁶⁰ Like that of Bartók, Maconchy's First Quartet has been evaluated as a 'début piece' in which the composer is still finding her musical voice.¹⁶¹ In spite of this assertion, however, many of the essential threads of Maconchy's distinctive musical vocabulary are already discernible in this quartet, as will become more apparent upon closer inspection of both this and subsequent works. In terms of form, harmonic language, rhythm, and texture, the First Quartet is a work of appreciable stylistic substance, to the extent, in fact, that reviewer Guy Rickards proposed its being more similar to the late quartets, than to those temporally closer:

In many ways the first essay has more in common with the late quartets, Nos. 11-13, rather than with its immediate successors, not least in its concision (it plays for just 13 minutes) [...]¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ The Emerson String Quartet, 'The Bartók Quartets: A Guide for Performers and Music Lovers', <http://www.carnegiehall.org/article/explore_and_learn/art_performanceguide_index.html> [accessed 7 September 2009].

¹⁶¹ Rickards, [untitled], p. 40.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

The Thirteenth Quartet (*Quartetto Corto*) in particular contains stylistic features distinctly reminiscent of Maconchy's début quartet, and a brief discussion of it will be included in the late-period chapter of this study.

String Quartet No. 1 has been described by Nicola LeFanu as 'overflowing with youthful energy'.¹⁶³ This is an instantly striking attribute of this work, and indeed one which permeates all of her subsequent quartets to some degree, regardless of their time of composition. From the vigorous, driving, syncopated rhythm of the opening figure to the 'unexpected twists and turns' of the final *Presto*, energy is evident in abundance throughout this quartet.¹⁶⁴

The first movement, *Allegro feroce*, is dominated by the dynamic repeated-note syncopated figure which opens the quartet (see Ex. 10), the intensity of which subsides only twice throughout the movement: in two sections marked *tranquillo* (RN 4 and 11), which are characterised by 5/4 metre and fifths sustained in the cello.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ LeFanu, sleeve notes for *Complete String Quartets*, compact disc FRC 9301, 1989.

¹⁶⁴ Maconchy, sleeve notes for *Complete String Quartets*.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Allegro feroce (♩ = circa 148)
sul G.

Vln I
ff

Vln II
ff

Vla
ff

Vc
ff

Ex. 10: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: I: b.1-4

The second movement, a mischievous and fantastical *Scherzo* of little over two minutes in duration, features light, capricious rhythmic and textural qualities hazily reminiscent of a Holstian or Mendelssohnian idiom. It is a high-powered, fast-paced contrapuntal movement, its boundless energy dwindling only slightly with the introduction of an expressive cello melody from RN 17, bar 12, through to RN 18, bar 11 (see Ex. 11).

Cello
mf espress

mp

Ex. 11: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: II: RN 17, b. 12-22

The third movement, *Andante sostenuto*, contrasts considerably with the previous two movements, introducing darker sonorities and expansive melodies into the work. It is a deeply expressive movement defined by a juxtaposition of poignant solo melodies with softly-grating accompanying voices. Ex. 12 illustrates Maconchy's employment of this juxtaposition in the opening bars, wherein the first violin sustains the melodic interest while the three remaining voices shift languidly beneath. The cello line softly punctuates the discourse through use of *pizzicato/arco* alternation, which infuses a subtly distinctive rippling motion into the texture.

Andante Sostenuto (♩ = circa. 80)

Vln I
p espress

Vln II
p

Vla
p

Vc
p
pizz. arco pizz. arco pizz. arco

pizz. arco pizz.

Ex. 12: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: III: b. 1-5

A further distinctive characteristic of the third movement is Maconchy's intermittent use of arpeggiated gestures. Because the melodic contours in the First Quartet move predominantly in scalar motion or in terms of narrow intervals, this feature is particularly striking. At RN 27–28, for example (see Ex. 13), the viola makes extensive use of arpeggiated passages. The first two (RN 27 bars 3–4) are root position arpeggios in C sharp minor; the next three (RN 27 bars 4–6) are first inversion arpeggios in B flat minor; and the final three (RN 27 bar 8, RN 28 bars 1–2) are root position arpeggios in B minor.

The image shows a musical score for the Viola part, consisting of two staves. The first staff contains measures 3, 4, 5, and 6 of RN 27. Measure 3 is a root position arpeggio in C sharp minor (C#-E-G-A-B). Measure 4 is a first inversion arpeggio in B flat minor (Bb-D-Eb-F). Measure 5 is a first inversion arpeggio in B flat minor (Bb-D-Eb-F). Measure 6 is a first inversion arpeggio in B flat minor (Bb-D-Eb-F). The second staff contains measures 8, 1, and 2 of RN 28. Measure 8 is a root position arpeggio in B minor (B-D-E-F). Measure 1 of RN 28 is a root position arpeggio in B minor (B-D-E-F). Measure 2 of RN 28 is a root position arpeggio in B minor (B-D-E-F). Dynamics include *f*, *ff*, and *meno f*. The score is in 3/4 time and features various accidentals and articulation marks.

Ex. 13: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: III: RN 27, b. 3–8

These arpeggios have the effect of emphasising the comparatively tonal makeup of this quartet by affecting a definite shift in the harmonic centre: first down a minor third (C sharp minor–B flat minor), then up a semitone (B flat minor–B minor). The type of tonality alluded to here is not ‘tonal’ in a traditional sense, whereby specific cadences and modulations might be expected, but rather the work is ‘tonal’ insofar as it features familiar chordal structures, and as such could not readily constitute ‘atonal’ music.

The *Presto* finale is a crisp, unpredictable movement, which is instantly identifiable by the series of ominous *forte/fortissimo* repeated chords (see Ex. 14) that dissolve seamlessly into and out of frivolous lyrical *pianissimo* gestures.¹⁶⁶

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, specifically the fourth movement (IV) of Maconchy's String Quartet No. 1. The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers measures 14-17, and the second system covers measures 30-34. The instruments are Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc). The music is in 2/4 time and features a series of repeated chords in the lower strings (Vln II, Vla, Vc) and a more melodic line in the Violin I part. The dynamics range from *f* (forte) to *p* (piano).

Ex. 14: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: IV: RN 29, b. 14–17 – RN 30, b. 1–4

Compositional Procedures

Many aspects relating to the formal strategies employed in Maconchy's First Quartet are Classically-derived. The work's separation into four independent movements is perhaps the most obvious parallel, recalling the late-eighteenth-century symphonic layout most closely associated with the Germanic tradition

¹⁶⁶ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

typified by Haydn and Mozart. Unlike that of *The Land*, the order in which the movements are positioned is also redolent of this era: two fast outer movements flanking two inner movements, one of which is a dance while the other is slow: *Allegro feroce – Scherzo – Andante sostenuto – Presto*.

Unlike Classical practice, Maconchy was not fastidious about impressing the utmost degree of structural clarity into her movements: rather than mould musical ideas into pre-existing templates, such as sonata form, Maconchy adopted a less conscious approach, allowing a greater degree of freedom for her musical ideas to germinate:

I have an overall plan when I begin to write, but I find I modify and change it out of all recognition as the piece grows, or even scrap it altogether. Musical material requires to create its own form and, if it has any vitality, you cannot force it into a prefabricated strait-jacket without killing it. As the music grows, its appropriate form grows along with it, hence the need to scrap the preconceived plan.¹⁶⁷

This strategy had the effect of producing four very distinct movements in her First Quartet, each of which consists for the most part of repeated and developed statements of the germinal ideas present in the opening material of each movement.

The issue of the ‘germ’ or ‘*donné*’ as Maconchy called it, clearly betrays the influence of Central European Modernism, particularly that of Bartók, who was fascinated by the structural concept of ‘a series of epidermal layers surrounding a germ’ and exploited the formal model extensively in his works.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 29.

¹⁶⁸ David Cooper, *Bartók: Concerto for Orchestra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 14.

Characteristic throughout [Bartók's quartets] is the motivic work – the construction of entire movements or of entire works from minute musical fragments, constantly varied, extended, transformed.¹⁶⁹

In his 1959 article in the journal *Notes*, reviewer Lawrence Morton expressed reservations about the germinal material underlying Maconchy's First Quartet, stating that 'the thematic material exposed at the opening of each of the four movements is singularly unattractive'. In spite of his misgivings, however, he conceded that there was 'vigor and passion in this music, [...] and enough correctness to satisfy certain academic requirements as well'.¹⁷⁰

While it is impossible to ascertain the precise criteria against which Maconchy's musical ideas were measured by Morton in order to be labelled 'unattractive', the issue solicits some degree of speculation. The opening of the first movement consists of a two-bar syncopated violin figure in 2/4 built on a repetition of the note E flat, which resolves downwards in bar 3 to an open-fifth D chord, which is enunciated simultaneously by all four voices, before the syncopated violin figure on E flat again dominates proceedings (see Ex. 10). The repetitive minor-second interplay between E flat and D immediately imposes a biting dissonance on the harmonic discourse of the movement, and does so in a manner which is strident and forthright. This type of 'intervallic' writing, where the emphasis is placed on one or a small number of intervals, is an element of Maconchy's style that occasionally attracts negative attention: composer Edmund Rubbra, writing in *Music and Letters* (1939), for example, vilifies the harmonic device in relation to her Third String Quartet:

¹⁶⁹ Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, p. 173.

¹⁷⁰ Lawrence Morton, [untitled], *Notes*, 16 (1959), pp. 314–15 (p. 314).

There is much to admire in this music [...]. Unfortunately, as in much of this composer's work, the obsession with a particular interval, in this case a major seventh, so dips the music's wings that it continually moves in a closed circle.¹⁷¹

The intervallic significance of the minor second in the motivic construction of the First Quartet is substantial. The second movement again features frequent minor-second allusions, the third features minor and major second utterances, while the fourth gestures regularly towards the minor second and its inversion, the major seventh. [Given that this criticism has intermittently arisen in relation to Maconchy's musical language, it is possible that Morton was basing his own negative impression on similar grounds. This said, a glance at any of Morton's often amusing music reviews reveals that to receive his approval was a very rare accolade indeed. In discussing American composer Peter Mennin's (1923–1983) String Quartet No. 2 (1951) in the same edition of *Notes*, for example, he writes: 'The slow movement seems to be there because one can't have a quartet without one. But I think Mennin should'.¹⁷² Similarly, he writes of Heitor Villa-Lobos' (1887–1959) String Quartet No. 9 (1945) and *Quatorzième quatuor à cordes* (1917):

Banality is, I fear, the watermark of this music and the composer cannot hide it even by dragging in through sheer force certain asperities of harmony and melody [...]. Even the fugued passages, and there are many, seem calculated primarily to fill pages. Certainly they don't rise out of the necessity of the material. But then I have strong doubts about the necessity of the material.¹⁷³

In each of the criticisms outlined above, Morton adopts a generally critical outlook, not clearly alluding to any specific failings on the part of composer. This presents a certain difficulty in deciphering what exactly it was that essentially fell

¹⁷¹ E.R., [untitled], *Music and Letters*, 20 (1939), p. 453.

¹⁷² Morton, [untitled], p.315.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

short of the reviewer's expectations, which has the adverse effect of lessening its impact on those at whom it is directed.]

The 'germs' or '*donnés*', which form the basis of Maconchy's First Quartet, receive similar developmental treatment as those of her subsequent quartets: an initial statement is presented to the four 'characters' who modify, expand and transform the material until such time as a compromise is reached and resolution formulated. Like those of Bartók, the motivic processes propelling Maconchy's quartets onward are naturally-derived:

His motives, frequently of two or three notes only, are in a continuous state of regeneration. They grow organically; they proliferate; the evolutionary process is kinetic.¹⁷⁴

At the beginning of Maconchy's second movement, for example, the folk-like motivic material first stated by the second violin quickly develops into a canonic passage between the top two voices (see Ex. 15). The first violin adopts a version of the original motif in the upper register at bar 6 with slight rhythmic or melodic alteration, and the resultant canonic interplay ensues until the introduction of the viola at bar 16.

¹⁷⁴ Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, p. 173.

Allegro molto (♩ = c.154)

The image shows a musical score for two violins and two lower strings (viola and cello). The tempo is marked 'Allegro molto' with a quarter note equal to approximately 154 beats per minute. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 6/8. Violin I is mostly silent. Violin II plays a melodic line starting with a forte (f) dynamic. The bottom two staves show the viola and cello parts, with the viola playing a rhythmic pattern of slurred three-quaver groups.

Ex. 15: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: II: b. 1–9

At this point (from one bar before RN 14), the opening motif undergoes a period of regeneration (see Ex. 16). The viola picks up on the tiny three-quaver pattern implicit in the original material (see Ex. 15: violin II, b. 2, 5; violin I, b. 7) and runs with it almost obsessively over the next nine bars, while the second violin progresses concurrently with a contrasting melodic line, also derived from the opening motif (see Ex.15: violin II, b. 7, 8). The three-quaver viola pattern differs from its derivation in that all three quavers are slurred, as opposed to just the first two of the original statement. Melodically, both versions are similarly exploitative of the minor second. The regenerated second violin line is slightly more removed from its ‘germ’, relatively speaking: the perfect fourth interval exploited in bars 7 and 8 of the original second violin line (see Ex. 15) is seized upon and presented a tone lower in a rhythmically-contracted guise in RN 14, bars 4 and 5 (see Ex. 16).

Ex. 16: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: II: RN 14, b. 3–7

Diminutive transformations of this variety - whether in terms of harmony, rhythm or texture - ensue all throughout this movement, thus clearly illustrating Maconchy's use of the organic evolutionary process outlined above in relation to Bartók.

Summary

The sound-world created by Maconchy in her First Quartet is one which discloses a diversity of formative influences. Baroque fugal figures (seen, for example, at the opening of the second movement (Ex. 15)) converge with rich Romantic textures (seen for instance in the third movement's opening (Ex. 12)) and a Classically-inspired formal idiom; all of this is encased in a rhythmic and harmonic mould reminiscent of a Modernist paradigm. When placed in the context of her entire quartet cycle, the First Quartet is recognisably an early Maconchy work. The fact that she had not yet developed her cyclic style, wherein the various movements are interrelated, is probably one of the foremost indications of its début status. The greater sense of tonality and less tersely-argued motivic content also goes some way towards rendering the work more easily accessible to the listener.

In many ways, the First Quartet is the perfect introduction to Maconchy's quartets: it is listener-friendly, but a combination of constructive forces ensures that the characteristic Maconchy sound is intact. The exploitation of *donné*-derived materials for motivic purposes, for instance, is typical of the composer all through her career, as is the prevalent employment of specific intervals for harmonic effect. Rhythmically too, hallmarks are discernible: frequent metric alteration and the unusual placement of accents for example (see Ex. 12 and 10 respectively)—also strongly in evidence in *The Land*—continue to feature in her ensuing output. The relative accessibility of this work, coupled with the fact that many of her essential compositional threads are nevertheless present, makes it a suitable starting-point from which to embark on the journey through the composer's quartets.

String Quartet No. 2

String Quartet No. 2 was composed in 1936 and was given its first performance by the Brosa Quartet at the ISCM Festival in Paris in 1937. Maconchy describes this work as more introverted and searching than the First Quartet, the latter's 'exuberant energy' giving way to darker sonorities and heightened intensity.¹⁷⁵

Maconchy's Second Quartet is written in four movements, with the second, third and fourth running continuously without a break. The sequence of movements mirrors that of *The Land*, whereby the first and third movements are slow while the second and fourth are fast.

¹⁷⁵ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

- I. Molto lento
- II. Poco presto
- III. Lento sostenuto
- IV. Allegro

In both *The Land* and the First Quartet, Maconchy's use of counterpoint is minimal. From the Second Quartet onward, however, contrapuntal procedures become an integral constituent of the composer's musical architecture. The versatility of the compositional tool appealed to Maconchy:

[Counterpoint] may be a serene weaving of melodic parts, or it may be a means of harmonic development – the moving horizontal lines coalesce to form new vertical combinations and harmonic progressions – something that has always interested me more than harmony treated merely as colour. Or counterpoint may be used to heighten emotional tension – as in Beethoven's dramatic use of it, particularly in his string quartets¹⁷⁶

In other words, according to Maconchy, counterpoint could have three diverse functions: first, the production of serenely weaving melodic parts; second, as a means of harmonic development; and third, as a vehicle for heightening emotional tension. In the Second Quartet, each of these functions is present to a considerable extent, and more often than not, the three appear in some sort of combination. In the course of this discussion, attention will be drawn to selected instances of each of these functions and combinations.

¹⁷⁶ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 28.

Movement I

The first movement builds itself up from tiny fugal beginnings to a vastly intense piece of music, and offers only snatches of respite from its insidious leaden vigour. The slowly-unfolding viola melody with which it opens is the seed, or *donné*, from which the entire motivic interest of the work grows:

Molto lento (♩ = circa 48)

Viola

p *espress*

Ex. 17: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: I: b. 1–5

The subsequent fugal treatment of the opening viola gesture exemplifies Maconchy's use of counterpoint for the purpose of heightening intensity, the third of the three previously-outlined functions (see Ex. 22).

The first movement could be considered as divided principally into four musical segments, each of which terminates in a climax of increasing potency. The first climactic incline encompasses the sixteen-bar opening *Molto Lento* section, growing out of the initial viola theme, and increasing in density until its abrupt termination at the end of RN 1, bar 8. The second incline develops out of the sweetly-interlacing violin melodies which take up where the opening *Molto Lento* left off, at RN 1, bar 9 (see Ex. 18); and peaks during the latter half of RN 3 following a comparatively homophonic *fortissimo* figure which had been steadily strengthening up to this point (see Ex. 19).

Lento (Tempo II ♩ = c. 60)

Vln I
p subito

Vln II
p subito

Ex. 18: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: I: RN 1, b. 9–10

Lento (♩ = 60)

Vln I
piu ff

Vln II
piu ff

Vla
piu ff

Vc
piu ff

Ex. 19: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: I: RN 3, b. 6–8

The violin interplay outlined in Ex. 18 is an archetypal example of Maconchy's use of counterpoint for the production of serenely weaving melodic parts. Both the first and second violins play segments derived from the opening viola motif: the first violin presents material related to the earlier part of the *donné* motif (see Ex. 17, b. 1, 2), while the second violin uses material related to the latter part (see Ex. 17, b. 3, 4, 5). The *Lento* tempo and *pianissimo subito* dynamic marking which underpin this segment further enhance the serene expressivity of these interwoven melodies.

The third climactic apex is reached at RN 5 bars 4–5, following an ‘emotion-heightening’ contrapuntal arrangement of the *donné* material in the upper voices, accompanied by a vigorously-alternating *pizzicato/arco* figure articulated first by both the viola and cello, and later by just the cello (see Ex. 20). And the final incline evolves out of a poignant second-violin-statement of the original *donné* material at RN 5, bar 8, and reaches its final *tutti fff* climax in the closing *Molto Lento* segment, five bars before the movement’s ending (see Ex. 21).

Ex. 20: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: I: RN 5, b. 1–5

Molto Lento (Tempo I ♩ = 48)

Vln I
 Vln II
 Vla
 Vc

fff
fff
fff
fff

sul C

Ex. 21: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: I: RN 7, b. 4

In the first movement alone, it is apparent that contrapuntal procedures are responsible for many aspects of the resultant sound-world. Its role in creating a ‘serene weaving of melodic parts’ and that of heightening emotional tension are perhaps its most immediately noticeable embodiments, but the second specified function—its use as a ‘means of harmonic development’—is also a noteworthy component of this movement.

Like *The Land* and the First Quartet, this work does not treat harmony in the conventional sense of the word, where, for example, one might expect clear modulations to occur. Instead, Maconchy uses a device, whether consciously or unconsciously, whereby harmonic interest is generated using blocks of stacked intervals which expand and reduce in intensity in accordance with the ebb and flow of the core argument. Because counterpoint is so often the chosen vehicle by which the core argument is transported, its role in the subsequent harmonic development of the work is crucial. This ‘harmonic-blocking’ device is used extensively throughout the work, but an example in previously discussed material

can be found in the opening fugal passage: the *donné* viola figure is introduced on C (see Ex. 17) accompanied by a G drone in the cello line; the second violin then enters in bar 6 with a similar *donné*-derived figure, this time on G, a fifth above the original statement; then, in bar 8, the first violin presents the figure, this time on D, again a fifth above the previous entry (see Ex. 22):

The musical score for Ex. 22 consists of four staves: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. The time signature is 3/4. The Vln I staff starts in bar 8 with a melodic line marked 'espress.' and 'mp'. The Vln II staff starts in bar 6 with a melodic line marked 'p espress.' and 'mp'. The Vla staff starts in bar 1 with a melodic line marked 'mp'. The Vc staff has a drone line marked 'poco a poco cresc.'.

Ex. 22: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: I: b. 6–9

A combination of the varying tone centres of each of the three melodic lines, together with their irregularly-staggered entries, and the fact that each presents slightly different versions of the *donné*, makes this section particularly illustrative of the ‘harmonic-blocking’ device in question. The interplay between the cello and viola during bars 1–5 produces two-note chords of varying intervals; the addition of the second violin at bar 6 produces triads of varying intervals, thus creating a further layer of sound; and the further addition of the first violin in bar 8 produces tetrachords, (and five-note chords where the viola harmonics appear). This gradual layering of sound through counterpoint, together with a constantly-evolving intervallic structure within the chords themselves, exemplifies the

‘blocked’ approach to harmony adopted frequently by Maconchy from this quartet onward.

Movement II

The second movement, *Poco presto*, is constructed on a frenzied, more defiant strain of the *donné* motif than the previous movement, and is dominated by the minor-second-rich dotted-quaver rhythm with which it opens:

poco presto (♩ = circa 280-90)
sul tasto
Viola
pp

Ex. 23: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: II: b. 1–4

Most of the second movement is identifiable by the continually-alternating 5/8–4/8 metre which is clearly visible in these introductory bars. This motivic substance represents a unifying rondo-like refrain to which each musical deviation, of which there are principally two, invariably returns.

The first musical deviation occurs at RN 10, bar 12, and continues through the *Lento* section to RN 11, bar 7. Here, the frenetic jerkiness of the core figure subsides into a playful *piano* section. The 5/8–4/8 dotted-quaver figure is transformed into a smoother variation, most of which is scored in continuous 5/8 with the occasional addition of 3/8 and 7/8. The earlier part of this deviation is characterised by the chase-like quality implicit in its contrapuntal content (see Ex.

24): the cello presents a rhythmically-varied version of the initial dotted-quaver figure, while the second violin enters with a similar figure three quavers later, its melodic content transposed up by the degree of a perfect fourth. This use of counterpoint serves both to heighten emotional intensity and to affect harmonic interest, thereby representing an instance where the second and third specified functions of counterpoint are used in combination.

Ex. 24: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: II: RN 10, b. 12–15

The *Lento* section, which constitutes the second part of the first deviation from the core rhythmic motif, is identified by the heavy resonances invoked through the presence of sustained chords and comparatively homophonic writing:

Lento (♩ = c. 140)

Vln I
pp
pesante ∨
molto cresc.
f

Vln II
pp
pesante ∨
molto cresc.
f

Vla
pp
pesante ∨
molto cresc.
f

Vc
pp
molto cresc.
f

Ex. 25: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: II: RN 11, b. 1–4

This *Lento* figure recurs at RN 16 and represents the second main deviation from the dominant rhythmic pattern of this movement. This second incarnation is similar to the first, the principal differences being the *fortissimo* dynamic-marking, the extremes of register in the first violin, and the heavily-accented scoring:

Ex. 26: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: II: RN 16, b. 1–4

These musical deviations provide a short respite from the relentless driving force of the otherwise dominant dotted-quaver figure, thereby typifying the ‘balanced and reasoned’ approach to composition perpetually sought by Maconchy in her creative ventures.¹⁷⁷

Movement III

The second movement proceeds without a break to the *Lento sostenuto* of the third movement. This movement is characterised by slow sumptuous lyrical lines which are erratically interrupted by agitated melodic fragments:

¹⁷⁷ See quote at n. 13.

Lento sostenuto (♩ = 50-52)

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

pizz. *p* arco *f* *agitato*
pizz. *p* arco *p* *tranquillo ma espress*
(lunga) *p* *tranquillo ma espress*
pizz. *p* arco *f* *agitato*

Ex. 27: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: III: b. 1-4

The razor-sharp execution of these agitated fragments imposes an unnerving sense of volatility on the otherwise tranquil discourse. Maconchy implements a comparable device in her Fourth Quartet to similar effect:

Tempo I Presto Tempo I Presto

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

arco *f* arco *f*
pizz. *f*

Ex. 28: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 4: I: b. 82-85

The manifestation of the device in the Fourth Quartet is particularly vicious, in that it penetrates the texture more completely than in the Second: in Ex. 28 above, for instance, the ‘*Presto*’ bars contain the agitated fragmentary figures, while the ‘*Tempo I*’ (Allegro) bars contain the would-be broad-arching lyrical lines which fall victim to these erratic disruptions. The homophonic articulation of these agitated fragments is typical of the Fourth Quartet and has the effect of rendering their delivery somewhat more forthright and austere than that of those featured in the Second. That they stem from the same motivic spring, however, is not in doubt. The angular, erratic, heavily-accented nature of the respective figures, together with their capacity to distract the listener completely from the surrounding textures, leaves little question as to their parallel origins.

This compositional device is strongly reminiscent of the ‘interruption motif’ used extensively by Janáček in his music. The first movement of his Violin Sonata (1914–15), for example, features the motif (see Ex. 29), namely in the way in which the short jagged violin fragments unexpectedly interrupt the lyrical, expansive piano melody.

The image shows a musical score for two instruments: Violin (Vln) and Piano (Pno). The Violin part is on a single staff with a treble clef, showing several short, jagged fragments marked with a 'V' and the tempo marking 'un poco meno'. The Piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a grand staff bracket. It features a lyrical melody marked 'dolce' and 'un poco meno', with triplets and a 'Rec.' marking. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4.

Ex. 29: Janáček: Violin Sonata: I: b. 53–54

The stylistic similarity between Maconchy and Janáček has been drawn on numerous occasions. Upon the release of her *Complete String Quartets* recording (1989), for instance, reviewer Guy Rickards wrote the following of the Second Quartet:

By contrast (to the First), the Second Quartet (1936) adumbrates the more lyrical side of Maconchy's nature, and betrays in part the influence of Janáček, especially in the *Lento sostenuto* slow movement. The high spirits of the First Quartet are swapped for searing eloquence which makes it a much deeper work, more searching, though just as sure in its touch. .. It is far removed from the Englishness of Butterworth or even Vaughan Williams.¹⁷⁸

It is not surprising that traces of Janáček's style are discernible in Maconchy's music: she was profoundly affected by his work ever since attending a performance of his tragic opera *Jenůfa* during her time in Prague, so much so that her daughter Nicola suggests that in many ways, his music was probably as much an influence on her style as that of Bartók.¹⁷⁹ The extreme intensity implicit in the music of both is also a shared characteristic. A key difference between their respective styles lies in their relative exploitation of contrapuntal procedures: Janáček did not use counterpoint widely, unlike Maconchy, for whom it increasingly came to constitute an integral component to her compositional trajectory.

Movement IV

The final movement of Maconchy's Second Quartet is predominantly cheeky and mischievous, but features occasional interludes of impassioned expressivity which

¹⁷⁸ Rickards, [untitled], p. 40.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

are characterised by metric alternation between 3/4 and 4/4 and Mannheim sigh-type scoring in individual lines (see Ex. 30). Towards the end of the movement, the *donné* viola theme, which initiated the entire work, is heard *fortissimo* in the cello (RN 37), thereby creating an overall sense of resolution and unity within the work.

Ex. 30: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: IV: RN 28, b. 3–6

The fourth movement begins with the slow *pizzicato* cello passage which closed the previous movement. A playful *staccato* folk-like melody is introduced in the fifth bar (see Ex. 31), immediately imprinting on this movement its characteristic mischievousness.

Ex. 31: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: IV: b. 5–6

This melody very obviously derives from the second half of the initial *donné* (see Ex. 17), beginning with a melodic pattern identical in terms of pitch to that stated across bars 4 and 5 of the opening viola [G, F sharp, F natural, E].

The first impassioned interlude presents itself at RN 28, bar 3 (see Ex. 30), and the ensuing interplay between these two chief musical concepts dominates the remainder of the finale. As the movement progresses the edges of these independent musical concepts become blurred: at RN 31, bar 5, for example, both lines appear simultaneously:

Ex. 32: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 2: IV: RN 31, b. 5–RN 32, b. 1

At this point, the folk-like melody is clearly stated in the first violin, while the second violin and viola transparently articulate melodic and rhythmic matter more akin to the second idea. Positioning contrasting ideas parallel to one another in this manner is characteristic of Maconchy at each stage of her compositional development. In later works, the ideas become progressively more integrated, such that it is often difficult to discern from whence the motifs originated; but in these earlier works, such effects are more audibly palpable. Maconchy refers to this act of placing completely contrasting musical ideas on top of one another as ‘rhythmic counterpoint’:

I use a counterpoint of rhythms as well as melodic lines – so you may have two or more independent rhythms working together simultaneously. And the object of all this is to achieve a more concentrated expression of the emotion implicit in the musical ideas themselves.¹⁸⁰

Rhythmic counterpoint as a compositional procedure will be mentioned often in musical discussions throughout this study, as the frequency with which Maconchy employed the device increased significantly with the evolution of her style.

Summary

Maconchy's Second Quartet possesses a sound-world which is in many ways quite independent from the two previously-discussed works. The extensive use of counterpoint, both in its conventional sense and in terms of rhythm, is a defining difference. While Maconchy incorporated this compositional procedure into her earlier works to a certain extent, it did not constitute 'the whole of the picture'.¹⁸¹ From her Second Quartet onwards however, counterpoint played a fundamental role in shaping her stylistic identity.

In durational terms, the Second Quartet is on a significantly more expansive scale than the First. In fact, with an approximate playing-time of twenty minutes (compared to the First Quartet's thirteen), String Quartet No. 2 even exceeds *The Land* in terms of its length. Interestingly, her Third Quartet, written two years later, lasts just ten minutes, making it the shortest of the four works in question.

This may be symptomatic of Maconchy's semi-conscious approach to

¹⁸⁰ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

composition, as reflected in her previously-outlined views (addressed as part of the First Quartet discussion) about music requiring ‘to create its own form’. In other words, the significantly-varying lengths of the aforementioned works would seem to support the notion that Maconchy composed in accordance with the demands implicit in the work itself.

Because fewer instrumental forces are at work in the quartets than in *The Land*, one might imagine Maconchy to have experienced a profound sense of restriction in the composition thereof. Paradoxically, however, the limitations of writing for string quartet seemed, in Maconchy’s case, to allow more room for manoeuvre. The practical downsizing implied by writing for the quartet medium in actuality led to a creative blossoming. In the Second Quartet, in particular, Maconchy exhibits an inventiveness and economic resourcefulness on a scale previously unrivalled in her output. Her cyclic use of the initial *donné*, for example, is a case in point: throughout the work, material deriving from the *donné* continually emerges, yet its impact is always fresh and innovative. This sort of motivic regeneration is largely responsible for the relatively more complex, intricate and concentrated sound characteristic of the Second Quartet, when compared with the two previously-discussed works.

On the one hand, the three works explored in this chapter represent a progressive expansion of the composer’s musical colour-palette; and on the other, they reflect a progressive crystallisation of her stylistic vocabulary. In many ways, *The Land* betrays the widest array of musical influences of the three works, thus rendering it

expansive in this regard. Much of the melodic and textural interest pertaining to *The Land*, for example, recalls the previous generation of British composers including Vaughan Williams and Holst, while much of the harmonic and rhythmic language suggests Modernist influences such as is found in the works of Bartók and Stravinsky.

By the time Maconchy composed the First Quartet, the influence of her British forebears had subsided somewhat, and her melodic and textural content began to take on a more contemporary complexion. In this regard therefore, a degree of refinement or crystallisation occurred within her compositional reasoning. The Second Quartet presents a further-distilled portrait of her musical ideology, due largely to both the introduction of cyclic form into her works, and her extensive exploitation of counterpoint in articulating her musical argument. While her compositional language acquired more focus in this way, it expanded in other ways: the ‘harmonic-blocking’ characteristic of the Second Quartet, for example, reflects a broadening in her concept of harmony and the inventive ways in which it can be developed. As her compositional style evolves, this seemingly paradoxical expansion-versus-compression idea becomes even more pronounced, as will become apparent in the next chapter of this study.

Chapter 3: The Middle Years (1940–1969)

Part 1

Life and Historical Context

The period between 1940 and 1969 was marred by the devastation of war from the outset, beginning with the Second World War and immediately followed by the uncertainties of the Cold War (1945–1991). In the cultural domain, Modernism was still a prominent force in the Western world: its epicentre, however, underwent a gradual shift. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, France and Austria, and specifically Paris and Vienna, had been two of the foremost creative centres in the West. The onset of war changed this position significantly, and Germany, Italy and particularly New York became the more prominent cultural centres in the Modernist sphere thereafter. The shift to America was due in large measure to the number of creative artists seeking refuge from the dictatorships which loomed large in several European countries at the time. In the musical realm, this included such influential composers as Bartók, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Milhaud and Hindemith, amongst others.¹⁸²

This period also saw the appeal of popular culture reach unprecedented heights. In the musical world, this was due to four principal catalysts: first, the emergence of a new cultural power in the USA, which was largely indifferent to European

¹⁸² Ton de Leeuz and Rokus de Groot (eds), *Music of the Twentieth Century: a study of its elements and structure*, 3rd edn, trans. Stephen Taylor (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 29.

trends and therefore liberated to a certain extent from its artistic doctrines; second, the rise of capitalism and consumerism which targeted ordinary middle-class families, thereby introducing culture to wider audiences at affordable prices; third, the invention of the record, which enabled non-music-literate composers, who had previously spread their art orally, to reach audiences around the world without the need for music notation; and fourth, the rise and exploitation of ‘youth culture’, which was to prove fundamental to the subsequent proliferation in the massive business appeal of popular music.¹⁸³

World War II

Following her convalescence from TB, it soon became possible for Maconchy and LeFanu to start a family, and their first child, Elizabeth Anna (known as Anna), was born on 24 October 1939. Due to the threat of German invasion in Britain at this time, Maconchy travelled to Dublin for their daughter’s birth and rejoined her husband in Kent the following year.

