RONALD STEVENSON'S PASSACAGLIA ON D S C H: UNDERSTANDING THE COMPOSER'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO LARGE-SCALED STRUCTURE, A LECTURE RECITAL, TOGETHER WITH THREE RECITALS OF SELECTED WORKS OF L. V. BEETHOVEN, J. BRAHMS, F. LISZT, F. MENDELSSOHN, B. BARTOK AND OTHERS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

By

Bradley J. Beckman, B.M., M.M.
Denton, Texas
August, 1994
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This paper investigates Ronald Stevenson’s unique treatment of large-scaled structure in his *Passacaglia on D S C H*. This piece’s unusual eighty-minute length, use of traditional forms and unusual piano techniques, musical references to other cultures and a massive triple-fugue over a ground bass will be examined as they relate to its overall form. The elements of rhythm, melody/mode, harmony, counterpoint, piano techniques, and tonality are also used as means of highlighting many unifying elements of the piece which contribute to its overall cohesiveness. Tributes to other composers, among them Dimitry Shostakovich to whom the piece is dedicated, are discussed in addition to many references to world cultures and events which support Stevenson’s views on what he terms *world music*.

Rarely is a piece written that encompasses such a wide range of musical elements that possess the ability to engage
an audience for an uninterrupted length of eighty-minutes. As of yet, an in-depth scholarly investigation of Stevenson’s treatment of formal unity in this landmark piano work has not been done. This analysis reveals Stevenson’s approach to composing in such a large form, as well as illustrating his mastery of variation, counterpoint and unending ingenuity for innovative piano techniques. The composer’s background and philosophies are discussed as well as the major impact made on his compositional style by both Percy Grainger and Ferruccio Busoni.
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Tape recordings of all performances submitted as dissertation requirements are on deposit in the University of North Texas Library.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Among the many people I would like to gratefully acknowledge are Mr. Joseph Banowetz, who first introduced me to Ronald Stevenson and his music. Also helpful was Mr. Chris Rice, President of Altarus Records, who provided taped lectures for me given by Mr. Stevenson. My sincere gratitude also goes to both Ronald and Marjorie Stevenson who invited me into their West Linton home and who graciously provided inspiration and information for this project. I would like to thank my grandparents, John and Dorothy Beckman for their interest and financial support as well as my parents, Brad and Joanne Beckman for their enthusiasm and confidence in my abilities and their willingness to support my academic and career choices.
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College of Music

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Graduate Recital

BRAD BECKMAN, piano

Monday, April 8, 1991  5:00 p.m.  Concert Hall

*Fantasie and Fugue in g minor for the Organ*  
Bach-Liszt

*Sonata in f minor, Op. 2*  
Allegro non troppo, ma energico  
Andante con espressione  
Scherzo - Trio  
Finale - Introduzione - Allegro non troppo e rubato

- Intermission -

*Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen --*  
*Prelude after J. S. Bach*  
F. Liszt

*Out of Doors*  
I. With Drums and Pipes  
II. Barcarolla  
III. Musettes  
IV. Musiques Nocturnes  
V. The Chase

B. Bartók

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A Graduate Recital

BRAD BECKMAN and OCTAVIA BRANDENBURG,
duo-pianists

Monday, November 25, 1991    8:15 p.m.    Concert Hall

En blanc et noir
    I. Avec emportement
    II. Lent. Sombre
    III. Scherzando

- pause -

Rapsodie Espagnole
    I. Prélude à la nuit
    II. Malagueña
    III. Habanera
    IV. Feria

- pause -

Fantaisie, Opus 5
    I. Barcarolle
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    III. Tears
    IV. Easter

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A Graduate Recital

BRAD BECKMAN, piano

Monday, March 22, 1993  8:15 p.m.  Concert Hall

Menuett in D Major, K. 355  
W. A. Mozart

Sonnata in c minor, Opus 111  
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- Intermission -

Variations sérieuses, Opus 54  
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Two Transcendental Etudes  
F. Liszt
  Harmonies du soir
  Eroica

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A Graduate Lecture Recital

BRAD BECKMAN, piano

Monday, April 25, 1994  5:00 pm  Concert Hall

LECTURE:

RONALD STEVENSON’S PASSACAGLIA ON D S C H:
UNDERSTANDING THE COMPOSER’S UNIQUE
APPROACH TO LARGE-SCALED STRUCTURE

Passacaglia on D S C H, Opus 70 ................. Ronald Stevenson
(b. 1928)
(Appropriate sections will be performed as they pertain to the lecture presentation)

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
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CHAPTER I

RONALD STEVENSON

Introduction

Ronald Stevenson's Passacaglia on D S C H, Op. 70 is one of the twentieth-century's landmark pieces of music for the piano repertoire. Its unusual eighty-minute length, use of traditional forms, unusual piano techniques, musical references from other cultures and a massive triple-fugue over a ground bass are among the more prominent features of this large work. This paper investigates Ronald Stevenson's methods for creating unity and cohesiveness in a piece of such challenging proportions for both listener and performer. Background of the composer, his philosophies and major influences will also be examined and discussed in relation to his Passacaglia on D S C H.

Background

Ronald Stevenson was born in 1928 in Blackburn, Lancashire and came from a working class background of Scottish and Welsh heritage. His father worked on the railway and his mother in the mill as a weaver. Stevenson claims that his love of beautiful melody originated from his father, who sang Scottish folk songs and was an amateur tenor when Stevenson was a boy. The music of his homeland
has inspired him ever since.¹ This boyhood memory is the earliest musical experience Stevenson can recall that eventually had a profound influence on his mature compositional style. Stevenson studied piano from age eight, and his first compositions date from his early teens. In 1945 he received a scholarship from the Royal Manchester College of Music where he studied piano and composition. In 1955 Stevenson was awarded an Italian Government Scholarship to do research on Busoni. While in Italy, he studied orchestration at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia, Rome with Guido Guerrini, who was then the director of the music school. The following year he lectured on contemporary music at Dartington College of Arts in England and two years later was invited to address the Congress of the First International Busoni Festival in Empoli. After lecturing on music at Edinburgh University in 1962, he became a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town in South Africa from 1963-1965. Since then, recent events have given Stevenson’s name further acclaim: an in-depth biography of Stevenson has been written entitled Ronald Stevenson: A Musical Biography, by Malcolm MacDonald (1989), published by the National Library of Scotland. Also, Stevenson’s Violin Concerto, commissioned by Yehudi Menuhin, was premiered in 1992 in Glasgow with the Scottish BBC Orchestra, with

¹Ronald Stevenson, Ronald Stevenson: Composer’s Anthology, Recorded Sound (1971), 747.
Menuhin conducting. An Altarus compact disc recording performed by Joseph Banowetz was issued in 1993 and features several premiere recordings including the Motus Perpetuus (?!) Temporibus Fatalibus commissioned by Banowetz in 1987 and premiered by him in performances in London’s Wigmore Hall and over the BBC the following year. An international Stevenson Society has recently been formed to promote the performance, publication, and recording of his music, with both Menuhin and Banowetz as patrons.

Stevenson’s activities can be divided into several areas: performing, recording, writing, broadcasting, and composition. As a pianist, Stevenson’s accomplishments have been formidable. He has maintained a distinguished performing career on five continents and has recorded many of his own works, including the 80-minute Passacaglia on D S C H (Altarus, 1988). Stevenson is drawn to the nineteenth-century repertoire, but also plays and records eighteenth-century works ranging from Bach to the post Sturm und Drang period. He has also shown enthusiasm for contemporary composers through his recordings and performances of Busoni, Szymanowski, Schoenberg, Havergal Brian and Sorabji. Stevenson’s playing suggests that of the nineteenth-century virtuosic style typical of Liszt and Rachmaninov.²

As a writer, Stevenson has researched a soon-to-be-published study on Busoni that has been at least twenty-five years in the making. In recognition for his work on this project, he received the Harriet Cohen International Music Award for Musicology in December of 1967, and ironically the massive volume has yet to be published. Also his History of Western Music, which was commissioned by the publishing house of Kahn and Averill, presents his views on what he terms, world music. Stevenson’s contributions to journals represent a wide perspective ranging in subject matter from Busoni and Grainger to Duke Ellington.

As a composer, Stevenson is regarded as a foremost figure in Scotland’s musical history. He has, more than any other composer, furthered the cause of fostering a Scottish musical identity, something which Stevenson thinks has not yet been fully established. Colin Scott-Sutherland makes this statement about Stevenson:

I would make the bold assertion that Stevenson, though Lancashire-born, is the most original figure working consciously within the confines of a Scottish tradition today—yet bringing the elements of the tradition into closer touch with the mainstream of European music to which Scotland has not as yet formed even a tributary.

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3Ibid., 27.

