

Morning Star III (Kandeyala)
An Analysis
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Morning Star III was composed in 1993 for the Brisbane contemporary music ensemble, Perihelion. It was originally scored for clarinet, viola, cello, piano and percussion. This present version for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and two percussion was written especially for MLC school in 1998. It is the third in a series of four chamber pieces which derive some musical material and aesthetic concepts from Aboriginal music from Arnhem Land in Australia's top end.

Morning Star III is a fast and exuberant work in a three-part form: fast, slow, fast. The fast sections are bright, dance-like and syncopated in character, whilst the slow section re-interprets the same material in a more lyrical fashion.

The piece has two main themes, the first a spiky four-note figure:

Example 1:

The musical notation for Example 1 shows two staves: flute (fl.) and clarinet (cl.). The tempo is marked as quarter note = 132 (♩=132). The music is in 4/4 time and consists of four measures. The first measure is marked with a first ending bracket (1) and a dynamic of *mp*. The second measure is also marked with a dynamic of *mp*. The third measure is marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The fourth measure is marked with a dynamic of *mf*. The flute part plays a spiky four-note figure: G4, A4, B4, C5. The clarinet part plays a more melodic line: G4, F4, E4, D4.

And the second a more melodic theme heard first in the clarinet:

Example 2:

♩=132

136 clarinet solo

mf *mf*

141

ff

This second theme is based on transcriptions of *Kandeyala* songs from a central Arnhem Land clan song series. *Kandeyala* translates as “Red Kangaroo Hunting Dreaming”. In the early 1990s, as a student at the University of Sydney, I was involved firstly with a fieldwork project where I transcribed clan song performances of visiting Arnhem Land Aboriginal people. I worked on a song series called *Morning Star*, and later incorporated some of this material into a piece for string quartet using the same name. Some of you who have performed in the MLC chamber orchestra will have performed this piece. In 1991 I also did extensive analysis on another related song series called *Baratjarr*. *Kandeyala* is one of the songs in this song series, and its syncopated tune stuck in my head so much that I knew I had to use it myself somewhere.

Clan songs or *manikay* are sacred (but open and public) songs which are often sung as a kind of liturgical accompaniment to the elaborate traditional mortuary ceremonies. They also may be performed around the campfire or in other social and ritual contexts. They are always performed by expert songmen who learn and inherit their craft in an oral tradition. Clan songs are performed by one or more singers, who also play clapsticks, and a didjeridu player. This use of clapsticks (or claves) in this version of *Morning Star III* is very similar to the indigenous music. They have the purpose of creating a steady pulse as well as marking out new sections of the piece. I haven't used anything like a didjeridu drone in this piece because I wanted to lift the *Kandeyala* material out of its original context and make it into something new.

Form

As I mentioned before, *Morning Star III* is basically in an ABA structure, defined by the elements of tempo and musical character. If we examine the use of themes, however, we see that it is a little more involved than this. Example 3 shows this relationship between theme and form:

Example 3: Form of *Morning Star III* in relation to thematic scheme.

A bars 1-167

♩=132

Theme 1 _____ (continues as ostinato).....

bars 1-120

Transition

bars 121-135

Theme 2 _____

bars 136-194

B bars 168-194;

♩=66

B (cont) bars 195-225

♩=100 ♩=115

Theme 1 _____

bars 195-225

A¹ bars 226-End

♩=132

Theme 1 _____

bars 226-End

Theme 2 _____

bars 207-225

Themes come together

Thematic Transformation

One of the important ways in which this piece achieves both unity and contrast is by the use of thematic or motivic transformation. By this term I mean the ability to change the character of a theme or motif yet preserve its essential structure or shape. Let us consider the simple four note theme in *Morning Star III* which appears in one form or another throughout most of the piece. You might notice, firstly, that in its first appearance it is in mirror form; the intervals in the clarinet part are almost an exact mirror of those in the flute.

Example 4:

The musical score for Example 4 shows two staves: Flute (fl.) and Clarinet (cl.). The tempo is marked as ♩=132. The flute part begins with a four-note theme in mirror form (G4, A4, B4, C5), marked with a first ending bracket and a dynamic of *mf*. The clarinet part plays a corresponding four-note theme in mirror form (C4, B3, A3, G3), marked with a dynamic of *mp*. The score includes a key signature change from G major to F# major and a time signature change from 4/4 to 2/4.

The second appearance of this theme is a transposed version: later on this variation of the theme transforms into an ostinato pattern.