Around the same time, it became apparent that Maconchy’s younger sister Sheila had become infected with TB, the disease which had taken their father’s life almost twenty years previously and which Elizabeth herself had only recently overcome. Unlike her sister, Sheila followed her doctor’s advice and moved, with their mother, to a sanatorium in Arosa in Switzerland, a village frequented by tuberculosis patients since the late nineteenth century due to its location at an

¹⁸³ Piero Scaruffi, ‘A History of 20th Century Popular Music: A preface to all histories’, <<http://www.scaruffi.com/history/preface.html>> [accessed 22 April 2010].

elevation of 1,800 metres amid forests and lakes.¹⁸⁴ Ironically, not only did the move eventually prove fatal for her sister, who died on 28 May 1945, their mother, Violet Poë, also passed away while in Switzerland; in fact she died very shortly after their arrival, on 8 November 1940.

During this difficult time, Maconchy and her husband set their minds to humanitarian endeavours, becoming actively involved in helping Jewish Czech musicians, with whom Maconchy had become friends during her time in Prague, to escape the impending horrors of World War II. During the course of our interview on 29 July 2009, Nicola LeFanu discussed how her mother and father had sponsored the daughter of two particular friends for a time during the early stages of the war. Maconchy, who had travelled in Europe during the late 1930s for various performances of her works, was forced to cancel further concerts and remain in England due to the huge escalation in anti-semitic activity in Germany and on the Continent.¹⁸⁵ Upon returning home (1938), she kept in contact by letter with this Czech family, and it was agreed, most likely on the suggestion of Maconchy and her husband, that their daughter Mimo, then around 17 years of age, would travel to England to live with the LeFanu family until such time as it was safe to return.

It is possible that Mimo was one of the 669 Czechoslovakian children transported by train from Prague by Sir Nicholas Winton in the six months prior to the outbreak of World War II. Winton, a British stockbroker of Jewish-German

¹⁸⁴ 'Arosa, Switzerland', <<http://europeforvisitors.com/switzaustria/articles/arosa.htm>> [accessed 31 March 2010].

¹⁸⁵ Diane Samuels, *Kindertransport* (London: Nick Hern, 1995), ix.

origin, coordinated a Czech tangent of the *Kindertransport* rescue missions, which sought to bring Jewish child-refugees from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia to safety in Britain before the outbreak of war. In order to get safely into Britain during this turbulent time, a sponsor had to be put in place that would agree to support and pay for that child-refugee for the duration of their asylum in the country.

Nicola, in our interview, recounted one particularly harrowing story relating her mother's experience at the immigration centre at the Port of Harwich in north-east Essex: while awaiting the arrival of Mimo, one of the immigration officers was asking a different young refugee questions which she could not understand on account of her unfamiliarity with the English language; the officer was brutal and refused her entry to the country on this account. While many people in Britain did not accept what was happening on the Continent at this time, Maconchy's close involvement with politics told her that this girl would most likely be killed if forced to return home. She also knew, however, that she could not afford to stay and fight a case for the young girl, lest it jeopardise Mimo's chances of getting safely through. Nicola recalls her mother saying that she 'took Mimo by the hand', and 'never let her go' until they were safely clear of immigration and away from harm.¹⁸⁶

Mimo lived with Maconchy and her husband for a period of approximately a year and a half, before being reunited with her parents, who had luckily managed to get sponsored in America. For the vast majority of Jewish child-refugees in Britain,

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

their families, friends and indeed everyone they had ever known in their home countries had perished brutally and needlessly during the Holocaust, but for Mimo at least, there was a happier ending.

The courage and compassion involved in the undertaking by Maconchy and LeFanu to sponsor Mimo was significant, not least in light of the fact that their own first child would have been but an infant at the time. However, circumstances deteriorated for the LeFanu family in subsequent years before again improving: increased political turbulence led to the family's evacuation from Kent in 1941. The Royal College of Surgeons building, where William had been working as librarian, was destroyed during the Blitz, and so the LeFanus relocated, taking with them the evacuated library contents, to Shropshire in the West Midlands. Difficult years ensued as their move to Shropshire left them isolated from friends and musicians in London, as well as from family and friends in Ireland. The grief of losing her mother and sister, compounded by the hardship implicit in raising a child and looking after another in war-torn circumstances, without the assistance of friends or extended family, made this period a particularly dark and lonely one for Maconchy, and one which was very different to the internationally successful career which she had experienced before the war.

After the War

With the end of the war, Maconchy, LeFanu and their young daughter Anna left Shropshire. The devastation to their cottage in Kent, caused by bombing during the war, rendered living in their old home impossible, so it was decided that they would move instead to Essex. In Essex they were at close proximity to London

whilst maintaining climate conditions that were mild enough to prevent a recurrence of TB. Living first at Wickham Bishops (where their second daughter, Nicola Frances, was born on 28 April 1947), and then at Boreham, approximately ten kilometres west, Maconchy remained in Essex until the final year of her life. In Boreham they established a garden to which Maconchy ardently devoted much of her time, and their house, ‘Shottesbrook’, now displays a blue plaque commemorating the forty years during which Maconchy resided there.¹⁸⁷

Although Maconchy, LeFanu and their family continued to spend their holidays in Ireland as far as possible, their working lives were firmly based in London. As far as composing was concerned, Maconchy continued to produce works during the war, albeit at a slower rate than in the previous decade. Nevertheless, the number of works produced during the entire period in question (1940–1969) remained substantial:

¹⁸⁷ Chelmsford Borough Council, ‘Blue Plaque Scheme’, <<http://www.chelmsfordbc.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=14050&articleaction=print>> [accessed 31 August 2009]. See Appendix III.

Genre	Number of Works
Orchestral	23
Chamber (solo instrument: 3)	27
Solo Vocal with instrument(s)	12
Unaccompanied Choral	8
Choral, with 1-9 instruments	6
Stage Work	7
Vocal-Orchestral	5
Instrument Ensemble	1
Total	89

Table 5: Overview of Middle Period Works

Several of the works written during this period show a clear creative engagement with the political issues of the time: ‘The Voice of the City’ (1943) for women’s chorus and piano, for example, was written as a lament for the fall of Stalingrad. Also, the slow movement of the Ninth Quartet (1968) was composed as a lament for the city of Prague following the Russian occupation.¹⁸⁸ Maconchy’s artistic engagement with political issues is also evident from her decision to write ‘The Ribbon in her Hair’ (1939), a choral work based on a poem by Seán O’Casey. This piece was published by the Workers’ Music Association (WMA), an organisation founded by Alan Bush in 1936 with the aim of encouraging the

¹⁸⁸ Woman’s Hour: programme dedicated to Elizabeth Maconchy, presented by Henrietta Otley, with guests Diana Ambache and Nicola LeFanu, BBC Radio 4, 5 March 2007, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/womanshour/20_05_02/friday/info4.shtml> [accessed 10 September 2008].

composition and performance of music, specifically that of the following nature:

- Music which expresses the ideals and aims of mankind towards the improved organisation of society.
- Music which exerts an influence against the social injustices of our present society.
- Music which encourages and reflects the activities and aspirations of the labour and peace movements for a new society.¹⁸⁹

Political events occurring during the middle period of Maconchy's career continued to influence her artistic trajectory well into her late years. Her setting of Louis MacNeice's 'Prayer Before Birth' (1971) for female voices, for example, is a chilling musical rendering of the poet's apocalyptic text outlining the perils of modern life, which he wrote amid the 1944 bombing of London. Her 1984 setting of Edith Sitwell's 'Still Falls the Rain' for double chorus also bears close associations with the Second World War, written as it was by Sitwell in 1942 as a direct response to the Blitz. These examples illustrate how Maconchy's creative endeavours were often sparked by external events, in turn showing how thoroughly political issues penetrated her life.

Accomplishments of this Period

On 9 February 1941, Maconchy's ballet 'Puck Fair' (1939–40) was performed in her absence in The Gaiety Theatre in Dublin. Scripted by Irish poet F.R. Higgins, the initial version of the ballet was scored for two pianos. Choreography was by Cepta Cullen, an integral figure in Irish ballet history; and design, which was done 'in a strong and vivid Cubist way'—many sketches are held at St. Hilda's —

¹⁸⁹ Workers Music Association, <<http://www.wmamusical.org.uk/How%20we%20began.htm>> [accessed 24 March 2010].

was by Mainie Jellett, Irish painter and a friend of Maconchy's.¹⁹⁰ Critic B.

Arnold wrote the following of this performance:

Here was ballet conceived by a poet, and essentially Irish in its conceptions, that had been translated from the poetry of words into the poetry of motion and music.¹⁹¹

Maconchy made a concert suite from the ballet, which was played with Adrian Boult at a 1944 Prom. Ina Boyle orchestrated the work, and this version was staged in The Opera House in Cork on 10 May 1948. Maconchy made further revisions to the score and this new version was performed, again at Cork Opera House, on 19 April 1953.¹⁹² The staging of Maconchy's 'Puck Fair' was an important landmark in the establishment of the national ballet in Ireland and is said to have been arguably Cepta Cullen's most successful choregraphical achievement.¹⁹³

In 1948, Maconchy won the Edwin Evans Memorial Prize for her Fifth Quartet, a prize to the value of £25 awarded for a chamber work by a British composer.¹⁹⁴ The winning quartet was written in Dublin, at a time when Maconchy's elder daughter Anna was in hospital with appendicitis, while her younger daughter Nicola was in London in hospital in Gt. Ormond St, thus proving that 'adverse circumstances may have no direct bearing on works of art'.¹⁹⁵ Despite the fact that her prize-winning quartet was composed in Ireland, generally speaking Maconchy's works were being performed less and less in the country at this time,

¹⁹⁰ B. Arnold, 'Stepping Back to a Magical, Marginal Artform', *Irish Independent*, 22 November 2008.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² See Chronology of Works, Appendix XV.

¹⁹³ Arnold, 'Stepping Back to a Magical, Marginal Artform'.

¹⁹⁴ 'Miscellaneous', *MT*, 89 (1948), pp. 128–30 (p. 129).

¹⁹⁵ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

a trend attributed speculatively by her daughter Nicola in part to her Protestant background and lack of an overtly nationalistic aspect in her musical language.¹⁹⁶

It is also possible that the composer's decreasing presence in the country contributed to this reduction of performances.

In 1953 (Coronation Year), Maconchy received the London County Council Prize of £150 offered for a Coronation Overture for her orchestral work *Proud Thames*.¹⁹⁷ This was premiered on 14 October 1953 at the Royal Festival Hall with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, under the conductorship of Sir Malcolm Sargent.¹⁹⁸ Adjudicators for the competition were Sir Adrian Boult, Dr Edmund Rubbra, and Mr Gerald Finzi.¹⁹⁹ According to Maconchy, the inspiration for writing the overture was 'the river itself': it is intended to represent the 'rapid growth' of the river from its 'trickling source among green fields' to the 'great river of sound' in London, where 'the full tide of the life of the capital centres on the river'.²⁰⁰ In his article in *The Musical Times* in December of that year, reviewer Donald Mitchell was less than complimentary about the prize-winning work:

The overture, in fact, was over before anything of any musical consequence had occurred. It is typical of our time that the work to win a prize should so completely lack a decent tune. The impoverished brevity of Miss Maconchy's 'Proud Thames' represents the stage where, so to speak, composers have given up trying to compose.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

¹⁹⁷ 'News in Brief', *The Times*, 29 July 1953, p. 2.

¹⁹⁸ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

¹⁹⁹ 'News in Brief', *The Times*, 29 July 1953, p. 2.

²⁰⁰ Maconchy, cited by Hugo Cole in sleeve notes to *Overture, Proud Thames, Music for Strings, Symphony for Double String Orchestra, Serenata Concertante for Violin and String Orchestra*, Lyrita, compact disc SRCD288, 2007.

²⁰¹ Donald Mitchell, 'Some First Performances' *MT*, 94 (1953), pp. 576–77 (p. 576).

A review featured in *The Times* following the premiere conveyed a somewhat more sympathetic attitude to the work, the reviewer conceding that, while it is ‘too short’: ‘topographically speaking, we leave the upper waters too soon, in a flash we are past Henley and a moment later the ebb is bearing us out past the towers of London’; this concision is ‘a fault as commendable as it is rare’. Essentially, the critic deemed it ‘a splendid little piece’ and an aptly named ‘proud journey’.²⁰²

An important series of broadcasts came in 1955, when the BBC’s Third Programme dedicated a series to her six quartets to date. At the time she was working on her seventh.²⁰³ These broadcasts were significant on many fronts: in addition to bringing her quartets to a new audience, they also served as a validation of their quality. According to William Haley, Director-General of the BBC at the inception of the Third Programme, its fundamental objective was to seek every evening ‘to do something that [was] culturally satisfying and significant’;²⁰⁴ for Maconchy’s entire quartet cycle to be chosen for broadcast was indeed testament to their cultural significance.

The late 1950s and 1960s witnessed Maconchy’s re-emergence into a more public role. In 1959 she became the first woman to chair the Composer’s Guild of Great Britain, an organisation founded in 1944 with a view to advancing ‘the artistic and

²⁰² ‘BBC Concert Hail And Farewell’, *The Times*, 15 October 1953, p. 11.

²⁰³ Macnaghten, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, p. 299.

²⁰⁴ William Haley, ‘The Third Programme: An Introduction by the Director-General of the BBC’, *Radio Times*, 29 September 1946.

professional interests of British composers'.²⁰⁵ As chairperson of the Guild, she represented the organisation in Canada (1961), and in Russia (1962). She was also responsible for setting up a core library of scores by living British composers, at Senate House (the library of the University of London), which laid the foundations for the subsequent British Music Information Centre (established in 1967). In addition to this, she worked tirelessly for the attainment of better conditions (fees and rights) for composers, and when the Guild seemed as though it was under threat, she persuaded Benjamin Britten, by this time a well-established figure in British music, to lend his name to it. Maconchy also served on advisory panels for the BBC and the Arts Council and was an active council member and Chair of the executive committee of the Society for the Promotion of New Music (SPNM), a British organisation founded in 1943 by Francis Chagrin with Mátyás Seiber and Roy Douglas 'to support the work of young and unestablished composers', and recognised today as 'the most important supporter and promoter of young composers in Britain'.²⁰⁶

Maconchy was also providing vital encouragement and assistance to the younger generation of composers behind the scenes. Several emerging composers wrote to Maconchy or sent her works seeking her advice. Throughout the course of her career Maconchy had experienced periods of both glittering success and dispiriting neglect, and so she understood and was sympathetic to the practical and emotional needs of her correspondents. In addition to her role as mentor of

²⁰⁵ 'Composers' Guild of Great Britain', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06214>> [accessed 25 March 2010].

²⁰⁶ Anthony Payne, 'Society for the Promotion of New Music', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26075>> [accessed 25 March 2010].

sorts, Maconchy also enjoyed the new friendships she forged among this younger generation of composers, including those with Thea Musgrave, Richard Rodney Bennett and Jeremy Dale Roberts.²⁰⁷

In 1969, the end of the current discussion period, Maconchy was joint recipient of the Radcliffe Music Award for a new string quartet, for her Ninth String Quartet (1968/69). The sums of £250, £150 and £100 for the first three places were divided equally amongst the four competitors in this quartet competition, as the adjudicators (Benjamin Britten, Thea Musgrave and Humphrey Searle) could not decide on an outright winner.²⁰⁸ The joint winners with Maconchy were Sebastian Forbes (String Quartet No. 1), Robert Sherlaw Johnson (String Quartet No 2), and Peter Sculthorpe (String Quartet Music).²⁰⁹

These prizes and endorsements assisted Maconchy's career in terms of remuneration and exposure, which in turn led to further commissions and earnings, but Maconchy was for the most part of her earlier career financially dependent on her husband. She did not work as a performer or as a teacher as many of her contemporaries would have, and so her personal earning power was solidly dependent on her composing career.

²⁰⁷ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

²⁰⁸ 'Radcliffe Music Award', *The Times*, 23 August 1968, p. 12.

²⁰⁹ 'Four composers share prize', *The Times*, 13 November 1969, p. 13. See Appendix IV.

Creative Dissatisfaction

Despite the substantial nature of Maconchy's output during this historical period, there is evidence to suggest that a degree of personal dissatisfaction was experienced in relation to its quality. A number of works dating from this time were subsequently withdrawn from her output, including 'Dies Irae' for chorus and orchestra (1940/41), a Symphony (1945–48), 'Toombeola' for violin and string orchestra (1954) and a String Trio for violin, viola and cello (1956). She withdrew her Symphony, on which she had worked for three years, after its first performance. The scores of these withdrawn works are still extant and kept in her archive at St Hilda's College.

A glance at her chronology of works will confirm that Maconchy in fact withdrew quite a number of works over her career, suggesting a significant degree of self-criticism on the part of the composer.²¹⁰ Self-criticism and perfectionism are characteristics that are seen abundantly in relation to various aspects of Maconchy's life: her manuscripts, for example—particularly those dating from later years—are highly articulate and detailed. She spent a very substantial amount of time revising her sketches, and the pencil copies held at St Hilda's are especially revealing: they show much scribbling and scrapping, and this presumably after throwing away much of her initial work.²¹¹

In addition to her self-critical nature and propensity for perfectionism, a further complication with which Maconchy was afflicted was that of the creative block.

²¹⁰ See Appendix XV.

²¹¹ See Appendix V.

In her 1983 BBC radio interview with Jeremy Siepmann, Maconchy alludes to this difficulty:

If one is a composer, one can't get away from it, even if one wanted to. It's one's reason for being alive I think. The worst moments are when one suddenly gets a hold-up or a block which I think can happen to most composers – it certainly happens to me.²¹²

Maconchy experienced creative block sporadically over the course of her career, and, as is common with those subjected to the condition, she suffered with the accompanying sense of despair and frustration.²¹³ Though the actual cause of creative block has been tirelessly debated, it is almost certainly exacerbated by self-criticism which would go some way to explaining Maconchy's predisposition to it.

²¹² Maconchy, BBC Radio 3 Audio Interview, presented by Jeremy Siepmann.

²¹³ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

Chapter 3: The Middle Years (1940–1969)

Part 2

Music of the Middle Years

The Second World War had a profound impact on musical life in Europe. War-torn nations tended to cling to the familiar, shunning the new, strange or exotic in music. Under the Nazi government, this resulted in a strict distinction between ‘approved’ and ‘unapproved’ musics. Music achieving official approval included that by Beethoven, Bruckner and Wagner due to the perceived ‘Germanicism’ of said composers. ‘Unapproved’ music on the other hand included that bearing associations with Jewish culture, Communism, homosexuality, mental illness and Modernism, to name but a few of the objections; and selected composers pertaining to this category included Schoenberg, Webern, Goldschmidt and Korngold.

Modernist endeavours became more austere in application during this period due in large part to influential theorists including Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) who regarded Arnold Schoenberg’s school as ‘the only true and historically valid progressive school of composition’.²¹⁴ Adorno vilified composers such as Stravinsky and Bartók who upheld some degree of allegiance to tonality.

²¹⁴ Botstein, ‘Modernism’.

The new generation of composers whose formative years were marked by the constrictions of the late 1930s and early 1940s wished to assert their musical voices all the more clearly with the close of the Second World War. This younger post-war generation, led by composers such as Boulez, Stockhausen, Ligeti, Berio and Carter, were inspired especially by Webern's abstract and pointillist language, in turn refining the very definition of Modernism:

After 1945 the implications of Webern's music – 12-note composition, short forms, transparent textures, delicate sonorities, fragmentation, experiments with time and the use of silence as an element of punctuation – defined not only the legacy of Viennese Modernism but became emblematic of Modernism *per se*.²¹⁵

A consequence of this quest for the new and authentic in music was the growing rift that developed between composer and concert audience. Many of these composers deemed the mass public to be more or less irrelevant to their music-making and enjoyed the resultant esotericism which essentially rendered Modernism an elitist movement.²¹⁶ A further alienating factor between composer and public was at the hands of figures such as Varèse, Nono and Babbitt, whose engagement and experimentation with new technologies initiated the rise of electro-acoustic music which by its nature called into question the role of the traditional concert audience.²¹⁷

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ Nolan Gasser, 'Period: Contemporary', <<http://www.classicalarchives.com/period/10.html>> [06 September 2009].

National Trends

After World War II contemporary music began to be heard more widely in Britain. This was partially due to the large number of foreign musicians who sought refuge in Britain during the war and re-energised British artistic and cultural life. New life was breathed into opera after World War II with the re-opening of Covent Garden and the development of the Sadler's Wells Company. National opera companies were also established in Ireland, Wales, and later Scotland, which did much to heighten interest in and awareness of the musical genre. Festivals such as the Bath International Music Festival (inaugurated in 1948) were organised for the purpose of presenting and promoting high-quality music, and numerous youth orchestras were founded, including those of Cheltenham and Edinburgh, which instigated and encouraged a culture of youthful music-making.²¹⁸ Britten and Tippett were perhaps the two best-known exponents of new British music during this period, but there were of course a myriad of others, not least Maconchy, who were also making substantial waves in Britain's contemporary music scene.²¹⁹

Overview of Works of this Period

This period was a prolific one for Maconchy in spite of her sporadic encounters with creative block. She composed in excess of forty substantial works and a similar number of lesser ones during this phase of her career. Like that of her

²¹⁸ 'Bath Music Festival', <<http://www.bathmusicfest.org.uk/about.aspx>> [accessed 24 April 2010].

²¹⁹ Chris de Souza, 'An Outline of British Music', <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/classical/britishcomposers/historybritmusic.shtml>> [accessed 20 November 2009].

previous compositional period, the majority of Maconchy's middle-period works are chamber and orchestral in genre; unlike the previous period, however, her interest in choral composition and opera became much more pronounced, with many of her most substantial works of this phase falling into these categories, including her trilogy of chamber operas *The Sofa* (1956/57), *The Three Strangers* (1957/58) and *The Departure* (1960/61). Leading performers of the day premiered many of Maconchy's works of this period, including clarinetist Frederick Thurston (*Concertino for Clarinet and Strings* (1945)), bassoonist Gwydion Brooke (*Concertino for Bassoon and Strings* (1952)), pianist Margaret Kitchin (*Concertino for Piano and Strings* (1949)) and vocalists Joan Cross and Sophie Wyss (several vocal works including 'Sonnet Sequence' (1946/47), 'A Winter's Tale' (1949) and 'Six Settings of Poems by WB Yeats' (1951)).

Writing for voice was something of a relaxation for Maconchy, and she enjoyed it immensely. It provided a reprieve from the intensity and constriction that accompanied writing for string quartet, her greatest passion. In our interview, her daughter Nicola LeFanu suggested that the presence of an underlying text assisted in suggesting which direction to take compositionally, essentially rendering the vocal medium a looser one than that of the quartet, thereby accounting to an extent for the more relaxed approach Maconchy took to its composition. Sourcing poetry and literature on which to base her vocal works was not problematic for Maconchy as all through their lives, both she and her husband had been avid readers, thus ensuring a wide pool of resources was always at her disposal.

Vocal composition and, particularly, opera allowed Maconchy to extend the dramatic side of her musical language. With the introduction of her small-scale operatic works, the qualities of lyricism and expressiveness for which Maconchy had previously been praised came to the attention of a new audience, many of whom had been under the misguided impression that Maconchy was a composer purely of intellectual, concise and dissonant music.²²⁰ Despite having written several dramatic works throughout her career and showing exceptional promise as a composer of opera, however, Maconchy never received a large-scale fully professional opera commission.²²¹

The experience of writing in the operatic genre was nevertheless an enriching and important one for Maconchy, and its impact is discernable in the basic shift that affected the composer's fundamental approach to composition. Quoting the musical language inherent in *Reflections* for oboe, clarinet, viola and harp (1960), *Serenata Concertante* for violin and orchestra (1962) and her Clarinet Quintet (1963) as examples, Nicola LeFanu highlights the steady evolution that took place in Maconchy's post-opera writings:

She left behind a harmony based on familiar tonal or modal hierarchies, for a language that is more exploratory. Her melodies became more expansive and her sensitivity to timbre, notable from her earliest work, was strengthened through her contact with a new generation of outstanding performers.²²²

LeFanu stresses that essential compositional hallmarks remained:

She never lost her early contrapuntal skill, with a flair for a counterpoint of rhythms as well as melodies; and she retained too her characteristic economy of

²²⁰ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

means, in which all the material in a piece is drawn out of what she called the *donné*.²²³

Among Maconchy's stage works of this period are two for children: *Jesse and the Mohawks* (1969) and *The Birds* (1967). In the journal *Music in Education* (February 1969) Maconchy discusses composing her extravaganza *The Birds*. She talks about the challenges and limitations of writing for children:

“Writing down” is the unforgivable sin; it can only result in music that is boring for all concerned and wastes the time of the young people it was written down for. But technical limitation can be a challenge, and if one can accept it as such, then writing for young performers can be both stimulating and exciting.²²⁴

It is clear that writing within a restricted domain was something that appealed to Maconchy. Her comment above in relation to the ‘challenge’ of technical limitation recalls sentiments expressed in defence of her love for the string quartet genre: ‘the very limitations of writing for quartet are a stimulus and a challenge’.²²⁵ For Maconchy, it was writing within these strict confines that ultimately intensified the satisfaction yielded on completion of a work.

Selected key works to be discussed in this section include the Fifth Quartet (1948), her choral work, ‘Nocturnal’ (1965), and the Eighth Quartet (1967). An examination of the Fifth and Eighth Quartets will provide insightful comparative reading into the evolution of her style within this middle period, and the inclusion of ‘Nocturnal’ allows the exploration of the basis for her daughter Nicola’s

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Maconchy, ‘The Birds’, *Music in Education*, February 1969, preserved in the Elizabeth Maconchy Archive, St. Hilda’s College, pp. 24–25.

²²⁵ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

assertion that the work constitutes a ‘typical example of the lyric voice of her maturity’.²²⁶

The String Quartet in Context

In the 1940s, a large and varied output of European string quartets began to emerge. Multiple quartet composers of this period included Shostakovich, Milhaud, Villa-Lobos, Hába, Holmboe, Maconchy and Simpson.²²⁷ In Europe, the quartet came to be considered ‘a bastion of tradition at a time of unrest’, as is represented, for example, by the highly intricate single quartets of Boulez (*Livre pour quatuor*, 1948) and Xenakis (*ST/4*, 1962).²²⁸

In Britain in the 1950s, Robert Simpson (1921–1997) began his cycle of sixteen quartets (fifteen of which are numbered), for which, in conjunction with his eleven symphonies, he is best known. Due to their similar fixation with writing for the string quartet medium, and the fact that they were both British, the stylistic characteristics implicit in works by Maconchy and Simpson make for interesting comparative reading.

Like Maconchy, Simpson had a fascination with intervallic writing, with the building blocks of many of his later quartets (from the Eighth onwards) organised around the resonances provided by the prevalence of specific intervals. He also shared her viewpoint that the four players in a quartet should be considered as

²²⁶ LeFanu, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)’.

²²⁷ Eisen et al, ‘String Quartet’, *Grove Music Online*.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

individuals, rather than as ‘four people providing the same kind of music at different pitches’.²²⁹ Simpson’s quartets, however, are written on a significantly larger scale than Maconchy’s, the shortest playing for approximately fifteen minutes – more or less the standard duration for those of Maconchy. Moreover, Simpson’s musical influences were in most, though not all, cases quite far-removed from those of Maconchy: Viennese Classicism for example was a prominent influence for Simpson in the area of rhythm, to such an extent that one of his primary aims was to recapture in his music the ‘momentum’ and ‘muscular’ handling of rhythm to be found in composers of this tradition, a stylistic trait which he believed to be largely lost in contemporary music.²³⁰

Maconchy’s String Quartets of this Period

Maconchy’s six quartets of this period (Nos. 4–9) are typically longer works than those of her early and late phases: at over seven minutes in duration, for example, the opening movement of the Sixth Quartet on its own is almost as long as the entire Third Quartet. All of the middle quartets adhere to the traditional four-movement format, with the exception of the Seventh which is written in five movements. Although symmetry was not a priority for Maconchy in her creative outlook, the Seventh Quartet is, on the surface, quite symmetrically conceived. Its five movements form an arch comprising two outer *Allegros* flanking two *Scherzos* in turn flanking a central *Lento*:

I. Allegro

II. Scherzo I, prestissimo

²²⁹ Lionel Pike, ‘Simpson, Robert’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25846>> [accessed 23 April 2010].

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

III. Lento, tempo libero

IV. Scherzo II, vivo

V. Allegro molto

This structural device was frequently adopted by Bartók: his Fourth and Fifth Quartets, for example, are written in arch form, as are his second Piano and Violin Concertos; unlike Bartók, however, there is little to suggest that the symmetrical conceptualisation in relation to Maconchy's Seventh Quartet pervades the work to any greater degree than superficially.

The middle quartets are also characteristically more expansive works than their predecessors and the musical language articulated therein is generally of a more integrated and daring nature. Timbral experimentation becomes progressively bold as the cycle evolves, and Maconchy's experience with vocal genres, including opera, manifests itself in the extremely passionate and dramatic writing expressed in the quartets of this period, particularly those of the later years.

Quartet Number	Year of composition	Movements
String Quartet No. 4	1942/43	I. Allegro – Lento appassionato – Allegro II. Allegro molto III. Lento, molto espressivo IV. Presto
String Quartet No. 5	1948	I. Molto lento – Allegro molto II. Presto III. Lento espressivo IV. Allegro
String Quartet No. 6	1950	I. Passacaglia – Lento moderato II. Allegro scherzando III. Lento espressivo, rubato IV. Allegro molto con brio
String Quartet No. 7	1955	I. Allegro II. Scherzo 1, prestissimo III. Lento, tempo libero IV. Scherzo 11, vivo V. Allegro molto
String Quartet No. 8	1967	I. Lento – Allegro moderato, vigoroso II. Scherzo – Allegro molto III. Lento (tempo libero senza misura) IV. Allegro
String Quartet No. 9	1968	I. Allegro II. Scherzo Trio: Presto III. Mesto, tempo libero IV. Allegro

Table 6: Middle Period Quartets

String Quartet No. 5

String Quartet No. 5 was written in Ireland in 1948 and was premiered by the Hurwitz String Quartet in London the following year. It is written in four movements:

- I. Molto lento – Allegro molto
- II. Presto
- III. Lento espressivo
- IV. Allegro

The Fifth Quartet was composed after a six-year break from quartet composition – the longest taken thus far by Maconchy. It was written at a time when Maconchy was experimenting with vocal music, but before her interest in operatic composition had fully manifested itself. Consequently, the Fifth Quartet features searing lyrical qualities, clearly audible, for example, in the *donné*-derived solo lines which dominate much of the melodic interest in the third movement (see Ex. 43); but the dramatic impetus underlying the work remains on a smaller scale than that of, say, the Eighth Quartet onwards, exhibiting a slightly more concentrated and restrained mode of dramatic expression than that employed in later works.

The quartet opens with a four-bar *Molto lento* section in 12/8 in which the four voices enter in canon, each clearly enunciating the octatonically-based *donné* material from which the entire work is inspired:

Molto lento (♩ = 60)

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

mp sonore
mp sonore
mp sonore
mp sonore

p

8va
p
mf
f
p cresc. poco a poco
mp cresc
f
meno
f
cresc. poco a poco
f

Ex. 33: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: I: b. 1–2

The first movement is characterised by the rondo-like effect created by its frequently-alternating tempo:

Bars 1–4	Bars 5–53	Bars 54–56	Bars 57–104	Bars 105–108	Bars 109–111
Molto Lento	Allegro Molto	Lento	Allegro Molto	Lento	Tempo I (Molto Lento)

Table 7: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: I: Tempo Changes

The sections marked *Lento* and *Molto Lento* are relatively short compared with the *Allegro Molto* sections; however, their role in articulating the expression of emotion is crucial: they embody the essence of the fatigued watchful eye supervising the sprightly momentum of the *Allegro Molto* sections, intervening where necessary to bring a sense of discipline back into the musical proceedings. The transition from the slow-to-fast segments and vice-versa is sharply-executed for the most part, creating the effect of there being five very distinct musical divisions etched into the movement's formal framework (with the final *Molto Lento* serving as an extension of the preceding *Lento*). Aside from their obvious metrical distinction, the slow interludes are identifiable by the clear exposition of the opening *donné* material articulated therein. The progression from the fast-to-slow sections is generally slightly less abrupt than that of the inverse, due to the presence of a preceding *rallentando* and *diminuendo*, as well as that of clear allusions to the slow *donné* melodies which are to follow (see Ex. 34). In the case of the slow-to-fast progressions, the contrast is starker and consequently the impact of the *Allegro Molto* sections is somewhat more pronounced.

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, specifically the first movement of Maconchy's String Quartet No. 5, measures 52-58. The score is divided into two systems. The first system begins with the tempo marking '(Allegro molto)' and transitions to 'Lento (♩ = 80) Sul G'. The instruments are Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. Dynamics include *rall. e dim.*, *f espr.*, *pp*, *p dim.*, and *pp*. The second system begins with 'Poco meno mosso (♩ = 70)' and transitions to 'Allegro molto (♩ = 70)'. Dynamics include *p*, *mf*, *p*, *pp*, *mp*, *mf*, *mp*, *mf*, *p*, *mp espr.*, and *pp*.