CHAPTER II

COMPOSER INFLUENCES

In addition to his parents, Stevenson claims influences from performers, composers and poets. Among the performers is soprano Kathleen Ferrier. Stevenson has written an Elegy for orchestra in her memory. Paderewski is also a strong influence, of whom Stevenson says: "He had an ability to make a melody speak: he had diction, he even had falsetto in his touch."¹ The main influence on Stevenson as performer and composer is Busoni. Stevenson discovered Busoni when he was 18 years old and since he had no formal teacher at the time, he claims Busoni as his master in absentia.² Stevenson copied by hand many pieces of Busoni manuscripts before photocopying was available, such as his Dr. Faustus, portions of Arlecchino, Turandot Suite, Klavierübung, and the Bach-Busoni Chorale Preludes. His close inspection of these works helped both to inspire the in-depth study of Busoni later in his life, and to serve as a master teaching tool for his own learning. Busoni is both a psychological and compositional influence on Stevenson. Psychologically, Busoni and Stevenson share an interest in

¹Stevenson, op. cit., 748.
²Orga, op. cit., 27.
Marxism. This was not so much as a participant, but more as an observer. Busoni experienced a self-imposed exile to Switzerland in light of his political views during World War I, and these moral ideals were also present in Stevenson when he served prison-time in Birmingham, England, for refusing similar military service during World War II. Philosophies such as social conscience and an ever-present awareness of his working-class background appear in several of Stevenson’s works, such as the first Cambriam Canto for harp, Op 92, no.1 (1965). This was composed in memory of his grandmother, who worked as a child truck-pusher in the South-Wales’ coalfields. Also, many passages in the Passacaglia on DSCH deal directly with the Nazi mistreatment of children and Jews, emergent Africa, and a rhythmic set of variations based on the speech intonation of the 1917 classical Bolshevik slogan: Peace, Bread and the Land.³

Busoni and Stevenson share a philosophy of creative musical eclecticism that draws on every musical and life experience.⁴ As a composer, Busoni’s influence may be seen in Stevenson’s profound interest in counterpoint. Like Busoni, Stevenson is also a gifted writer and an inspired orchestrator. They both reject originality per se,
believing that originality should be born out of human experience rather than a false attempt to be original. Stevenson’s experimentation in micro-tonal music stems from Busoni’s theories explained in his *New Aesthetic of Music* (1906), which explores many of the origins of micro-tonal usage from other cultures. Busoni’s dedication to transcribing has also made its way into Stevenson’s musical being. Both composers treat this practice artistically, not as an attempt to improve on another composer’s work. As a performer, Busoni can be said to have inspired in Stevenson both a sense of bravura and spiritual exploration that ultimately descended from Franz Liszt. Stevenson is interested in composers such as Sorabji, van Dieren and Percy Grainger, all of whom have ties to Busoni either as students or admirers. Stevenson’s own preoccupation with the music of Scotland may well stem from Busoni’s investigation of Italian folk traditions.

Stevenson’s Busoni studies led him to Percy Grainger, a student of Busoni who played a very prominent role in Stevenson’s development. With his unassuming character, his longing for an end to the dominance of middle-European musical tradition, and his experiments with electronic music, Grainger provided what Stevenson calls a “healthy

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antidote to the mystical world of Busoni. Grainger challenged Busoni's philosophy that music is primarily made up of architectonic structures. He believed more in a continuous unravelling of musical ideas. It would seem that Stevenson has synthesized these viewpoints and fashioned his own compositional style, in part based on the philosophies of these two musical giants who influenced him the most.

With the completion of the Passacaglia on D S C H in 1962 and a large part of the biographical study on Busoni finished, Stevenson left behind the dominant Busonian influence in favor of Scottish folk music, in which the traditions of his homeland play a more prominent role in his compositional output. Combining his interest in the music of his homeland with that of other cultures continues to be a major factor in his compositions such as the piano concerto named The Continents, which was premiered in 1972, as well as many pieces dedicated to Scottish poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid, Sorley Maclean, Sidney Goodsir Smith, and Francis George Scott. At this point in his development, Stevenson seemed to be looking for a way to express an all-encompassing world view of music, which also included Scotland.

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7Ibid., 27.
8Stevenson, op. cit., 750.
CHAPTER III

CONCEPT OF WORLD MUSIC

During the course of Stevenson's studies on Busoni and his newfound interest in Percy Grainger, Stevenson became increasingly interested in the music of different cultures, as well as in cultivating his own native music of Scotland. Through Busoni's research of Italian folk traditions and Percy Grainger's ideal of a new type of world music, Stevenson became interested in how the musical aspects of different cultures might complement one another to form an ideal musical expression drawn from the most musically influential cultures of the world. Percy Grainger imagined a kind of world music when he wrote the program notes for his *Scotch Strathspey and Reel* and said:

If a room-full of Scottish and Irish fiddlers and pipers and any nationality of English-speaking, shanty-singing deep-sea sailors could be spirited together and suddenly, miraculously endowed with the gift of polyphonic improvisation enjoyed, for instance, by South-Sea Island Polynesians, what a strange, merry, friendly Babel of tune, harmony and rhythm might result!

What relationship would emerge from the combination of African drumming superimposed over Indian-Raga playing

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'MacDonald, op. cit., 67.'
without the Indian drums? This was one of the questions that Stevenson proposed. The idea of finding coalescing points of different music of the world became a dominant thread in Stevenson’s compositional output. He maintained that there are three world regions that have contributed to the foundations of music:

- African music is primarily rhythmic and physical;
- Asian is primarily melodic and spiritual; and
- European music is primarily harmonic and polyphonic, emotional and intellectual. The sum of the physical, the spiritual, the emotional and intellectual, is the whole being of an individual’s life. So the sum of world music is the complete music of mankind.

Stevenson began to wonder if there was a Scottish contribution to this ideal of world music. He then realized that there was much to learn and appreciate from the ancient Scottish bagpipe music referred to as pibroch. It represents a unique contribution to world music in that it possesses the combined elements of many different cultures. Stevenson outlines many characteristics that support his claims about pibroch. Scottish pibroch uses a nine-note scale from g to a, which tunes its fourth and seventh scale degrees a quarter-tone sharp. This is the only example of micro-tonal music in the British Isles and stems from music

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2Ibid., 67.

3Ronald Stevenson, Western Music: An Introduction, (Kahn and Averill, 1971), 208.
of Asia and India. In addition, pibroch scales make use of a quartonic structure, which comes from ancient Scottish vocal music. Pentatonic modes are used, which originate from music of Africa, the American Negro, Asia, the Balkans, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Polynesia. Hexatonic modes, taken from Scottish folksong, and heptatonic modes, from ancient Greece and Rome are also found. Therefore, the scales often employed in Scottish pibroch uniquely combine elements of the world's harmony.⁴

Stevenson was very aware of these world music characteristics when he began writing his Passacaglia on D S C H, since the spirit of the entire work employs the commingling of musical idioms from many cultures, including his own in a Scottish pibroch section that was added to the Passacaglia on the day of its premiere. In addition, there are many references to many twentieth-century events that support Stevenson's statement that the Passacaglia on D S C H is not only an example of world music, but also an example of epic art. The composer writes:

The historic events of the twentieth-century are epic and only an epic art can reflect their reality. Epic art is allied to the notion of world music for music confined to the culture of one nation or one continent cannot be truly epic.⁵

⁴MacDonald, op. cit., 68.

⁵Adrian Corleonis, A Caledonian Orpheus? Discovering Ronald Stevenson, Fanfare (vol. 12, 1989), 524.
CHAPTER IV

PASSACAGLIA ON D S C H

Forms

Stevenson’s approach to overall form in this very large work is much like the continuous, unravelling approach that was described by Percy Grainger. However, more traditional structures are found within the overall framework. Stevenson has mentioned James Joyce as a particular inspiration for the Passacaglia on D S C H. Stevenson has said that "the method of composition shares a relationship with the linguistic feat of James Joyce in Finnegan’s Wake, specifically to the section Anna Livia Plurabelle, where Joyce’s technique of piling up hundreds of rivers’s names gives rise to a torrential collage of words, poetry, sound and imagery."¹ The Passacaglia on D S C H shares a formal and inspirational connection to Busoni’s Fantasia Contrappuntistica and Sorabji’s Opus Clavicembalisticum. Just as influential are the Twenty-Four Preludes and Fugues of Shostakovich, Bach’s Goldberg Variations and Art of Fugue, and perhaps closest of all in spirit, the Diabelli Variations of Beethoven, with its canonic variations, and

¹Orga, op. cit., 29.
enormous fugue.\textsuperscript{2} The Russian composer Mordechai Seter states, "World music could be encouraged by composers writing in forms common to Eastern and Western music such as variation and passacaglia."\textsuperscript{3} This seems to reflect Stevenson's choice of form for his \textit{Passacaglia}, which is a series of hundreds of variations held together by a ground bass pattern. The word \textit{passacaglia} has Spanish origins from the word \textit{passacalle}, and has two roots: \textit{passo}, which means to step and \textit{calle}, which means street. Literally then, passacaglia means to walk the street.\textsuperscript{4} The essence of the traditional passacaglia as well as Stevenson's \textit{Passacaglia} is its ground bass pattern. Variation technique also seems to be an inherent part of a passacaglia, especially one of this length. As a musical form, variations have Spanish, English, Asian, and African origins. In his \textit{Passacaglia}, Stevenson combines the passacaglia form with variation forms and techniques. He was drawn to these forms because of their strong cross-cultural appeal, which makes their symbolic coupling even more significant for Stevenson, given his desire for a world view of musical composition. In addition, he uses a number of other traditional forms and

\textsuperscript{2}MacDonald, \textit{op. cit.}, 54.