Example 5:

Violin I
Cello

f

After the opening statements of the theme, the character of the piece changes. The time signature remains a consistent 7/8 for long periods while the piano plays a new accompanying ostinato. The pace has become less frenetic, and the dynamics are softer. Here in bar 68 we can see a new transformation of the theme: the four notes are introduced one by one in a new transposition, beginning with the cello, then with the violin, clarinet, flute and vibraphone following. The theme has thus been elongated, and sounds much more flowing and gentle.

Example 6: Elongated version of theme

Fl
Cl
Perc 1
Perc 2
Vln
Vlc
Pno

p

vibraphone
arco

After this more mellifluous section, the texture accelerates and returns to its original spiky character. At this point the four note theme repeats over and over and transforms

into an ostinato accompaniment pattern. In the following two examples, note the transition of the theme its new role as accompaniment in the piano line.

Example 7: Transition of four-note theme.

Example 7 is a musical score for a chamber ensemble, starting at measure 128. The instruments are Flute (Fl), Clarinet (Cl), Violin (Vln), Viola (Vlc), and Piano (Pno). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score shows a four-note theme (B-flat, A, G, F) that transitions from a melodic role to an accompaniment role. The Flute and Clarinet parts play the theme in a staccato, dotted rhythm, starting at *mf* and ending at *pp*. The Violin part plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, starting at *mf*. The Viola part plays a similar accompaniment, starting at *mf* and ending at *p*. The Piano part plays a complex accompaniment of sixteenth notes, starting at *p*. The score ends with a *rit.* marking.

Example 8: Four-note theme as ostinato for new theme.

Example 8 is a musical score for a chamber ensemble, starting at measure 134. The instruments are Clarinet (Cl), Percussion 1 (Perc 1), Percussion 2 (Perc 2), Violin (Vln), Viola (Vlc), and Piano (Pno). The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The score shows a four-note theme (B-flat, A, G, F) that transitions from a melodic role to an ostinato accompaniment role. The Clarinet part plays the theme in a staccato, dotted rhythm, starting at *mp* and marked as a *solo*. The Percussion 1 part plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, starting at *p* and marked as *bongos*. The Percussion 2 part plays a similar accompaniment, starting at *p* and marked as *Aboriginal clapsticks*. The Violin part plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, starting at *p*. The Viola part plays a similar accompaniment, starting at *p*. The Piano part plays a complex accompaniment of sixteenth notes, starting at *p*.

In the middle, slow section, both themes are heard together in a slightly augmented form. The violin part plays the *Kandeyala* tune in a new mode alongside an elongated version of the four note theme.

Example 9: Both themes brought together.

Piu Mosso ♩=115-118

The musical score for Example 9 is titled "Piu Mosso" with a tempo of ♩=115-118. It consists of six staves: Flute (Fl), Clarinet (Cl), Percussion (Perc I), Violin (Vln), Viola (Vlc), and Piano (Pno). The score is in 4/4 time and features various dynamics and articulations. The Flute and Clarinet parts start at measure 203 and play a melody with a dynamic of *mf*. The Percussion part has a triplet of chords with dynamics *p* and *mf*. The Violin part plays a melody with a dynamic of *f* and the marking *espressivo*. The Viola part plays a melody with a dynamic of *mf*. The Piano part has a dynamic of *mp* and the marking *sempre*. The score includes various dynamics such as *mf*, *f*, *mp*, and *p*, and articulations like *espressivo* and *sempre*. The score also includes a triplet of chords in the Percussion part and a triplet of notes in the Piano part.

There are many more of these sorts of transformations: these are some of the more obvious ones. See if you can find yet more!

Harmony

Like many pieces written in the C20th, there is no set key in *Morning Star III*. It would be tempting to call it an atonal piece, but I think this would not be entirely accurate. Much of the harmony used in this piece conforms to simple scales and modes which you might recognise if you play them on the piano. These simple, clear harmonies are often obscured, however, by their juxtaposition against each other, creating dissonance and colour. I like to think of this kind of harmony as being kind of spicy like a good chilli. There are a variety of harmonic flavours in this piece, so hopefully there are some parts which will be a bit more like a lemon sorbet as well as a variety of spicy flavours.

Let us take as an example the opening of the work from bars 11-15 (Example 10). Here the violin and cello play in an A flat major kind of mode (it's not exactly that: there is a D natural rather than a D flat) while the piano plays A and E natural and the vibraphone a kind of F major 9th chord. This sort of harmony is known as **bi-tonal** or **polytonal** harmony, meaning that there are two or more tonalities sounded at the same time. Igor Stravinsky is the most famous composer to use this technique which you can hear in his orchestral piece *The Rite of Spring*.

Example 10: Use of polytonality in *Morning Star III*.

