

Donald Bousted (1957- 2021) A Tribute—and ‘Mini-Review’ of 19.5

Patrick Ozzard-Low

In May 2021, a message pinged in from my friend and former colleague, the composer and mixed-media artist Donald Bousted.

Dear Patrick,

I hope you are well and surviving these odd times? [*Covid times...*]

My longest, possibly my most ambitious work, ‘19.5’ for microtonal trumpet in 19 divisions of the octave and malletKAT, was released today and I would like to offer you a complimentary copy. [*Various links followed...*]

The work was begun in December 2011 and finished in 2014. With the help of the commissioners, *duo Contour*, it has been rehearsed and performed in sections since 2014. In 2018/19 I thoroughly revised it before recording began. So it’s been a long process but I feel very happy with the result! [*This was great to hear, as it was not always so...*]

Also, you are one of the dedicatees! I think it’s probably unlikely that I would have encountered 19 [*divisions of the octave*] when I did if it hadn’t been for CNMI [*Centre for New Musical Instruments*]. It was a shame it was such a short liaison but for me it was a very intense and highly productive time. And one of the results is that I am still extremely interested in 19 and have more plans to write for it in the future. [*Plans that had no chance to materialise.*]

Let me know how you are doing sometime. Any more fabulous CDs on the horizon? [*Nice of him to put it that way.*]

With best wishes,

Donald

This was a touching note—and a surprise. For years we’d lived on opposite sides of the country and despite occasional electronic contact, not met for ages. As soon as I’d heard 19.5, I also realised this was not just another of Don’s many pieces, rather it was an important step in his musical odyssey, and a particular privilege to be one of the dedicatees.¹ When I’d listened a few times, I realised I wanted to write a short appreciation or ‘mini-review’—at least for facebook. The best of Don’s music had not had the traction I felt it deserved, and as I wrote at the time: ‘I have a suspicion that many people don’t really *get* it’. But in that moment I hadn’t the slightest inkling I would be reviewing Don’s last large-scale composition.²

Don was someone whose creative trajectory was always evolving—but while the means or the medium changed and developed, the direction, the resolve, the objective was always very much Don. I knew him primarily as a composer: originally his ambition was to be a classical guitarist and he became a very fine player, but partly due to developing tendonitis in his elbow, in his 20’s the focus moved to musical composition. He had some successes with early pieces, and although he still continued to write in standard equal-temperament throughout his career, over time he developed a consuming interest in and commitment to microtonality. He also had a strong and characteristic need to extend the range of expression and reference of his work—which may have been amplified by a worry, at least in the short term, that microtones might narrow the potential audience. In any case, his path was increasingly to integrate his music—instrumental and/or electronic—with video, installation and performance art. At different times he described himself as: “a composer”, “a composer and film-maker”, “an artist and film maker”, “a composer, sound and

¹ 19.5 is dedicated to Don’s long-term collaborators Stephen Altoft (trumpet) and Lee Ferguson (percussion)—otherwise known as *duo Contour*, the indefatigable players who made Don’s enthusiasm for 19-div (and other microtonal systems) spring to life in real acoustic/electronic performances—plus Lewis Jones (see text) and myself.

² Many thanks to Steve Altoft for inviting me to publish this tribute on *Donald Bousted Editions* and for his advice and corrections.

installation artist, film maker and guitarist". His music and sound-art were heard at the Huddersfield, Darmstadt, Berkeley, Daegu and Bangor festivals, and played across Europe and in North and South America; his films were screened in the UK, Chile, France, Palestine, Russia, Spain and the USA, as well as being webcast/broadcast on HypTV (Sky TV). Towards the end of his life, alongside continuing compositional and film work, he reinvented his performing self again, devoting a great deal of time to commissioning, concertising and recording music—expertly and beautifully—for the classical ukulele.