\textsuperscript{3}Bat Kol, \textit{(Israeli Music Magazine)}, 1960. Title of article and page number unknown.

\textsuperscript{4}Ronald Stevenson, Lecture given on April 19, 1989 at the Chatham Music School, Manchester, England.
musical idioms to represent other world cultures. The result is a kind of musical fresco that unfolds over the course of eighty minutes.\footnote{Ates Orga, From unpublished notes for a soon to be published book about Ronald Stevenson and his music.}

The Passacaglia on $D\, S\, C\, H$ is dedicated to the composer Dimitry Shostakovich. The letters $D, S, C, H$ correspond to the initials of the composer’s name and are musically translated as $D, E$-flat, $C$ and $B$-natural to form the notes of the ground bass pattern. This is a four-note motive that Shostakovich himself used in his Eighth String Quartet, Tenth Symphony and First Violin Concerto.

Stevenson also can recall as a boy of fourteen playing the Chants du voyageur, Op. 8 of Paderewski, which opens with the $D, E$-flat, $C, B$-natural motive embedded within the texture (See example 1).

Stevenson's ground bass pattern uses these four notes stated over seven measures. The intervals of a minor second and a minor third are stated in the opening three measures and form the four-note D S C H ground pattern. Following this is an inverted treatment of the minor second interval that results in a minor seventh, minor third, minor seventh pattern. The tail of the ground consists of a retrograde of the first four notes, which becomes B-natural, C, E-flat, D. The complete ground is illustrated here:

Example 2. Opening measures of the Passacaglia illustrating the seven-measure ground bass pattern.

The ground bass is present throughout the entire Passacaglia and is therefore the most consistent unifying element in the piece. However, the ground is not only used as a bass line. Stevenson frequently moves the ground to all registers of the piano. Despite being ever present, the ground is not always the most prominent element of the musical texture.

*All references to the score of the Passacaglia on D S C H will be taken from the Oxford University Press edition, published in 1967.*
It ranges from being barely perceptible to being triumphantly stated in octaves encompassing the entire range of the keyboard.

Many traditional forms coexist within the passacaglia form in this piece, the first of which is the Sonata allegro form that opens the Passacaglia. Stevenson's treatment of this Sonata allegro is not traditional in the classical sense. When considering Stevenson's non-traditional treatment of sonata form, it would be helpful to recall what Charles Rosen says about sonata form: "...the sonata is not a definite form like a minuet, a da capo aria, or a French overture: it is, like the fugue, a way of writing, a feeling for proportion, direction, and texture rather than a pattern." Stevenson's sonata is, in part, guided by the D S C H ground pattern, and therefore is not suited to the traditional presentation of a first and second theme which employs movement from the tonic to the dominant or mediant. Each section of this sonata form consists of a telescoping of ideas into subject groups, which was a favorite practice of Busoni. Each subject is contrasting in either character, tempo or melodic content. The presence of an exposition or what could be called a first subject group, is found

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in measures 1-84 with several contrasting motives presented over the ground bass. This is followed by a development, or second subject group, beginning in measure 85 and ending in measure 147. The development is slower and more melodic in character and uses rolled chords built with three of the notes found in the ground (D, C, and E-flat). This rolled style of chord playing is a direct influence of the playing of Paderewski, who often rolled chords in his performance to give his playing a certain freedom and individualistic style. The recapitulation is somewhat open-ended since, after a short restatement of the opening ground recast with octaves and harmonic minor seconds, a second development section begins in measure 155. This section draws its material from the four-note tailpiece of the ground pattern. This is followed by development of the melodic theme introduced in the first development section of measure 162. Further treatment of the ground through use of different textural devices such as repeated notes, fourths, fifths and full chords extends the second development section to its close in measure 237, where the waltz in rondo form appears. This open-ended construction of the recapitulation helps the sonata to achieve a more meaningful integration with the remainder of the Passacaglia, as will be seen later. Though Stevenson’s treatment of the sonata is not conventional, the spirit of proportion, direction, and texture that Rosen speaks of is definitely present.
The waltz begins in measure 238 and uses a traditional ABACA rondo form. Stevenson, however, uses this opportunity to use modal keys. The A section, beginning in A-flat lydian, moves to B-flat major in the B section in measure 252. A-flat lydian returns with the A section in measure 265 and a combination of G phrygian/minor is presented as the C section. The final return of the A section in measure 287 reflects a key movement up by one half-step to A minor, which then slips back down to A-flat lydian in measure 294, where the waltz ends. Since the episodes of this rondo are always subject to the harmony of the ground bass pattern, it could be argued that they are not true episodes. However, their function in the form suggests that of episodes placed between the main A sections. After a long fermata in measure 301, a dreamlike episode not related to the previous rondo section leads to the prelude of the next section which Stevenson labels Suite.

The Baroque suite with its diverse origins is Stevenson's model for the next section of the Passacaglia. The Suite begins in measure 322 with an extensive prelude that uses a traditional keyboard style of passage work. Scales, chromatic seconds, thirds and sixths, repeated notes, a left-hand solo section followed by a similar section for the right-hand and trills are all used over almost the entire range of the keyboard. The sarabande, which has Mexican and Spanish origins, follows the prelude
in measure 448 and is cast in the traditional slow triple meter with an emphasis on the second beat. Its character is slow and dignified, but is then interrupted by an Irish gigue that begins in measure 476 with a single-lined texture in triplets above the ever present ground bass. The gigue is also interrupted by the return of the sarabande in measure 460 over one final statement of the ground before moving to the minuet in measure 467. The minuet, representing the French culture, continues in triple meter. The texture is lighter and more delicate in character and the use of rolled chords on almost every quarter-note beat is yet another example of the Paderewski style of playing that has so influenced Stevenson. Stevenson also modeled the style of this minuet after the Prelude No. 5, Op. 87 in D minor of Dimitry Shostakovich (See examples 3a and 3b).

Example 3a. Opening measures of Prelude No. 5, Op. 87 by Dimitry Shostakovich.
Example 3b. Minuet from Passacaglia, measures 497-503.

The minuet traditionally has one trio section. In this case, Stevenson has written two trios. The first trio begins in measure 519 and has a legato right-hand melody and no rolled chords. Later in measure 539, the legato melody moves to the left-hand and is combined with the rolled chords in the right-hand. The second trio begins in measure 560 and also uses a legato theme. However, this trio uses D-flat major against the ground bass pattern. Following the second trio in measure 574, is an unusual simultaneous combination of the two trio sections and the minuet, resulting in both polytexture and polytonality through the use of D-flat major and D phrygian that will be seen in a later example. The minuet makes a final appearance on its own in measure 588 and is again interrupted by the gigue in
measure 595. After a long fermata that breaks off the gigue rhythm, a polyrhythmic gavotte appears in measure 608, which uses a 2/2 time signature in the upper part against a 3/4 time signature in the lower part. This results in a misalignment of bar-lines and an off-balanced rhythmic feeling. The traditional gavotte is of French origin and is usually found with two upbeats given at the beginning. Stevenson uses the traditional upbeat pattern, but slows the tempo with each appearance by marking either pochetto ritardando or poco ritardando. These upbeats are played against the four-note tail section of the ground bass pattern (See example 4).

Example 4. Measure 608 of the gavotte.

![Example 4](image)

The gavotte also introduces a trio section in measure 626 with a three-voiced texture that, in contrast to the gavotte, is more legato. The gavotte returns in measure 636 and is rhythmically enhanced by the use of the Scotch Snap rhythm in measures 643-667, which is a characteristic short-
long rhythm based on Scottish speech patterns
(See example 5).

Example 5. Measures 643-649 of the gavotte illustrating the Scotch Snap rhythm.

This section ends softly and leads to the final section of the Suite, which is a Lisztian polonaise in measure 676. The polonaise uses the ground pattern in the upper voice in octaves while a rumbling accompaniment figure occurs between notes of the ground that states the traditional polonaise rhythm in triple meter (See example 6).

The element of variation is an inherent part of Stevenson's Passacaglia; however, there are four instances where Stevenson specifically labels a section as a variation in the formal sense. The first of these variations is found on pages forty and forty-one, measures 753-773. Stevenson has labeled this section as Episode: arabesque variations. It is a very short section that connects the Scottish pibroch to the approaching nocturne on page forty-one, measure 774. The variations are primarily achieved by the use of a smaller rhythmic unit in each variation. First, the ground pattern is stated in chords, which is followed by a quasi flauto section written with eighth-notes and triplets. This is followed by scale patterns in sixteenths grouped in quintuplets. Each variation conforms to the seven-measure length of the ground pattern that is always present. The next set of variations is found on pages
fifty-two through fifty-seven. This set of variations is
based on the speech rhythm of the Russian political slogan
of Peace, Bread and the Land (See example 7).