Ex. 34: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: I: b. 52–58

The second movement is defined by its condensed, turbulent nature, and is immediately identifiable by the extensive use of grace notes applied to its main motivic material:

Presto (♩ = 138)

Vln I *p leggiero* *f leggiero*

Vln II *f*

Vla *f leggiero*

Vc *poco sf p* *f*

Ex. 35: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: II: b. 1–6

The third movement, *Lento espressivo*, is characterised by passionate extended melodic lines underpinned by lush, shifting harmonies in the lower registers:

Bars 1–29	Bars 30–45	Bars 46–59	Bars 60–105	Bars 106–116	Bars 117– 122	Bars 123– 127	Bars 128– 143	Bars 144–151
Allegro	Più mosso (allegro molto)	Meno mosso (Tempo I)	Allegretto	Più mosso (allegro molto)	Tempo I	Meno mosso	Allegro Molto	L'istesso tempo

Table 8: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: IV: Tempo Changes

Movement I

Despite its brevity, the four-bar opening of the first movement shapes the development of the entire Fifth Quartet.²³¹ The octatonic scalar movement stated in the opening four bars (Ex. 33) sets the distinctive major-minor harmonic backdrop which penetrates all four movements, becoming most intense at instances of heightened emotional concentration. In her 1955 *Musical Times* article, Anne Macnaghten makes a general reference to Maconchy's frequent adoption of this harmonic device in her works:

The [...] major-minor effect is an unmistakable 'finger-print', occurring whenever there is a strong emotion and often producing a state of extreme tension. It amounts almost to an obsession, but although it appears in so much of her work it is certainly no sterile repetition of a successful formula but rather the renewal of a deep experience.²³²

This harmonic 'finger-print' is an integral component in Maconchy's musical vernacular which becomes increasingly potent as her individual compositional style evolves.

The sprightly *Allegro molto* section which follows the opening *Molto Lento* is defined by vibrant melodies and engaging rhythms which immediately lighten the

²³¹ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

²³² Macnaghten, 'Elizabeth Maconchy', p. 299–300.

intensity of the quartet’s opening. The ‘continuous melodic and rhythmic invention’ which characterises the *Allegro molto* section highlights Maconchy’s technical fluency with contrapuntal composition, highlighting the composer’s predilection for incorporating into her works a clear counterpoint of rhythms as well as melodies:²³³

Ex. 37: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: I: b. 28–30

While all lines (above) are scored in the same metre, the first violin plays a rhythmically-augmented lyrical variant of the opening canonic material, with the remaining voices skittering along simultaneously with a gypsy-type melody. The thorough contrast in terms of the rhythms of both lines renders this extract a clear example of Maconchy’s adeptness with rhythmic counterpoint.

²³³ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

Variations on the *donné* material are evident throughout the entire movement. The most striking variation is perhaps that derived from the alternating semitonal pattern which opens the quartet (cello: G – A flat – G – A flat – B flat). Although varying in terms of rhythm and pitch, this short figure materialises time and time again: in bar 14 for example, the cello instigates a second canon-like episode using a variation of this short gesture, which initiates the subsequent ‘nervoso’ incarnation of the motivic figure:

Ex. 38: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: I: b. 14–17

Both the pitch and the rhythm are altered in this instance (B – C – B – C) but its motivic origins lie firmly within the quartet’s opening figure. The final *Molto lento* represents an additional contrasting example of Maconchy’s transformation of this neighbour-note gesture:

Ex. 39: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: I: b. 109

Throughout the first two bars of this three-bar 12/8 section, both the second violin and viola parts play material that very obviously derives from the quartet's opening figure, moving almost exclusively in repeated groups of semitones. However, this guise sees it transform significantly from previous statements, illustrating Maconchy's highly economic motivic resourcefulness.

A second source of motivic inspiration with its roots in the opening *Molto lento* is the extensive use of the descending leap of a minor ninth. This short figure first appears in the cello line across bars 1 and 2 (not including upbeat; see Ex. 33). The first leap occurs from the note F down to E, and is immediately followed by a second descending minor-ninth leap beginning on the note B natural and leaping down to B flat. The viola then takes up the motif, followed by the first violin, and in turn followed by the second violin. Examples of the descending minor ninth are abundant throughout this movement: the first bar of the first *Allegro molto* for example (see Ex. 40) features this device in the second violin (E down to D sharp). The viola follows suit in bars 7, 8, and 9, varying the pitch and rhythm of the original violin statement, and continues to articulate this intervallic device over the next few bars:

Ex. 40: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: I: b. 5–9

Maconchy's fixation with this interval is once again symptomatic of her penchant for intervallic composition, whereby she seizes upon one or a small number of intervals and exploits the consequent resonance near-obsessively for a period whose duration is dictated by the necessity of the musical argument.

The C major close of the textural mosaic that constitutes the quartet's opening movement typifies Maconchy's use of tonality for non-tonal purposes. This non-functional use of tonal sounds is a feature strongly in evidence in much of Maconchy's output and has been alluded to on several occasions in relation to previous works. In spite of the seeming surface atonality of the Fifth Quartet, brought about largely by the aforementioned 'major-minor fingerprint', three of its four movements (I, III and IV), close with major chords, thereby epitomising Maconchy's inclination towards non-functioning tonality.

Movement II

The second movement takes a new and entirely different angle on the original canon material. It is concise and charged, and the extensive deployment of grace notes and unconventional accents infuses a gypsy-like essence into the texture of the movement. The tempo stabilises somewhat in its central *Meno mosso* section (bars 56–85), providing a fleeting respite from the otherwise frenzied *furore*, but the *Presto* of its opening soon returns, its impetus more vital than ever.

The central *Presto* theme, stated by the first violin in bar 1 (see Ex. 35, b. 1–3), is largely based on similar semitonal movement as was present in the *donné*.

However, the composer's treatment of the material in this instance is considerably different to that of the central neighbour-note idea of the first movement. In this

case, the positioning of the grace notes is essential; were it not for the grace notes, the semitonal relationship of the central sequence would not be nearly as strong: for example, were the grace notes omitted from the first three bars of the first violin line the sequence would take the following form:



Ex. 41: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: II: b. 1–3 (grace notes omitted)

In other words, the pattern alternates at intervals of two, between semitone and whole tone movement. With the grace notes included however (occurring just before the first and third beats of each bar with the exception of bar 1 where the first beat is a rest, see Ex. 35), semitonal presence increases significantly. While those occurring before the third beat simply repeat the C sharp of the previous beat; those embellishing the first beat occur on D natural, bridging the gap between the whole tone interval of C sharp to E flat, and therefore, transforming the sequence into one whose semitonal presence is much stronger. This again is symptomatic of the innovation exercised by Maconchy in producing very different sounds through the use of very similar material.

The descending minor ninth leap is evident in this movement as in the previous one, and that of the major and minor seventh also appears frequently. Clear examples of the exploitation of all of these intervals are visible in the central *Meno mosso* section of this movement: in bar 63 for example, the viola plays two groups of four quavers as follows:



Ex. 42: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: II: b. 63–65

Here, an example of a descending major seventh leap is seen between the first two notes (F sharp–G), while that of a descending minor seventh leap is visible between the fifth and sixth notes (F natural –G). In bar 65, the descending leap of a minor ninth becomes apparent between the first two notes (A flat – G).

The above examples are clearly illustrative of Maconchy’s ability to construct two very different-sounding movements using similar basic material: semitonal gestures are quite pronounced in both movements, and both also feature numerous examples of wide-ranging descending leaps, to specify but two of the unifying characteristics. This exemplifies the concision and motivic resourcefulness commonly associated with Maconchy.

Movement III

The third movement is the longest of the four at approximately six minutes’ duration, and showcases Maconchy’s recently-attuned adroitness with writing for vocal forces. The serenely-shifting harmonies with which it opens provide a sensuous backdrop for the sweetly soaring aria-like melodic gestures which pass seamlessly from one voice to the next, sometimes overlapping to exquisite expressive effect (as in the first violin and viola in Ex. 43):

Ex. 43: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: III: b. 20–22

A testament to the lyrical maturity achieved in Maconchy’s musical language at this middle stage of her career, is the re-emergence of the primary melodic interest of this movement (namely the motivic material evident in the first bar of the violin I line in Ex. 43) in the third movement of her Twelfth Quartet, composed over thirty years later:

Ex. 44: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 12: III: RN 28, b. 3–4

At the section marked *pochiss. rall. a tempo* (bar 35; see Ex. 45), the texture undergoes a sudden transformation. During this section, the searing melodies and shifting harmonies are exchanged briefly for brash, *forte*, highly-syncopated, heavily-accented lines which are executed canonically by the top three voices against a repeated-D *pizzicato* crotchet pattern on cello:

Ex. 45: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: III: b. 34–36 *mf*

The real-time severity of this unexpected interruption is short-lived, diminishing rapidly over the next six bars; its destabilising impact, however, lingers right through to the movement's close, in a manner not entirely dissimilar to that created by the Janáček-inspired 'interruption motif' mentioned earlier as part of the Second Quartet discussion. The uneasy aura surrounding the sudden mid-movement structural disjuncture keeps the listener on edge right up until the introduction of the high *tranquillo* episode in the movement's final paragraphs (bars 60–70), where the extreme emotional tension is finally released.

In his 1991 review of quartets 5–13 (*Tempo*), Martin Anderson states that the 'lyric wistfulness' present in the third movement is strongly suggestive of Grace Williams' *Sea Sketches*, a musical voyage for string orchestra composed four years earlier (1944). It is likely that this comparison derives chiefly from the tonal resonance underlying this particular movement. The shifting chordal undercurrent from the major triad of G flat to that of G natural gives a distinctly tonal basis to

the movement, thereby creating a sonic link with a more traditional harmonic idiom; and the resultant gentle rocking motion infuses a passionate, lyrical quality on the discourse, specifically redolent of the Romantic/Impressionistic sound-world with which Williams' musical language is most closely associated. As with her decision to close three of the four movements of this quartet on major chords, however, the semblance of tonality in this movement is merely symptomatic of Maconchy's predilection for using tonal chords in non-tonally-functioning ways. The movement does not modulate in any conventional harmonic sense, nor does it uphold any allegiance to traditional cadential values, and therefore Maconchy's treatment of harmony is in essence quite removed from that of previous cultural epochs; but the stylistic comparison drawn between Maconchy and her friend and colleague Grace Williams is certainly an interesting and legitimate one, and is worthy of more investigation outside the limits of the present study.

An additionally prominent feature regarding the harmonic nucleus of this movement is the pervasiveness of the major seventh and by extension its inversion, the semitone. The opening bar features a descending major-seventh leap in all three parts ((see Ex. 36): Violin II: B flat down to B natural; Viola: G flat down to G natural; Cello: D flat down to D natural). This major-seventh profusion recalls the sonority created by the extensive use of the same interval in the previous movement, which serves to link the movements thematically. Moreover, the alternating major-seventh chordal shift could be construed as an expansion of the semitonal prevalence in the work's opening *donné* material, thereby serving to unify the harmonic matrix of the entire quartet.

Movement IV

The vast expanse of the third movement is counteracted here by the tiny condensed space occupied by the finale, instantly recalling Maconchy's quest to express in her quartets a 'balanced and reasoned statement of ideas'.²³⁴ The final movement opens with a syncopated rhythmic pattern whose driving momentum transports the music through a labyrinth of finely-compressed contrasting musical episodes.²³⁵ The haunting melody which appears in the first violin in bar 19 (see Ex. 46) centred on F and recurs in the second violin in bar 87 on B (see Ex. 47), is redolent of the melodic serenity of the previous movement, and draws attention once again to the permeating influence that vocal composition exerted over Maconchy's instrumental writing.



Ex. 46: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: IV: b. 19–21



Ex. 47: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: IV: b. 87–89

A gentle *pizzicato* section in 5/8 is introduced in bar 60, offering a momentary respite to the insistent onward movement, but it is quickly forced to surrender again to the unrelenting opening momentum as all the chief musical gestures

²³⁴ See quote at n. 13.

²³⁵ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

become intertwined from bar 106 (*Più mosso (Allegro molto)*). The tempo increases as the music progresses into its final *L'istesso tempo* section at bar 144, in which a climactic closing paragraph is created by the veiled return, transposed and rhythmically-altered, of the *donné* material that originally opened the quartet. The gesture is now on C, as opposed to the opening G, and is most clearly perceptible in the second violin and cello lines across bars 147–148:

L'istesso tempo (♩ = 224)

Vln I
gliss
più f

Vln II
più f

Vla
più f

Vc
più f

Ex. 48: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 5: IV: b. 147

It is not until the reintroduction of the transformed *donné* material at this point that the preceding whirl of musical byzantinity finally appeases and a genuine resolution to the work is ultimately permitted to take shape.

Summary

Striking a balance between variety and unity is a key compositional consideration in this quartet. Structurally, the mosaic-like organisation of contrasting musical episodes, which is particularly audible in the final *Allegro* for example, is responsible for creating a good deal of the sense of variety associated with this work. Much of the harmonic, rhythmic and textural interest intrinsic in these contrasting episodes, however, serves to re-unify the implicit sense of formal disconnection. The evolution of selected fragments contained within the *donné* material – for example, the recurrent semitonal references to be found throughout the work – plays a vital role in this process of structural unification, as does the vacillating sense of tonality underlying all four movements.

The impassioned lyricism to be found in the melodic interest in this work, particularly that articulated in the third movement, is typical of the middle-period works and is a clear manifestation of the creative upsurge in the composer's concurrent output of vocal writing. This lyrical quality is tightly regulated, however, and is never permitted to stray into sentimental territory, such is the tenacity of Maconchy's determination to ensure that her music consistently reflects the 'intense but disciplined expression of emotion' to which she steadfastly aspires in her compositional pursuits.²³⁶

Maconchy was increasingly in demand for choral commissions during the middle and late periods of her life and responded with some of her finest work.²³⁷ As was

²³⁶ See quote at n. 13.

²³⁷ Nicola LeFanu, *Music for Voices*, sleeve notes for Lorelt compact disc LNT127, 2007.

mentioned previously, ‘Nocturnal’ (1965), a three-movement work for unaccompanied SATB choir, is described by her daughter Nicola LeFanu as ‘a typical example of the lyrical voice of her maturity’. Deviating from the central examination of the string quartets, this study will now focus for comparative purposes on the compositional strategies underlying this key vocal work.

‘Nocturnal’

‘Nocturnal’ was written as a response to a commission for the 1965 Cork International Festival and consists of a continuous setting of three poems by three different poets:

- I. ‘Come!’ by William Barnes (1801–1886)
- II. ‘Will you come?’ by Edward Thomas (1878–1912)
- III. ‘To the Night’ by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822)

Maconchy’s text-settings are typically succinct and are linguistically linked by the motive ‘Will you come?’ The essence of each poem is captured in spite of the laconic nature of the piece ‘from the spring time optimism of the opening courtship, through a summer scherzo, to the sensuous consummation in Shelley’s *Night*’.²³⁸

In keeping with her compositional ideology, ‘Nocturnal’ is a terse, concise musical work in which all subsequent material develops out of the opening

²³⁸ *Ibid.* See Appendix VI.

gesture. This six-note opening soprano figure is divided into two cells which are separated by a dotted line:

Andante con moto (♩ = circa 76)

mp

Soprano

Will you come in ear - ly Spring

Ex. 49: Maconchy: Nocturnal: I: b. 1-3

The first cell of the ‘*donné*’ material is consonant with a pentatonic basis (C sharp, D sharp and F sharp), while the second cell introduces dissonance through its use of the pitches A and E. This consonant/dissonant interplay permeates the whole work – a harmonic device which is characteristic of Maconchy’s style across each genre of composition.²³⁹ Supporting harmony is introduced by the male voices in bar 2 in the shape of a trichord based on F sharp which is preceded by a sonority based on G:

Tenor

p

Come, _____ come! _____

Bass

p

Will you come _____ in ear-ly Spring? _

Ex. 50: Maconchy: Nocturnal: I: b. 2-3

²³⁹ Roma, *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers*, p. 71.

The prevalence of the F sharp sonority gives the work a sense of tonal grounding.²⁴⁰ The relationship between the neighbour chords built on F sharp and G is heard in different ways in the lower voices, and the resultant rocking motion recurs throughout the work. The harmonic template formulated through this use of chords whose tonal base shifts at the interval of a semitone recalls quite vividly that underlying the *Lento espressivo* (Movement III) of the Fifth Quartet (see above discussion). Indeed, in terms of pitch, their tonal blueprints are enharmonically equivalent ('Nocturnal': F sharp–G; String Quartet No. 5: G flat–G). This gestural parallel is plainly illustrative of how Maconchy's harmonic ideology transcended the string quartet medium and penetrated other musical genres to equally convincing effect. This, in turn, points to the possibility that the composer's experience with writing for string quartet enriched the quality of her vocal output, as well as the more-commonly-observed contrary.

Movement I: 'Come'

The first movement conforms to a ternary form (ABA) of sorts. The first section comprises the first verse of poetry which features the fugal opening to the start of the second verse beginning 'Will you come if you be true' (bar 12), which marks a distinct textural departure from the previous section. In this central section, Maconchy 'expands her harmonic palette' using more overt dissonance through chromatic alteration, causing the tonal centre to appear increasingly ambiguous.²⁴¹ The A section returns just before the first solo (tenor) marked by the staggered

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

utterance of the word ‘soon’ (bars 23–24), roughly corresponding to the return to the lyrics of the first verse.

The individual lines of the first movement are set syllabically for the most part, with extended melismas occurring only at moments of heightened dramatic tension. The first of the three principal melismatic gestures in this movement occurs in the final line of the first verse on the word ‘longer’ (bars 9–10), while the remaining two are positioned in the ‘B’ section on the words ‘love’ and ‘call’:

The image displays a musical score for four vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The score is divided into two systems. The first system covers bars 15-19, and the second system covers bars 20-24. The lyrics are: "For to quick-en love a new? Will you call". The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *dim.* (diminuendo). The Soprano and Alto parts have long melismas on the word "a-". The Tenor part has a melisma on "love". The Bass part has a melisma on "a new?".

Ex. 51: Maconchy: Nocturnal: I: b. 15–19

These gestures are presented canonically with the exception of the soprano and alto version of the second example ('love': bars 15–17) which is enunciated simultaneously by both voices and constitutes the foremost climactic point in the movement. This type of interplay between homophony and counterpoint at climactic points is characteristic of Maconchy's compositional style throughout her career, and, as will become clear in the next musical discussion, is particularly relevant in regard to the Eighth Quartet.

Movement II: 'Will you come?'

Movement II, which is marked *Allegro scherzando*, offers a more playful variant of the opening *donné* material of the first movement. Its form is rondo-like: the jerky opening motive 'will you come' returns intermittently in different grammatical tenses ('would you come?', 'would you have come?', 'if you come') and is separated by passages of a more sustained chordal nature. The contrapuntal interplay which runs throughout the entire movement abates occasionally, most notably at the three utterances of the word 'beloved' in the final section of the work where three of the four voices combine forces momentarily before taking their separate routes once again – another example of Maconchy's use of homophonic textures at climactic episodes:

Soprano *mf* Be - lov - ed, would you have come, *mf*

Alto *mf* Be - lov - ed, *mp* be - lov - ed, *mp*

Tenor *mf* Be - lov - ed, *mp* be - lov - ed, *mp*

Bass *mf* Be - lov - ed, *mp* be - lov - ed, *mp*

Ex. 52: Maconchy: Nocturnal: II: b. 70–74

Like the first movement, the rocking G–F sharp harmonic template is the pervading sonority throughout this movement, and the melodic contouring again emphasises the *donné's* pentatonic overtones:

Allegro scherzando (♩ = c. 180)

Tenor *pp* > Come! Come!

Bass *p* Will you come? Will you come?

Ex. 53: Maconchy: Nocturnal: II: b. 1–3

The C sharp sonority of the bass line seen here in bar 3 (and continuing through to bar 5), set against the A flat and B flat dotted minims of the tenor line, clearly

accentuates the F sharp major pentatonic which serves as the tonal basis for this work. As the movement progresses the tonal centre becomes increasingly indistinct, in a manner quite similar to the ‘B’ part of the previous movement; but the F sharp/G flat sonority is never far from the surface, returning intermittently to ground the meandering tonal core. The major G flat triad in bar 26, for example, brings the tone-centre firmly back into focus, however fleetingly, from the predominant B flat resonance of the preceding paragraph (beginning ‘So late, At my side?’ (bars 10–17)). This type of tonal-anchoring, whereby the F sharp sonority emerges recurrently from a harmonically-hazy background, is audible all through this work, and contributes significantly to producing the prominently tonal overtones inherent in the work. As mentioned previously, this non-traditional use of tonality is a stylistic fingerprint also shared with the quartets.

Movement III: ‘To the Night’

Movement III is a dark, deeply-sensuous *Lento espressivo* featuring extended lyrical lines of an intensely passionate nature. The lush harmonic threads embroidered into its fabric immediately set it apart texturally from its two predecessors. The ebb and flow of the movement’s vocal contours produces blocks of harmony faintly redolent of the slowly-unfolding canonic opening of the previously-discussed Second Quartet, which intensify and diminish in potency as dictated by the necessity of the discourse. The rich walls of sound created as a result of this harmonic layering produce a vastly intense text-setting. Ex. 54 illustrates the final and penultimate lines of the Shelley poem: ‘Swift be thine

approaching flight, Come soon beloved Night, come soon', and it is clearly illustrative of this harmonic-blocking device.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in common time (C) and features a complex harmonic texture. The lyrics are: Soprano: 'Swift be thine approaching flight,'; Alto: 'soon, come soon,'; Tenor: 'Come, beloved Night, come'; Bass: 'come soon! soon! Will you come?'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp* and *p*, and various musical notations like slurs and ties.

Ex. 54: Maconchy: Nocturnal: III: b. 13–15

A B major sonority is prominent in all four voices during the first half of bar 13. Where one might expect a chordal shift (IV–I cadence) back to the tone-centre of F sharp in the second half of the bar, however, a G natural is introduced in the soprano melody juxtaposed with a triad based on D sharp in the remaining voices (D sharp, F sharp, G sharp). The vertical interaction of these sonorities creates a grating major-minor block of sound. Similarly, where one might aurally be prepared for a G sharp minor flourish on the second beat of bar 14 (due to the preceding descending tenor run (E, D sharp, C sharp)), the resolution never comes, and is replaced instead by a further block of biting dissonance created by the G natural sonority articulated in the tenor melody against the C sharp and G sharp implicit in the melodic contours of the female voices. The device of harmonic-blocking amounts essentially to the vertical consequence of linear activity and, therefore, it is fundamentally a by-product of counterpoint. The reason it is so immediately striking in this particular movement as opposed to the

other two, wherein counterpoint was equally apparent, is most likely due to the sustained languorous nature of the individual melodic lines.

The most unusual feature of the third movement is perhaps its enigmatic ending, where all four voices fizzle ‘*a niente*’ with an ascending *glissando* (see Ex. 55).

The second movement features similar use of *glissandi*, but without the homophonic conviction or perplexing mystique inherent in the case of the third movement. The question as to whether this is a throwaway gesture or simply an ambiguous action on the part of the composer is an interesting one. Given the astringent levels of discipline generally adopted by Maconchy with regard to her compositional pursuits, it seems unlikely that this should be a throwaway gesture; this said, however, as previously established, she did consider vocal composition something of a relaxation and therefore it is possible that she chose to close the work in this manner in the name of playful frivolity. It is also possible that there is a clear underlying reason or indeed reasons for this inventive choice of ending: perhaps for example, it bears witty associations with the ‘sensuous consummation’ implicit in Shelley’s text; or perhaps it is a deliberately mischievous act to release the harmonic discourse from the shackles of tonality to which it had appeared finally to succumb in the work’s closing bars.

The image shows a musical score for four vocal parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The score is for measures 17 and 18. The Soprano part begins with a *pp* dynamic and a *morendo a niente* marking. The Alto part also starts with *pp* and *morendo a niente*. The Tenor part has a *morendo* marking. The Bass part starts with *pp* and *morendo a niente*. The lyrics for the Soprano, Alto, and Tenor parts are "soon!". The Bass part has the lyrics "Come soon!". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 55: Maconchy: Nocturnal: III: b. 17–18

Whatever the underlying reason, the decision to close the work in this imaginative manner reflects a growing confidence on the part of the composer, and its bemusing overtones serve to dispel any lingering misconceptions of Maconchy as a composer of solely serious, intellectual means.

Summary

Generally speaking, the musical language employed in ‘Nocturnal’ is similar to that of Maconchy’s contemporary quartets. The basic strategic blueprint clearly derives from similar compositional materials: the *donné* for example, which in this case is to be found in the opening soprano gesture, is the seed from which the entire work grows, and is placed towards the beginning of the piece. Equally, their respective harmonic nuclei are based on similar assumptions: chromaticism is a

key component for example, and tonality has its place but is treated in an entirely modern idiom. On the subject of tonality, it is striking that ‘Nocturnal’ appears to maintain a stronger allegiance thereto, eluding an overall less dissonant impression than do the quartets. This should be considered alongside, amongst other factors, the fact that ‘Nocturnal’ is a significantly shorter work than the quartets, thus leaving physically less room for her ideas to expand, mutate and proliferate.

In the area of rhythm, there are also similarities between this work and the quartets: rhythmic counterpoint, for example, has its place in both. At times the implementation of this device in ‘Nocturnal’ recalls the Janáček-influenced ‘interruption motif’ present in the quartets, particularly the Second and Fourth. The second movement for example, features gestures which are particularly redolent of this influence: the ‘rocking’ shifting chordal accompaniment provided by the tenors at various intervals throughout the second movement, for instance, is frequently interrupted by jabbing interjections from the other voices (see Ex. 56). The nature of the motif’s incorporation into this work is simpler, however, contributing to a much less dramatic impact than its equivalent in the quartets. The jagged edges created by the angular rhythmic and intervallic structure of the illustration pertaining to the Second Quartet (see Ex. 27), for example, are not near as pronounced in this instance, and the *pianissimo* marking in this case further softens the ‘interruptive’ impact.

Tenor *pp*
 Come! Come! Come!

Bass *pp*
 Will you come? Will you come? O, will you, will you,

will you come?

Ex. 56: Maconchy: Nocturnal: II: b. 19–27

The principal differences between the musical language underlying ‘Nocturnal’ and that of the contemporary quartets obviously stem from the implications of writing for the forces for which they are intended. The presence of a text, or more specifically three texts, introduces a dimension into ‘Nocturnal’ that the quartets obviously cannot share in any conventional sense. In some ways the presence of a text should allow for a more relaxed approach to its musical setting, as the aural focus is divided between both the sounds and meanings of the words, and their musical interpretation, thereby presumably distracting the composer to some extent from the concentrated intensity of writing purely for instrumental forces. By the same token, however, this distracting quality could be seen as a limitation as it implies, for instance, a presupposed formal template with which a composer – particularly one used to using a *donné*-type structural setup like Maconchy, would have to grapple. In Maconchy’s case, the former scenario seemed to apply for the most part: writing for voice provided something of a reprieve from the rigorous demands of the string quartet medium.

Even allowing for the considerations of text, however, the working habits and ways of handling the material underlying 'Nocturnal' and the quartets are similar, and as such, leave one with little doubt but that they are the product of the same composer.

String Quartet No 8

String Quartet No. 8 was written in 1967 after a twelve-year break from quartet composition due in large part to an increased personal interest in, and outside demand for, vocal compositions. The quartet was commissioned by the Macnaghten Concerts Society and was given its first performance by the Aeolian Quartet on 5 April 1967 in the Purcell Room in London. It is in four movements:

- I. Lento – Allegro moderato, vigoroso
- II. Scherzo – Allegro molto
- III. Lento (tempo libero senza misura)
- IV. Allegro

The Eighth Quartet is immediately striking as a dark, emotive and dissonant work. It features episodes of extreme agitation whose acerbic execution is hitherto unrivalled in Maconchy's cycle of quartets, and is in fact more characteristic of her late period works, particularly String Quartet No. 13 (*Quartetto Corto*). These passages are intermingled with those of a poignant and lyrical nature, reflecting Maconchy's recently-extended dexterity in writing for dramatic vocal forces.

The first movement begins with the chord which proceeds to dominate melodic and harmonic material for the entire quartet:

Ex. 57: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: I: b. 1

The textural effects apparent from the earliest stages of the first movement pervade the whole work, illuminating the increasingly important position occupied by timbral colour, and the imaginative manipulation thereof, in the structural architecture underpinning Maconchy's later quartets. Although Maconchy's interest in timbre had been gradually increasing, the Eighth Quartet is pivotal in this regard: never before in her cycle had timbre exerted such prime constructional influence.

The second movement is a *Scherzo* although it is very far removed from the 'joke' implied by its title. It is dark and menacing with minimal respite, which, when it appears, comes in the shape of a guarded lyrical viola line which leads to a central *tranquillo* section (RN 17 bar 5–20).

The third movement is a highly-expressive, acutely-imaginative *Lento*. It features minimal bar line structuring, but rather is written out in long unfolding contours. The sensuously-melismatic resultant layering of sounds renders this movement a musical oasis of sorts, blunting the serrated austerity of its surrounding soundscape.

The final *Allegro* is characterised by passages of viciously-attacked multiple-stopping (see Ex. 58) interlaced with gentler episodes featuring spirited gypsy rhythms and subtle timbral effects. The exceptionally diverse elements of this final movement coalesce peacefully in the closing paragraphs.

Allegro (♩ = 126)

Vln I
f *f* *fp* *f* *fp*

Vln II
f *f* *fp* *f* *fp*

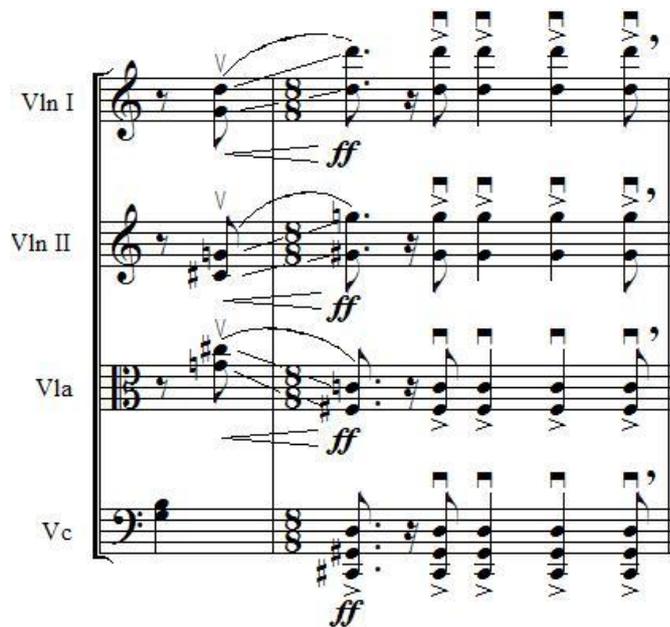
Vla
arco *f* *f* *fp* *f* *fp*

Vc
pizz. *f* *f*

Ex. 58: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: I: b. 1–4

Formal and Harmonic Strategies

The thematic material underlying the Eighth Quartet reflects the composer's propensity towards economic composition. Like much of Maconchy's work, the *donné* material on which the Eighth Quartet is based is stated at the beginning of the work. In this case, it takes the form of a chordal spread comprising two perfect fifths (C sharp–G sharp; G–D) superimposed at the interval of a diminished fifth (C sharp–G) (see Ex. 57). This chordal structure serves as the basis for a considerable degree of the melodic and harmonic material of all four movements, and is the principal unifying factor of the work.²⁴² Accordingly, the quartet's main formal gesture, a chordal statement first introduced in bar 5 of the opening *Lento*, is built around this dissonant harmonic framework.

The image shows a musical score for the first five bars of the first movement of Maconchy's String Quartet No. 8. It features four staves: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc). The music is in a minor key, indicated by two sharps (F# and C#) in the key signature. The time signature is 3/4. The score begins with a dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo). The first bar shows a complex chordal structure with overlapping notes and rests. The second bar continues this structure with some melodic movement. The third bar shows a similar chordal texture. The fourth and fifth bars continue the pattern, with the Vln I and Vln II parts having long, sweeping lines over the chords. The Vc part has a more active, rhythmic line. The overall texture is dense and dissonant, reflecting the 'chordal spread' mentioned in the text.

Ex. 59: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: I: b. 4–5

In the interest of elucidating the economy with which Maconchy composed her Eighth Quartet, we can see that within the first five bars of this work, the

²⁴² Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

composer has put in place, first, the chordal basis upon which the melodic and harmonic structure of much of the work is to be built (see Ex. 57); and second, the central statement around which a web of subsequent material will be woven (see Ex. 59); both of which contribute immensely to the distinctly dark essence of this quartet.

The main chordal statement is presented homophonically for the most part with all four voices joining forces to maximise its dramatic impact. Its repeated syncopated chords are heavily accented and require strongly-attacked *martellato*-like effects at almost every occurrence. The form it takes and its relative severity varies throughout the work but its forthright manner propels it into the foreground on almost every occasion, solidifying its climactic position in the process.

The musical score for Ex. 60 shows four staves: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/8. The first measure (b. 5) is marked *pp* for all instruments. The second measure (b. 6) is marked *ff con forza* for all instruments. The third measure (b. 7) is also marked *ff con forza* for all instruments. The Vc part starts with a *p* dynamic in the first measure. The score shows a homophonic texture with all instruments playing the same rhythmic pattern of chords.

Ex. 60: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: II: RN 20, b. 5–7

Vln I
 Vln II
 Vla
 Vc

ff
ff
ff

5
 5
 5

Ex. 61: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: III: RN 28, b. 3

Vln I
 Vln II
 Vla
 Vc

ff
ff
ff
ff

marcato, con forza
marcato, con forza
marcato, con forza
marcato, con forza

Ex. 62: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: IV: one bar before RN 38 and b. 1–2 of RN 38

Each of Ex. 60, Ex. 61 and Ex. 62 constitutes at least one of the climactic points in the respective movements. The fourth movement incarnation (Ex. 62) delivers the most devastating impact of all the occurrences of the statement, the sheer ferocity of its execution pushing the extremities of Maconchy's compositional scope almost off the scale. Although dramatic-writing was always a formidable factor in Maconchy's musical language, this quartet marks a decisive escalation-point in the weight and raw venom of its conveyance.