Don was also known amongst musical colleagues for his staunch and energetic work driving new ideas and events forward. He co-authored *The Quarter-Tone Recorder Manual* (with Kathryn Bennetts and Peter Bowman) and *The Microtonal Trumpet* (with Stephen Altoft), for both of which he also composed many studies. He created and directed *Microtonal Projects*, and when he wasn't creating his own pieces, there didn't seem to be a moment when he wasn't devising or collaborating on a new performance project or event. He created and directed four editions of *UKMicroFest*, nine of *Wild Dog*, plus *Late at Tate (Microtonal)* and *EUROMicroFest 2015: Forgotten Spaces*. As a lecturer at the Universities of Huddersfield and Kingston, and as a private tutor for guitar and composition, he was warmly appreciated by many of his students, a handful of whom later became composers (amongst them: Mark Bowden, Geoffrey Cox and Michael Wolters). The full range of Don's creative endeavours is beyond the compass of these personal reflections—but his achievements were considerable and it's sad they weren't more widely recognised in his lifetime.

Adding to the repertoire

When one considers Don's microtonal music and his marriage of music and video, it's easy to form the impression of an artist who was always 'pushing forward', who would gladly leave their earlier efforts behind.³ It would be a mistake though to overlook some of Don's early pieces, written in conventional equal temperament. At least two of these stand out particularly and—I'll put my neck out here—I think both deserve a place in the repertoire.⁴ They are: the short but very beautiful and airy *Islands* [flute and harp, 1990] and the powerful *A Woldgate Requiem* [organ, 1995, recorded by Kevin Bowyer on *Cathedral Classics 003*], a deeply felt, dissonant response to the loss of young lives in a tragic accident.⁵ Likewise, amongst the early microtonal pieces, both *A Journey among Travellers* [two players (descant, treble and tenor recorders), 1996, recorded by Kathryn Bennetts and Peter Bowman on *QTR CD 07-98*], and described by *The Wire* as "a series of tiny masterpieces") and *5 Quarter-Tone Pieces* [one player (alto and tenor recorders), 1997], remain vital, progressive additions to the recorder repertoire.

'Composer in Residence' at the Centre for New Musical Instruments (CNMI)⁶

I first came into contact with Don not so long after the above pieces were written—and, if I remember correctly, shortly before I published *21st Century Orchestral Instruments* (1998). Together with Lewis Jones (then senior lecturer and an occasional instrument maker), I then founded CNMI in 2000. Once CNMI was officially recognised as a research centre of London Guildhall University, and with the help of a Leverhulme award, we were extremely fortunate to appoint Donald Boustead as Composer in Residence for the academic year 2001-2.

By this time, CNMI had begun creating a number of new (adapted) instruments. One of them was a (fledgling) prototype acoustic trumpet, with two sets of modified valve inserts and an electromechanical fourth valve, together designed to

³ But perhaps that wasn't always the case? There are pieces on Don's Soundcloud page which it's perhaps surprising he made public—although possibly they're occasional or very early pieces which he simply didn't object to sharing.

⁴ No one would dispute, I think, that Don's output was uneven—but this doesn't affect the value of his best music. He almost acknowledged this: "Some things I think long and hard about but I also try to write quickly, so I'm forced to live dangerously and use my intuition." <http://soundlab.newmediafest.org/interview-donald-boustead>

⁵ <https://donaldboustead.com/2016/12/21/notes-on-a-woldgate-requiem>

⁶ CNMI was a Research Centre (2000-2004) of London Guildhall University (LGU). Its purpose was to research and create new musical instruments, and it focussed chiefly on new and adapted versions of mainstream acoustic and orchestral instruments, particularly in response to the requirements of contemporary classical 'new music'. Thus CNMI aimed to motivate and create collaborations, in person and via internet, between individual (artisan) acoustic instrument makers, commercial instrument manufacturers and academic researchers (in acoustics, electronic and materials technology, organology etc), plus composers, performers and music theorists. The initial focus was on creating instruments for microtonality (eg., 19-ET recorders, 19/24-ET brass quintet, microtonal flute and clarinet) but it also aspired to innovations of acoustic instrumental timbre and the integration of acoustic instruments with electronics, and so on. Possibly this was an insanely ambitious programme—but it was tragic that various difficulties (not least the merger between London Guildhall University and University of North London) brought the project to a premature close in 2004.

