Schoenberg persuaded him to include the Five Orchestral Pieces by his pupil Webern at a Promenade Concert in August. Such a performance would have been a remarkable event in an England still newly accustomed to the music of Debussy, Busoni, Delius and Sibelius, and would have made 1914 the first year in which Schoenberg, Berg and Webern each received performances in London. In a letter to Schoenberg dated 2 July Webern wrote that he would send the orchestral material to Wood in London by the end of the week.[56] But just a few days earlier, Archduke Ferdinand had been assassinated and within weeks Europe was at war. The Webern performance was cancelled.

The outbreak of war dealt a severe blow to the progress of the Second Viennese School in Britain. Webern and Berg remained absent from the concert hall in Britain for many years, and the number of performances and articles devoted to Schoenberg began to dwindle. Wood began to cool in his appreciation, while Newman became positively hostile.

During the 1920s, however, the tide began to turn again, as the Schoenberg cause came to be championed by such critics as Havergal Brian, Leigh Henry and Cecil Gray, and by such conductors as Eugene Goossens and Edward Clark. Clark's importance in this respect should not be underestimated: he gave the first English performance of the Chamber Symphony no.1 in May 1921 and the world première of the orchestral version of *Verklärte Nacht* in Newcastle in December 1924. Later, as Contemporary Music Adviser to the BBC in London, he invited Schoenberg to conduct performances of *Gurrelieder* in 1928, *Erwartung* in 1931, and the Variations for Orchestra in 1933. Webern, Hindemith and Stravinsky were also invited to conduct their own works. But his departure in 1934 deprived the BBC of a vital link with contemporary European music and Schoenberg was again relegated to the fringes of musical activity until Glock's appointment in 1959.

Even today, Schoenberg performances are infrequent, a fact that should make us pause before we launch into the customary criticisms of musical life and outlook in Britain in the early years of the century. Have our musical tastes as a nation really advanced significantly over the last 75 years?

[56]see Hans Moldenhauer: *Anton von Webern: a Chronicle of his Life and Work* (London, 1978), 187

Vic Hoyland: a report on progress

Andrew Clements

Five years ago (MT May 1982, p.329) Martin Dreyer surveyed Vic Hoyland's musical development to date, finding in it a 'quest for the theatrical properties of musical gestures [which] has acquired a distinctive voice over the past decade'. The intervening period has not made that voice any less distinctive, quite the contrary, but it has taken Hoyland's music in a direction that might not have been easily predicted at that time. The première of his first BBC commission, *In Transit*, at the Proms seems an appropriate point at which to take stock again. The change of direction may not amount to a radical reorientation, but at the very least it represents a paring-down of his musical resources closer to their expressive essentials, and a newly apparent keenness to furnish his listeners with graspable structures and clearly defined points of reference.

Dreyer's article was prompted by the first performance of *Michelagniolo* (1981), a multi-layered music-theatre treatment of the character and personal and artistic life of Michelangelo for baritone soloist, six male voices and 23 instruments. It was Hoyland's most ambitious undertaking, and in many ways a highly personal summation of his creative intentions, the final clearing of a stylistic debt to the European post-1945 avant garde (and to Berio in particular), and a further exploration of the symbiotic relationship between physical (that is dramatic) gesture and its musical analogue which, as Dreyer observed, lies at the very core of Hoyland's work. But already by the time of the première of *Michelagniolo* the composer had begun the task of purging his compositional techniques. The *Quartet-movement* (1982) initiated the process, but its formal rigour and harmonic–thematic coherence seem to have been achieved at some cost to the music's poise and ease of flow. It is a highly wrought, tense piece, betraying Hoyland's urgent desire to simplify his means and the struggle involved in doing so.