There are two germinal offshoots of the main chordal statement which also permeate the greater portion of the quartet: the first is an angular contrapuntal figure, first introduced by the first violin in bar 6 of the first movement (see Ex. 63), which is characterised by *non-legato* quavers executing an awkwardly-leaping melodic line; and the second is an expressive lyrical line, first presented in the cello between RN 3 and RN 4 of the first movement (see Ex. 64), which is defined by serenely-sculpted contours centred on a cross-register chromatic cluster of notes (in this case C, C sharp, D, D sharp, E, or enharmonic equivalent).

Allegro moderato, vigoroso
 (♩ = c. 136)
 au talon (5+3)
 Vln 1
 f non legato

Ex. 63: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: I: b. 6–9

Cello
 p espress. intenso f mf cresc.

Ex. 64: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: I: RN 3, b. 1–7

These tangential motifs recur in various guises in each of the four movements, often serving as essential respite from the intensity of the central motif. The final *Allegro* is particularly exploitative of the former motivic figure, incorporating it thoroughly into its central melodic and rhythmic architecture (see Ex. 65), while much of the third movement derives from the romantic hues intrinsic in the latter offshoot, focusing more on smaller intervallic content such as seconds, than sevenths (see Ex. 66):

Ex. 65: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: IV: RN 30, b. 5–7

Ex. 66: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: III: b. 1 opening

In addition to the main chordal statement and its two germinal offshoots, this quartet also features a number of motivic fragments which are not so immediately apparent. Maconchy often seizes upon small patterns in her works, treating them rather like fleeting obsessions, which she then expands to facilitate their integration into subsequent musical textures. An example of such is seen at RN 3 and 4 in the first movement: at RN 3, bars 6–7 (see Ex. 67) the cello executes the previously-outlined melody, against which the remaining voices provide sparse accompaniment:

The musical score for Ex. 67 shows the first seven bars of RN 3 in the first movement of Maconchy's String Quartet No. 8. The tempo is 'Poco lento' (approximately 120 beats per minute). The score is written for four string instruments: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The Cello part is the most active, playing a melodic line marked 'p espress.' and 'intenso'. The other instruments provide sparse accompaniment with chords and short melodic fragments. Dynamics include 'p', 'mp', 'f', and 'cresc.'.

Ex. 67: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: I: RN 3, b. 1–7

Because the cello line is dominant at this point, the minor third interval prevalent in its melody is clearly exposed. Almost immediately (RN 3, bar 8), the viola picks up on the interval and implements it into its own dialogue, and after four bars (RN 4, bar 3, see Ex. 68) the first violin also gets caught up in its infectious allure, presenting a rhythmically-augmented variation of the motivic fragment in the higher extremity of its range (Ex. 68). The blitz of minor third activity which follows all through RN 4 results in its subsequent acceptance into the mainstream discourse: the following measure (RN 5), for example, repeatedly features this

interval, as does much of the remainder of the first movement, and indeed a good deal of the rest of the quartet.

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, specifically the first movement of Maconchy's String Quartet No. 8, measures 3-4. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of four staves: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc). The Vln I and Vln II parts are marked 'arco' and 'f'. The Vla and Vc parts are marked 'f'. The Vln I part has a long note with a slur over it. The Vln II part has a long note with a slur over it. The Vla and Vc parts have a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Ex. 68: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: I: RN 4, b. 3-4

This organic process of thematic evolution, whereby seemingly arbitrary ideas become tangled up into the core texture to such an extent that they then become central motivic figures within the formal framework of the work, was coined by reviewer Edward GreenField as a process of ‘spontaneous mutation’.²⁴³ This particular device becomes increasingly apparent as the quartet cycle evolves and is a chief contributory factor to the tautening of motivic content that occurs from roughly this work onwards.

²⁴³ Edward GreenField, [untitled], *MT*, 106 (1965), p. 46.

Rhythmic and Textural Procedures

As is characteristic of the Maconchy idiom, rhythmic counterpoint is evident in abundance in this quartet. The fourth movement is particularly representative of this textural device: at RN 33 for example (see Ex. 69), the first violin and viola parts articulate a clear allusion to the slow lyrical motif while the second violin and cello lines juxtapose a reference to the angular contrapuntal gesture alongside, thus weaving an unmistakably contrapuntal quality into the fabric of the work.

The musical score for Example 69 consists of four staves: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Cello (Vc). The music is in 4/8 time. Vln I is marked *cantabile e sereno* and plays a melodic line with a slur. Vln II plays a rhythmic, angular pattern. Vla is marked *mp ben tenuto, cantando* and plays a melodic line. Vc is marked *mp* and plays a rhythmic pattern, with *arco* written above the staff in the second measure.

Ex. 69: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: IV: RN 33, b. 1–3

As the movement progresses, Maconchy's implementation of rhythmic counterpoint becomes increasingly integrated and intense, the quartet's diverse elements eventually becoming so entangled that it is at times difficult to discern where one motivic reference ends and the next begins. The *Meno Mosso* section at the heart of the movement, for example, is keenly illustrative of this point:

Meno mosso (♩ = c. 92)

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

Ex. 70: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: IV: RN 34, b. 1–5

The section opens with a harmonically-varied statement of the *donné* chordal spread. This statement is then succeeded by an episode whose melodic and rhythmic content conjures a hybrid version of both the expressive first and the angular second motivic offshoots; all of this is articulated in a double-stopped manner reminiscent of the main homophonic chordal statement. It is this style of writing, whereby several contrasting motivic templates fuse to the point at which they are almost individually indeterminable, which exemplifies the textural integration for which Maconchy's late quartets are renowned.

A further compositional device employed increasingly by Maconchy as her quartet-cycle evolved was that of implementing textural procedures to structural effect. The application of textural techniques, especially that of *glissando* for example, is crucial to the fabrication of the unique sound-world of the Eighth Quartet. From as early as the second bar of the opening movement (see Ex. 58),

glissandi occupy a prime edificial position in this quartet. Commonly flanking climactic episodes, they generally serve to affect a brief pause in proceedings and, in doing so, intensify the impact delivered by the surrounding threads of the ongoing musical argument. During the final movement, the incorporation of *glissandi* escalates to the extent that the device itself could be construed as performing a fully-fledged formal, melodic, rhythmic and textural function, thereby penetrating each of the chief facets of composition to some degree (see Ex. 71).

The image shows a musical score for a string quartet, measures 1-3. It consists of four staves: Violin I (Vln I), Violin II (Vln II), Viola (Vla), and Violoncello (Vc). The time signature is 2/4. The Violin parts play a melodic line with glissandi, marked with dynamics *ffp*, *ff*, and *f*. The Viola and Violoncello parts play a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, marked with accents and a dynamic *f*.

Ex. 71: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8: IV: RN 39, b. 1–3

This brutal use of *glissando* is highly reminiscent of a Bartókian idiom, thus further illuminating the formative influence of the latter in shaping Maconchy's stylistic vocabulary. The following example (Ex. 72), taken from the second part of Bartók's Third Quartet shows his similar exploitation of this device:

Ex. 72: Bartók: String Quartet No. 3: II: b. 423–430

In neither case do these *glissandi* serve as pleasant decorative musical devices as their usage in a more Romantic, expressive paradigm might imply; rather they impose a scratching, caustic, siren-like sonority onto the discourse, in effect performing an antithetic role to that instilled by tradition.

This daring and inventive use of *glissando* is also symptomatic of the confidence acquired by Maconchy in her later years. During the course of our interview in July 2009, Nicola LeFanu referred to this acquisition of confidence and outlined the example of the visible transformations which took place in her mother's personal handwriting in her manuscripts, as well as the detailed instructions she specified for her printers, publishers and performers.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Photographs of sketches and scores held in the Elizabeth Maconchy Archive at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, which highlight these issues, may be viewed in Appendix VII.

Summary

The three selected works of this period offer insightful reading into the stylistic evolution occurring during the middle stage of Maconchy's career, as well as interesting comparative reading with that of the early period. From a general point of view, it is apparent that melodic interest intensifies in the middle works—particularly in the quartets—almost certainly owing to the creative outpouring of vocal and choral music simultaneously taking place in Maconchy's compositional trajectory. Technically, the expression of emotion is increasingly executed by means of counterpoint, both in a rhythmic sense and in that of a more traditional nature. Its use in the former sense is perhaps a more immediately distinctive feature of the middle works, than that of the latter. In fact Maconchy's rhythmic language in general underwent a significant degree of emancipation during this phase. Her metric grip loosened somewhat, leading to greater flexibility of rhythms. A clear example of this is the *Lento* movement of the Eighth Quartet (see Ex. 66), in which she almost abandons bar line-structuring altogether. Experimenting with rhythm is a stylistic characteristic which continues to penetrate the late works. An example may be found in the Twelfth Quartet, where Maconchy occasionally substitutes an 'X' in place of a time signature (see Ex. 88).

Perhaps the most notable characteristic of the middle period works, from a developmental point of view, is Maconchy's progressive sensitivity to timbre. The daring, inventive employment of technical devices evident in the middle works, particularly the quartets of the later part thereof, led to a very notable extension of

her textural colour-palette to encapsulate a broad spectrum of slighter hues. The Eighth Quartet, in particular, was a turning point in this regard as was evidenced, for instance, by the example of her strikingly Bartókian employment of *glissando* in the fourth movement, where its magnitude was such that it essentially came to embody a role in each of the chief facets of composition. Maconchy's sensitivity to timbre further heightened in the late period works, as will become clear in the next chapter.

Generally, the stylistic development which occurred during Maconchy's middle period intensified the aforementioned sense of expansion-versus-compression in her music. Her openness to cross-genre influence—for example, vocal works influencing quartets and vice versa—initiated a broadening, even relaxation of her language in some ways. Simultaneously, it affected a solidification of her own musical identity, in turn affecting a crystallisation of her stylistic vocabulary. This distillation is evidenced, for instance, in her increased tendency to seize upon brief gestures and work them into ensuing textures, as was clearly audible, for example, in the spontaneous adoption and subsequent integration of the minor third into the first movement of the Eighth Quartet (Ex. 67). This expansion-versus-compression concept reveals the progressively economic nature of the composer's compositional vision, a revelation which will be further explored in the next chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 4: The Late Years (1970–1994)

Part 1

Music of the Late Years

The Cold War dominated political affairs for the most part of this historical period, coming to its official end only in 1991. Culturally, from the late 1970s onwards the term ‘Postmodernism’ began to come into common parlance.²⁴⁵

American in origin, the term has a range of meanings largely dependent on one’s definition of Modernism. Broadly speaking, Postmodernism as a historical period can be defined as ‘that which postdates the period 1450–1950, reflecting a crisis of cultural authority and world view, especially that vested in Western culture and its institutions’.²⁴⁶ Selected figures synonymous with Postmodernism include David Antin, Charles Olson and Samuel Beckett (literature); John Cage, Terry Riley, George Rochberg, Arvo Part, Alfred Schnittke, John Adams, Steve Reich and Philip Glass (music); Andy Warhol, Marcel Duchamp and Roy Lichtenstein (art); Michel Foucault, Richard Rorty, Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jacques Derrida (philosophy), Jean Baudrillard (sociology), Nancy Schepper-Hughes (anthropology), and Fredric Jameson (literary criticism and Marxist political theory).

²⁴⁵ Jann Pasler, ‘Postmodernism’, *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40721>> [accessed 5 March 2010].

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Popular culture also became an integral part of everyday life during this period. In a musical context, the explosion of youth culture as a socio-political phenomenon initiated to varying degrees by the Vietnam War (1959–1975) and the civil rights movement (1950–1980), was largely responsible for the upsurge in the appeal of popular music. Consequently, ‘pop’ music came to acquire an ideological identity which elevated its status to much more than simply entertainment for the masses.²⁴⁷

Independent Years: Broadened Musical Horizons

The final period of Maconchy’s life was one of great personal and musical independence. With her family raised, she had more time to devote to personal endeavours. Travelling to the increasing number of performances her works received both in the UK and overseas became a much more frequent occurrence for Maconchy, and a constant demand for commissions kept her production levels high until the early 1980s. Much of her later commissioned work was choral, ranging from songs and unaccompanied pieces to large-scale works for voices and instruments, including her major dramatic cantata *Heloise and Abelard* (1978).

Maconchy had always been open-minded and adventurous in her creative outlook and this continued into her late years. She strove to keep in touch and up-to-date with new musical developments, be it through regularly attending concerts dedicated to contemporary music, listening avidly to the BBC’s Radio 3, or

²⁴⁷ Scaruffi, ‘A History of 20th Century Popular Music’.

through direct correspondence with young composers themselves. Through her daughter Nicola and Nicola's husband, Australian composer David Lumsdaine, Maconchy could engage with the young generation of composers in a new and personal way, and she yielded a great deal of pleasure from this.²⁴⁸ Maconchy's zeal for continually absorbing new music was characteristic all through her life and had the effect of broadening her own creative horizons, the musical manifestation of which will be investigated in the second part of this chapter.²⁴⁹

Maconchy's commitment to promoting new music continued in the final period. She succeeded Benjamin Britten as President of the SPM, following his death in 1976, a post which enabled her to pursue her objective in a public arena. Her tenure in this capacity was successful on a number of fronts, not least financially: the fiduciary problems experienced by the Society during the 1950s and 1960s were stabilised during Maconchy's time as president, enabling the organisation to broaden the scope of its operations. During the 1980s, for instance, it took over the administration of the British section of the ISCM and launched the record label New Music Cassettes.²⁵⁰

Maconchy regarded contemporary music as a 'mixed bag', and accordingly, her feelings about it were mixed: she felt that while some of it was very good, some

²⁴⁸ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 29.

²⁴⁹ 'Elizabeth Maconchy', DVD.

²⁵⁰ Payne, 'Society for the Promotion of New Music'.

held but ‘momentary appeal’.²⁵¹ She was particularly heartened by the number of female British composers making their name during this period:

When I was young there were half a dozen women composers of about the same age in England, though not I think elsewhere. This was something new, previously there had been the isolated figure of Ethel Smyth, and since then there have been very few young women composers, with the notable exception of Thea Musgrave. [...] Now, forty years after my own generation, another group of young women has come on the scene: - Gillian Whitehead, Anna Lockwood, Jennifer Fowler, Melanie Daiken, Helen Longworth, Erica Fox, Margaret Lucy Wilkins, Nicola LeFanu to name only some of them.²⁵²

In the 1960s and early 1970s, musical conditions in Britain were reasonably favourable for female composers. For the older generation, to which Maconchy and her contemporaries belonged, it was a time in which the number of commissions and performances escalated; and for the younger generation, which included Nicola LeFanu and her contemporaries, it was a time when the type of discrimination against women in music which had befallen previous generations, was widely believed to be ‘a thing of the past’.²⁵³ In 1973, for example, three out of the four orchestral commissions for that year’s BBC Promenade Concerts went to female composers (Nicola LeFanu, Thea Musgrave and Priaulx Rainier). Conditions deteriorated somewhat in subsequent years, however: only one out of forty Proms commissions went to a female composer in the fourteen-year period 1973–1987, despite women composers making up 15 per cent of the total number of British working composers at the time.²⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the musical climate has undergone periodic improvements in terms of opportunities for female composers since the 1970s, and for Maconchy, the late years were successful in several respects.

²⁵¹ ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

²⁵² Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 29.

²⁵³ LeFanu, cited by Roma in *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers*, p. 149.

²⁵⁴ Roma, *The Choral Music of Twentieth-Century Women Composers*, p. 150.

Numerous public honours came Maconchy's way during this period of her life. In 1970 she was awarded a medal from the Worshipful Company of Musicians, the livery company established in 1750, which 'encourages and promotes musical performance and education to the highest professional standards and particularly supports young musicians'.²⁵⁵ In 1977, the year after her appointment as President of the SPNM, she was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) and ten years later, in 1987, she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE). Additional honours included Fellowship of the RCM (1984),²⁵⁶ and the RAM, and Honorary Fellowship of St Hilda's College, Oxford. Her seventieth, eightieth and eighty-fifth birthdays were marked by numerous concerts and performances of her works. For her seventieth birthday, the Park Lane Group gave a concert featuring an all-Maconchy programme, and the SPNM presented *The Land* as part of an orchestral concert, where it received a standing ovation. Her eightieth birthday was celebrated by a concert party given by several distinguished artists,²⁵⁷ and her eighty-fifth birthday was marked by quartet concerts, BBC Singers concerts, and a performance of her Concertino for bassoon and string orchestra (1952) in Norwich, with her eldest grandson, Christopher Dunlop, performing as soloist.²⁵⁸

Broadened Literary Horizons

As well as broadening her musical perspective, Maconchy's literary horizons also expanded during this period. Her husband William LeFanu contributed in some

²⁵⁵ Worshipful Company of Musicians, <<http://www.wcom.org.uk/>> [accessed 5 April 2010].

²⁵⁶ See Appendix VIII

²⁵⁷ See Appendix IX.

²⁵⁸ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

capacity towards this expansion: he was exceptionally well-read and introduced her to numerous new texts and writers. LeFanu also translated selected texts for her including ‘The Garland: Variations on a Theme’ (1938, from the Latin *Anacreontica*) and ‘Shoheen Sho: Irish Lullaby’ (1954). A glance at a representative selection of Maconchy’s choices of text throughout her career will confirm this literary expansion as well as elucidate those writers to whom she was drawn at various stages of her career.

The texts for Maconchy’s earliest vocal works are of anonymous origin (‘There is a lady sweet and kind’ (1924/25); ‘My sweet sweeting’ (1926); ‘The Call’ (1926)). Shakespeare became the first prominent literary influence (‘Ophelia’s Song’ (*Hamlet*) (1926)); ‘O Mistress Mine’ (*Twelfth Night*) (c1926)), and remained a consistent inspiration all through her compositional career with works written as late as the early 1980s based on his texts (‘For Bonny, Sweet Robin’ (*Hamlet*) (1982)).

In the early and middle phases of her career (until c1960), the majority of Maconchy’s text-settings were based on pre-twentieth-century sources, with Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) being a particularly important influence (see below). Sixteenth and seventeenth-century texts also featured prominently, including those by Robert Herrick (1591–1674) (‘A Meditation for his Mistress’ (1928)); Benjamin Johnson (1572–1637) (‘Have you seen but a bright lily grow?’ (1929)); John Donne (1572–1631) (2 Motets: ‘A Hymn to Christ’, ‘A Hymn to

God the Father' (1931); and Henry King (1592–1669) ('The Exequy' (1956)); as well as the aforementioned texts by Shakespeare.

From the 1960s onwards works by contemporary poets and writers represented an increased proportion of her text-based output. Texts by British poet and librettist Anne Ridler (1912–2001), for example, feature prominently in her 1960s output ('The Departure' (1960/61); 'Music for Witnesses' (1966); 'The Jesse Tree' (1969/70)), while those by Louis MacNeice (1907–1963), Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965) and W.H. Auden (1907–1973) appear more than once in her post-1970 output. Maconchy's decision to set a greater number of contemporary texts in her later years shows an increase in the degree to which she became creatively engaged with the literary trends of the time.

Over the course of her career, Maconchy returned frequently to texts by Victorian poet Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889). She 'shared his fascination with poetic rhythm', was 'fired by his imagery',²⁵⁹ and in her own words, felt that much of his poetry seemed almost to 'demand' to be set to music.²⁶⁰ She set three of his lyrical poems, 'The Starlight Night' (1964), 'Peace' (1964) and 'The May Magnificat' (1970) for soprano and chamber orchestra, and two additional poems, 'Pied Beauty' (1975) and 'Heaven-Haven' (1975) for chorus and brass.²⁶¹ Of all his texts, that which haunted her 'most vividly', in her view seeming 'to cry out

²⁵⁹ LeFanu, 'Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)'.

²⁶⁰ Maconchy, 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo: Programme Notes', <http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2432&State_3041=2&workId_3041=12213> [accessed 3 July 2010].

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

for music’, was ‘The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo’.²⁶² Maconchy set a vocal-orchestral version of this text in 1930/31, which was later withdrawn, but she returned again to the text when choral conductor Stephen Wilkinson requested a work for his William Byrd Singers in 1978, opting this time to set it for SSAATB, with alto flute, viola and harp.²⁶³

Despite the lack of any pronounced Irish influence on her music, Maconchy’s attraction to Irish writers is evident from a brief inspection of her output. Texts by Irish writers including W.B. Yeats, Seán O’Casey, F.R. Higgins, Sheila Wingfield, Cecil Day-Lewis and Louis MacNeice all appear in her vocal output, and one of her most acclaimed late vocal works, ‘My Dark Heart’ (1981) for solo voice and small orchestra, is based on a translation of three Petrarch texts by John Millington Synge. Interestingly, Maconchy herself claims not to have been especially drawn to Irish writings, so this representation is likely a product of coincidence.²⁶⁴

Reflection on Life as a Composer

When prompted by interviewer Jeremy Siepmann as to whether growing older made life as a composer easier or harder, Maconchy replied:

Both I think. I’ve had more time for one thing because when I was younger I had my family to bring up which takes a great deal of time although there were only

²⁶² ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

two of them. I have more time now. On the other hand, ideas don't come so thick and fast when you're older.²⁶⁵

In truth, Maconchy suffered periods of acute distress with the reality of growing old as a composer. Doubts crept into the very essence of her compositional reasoning: 'Have I still got anything worthwhile to say or have all my ideas dried up? – is any of my work any good anyway? – why go on trying?' The 'attacks of depression' to which she was subject all her life became 'more frequent and formidable' as she grew older and at times she felt the most logical option was to retire and 'leave it to the younger generation' entirely.²⁶⁶

In spite of these pervasive feelings, Maconchy continued to compose well into her seventies. Although exceptionally supportive of the younger generation of composers, she did not feel she had musically communicated all she had intended to say:

After a blank patch now and then the urge to write has up till now returned again with its old compulsion – ideas begin to come and one is off again, planning, writing, scrapping, - with a mounting pile of sheets of manuscript on the floor.²⁶⁷

This type of productivity in old age is not uncommon amongst composers: Verdi, Stravinsky and Richard Strauss are obvious examples, not to mention English composer Havergal Brian, who composed twenty-two symphonies after the age of eighty, and Elliott Carter who is still composing at the age of 101.

²⁶⁵ Maconchy, BBC Radio 3 Audio Interview, presented by Jeremy Siepmann.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 29.

The Final Years

Maconchy ceased composing in 1986 with the exception of one final choral work, 'On St. Stephenses Day', which she completed in 1989 for the 70th birthday of conductor Stephen Wilkinson. Bringing her composing career to an end was an entirely conscious decision, her main motivation being the desire to keep from adding to her canon of works pieces not worthy of their position therein.²⁶⁸

Michael Tippett, too, made the conscious decision to retire from composing, his last major composition being *The Rose Lake*, a tone poem written in the period 1991–3, completed five years before his death in 1998. The decision to retire from composing reflects an acceptance on the part of the composer of having lived out a complete musical career. Unlike those composers such as Mozart and Schubert who were 'cut off in their prime', so to speak, the issues of 'what if' or 'if only' are irrelevant to the likes of Maconchy and Tippett in this regard, in a way placing them in a privileged position amongst composers.

The last ten years of her life saw a gradual deterioration in Maconchy's health and her death on 11 November 1994 was attributed to irreversible damage to her lungs, most likely caused by the TB she contracted in her twenties. Her husband William LeFanu died just five months later on 7 April 1995. She and her husband are buried at Eaton Parish Church in Norfolk.

²⁶⁸ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

Posthumous Events

In 1995, the year after her death, the Elizabeth Maconchy Composition Fellowship was established in Ireland. Funded by the Arts Council, it was set up at the instigation of the Contemporary Music Centre, 'in response to a clearly perceived need to provide wider opportunities for postgraduate training for composers'.²⁶⁹ The fellowship is offered once every three years to provide a successful candidate with funding towards the cost of tuition fees and living expenses at a recognised university where he/she must pursue a doctoral programme in composition.²⁷⁰

In 2007, the centenary of Maconchy's birth was celebrated by a number of special events. In addition to various celebratory concerts and performances of her works, a selection of her choral music was released for the first time in a recording entitled *Music for Voices*. Two of her one-act operas, *The Sofa* and *The Departure*, were performed at the Lilian Baylis Theatre, Sadler's Wells, directed by Alessandro Talevi and conducted by Dominic Wheeler, and released on CD. BBC Radio 3 made her their featured 'Composer of the Week' in March 2007. In Ireland, a young ensemble named 'The Maconchy Project', whose members include clarinettist Bernadette Balfe, violinists Lynda O' Connor and Nicole Hudson, violist Karen Dervan, and cellist Lioba Petrie, presented a series of contemporary concerts which featured two of Maconchy's less-performed

²⁶⁹ 'Elizabeth Maconchy Composition Fellowship', <<http://www.cmc.ie/news/2005/ring-awarded-maconchy.html>> [accessed 1 September 2009].

²⁷⁰ 'Elizabeth Maconchy Composition Fellowship', <http://www.artscouncil.ie/en/view_fund.aspx?fid=2e8d26db-7704-436d-bf69-7cf4f2cc5011> [accessed 1 September 2009].

chamber works: Sonatina for string quartet (1963), and Quintet for clarinet and strings (1963).²⁷¹

²⁷¹ 'The Maonchy Project',
<http://www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/Services/Arts/Arts_Arena/Music.html> [accessed 4 February 2010].

Chapter 4: The Late Years (1970–1994)

Part 2

Music of the Late Years

The final phase of Maconchy's career saw the emergence of a Postmodernist aesthetic, whose chief musical exponents began questioning the assumptions underlying the Modernist paradigm, often rejecting them entirely. John Cage's free approach to composition became a potent influence during this period with the result that 'younger composers felt free to be free, to dispense with presuppositions about what music is and must be and to explore where their instincts and interests and modern technology took them'.²⁷² Cage's idea of a 'prepared piano', as well as his readiness to explore the possibilities of chance (aleatoricism), inspired a whole generation of experimental composers, American and otherwise, making him one of the foremost composers and experimenters of the mid-late twentieth century.

This late period also saw a move towards bridging the divide between composer and concert audience which had taken hold in previous decades. Minimalism, for example, originated as a reaction against elitism in music. Its pioneers, including Glass, Reich, Riley and Adams, directly challenged the angular asperity often associated with the Modernist idiom through the deliberate use of a highly-diatonic, intentionally-repetitive musical language. In the later part of the century,

²⁷² John Rockwell, 'The Impact and Influence of John Cage', *New York Times*, 8 February 1987.

the introduction of internationalism, spirituality and mysticism in music, as typified in works by composers such as Arvo Pärt, Lou Harrison, and Toru Takemitsu, further bridged the composer/audience divide, going some way towards once again rendering ‘classical’ music a more accessible art-form.²⁷³

Overview of Works of this Period

Maconchy’s later period was one of extraordinary productivity. Placing the orchestral genre aside, she focused her creative energies largely on chamber and choral endeavours. Her cycle of quartets grew from nine to thirteen, and was broadcast in its entirety on more than one occasion.²⁷⁴ A complete recording of the quartets was made in 1989/90 (performed by the Hanson, Bingham and Mistry Quartets; issued by Unicorn-Kanchana and re-issued by Regis: Forum FRC 9301). Many of her additional late chamber works were written to commission from musician friends, including Thea King, Janet Craxton, Evelyn Rothwell, Kenneth Heath, Osian Ellis, Nicholas Logie and Stephen Isserlis.²⁷⁵

Vocal works make up the majority of Maconchy’s late output. As with her chamber works, this large output was partly due to the number of commissions received from friends. Singers who sought works from her include Peter Pears, Noelle Barker, Jane Manning and Tracey Chadwell, and a number of conductors, including Graham Treacher, John Poole and Stephen Wilkinson, also invited new

²⁷³ Gasser, ‘Period: Contemporary’.

²⁷⁴ LeFanu, ‘Elizabeth Maconchy DBE (1907–1994)’.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

work and were associated with her premieres.²⁷⁶ Major works for voice include her two dramatic cantatas *Ariadne* (1970/71) and *Héloise and Abelard* (1976–78).²⁷⁷

Genre	Number of Works
Chamber	22
Unaccompanied Choral	13
Orchestral	7
Solo Vocal with instrument(s)	7
Vocal-Orchestral	6
Choral, with 1-9 instruments	4
Instrument Ensemble	2
Stage Work	1
Total	62

Table 9: Overview of Late Period Works

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ I was fortunate enough to attend a performance of the latter in London with Carola Darwin, Robert Rice, John Upperton, Elysian Singers, Orchestra of the City, Guild Hall School of Music & Drama, dir. Sam Laughton, Jerwood Hall, LSO St. Luke's, UBS and LSO Music Education Centre, London [9 November 2008]

Key works of this period include the two one-movement quartets, Nos. 10 and 11, her choral work ‘Creatures’, and *Quartetto Corto*. The main focus of the ensuing discussion is to explore the idea that Maconchy’s stylistic vocabulary was still actively evolving throughout this late phase of her career.

The String Quartet in Context

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw a surge in the popularity of the string quartet amongst composers and performers. Reasons to account for this are many and varied: first, the ‘partisan conflicts of the 1950s [...] between an avant garde and a body of traditionalists’ were no longer an issue; second, ‘the joining of Eastern Central Europe into the Western musical commonwealth’ brought acclaim to composers, including Kurtág, Schnittke and Gubaidulina, who had been composing with ‘conventional means in unconventional ways’; third, many new ensembles embraced contemporary works and included them in their repertoires, thereby increasing the demand for new quartets. Quartet composers of this period include Reich, Young, Riley, Glass, Adams (American minimalism – specialised in by The Kronos quartet of San Francisco; Volans, Górecki, Golijov, Tan (Traditional music cultures – also played by Kronos quartet); Carter, Birtwistle, Ferneyhough, Xenakis, Dusapin, Lachenmann, Stockhausen and Cage (High Modernism – specialised in by Arditti quartet of London); also Nono and Dutilleux.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ Eisen et al., ‘String Quartet’.

Maconchy's String Quartets of this Period

Maconchy's final four quartets (Nos. 10 to 13 (*Quartetto Corto*)) were written between the years 1971 and 1984. They represent perhaps her most unified works, emitting an overall heightened impression of formal, harmonic, rhythmic and textural integration. The late quartets are characterised by a broadening of musical language met with a compression of emotional expression: Maconchy expands her compositional dimensions in terms of tempi, dynamics, harmonies, rhythms and range, although not in terms of duration (the late quartets are not any longer than previous quartets and are, in fact, shorter than most of the middle-period quartets). The effect produced is one of an extended colour-palette brimming with layers of subtle shades, which meld and mix to deepen sonic interest.

Aspects relating to the overall formal structure of Maconchy's late quartets are unconventional: the Tenth and Eleventh Quartets, for example, are written in one continuous movement, a structure not employed by the composer since her Third Quartet in 1938. They are longer works than the Third Quartet, however, playing for approximately thirteen and fourteen minutes respectively, compared to the ten minutes of the Third. The underlying motivic material and manipulation thereof also makes String Quartets Nos. 10 and 11 much denser, more intricate works than the Third. The Twelfth Quartet follows the four-movement format, by far the most common formal construction adopted by the composer in her cycle of thirteen quartets; and the Thirteenth Quartet, officially known as *Quartetto Corto*, is in three compact and tightly-woven movements, none of which exceeds three minutes in duration.

Quartet Number	Year of Composition	Movements
String Quartet No. 10	1971/72	One continuous movement
String Quartet No. 11	1976/77	One continuous movement
String Quartet No. 12	1979	I. Allegro molto II. Scherzo – Vivo III. Lento non troppo e flessibile IV. Molto moderato – Allegro moderato, vigoroso
String Quartet No. 13 (Quartetto Corto)	1984	I. Allegro moderato II. Lento, ma molto flessibile III. Allegro risoluto

Table 10: Late Period Quartets

The One-Movement Quartets: String Quartet Nos. 10 and 11

Maconchy's Tenth Quartet was composed in 1971/72 in response to a commission from the Cheltenham Festival and first performed there in 1972. It is written in one continuous and closely-knit movement, a form Maconchy had not adopted since her Third Quartet in 1938.

The formal blueprint of the Tenth Quartet exhibits a montage of tempos and textures. The tempo undergoes nine dramatic changes from the opening *Molto Lento* to its closing paragraphs, and a similar number of less pronounced alterations. The large number of tempo changes in both the Tenth and Eleventh

Quartets means that each musical segment is relatively short in duration, and this, together with the intensely integrated nature of the underlying motivic material, renders the various musical portions significantly more akin to sections rather than movements, thereby accounting perhaps for Maconchy's decision to complete these works in a single span. The table below outlines the nine major tempo changes appearing during the Tenth Quartet, along with the Rehearsal Numbers at which each of the changes is implemented:

Opening	RN 5	RN 11	RN 13	RN 14	RN 15	RN 16 (from b. 8)	RN 17 (b. 5-6)	RN 18	RN 29
Molto Lento	Vivo	Lento	Allegro Molto, vigoroso	Meno Mosso	A Tempo (allegro molto)	Poco Lento	Piu mosso, ma tranquillo	Allegro molto	Molto Lento

Table 11: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: Tempo Changes

The *Molto Lento* sections which frame the work are characterised by a recurrent viola gesture first heard 'quasi sotto voce' in the opening bars (see Ex. 73), against which a canvas of accompanying chords softly pulsates. This brief viola gesture is the *donné* which dominates much of the quartet's subsequent motivic procedures.²⁷⁹



Ex. 73: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: b. 1-5

²⁷⁹ Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

Variations of this motif abound in ensuing passages. In the opening *Molto Lento* section alone, references to the motif are profuse: it is presented canonically at RN 1 (see Ex. 74); a rhythmically and melodically unified variant is introduced at RN 2 (see Ex. 75); and it forms snatches of the first violin melody line at RN 2 in the ‘*senza misura*’ section (see Ex. 76).