achieve 12, 19 or 24 divisions of the octave (depending which set of tubes was used).⁷ Don produced excellent music for this instrument (musically and pedagogically), some first-class research, and he brought with him the gifted trumpeter Stephen Altoft as the trumpet's initial test-pilot. Later, the CNMI prototype trumpet was abandoned but—without wishing to claim too much credit here—these collaborative beginnings motivated Don to compose a significant number of new pieces, and Stephen Altoft later to develop a mechanical (ie., non-electromechanical) 19-div trumpet to properly perform Don's pieces. Ultimately, too, it led to their joint publication *The Microtonal Trumpet*.⁸

Why 19?

Don didn't focus exclusively on a single system of tuning—but it's striking that he chose to frame 19.5, his "most ambitious work", in 19 divisions of the octave.⁹ So why did Don become fascinated with and make such a commitment to (as he called it) '19-div'?¹⁰

In 'new music', quarter-tones (24-div) have for a long time been the *de facto* tuning system (or 'tuning conception') for the majority of composers wanting to expand their palette of intervals and tones. It seems to be the 'no-brainer next step' because it retains the twelve familiar notes and conveniently adds twelve new ones (nominally equally-spaced) between them. From one perspective, 24-div appears to be a radical break from tradition because the scale comprises *two* parallel circles of fifths, each completely separate from the other. However, for composers interested in harnessing the sonic purity and 'bloom' of pure intonation and the harmonic series, 24-div (or at least 24-ET, realised accurately on a fixed-pitch instrument such as an extended piano or marimba) makes little or no improvement on the intonational compromises already implicit in 12-ET—and can thus also appear to be a rather conservative choice.

In contrast, 19-div comprises just *one* extended (19-step) circle of fifths—although, in strict 19-ET the fifth is slightly flat relative to either a pure fifth or a 12-ET fifth—and any set of twelve pitches *adjacent within the circle*, forms a scale that is near-identical to 'third-comma mean-tone temperament', an historical tuning with thirds, sixths, fourths and fifths all lying more-or-less acceptably close to their pure (just intonation) equivalents.¹¹ Also, according to the theory of 'consistency' (namely, one of the more interesting approaches to guesstimating the relative musical potential of alternative equal temperaments), 19-div is significantly more 'consistent' than 24-div—and thus, at least in theory, perhaps more 'exploitable'.¹² Considerations such as these can pale into insignificance relative to the vision, imagination and talent of a good composer—but they do more-or-less accurately predict various aural qualities and structural limits...

In any case, these kinds of consideration were necessarily part of the mix when—stepping back a couple of years, to 1996/7, and with a small grant from the Arts Council—I commissioned Lewis (and his colleague David Armitage) to make two Renaissance-type tenor recorders in 19-ET.¹³ This was perhaps the first time a recorder has been deliberately

⁷ Modifications to an existing trumpet were carried out by David Cowie, a mature student, directed and mentored within CNMI.

⁸ *The Microtonal Trumpet* is freely available as a PDF: <https://microtonalprojects.com/the-microtonal-trumpet>

⁹ In the third and last part of 19.5, the software patches for the MalletKAT provide for what Don called "a polymicrotonal development of 19-div, using just intonation scales in 10, 13, 19 and 26 divisions of the octave and non-octave and mirror scales". His *24 Microtonal Studies* for trumpet employ quarter-tones, eighth-tones and 19-div. He also wrote music in 72-div.

¹⁰ Don used the suffix "div" as opposed to "ET" to distinguish a system having, for example, 19 steps (which may or may not be equal, depending whether a temperament or instruments of variable intonation are employed) from one of more strictly equal steps (such as might be realised on instruments of fixed pitch).

¹¹ In 19-ET, the minor third is virtually identical to the pure minor third (6/5), therefore significantly closer to the pure interval than the minor 3rd in 12-ET; arguably the major third is less acceptable, however.

