

INNOVATIONS

EUROPEAN GUITAR COMPOSITIONS OF THE 1970s AND 1980s

BY STEPHEN GOSS

PART 2: EXTERNAL FORCES

THE FIRST article dealt with the discussion of representative art through the medium of the guitar, and how its expression has necessitated the excavation of new and rich timbral resources. The second article will attempt to portray how composers have drawn on external, extra-musical stimuli to catalyse their compositional processes, and illustrate by what means they have sought new sounds to achieve the realisation of their exotic artistic conceptions.

A fascinating example of a work triggered off by a single outside influence is Štěpán Rak's *Voces de Profundis* (1981), inspired by Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1976). Lance Bosman has pointed out that 'without following the film's story, the piece is intended to convey through melodic expression and acoustic utterance, something of its atmosphere, the torment of schizophrenia'.¹

The work relies heavily on unorthodox sound-painting using bizarre colouristic effects.² However, these effects do not constitute primary material, as the work revolves around the development and transformation of three basic themes.³ For example, the first theme (bars 1-7) is re-coloured in two ways. Its first reappearance (bars 101-109) represents a sentimental vision of Norman Bates's mother, whereas the second (bars 157-163) exploits bitonality to musically portray the concept of schizophrenia.

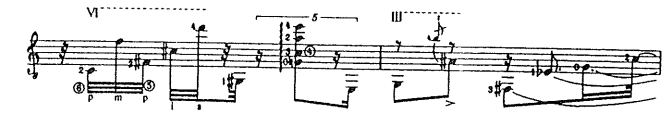
Henze is another composer who has based his works on a single generating stimulus which, in his case, functions as the implicit substratum of the composition.⁴

His two herculean guitar sonatas, *Royal Winter Music I* (1976) and *Royal Winter Music II* (1979) fit into this category. In the first sonata 'the writing is full of technical innovations, the pieces that it contains are settings of Shakespeare (each deals with a character from a play)⁵ and the aim is to unfold and release the full orchestra of the guitar sound'.⁶ The whole sonata grows out of the first movement, a 'music for text' translation of Richard of Gloucester's monologue 'Now is the winter of our discontent' from Richard III. The way in which the phrases 'Made glorious summer' (Ex.12), 'Grim-visag'd War' (Ex.13) and 'the lascivious pleasing of a lute' (Ex.14) are set is particularly ingenious:

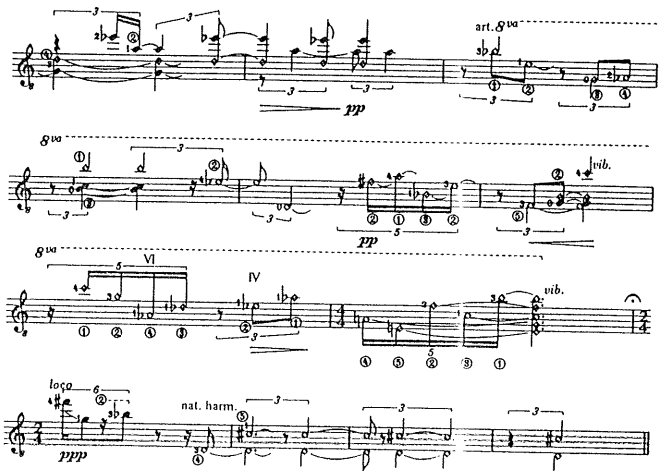
(Ex. 12)



(Ex. 13)



(Ex. 14)



Ex. 12, 13, 14. 'Gloucester' from *Royal Winter Music I* (1976) – Hans Werner Henze (edited by Julian Bream). B. Schott's Soehne, Mainz, 1976. Reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Ltd.

The omnipresent tambora in the second half of the movement, depicting Gloucester's profound wickedness, reaches its zenith as he expounds his intentions to murder King Edward's heirs (Ex.15).



Ex. 15. 'Gloucester' from *Royal Winter Music I* (1976) – Hans Werner Henze (edited by Julian Bream). B. Schott's Soehne, Mainz, 1976. Reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Ltd.