Example 7. Thematic motive for Peace, Bread and the Land,
measures 970-972.

There are seven variations, each of which contains the five-
ote rhythm pattern found in the theme in measures 970-
972. Each variation subjects the rhythmic pattern to either
augmentation or diminution, while always being stated
against the ground bass pattern. The last two variations
are primarily based on the seven-measure ground pattern in
combination with biting two-note figures and fortissimo
octaves that represents one of the most bravura sections of
the entire Passacaglia (See examples 8 and 8a).
Example 8. (Continued)

Example 8a. Variation seven, measures 1033-1039 of Peace, Bread and the Land.
A set of C-minor variations is found on pages eighty-two through page eighty-six. Stevenson uses a C pedal to unify this set of seven variations. Different pianistic and rhythmic techniques are used for each of the seven variations in this section. Octaves, quintuplets, arpeggios, triplets, Scotch Snap, and cluster chords are included. The final set of variations is found on page 128, measure 2174 to page 140, measure 2222. The section is labeled Adagissimo barocco and contains seven variations leading to a final coda that concludes the piece. The set begins with very slow-moving double-dotted rhythms based on the ground bass pattern. As the variations progress, the
rhythm becomes more active, moving from the double-dotted figure through triplets and thirty-second notes. The first variation begins in the lower register of the piano and as the variations progress, the range is expanded to include the outer ranges of the keyboard.

Stevenson’s love of counterpoint is evident in the penultimate section of the *Passacaglia*, measures 1510-2173. The triple-fugue over a ground bass in this section can compare in stature to Beethoven’s late period fugues such as the *Grosse Fuge*, C-sharp minor Quartet/first movement or the finales of Opp. 106 and 110. A triple-fugue over a ground bass is an unusual, if not unprecedented example of contrapuntal skill. Fugal writing is normally considered to be a compositional technique rather than a musical form. However, the use of three subjects over a ground bass clearly defines structural points within this large section of the *Passacaglia*. Therefore, compositional aspects as well as formal aspects of Stevenson’s treatment of the fugue can be recognized. The three fugal subjects have significance apart from their compositional and formal qualities. The first is labeled *andamento*, and is a lively, Schoenberg-like subject beginning in measure 1510. It contains angular jumps and seemingly non-tonal harmonies, much like those of a twelve-tone row. However, Stevenson’s *andamento* is not academically strict dodecaphony, but attempts to capture the artistic essence and freedom of that
technique. The subject begins with five notes which were first heard in the strumming figure on page twenty in the left-hand improvisatory section found in measure 371 (See example 9).

Example 9. Measure 371, which shows the five-note strumming figure.

Present in the left-hand in measure 1510, is the D S C H ground bass pattern, which is seven measures long.

Stevenson's andamento subject also conforms to the ground bass pattern's seven-measure length and is illustrated in example 10.

Example 10. Andamento fugue subject, measures 1480-1486.
Example 10. (Continued)

The second subject found in measure 1712, in contrast to the lively andamento, consists of the B A C H motive. This motive musically translates to the note B-flat, A, C, B natural. This subject is obviously much shorter than the seven-measure andamento and is much simpler in its four-note construction. Again, the D S C H ground bass pattern is presented in combination with the B A C H fugal subject (See example 11).


It is not until the Allegro moderato of page one-hundred three, measure 1796, that the andamento is combined with B A C H and D S C H in octaves. (See example 12)
Example 12. Combination of andamento, B A C H and D S C H fugal subjects, measures 1796-1802.

Stevenson's third subject is the Dies irae, which is presented on page one-hundred thirteen, measure 1922. The subject is stated in single notes in a very low register of the keyboard. The ground pattern is present in the upper voice reharmonized with fourths and fifths (See example 13).
Example 13. *Dies irae* as a fugal subject, measures 1922-1928.

Stevenson attaches great significance to the *Dies irae* in this section. This section is labeled: *In memoriam the six million*, which refers to the six million Jews who were massacred during World War II. Although the presence of the *Dies irae* has a powerful emotional effect, it is also structurally significant. The *Dies irae* subject is seven measures in length, which corresponds, in length, to the *andamento* subject and *D S C H* ground bass pattern. This provides contrast and a symmetrical balance to the shorter *B A C H* subject. Also, the *B A C H* motive is found within the *Dies irae* through the presence of two semi-tones and a minor third (See table 1).
Table 1. Intervallic comparison of *B A C H* and *Dies irae* fugal subjects to the *D S C H* ground pattern.

*B A C H*---*Dies irae*---*D S C H*

The point at which the *andamento*, *B A C H*, *Dies irae*, and the *D S C H* motives occur together is marked *con molto importanza* (with great importance), measures 2020-2026. Many combinations of these three fugal subjects along with the *D S C H* pattern appear following this initial combined statement (See example 14).

Compositional Techniques

Ronald Stevenson’s uses of compositional techniques can be seen by examining the elements of rhythm, melody/mode, harmony, counterpoint, piano techniques and tonality. A yet to be published book about Ronald Stevenson and his music by Ates Orga investigates these elements as a means of understanding many of the musical aspects of the *Passacaglia on D S C H*. The first element Orga discusses is Stevenson’s use of rhythm. Rhythm is one of the most prominent musical elements that can be used to illustrate the influence of other cultures. In Stevenson’s *Passacaglia*, African, African-American, and Scottish cultures are represented by an evocation of their idiomatic rhythms. A section beginning on page sixty-seven, measure 1196, represents emergent Africa. The ground bass pattern is stated in the right-hand on the keys, while the left-hand strikes the strings of the piano. The left-hand begins softly using the fingertips and builds in intensity by using the palm followed by the fist on the strings. This was inspired by the sound of African Bantu drumming that Stevenson heard while he was living in Cape Town, Africa. He sought to capture the essence of this drumming sound at the piano. On pages 107 and 108, measures 1852-1858, begins a section of persistent syncopated rhythms that are taken from African-American jazz music (See example 15).

One of the most interesting and personal sections of this piece is the Scottish pibroch section on pages thirty-nine and forty, measures 718-752. Stevenson has done extensive research into this traditional bagpipe music of Scotland and claims that it is in many ways Scotland's strongest contribution to music. The rhythm of this pibroch has the characteristic Scotch snap, which was illustrated earlier in the gavotte (See example 4). The pibroch uses many quick ornaments that are to be played on the beat. The tempo of this section is slow, but very free. The performer may go so far as to disregard the bar lines to give the pibroch an improvisatory quality (See example 16).
Stevenson uses meter in two examples to add rhythmic interest and vitality to the music. The gavotte found on pages thirty-one to thirty-five, measures 608-675, uses a polymeter of 2/2 against 3/4. This results in a misalignment of the bar-lines between the right and left hands (See example 4). Stevenson describes this gavotte as being very happy and joking and the juxtaposition of two different meters helps achieve this. The other example is found on pages fifty and fifty-one, measures 914-948 (See example 17). In this example Stevenson uses 3/4 against 4/4 to create a sense of tension and conflict in this section entitled Glimpse of a War-Vision. Stevenson remarks about this section:
It was inspired by the idea of the Soviet hammer beating the Nazi swastika into a sickle. The idea of the hammer is, of course, inherent in the mechanism of the piano; and though music is (mercifully) powerless to paint a swastika, it can certainly suggest the mechanistic devilry and brutality of which the crooked cross is but the symbol.9

Stevenson was concerned that this brutal section of the piece was not ugly enough to represent the brutality associated with the Nazi swastika.10

Example 17. Glimpse of a War-Vision, measures 914-920.

Stevenson's use of melody/mode is the second area to be examined. The D, E-flat, C, B-natural motive can only fit diatonically in C minor. However, Stevenson chooses to center his Passacaglia on D with a prominent use of E-flat, the flatted second that would indicate the phrygian mode. This mode will be present throughout the piece in the ground bass pattern. As mentioned earlier, the intervallic make-up

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9Ronald Stevenson, Record jacket notes from Passacaglia on D S C H, (Altarus, 1988).

10Orga, unpublished notes.
of the D S C H motive contains a semitone, minor third, and semitone. Stevenson has a preference for these intervals as well as the tritone interval, which will prove to be significant when tonality is examined later. In measures 8-21, a combination of D-major and D-minor is used in the upper voice, illustrating Stevenson’s fondness of modal mixture, which will be a recurrent aspect throughout the Passacaglia (See example 18).

Example 18. Use of modal mixture of D major and D minor, measures 8-21.

![Example 18: Use of modal mixture of D major and D minor, measures 8-21.]

An interesting and innovative use of different scale patterns can be found on pages sixteen and seventeen, measures 322-335. The section marked Presto scorrevolmente, (fast and gliding) is a combination of an Indian-Raga, whole-tone, and chromatic scales. This combination of scale patterns is referred to by Stevenson as a polyglot scale that is borrowed from the Arab scale technique of maqam
(See example 19). The maqam scale technique uses different inflections of the notes by using micro-tones that results in a series of continuous variation. Busoni outlines many scale combinations in his New Aesthetic. He claims there are at least 113 possible scales that can be devised through the use of various micro-tonal combinations.  