Ex. 74: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 1, b. 1–3

Ex. 75: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 2, b. 1

Ex. 76: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 2, b. 3–4

Maconchy’s characteristic economic resourcefulness is clearly visible in these short illustrations: using minimal motivic fabric, she manages to piece together a musical patchwork whose total seems consistently to comprise more than the sum of its parts.

‘Spontaneous Mutation’

In this quartet, it is apparent that the main thematic material underpinning each section evolves by a process of ‘spontaneous mutation’.²⁸⁰ This expression was used by reviewer Edward GreenField in relation to the motivic architecture framing Maconchy’s Fifth Quartet and is valid to a certain extent in relation to all of her quartets; but it is the later quartets which exploit this formal device most abundantly. The first dramatically contrasting section of the Tenth Quartet (*Vivo* RN5, see Ex. 77) for example, is constructed almost obsessively on an embellished grace-note idea first stated early in the opening *Molto Lento* (see Ex. 78).

²⁸⁰ GreenField, [untitled], p. 46.

Vivo (♩ = c. 160)

Vln I
Vln II
Vla

Ex. 77: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 5, b. 1–2

Vln II
Vla

Ex. 78: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 1, b. 3

As a result of this near-obsessive adoption of a tiny, otherwise unremarkable musical gesture, the *Vivo* section is instantly recognisable, underpinning the importance of gesture in Maconchy's compositional reasoning. Just as easily as this idea is picked up, however, the grace-note gesture is dropped again and replaced by Maconchy's succeeding musical 'tick': the heavy chordal passages which form the basis of the following *Lento*. The motivic threads underlying the *Lento* (RN 11, seen most clearly in violin I and cello, see Ex. 79), strongly

resemble material present in the five-bar musical passage during the *Vivo* section at RN 8 (see Ex. 80).

Lento (♩ = c. 68)

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

Ex. 79: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 11, b. 1–3

Sul IV -----

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

Ex. 80: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 8, b. 1–5

The measured homophonic writing contained in this five-bar ‘interlude’ in the *Vivo* is taken up in the outer voices of the *Lento*.

In a similar way, the following *Allegro Molto, vigoroso* picks up on and presents a rhythmically-distorted version of a three-note descending chromatic pattern employed as part of a bigger picture in the motivic material underlying the previous *Lento* (visible in the violin II line of Ex. 79) (see Ex. 81).

Allegro molto, vigoroso (♩ = c. 180)

Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc

Ex. 81: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 10: RN 13, b. 1–3

The ferocity and vigour implicit in this incarnation of the pre-mutation material makes this one of the more distinctive sections of the quartet. It also exemplifies Maconchy’s proclivity for using intervals in a new gestural way for the purpose of developing the argument of the quartet.

This process of impulsive mutation can be readily detected at numerous junctures throughout the remainder of this quartet, and the acuity with which it is exploited is likely to account to some degree for her daughter Nicola LeFanu's observation that the form of the Tenth Quartet is 'entirely coherent as it unfolds to the listener'.²⁸¹ Maconchy herself said similarly of her Eleventh Quartet, that it is 'perhaps the most completely-integrated' of all of her quartets.²⁸² In terms of unity and integration, both quartets are in fact exemplary archetypes.

As the only two of Maconchy's later quartets to be written in one-movement format, the Tenth and Eleventh Quartets merit a degree of comparative investigation. From the opening bars of the Eleventh Quartet it is apparent that the *donné* material is very similar to that of its predecessor:

Lento (♩ = c. 54)

Ex. 82: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 11: b. 1–2

²⁸¹ LeFanu, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

²⁸² Maconchy, sleeve notes, *Complete String Quartets*.

The first three notes of the *donné* material in both are in fact identical in terms of the pitches used (B, C and D flat), which immediately serves to unify the two quartets. Upon closer inspection however, it becomes apparent that the two are in fact very individual works. Reviewer Trevor Bray had the following to say in relation to the Eleventh Quartet in a 1984 *Musical Times* article:

Elizabeth Maconchy's 11th String Quartet is one of her most impressive. In her earlier quartets the too obvious structural and textural indebtedness to Bartók's examples overshadowed the individual characteristics of her idiom. But here Bartók's influence has been integrated more purposefully into her style providing a language that is at once thematically taut and expressively very flexible.²⁸³

The contrasting textures and tempos in the Eleventh Quartet are mosaic-like in the extreme with different tempo markings stated every couple of bars at some points. This continuous textural regeneration leads to the creation of a highly-condensed, acutely-intricate sonic matrix, which comes across as having been devised on a significantly more expansive scale than that of the Tenth. In many ways, the Eleventh essay represents the pinnacle of Maconchy's late style, whereby practically every dimension of her musical language is challenged and ultimately intensified. This is not to say that the Tenth Quartet is any less unified than its successor. The difference is in the respective breadth of ideas spun into the web of each of the works: the subtle shading implicit in the Eleventh delivers a slightly more compact, multilayered impact than that of its precursor.

In the interest of clarifying what is meant by Bray in relation to the purposefully-integrated Bartókian influence in the Eleventh Quartet, it is helpful to broaden the present discussion momentarily. The influence of Bartók is identifiable in many

²⁸³ Trevor Bray, 'British String Quartets', *MT*, 125 (1984), p. 581.

facets of the Eleventh Quartet, two in particular being the ‘Night Music’-type textures created at numerous stages throughout the work; and the magisterial, orchestral-sized harmonic blocks that emerge periodically. The following example (Ex. 83) is taken from the second movement of Bartók’s Fifth Quartet and illustrates one instance of the ‘Night Music’ textures for which the composer is fêted:

Ex. 83: Bartók: String Quartet No. 5: II: b. 26–27

The term ‘Night Music’ is synonymous with Bartók and loosely refers to ‘those contexts, from brief passages to complete works, in which [the composer] conveys the sounds of nature at night’.²⁸⁴ Its forms are many and varied, and so it is difficult, maybe even impossible, to define objectively; but on a technical level it is perceptible to a certain extent by an inherent sparseness of texture wherein vastly contrasting musical fragments are often jaggedly juxtaposed, and attention

²⁸⁴ Gary Danchenka, ‘Diatonic Pitch-Class Sets in Bartók’s Night Music’, *Indiana Theory*, 8/1 (Spring 1987), pp. 15–55, cited by Elliott Antokoletz in *Béla Bartók: A Guide to Research*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 265.

to timbre is scrupulous, all of which contributes to the evocation of the sounds of nocturnal nature.

There are numerous instances in Maconchy's works where one could realistically discern the influence of Bartók's 'Night Music'. In terms of the quartets for example, allusions to the influence become increasingly apparent from the middle works onwards, as Maconchy's sensitivity to timbre heightened. The first *Scherzo* (Movement II) of the Seventh Quartet, for example, features textural qualities which are reminiscent of this Bartókian effect. The following example (Ex. 84) is taken from the closing paragraphs of this movement:

Ex. 84: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 7: II: RN 17, b. 4–7

The *pianissimo* backdrop and timbral colours employed in this sequence, coupled with the clearly-contrasting melodic and rhythmic fragments inherent in the individual lines, impress on this segment an ethereal, otherworldly quality which is distinctly redolent of the 'Night Music' concept epitomised by Bartók. From the Eighth Quartet onwards, gestures towards this textural paradigm become

significantly more pronounced: the timbral nuances intrinsic in the previously-outlined *senza misura* section of String Quartet No. 10, for example (see Ex. 76), are singularly mnemonic of this sonic sequent. In the Eleventh Quartet episodes recalling the Bartókian effect are manifold and, as suggested by Bray in his evaluation of the work, keenly and purposefully integrated into her style. The following example (Ex. 85) illustrates her inventive use of frenzied harmonics for the purpose. The resonance created by the juxtaposition of these harmonics with the melodic contours of the other two voices is strongly evocative of the nocturnal sonorities of ‘Night Music’. The contrasting fragments in this instance are perhaps less pronounced than those typified by Bartók, but the textural similarity is unmistakable, thereby exemplifying the ‘purposefully-integrated’ nature of this influence, as stated by Bray.

Ex. 85: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 11: RN 10, b. 5–9

In relation to the Bartókian harmonic-blocking, the following is a transparent example of such in his works (see Ex. 86). Taken from the second movement of String Quartet No. 5, it clearly enunciates his use of block harmony in the most basic form: there are two forces, the accompanying chordal chorale-type writing

and the first violin line which plays a melody unrelated tonally to the major chordal base of C.

The image shows a musical score for Bartók's String Quartet No. 5, II, measures 18-21. It consists of four staves: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. The Vln I staff has a melodic line starting in measure 18 with a 'più p' dynamic. The Vln II, Vla, and Vc staves provide a harmonic base with sustained chords and moving lines, also marked 'più p'.

Ex. 86: Bartók: String Quartet No. 5: II: b. 18–21

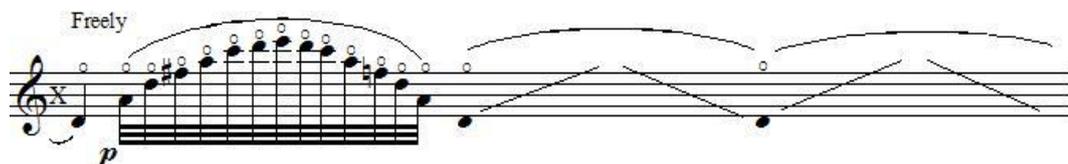
The following illustrates a more disguised version of a similar blocking device in Maconchy's Eleventh Quartet:

The image shows a musical score for Maconchy's String Quartet No. 11, measures 7-1. It consists of four staves: Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. The Vln I staff has a melodic line starting in measure 7 with 'Sul G' and 'cantabile' markings. The Vln II, Vla, and Vc staves provide a harmonic base with sustained chords and moving lines, marked 'mp'.

Ex. 87: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 11: RN 21, b. 7 – RN 28, b. 1

The first prominent chordal sonority (second beat) is made up of C, B flat, E and A, which resembles a C major dominant seventh with added sixth. The second chordal block (last beat) resembles a B flat minor with C sharp bass (which, if spelled enharmonically makes a first inversion B flat minor chord), and the third (first beat of following bar) is made up of an F base with A (falling to A flat), E flat and B flat recalling an F seventh chord with major third falling to minor third. This three-chord section in fact produces a very tonal sonority of V – iv – i in F minor. While more disguised than this particular example of Bartók's, the parallel is quite discernible audibly, that is, standard cadential movement within an otherwise non-tonal setting.

While traces of the ‘purposefully-integrated’ characteristics outlined above are also palpable in the Tenth Quartet, the level of textural penetration achieved therein is on a slighter scale. Their manifestation in the Eleventh Quartet is comparable to some extent to a cross-quartet cyclic-type ‘spontaneous mutation’, whereby the concept is picked up from the previous quartet and worked into the mainstream texture of the subsequent work. The ‘Night Music’ idea in particular is taken to extremes in the Eleventh Quartet, and in fact carries through to the Twelfth Quartet where its textural significance is taken to new heights:



Ex. 88: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 12: II: RN 15, b. 7

The vaporous whirling effect created as a result of the combined use of spiralling harmonics and extensive *glissandi* produces a celestial, ‘Night Music’-like

ambience on a level entirely exclusive to the Twelfth Quartet – a feature plainly reflective of the evolutionary processes still actively shaping the linguistic contours of Maconchy’s musical lexicon. To illuminate further the remarkable strength of Maconchy’s creative impulses during this late period, the next section will be devoted to a discussion of her delicately-charismatic song cycle ‘Creatures’, composed in 1979, the same year as the Twelfth Quartet.

‘Creatures’

‘Creatures’ is a series of seven short, charmingly intricate animal portraits for SATB choir. Six of its seven texts are by British writers, all of whom are contemporary figures, with the exception of William Blake; and the remaining text ‘The Dove and the Wren’ is a traditional nursery rhyme. ‘Creatures’ was commissioned by Stephen Wilkinson and the BBC Northern Singers. Although it was written as a complete cycle, Maconchy specifies on the cover of the score that it need not be performed thus, stating that ‘a choice of the pieces’ may be selected for performance instead of the entire set.²⁸⁵

- I. ‘The Hen and the Carp’ (text: Ian Serraillier (1912–1994))
- II. ‘The Snail’ (text: James Reeves (1909–1978))
- III. ‘Rendez-vous with a Beetle’ (text: E.V. Rieu (1887–1972))
- IV. ‘Tiger! Tiger!’ (text: William Blake 1757–1827))
- V. ‘Cat’s Funeral’ (text: E.V. Rieu)
- VI. ‘The Dove and the Wren’ (words traditional)
- VII. ‘Cat!’ (text: Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965))

²⁸⁵ See Appendix X.

Interestingly, in a number of the pieces, the female voices perform a foreground melodic function, while the male voices execute a background role. This is particularly true, for example, of ‘The Snail’, ‘Cat’s Funeral’, ‘The Dove and the Wren’.

I. ‘The Hen and the Carp’

The first piece of the set, ‘The Hen and the Carp’ is an animated exchange between a melodramatic hen and a self-righteous carp on the issue of giving birth. The piece is defined by its continually changing vocal textures: it begins with each of the four voices singing in unison; in the third bar the harmony splits, introducing homophonic interest; the fifth bar sees each of the four voices burst into an energized canon; and the seventh bar introduces the contrapuntal setting of contrasting lyrics (see Ex. 89). An inventive interplay between vocal textures continues all throughout this short piece.

The image shows a musical score for two voices: Soprano and Alto. The Soprano part is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It begins with a whole rest, followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a quarter note C5. A dynamic marking of *f* is placed above the first note. A slur covers the last three notes, with a '3' above it indicating a triplet. The lyrics 'What a won - der - ful hen' are written below the notes. The Alto part is also in treble clef with a common time signature. It begins with a quarter note G3, followed by a series of eighth notes: A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F4, G4, A4, B4, C5, D5, E5, F5, G5, A5, B5, C6, D6, E6, F6, G6, A6, B6, C7, D7, E7, F7, G7, A7, B7, C8, D8, E8, F8, G8, A8, B8, C9, D9, E9, F9, G9, A9, B9, C10, D10, E10, F10, G10, A10, B10, C11, D11, E11, F11, G11, A11, B11, C12, D12, E12, F12, G12, A12, B12, C13, D13, E13, F13, G13, A13, B13, C14, D14, E14, F14, G14, A14, B14, C15, D15, E15, F15, G15, A15, B15, C16, D16, E16, F16, G16, A16, B16, C17, D17, E17, F17, G17, A17, B17, C18, D18, E18, F18, G18, A18, B18, C19, D19, E19, F19, G19, A19, B19, C20, D20, E20, F20, G20, A20, B20, C21, D21, E21, F21, G21, A21, B21, C22, D22, E22, F22, G22, A22, B22, C23, D23, E23, F23, G23, A23, B23, C24, D24, E24, F24, G24, A24, B24, C25, D25, E25, F25, G25, A25, B25, C26, D26, E26, F26, G26, A26, B26, C27, D27, E27, F27, G27, A27, B27, C28, D28, E28, F28, G28, A28, B28, C29, D29, E29, F29, G29, A29, B29, C30, D30, E30, F30, G30, A30, B30, C31, D31, E31, F31, G31, A31, B31, C32, D32, E32, F32, G32, A32, B32, C33, D33, E33, F33, G33, A33, B33, C34, D34, E34, F34, G34, A34, B34, C35, D35, E35, F35, G35, A35, B35, C36, D36, E36, F36, G36, A36, B36, C37, D37, E37, F37, G37, A37, B37, C38, D38, E38, F38, G38, A38, B38, C39, D39, E39, F39, G39, A39, B39, C40, D40, E40, F40, G40, A40, B40, C41, D41, E41, F41, G41, A41, B41, C42, D42, E42, F42, G42, A42, B42, C43, D43, E43, F43, G43, A43, B43, C44, D44, E44, F44, G44, A44, B44, C45, D45, E45, F45, G45, A45, B45, C46, D46, E46, F46, G46, A46, B46, C47, D47, E47, F47, G47, A47, B47, C48, D48, E48, F48, G48, A48, B48, C49, D49, E49, F49, G49, A49, B49, C50, D50, E50, F50, G50, A50, B50, C51, D51, E51, F51, G51, A51, B51, C52, D52, E52, F52, G52, A52, B52, C53, D53, E53, F53, G53, A53, B53, C54, D54, E54, F54, G54, A54, B54, C55, D55, E55, F55, G55, A55, B55, C56, D56, E56, F56, G56, A56, B56, C57, D57, E57, F57, G57, A57, B57, C58, D58, E58, F58, G58, A58, B58, C59, D59, E59, F59, G59, A59, B59, C60, D60, E60, F60, G60, A60, B60, C61, D61, E61, F61, G61, A61, B61, C62, D62, E62, F62, G62, A62, B62, C63, D63, E63, F63, G63, A63, B63, C64, D64, E64, F64, G64, A64, B64, C65, D65, E65, F65, G65, A65, B65, C66, D66, E66, F66, G66, A66, B66, C67, D67, E67, F67, G67, A67, B67, C68, D68, E68, F68, G68, A68, B68, C69, D69, E69, F69, G69, A69, B69, C70, D70, E70, F70, G70, A70, B70, C71, D71, E71, F71, G71, A71, B71, C72, D72, E72, F72, G72, A72, B72, C73, D73, E73, F73, G73, A73, B73, C74, D74, E74, F74, G74, A74, B74, C75, D75, E75, F75, G75, A75, B75, C76, D76, E76, F76, G76, A76, B76, C77, D77, E77, F77, G77, A77, B77, C78, D78, E78, F78, G78, A78, B78, C79, D79, E79, F79, G79, A79, B79, C80, D80, E80, F80, G80, A80, B80, C81, D81, E81, F81, G81, A81, B81, C82, D82, E82, F82, G82, A82, B82, C83, D83, E83, F83, G83, A83, B83, C84, D84, E84, F84, G84, A84, B84, C85, D85, E85, F85, G85, A85, B85, C86, D86, E86, F86, G86, A86, B86, C87, D87, E87, F87, G87, A87, B87, C88, D88, E88, F88, G88, A88, B88, C89, D89, E89, F89, G89, A89, B89, C90, D90, E90, F90, G90, A90, B90, C91, D91, E91, F91, G91, A91, B91, C92, D92, E92, F92, G92, A92, B92, C93, D93, E93, F93, G93, A93, B93, C94, D94, E94, F94, G94, A94, B94, C95, D95, E95, F95, G95, A95, B95, C96, D96, E96, F96, G96, A96, B96, C97, D97, E97, F97, G97, A97, B97, C98, D98, E98, F98, G98, A98, B98, C99, D99, E99, F99, G99, A99, B99, C100, D100, E100, F100, G100, A100, B100, C101, D101, E101, F101, G101, A101, B101, C102, D102, E102, F102, G102, A102, B102, C103, D103, E103, F103, G103, A103, B103, C104, D104, E104, F104, G104, A104, B104, C105, D105, E105, F105, G105, A105, B105, C106, D106, E106, F106, G106, A106, B106, C107, D107, E107, F107, G107, A107, B107, C108, D108, E108, F108, G108, A108, B108, C109, D109, E109, F109, G109, A109, B109, C110, D110, E110, F110, G110, A110, B110, C111, D111, E111, F111, G111, A111, B111, C112, D112, E112, F112, G112, A112, B112, C113, D113, E113, F113, G113, A113, B113, C114, D114, E114, F114, G114, A114, B114, C115, D115, E115, F115, G115, A115, B115, C116, D116, E116, F116, G116, A116, B116, C117, D117, E117, F117, G117, A117, B117, C118, D118, E118, F118, G118, A118, B118, C119, D119, E119, F119, G119, A119, B119, C120, D120, E120, F120, G120, A120, B120, C121, D121, E121, F121, G121, A121, B121, C122, D122, E122, F122, G122, A122, B122, C123, D123, E123, F123, G123, A123, B123, C124, D124, E124, F124, G124, A124, B124, C125, D125, E125, F125, G125, A125, B125, C126, D126, E126, F126, G126, A126, B126, C127, D127, E127, F127, G127, A127, B127, C128, D128, E128, F128, G128, A128, B128, C129, D129, E129, F129, G129, A129, B129, C130, D130, E130, F130, G130, A130, B130, C131, D131, E131, F131, G131, A131, B131, C132, D132, E132, F132, G132, A132, B132, C133, D133, E133, F133, G133, A133, B133, C134, D134, E134, F134, G134, A134, B134, C135, D135, E135, F135, G135, A135, B135, C136, D136, E136, F136, G136, A136, B136, C137, D137, E137, F137, G137, A137, B137, C138, D138, E138, F138, G138, A138, B138, C139, D139, E139, F139, G139, A139, B139, C140, D140, E140, F140, G140, A140, B140, C141, D141, E141, F141, G141, A141, B141, C142, D142, E142, F142, G142, A142, B142, C143, D143, E143, F143, G143, A143, B143, C144, D144, E144, F144, G144, A144, B144, C145, D145, E145, F145, G145, A145, B145, C146, D146, E146, F146, G146, A146, B146, C147, D147, E147, F147, G147, A147, B147, C148, D148, E148, F148, G148, A148, B148, C149, D149, E149, F149, G149, A149, B149, C150, D150, E150, F150, G150, A150, B150, C151, D151, E151, F151, G151, A151, B151, C152, D152, E152, F152, G152, A152, B152, C153, D153, E153, F153, G153, A153, B153, C154, D154, E154, F154, G154, A154, B154, C155, D155, E155, F155, G155, A155, B155, C156, D156, E156, F156, G156, A156, B156, C157, D157, E157, F157, G157, A157, B157, C158, D158, E158, F158, G158, A158, B158, C159, D159, E159, F159, G159, A159, B159, C160, D160, E160, F160, G160, A160, B160, C161, D161, E161, F161, G161, A161, B161, C162, D162, E162, F162, G162, A162, B162, C163, D163, E163, F163, G163, A163, B163, C164, D164, E164, F164, G164, A164, B164, C165, D165, E165, F165, G165, A165, B165, C166, D166, E166, F166, G166, A166, B166, C167, D167, E167, F167, G167, A167, B167, C168, D168, E168, F168, G168, A168, B168, C169, D169, E169, F169, G169, A169, B169, C170, D170, E170, F170, G170, A170, B170, C171, D171, E171, F171, G171, A171, B171, C172, D172, E172, F172, G172, A172, B172, C173, D173, E173, F173, G173, A173, B173, C174, D174, E174, F174, G174, A174, B174, C175, D175, E175, F175, G175, A175, B175, C176, D176, E176, F176, G176, A176, B176, C177, D177, E177, F177, G177, A177, B177, C178, D178, E178, F178, G178, A178, B178, C179, D179, E179, F179, G179, A179, B179, C180, D180, E180, F180, G180, A180, B180, C181, D181, E181, F181, G181, A181, B181, C182, D182, E182, F182, G182, A182, B182, C183, D183, E183, F183, G183, A183, B183, C184, D184, E184, F184, G184, A184, B184, C185, D185, E185, F185, G185, A185, B185, C186, D186, E186, F186, G186, A186, B186, C187, D187, E187, F187, G187, A187, B187, C188, D188, E188, F188, G188, A188, B188, C189, D189, E189, F189, G189, A189, B189, C190, D190, E190, F190, G190, A190, B190, C191, D191, E191, F191, G191, A191, B191, C192, D192, E192, F192, G192, A192, B192, C193, D193, E193, F193, G193, A193, B193, C194, D194, E194, F194, G194, A194, B194, C195, D195, E195, F195, G195, A195, B195, C196, D196, E196, F196, G196, A196, B196, C197, D197, E197, F197, G197, A197, B197, C198, D198, E198, F198, G198, A198, B198, C199, D199, E199, F199, G199, A199, B199, C200, D200, E200, F200, G200, A200, B200, C201, D201, E201, F201, G201, A201, B201, C202, D202, E202, F202, G202, A202, B202, C203, D203, E203, F203, G203, A203, B203, C204, D204, E204, F204, G204, A204, B204, C205, D205, E205, F205, G205, A205, B205, C206, D206, E206, F206, G206, A206, B206, C207, D207, E207, F207, G207, A207, B207, C208, D208, E208, F208, G208, A208, B208, C209, D209, E209, F209, G209, A209, B209, C210, D210, E210, F210, G210, A210, B210, C211, D211, E211, F211, G211, A211, B211, C212, D212, E212, F212, G212, A212, B212, C213, D213, E213, F213, G213, A213, B213, C214, D214, E214, F214, G214, A214, B214, C215, D215, E215, F215, G215, A215, B215, C216, D216, E216, F216, G216, A216, B216, C217, D217, E217, F217, G217, A217, B217, C218, D218, E218, F218, G218, A218, B218, C219, D219, E219, F219, G219, A219, B219, C220, D220, E220, F220, G220, A220, B220, C221, D221, E221, F221, G221, A221, B221, C222, D222, E222, F222, G222, A222, B222, C223, D223, E223, F223, G223, A223, B223, C224, D224, E224, F224, G224, A224, B224, C225, D225, E225, F225, G225, A225, B225, C226, D226, E226, F226, G226, A226, B226, C227, D227, E227, F227, G227, A227, B227, C228, D228, E228, F228, G228, A228, B228, C229, D229, E229, F229, G229, A229, B229, C230, D230, E230, F230, G230, A230, B230, C231, D231, E231, F231, G231, A231, B231, C232, D232, E232, F232, G232, A232, B232, C233, D233, E233, F233, G233, A233, B233, C234, D234, E234, F234, G234, A234, B234, C235, D235, E235, F235, G235, A235, B235, C236, D236, E236, F236, G236, A236, B236, C237, D237, E237, F237, G237, A237, B237, C238, D238, E238, F238, G238, A238, B238, C239, D239, E239, F239, G239, A239, B239, C240, D240, E240, F240, G240, A240, B240, C241, D241, E241, F241, G241, A241, B241, C242, D242, E242, F242, G242, A242, B242, C243, D243, E243, F243, G243, A243, B243, C244, D244, E244, F244, G244, A244, B244, C245, D245, E245, F245, G245, A245, B245, C246, D246, E246, F246, G246, A246, B246, C247, D247, E247, F247, G247, A247, B247, C248, D248, E248, F248, G248, A248, B248, C249, D249, E249, F249, G249, A249, B249, C250, D250, E250, F250, G250, A250, B250, C251, D251, E251, F251, G251, A251, B251, C252, D252, E252, F252, G252, A252, B252, C253, D253, E253, F253, G253, A253, B253, C254, D254, E254, F254, G254, A254, B254, C255, D255, E255, F255, G255, A255, B255, C256, D256, E256, F256, G256, A256, B256, C257, D257, E257, F257, G257, A257, B257, C258, D258, E258, F258, G258, A258, B258, C259, D259, E259, F259, G259, A259, B259, C260, D260, E260, F260, G260, A260, B260, C261, D261, E261, F261, G261, A261, B261, C262, D262, E262, F262, G262, A262, B262, C263, D263, E263, F263, G263, A263, B263, C264, D264, E264, F264, G264, A264, B264, C265, D265, E265, F265, G265, A265, B265, C266, D266, E266, F266, G266, A266, B266, C267, D267, E267, F267, G267, A267, B267, C268, D268, E268, F268, G268, A268, B268, C269, D269, E269, F269, G269, A269, B269, C270, D270, E270, F270, G270, A270, B270, C271, D271, E271, F271, G271, A271, B271, C272, D272, E272, F272, G272, A272, B272, C273, D273, E273, F273, G273, A273, B273, C274, D274, E274, F274, G274, A274, B274, C275, D275, E275, F275, G275, A275, B275, C276, D276, E276, F276, G276, A276, B276, C277, D277, E277, F277, G277, A277, B277, C278, D278, E278, F278, G278, A278, B278, C279, D279, E279, F279, G279, A279, B279, C280, D280, E280, F280, G280, A280, B280, C281, D281, E281, F281, G281, A281, B281, C282, D282, E282, F282, G282, A282, B282, C283, D283, E283, F283, G283, A283, B283, C284, D284, E284, F284, G284, A284, B284, C285, D285, E285, F285, G285, A285, B285, C286, D286, E286, F286, G286, A286, B286, C287, D287, E287, F287, G287, A287, B287, C288, D288, E288, F288, G288, A288, B288, C289, D289, E289, F289, G289, A289, B289, C290, D290, E290, F290, G290, A290, B290, C291, D291, E291, F291, G291, A291, B291, C292, D292, E292, F292, G292, A292, B292, C293, D293, E293, F293, G293, A293, B293, C294, D294, E294, F294, G294, A294, B294, C295, D295, E295, F295, G295, A295, B295, C296, D296, E296, F296, G296, A296, B296, C297, D297, E297, F297, G297, A297, B297, C298, D298, E298, F298, G298, A298, B298, C299, D299, E299, F299, G299, A299, B299, C300, D300, E300, F300, G300, A300, B300, C301, D301, E301, F301, G301, A301, B301, C302, D302, E302, F302, G302, A302, B302, C303, D303, E303, F303, G303, A303, B303, C304, D304, E304, F304, G304, A304, B304, C305, D305, E305, F305, G305, A305, B305, C306, D306, E306, F306, G306, A306, B306, C307, D307, E307, F307, G307, A307, B307, C308, D308, E308, F308, G308, A308, B308, C309, D309, E309, F309, G309, A309, B309, C310, D310, E310, F310, G310, A310, B310, C311, D311, E311, F311, G311, A311, B311, C312, D312, E312, F312, G312, A312, B312, C313, D313, E313, F313, G313, A313, B313, C314, D314, E314, F314, G314, A314, B314, C315, D315, E315, F315, G315, A315, B315, C316, D316, E316, F316, G316, A316, B316, C317, D317, E317, F317, G317, A317, B317, C318, D318, E318, F318, G318, A318, B318, C319, D319, E319, F319, G319, A319, B319, C320, D320, E320, F320, G320, A320, B320, C321, D321, E321, F321, G321, A321, B321, C322, D322, E322, F322, G322, A322, B322, C323, D323, E323, F323, G323, A323, B323, C324, D324, E324, F324, G324, A324, B324, C325, D325, E325, F325, G325, A325, B325, C326, D326, E326, F326, G326, A326, B326, C327, D327, E327, F327, G327, A327, B327, C328, D328, E328, F328, G328, A328, B328, C329, D329, E329, F329, G329, A329, B329, C330, D330, E330, F330, G330, A330, B330, C331, D331, E331, F331, G331, A331, B331, C332, D332, E332, F332, G332, A332, B332, C333, D333, E333, F333, G333, A333, B333, C334, D334, E334, F334, G334, A334, B334, C335, D335, E335, F335, G335, A335, B335, C336, D336, E336, F336, G336, A336, B336, C337, D337, E337, F337, G337, A337, B337, C338, D338, E338, F338, G338, A338, B338, C339, D339, E339, F339, G339, A339, B339, C340, D340, E340, F340, G340, A340, B340, C341, D341, E341, F341, G341, A341, B341, C342, D342, E342, F342, G342, A342, B342, C343, D343, E343, F343, G343, A343, B343, C344, D344, E344, F344, G344, A344, B344, C345, D345, E345, F345, G345, A345, B345, C346, D346, E346, F346, G346, A346, B346, C347, D347, E347, F347, G347, A347, B347, C348, D348, E348, F348, G348, A348, B348, C349, D349, E349, F349, G349, A349, B349, C350, D350, E350, F350, G350, A350, B350, C351, D351, E351, F351, G351, A351, B351, C352, D352, E352, F352, G352, A352, B352, C353, D353, E353, F353, G353, A353, B353, C354, D354, E354, F354, G354, A354, B354, C355, D355, E355, F355, G355, A355, B355, C356, D356, E356, F356, G356, A356, B356, C357, D357, E357, F357, G357, A357, B357, C358, D358, E358, F358, G358, A358, B358, C359, D359, E359, F359, G359, A359, B359, C360, D360, E360, F360, G360, A360, B360, C361, D361, E361, F361, G361, A361, B361, C362, D362, E362, F362, G362, A362, B362, C363, D363,

which shifts seamlessly from voice to voice but is ever-present. The greater part of the piece is dominated by paired homophonic writing in the soprano and alto lines. It is not until the final line of verse, ‘Like a toppling caravan’, that Maconchy employs canonic imitation as a central textural device. Aside from the descending minor-seventh vocal *glissando* on the word ‘toppling’ (bars 34–35), melodic movement is mostly stepwise or based on small intervals, intensifying the slow laboured plight of the snail. These *glissandi*, however, are vital to the sound-world of this piece and also serve to forge a sonic link with the contemporary quartets, further enhancing the major role timbral and colouristic devices come to play in Maconchy’s mid-to-late output. Octatonic melodic gestures abound in this piece and are particularly transparent in the humming passages.

III. ‘Rendez-vous with a Beetle’

The third piece, ‘Rendez-vous with a Beetle’ depicts a somnolent beetle contemplating the sensuous pleasures of ‘dusk in Usk’, a small town in South Wales. Maconchy’s setting is mostly syllabic and homophonic but features fleeting melismas of canonic writing which are centred on a descending five-note whole-tone quaver pattern:

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line in 2/4 time. The tempo is marked 'Tempo moderato' with a metronome marking of approximately 104 (♩ = c. 104). The dynamics are marked 'mp'. The melody consists of a descending five-note whole-tone quaver pattern: G4 (quarter), F#4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half). The lyrics are 'Meet me in Usk and drone _____ to me'. The word 'drone' is followed by a long horizontal line representing a melisma. Above the final note (C4), there is a fermata and a '5' indicating a five-measure rest.