A more relaxed, expansive statement of his intentions may be found in *Fox* (1983) for 11 instruments, in which the five-movement structure centres on an unmistakable and clearly referential melodic line, whose statements in more or less modified forms and contexts articulate the first three movements, and whose elaboration constitutes the whole of the finale. The shift of emphasis in Hoyland's music may be appreciated by comparing *Fox* with an earlier work for chamber ensemble to which it is in some ways a companion piece: *Andacht zum Kleinen* (1980) shares with its successor a shimmering, sensuous treatment of instrumental sonority which it is difficult not to characterize as Italianate, but its inventions are designed to be self-

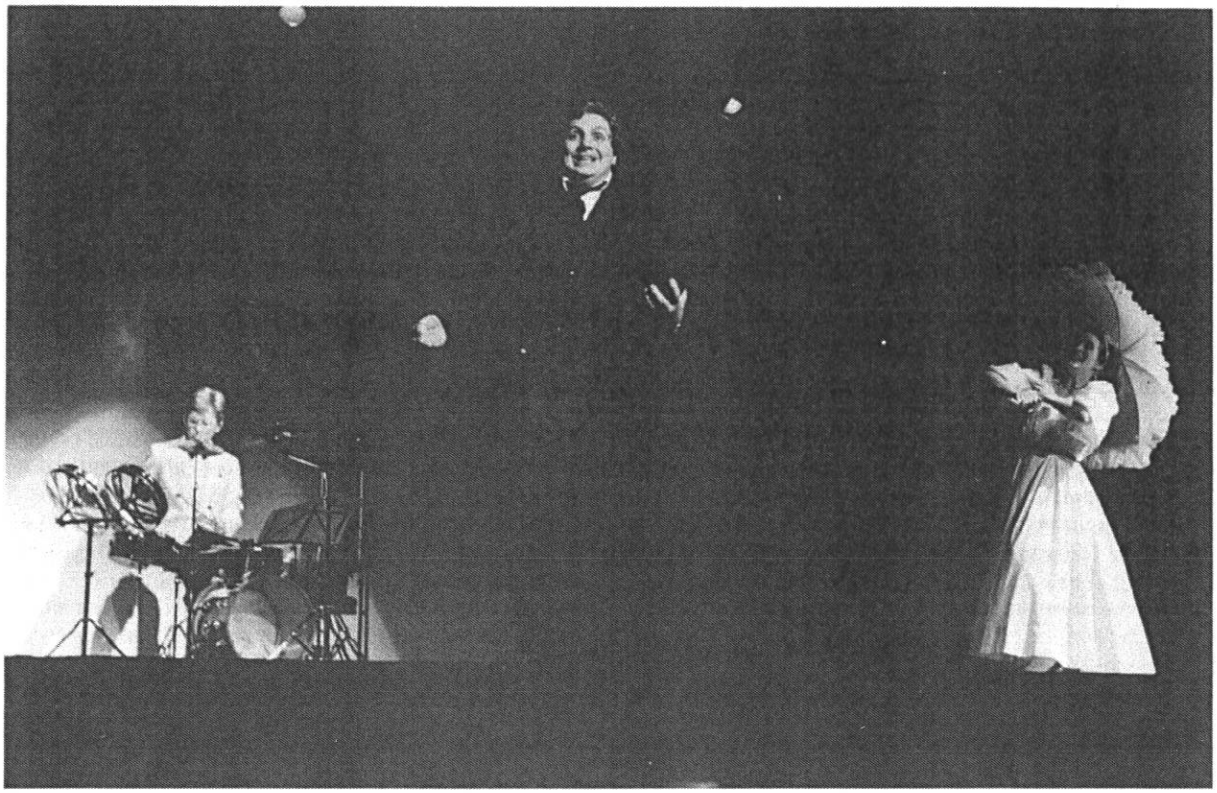
contained and to operate across much shorter timespans. *Andacht* draws together threads from Hoyland's earlier works, bringing to fruition ideas on texture and rhythmic definition and excluding almost entirely consideration of line and its unambiguous verticalization.