Example 19. Polyglot scale, measure 322.

Stevenson’s use of harmony ranges from chords of seconds, thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths, sevenths, and the eventual combination of all the above. In addition he uses

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Footnotes:

11 Stevenson, Western Music, 205.


13 Stevenson, Western Music, 200.
bitonality and polytonality. The following table will list the uses of the different types of chords and their ultimate combination (See Table 2). These isolated examples are combined into a twelve-note cluster chord on page seventy-seven, measures 1335-1341. This is a very explosive climax of this section of the Passacaglia and is played fff with the palms on the keys. (See example 20)

Table 2. Appearances of various interval-based chords.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chords of seconds</th>
<th>page 24</th>
<th>measures 427-433</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chords of thirds</td>
<td>page 22</td>
<td>measures 406-419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chords of fourths</td>
<td>page 124</td>
<td>measures 2104-2110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chords of fifths</td>
<td>page 126</td>
<td>measures 2139-2144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chords of sixths</td>
<td>page 23</td>
<td>measures 420-426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chords of sevenths</td>
<td>page 7</td>
<td>measures 138-147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twelve-tone cluster</td>
<td>page 77</td>
<td>measures 1335-1341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 20. Palms on keys for the twelve-note cluster chord, measures 1335-1341.
Example 20. (Continued)

Bitonality is first used on page five, measures 114-127 (See example 21).

In each measure of this example a blocked chord is played with the right-hand while below it is an accompanying figure made up of broken thirds that are written one half-step below the blocked chord. Bitonality is also found on page twenty-nine, measures 560-573 (See example 22).


This is the second trio section of the minuet. The material of the trio is loosely set in D-flat major and is passed back and forth from the right-hand to left-hand. This occurs over the ever present ground bass pattern, which is
in D-phrygian. On page thirty, the polytonal combination of the minuet theme in D major/minor, the Trio I theme in G-phrygian and the Trio II theme in D-flat major occurs in a four-part texture with the D S C H pattern (See example 23).

Example 23. Polytonality, measures 574-580.

Counterpoint is one of Ronald Stevenson's great loves, and that could not be more evident than in his contrapuntal setting of the triple-fugue over a ground bass beginning on page eighty-eight, measure 1510 and extending to page 128, measure 2173. Stevenson has speculated as to the possibility of this being an innovative contrapuntal technique. Regardless, this is surely one of the greatest examples of large-scale fugal writing of the twentieth-century. Stevenson employs many traditional techniques of fugal writing while also maintaining the complexity of the
triple fugue over a ground bass. After the andamento subject is stated in its entirety on page eighty-eight, measures 1510-1516, the first five notes are stated in augmentation on page ninety, measures 1559-1563 (See example 24).


Transpositions of fugal subjects by various intervals including the tritone are frequently found as well as altered subject fragments both alone and in combination with each other. Inverted subjects are found both at original pitch and transposed (See examples 25 and 26).
Example 25. Inverted andamento fugue subject, measures 1649-1655.

Example 26. Inverted and transposed andamento fugue subject, measures 1663-1669.
Canonic treatment is found using the *andamento* subject on page ninety-seven, measure 1677-1683. Here the subject is harmonized in thirds and fourths (See example 27). An interesting rhythmic combination of the $D S C H$ pattern is found on page ninety-eight, measures 1691-1697. Stevenson has simultaneously combined half-notes, eighth-notes and sixteenth-notes as applied to the $D S C H$ pattern. A multi-leveled rhythmic texture is the result (See example 28).

Example 27. Canonic treatment of *andamento* fugue subject, measures 1677-1683.

These are only a few examples of the many traditional and more innovative fugal techniques Stevenson uses in this complex section of the Passacaglia. In addition, he incorporates many elements of the earlier parts of the Passacaglia. As will be seen later, this also serves to unify the piece.

One of the more unique elements of the Passacaglia is Stevenson's use of a variety of piano techniques, both traditional and non-traditional. Stevenson has said that "he has put into the Passacaglia everything he knows about the piano." This seems to be true, for traditional piano textures and techniques resembling those of Bach, Chopin, Liszt and Schoenberg have been used, as well as non-traditional and innovative piano techniques that are used

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14Orga, unpublished notes.
specifically for achieving a particular sound quality. Most basic to piano technique is the use of the fingers on the keys. However, Stevenson goes further to use the fingernails on the keys for both single and double-note glissandi. The single-note glissando is found on page forty-four, measures 823-829 and is labeled Réverie-Fantasy (See example 29).

Example 29. (Continued)

Stevenson achieves a harp-like quality by the use of this unusual type of glissando played on the keys in between a series of blocked chords. Double-note glissandi are effectively used on page seventy-eight, measures 1342-1360 (See example 30).

Example 30. (Continued)

These glissandi are to be played simultaneously on the white and black keys with one hand. They appear in various ranges over the entire keyboard. Stevenson introduces an innovative technique which he calls a glissando arpeggio on page forty-six, measures 844-850. This is achieved by silently depressing the notes of a blocked chord while strumming the keys that fall in between the chord-tones with the fingernail on the keys (See example 31).

Another technique within this same example is impossible to obtain without electronic amplification equipment. In measures 844-847 and 850, Stevenson calls for a crescendo/diminuendo from a chord silently depressed before the glissando arpeggio. This results in the production of harmonics resulting from the silently depressed chord. The composer notes at the bottom of the page (N.B.) that in radio performance the desired amplification of these harmonics may be obtained by an electronic volume control (See example 31). In order to obtain the necessary arrangement of the left-hand over the right in measures
849-850, Stevenson has indicated that the knuckles of the left-hand must be pressed against the piano lid to allow the right-hand to roll the chords (See example 31). Stevenson also calls for using the fingernails on the strings earlier in this section on page forty-five, measures 830-840 (See example 32). When strumming the strings inside the piano, Stevenson indicates what register to be used by writing, *glissando sulle corde altissime*, which indicates the highest register of the piano strings and *glissando sulle corde del registro di mezzo*, which indicates the middle register.

Example 32. Fingernail glissandi on the strings, measures 830-840.
Example 32. (Continued)

The palms and fists are used as unique piano techniques as well. Page seventy-seven, measures 1328-1334, includes an indication to use the fists on the keys in a right-hand over left-hand motion. Measures 1335-1341 include twelve-note clusters played on the keys with the palm of the right and left hands (See examples 33 and 34). An impressive section of the Passacaglia entitled to emergent Africa is found on pages sixty-seven, measures 1196-1272 (See example 35). This section requires the use of the left palm, fingertips and the heel of the palm used directly on the piano strings. The fingertips of the left-hand lightly tap the strings in the lowest register of the piano, while the right-hand plays
the D S C H ground bass pattern. Drum rhythms are played deep in the bass register and gradually rise to the treble. As the section grows in intensity, the fingertips are replaced by the palm and eventually the heel of the palm, which results in creating different sonorities. Stevenson says that these unusual piano techniques are not used as "special effects" for their shock value, but are conversely used to create a particular sound quality. In the African section, Stevenson sought to recreate the sound of Bantu drumming that he heard from what he calls a "tribal virtuoso" while teaching in Cape Town, Africa. Stevenson describes how his own experience inspired the writing of this section of his Passacaglia:

This was not a gimmick that began as a kind of Cageian direct-contact tactic on the strings. It began from an aural experience of hearing the African drummer and then asking, how can I do that? How can I evoke those sounds? . . . I subsequently discovered that if one began by touching the strings--just tapping with the fingertips--later on using the palm of the hand and finally at the height of the crescendo the heel of the hand, quite different sonorities could be obtained.  

The effect of these varied piano techniques makes a definite impact on the listener both aurally and visually. The composer remarks about the so-called extra-musical elements

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16 MacDonald, op. cit., 59.

17 Ibid.
of his Passacaglia:

For me nothing is extra-musical so long as it is not alien to human emotion. Music seems to be able to absorb something of whatever makes us human beings. Therefore the music I make is influenced not only by other composers but by performers, and by the experiencing of life.\textsuperscript{8}

Example 33. Fists on keys, measures 1328-1334.

\textsuperscript{8}Stevenson, Composer's Anthology, 747.
Example 34. Palms on keys, measures 1335-1341.

Example 35. Opening measures of To emergent Africa, measures 1196-1202.