Ex. 90: Maconchy: Creatures: III: b. 1–4

IV. ‘Tiger! Tiger!’

The fourth piece, ‘Tiger! Tiger!’, is an ode to the beauty, strength and mystique of the tiger. Its passion-infused canonic opening returns to close the piece, while the heart of the work is a somewhat more tranquil journey through a series of rhetorical questions directed at the animal’s cosmic creator. Its interwoven melodies contain numerous awkward leaps throughout, imprinting a sense of sonic disjuncture into its texture. This piece features the structural use of silence, a compositional device of which one is not overly conscious in Maconchy’s works: after the word ‘symmetry’ (bar 10) for example, there is a magnified pause in proceedings; again at the beginning of the *Poco meno mosso, tranquillo* section after the word ‘clasp’ (bar 44), and a third time before the return to the opening canonic material at bar 58–59. In this way the different formal divisions of the piece are clear-cut, which serves to counter-balance the prevailing sense of sonic disconnectedness to some degree.

V. ‘Cat’s Funeral’

The fifth piece, ‘Cat’s Funeral’, is an aching lament for a deceased cat. Maconchy’s setting features a hypnotic refrain characterised by homophonic chordal shifts in the lower voices set to the words ‘Deep, down deep’, against which the soprano line articulates a poignant melody strongly exploitative of the tritone. The resultant resonance exemplifies Maconchy’s use of intervals for direct expressive purposes. The intervening sections feature increased contrapuntal interest and dynamic colouring. The result is a deeply sensitive rendering of a text which could otherwise all-too-easily have become sentimentalised.

VI. 'The Dove and the Wren'

The sixth piece, 'The Dove and the Wren', revisits the topic of giving birth: this time it is a fearful dove expressing concern at how she will 'bring up two', while a dismissive wren boasts of bringing up ten 'like gentlemen'. As in a number of the 'Creatures' pieces, the female voices sustain much of the melodic interest while the male voices execute a repetitive background function, in this case repeating the words 'coo,coo,coo' at major second intervals to one another using syncopated rhythmic language (see Ex. 91).

VII. 'Cat!'

The final piece, 'Cat!', is a thrilling chase in which a frenzied feline finds herself the object of a canine pursuit. It is a highly visual, explosively onomatopoeic text-setting and, at just one minute's duration, is the shortest of the seven pieces. It features occasional non-musical exclamatory utterances including 'wuff, wuff' and 'pfitts, pfitts', the precise notation of which serves to highlight the 'intellectual' manner in which Maconchy uses exactitude to produce a seemingly chaotic effect.

Compositional Strategies

The seven miniatures comprising 'Creatures' reveal a lighter, more playful side of Maconchy's character than was evident in previously-discussed works. Her choices of text allow for highly imaginative wordplay, although her artistic

integrity and keenly disciplined approach to composition never permit the taking of this wordplay to unmusical lengths. An obvious example to highlight this point is her treatment of the underlying ‘coo, coo, coo’ gesture in ‘The Dove and the Wren’ (see Ex. 91):

Tranquillo (♩ = c. 60)

Soprano *mp*
The dove says coo, coo.

Alto

Tenor *p*
Coo, coo, coo-coo, coo, Coo, coo, coo-coo, coo, Coo, coo, coo-coo, coo,

Bass *p*
Coo, coo, coo-coo, coo, Coo, coo, coo-coo, coo, Coo, coo, coo-coo, coo,

Ex. 91: Maconchy: Creatures: VI: b. 1–3

While on the surface this is clearly a literal representation of the doves’ call, Maconchy manipulates its simple pattern so that it plays a vital architectural role in the delicate framework of the piece: rhythmically, its syncopated lines are integral in dictating the piece’s formal layout; harmonically, the musical rendering forms the basis of the central simultaneous C/D tonal backbone of the piece; and texturally it sets the entire pictorial scene into and out of which the principal melodic characters (soprano and alto lines) drift. This exemplifies the aforementioned manner in which Maconchy uses her selected text for the purpose

of suggesting which direction to take compositionally, but never allows it to compromise the musical value of the finished work.

Compared with the contemporary quartets, ‘Creatures’, like ‘Nocturnal’, appears by and large more tonally-grounded. The third piece of the cycle, ‘Rendez-vous with a Beetle’, for example, has a very pronounced tone centre of D major. This base is peppered with whole-tone references (seen for example in the five-note melisma illustrated in Ex. 90), which, relative to the cutting dissonance found in the quartets, still result in a largely concordant, consonant sound-world. Even ‘The Snail’, with its loosely octatonic background-humming, comes across as largely tonally-oriented when juxtaposed with the foreground melodic matter. The opening soprano gesture illustrated below is firmly in A minor but for the opening D sharp:

Andante con moto (♩ = c. 60)

Soprano *mp*
At sun - set when the night dews fall, ____

Alto *p*
(hum)

Ex. 92: Maconchy: Creatures: II: b. 1–4

The paired soprano-alto writing which dominates much of the melodic interest in the piece also enhances the harmonic consonance to some extent. The fact that the individual lines move predominantly in major thirds for the first portion (‘On ivy stems she clammers down / Carrying her house of brown / Safe in the dark no greedy eye / Can her tender body spy’ (bars 12–23, see Ex. 93), implies that the

vertical harmonic impact is major for the most part, if the linear contours are more tonally-ambiguous.

The image shows a musical score for two voices: Soprano and Alto. Both parts are in C major, 4/4 time, and marked *mp*. The lyrics for both parts are "On i - vy stems she clam-bers down". The Soprano part begins with a half rest followed by a quarter note G4, then a dotted quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, a quarter note C5, a quarter note B4, a quarter note A4, and a half note G4. The Alto part begins with a quarter note G3, a dotted quarter note A3, a quarter note B3, a quarter note C4, a quarter note B3, a quarter note A3, and a half note G3. The interval between the Soprano and Alto parts is a major third.

Ex. 93: Maconchy: *Creatures: II*: b. 12–14

This is a further example of Maconchy’s non-functional use of tonality, a stylistic trait that permeates her output irrespective of the forces for which she is writing, and it also typifies her concentrated exploitation of a particular interval (major third).

Structurally speaking, ‘Creatures’ is suggestive of a less dense, more light-spirited approach to composition than the quartets. The musical vocabulary exploited in the former is different from the intense, abstract, sometimes grittily acerbic equivalent in the quartets. The issue of ‘spontaneous mutation’, for example, is only barely relevant to ‘Creatures’, in spite of the fact that the formal language of her quartets has increasingly been dictated by this means up to now. Essentially, ‘Creatures’ is a charming reflection of the slight relaxation in her creative approach (certainly not her technical execution), which occurred in relation to Maconchy’s musical language in her later years. The tightly-articulated, passionately-intellectual and intellectually-passionate language for which she is renowned is still steadfastly present; the difference lies mostly in her approach

thereto. The confidence she had accumulated over the course of her career had in effect permitted her more freedom to experiment with her style. The childlike humour implicit in ‘Creatures’ is a case in point: while the cycle is clearly not written as a children’s piece, the chosen texts enabled Maconchy to rediscover and recapture the essence of childhood, causing the composer to expand her musical horizons. It follows that Maconchy’s style continued to evolve right into the latest part of her career, as a brief discussion of her Thirteenth Quartet will further illuminate.

String Quartet No. 13 (*Quartetto Corto*)

Maconchy’s Thirteenth Quartet was written in 1984, five years after her song cycle ‘Creatures’, and her Twelfth Quartet. It was composed as the test piece to be performed by finalists in the 1985 Portsmouth String Quartet Competition.²⁸⁶ The concise nature of this quartet (lasting just eight minutes) accounts for the title *Quartetto Corto* (‘Little Quartet’). It is in no way ‘little’ in terms of musical dynamism, however, exhibiting the same exuberance and intensity characteristic of its twelve predecessors.

The Thirteenth is the only one of Maconchy’s quartets to be written in three movements, which is symptomatic of the continually-evolving nature of her musical style, and also, perhaps, of the time limit imposed by the competition:

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Lento, ma molto flessibile
- III. Allegro risoluto

²⁸⁶ See Appendix XII, XIII, XIV.

At this late stage of the composer's career, one may have expected an adherence to a tried and tested formal template, but Maconchy chose once again to 'start afresh' in the Thirteenth Quartet, in a manner which vividly recalls her account of the creative approach taken by W.H. Auden in his construction of a new work.

W.H Auden in his inaugural address as Professor of Poetry at Oxford said that with every new work he was starting afresh: that he never wrote from experience, but felt each time that he was setting out on an uncharted voyage. This sums up very well for me what I feel when I'm starting on a new work: that I am not writing from previous experience, or following the recipe as before, but embarking on a perilous voyage.²⁸⁷

Most likely a product of coincidence, the tripartite format adopted by Maconchy in this work conforms to that of the late-seventeenth-century Italian overture whose three movements traditionally took the form: fast–slow–fast. In a contemporary context, the first three of Bartók's six quartets are in three-movement-form, as are Shostakovich's Fifth, Seventh and Fourteenth Quartets, and single quartets by Webern (String Quartet Op. 28 (1936–38)), Barber (String Quartet Op. 11 (*Adagio for Strings*: 1936)) and Maconchy's compatriot Robert Simpson (String Quartet No. 10 (1983)). In Maconchy's case, the three movements are written in a single continuous span, whereby she asks that the first movement run into the second, and the second into the third.

The first movement of Maconchy's final quartet opens with what quickly becomes apparent as the work's *donné*: vigorously double-stopped tremolo chordal statements repeatedly attacking tritone-laden sonorities:

²⁸⁷ Maconchy, 'A Composer Speaks', p. 28.

Allegro moderato (♩ = c. 120)

Ex. 94: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 13: I: b. 1–4

The tritone is centrally significant to this short work, contributing notably to its singularly chilling essence. The opening *donné* chord above (Ex. 94), for example, comprises two vertical tritones superimposed at the interval of a minor ninth (viola: {B, F}; violin I: {C, F sharp}) along with a double-stopped perfect-fourth interval in the second violin, and a C bass-note in the cello. Across bars 3–4, the texture broadens to facilitate horizontal as well as vertical tritonal references, thereby further emphasising its sonic significance (see Ex. 94: Horizontal: violin I: {F sharp}–{C}; viola: {B}–{F}; cello: {C sharp, B}–{G, F}–{C sharp, G}; Vertical: viola {F, B}).

The opening movement is characterised by a striking oscillation in levels of emotional tension. The vicious opening chordal gesture illustrated above (Ex. 94) behaves as a recurrent pivot point to and from which contrasting episodes of varying weights develop. The impact of these intervening episodes is substantial as the transition from one to the next is generally quite sudden and the underlying motivic content quite different. The close-interval melismatic contours illustrated in Ex. 96, for example, typify the expressive textures heard during the first contrasting segment, which are instantly very far-removed from the chilling resonances implicit in the vigorous *donné* chordal statements.

The second movement grows out of the first and comprises extended unfolding melodies which weave a rich web of harmonies into the fabric of the quartet.²⁸⁸ Its opening melodic gesture (see Ex. 95) instantly recalls aspects of the musical substance underlying the first contrasting episode in the previous movement: the presence of short melodic melismas interwoven with sustained notes, for example, is a shared characteristic, as is the use of clusters of chromatic and small intervals contained within the short melismatic figures (see Ex. 96).

Vln I

Lento (♩ = c. 84) ma molto flessibile

f 5 *p* *mp* *p* *dolce*

Ex. 95: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 13: II: b. 1–3 (opening)

²⁸⁸ Maconchy, 'Quartetto Corto',
 <http://www.chesternovello.com/Default.aspx?TabId=2432&State_3041=2&workId_3041=12199
 > [accessed 8 September 2009].



Ex. 96: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 13: I: One bar before RL C – RL C, b. 1–3

The second movement runs continuously into the final *Allegro risoluto*, which proceeds to blend the dense chordal content of the quartet's opening movement with the long expressive lines of the second movement, thereby affecting an equilibration of their respective emotional weights.

The formal layout of the final movement mirrors that of the complete quartet with two outer allegro sections flanking a slow expressive core. In spite of what one might expect, the quartet's closing paragraphs do not articulate a coalescence of the various strains of forerunning musical arguments, but return instead to the derisive opening statements transposed up a minor ninth, their impact all the more cutting in light of the seeming serenity of preceding musical events.

Compositional Procedures

The brief duration of this work together with Maconchy's use of a tripartite structure show that her musical style was still evolving. Other symptoms of this stylistic evolution include the fact that it is not as heavily exploitative of timbral colour as its immediate predecessors, nor is it so readily constructed upon the process of 'spontaneous mutation'. These factors suggest an openness on the part of the composer to experiment again with her stylistic vocabulary. A defining

consequence of these factors is that *Quartetto Corto* presents chiefly as an extroverted work, wherein much of the principal musical interest is positioned to the fore. Even the central movement, whose rich interlacing contours render this the most introspective of the three movements, is eminently coherent. It is principally in this regard that the Thirteenth Quartet is reminiscent of the early quartets, particularly the First, as was mentioned briefly in relation to this work in the early period chapter.

The driving rhythmic dynamism intrinsic in both the first and final quartets is such that it propels much of the respective musical interest into the foreground, essentially rendering both works more easily accessible on first hearing than perhaps some of the intervening works. Aspects of the third movement are particularly illustrative of this parallel: the rhythmic undercurrent inherent in the following examples, for instance, one of which is taken from the third movement of the Thirteenth Quartet (see Ex. 97) and one from the first movement of the First Quartet (see Ex. 98), is directly comparable:

The image displays a musical score for a string quartet, specifically the third movement of the Thirteenth Quartet by Maurice Maconchy. The score is arranged in four staves, labeled Vln I, Vln II, Vla, and Vc. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/8. The first staff (Vln I) begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat, and a 4/8 time signature. It features a series of eighth notes with accents, starting on G4 and moving up to D5. The second staff (Vln II) also has a treble clef, one flat, and 4/8 time signature, with a series of eighth notes starting on G4 and moving up to D5, each with an accent. The third staff (Vla) has a bass clef, one flat, and 4/8 time signature, with a series of eighth notes starting on G3 and moving up to D4, each with an accent. The fourth staff (Vc) has a bass clef, one flat, and 4/8 time signature, with a series of eighth notes starting on G2 and moving up to D3, each with an accent. The dynamic marking *f* (forte) is placed below the first and third staves.

Ex. 97: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 13: III: RL U: b. 1

Ex. 98: Maconchy: String Quartet No. 1: I: closing bars

Rhythmically, both examples are constructed on similar models: the hemiola-like effect created at the close of the first movement of the First Quartet (Ex. 98) is reproduced in the single bar example of the Thirteenth (Ex. 97). The syncopated writing which places two semiquavers outside three quavers in a 4/8 bar is mostly responsible for this rhythmic effect, as it produces a pattern where the emphasis is on every second half-beat beginning with the second (for example: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8). The accent placement and homophonic textures employed at these points further enhance the rhythmic similarity between the two examples.

The finer formal procedures underpinning this quartet also recall those employed from the earliest works. The extensive use of *donné*-derived motivic gestures, for

example—and all that this implies in terms of harmony, rhythm and texture—is in keeping with the basic structural stencil of forerunning quartets. Her keen concentration on one or a small number of intervals too—in this case, the tritone—is consistent with her previous output. *Quartetto Corto* could never, however, be mistaken for anything other than a late work, due primarily to the razor-sharp clarity of its argument.

In her final quartet, Maconchy condenses the technical expertise acquired through over sixty years of composing into the tiny expanse of barely eight minutes. Consequently, her aforementioned compositional quest to exclude ‘everything extraneous to the pursuit of the central idea’ is strikingly apparent in this work.²⁸⁹ Taking the example of her use of textural techniques and timbral colour, for instance, the Thirteenth Quartet does not develop any specific colouring device to the extent or length seen for example in the increasingly experimental use of harmonics and *glissandi* discussed above in relation to the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Quartets. Instead, Maconchy filters the experience gained from previous works into a distilled, compact entity, whose eight minutes expose the pared essence of her musical argument. The result is a work of frequently changing blocks of textural colour—heard especially in the fast outer movements—whose execution is slick, clean and decisive.

²⁸⁹ See quote at n. 108.

Summary

From the point of view of technical experimentation, it could be argued that Maconchy's Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Quartets were more 'progressive' than the Thirteenth. Taking the aforementioned example of her use of textural colour for instance, each of the three former quartets developed and extended the possibilities implicit therein with increasing invention. This did not extend to the Thirteenth in any overt sense. Her creation of 'Night Music'-type effects (discussed above as part of the 'One-Movement Quartets'), for example, is particularly revealing in this regard: from as early as the Seventh Quartet, but especially from the Eighth Quartet onwards, these ambient effects became increasingly pervasive. Their constituent components also become more daring, to the extent that by the Twelfth Quartet Maconchy had to devise a system of notation she had never before used in an attempt to articulate accurately her sonic intentions (see Ex. 88). In *Quartetto Corto*, textural colour has its place but the innovative manipulation thereof is no longer central to the sound-world. Thus, in terms of technical experimentation, there is a strong case to support the notion that Maconchy's final quartet is not as 'progressive' as its immediate predecessors.

From the point of view of maturity, however, *Quartetto Corto* seems to sit well in its position at the end of her quartet cycle. As in the case of 'Creatures', there is a seeming simplicity about the Thirteenth Quartet, a hint of childlike playfulness, which sets it apart from its forerunners. In terms of her underlying approach, this can clearly be seen to reflect Maconchy's fearlessness to embark on a 'perilous voyage' with each new work. The 'voyage' in this case just happens to have taken

a direction tangential to that of the immediately preceding quartets, whereby the driving forces have shifted gears such that the emphasis on pushing technical boundaries is diminished, while that on articulating a clear, precise argument with the utmost concision is amplified. Whether the decision to take this direction was conscious or unconscious on the part of the composer is unclear. What is clear, however, is that this open-minded approach to composition—characteristic of the composer all through her career—affected a continuous regeneration of Maconchy's musical style, essentially freeing her from the aforementioned danger of 'continually [moving] in a closed circle'.²⁹⁰ The fact that she once again permitted herself the freedom to expand her horizons at this late stage of her career could be viewed as a true reflection of the maturity she achieved in old age.

²⁹⁰ See quote at n. 170.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

In the 1985 documentary film by MJW Productions, Anne Macnaghten comments that Elizabeth Maconchy made an impression as ‘someone with something to say’. Maconchy was indeed ‘someone with something to say’, and moreover, she was going to say it regardless of whether or not there was anyone listening.

Maconchy regarded the art of composing as a ‘selfish and solitary occupation’.²⁹¹ As far as she was concerned, while a work may appear at surface level to have been composed ‘for a particular artist or a particular ensemble or even a particular occasion’, ultimately, that work is written for its own sake, or for the composer’s own sake, ‘which is [essentially] the same thing’.²⁹² Consequently, producing works to fulfil the needs of the public ‘or for any other disinterested public-spirited purpose’ was never a part of Maconchy’s agenda.²⁹³

The integrity implicit in this viewpoint is clear. As an artist, Maconchy’s central aspiration was to produce works to a quality of which she herself approved: ‘there is no standard so exacting as to satisfy oneself’.²⁹⁴ A consequence of the combination of her artistic integrity and shy temperament, however, was that

²⁹¹ ‘Elizabeth Maconchy’, DVD.

²⁹² Maconchy, ‘A Composer Speaks’, p. 29.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Maconchy did not consciously engage in making a self-serving effort to say ‘the right thing to the right person’ or to be in ‘the right place at the right time’, tending instead to take a back seat in such self-promotional matters.²⁹⁵ While the nobility implicit in this personal characteristic is admirable, it unfortunately had the drawback that her works were often overlooked by impresarios. This, in turn, limited the opportunities at Maconchy’s disposal, making it difficult for her to achieve what might conventionally be considered ‘success’: wide public acclaim and the attainment of wealth.

What she did have, however, was ‘the love and esteem of practising musicians’, a definition of success, one suspects, upon which the composer perhaps placed more value.²⁹⁶ When asked what she felt her mother would have wanted for her music in the present day, Maconchy’s daughter Nicola replied: ‘I think she would just simply want that performers know [...] and enjoy it, and that it’s played and in the repertoire’.²⁹⁷

Maconchy was a composer of distinction. From her earliest years, she embodied the essence of passion, intelligence and tenacity in the face of life’s challenges and integrated these characteristics thoroughly into her music. She assimilated her musical influences and manipulated them such that her creative independence was upheld, striking a notably individual path in the compositional sphere, particularly in relation to her British counterparts.

²⁹⁵ ‘Woman’s Hour: programme dedicated to Elizabeth Maconchy’.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Interview with Nicola LeFanu.

For this thesis, a decision had to be made as to a specific point of focus, and for the following reasons it was decided that the string quartets would provide this focus: first, because of Maconchy's personal assertion of the quartets as having provided her with a vehicle for working out her musical development;²⁹⁸ second, from a practical point of view, a large number of the available resources, including newspaper, journal and internet articles and interviews, concentrate largely on the quartets, meaning greater ease of access to information; and third, on a personal level, I believe the quartets to be of exceptional quality within her output and also in the wider national and international context, and am passionate about highlighting their quality.

In his publication *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, musicologist Halsey Stevens takes the view that

There is no better way to approach the music [...], and certainly no better way of understanding the processes of growth that [the] music underwent, than through the string quartets.²⁹⁹

This, I feel, is also true in the case of Maconchy. Maconchy's cycle of thirteen string quartets presents a progressively crystallised portrait of her musical style and its development. Demonstrating an increasing sophistication of technique but also a streamlining of ideas, the quartet cycle, in essence, exemplifies the paradoxical concept of stylistic expansion-versus-compression alluded to frequently throughout this study, and the discussion on works from other genres provided vital comparative contextualisation to this end.

²⁹⁸ See quote at n. 3.

²⁹⁹ Stevens, *The Life and Music of Béla Bartók*, p. 173.

The tripartite structure adopted in this thesis facilitated ease of insight into the general and specific stylistic development of Maconchy as a composer. Through selecting representative works from each historical period, aspects of her style which obtained all throughout her career, as well as those she left behind at various stages, became clear.

The fact that Maconchy was a gestural composer, concerning herself with short musical fragments, as opposed to large-scale concepts or templates, is apparent all through her career. This could be attributed in large part to her belief in ‘[letting] your unconscious work for you’.³⁰⁰ Because she never planned anything out, musically speaking, in any great detail in advance of composition, she could afford to explore the possibilities implicit in the ideas themselves as they arose. Her multifaceted use of the *donné* exemplifies the gestural nature of her ideology.

From her earliest output, the *donné* proved integral to the formal construction of her works. This simple device penetrated each genre in which she composed, effectively constituting the life blood of her output. The extent to which it was integrated into any given work was dependant on several factors, the main two of which were, first, the genre of the work in question; and second, the time period in which the piece was composed. By and large, its use was most tightly integrated into her quartets, and generally speaking, her later works featured more intricate development thereof than those of her earlier years. In *The Land* and the First Quartet, for example, the *donné* was not used cyclically in that it did not permeate

³⁰⁰ See quote at n. 122.

each movement of the work. From the Second Quartet onward, however, it began to function as an integral unifying component of entire works and the resourcefulness with which it was developed became more imaginative and daring. This motivic innovation became increasingly experimental in the middle- and late-period quartets, due in large measure to Maconchy's growing fervour for seizing impulsively upon brief gestures—in the process named by GreenField as 'spontaneous mutation'—and kneading their potential exhaustively until they become entangled in the central argument of the work, at which time the process generally begins again. The result is that Maconchy manages to produce very different-sounding results through the use of very similar raw materials, illustrating the highly economic nature of her musical vision.

As her quartet cycle evolved, the gestural nature of Maconchy's style extended to encompass not only cross-quartet motivic references, but also cross-genre quotation. The latter is apparent, for example, in the similar harmonic architecture (F sharp/G flat–G rocking motion) underlying her choral piece 'Nocturnal' and the third movement of her Fifth Quartet. In relation to the quartets, motivic similarities are audible, for example, in the *donné* gestures underpinning the Tenth and the Eleventh (Ex. 73, 82); in the aforementioned whirling harmonics implicit in the Eleventh and Twelfth (Ex. 85, 88); and in selected melodic fragments intrinsic to the Twelfth and Fifth (Ex. 43, 44). This type of cross-referencing could be interpreted in many ways, two of which are particularly prominent. The use of similar motivic content in separate works could suggest that Maconchy's compositional scope was somewhat narrower than on first impression: the fact

that she returns to previously-explored ideas could feasibly imply a creative limitation on the part of the composer. By the same token, however, the employment of similar gestures in otherwise independent works could be understood simply to reflect the nature of Maconchy's compositional 'series'.

The idea of a compositional 'series' was put forward by Maconchy's friend Grace Williams in conversation with musicologist A. J. Heward Rees, when she imparted her belief that 'every composer [had] his own series of notes which form his own idiom'.³⁰¹ Williams' held that it was 'partly instinctive' but that composers generally kept to the same series of notes, regardless of whether or not they were conscious of the fact. By way of clarifying her point she continued that if, for example, she was sight-reading a score of Britten's, she would know 'at once' if she had played a wrong note because it would simply have sounded 'out of context' with the composer's so-called 'series'.³⁰² According to this ideology, it would seem natural that motivic content underpinning one work would resemble that of another due simply to the selection of notes forming that particular composer's 'series'. While this still constitutes a creative limitation of sorts, it is one with which every composer is confronted.

A second characteristic pertaining to Maconchy all throughout her career is her predilection for intervallic composition. Maconchy was profoundly influenced by the resonances produced by certain intervals, and tended to build works around one or a small number of intervals, which varied according to the work in question. In the First Quartet, as we have seen, the minor second, and to a lesser

³⁰¹ Grace Williams, 'Heward Rees interviews Grace Williams shortly before her death', <http://www.welshmusic.org.uk/grace_williams.htm> [accessed 29 January 2009].

³⁰² *Ibid.*

extent the major second and major seventh (the inversion of the minor second), are prevalent intervals. In the Fifth Quartet, the minor second again features prominently, as do the descending minor ninth and major seventh leaps. The two perfect fifths superimposed at a diminished fifth, which formed the *donné* in the Eighth Quartet, serve as an additional example, and the extensive use of the tritone in the Thirteenth further highlights this penchant for intervallic composition. This type of writing dramatically affected the overall sound-world emitted by each work, thereby constituting an integral component of Maconchy's independent musical voice.

A third characteristic fundamental to the shaping of Maconchy's musical identity was the openness to new influences and ideas which she exhibited all through her career. This particular trait penetrated every facet of her creative vision, and as her confidence increased, so too did her commitment towards exploring the possibilities inherent in these new influences. For the purpose of relating this point to concrete examples, the Eighth Quartet serves as an ideal archetype. In many ways, String Quartet No. 8 marks a pivotal point in Maconchy's output. Structurally, harmonically, rhythmically and texturally, it stands out from its predecessors, nodding firmly towards what was yet to come in her musical trajectory.

Basing her Eighth Quartet *donné* on the resonance implicit in the opening chord constituted the first point of departure. Up to this point, Maconchy's *donnés* generally comprised of horizontal rather than vertical gestures, in that they typically grew out of brief melodic figures—the slowly-unfolding viola melody

in the Second Quartet for example (Ex. 17), or the canonically-introduced octatonic gesture in the Fifth (Ex. 33)—rather than the chordal spread intrinsic to the Eighth. The impact of this constructive decision was substantial: one possible interpretation is that it represented a shift in her focus from a melodic germ to that of a more layered or textural nature, and consequently, to a more pronounced fascination with matters of timbre.

From the Eighth Quartet onward, texture, and the myriad possibilities inherent therein, increasingly came to represent a key constituent of the constructive procedures underpinning Maconchy's music. Indeed texture is arguably the facet of composition which underwent the most radical development over the course of her career, and this is particularly clear in relation to the quartets. As her style evolved, the function carried out by textural devices transformed from being largely decorative—as in the use of harmonics in the viola line illustrated in Ex. 22 (String Quartet No. 2: Movement I)—to being of fundamental structural value to a work—as in the use of harmonics illustrated in Ex. 88 (String Quartet No. 12: Movement II). One of the single most audibly distinguishing factors between Maconchy's early-, middle- and late-period styles is in fact the relative emphasis placed on textural procedures.

Stylistic elements that Maconchy came to rely less on over her career are largely related to her various formative influences. The echo of Vaughan Williams, Holst and the English Pastoralist School, outlined in relation to the harmonic undercurrent of *The Land*, for example, faded significantly as her style developed.

In fact her allegiance to tonality and modality in general diminished as her musical language evolved. She never abandoned tonal resonances completely, but rather incorporated them into her language in a non-traditionally functioning manner. In fact, her use of mixed tonalities came to represent a defining feature of her harmonic ideology. Coined by Anne Macnaghten as ‘an unmistakable “finger-print”’, Maconchy’s simultaneous use of major and minor sonorities came to denote episodes of heightened emotion, their combined force often producing ‘a state of extreme tension’.³⁰³ The exploitation of this harmonic device penetrates each of the genres discussed as part of this study, although by and large, the two featured choral works, ‘Nocturnal’ and ‘Creatures’, emanate a less ambiguous sense of tone centre than the quartets.

It is perhaps more accurate to say not that Maconchy ‘came to rely less on’ certain stylistic influences as her career progressed, but rather that she incorporated those influences into her language with increasing acuity. In the article ‘Who is your favourite composer?’ (1967), Maconchy states that:

A young painter, poet or composer seems to have an unerring instinct for finding the right thing, the unique thing he needs for his own creative purposes, in the work of others. He seizes on the thing which sparks off ideas of his own and, at the same time, suggests means of expressing them.³⁰⁴

For Maconchy, much of this formative inspiration was to be found in the music of Central European Modernist composers—especially Bartók and Janáček—as is ascertainable from the architectural assumptions underlying much of her early

³⁰³ See quote at n. 231.

³⁰⁴ Maconchy, ‘Who is your favourite composer?’, *Composer*, 24 (1967), pp. 20–21 (p. 21).

output. With the evolution of her style, however, came a more purposeful integration of these influences. This issue was explored in Part 2 of Chapter 4 in relation to the fundamentally Bartókian influences underpinning the textural experimentation of her late quartets. It is also true of Bartók's influence on her rhythmic language.

Maconchy's rhythms were a driving force from the outset. The sheer energy, dynamism and imagination invested therein throughout her career renders this facet of composition that which perhaps most closely resembles a Bartókian paradigm. From her earliest works, similarities between their respective approaches were discernible. His influence in inspiring a fluid approach to rhythm—whereby metric considerations were largely dictated by the 'necessity of the argument' rather than the inverse, for example—was perhaps one of the most thoroughly penetrating. As her style evolved, the impact of this influence intensified, as was clearly evidenced, for example, by her pivotal decision to write the third movement of the Eighth Quartet almost without bar-line structuring. From this point onward, Maconchy's rhythms came increasingly to embody a fluid, malleable entity, the manipulation of whose possibilities became of central structural significance, as seen, for example, in the mosaic-like patchwork of tempos underpinning the one-movement quartets, No. 10 and 11. Thus, over the course of her career, Maconchy became less directly beholden to other composers; rather, she integrated her formative influences in a tightly controlled and refined manner for her own artistic ends.

Elizabeth Maconchy's life and career spanned almost the entire twentieth century, a period of unprecedented change and historical turbulence. In spite of adverse circumstances and immense personal difficulties, she had a compulsion towards composing which could not be quelled. Her works of all genres, but particularly her string quartets, reveal a composer of exceptional merit, deserving of a recognition as yet unforthcoming. In the words of reviewer Martin Anderson:

Her work for other musicians aside, the sheer technical skill to be found in [the quartets] would explain the deep respect Elizabeth Maconchy's name commands – although not why the wider public has so far failed to acknowledge her as one of the finest composers the British Isles have produced. That time will come.³⁰⁵

It is my hope that this thesis will make some contribution towards the scholarly study of this extraordinary but underappreciated composer.

³⁰⁵ Martin Anderson, [untitled], *Tempo*, 176 (1991), p. 46.

Appendix I a

Teachers' Terminal Report, Royal College of Music, Christmas Term, 1925

ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC.
TEACHERS' TERMINAL REPORT, CHRISTMAS TERM, 1925.

Pupil's Name *Inacorthy, Elizabeth*

	Regularity, Punctuality, and Industry	Progress and General Remarks	Teacher's Signature
PRINCIPAL STUDY <i>Laird</i>	<i>Unfailing</i>	<i>Excellent progress - her work is becoming much freer, especially in expression owing to a better understanding of the musical style.</i>	<i>A. G.</i>
SECOND STUDY <i>Composition</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Must write more & overwork has learnt a lot of fundamentals - a very fine hand.</i>	<i>A. G.</i>
PAPER WORK			
AURAL TRAINING	<i>Unfailing</i>	<i>Real progress</i>	<i>A. G.</i>

The Easter Term commences on Monday, 11th January, 1926.

a capital person etc & capital record.
Hugh P. Allen Director.

December, 1925.

Appendix I b

Teachers' Terminal Report, Royal College of Music, Midsummer Term, 1929

ROYAL COLLEGE OF MUSIC.
TEACHERS' TERMINAL REPORT, MIDSUMMER TERM, 1929.

Pupil's Name *Maconchy, Elizabeth. V.*

	Regularity, Punctuality, and Industry	Progress and General Remarks	Teacher's Signature
PRINCIPAL STUDY		<i>very good solo he - but I can teach her no more - so will work on her on selected works for R.W.</i>	
<i>Composition</i>	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Excellent in every way.</i>	<i>J.H.</i>
SECOND STUDY		<i>Shows all round ability as an accompanist. Must be my very best he.</i>	<i>C.H.</i>
<i>Pp. Acct.</i>			
PAPER WORK			
GENERAL TRAINING			

Source: Elizabeth Maconchy Archive, St Hilda's College, Oxford University (photographs taken 13 August 2009)

Appendix II

Marriages

Mr. W.R. Le Fanu and Miss E.V. Maconchy

The marriage took place at Santry Parish Church, Co. Dublin, on, Saturday, of Mr. William Richard Le Fanu, only son of Mr. T. P. Le Fanu, of Bray, Co. Wicklow, and Miss Elizabeth Violet Maconchy, second daughter of the late Mr. G. E. C. Maconchy and Mrs. Maconchy, of Layer de la Haye, Essex. The Archbishop of Perth (uncle of the bridegroom) officiated, assisted by the Rev. J. H. Ruby.