¹² Of course this also depends on the kind of music a composer wants to write, their personal responses to the intervals available in a given scale, and so on. Moreover, the 'consistency' criteria favour compositional approaches that value pure tunings and tonal triads. For an explanation of 'consistency' see Appendix IV of: Patrick Ozzard-Low, *21st Century Orchestral Instruments* (1998)—free download: <https://www.secondsnata.com/writings-on-music>

¹³ There were a number of complementary reasons for commissioning the (two) recorders in 19-ET: (i) to realise the first ever truly acoustic woodwind realisation of 19-tone harmony; (ii) at the time it was important to prove or disprove that an acoustic woodwind could support a radically different tuning system other than quarter-tones; (iii) for the instruments to function in new music as well as in early music—for example, accompanied by harpsichord in meantone tuning, or by *Cembalo Cromatico*, the 17th Century 19-division instrument, of which some few modern versions now exist.; and not least (iv), because the two instruments were within budget. In 1997, I visited Yamaha UK to propose the idea of making a 19-division clarinet—they quoted c. £25,000 for one instrument. It seems, though, that Yamaha were interested: to my surprise, a couple of years later, Yamaha Japan released patents for a number of the ideas I'd proposed at the meeting, including one covering all possible 19-division woodwind instruments—clearly a breach of the terms of this encounter—and one that defied common sense.

made to achieve a radically alternative tuning system¹⁴—and perhaps the first time an acoustic woodwind instrument has ever been conceived to realise 19-div/ET.¹⁵ These new recorders were, I think, also a further point of connection for Don, given how extensively he had already worked with Kathryn Bennetts and Peter Bowman on *A Journey among Travellers*—as well as *The Quarter-Tone Recorder Manual* and other pieces for recorder(s).

So, my understanding was that Don initially became attracted to experimenting with 19-div in part simply because we had started making such instruments at CNMI—but also for reasons similar to those I’ve outlined. Clearly he was searching for radical new forms of expression, with one foot resolutely planted in modernity, and the other (well, at least a big toe) maintaining a vestige of belief in the importance of ‘tonal force-fields’.¹⁶ Likewise, as far as I know, Don never subscribed to the kind of assumptions and techniques that underlie serialism and post-serialism. I always recognised that Don’s music was very different from mine (for a long period I was influenced by a particular vein of French serialism, eventually emerging from it in rather different direction), but I think our innate responses were to some extent shared—an unspoken but accepted part of the friendship. It was unfortunate that CNMI’s 19-div recorders and trumpet were less successful as working instruments than we’d hoped, nevertheless it seems they played a key role in setting this ‘19-thread’ in motion—and, to his great credit, Don became perhaps the (classical) composer who began the exploration of ‘19’ most seriously.¹⁷

19.5

By the time he came to write *19.5*, his work had evolved in a remarkable and moving way.¹⁸ His musical voice had maintained its identity, but matured and deepened. One might say the music achieves an independence from ‘mainstream’ new music—but maybe that no longer exists? Either way, the music is fully his own. In *19.5*, there is an understatement, intensity and concentration, as well as a breadth, that are rare (and very welcome) in new music.¹⁹ Given that he was one of an almost infinitesimally small number of composers seriously exploring ‘19’ (for acoustic instruments) this was a remarkable achievement. The music is funny, ironic, sometimes biting, sometimes enigmatic—yet also contains some very beautiful and moving passages. If it’s true, as I suspect it is, that many in new music don’t get it, then I hope this expanded version of my earlier thoughts might help. It’s not easy listening.

¹⁴ In practice, of course, no recorder or trumpet player (or player of any instrument of variable intonation—strings, winds, brass) tries to adhere strictly to an equal temperament—unless perhaps a composer has specifically requested it. Making an instrument with the aim of producing—as closely as possible—the pitches and intervals of, say, 19-ET, simply means that, ideally, these are the pitches the instrument will produce when attacks, breath pressure and embouchure are consistently equal.