Stevenson's treatment of tonality in his Passacaglia makes use of tonal centers that are not confined to that of major or minor modes. Tonalities change frequently and a confirmation of mode is often difficult, if not impossible to determine. Though movement through various key areas is
frequent, Stevenson uses key signatures in specific areas, which lends clues to the general outline of the tonal plan. The first and most important of these key areas is introduced in the ground bass pattern of D S C H, which suggests D-phrygian, with D being the tonal center of the piece as a whole. Stevenson often uses tonal centers that reflect a free modal mixture. One could say that D-phrygian is always present within the piece from the ground bass, while it also appears in combination with other key areas and modes throughout the piece. On page eleven, measure 217, the piece shifts to G, followed by the waltz on page twelve, measure 238, which introduces a move to A-flat lydian. The different sections of this rondo each involve a different key. Measure 252 moves to B-flat and measure 266 moves back to A-flat lydian. G minor begins in measure 273 and is followed by A minor in measure 287. On page forty-one, measure 774, F-sharp is introduced as a tonal center with a clear tendency towards the minor mode. The next major key area arrives with the C minor variations that begin on page eighty-two, measure 1412. The C pedal is a clear indication of the key center, while the music itself only provides an occasional E-flat to support the C minor mode. This section extends to page eighty-six, measure 1474. Page 108, measure 1859, introduces a short, but ultimately significant key center of G-sharp that ends in measure 1864. The remainder of the piece is centered around
D with a variety of modal treatments. Table 3 shows the progression of key centers throughout the piece. Orga points out the significance of a definite tendency toward flat keys as well as an overall movement by tritone both down to A-flat and up to G-sharp at either end of the structure. Stevenson's philosophy of modal mixture is best expressed in the final measures of the piece, where he writes a cadential formula of D major, D minor and finally D unison.

Table 3. Key scheme of the Passacaglia based on notated key signatures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keys Centers</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>Ab</th>
<th>Bb</th>
<th>Ab</th>
<th>Gm</th>
<th>Am</th>
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World Events

One of the most important and readily apparent aspects of Stevenson's Passacaglia is its references to world events and nationalities. Many have been mentioned, but some of the more prominent examples include references to Germany,
Russia, Spain, Africa and Scotland. The first of these prominent references is found in the previously mentioned Scottish pibroch section of page thirty-nine, measures 718-752 (See example 16). This section is basically a transcription of the urlar of the seventeenth-century pibroch lament. Cumha na Cloinne, which means lament for the children, was composed by Patrick Mor MacCrimmon after the death of his own sons. In addition, it is dedicated by Stevenson to the child victims of the Nazi holocaust. Stevenson describes his philosophy about his setting of this emotional event:

How can music without the aid of words refer specifically to such a subject as the child victims of Nazism? My answer would be that since the original lament has a naivete about it that it somehow evokes the world of children, and as we in our time have lived through the experience of children under Nazi rule, the music might well appeal to present-day sensibilities in this way. I have no wish to restrict my work by hedging it about with programmatic ideas, but I think that anyone who is open to musical speech would hear something of what I want to convey—even if he did not understand it, so to speak, in the same words.¹⁹

The clashing presence of major and minor thirds in this section suggest the micro-tonal inflections of the bagpipe scale.²⁰

The next section is associated with World War II. This

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰MacDonald, op. cit., 55.
powerful three-part section entitled Fanfare--Forebodings: Alarm--Glimpse of a War-Vision, is found on pages forty-nine through fifty-two. The section begins with a startling fanfare in quick sixteenth-note rhythms. As it progresses to the lower register of the piano, the fanfare is transformed into a rumbling tremolo in the left-hand. Above this are short sixteenth-note chords and broken sevenths and semitones. Virtually the entire keyboard is explored in this short section leading to a brutal and rhythmic section entitled Glimpse of a War-Vision. A polymetric use of 3/4 over 4/4 as well as a strong fortissimo dynamic level help to make this a mechanical and disturbing evocation of what Stevenson describes as the "cutting edge of the Nazi swastika." The section that follows is Russian in its labeling by Stevenson. In measure 956, page fifty-two, Stevenson writes in Russian, Peace. This describes the demeanor of the section, which is more calm and serene, with rhythmic motion reduced to slow-moving quarter-notes and dotted half-notes. Stevenson is setting the scene for the next section of the piece that is rhythmically based on the speech intonation of the Russian political slogan, Peace, Bread and the Land [1917] (See example 7). This begins in measure 970 and continues through several variations including motivic development in different registers as well.

21 Stevenson, Lecture at the Chatham Music School, April 18, 1989.
as large crescendos and bravura octaves. It is interrupted by a Russian symphonic march that is introduced in measure 1040 on page fifty-seven. Stevenson actually orchestrates this section by assigning quasi-instrumentations to various parts of the piano texture. Such examples include bass drums, horns, trumpets and string-like pizzicato. This kind of symphonic march is very much reminiscent of Shostakovich and is yet another stylistic reference to the composer in addition to the D S C H ground bass motive (See example 36).

Example 36. March in the style of Shostakovich. Measures 1040-1046.

Another nationalistic section, though short in comparison to many of the Russian sections, belongs to Spain. It forms a connection both formally as well as geographically to the remaining African section that
follows. The Spanish fandango is found on pages sixty-four through sixty-seven, measures 1159-1195. This section is played with much rubato and expressive freedom. The flourishing arpeggios create an image of the swirling garment of a Spanish flamenco dancer. Stevenson usually ends a phrase with an upward arpeggio, thus imparting a somewhat flirtatious character to the music. On page sixty-six, measures 1180-1186, Stevenson on occasion demands that a piece of light cardboard be placed on top of the strings while playing repeated notes on the piano keys. This produces a strummed-guitar sound characteristic of Spanish music. The arpeggios grow ever-louder and encompass a wider range of the piano until they rest in the lowest register of the piano. This leads to the African section entitled to emergent Africa, which has been mentioned earlier.

Other nationalistic references are found in the massive triple fugue. For Stevenson, a combination of cryptogram motives has much nationalistic significance. The combination of the German B A C H motive with that of the Russian D S C H is what Stevenson calls "a symbol that Russian and German and the whole of mankind can and will live as brothers in harmony and peace." The presence of the Dies irae is a tribute to the memory of the six million Jews who perished at the hands of the Nazi regime.

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MacDonald, op cit., 49.
Following the triple fugue on page 128, measure 2174, is a section marked Adagissimo barocco. Barocco refers to the over-dotted, French overture style of rhythm used here. A set of six variations begins here based on the ground bass theme. Both a double-dotted rhythm and a much slower tempo are used. During this section the outer extremes of the keyboard are used which helps to achieve the effect of a widening or expansion of space. Stevenson indicates in the music con un senso di spazio quasi gagarinesco in measure 2192, which means "as though with Gagarin's perception of space."²³ Yuri Gargarin was the Russian cosmonaut who first orbited the Earth in 1961.

²³Ibid., 51.
CHAPTER VI

STEVENSON’S CONTROL OF OVERALL FORMAL UNITY IN THE PASSACAGLIA THROUGH THE USE OF MUSICAL AND EXTRA-MUSICAL TECHNIQUES

In a piece of such enormous length and complexity, the question arises as to how an audience will perceive the piece as a whole. The eighty-minute length is a challenge for both the performer and listener. However, Stevenson is a master at holding the listener’s interest by using a variety of methods. The overall form of the Passacaglia has already been determined to be that of a loose passacaglia, from which a super-structure of various traditional forms continuously evolves. Notwithstanding the passacaglia, most of the forms seem to stand alone or are examples of world music rather than being part of an overall formal design. A three-part division of the piece is given by the composer that provides a general grouping of sections. This grouping suggests a possible modeling after Sorabji’s Opus Clavicembalisticum, which was itself modeled after Busoni’s Fantasia Contrappuntistica. While Stevenson does not necessarily recommend a different order of sections for performance, he remarks that he did not compose the piece in its final order and does not assume that the order presented
is the only one possible. Despite the Passacaglia’s seemingly independent sections, there are formal divisions of the piece that have structural significance, as well as many musical elements that help to unify the piece.

In the Oxford University Press Edition of the Passacaglia on D S C H, Stevenson lists a three-part plan of the work: Pars Prima, Pars Altera, and Pars Tertia. The significance of each section takes many forms. Stevenson relates this tripartite division to human physiological elements. For example, the human body has three main divisions: the head, the torso and the legs. Another parallel can be observed by looking at the shoulder, arm and hand or by the presence of three joints that divide the fingers of the hand. These elements do not apply to Stevenson’s Passacaglia exclusively, although they do help illustrate further Stevenson’s desire to base his musical composition on human elements. Stevenson also divides the basic elements of musical expression into three categories of rhythm, intellect, and emotion. Rhythm is both animal and muscular, intellect is represented by counterpoint, and emotion is represented by color and harmony. Stevenson describes the Pars Prima section of his Passacaglia as the emotional section, which is centered around changing qualities of both harmony and color as well as representing

the more traditional structures that we have already examined. It also contains the most frequent change of key signatures.

The *Pars Altera* section, which begins on page forty-four, measure 823, contains the most frequent uses of non-traditional piano techniques, as well as being the section that is the most rhythmically oriented. This section represents not only the more animal/muscular elements of the piece, but Stevenson’s expression of *world music* and social conscience as well. This is also where the performer is most physically active. Standing to reach inside the piano and striking the strings with the hands at about half way through the performance may well have both an aural and visual impact on the listener.