What *Fox* does share with *Andacht zum Kleinen* is a title with origins in the visual arts. 'Devotion to small things' is a quotation from Moholy-Nagy's description of Paul Klee, and Braque's engraving *Fox* provided the source for the later work. There is no question of the engraving inspiring the music; rather its methods of construction, building lines from points, chimed with Hoyland's intentions in the ensemble work. There is a moment, at the very end of the *Quartet-movement*, when a melodic line finds the space to define itself, and it is that implication which *Fox* develops, opening out the costive harmonic world of the quartet and admitting points of reflection and repose.

With a new path clearly established for his instrumental music, Hoyland could hardly return to the multiple complexities of *Michelagniolo* for a further music-theatre work. In fact *A Head and Two Tails*, the triptych composed for the Northern Music Theatre (of which Hoyland was a founding director) in 1983 and 1984, appropriately colonizes entirely fresh ground. Its central panel, *Dumb Show* (the first segment to be written), is arguably one of the most original music-theatre pieces staged in Britain in the last decade. Every movement is strictly prescribed and the consonance of music and gesture further reinforced.

Dumb Show was written for the group Vocem and requires two performers, male and female, dressed in Edwardian costume, together with a percussionist playing a dance-band drum kit. The performers are confined to separate 8 × 8 grids on the acting area; they are allowed to move only according to the rules of a knight in chess – one square laterally, one diagonally – and so during the course of the work visit every square on the grid. There are two possible routes that include every square; those are the ones allotted to the man and woman. On to that groundplan Hoyland grafted another layer of gesture and vocalization derived from the settings of six Old English riddles from the Exeter Book, preserving the text in the Anglo-Saxon original for all but one of them. The solutions are inanimate objects, and the sets of clues generate a variety of unexpected allusions and cross-references, which are picked out in the carefully choreographed body movements of the performers.

The texts themselves are crude and direct, and that flavour, which would otherwise elude a modern audience, is carried over into the action. So the first riddle – 'I saw a swift one shoot across the road . . . SSIP. I saw a woman sitting alone.' – the answer to which is 'Urine', is accompanied by the following direction to the performers: 'Facial expression – as though dying for a "pee" but can't find the right place to do it (cat-like)'. And from the grammar of movements built up from the implications of the riddles Hoyland developed the percussion riffs, creating a raw,



Hoyland's 'Dumb Show': Vocem staging, Huddersfield Festival 1984

brash counterpoint to the slickly stylized movements on stage.

Of all Hoyland's works so far *Dumb Show* shows the least indebtedness to external models. That may seem like meagre praise, but in the overheated and much-imitated world of recent music-theatre it is a considerable achievement; pieces that are truly *sui generis* are rare indeed. Kagel is perhaps a progenitor at one remove, and Hoyland himself acknowledges that working on a staging of *Pas de cinq* with Northern Music Theatre helped him to develop the gestural vocabulary of *Dumb Show*. Yet the final conception seems utterly seamless, at once touching, intriguing and extremely funny.

The two flanking panels of the *A Head and Two Tails* triptych were designed to offer maximum contrast, though they do preserve both the Edwardian flavour and the use of archaic English sources. The first element, *Bitch*, is entirely spoken: a modern English version by David Hirst of the Middle English comic verse *Dame Sirith and the Weeping Bitch* got up in the guise of a music-hall monologue. The last, *Foxed*, uses a Middle English verse *Vox and Vuolf* in its original form for a setting for three soloists, five chorus and an ensemble of four percussionists and two amplified pianos that adheres much more closely to norms of what 'music-theatre', post-Stravinsky, is expected to be. The narrative is continuous, the staging essentially naturalistic, so that viewed as a whole the triptych offers a whole range of dramatic possibilities: a work in which music is redundant and its text thoroughly comprehensible (*Bitch*); one in which the text is virtually unintelligible and music and gesture welded indissolubly without any narrative significance (*Dumb Show*), and the third which preserves strong narrative features and a text that is partly understandable, but coupled with music whose role is now much closer to that of traditional accompaniment (*Foxed*).