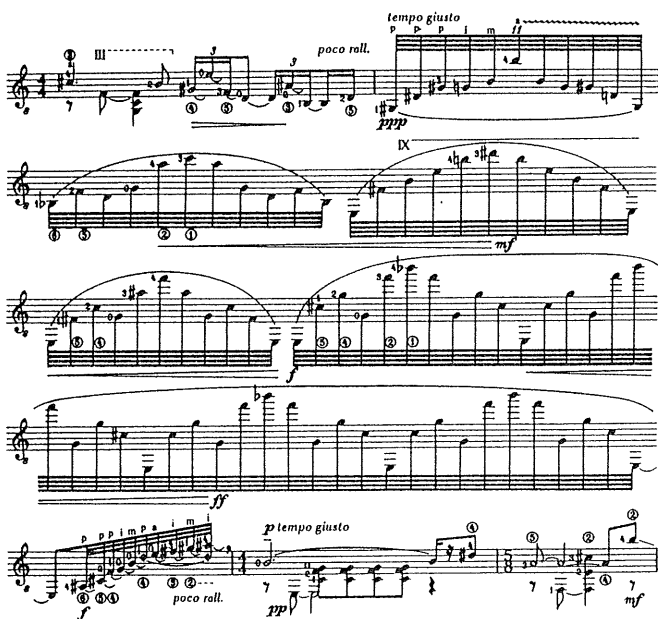
Earlier in the movement, when Gloucester is describing his grotesque appearance, Henze's characterisation approaches the limits of the guitar's gestural capabilities (Ex.16)

(Ex. 16)



Ex. 16. 'Gloucester' from *Royal Winter Music I* (1976) – Hans Werner Henze (edited by Julian Bream). B. Schott's Soehne, Mainz, 1976. Reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Ltd.

as it does occasionally throughout the score. Examples can be cited during VI 'Oberon' and III 'Ariel' (Ex.17)



Ex. 17. 'Ariel' from *Royal Winter Music I* (1976) – Hans Werner Henze (edited by Julian Bream). B. Schott's Soehne, Mainz, 1976. Reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Ltd.

The tour de force of Henze's Winter Music cycle forms the finale of the second sonata, a terrifying recreation of 'Mad Lady Macbeth'. Henze is precautious that the guitarist should comprehend the esoteric and laminiferous character of Lady Macbeth and therefore outlines his basic conception in the preface to the work.⁷ A recurring motive (Ex.18) acts as an axis to this montage-like movement that encompasses the whole emotional spectrum of one of Shakespeare's most complicated characters.



Ex. 18. 'Mad Lady Macbeth' from *Royal Winter Music II* (1979) – Hans Werner Henze (edited by Julian Bream). B. Schott's Soehne, Mainz, 1976. Reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Ltd.

The Royal Winter Music cycle is a major contribution to the modern guitar repertoire, demanding a high level of intellectual participation from player and audience alike. The work is the crystallisation of Henze's personal and subjective interpretation of Shakespeare, in contrast to Rak's *Voces de Profundis* which is merely an attempt to objectively restate the atmosphere of Hitchcock's *Psycho* in an alternative artistic guise.

In *An eine Aeolsharfe* (1985-86), Henze's recent guitar concerto, the guitar writing is considerably more melodic than in the two 'Shakespeare' sonatas, with the instrumental ensemble providing the harmonic background. Henze's innovative scoring, combining modern with period instruments, allows the guitar to be heard throughout the work with a minimum of amplification.⁸ The concerto draws on poems by Eduard Morike (1804-19875) in much the same way as Royal Winter Music draws on Shakespeare.⁹

Poetry has provided the initial impetus for a myriad of guitar compositions. Reginald Smith Brindle's *Four Poems of Garcia Lorca* was 'directly inspired by Lorca's poetry, and the consistency of the theme in the poems is echoed by a consequent unity of atmosphere in the music.¹⁰ Lorca's perpetual obsession with darkness and death in the four poems is chillingly transferred to the guitar in Smith Brindle's music. This can be observed in the first poem 'Lamentación de la Muerte' (The Lament of Death) where an intense melody (played on the 4th string) is incessantly interrupted by funereal drum-rolls (Ex.19).