*Pars Tertia*, which begins the massive fugal section, begins on page eighty-eight, measure 1510. This represents the final contrapuntal section that expresses the intellectual side of the composer and shares a relationship with other great contrapuntal works such as Bach’s *Goldberg Variations* and *Art of Fugue*, Beethoven’s *Eroica* and *Diabelli Variations*, Brahms’s *Handel Variations*, Reger’s *Telemann Variations*, and perhaps more than any other, Busoni’s *Fantasia Contrappuntistica*. The three sections are not considered movements and are to be performed without pause as one uninterrupted movement. The eighty-minute length seems to be relative to human experience as well. Stevenson
makes this observation about the enormous length of his Passacaglia:

Consider the work as a map in music. The terrain: a life span. The scale: one minute-one year. The duration: 80 minutes. There is a physical climax after 35 minutes, as there is in life about 35 years of age. The final climax is psychical, not physical: psychical in the Greek sense—of the mind, not the body. This conception was not premeditated. I became aware of it only after performing the work some 20 times over 20 years.2

The thirty-five year climax that Stevenson mentions occurs in Pars Altera during the powerfully rhythmic African section on page sixty-seven and extends through the section entitled Central etudes, which is found on pages seventy-one through eighty-two. These two sections represent the most taxing physical elements of the entire piece for the performer as well as functioning as the mid-point of the piece. The Canadian musicologist, Paul Rapoport remarks about the length of the Passacaglia:

The 80-minute duration of the Passacaglia is not cause for concern. In the experiencing of this composition, clock time is unreal. Real musical time, intense and immanent in such an undertaking, is very different. It is quite possible to feel, after hearing the Passacaglia, that it is much shorter than its stated duration, and, after hearing it a few times and thinking about it for a while, that it is much longer. This disorientation is both unlimited and all-encompassing. In this connection, words of another epic writer, Marcel Proust, are highly

2Stevenson, Record jacket notes from Passacaglia on D S C H, (Altarus, 1988).
appropriate: ". . . a profound idea which has enclosed space and time within itself is no longer subject to their tyranny and could never perish."\(^3\)

Stevenson uses many motivic links to lend cohesiveness to his *Passacaglia*. The most basic of these is the *D S C H* motive that is used throughout the duration of the piece. An element of continuity is built into the ground pattern at its conclusion. The tailpiece section, consisting of four eighth-notes, functions as a rhythmic up-beat to the following measure. This allows the ground to be continuously linked to its next restatement (See example 37).

Example 37. Four-note tailpiece of the *D S C H* ground bass pattern.

The *D S C H* motive also can be found on pages fifty and fifty-one, measures 914-948, embedded within the vertical spelling of the right-hand chords which Stevenson says resembles the "cutting edge of the Nazi swastika."\(^4\) This same treatment can be found in the development section of

\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)Stevenson, Lecture at the Chatham Music School, April 19, 1989.
the opening Sonata allegro on page four, measure 85 (See examples 38 and 39).

Example 38. Vertical use of three of the four notes found in the D S C H pattern. Measure 914.

Example 39. The same three notes used vertically in the Sonata allegro section. Measure 85.

The D S C H motive undergoes countless transformations and reharmonizations throughout the piece. One of the most striking statements occurs at the end of the piece on pages one-hundred forty and forty-one, measures 2223-2233, where the D S C H motive is harmonized with major and minor chords (See example 40).

In measures 2242-2245, a cluster chord appears with notes derived from the D S C H ground pattern (See example 41).

A scale made up of the four-note $DSCH$ motive rearranged as $B, C, D, E$-flat, occurs in measure 2250 (See example 42).

Example 42. Scale based on rearranged notes of the $DSCH$ pattern. Measure 2250.

The opening Sonata allegro reveals a strong use of semitones and minor third intervals. These intervals are basic to the $DSCH$ motive, as well as to the $BACH$, Dies irae and andamento fugue subjects in the contrapuntal section of the Pars Tertia. This far-reaching quality of the opening Sonata allegro is partially due to its open-ended construction. Paul Rapoport remarks about this quality:

The Sonata allegro has few strongly marked formal divisions and no closed-off recapitulation. As a result, it achieves a more meaningful formal integration with the rest of the work than a full classical Sonata-allegro design would allow. This also enables Stevenson to refer to the Sonata allegro later and thereby continue its reach beyond its actual conclusion. Its most striking reappearances are in Pars Tertia, in both the Fugue and the concluding Adagissimo. Each of the
fugue themes is foreshadowed in the opening pages of the Sonata allegro, but not obviously, for this is a composition whose continuous development is as subtle as it is far-reaching.\(^5\)

The subtle foreshadowing of fugal themes in the Sonata allegro that Rapoport speaks of is primarily made up of the frequent use of minor seconds and thirds that are found in the D S C H pattern, which directly links itself to the construction of the three fugal subjects. Other examples of the Sonata allegro’s far-reaching influence is found in reference to the staccato chords found on page two, measures 36-49 (See example 43a). These chords reappear on the bottom of page thirty-one, within the gavotte (See example 43b) and also on page ninety where the chords are reduced to thirds in measures 1545-1565 within the large fugal section (See example 43c).

Example 43a. Staccato chords found in the Sonata allegro, measures 36-49.

\(^5\)Rapoport, Record jacket notes from Passacaglia on D S C H, (Altarus, 1988).
Example 43a. (Continued)

Example 43b. Staccato chords found in gavotte, measures 614-618.
Example 43c. Staccato chords reduced to thirds in the fugal section, measures 1545-1565.
Within the prelude of the Suite, there is a five-note motive that recurs in several places throughout the Passacaglia. It is first seen on page twenty, measure 371, where the notes E-flat, C-sharp, B-flat, G, and F-sharp and are stated with the left-hand as an accompanying figure to the D S C H motive stated in the bass (See example 9). The same five notes are found later in a different order that forms the beginning of the andamento fugue subject found on page eighty-eight, measure 1510 (See example 10). This five-note motive appears again in the right-hand on page one-hundred nine, measure 1866. It is arpeggiated much like its initial appearance on page twenty, only now in retrograde with the right-hand. (See example 44)

Example 44. Five-note motive played in retrograde, measure 1866.

Its reappearance on page 122, measures 2055-2075, is very different. Here, Stevenson uses the first five notes found in the andamento fugue subject, which were originally generated in the strumming figure on page twenty, measure
371 (See example 9). By using the first five notes of the andamento subject as a blocked chord, Stevenson has constructed what he terms a frozen fugue subject. The chord is repeated in the right hand as an ostinato accompaniment with disjunct staccato eighth-notes in the left-hand (See example 45).

Example 45. Frozen andamento fugue subject, measure 2055.

Stevenson's use of a mordent ornament has both rhythmic and melodic significance. At several places within the Passacaglia, Stevenson uses both the minor and major second interval associated with the mordent as well as its short-short-long rhythm. The first use of the mordent is found within the Scottish pibroch section on page thirty-nine, measures 738-741 (See example 46).

*Beckman, Interview, Dec. 5, 1993.*
Example 46. Use of the mordent in the Scottish *pibroch*, measures 738-741.

Here Stevenson uses the French ornament sign, as well as writing out the notes in measures 740-741. Page forty-nine uses both the rhythm and melodic shape of the mordent in measures 886-887 (See example 47).

Example 47. Use of the mordent written out in chords in the *Fanfare*, measures 886-887.

Despite the use of blocked chords here, the mordent is still evident through its distinctive rhythmic contour and minor second intervallic outline. Page eighty-four introduces another improvisatory-like section reminiscent of the one
found on pages twenty and twenty-one. This section begins by using the mordent rhythm, the major second instead of a minor second interval, and the short-short-long rhythm in measures 1433 and 1436 (See example 48).

Example 48. Use of the mordent figure that is written out in measures 1433 and 1436.

The most symbolic use of the mordent is found on page eighty-six, measure 1475, where Stevenson uses the mordent as a tribute to J.S. Bach. Here he uses the mordent as part of a two-measure theme that follows the same melodic contour of Bach's Organ Toccata in D minor (See example 49). It is brought back later in the final fugal section on page ninety-two, measures 1587-1596 in combination with the andamento fugue subject and ground bass pattern (See example 50).
Example 49. Tribute to J.S. Bach by use of the characteristic mordent and thematic shape from his Organ Toccata in D minor. Measures 1475-1477.

Example 50. Combination of Bach tribute theme with the andamento fugue subject and D S C H pattern. Measures 1587-1596.
Another rhythmic figure used is the Scotch Snap, which Stevenson states is derived from Scottish speech patterns. As mentioned in example five, this rhythm is first found in the gavotte on page thirty-three, measure 643 and extends to measure 667 on page thirty-five. It occurs again in the Scottish pibroch section on pages thirty-nine and forty (See example 16).

Trills and scales are among the many textures in the Passacaglia that are repeatedly used, in part, for their unifying qualities. Extensive use of trills is found on pages twenty-two and twenty-three, measures 399-412. The trills are written in both single-notes and thirds below simultaneous melody notes on each quarter-note beat (See examples 51a and 51b). This type of texture reappears on page ninety-nine, measures 1705-1710 (See example 51c).

Example 51a. Trills found in measures 399-405.

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Example 51a. (Continued)

Example 51b. Trills in thirds, measures 406-412.
Example 51b. (Continued)

Example 51c. Trills used in measures 1705-1710.