The musical score for Example 10, titled "Use of polytonality in *Morning Star III*", consists of five staves. The top staff is Percussion 1 (Perc 1), which includes a vibraphone part with the instruction "vibraphone motor always off" and a dynamic marking of *mf*. The second staff is Percussion 2 (Perc 2), featuring bongos played with medium sticks, marked *mp*. The third staff is Violin (Vln), marked *f*. The fourth staff is Viola (Vlc), also marked *f*. The fifth staff is Piano (Pno), with dynamics ranging from *<f* to *mp* and *mf*. The score is divided into five measures, each with a different time signature: 3/4, 4/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 3/4. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major/A-flat minor). The percussion parts are in A-flat major mode, while the piano part is in A major mode, creating a bi-tonal or polytonal effect.

On other occasions a more simple, transparent harmony is used, such as in this instant which is based on the scale A, B, C#, D, E, F#, G (ie D major but with an A tonal centre).

Example 11: A more transparent harmony.

The musical score for Example 11 consists of five staves. The top staff is for Flute (Fl), starting at measure 36. The second staff is for Percussion 2 (Perc 2), labeled 'chicken shaker'. The third staff is for Violin (Vln). The fourth staff is for Viola (Vlc). The bottom staff is for Piano (Pno), labeled 'middle'. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of five measures. The Flute part features a melodic line with various rhythmic patterns. The Percussion 2 part plays a steady eighth-note pattern. The Violin and Viola parts play a harmonic accompaniment. The Piano part plays a steady eighth-note pattern. The dynamic marking 'mp' (mezzo-piano) is present in several places.

Rhythm and Colour

Morning Star III implements rhythm as a very important musical device. When I was in high school, I remembered my teacher saying to me that it was harmony that made music go forward. At the time, I was puzzled by this, since it was a theory of mine that music could maintain momentum by rhythm alone—take music written for untuned percussion for example! Although I finally figured out that my teacher was talking about harmonic progression, when I encountered music by minimalist composers such as Steve Reich I realized that my theory was actually right! Rhythm can indeed provide enough momentum and excitement by itself. Ross Edwards' piece *Flower Songs* is testament to this: it really only uses one chord throughout the first movement, but it is a very vibrant and exciting work.

I have used an array of percussion instruments in *Morning Star III* ranging from keyboard instruments such as the vibraphone and glockenspiel, through to drums such as the bongos and congas and a tom-tom, as well as cymbals and a shaker. Percussion is used firstly to give the piece added rhythmic punch as well as colour through the use of instruments such as the glockenspiel, shaker, whip and wind chimes.

Since this ensemble of seven players features a mixture of winds, strings, piano and percussion, there are plenty of opportunities to feature individual players in solos (in the slow section for example) and instruments in duos, trios and quartets, as well as

punchy *tutti* textures. This is a way of mixing instrumental colours and matching them up, rather similar to how a painter uses colour.

An obvious rhythmic feature of *Morning Star III* is its use of many changing time signatures which constantly vary the place that accent appears to fall. This is a technique also pioneered by Igor Stravinsky, but one that can also be found in traditional music from Eastern Europe and medieval music. In fact, these techniques have been around for a very long time. As well as serving the function of displaced accent, the purpose behind time signature changes is often to expand a repeated pattern so that the music always appears as fresh and surprising. Let us consider the structure of bars 32-45, the rhythmic structures which are represented below in Example 12.

Example 12: Additive rhythmic structures.

	bars 32-35				
Time signature:	4/4	6/8	5/8	3/8	
Grouping of ♪:		3+3	3+2	3	
	bars 36-40				
Time signature:	4/4	6/8	5/8	2/4	3/8
Grouping of ♪:		3+3	3+2	2+2	3
	bars 41-45				
Time signature:	4/4	6/8	7/8	2/4	3/8
Grouping of ♪:		3+3	3+2+2	2+2	3

As you can see from this example, the metric pattern first given in bars 32-35 is gradually expanded by the addition of a 2/4 bar, and expanded further still by the substitution of a 7/8 for the 5/8 bar in the third bar of the pattern.

The Indigenous Influence

Through working with indigenous material, a musical vocabulary has been accumulated which has influenced much of my music, even though the majority of my works do not incorporate direct quotations of Aboriginal material. General characteristics of this musical vocabulary include a predilection towards active, vibrant, fast tempo, dance-like sections emphasizing the physical and corporeal aspects of music; a respect for melody and a general willingness to incorporate lyrical elements into the texture of works; and a propensity to work from small cells which are woven into a larger tapestry of repetitive textures, which are subject to a variety of permutations.