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Four Poems of García Lorca

1 Lamentación de la Muerte
("Sobre el cielo negro...")
Reginald Smith Brindle

Lento (♩ = 90)

Ex. 19. 'Lamentación de la Muerte' from *Four Poems of García Lorca* – Reginald Smith Brindle (Schott 1977). Reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Ltd.

As in a majority of his works inspired by poetry,¹¹ Smith Brindle employs serialism (albeit intermittently) in the Lorca pieces; this is 'so that the emotive, poetic imagery of the works is tempered by a musical language which has a certain rational discipline.'¹²

A markedly different approach to composition kindled by poetry exists in Carey Blyton's extended work *The Oceans of the Moon* Op.75 (1975). The work is based on a setting of Shelley's poem 'To the Moon', borrowed from the composer's earlier song cycle *Lachrymae* – In Memoriam John Dowland Op.23 (1956).¹³ The song, transcribed for guitar, constitutes the epicentre of the work and the theme for a set of eight variations (four heard before the song setting and four after it). Each variation reflects the nature of a lunar sea (See Ex.20 and 21).

Without expression (♩ = 60)

Ex. 20. Variation 3 – 'The Sea of Cold' from *The Oceans of the Moon* (1975) – Carey Blyton (Bèrben 1979). Reproduced by kind permission of the publishers.

Tempo I (♩ = 100)

Ex. 21. Variation 8 – 'The Ocean of Storms' from *The Oceans of the Moon* (1975) – Carey Blyton (Bèrben 1979). Reproduced by kind permission of the publishers.

Michael Tippett's heterogeneous sonata, *The Blue Guitar* (1983-84), received its original lambent coruscation from Wallace Stevens's poem 'The Man with the Blue Guitar', which was in turn stimulated by a Picasso painting. However, unlike the pieces discussed above, the poem does not form the structural backbone of Tippett's sonata. It simply functions as a point of departure on to which Tippett superimposes an anastomosis of conceptual influences. *The Blue Guitar* was composed shortly after Tippett completed his colossal oratorio *The Mask of Time* (1980-82), the didacticism of which contributes greatly to the variegated eclecticism of the guitar sonata.¹⁴

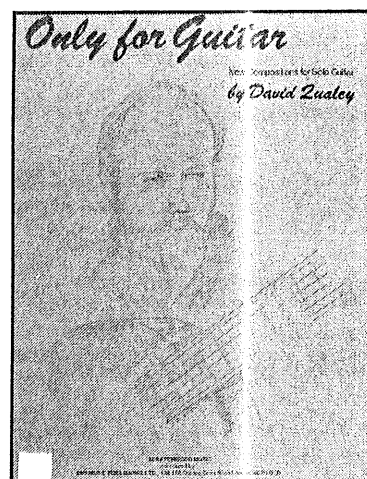
Among the more trenchant of these influences is the North American vernacular music, and particularly the Blues (a trait traceable in Tippett's work from the mid-sixties.¹⁵) Tippett indulges in a pun on the word 'blue' to the extent of directly mimicking a Blues guitarist (Ex.22)¹⁶

In time again (Medium Slow)

Ex. 22. 1st movement from *The Blue Guitar* (1983-84) – Michael Tippett (Schott 1985). Reproduced by kind permission of Schott & Co. Ltd.

The second quaver can be 'bent' microtonally in the manner of a blues guitarist.

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Tippett does not compromise his compositional style in *The Blue Guitar*, as many composers have done when writing for the guitar, and the formal procedures he employs can be cited elsewhere in his output. The mosaic organisation of the central section of the first movement was first employed in the Second Piano Sonata (1962), and the bipartite structures of movements 2 and 3 replicate the architecture of the finale to the Concerto for Violin, Viola and Cello (1978-79).