Scales are also frequently used throughout the piece and are readily recognizable. Stevenson uses his unusual combination of Indian Raga/whole-tone/chromatic scales exclusively on pages sixteen and seventeen, measures
322-335. Woven into these scales is the ever present $DSC$ $H$ motive (See example 52a).

**Example 52a.** Indian Raga/whole-tone/chromatic scales combined in measure 322.

On page nineteen, measures 357-363, he constructs an alternating scale pattern of all-white keys, pentatonic black keys or whole tone scales in the left-hand under a repeated-note figure in the right-hand (See example 52b).

**Example 52b.** White keys, pentatonic, whole tone scales combined, measures 357-361.
This type of scale is found again on page one-hundred five, measures 1824-1830 (See example 52c).

Example 52c. Scale patterns based on a combination of elements found in examples 52a and 52b. Measures 1824-1830.

In this example, Stevenson seems to have taken the combination of scales with the D S C H pattern from page sixteen and seventeen, and the predominately white key pattern taken from page nineteen.

Stevenson has pointed out a far-reaching tempo relationship between the opening tempo and the tempo of the Adagissimo barocco on page 128. The Passacaglia begins at a
metronome speed of sixty-six, which equals a quarter-note. The final Adagissimo barocco is also played at sixty-six, however, the eighth-note is the unit of beat. This results in the final Adagissimo sounding much slower than the opening, while still possessing a type of spiritual connection. This section also shares a rhythmic connection to the third movement of Shostakovich’s Sonata No. 2 for piano (See examples 53a and 53b).


\[\text{Adagissimo barocco} \quad \text{non legato}\]

\[\text{Example 53a. Opening measures of the Adagissimo barocco. Measures 2174-2180.}\]

\[\text{Beckman, Interview, Dec. 5, 1993.}\]
CONCLUSION

When Ronald Stevenson wrote his Passacaglia on D S C H in 1962, it was definitely not fashionable to compose a piece of such enormous length and complexity. However, the contributions of this very important composer are gradually beginning to be recognized by a wider, and very sophisticated audience. Stevenson has said that he did not compose the Passacaglia with a predetermined length or order of events in mind. However, his ideas of world music, the
influences of Busoni and Grainger, his nurturing of a Scottish musical language, and a profound love of counterpoint were firmly implanted when his work on the Passacaglia began. The obvious question that may be asked of such a large piece is whether or not it has the capability to engage an audience for eighty-minutes. When both the scope of the piece and its profound message of a peaceful coexistence of many diverse elements are understood, its complete performance becomes a very significant and moving event. Through the writing of his Passacaglia on D S C H, Stevenson has realized his ideal of a type of musical multi-cultural expression grounded in the basic human elements of emotion, intellect, and physicality. His approach to large-scaled form, in part, relies on his use of various twentieth-century events as well as his uses of traditional formal structures. His creativity seems boundless, stemming from past traditions through innovative practices of his own, especially in the area of piano technique. The Passacaglia on D S C H is truly a remarkable work and firmly establishes Ronald Stevenson as a composer with a large vision of the human experience, which he feels can be best expressed through a work of this magnitude. The challenge now lies with both the performer and listener to perform this piece more frequently for audiences who want to experience this twentieth-century musical landmark.
APPENDIX A

A LISTING OF SECTIONS FOR THE

PASSACAGLIA ON D S C H
PASSACAGLIA on DSCH

PLAN OF WORK

**PARS PRIMA**
- Sonata allegro
- Waltz in rondo-form
- *Episode*
- Suite (Prelude, Sarabande, Jig, Sarabande, Minuet, Jig, Gavotte, Polonaise)
- Pibroch (Lament for the Children)
- *Episode: arabesque variations*
- Nocturne

**PARS ALTERA**
- Reverie-Fantasy
- Fanfare — Forebodings: Alarm — Glimpse of a War-Vision
- Variations on “Peace, Bread & the Land” (1917)
- Symphonic March
- *Episode*
- Fandango
- Pedal-point: “To emergent Africa”
- *Central Episode: études*
- Variations in C minor

**PARS TERTIA**
- Adagio: tribute to Bach
- Triple Fugue over ground-bass:
  - Subj. I: andamento
  - Subj. II: B A C H
  - Subj. III: Dies Irae
- Final variations on theme derived from ground
  (adagissimo barocco)
APPENDIX B

A PARTIAL LISTING OF RONALD STEVENSON

PIANO WORKS
A partial listing of Ronald Stevenson Piano Works

Sonatina I
Sonatina II
Sonatina III
Overture
1818 Variations on a Bach Chorale
Vox Stellarum
Prelude for Jean Sibelius (1948)
Three Nativity Pieces
Berceuse symphonique
Fugue on a fragment of Chopin
Waltzes
Andante Serene
Variation--Study on a Chopin Waltz
Three Cadenzas for Mozart’s Concerto in d, K.V.466
Nocturne (homage to John Field)
Variations on a Theme of Pizzetti
A 20th-Century Music Diary (16 movts.-1956-59)
Double Waltz (two Chopin Waltzes combined)
Six Pensees sur les Preludes de Chopin
Keening Song for a Makar (Fancis George Scott) (1959)
Suite from Paderewski’s Manru (4 movts.)
Simple Variations on Purcell’s Scotch Tune
Scottish Folk-Music Settings (9 songs-1963)
Irish Folk-Song Suite (4 movts.)
Chinese Folk-Song Suite (5 movts.)
Ghanian Folk-Song Suite (5 movts.)
Two Ecologues: Sumer is icumen en (1951)
The Ploughboy (after Shield-1956)
Fantasy on themes from Busoni’s Doktor Faust (1955)
Fugue on a theme from Busoni’s Doktor Faust (1951)
Prelude, Fugue and Fantasy on themes from Busoni’s Doktor Faust (1959)
Passacaglia on DSCH (1962)
Harpichord Sonata (1968)
Heroic Song (1967) (for Hugh MacDiarmid)
Motus Perpetuus(?)Temporibus Fatalibus

Transcriptions:

Cradle Song: Wozzeck (Berg)
Pavan, Galliard and Jig (after John Bull)
Valse a deux tems (Chopin), for left hand alone
Grande Valse in A-flat (Chopin), for right hand alone
Six Children’s Pieces (Delius)
Hill Song I (Grainger) (1960)
Green Bushes: Passacaglia (Grainger)
Fantasy in f (Mozart)
Toccata (Purcell)
Ground in c (Purcell)
Ground in e (Purcell)
Ground in d (Purcell)
The Queen's Dolour (Purcell)
Seven Songs (Francis George Scott)
Weep You No More, Sad Fountains (van Dieren)
Prelude No. 3 (Villa-Lobos)
Peter Grimes Fantasy (Britten)

Concerti:

Concerto No. 1 A Faust Tryptich (1960)
Concerto No. 2 The Continents (1972)
APPENDIX C

THE RONALD STEVENSON SOCIETY’S

AVAILABLE PUBLICATIONS OF

CD’S, LP’S AND BOOKS
The Ronald Stevenson Society

Publications

Stevenson on CD

**Heroic Song for Hugh MacDiarmid** coupled with Liszt, Chopin, Debussy, Marek, MacDowell, Sorabji and Bach-Busoni
"Cathedrals in Sound". Stevenson (piano)
Altarus AIR-CD-9043

**Passacaglia on DSCH** coupled with **Recitative and Air** for Shostakovich and **Prelude, Fugue and Fantasy** on themes from Busoni's "Doktor Faust"
Stevenson plays Stevenson Piano Works
Altarus AIR-CD-9091(2). Double Set

**Beltane Bonfire, 2 Scottish Ballads, 8 Song Transcriptions** from F G Scott coupled with music by Ronald Center
"Piano Music from Scotland". Murray McLachlan (piano)
Olympia OCD 264

**Stevenson Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2**
Murray McLachlan (piano); Chetham's Symphony Orchestra conducted by Julian Clayton
Olympia OCD 429

**Stevenson Piano Music**
Fugue on a Fragment of Chopin
A 20th Century Music Diary
Symphonic Elegy for Liszt
A Scottish Triptych
Motus Perpetuus Temporibus Fatalibus
Joseph Banowetz (piano)
Altarus AIR-CD-9089

**Den Bergtekne (Taken into the Mountains) : Ballad after Grieg**
Norse Elegy for Ella Nygaard
Beltane Bonfire, coupled with Sorabji and Hinton
Donna Amato (piano)
Altarus AIR-CD-9021
Publications

Stevenson on LP

**Hill Song No 1**, Grainger-Stevenson,
Grainger: 3 Scotch Folksongs, 14 Songs of the North and
Scottish Strathspey and Reel
"Grainger: Salute to Scotland". Stevenson (piano)
Altarus AIR-2-9040

**Prelude, Fugue and Fantasy**
Rosenkavalier Ramble (Grainger)
The Minstrel's Lay from "Wat Tyler". Bush-Stevenson
Wiegenlied aus "Wozzeck". Berg-Stevenson
"20th Century Operatic Fantasies". Stevenson (piano)
Altarus AIR-2-9042

**Passacaglia on DSCH**
Stevenson (piano)
Altarus AIR-2-9090(2). Double Set

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