Though the world of *A Head and Two Tails* seems far removed from that of the instrumental works that preceded it, there are carefully contrived thematic links between *Fox* and *Foxed*: the ritornello that punctuates the action of the theatre piece is transplanted from the ensemble work, while the 'Head and Two Tails March' that closes *Foxed* and which is to be used to separate the components when the triptych is performed in its entirety is itself derived from the closing section of *Fox*, though its rowdy Stravinskian mood is far removed from the translucent, hushed world for which it was conceived.

In Hoyland's most recent works the links between successive pieces grow stronger, so that it becomes possible to consider a family of compositions of which the commission, *In Transit*, is the newest member, and which also contains the String Quartet (1985) and *Seneca/Medea* (1985). Those works were, however, preceded by the short Brass Quintet, also completed in 1985, and which seems at this

point less like a complete, self-sufficient work than a sequence of preparatory sketches, investigating the tonal and ensemble possibilities of the medium for a later, more extended essay. The choral setting of a section of Seneca's *Medea* is iself intended as the first part of a substantial tripartite scheme, which will surround a central dramatic scena for soprano with two extended choral movements.

In *Seneca/Medea* the process of simplification and distillation begun in the *Quartet-movement* and *Fox* is decisively continued. Though the text is set in Latin, Hoyland is at pains to make it distinct: much of the choral writing proceeds in rhythmic unison and the instrumental accompaniment (for flute, clarinet, piano percussion, violin and cello) is carefully restrained. The rhythmic profile of the music is sharply emphasized; the ghost of a ballet score lurks behind the conception too. What is also apparent is the significance Hoyland assigns to the choral line, to the extent that for much of the work the instrumental contributions seem to be subordinate to it, providing contexts and glosses but rarely obscuring its uncomplicated dramatic force. That central importance of line, already used to great effect in *Fox*, comes to dominate both the String Quartet and *In Transit*.

When the String Quartet was first performed, it was natural to assume it to be a belated continuation of the *Quartet-movement*; Hoyland had revealed that the earlier work was originally planned to have three movements, but that the need to have it ready for the première had prevented him from fulfilling that scheme in 1981. When, however, he began to write the new quartet, he found it impossible to pick up the threads of the *Quartet-movement* and instead planned an independent work. The String Quartet was written very quickly, in barely four weeks, and was intended to have five movements; only four were given at the first performance, and Hoyland now feels it is a perfectly satisfying and complete structure as it stands.

The pressure to write the work quickly seems in retrospect to have been entirely beneficial; Hoyland was forced to make creative decisions immediately, to establish a structure with a minimum of prevarication, and the result is the most clearly defined and palpable work he had written to date. The distance travelled from the costive intricacies of the *Quartet-movement* is substantial; its musical objects are significantly simpler. The exceptionally calm and lucid third section, in which the melodic line that underpins the entire work is allowed to emerge unambiguously, is perhaps the most striking and effective instrumental music Hoyland has written. In its idiomatic handling of the medium, also, the String Quartet shows not only a major advance, but a new confidence in Hoyland's own belief that his technical demands would be realized accurately; writing for the Arditti Quartet (for whom it was commissioned) must be immensely reassuring for any composer.

The success of the String Quartet, critically and in performance, perhaps encouraged Hoyland to pursue a similar set of ideas in the orchestral work requested for the 1987 Proms. A large orchestra with copious percussion (five players) was put at his disposal, and initially he contemplated a percussion concerto. Though that idea was quickly rejected, percussion remains a pre-eminent feature of *In Transit*, and the antiphonal disposition of the five percussionists (with one placed centrally) led on to the division of the entire orchestra into two smaller ensembles placed to the left and right of the stage. Their instrumental composition is largely similar, though one has a greater content of reeds than the other. The central percussionist assumes a crucial role in articulating the discourse, either to crystallize out its harmonic thrust on the vibraphone, or to underline its rhythmic structure on log drums.