The bride, who was given away by her grandfather, Captain G. L. Poë, R.N., wore an ankle-length gown of flowered cream silk poplin, and a veil of old Honiton lace, which was held in place by a wreath of orange-blossom. Her train of old Honiton lace was carried by Miss Pamela Barclay, and she carried a sheaf of lilies. The other child attendants were Miss Susan Colville and Miss Jean Barclay. The grown-up bridesmaids were Miss Sheila Maconchy (sister of the bride), Miss Lucie Le Fanu (sister of the bridegroom), and Miss Biddy Bowen Colthurst. They wore ankle-length gowns of pale yellow chiffon, with amber-coloured wreaths in their hair, and carried bouquets of amber-coloured chrysanthemums. Mr. Christopher Eastwood was best man.

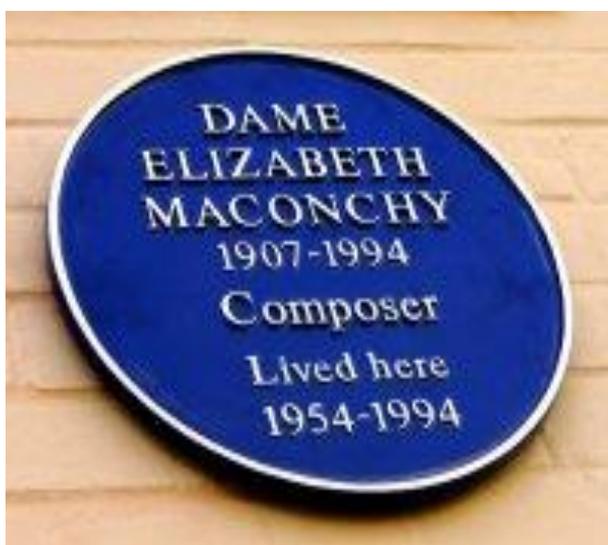
A reception was held at Santry Court (lent by Captain G. L. Poë, R.N.). The honeymoon is being spent in Connemara, and the bride travelled in a two-piece suit of powder-blue crêpe de chine, with a hat to match.

Source: Marriages (Marriages)

The Times Monday, Aug 25, 1930; pg. 13; Issue 45600; col C

Appendix III

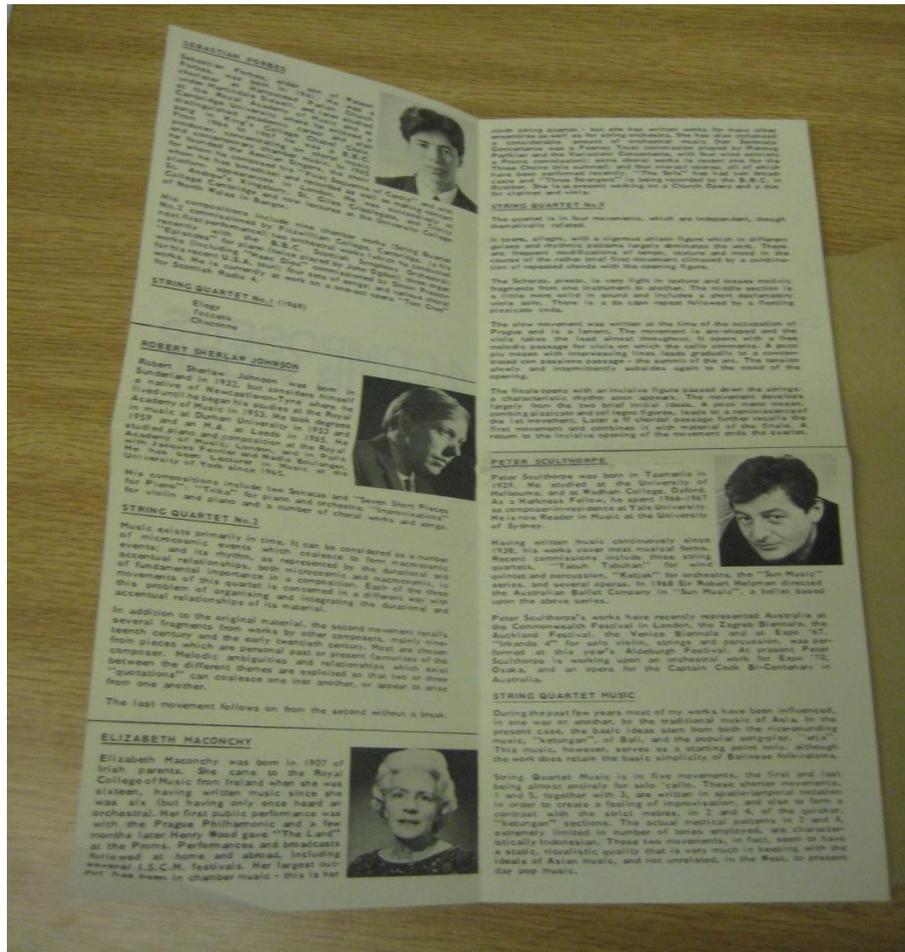
Blue plaque displayed on wall of ‘Shottesbrook’ in Boreham commemorating the forty years Maconchy lived there. The plaque was unveiled in June 2007 as part of the Blue Plaque Scheme set up by Chelmsford Borough Council to celebrate the Borough’s rich cultural heritage. Other notable additions to the scheme include Marconi, Oliver Goldsmith, Christopher Cockerell (inventor of the hovercraft), and the suffragette Anne Knight.



Source: ‘Chelmsford Borough Council: Latest Blue Plaque Unveiled’,
<<http://www.chelmsfordbc.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=14050&articleaction=print>> [accessed 31 August 2009]

Appendix IV

Programme for the Radcliffe Music Award for a new string quartet (1969) of which Maconchy was joint recipient for her Ninth String Quartet (1968/69), along with: Sebastian Forbes (String Quartet No. 1); Robert Sherlaw Johnson (String Quartet No 2); and Peter Sculthorpe: (String Quartet Music).

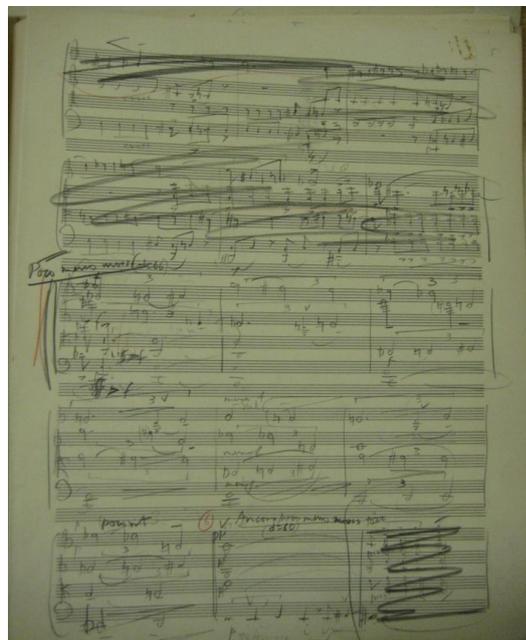
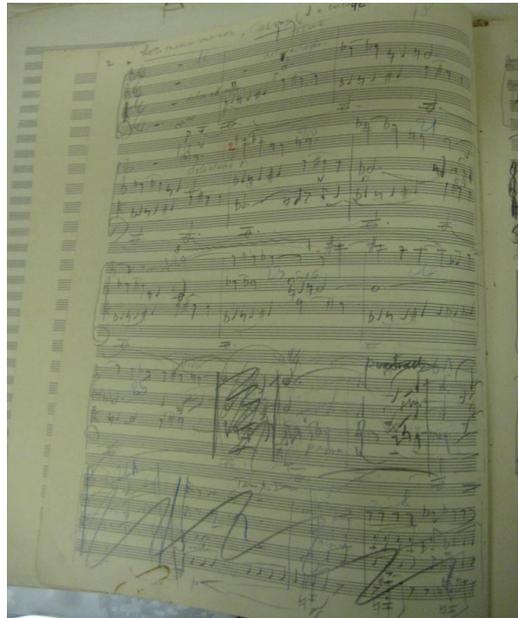


Source: Elizabeth Maconchy Archive, St Hilda's College, Oxford University (photograph taken: 13 August 2009)

Appendix V

Elizabeth Maconchy: String Quartet No. 7 (1955) Movement I: Pencil Copy

Sketches and revisions on rough pencil copy.



Source: Elizabeth Maconchy Archive, St Hilda's College, Oxford University
(photograph taken: 13 August 2009)

Appendix VI

Nocturnal (1965)

I. Come!

Poem by William Barnes

Will you come in early Spring?

Come at Easter, or in May?

Or when Whitsuntide may bring

Longer light to show your way?

Will you come, if you be true

For to quicken love anew?

Will you call in Spring or Fall?

O come, o come now soon!

II. Will you come?

Poem by Edward Thomas

Will you come?

Will you come?

Will you ride

So late

At my side?

O, will you come?

Will you come?

Will you come

If the night

Has a moon,

Full and bright

O, will you come

Would you come?

Would you come

If the noon

Gave light,

O, beautiful,

Would you come?

Would you have come?

Would you have come

Without scorning,

Had it been

Still morning?

Beloved, would you have come?

If you come,

Haste and come.

Owls have cried;

It grows dark

To ride

Beloved, beautiful,

Come!

III. To the Night

Poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Death will come when thou art dead,

Soon, too soon:

Sleep will come when thou art fled;

Of neither would I ask the boon

I ask of thee, beloved Night!

Swift be thine approaching flight,

Come soon beloved Night, come soon!

Appendix VII

Elizabeth Maconchy: String Quartet No. 8 (1967)

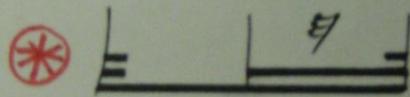
Examples of Maconchy's detail regarding printing and performance instructions:

- i) Specific directions for printers (on inside cover of Ink Copy)
- ii) Alignment of instructions (Movement I: RN 4)
- iii) Stem-direction (Movement I: RN 8)
- iv) Performing instructions (Movement III: RN 24: Pencil Copy)
- v) Amended performing-directions (Movement III: RN 24: Ink Copy)
- vi) General articulation (Movement III: RN 25)
- vii) General articulation (Movement IV: RN 31)

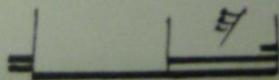
All photographs taken in Elizabeth Maconchy Archive, St Hilda's College, Oxford University (13 August 2009)

Movement IV

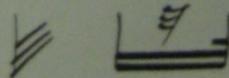
At each appearance of
this figure please set
original unaltered
ligaturing, with this
difference:



rather than

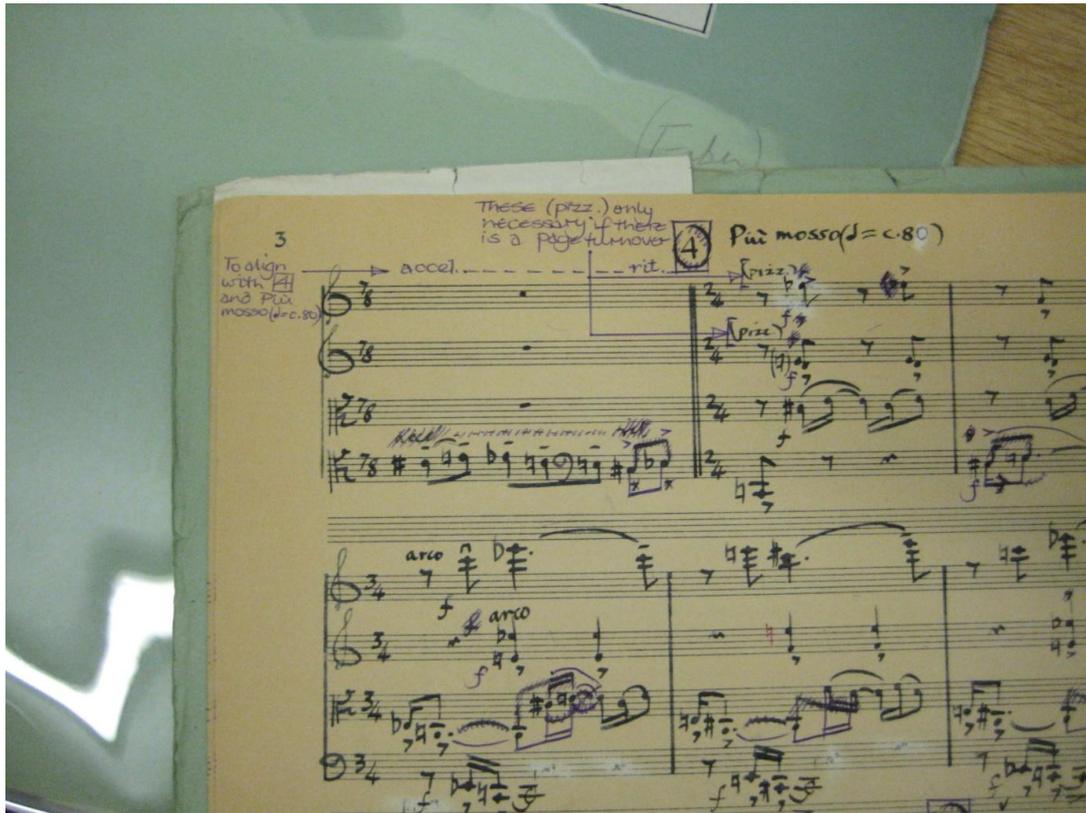


or



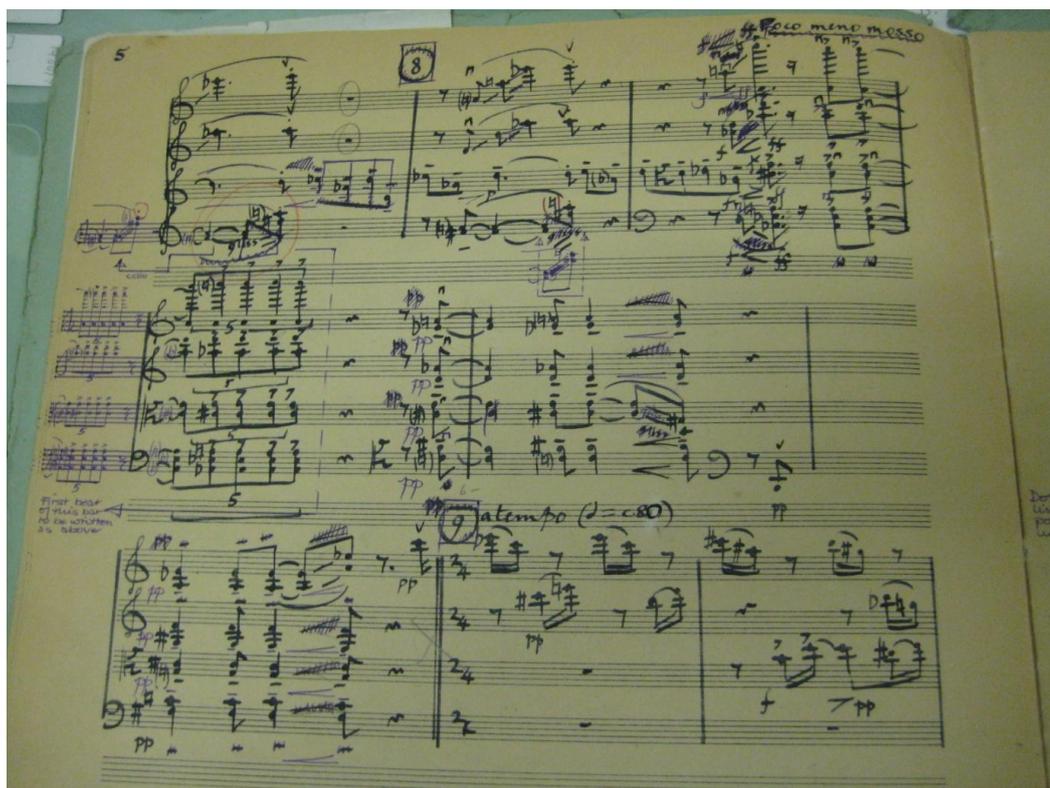
THROUGHOUT

- i) Specific directions for printers (on inside cover of Ink Copy)
- 'Movement IV: At each appearance of this figure please set original unaltered ligaturing, with this difference'

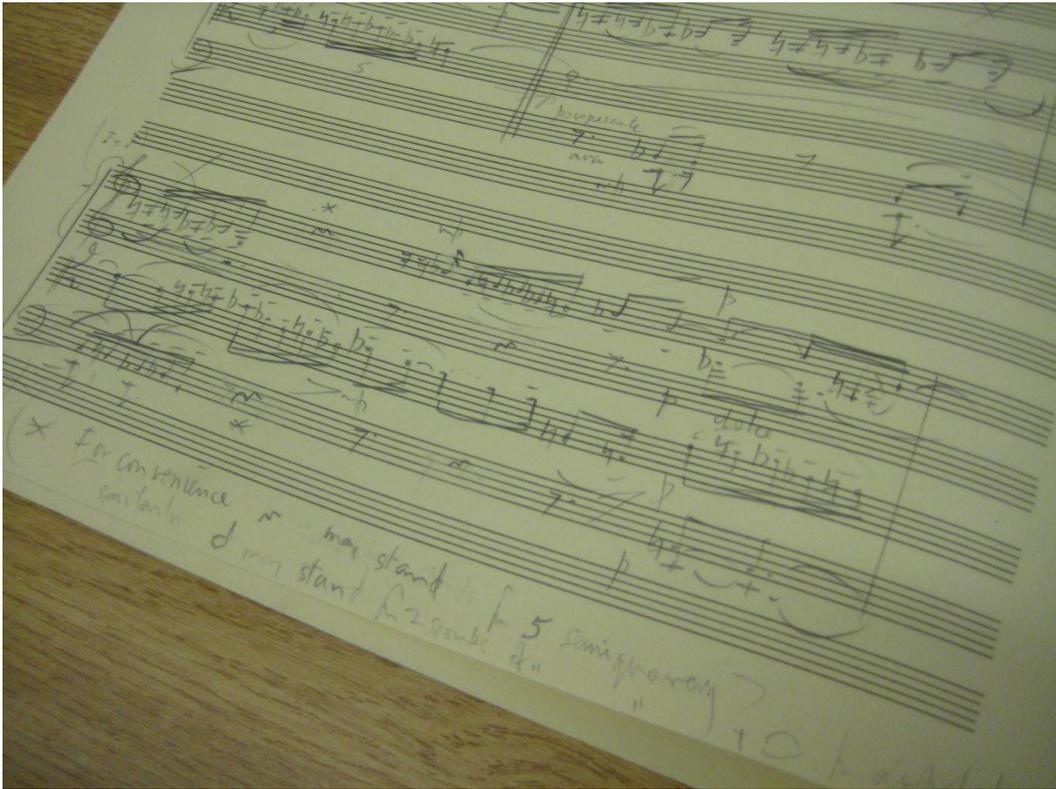


ii) Alignment of instructions (Movement I: RN 4)

- Writing in top left margin: '(accel.) To align with (RN) 4 and più mosso'
- Writing at top of page: 'These (pizz.) only necessary if there is a page turnover'



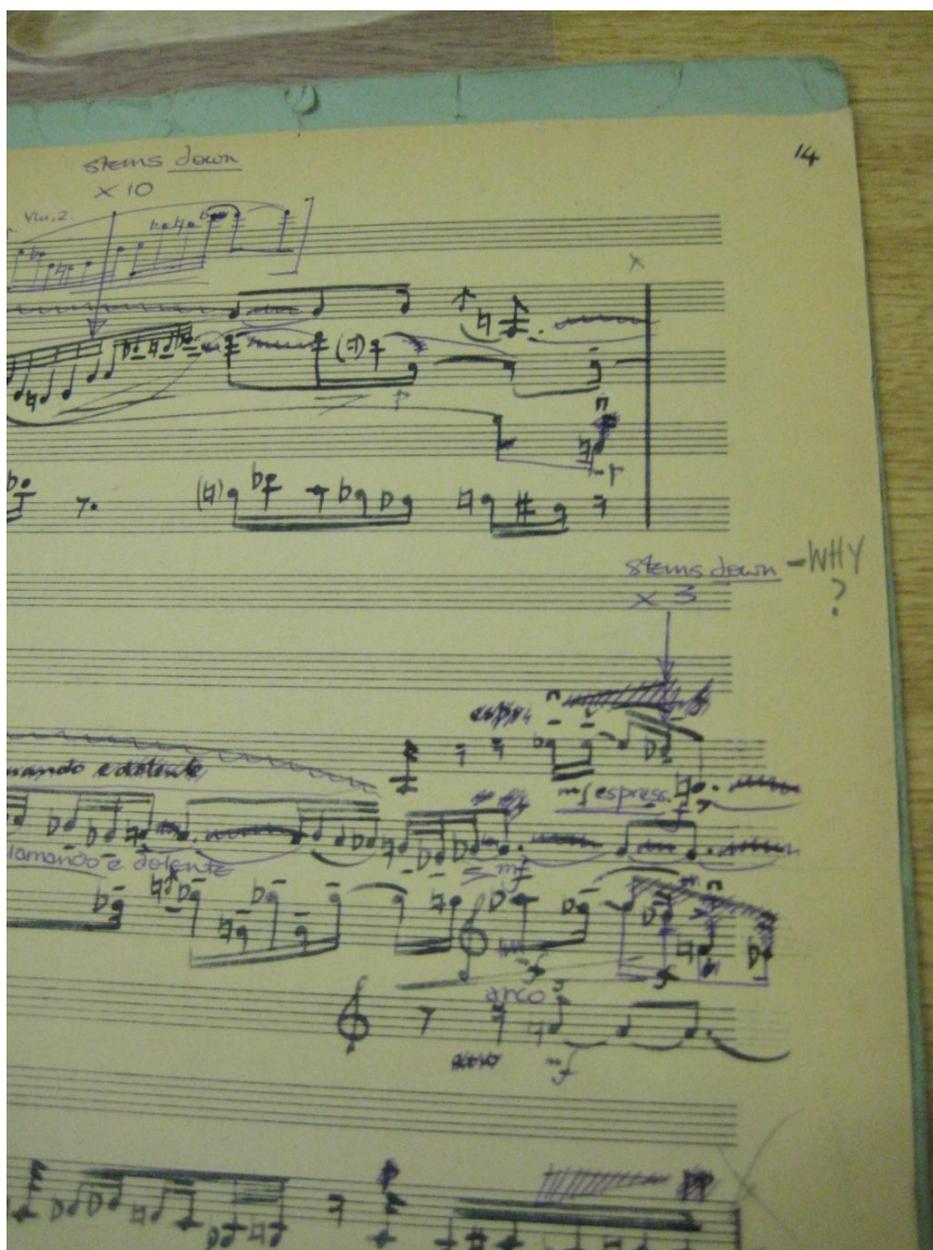
iii) Stem-direction (Movement I: RN 8)



iv) Performing instructions (Movement III: RN 24: Pencil Copy)



v) Amended performance directions (Movement III: RN 24: Ink Copy)



vi) General articulation (Movement III: RN 25)

The image shows a page of handwritten musical notation for Movement IV, RN 31. The score is written on five systems of staves, each containing a piano part (treble and bass clefs) and a string part (treble and bass clefs). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. Key performance instructions are written in Italian and include:

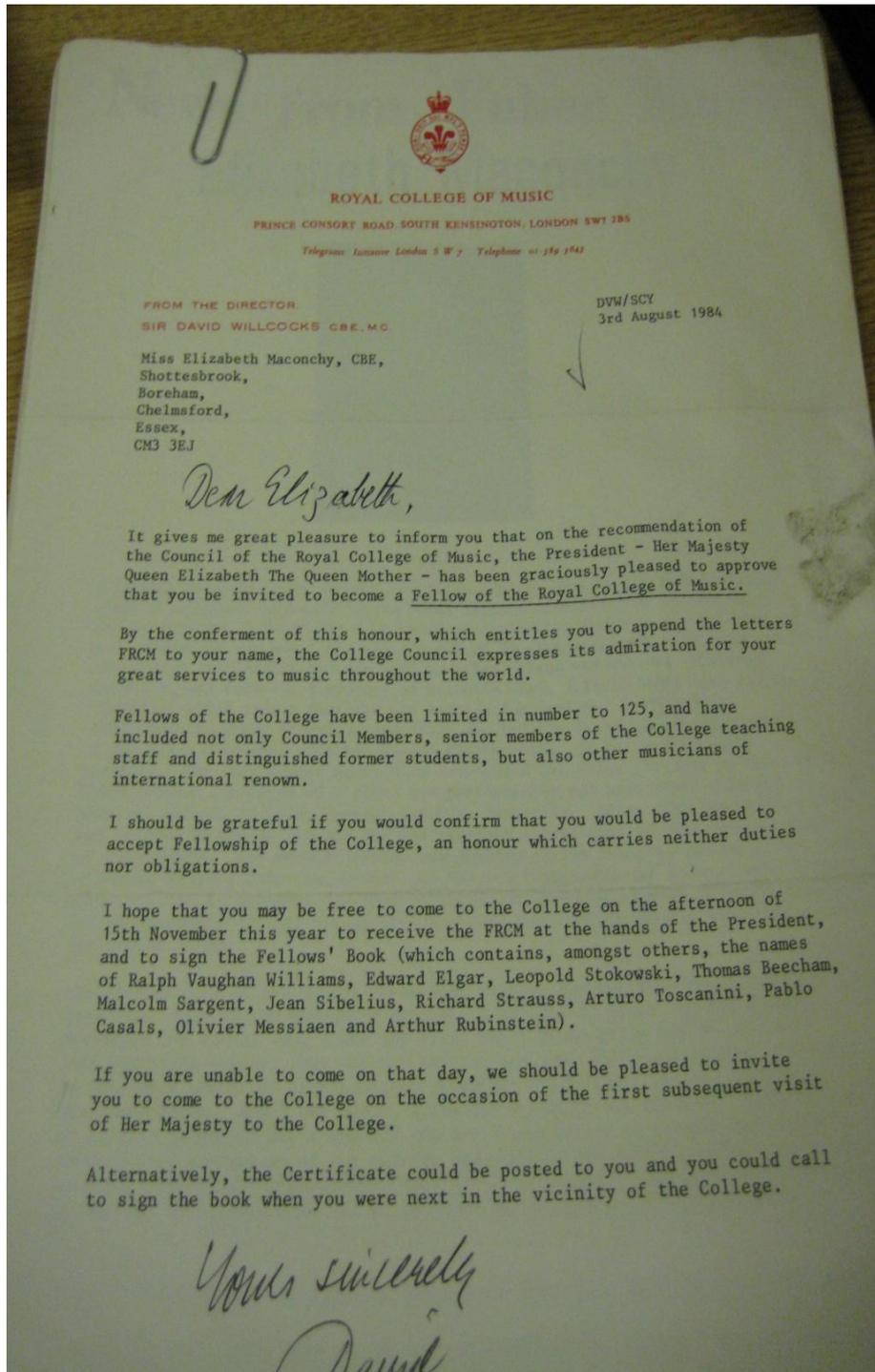
- 31) poco meno mosso** (at the top of the first system)
- a tempo** (at the top of the second system)
- non tenuto?** (written above the piano staff in the second system)
- ben legato** (written above the piano staff in the third system)
- poco marcato** (written below the piano staff in the fourth system)
- meno vivibile** (written above the piano staff in the fifth system)
- meno e cantabile** (written above the piano staff in the fifth system)
- ben tenuto, cantando arco** (written below the piano staff in the fifth system)
- arco** (written below the piano staff in the fifth system)

The score is densely written with musical notation, including various note values, rests, and dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. There are also some handwritten annotations and corrections throughout the page.

vii) General articulation (Movement IV: RN 31)

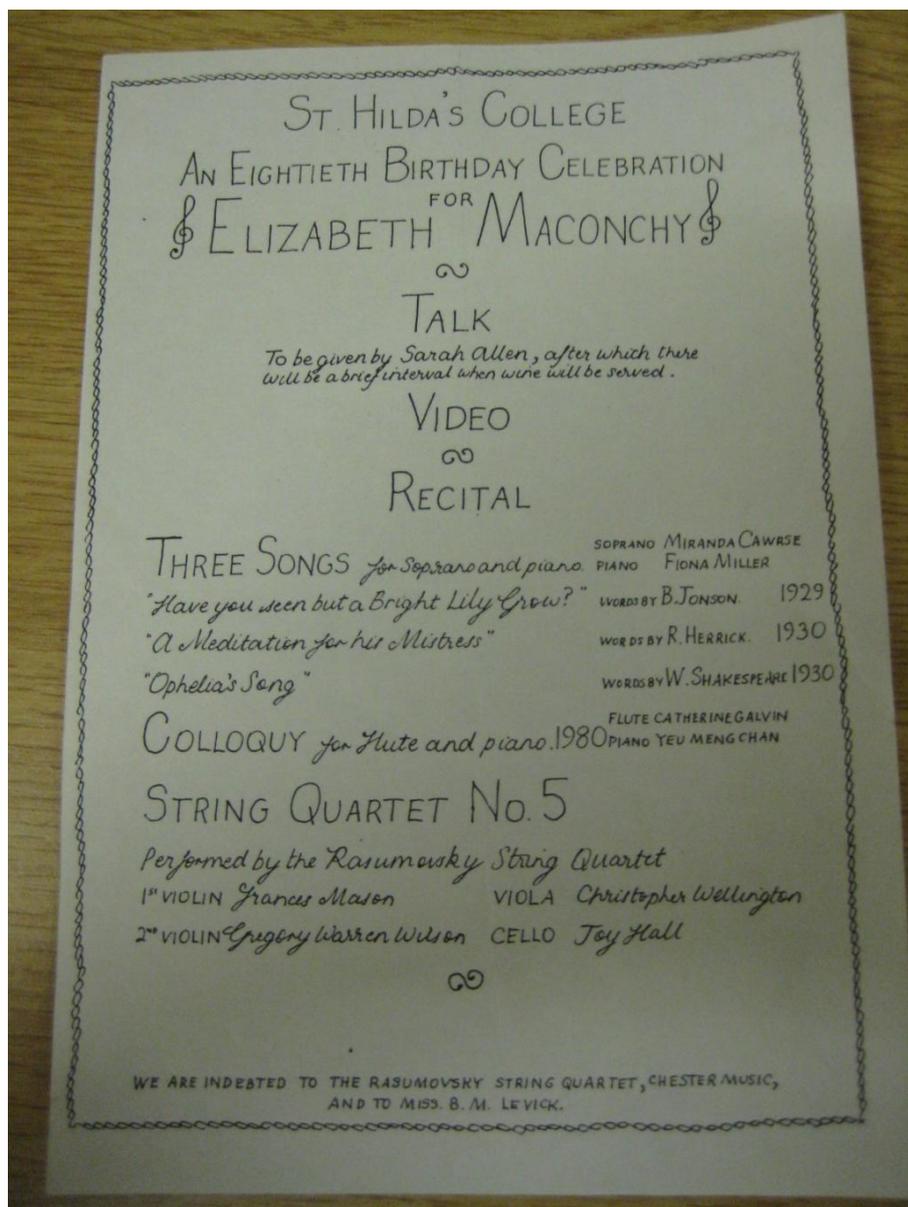
Appendix VIII

Letter from Sir David Willcocks (dated 3 August 1984) inviting Maconchy to become a Fellow of the Royal College of Music.



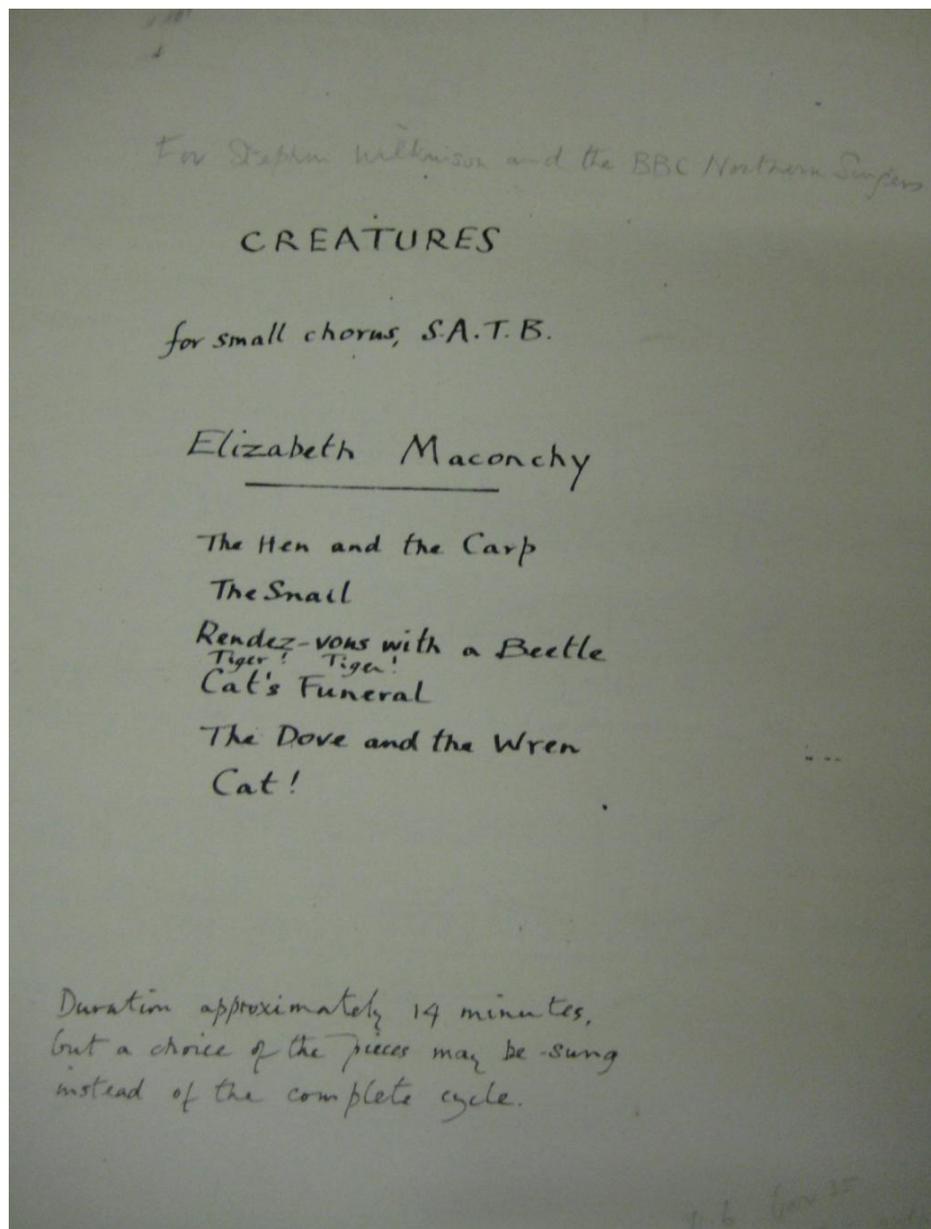
Appendix IX

Leaflet relating to Maconchy's 80th-birthday celebratory concert at St Hilda's College, Oxford.