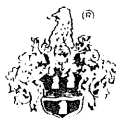
A technique prevalent in *The Blue Guitar* is the immediate repetition of long musical paragraphs at a modified pitch, an established hallmark of Tippett's style used to great effect in the Fourth Symphony (1977). The intriguing aspect of its use here, however, is that its repetitions are not exact – at first the subtle alterations are imperceptible (for example in the canon of the first movement) but as the sonata progresses so the deviations begin to caricature the shape of the music, culminating in grotesque subjugations of the original material.

They said 'You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are.'

The man replied, 'things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar.'

Wallace Stevens¹⁷

1. *Voces de Profundis* by Štěpán Rak: An Essay – Lance Bosman (Guitar International, October 1985).
2. Rak provides a glossary of these effects in his performance instructions.
3. Rak's themes bear no resemblance to any part of Bernard Herrmann's original score composed for the film.
4. An example of this outside Henze's guitar music is in the third movement of his Second Piano Concerto (1967), based on Shakespeare's sonnet 'The expanse of spirit in a waste of shame'.
5. Henze's parentheses.
6. Politics and music (collected writings 1953-81) – Hans Werner Henze (translated by Peter Lebanyi), Faber and Faber 1982.



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7. 'The third and last movement of this new Winter Music portrays the mad lady appearing like Maria Callas in the same part (though without the same sonority), clad in a long robe, her hair undone, her crazy eyes following the smoky, flickering light of a candle on a Georgian candlestick which she herself supports with one arm as if it were a torch, while the other points a sword at her breast. She moves through the bleak halls of her cold, black palace, a thunderstorm is raging outside, the wind is howling, she is totally mad, talks incoherently, sings dirty ditties, swears and shouts. For all that she is immensely royal, her madness is majestic. Unlike the fragile little Ophelia who evokes pity, Lady Macbeth is carved from quite a different block and does not evoke our pity at all; we are afraid of her. In fact the piece is particularly difficult to play, and many a guitarist will approach it with fear and trembling, just as we ourselves would not care to cross the path of Lady Macbeth, above all not now and in her present state' – Hans Werner Henze, preface to *Royal Winter Music II* (translated by Stefan de Haan) (Schott 1983).

8. The scoring of *An Eine Acolsharfe* is as follows:

solo guitar
alto and bass flutes
oboe d'amore
cor anglais
bassoon
bass clarinet
harp
percussion
2 violas
viola d'amore
viola da gamba
2 cellos
double bass

9. The poems by Morike used are:

To an Aeolian Harp
To Herman
Question and Answer
To Philomele

10. Preface from *Four Poems of Garcia Lorca* (1977) – R. Smith Brindle (Schott 1977).

11. Other guitar compositions written by Reginald Smith Brindle inspired by poetry include:

Memento (1975) – Bèrben 1975 (Lorca).
Do Not Go Gentle (1976) – Suvini Zerboni 1976 (Dylan Thomas).
November Memories (1976) – Suvini Zerboni 1976 (Margherita Gidacci).

12. Preface from *Four Poems of Garcia Lorca* (1977) – Reginald Smith Brindle (Schott 1977).

13. Another work based on poems of Shelley is Michael Blake Watkins's *The Spirit of the Earth* (1978), which draws on extracts from 'Mont Blanc' and 'Prometheus Unbound'.

14. Meirion Bowen has observed that 'Tippett has seized a lot from other men's music. A cursory examination of his work would support this observation. However, the end result is never mere eclecticism. The outside influences have only nurtured and accelerated the development of the composer's own personal idiom' – *Michael Tippett*, by Meirion Bowen (Robson Books, 1985).

15. Two important blues-influenced works are *The Shires Suite* (1965-70) and *The Ice Break* (1973-76).

16. Other general influences on Tippett's style have been listed elsewhere by Ian Kemp, David Matthews, Meirion Bowen and Tippett himself (see Bibliography at end of this series).

17. Excerpt from 'The Man with the Blue Guitar' from *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (Faber and Faber, London).



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