Central to the conception of *In Transit*, however, is the idea of line, which Hoyland was able to develop further from his early training in the visual arts. In Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* the artist discusses the concept of line, and how other kinds of non-linear idea can be set against it. In it he coins the phrase – 'Taking a line for a walk'. Hoyland develops that idea in the orchestral work, taking a long-limbed melodic statement and putting it 'in transit' against a variety of other material, and so defining the work's tripartite structure. Twice the music builds towards unambiguous statements of the line; the third section consists of a massive statement of the line alone. The increasing dogged intransigence of the line (giving a second, punning origin for the work's title) gives coherence and dramatic shape to the structure; in score at least, *In Transit* appears to be the most lucidly argued of Hoyland's scores to date, and perhaps a creative end-point for this particular line of development. Where he takes his music from here will be fascinating to watch.

Vic Hoyland's 'In Transit' receives its first performance at the Proms on 4 August.

Nicholas Maw: the second phase

Bayan Northcott

In a brief record review of Nicholas Maw's Sinfonia (1966) and Sonata for strings and two horns (1967) published in *Tempo* in 1972, Ian Kemp wrote:

> Maw is a fascinating figure, and a fortunate one among his generation, for he seems unperturbed by problems of self-identity. If within his rich musical textures there are threads of Strauss, Berg, Britten or even Tippett, this is simply characteristic of a composer who allows his imagination to absorb whatever is germane to his already personal style. The musical personality has qualities that are rare today: a real sense of flow, a breadth of gesture, a warmth and spontaneity of manner. There are, it is true, occasions when ideas are not defined beyond the status of types: and in that sense, a true individuality has not yet fully emerged. But the natural exuberance of his language inspires confidence that it will.

At the point those words appeared, Maw was already talking of a new phase in his career. He might also have taken issue with the implication that his self-discovery had been entirely unfraught. By his own account, the composing of *Scenes and Arias* in 1961–2 had represented an intuitive breakthrough after a long period of doubt – and a breakthrough obliging him to a more conscious 'second apprenticeship' only completed with the appearance of his opera *The Rising of the Moon* in 1970.

Other Maw enthusiasts might have deleted Tippett from the list of imputed influences and substituted pre-1914 Schoenberg à propos expressionist pages of *Scenes and Arias* and, perhaps, Bartók for some of the textures of the long, one-movement String Quartet no.1 (1965). Yet Kemp's generous tribute was essentially just. Many of the melodic and harmonic traits that burst forth in *Scenes and Arias*, so vastly enriched in feeling, complexity and range of allusion, were already to be found in such student works as the Sonatina for flute and piano (1957) and the Nocturne for mezzo-soprano and chamber orchestra (1958) – however their development might have been inhibited meanwhile by Maw's attempt to come to terms with post-Webernian orthodoxy. True, his subsequent decision to try to master the superabundance he had invoked by accepting as binding the terms of whatever commissions presented themselves, might have been thought equivocal – especially as they turned out to be for a pair of operas with stringent conditions attached and a series of concert pieces for modest classical forces. Yet any suggestion of a failure of nerve has to take into account not only the refinement of technique and extension of formal skills in the Sinfonia, Sonata and the best music of *The Rising of the Moon*, but also the remarkable feat of creative self-criticism by which *Scenes and Arias* itself was transformed from a latent to a manifest masterpiece in Maw's revision of 1966. Not only were dubious passages unerringly excised or recomposed – notably the ending which had originally stumbled on unaccountably – but, in the two sumptuous interludes he added, Maw succeeded in recapturing the radiance of a work initially composed under exceptional circumstances of artistic and personal happiness.

By the time of Kemp's review, *The Rising of the Moon*