Appendix X

'Creatures': cover of photocopy



'Duration approximately 14 minutes, but a choice of the pieces may be sung instead of the complete cycle'

Appendix XI

'Creatures' (1984)

I. The Hen and the Carp (text: Ian Serraillier (1912–1994))

Once, in a roostery
there lived a speckled, and when-
ever she laid an egg this hen
ecstatically cried:
'O progeny miraculous, particular spectacular,
what a wonderful hen am I!'

Down in a pond nearby
perchance a fat and broody carp
was basking, but her ears where sharp –
she heard Dame Cackle cary:
'O progeny miraculous, particular spectacular,
what a wonderful hen am I!'

'Ah, Cackle,' bubbled she,
'for your single egg, O silly one,
I lay at least a million;
suppose for each I cried:
"O progeny miraculous, particular spectacular!"
what a hullabaloo there'd be!'

II. The Snail (text: James Reeves (1909–1978))

At sunset, when the night-dews fall,
Out of the ivy on the wall
With horns outstretched and pointed tail
Comes the grey and noiseless snail.
On ivy stems she clammers down,
Carrying her house of brown.

Safe in the dark, no greedy eye
Can her tender body spy,
While she herself, a hungry thief,
Searches out the freshest leaf.
She travels on as best she can
Like a toppling caravan.

III. Rendez-vous with a Beetle (text: E.V. Rieu (1887–1972))

Meet me in Usk
And drone to me
Of what a beetle's
Eye can see
When lamps are lit.
And the bats flit
In Usk
At dusk.

And tell me if
A beetle's nose
Detects the perfume
Of the rose
As gardens fade
And stars invade
The dusk
In Usk.

IV. Tiger! Tiger! (text: William Blake 1757–1827))

Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? What dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see?
Did He who made the lamb make thee?

Tiger, tiger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

V. Cat's Funeral (text: E.V. Rieu)

Bury her deep, down deep,
Safe in the earth's cold keep.
No more to watch bird stir;
No more to clean dark fur;
No more to glisten as silk:
No more to revel in milk;

No more to purr.
Bury her deep, down deep,
She is beyond warm sleep.
She will not walk in the night;
She will not wake to the light.

VI. The Dove and the Wren (words traditional)

The dove says 'Coo, coo, what shall I do?
I shall never be able to bring up two.'
'Pooh!' says the wren, I've got ten,
And rear them all like gentlemen!

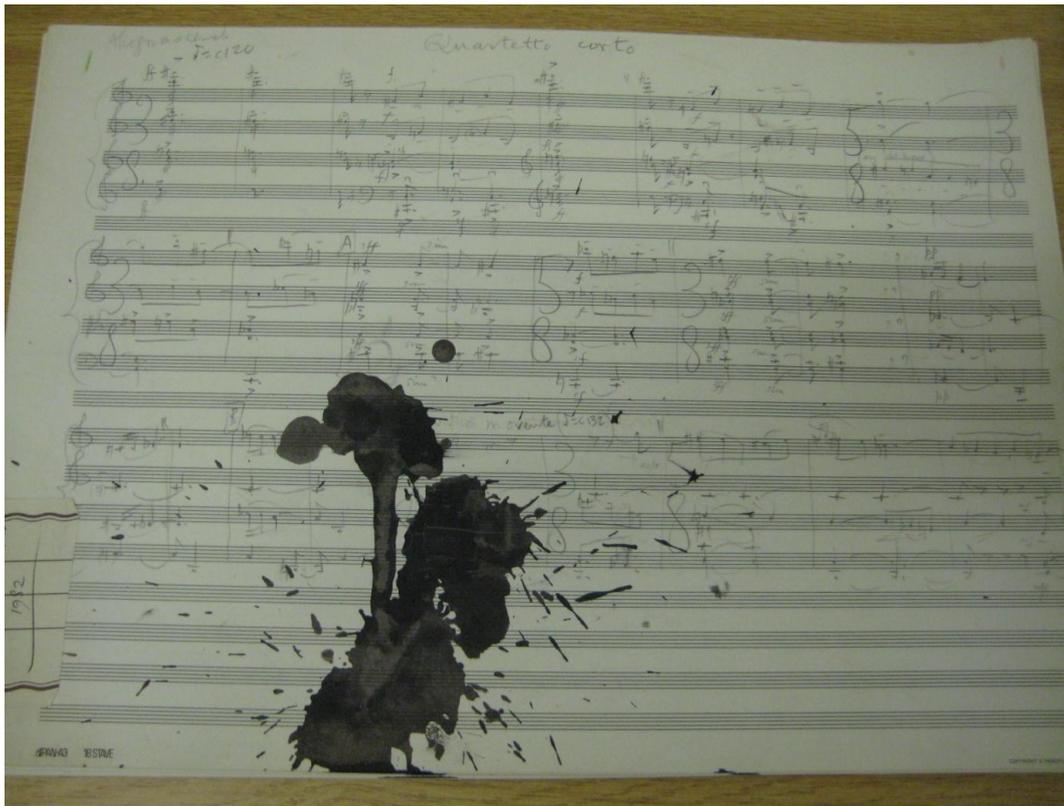
VII. Cat! (text: Eleanor Farjeon (1881–1965))

Cat! Scat!
Atter her, atter her,
Sleeky flatterer
Spit-fire chatterer,
Scatter her, scatter her
Off her mat!
Wuff! Wuff!
Treat her rough!
Git her, git her,
Whiskery spitter!
Catch her, catch her,
Green-eyed scratcher!
Slithery, hisser,
Don't miss her!
Run till you're dithery,
Hithery, thithery
Pfitts! pfitts!
How she spits!

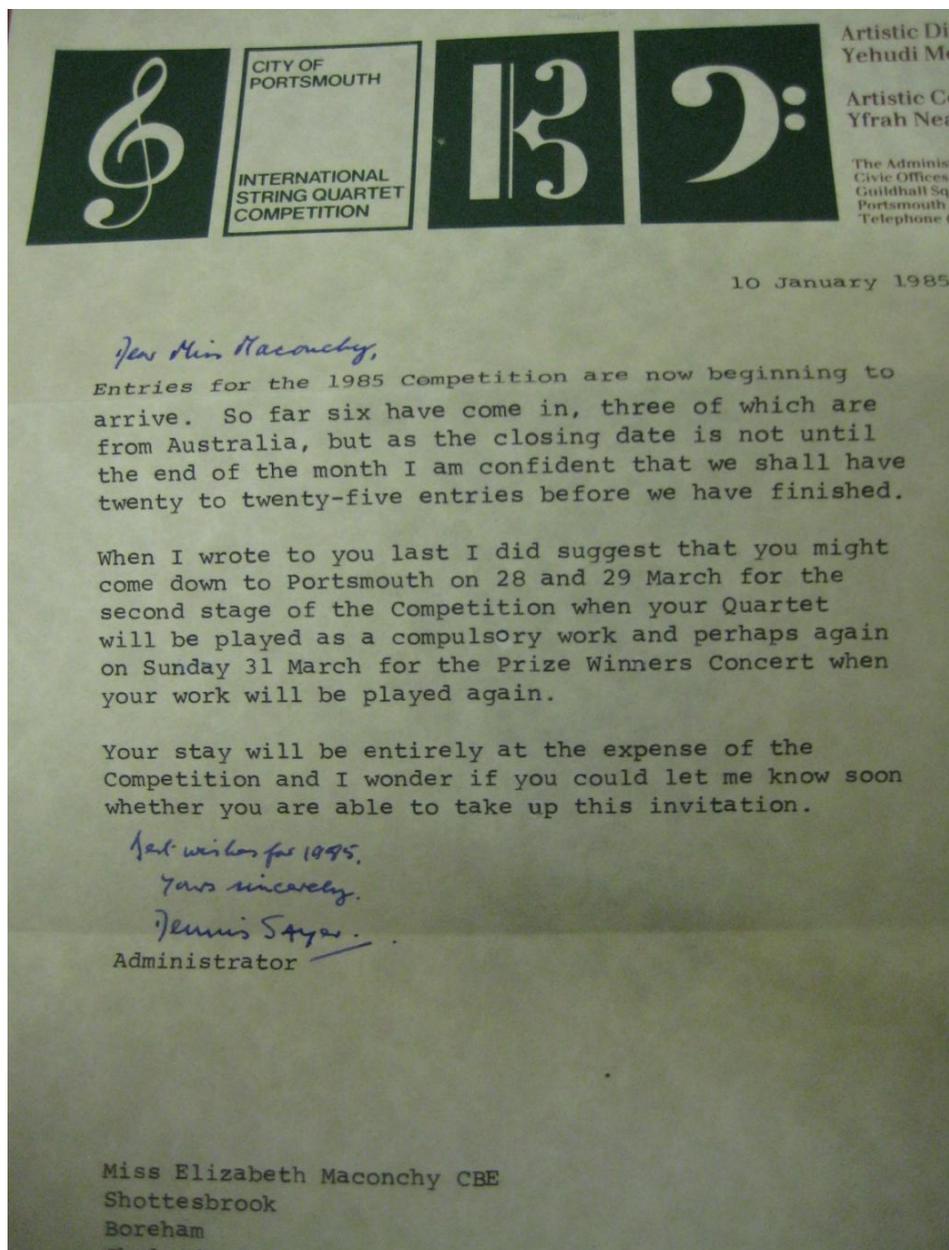
Spitch! Spatch!
Can't she scratch!
Scratching the bark
Of the sycamore tree,
She's reached her ark
And's hissing at me—
Pfitts! Pfitts! Wuff! Wuff!
Scat, cat! That's that!

Appendix XII

String Quartet No. 13 (Quartetto Corto): ink spillage on front page of manuscript

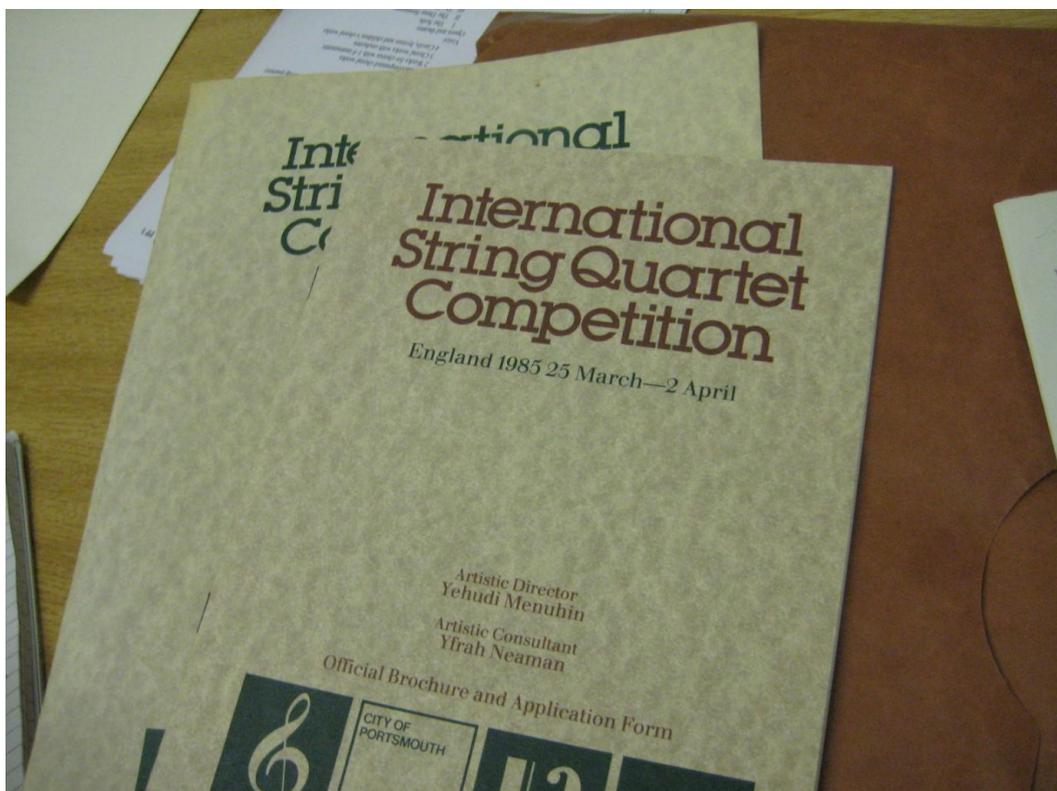


Appendix XIII



Letter from the administrator for the International String Quartet Competition 1985 about the commissioning of this work for compulsory performance by competitors.

Appendix XIV



Official programme for the International String Quartet Competition, written in six languages: English, German, Italian, Spanish, French and Russian.

Appendix XV: Chronology of Works

Year	Work	Genre
1924	Suite, e, str	orchestral
1924/25	'There is a lady sweet and kind' (anon.)	solo vocal with instrument
1926	'My sweet sweeting' (anon.), Jan	solo vocal with instrument
	'The Call' (anon.), Feb	solo vocal with instrument
	'Ophelia's Song' (W.Shakespeare, <i>Hamlet</i>), April (1930)	solo vocal with instrument
	Fantasy, fl, hp, str orch, lost	orchestral
	Elegy, fl, hn, str orch, lost	orchestral
c1926	'Martin said to this man'	solo vocal with instrument
	'O mistress mine' (Shakespeare, <i>Twelfth Night</i>)	solo vocal with instrument
	'There were three ravens'	solo vocal with instrument
1926/27	Andante and Allegro, fl, str orch	orchestral
1927	'All the Flowers', Jan	solo vocal with instrument
	'Harp Song of the Dane Women' (R.Kipling, <i>Puck of Pook's Hill</i>), 1v, hp	solo vocal with instrument
	Sonata, vn, pf	chamber
1927/28	Fantasy for Children, small orch	orchestral
1928	Concerto (Concertino), pf, chber orch, rev. 1929-30, pubd	orchestral
	Theme and Variations	orchestral
	'A Meditation for his Mistress' (R.Herrick), Dec	solo vocal with instrument
1929	The Land, suite after V. Sackville-West poem, pubd	orchestral
	'Have you seen but a bright lily grow?' (B.Jonson), May (1930)	solo vocal with instrument
	Qnt, 2vn, 2 va, vc	chamber
c1929	'In Fountain Court' (A. Symons)	solo vocal with instrument
1929/30	Sym, withdrawn	orchestral

Year	Work	Genre
1930s	Deborah' 2 solo vv, double chorus, orch	vocal-orchestral
	6 short pieces, vn, pf	chamber
1930	Suite, chamber orch, pubd, withdrawn	orchestral
	'The Woodspurge' (D.G. Rosetti)	solo-vocal with instrument
1930/31	The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' (G.M.Hopkins), withdrawn	vocal-orchestral
1931	The Willow Plate (dramatic work, 3 pts), 1931, inc.	stage work
	2 Motets: 'A Hymn to Christ', 'A Hymn to God the Father' (J.Donne), double chorus, pubd	unaccompanied choral
1932	Qnt, ob, 2 vn, va, vc (c1932, 1996)	chamber
1932/33	Comedy Ov.	orchestral
1933	Great Agrippa (ballet after H.Hoffman: <i>Struwwelpeter</i>), 1933, concert perf., London, Mercury, 4 Feb 1935; pubd	stage work
	Str Quartet No. 1, pubd	chamber
1934	'The Thrush' (J.Keats)	solo-vocal with instrument
	Prelude, Interlude and Fugue, 2vn, pubd	chamber
1935	Little Red Shoes (ballet, G.Reverat and Maconchy, after H.C. Anderson), 1935, pubd; withdrawn	stage work
	Divertissement, 12 insts, pubd	instrumental ensemble
	'The Arab' (G. Meredith)	solo-vocal with instrument
	Toccata, pf	chamber, solo inst
1936	Str Quartet No. 2, pubd	chamber
1937	Conc., va,orch, pubd, withdrawn	orchestral
	'How Samson Bore Away the Gates of Gaza' (N.V. Lindsay), pubd	solo-vocal with instrument
	5 pieces, va, lost	chamber
	'Sleep brings no joy to me' (E. Bronte)	solo-vocal with instrument
c1937	'I made another song' (R. Bridges)	solo-vocal with instrument
1937/38	Sonata, va, pf, pubd, withdrawn	chamber
1938	'How Samson Bore Away the Gates of Gaza' (N.V. Lindsay) S/T, orch, pubd [rev. of song, 1937]	vocal-orchestral
	'The Mothers', (S. Townsend Warner) SSAA	unaccompanied choral
	The Garland: Variations on a Theme' (Anacreontica, trans. W. LeFanu), pubd	solo-vocal with instrument
	Str Quartet No. 3, pubd	chamber
	Impromptu: Fantasia for One Note, pf (1939)	chamber, solo inst

Year	Work	Genre
1939	Puck Fair (ballet, 5 scenes, F.R. Higgins), 2pf, 1939-40, pubd; Dublin, Gaiety, 9 Feb 1941; orchd I. Boyle, c1948, Cork, Opera House, 10 May 1948; composer's rev. of orchd version c1953, Cork, Opera House, 19 April 1953	stage work
	'The Ribbon in her Hair' (S.O'Casey), chorus, pf	choral, with 1-9 insts
	'The People Advance' (R. Swingler), B, mixed vv [episode 9 of Music and the People, collab. Vaughan Williams, A. Cooke, Lutyens, Yates, Rubbra, Crisholm, Darnyon, Austin, Demuth, Rawsthorne, Bush]	unaccompanied choral
	A Country Town, suite, pf (1945)	chamber, solo inst
1939-42	Str Quartet No. 4 (1949)	chamber
1940	'The Winkle Woman' (E. Clifford), mez, pf (1940)	solo-vocal with instrument
1940/41	Dialogue, pf, orch, pubd	orchestral
	Dies Irae', C, chorus, orch, withdrawn	vocal-orchestral
c1941	Contrapuntal Pieces, pf	chamber, solo inst
1941	'The Disillusion' (S. Wingfield), Jan, pubd	solo-vocal with instrument
	'Sailor's Song of the Two Balconies' (Wingfield), Jan, pubd	solo-vocal with instrument
1942	Variations on a Well-Known Theme, pubd	orchestral
	'The Shark and the Whale' (topical song for children, I. Schneider), unison vv, pf	choral, with 1-9 insts
1941-43	Divertimento, vc, pf (1954)	chamber
1942/43	Theme and Variations, str orch, pubd	orchestral
1943	Suite (from ballet Puck Fair)	orchestral
	'Howe ye' (Bible), chorus, orch	vocal-orchestral
	'The Voice of the City' (J.Morris) women's chorus, pf	choral, with 1-9 insts
	Sonata, vn, pf	chamber
1943?	'By the Waters of Babylon' (Bible: Ps cxxxvii), chorus orch	vocal-orchestral
1944	'Pioneers of Rochdale' (F.Chrome), unison/mixed vv, pf)	choral, with 1-9 insts
	'A Song of Freedom', TTBB	unaccompanied choral
1945	Concertino, cl, str orch (1993)	orchestral
1945-48	Sym, pubd, withdrawn	orchestral
1946/47	Sonnet Sequence' (K.Gee), S, 9 insts	solo-vocal with instruments
1948	Str Quartet No. 5 (1950)	chamber
1949	Concertino, pf, str orch, pubd	orchestral
	A Winter's Tale' (Gee), S, str qt	solo-vocal

Year	Work	Genre
		with instrument
1950	2 Dances from Puck Fair (from ballet), pubd	orchestral
	Str Quartet No. 6 (1951)	chamber
	A Country Town: 8 Short Pieces (arr. of pf pieces 1939)	chamber
1950/51	Nocturne, after Coleridge: <i>The Ancient Mariner</i> , pubd	orchestral
1951	6 settings of Poems by WB Yeats, S, SAA, cl, hp, opt. 2 hn	choral, with 1-9 insts
	Duo: Theme and Variations, vn,vc, pubd	chamber
1952	Concertino, bn, str orch (1952)	orchestral
	8 Children's Pieces, pf	chamber
1952/53	Proud Thames: Coronation Ov., pubd	orchestral
	Sym., Double String Orch, pubd	orchestral
1953	Suite on Irish Airs, small orch	orchestral
1954	Suite on Irish Airs, [full orch arr.of version for small orch of 1953]	orchestral
	Shoheen sho: Irish Lullaby (trans. LeFanu) (1955)	solo-vocal with instrument
	5 Hungarian Tunes, cl, pf	chamber
	5 Hungarian Tunes, pf 4 hands [arr.of pieces for cl and pf of 1954]	chamber, solo-inst
	4 Improvisations, db	chamber, solo-inst
	Toombeola, vn, str orch, withdrawn	orchestral
1954/55	Str Quartet No. 7, pubd	chamber
1955	Suite on Irish Airs (orch version of vn, pf piece, 1955)	orchestral
	3 Pieces, 2cl	chamber
	Where's my little basket gone?, variation 5 [other variations by Bush, Ferguson, Finzi, Jacob, Lutyens, Rawsthorne, G. Williams]	orchestral
c1955	Suite on Irish Airs, vn, pf	chamber
	Suite on Irish Airs, fl, pf [arr.of vn, pf piece]	chamber
1955/56	Conc., ob, bn, str orch, pubd	orchestral
	Suite, ob, str orch	orchestral
	Part Songs for St. Mary's School	choral, with 1-9 insts
c1956	A Country Town: 6 [recte 7] Short Pieces [arr. of pf pieces 1939]	orchestral
1956	'The Exequy' (H. King)	solo-vocal with instrument
	(4 Shakespeare Songs) 3. Come Away, Death	solo-vocal with instrument
	Str Trio, vn, va, vc, withdrawn	chamber
1956/57	The Sofa (comic op, 1, U. Vaughan Williams), 1956-7, pubd; London, Sadler's Wells, 13 Dec 1959; rev. 1966, London, Town Hall, Euston Road, 28 Feb 1967	stage work

Year	Work	Genre
1957	Variations on a Theme from Vaughan Williams 'Job', vc (1960)	chamber, solo-inst
1957/58	The Three Strangers (op., 1, Maconchy, after T. Hardy, <i>The Three Wayfarers</i>), 1957-58, rev. 1967, 1969, 1977, pubd; Bishop's Stortford College, 5 June 1968	stage work
1959	'A Hymn to God the Father' (J.Donne), T, pf	solo-vocal with instrument
1960/61	Reflections, ob, cl, va, hp (1962)	chamber
	The Departure (op. 1, A. Ridler) 1960-61, rev. 1977, pubd; London, Sadler's wells, 16 Dec 1962	stage work
	'Christmas Morning: a Carol Cantata', S, tr/women's vv, pf/ (recs, perc., pf) (1963)	choral, with 1-9 insts
1961	The Yaffle, pf (1961)	chamber, solo inst
1962	Mill Race, pf (1963)	chamber, solo inst
	Ophelia's Song' (W.Shakespeare: <i>Hamlet</i>), S, unison vv, opt. Descant rec, pf [arr. Of song, 1926]	choral, with 1-9 insts
	The Armado' (anon.), SATB, pf (1963)	choral, with 1-9 insts
	Serenata Concertante, vn, orch, (1972)	orchestral
	Moonlight Night, pf	chamber, solo inst
c1962	Conversation, pf	chamber, solo inst
1963	Sonatina (1964)	chamber
	Qnt, cl, 2 vn, va, vc (1966)	chamber
1963/64	Samson and the Gates of Gaza' (N.V. Lindsay) SATB, orch, pubd [arr. Of song, 1937]	vocal-orchestral
1964	(Setting of Poems by G.M. Hopkins 1) 'The Starlight Night' 2) 'Peace' (1970)	vocal-orchestral
1964/65	Variazioni concertante, ob, cl, bn, hn, str orch	orchestral
1965	Go, Penny, Go, round', 4vv	unaccompanied choral
	Nocturnal' (W. Barnes, E. Thomas, P.B. Shelley), SATB (1966)	unaccompanied choral
	Propheta mendax', TTA/SSA (1966)	unaccompanied choral
	'A Hymn to Christ' (Donne), T, pf	solo-vocal with instrument
	'The Sun Rising' (Donne), T, pf	solo-vocal with instrument
	(4 Shakespeare Songs) 1 Take, oh take those lips away, 2 The Wind and the Rain, 4 King Stephen [3 Come Away, Death (1956)]	solo-vocal with instrument
	Sonatina, hpd (1972)	chamber
	Notebook, hpd (1977)	chamber
1965/66	Music for Woodwind and Brass, (1986)	instrumental ensemble
1966	Music for Witnesses (incid music, Ridler) 1966;	stage work

Year	Work	Genre
	Leeds, 1967	
	An Essex Ov. (1967)	orchestral
	Down with the Rosemary and Bays: Twelfth Night Carol' (R. Herrick), 2-pt chorus, (1967)	unaccompanied choral
	I Sing of a Maiden', carol, S/Tr, SAT/TrAT (1966)	unaccompanied choral
	No Well, Sing we No Well', carol, 3-pt chorus (1967)	unaccompanied choral
	This Day', carol, S/Tr, SA/TrA (1966)	unaccompanied choral
	6 Pieces, vn	chamber
1966/67	Str Quartet No. 8 (1967)	chamber
1967	Preludio, fugato e finale, pf 4 hands	chamber
1967/68	Conversations, cl,va (1987)	chamber
	The Birds (extravaganza, 1, Maconchy, after Aristophanes) 1967-8 (1974); Bishop's Stortford College, 5 June 1968	stage work
1968	3 Cloudscapes, withdrawn	orchestral
1968/69	Str Quartet No. 9, pubd	chamber
	And Death Shall Have No Dominion' (D. Thomas),SATB, 2 hn, 3 tpt, 3 trbn, pubd	choral, with 1-9 insts
1969	Johnny and the Mohawks (children's op, 1, Maconchy), 1969 (1970); London, Francis Holland School, sum. 1971	stage work
1969/70	The Jesse Tree (masque, 1, Ridler) 1969-70; Dorchester Abbey, 7 Oct 1970	stage work
1970	3 Preludes, vn, pf	chamber
	Music for db and pf (1971)	chamber
	Settings of poems by Gerard M. Hopkins, S/T, chbr orch: (1 'The Starlight Night', 1964, 2 'Peace', 1964), 3 'The May Magnificat'	vocal-orchestral
1970/71	Ariadne' (dramatic monologue, C. Day Lewis), S, orch, pubd	vocal-orchestral
1971	Suite (arr. of movts from pf sonata by J. Haydn), pubd, withdrawn	chamber
	Faustus' (C. Marlowe: <i>The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus</i>), scena, T, pf, pubd	solo-vocal with instrument
	Prayer before Birth' (L. MacNeice), SSAA (1987)	unaccompanied choral
	Doubt that the stars are fire' (Shakespeare: <i>Hamlet</i>), round, 4vv	unaccompanied choral
1971/72	Str Quartet No. 10 (1974)	chamber
1972	Qt, ob, vn, va, vc	chamber
	3 Bagatelles, ob, hpd (1974)	chamber
	Educational pieces for combinations of 2 str insts (1972)	chamber
1972/73	Genesis, withdrawn	orchestral
1973-75	Epyllion. vc, str orch (1975)	orchestral
1973	Samson and the Gates of Gaza' (Lindsay), chorus, brass band, pubd (arr. of song 1937)	vocal-orchestral
	Fly-by-Nights' (trad.), women's/children's vv, hp/pf (1977)	choral, with 1-9 insts

Year	Work	Genre
	The Isles of Greece (Byron), SATB, orch	vocal-orchestral
1973/74	3 Songs: 1) 'A Widow-Bird Sate Mourning' (Shelley), 2) 'So We'll go no more a-roving' (Byron), 3) 'The Knot there's no Untying' (T. Campbell), 1v, hp, pubd	solo-vocal with instrument
1974	Siren's Song' (W. Browne: <i>Ulysses and Circe</i>), S, SSATB, (1977)	unaccompanied choral
	2 Epitaphs: 1) 'Our Life is Nothing but a Winter's Day' (F. Quarles), 2) 'As the Tree Falls' (anon.), SSA (1976)	unaccompanied choral
	Christmas Night', carol, 4vv, pubd	unaccompanied choral
1975	The King of the Golden River (children's op, 1, Maconchy, after J. Ruskin), 1975, rev. 1976; Oxford, U. Church of St Mary, 29 Oct 1975	stage work
	2 Settings of Poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins: 1) Pied Beauty, 2) Heaven- Haven, chorus, brass, pubd	vocal-orchestral
	Chant for Bishops Stortford Parish Church'	unaccompanied choral
	Touchstone, ob, chbr org	chamber
1976-78	Heloise and Abelard (dramatic cant., Maconchy), S,T,B, chorus,orch, (1978)	vocal-orchestral
1976	Sinfonietta (1976)	orchestral
	Morning, Noon and Night, hp, pubd	chamber, solo inst
c1976	Harp Song of the Dane Women' (R. Kipling: <i>Puck of Pook's Hill</i>), unison vv, pf (arr.of song 1927)	choral, with 1-9 insts
1976/77	Str Quartet No. 11 (1982)	chamber
1977	Sun, Moon and Stars', S, pf, pubd	solo-vocal with instrument
1978	4 Miniatures (E. Farjeon): 1) 'Light the lamps up, lamplighter', 2) 'For Snow', 3) 'The Night will never stay', 4) 'For a Mocking Voice', SATB (1979)	unaccompanied choral
	The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo' (Hopkins), SSAATB, a fl, va, hp	choral, with 1-9 insts
	Contemplation, vc, pf (1978)	chamber
1979	Creatures:1) 'The Hen and the Carp' (I. Serrailier), 2) 'The Snail' (J. Reeves), 3) 'Rendez-vous with a Beetle' (E.V. Rien), 4) 'Tiger! Tiger!' (W. Blake), 5) 'Cat's Funeral' (Rien), 6) 'The Dove and the Wren' (trad.), 7) 'Cat!' (Farjeon), SATB (1980)	unaccompanied choral
	Str Quartet No. 12 (1979)	chamber
	Colloquy, fl, pf (1980)	chamber
	Romanza, va, wind qnt, str qnt, pubd	inst ensemble
1980	Fantasia, cl, pf (1981)	chamber
	Piccola musica, vn, va, vc, pubd	chamber
	Trittico, 2 ob, bn, hpd, pubd	chamber
1980/81	Little Sym. (1981)	orchestral
1981	My Dark Heart' (Petrarch, trans. J.M. Synge), S, fl + a fl, ob, eng hn, vn, va, vc (1981)	solo-vocal with insts

Year	Work	Genre
	Wind Qnt, fl, ob, cl, hn, bn (1982)	chamber
1981/82	Music for Str (1982)	orchestral
1982	Tribute, vn, double ww, (1983)	inst ensemble
	For Bonny, Sweet Robin' (Shakespeare: <i>Hamlet</i>), 1v, chorus	unaccompanied choral
	L'Horloge' (C. Baudelaire), S, cl, pf, pubd	solo-vocal with insts
	3 Songs (from Heloise and Abelard), Bar, pf	solo-vocal with instrument
1982/83	Str Quartet No. 13 (Quartetto Corto) (1985)	chamber
1983	The Bellman' (Herrick), carol, SATB (1985)	unaccompanied choral
	There is no rose' (anon.), carol, SATB (1985)	unaccompanied choral
	5 Sketches, va (1983)	chamber, solo inst
1983/84	O Time turn back', SATB, wind qnt,vc (1984)	choral, with 1-9 insts
1984	Concertino, cl, small orch (1984)	orchestral
	Still Falls the Rain' (E. Sitwell), double chorus (1985)	unaccompanied choral
	Narration, vc (1984)	chamber, solo inst
c1984	Excursion, bn, pubd	chamber, solo inst
1985	Life Story, str orch (1985)	orchestral
	3 Songs for Tracey Chadwell: 1) In memory of W.B. Yeats (W.H. Auden), 2) In Memory of W.B. Yeats II (Auden), 3) It's No Go (MacNeice) (1985)	solo-vocal with instrument
1986	Butterflies (J. Ray) (1986)	solo-vocal with instrument
	Bagatelle, pf	chamber, solo inst
1989	On St. Stephenses Day', women's chorus (1989)	unaccompanied choral

Source: Hugh Cole and Jennifer Doctor, 'Maconchy, Dame Elizabeth', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*,
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Abstract

With a career spanning almost the entire twentieth century and an output exceeding two hundred works, Elizabeth Maconchy was a composer of extraordinary passion, intellect and ability. Winner of numerous substantial prizes and champion of new music and young composers, she was a figure of true tenacity in the face of serious illness and difficult circumstances. This study serves as an introduction to the composer's life and music bringing together significant unpublished and previously unavailable material for the first time.