¹⁵ Such instruments go back some time. The first quarter-tone clarinet was designed and made by Dr. Richard H. Stein in roughly the first decade of the 20th Century, although attempts to play the resulting instrument, I believe, were abandoned. Around 1924, *Kohlert* built a quarter-tone clarinet commissioned by Alois Hába which differs from a conventional Bb Clarinet primarily in having additional quarter-tone keys and somewhat modified tone-holes. In 1937, Fritz Schüller made a quarter-tone clarinet in which two parallel bores are connected to a single mouthpiece. One bore is slightly longer (nominally a quarter-tone longer) than the other, while a single system of keywork acts on the tone-holes of both bores simultaneously, and a single-keyed valve is used to switch between the two bores. It appears that none of these solutions was particularly successful.

¹⁶ I’m not alone in hearing some of Don’s microtonal music this way—see, for example, Kathryn Bennetts, *Solo Recorder Music of the 1990s: Analytical Approaches to the Repertoire and its Performance*, Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Canterbury Christ Church University (2016), pp. 75 *et seq.* I’d say this is also borne out by Don’s PhD thesis, see: Donald Bousted, *Rhythmic, Diatonic and Microtonal Structures in Musical Composition: Method and Notation (Compositions 1993-1998)*, University of Huddersfield, 2001.

¹⁷ Stephen Altoft has reminded me that Manfred Stahnke’s *Vier Etuden* were written for his 19-div trumpet with electronics and Graham Hair has written for singers (sometimes with instruments) in 19-div. Also, Fabio Costa’s transcriptions of some famous pieces into 19-div are remarkable: https://www.youtube.com/@Fabio_Costa_Music I imagine there are many other examples.

¹⁸ I’m not sure why the piece is called *19 point 5*. Stephen Altoft has suggested it may refer to the fact that in the third part of the piece, the *malletKat* uses additional tunings which go ‘beyond’ 19-div—so perhaps it’s a kind of pun on the idea of a ‘software revision’ or extension of 19-div?

¹⁹ Stephen Altoft has pointed out that during roughly the last 10 years of his life Don’s compositional approach changed somewhat, particularly through composing via *MOTU Digital Performer*. Don began improvising at the keyboard attached to his computer: the results were exported to *Finale*, where Don then made edits and revisions. “There are passages in *19.5* that are written out improvisations, and he wanted us to play them that way: where both voices would begin and end the passage together but during them would be flexible. He wanted to engage more in the intuitiveness of his music”. When Don returned to performing, primarily on ukulele, he wanted to achieve similar results, and to minimise difficult notation: this led to revisions—for example, commas were used in place of additive 1/16 beats, and so on. [Stephen Altoft, personal communication]

'Mini-review' of 19.5—a 'pared-down opera'?²⁰

19.5 comprises twelve movements in total, grouped together in three main Parts—*Modes*, *Poetry* and *Spirit*—each Part containing four pieces. In Part 1, *Modes*, the first two pieces have an almost playful, whimsical character that doesn't take itself too seriously, but there's a melancholic/ironic tension lurking below the surface, albeit restrained, wistful, understated. In the first piece, 'MAJ', one might imagine a couple who are trying to make things work—but suddenly realise they never will. Sadness follows, and perhaps temporary acceptance—all very quietly done, in 25 bars. In the next, 'MIN', something reminds me slightly of a circus, with a lilting but insistent pun on G# and its 19-div neighbour Ab, and an attempt at lyricism that is somehow 'off', half-hearted, like a clown who feels powerless either to sing or be funny. And then comes, paradoxically, a short and curious running coda which actually *is* funny. Writing something genuinely (and purely musically) funny is one of the hardest things to do in music—even harder when hardly anyone is going to get the joke. (By the way—Don's favourite composer was Haydn).²¹

If we're still talking about the same protagonists—in the third piece, 'HOLE', the distance between them has grown: the sadness and emptiness are palpable. The title refers to the 'whole-tone' scale, although in 19-div—or speaking more strictly, 19-ET—this is either an uneven scale or a spiral where the two ends fail to meet... so perhaps this is also about the 'hole' in whatever relationship is disintegrating? What we hear is a conversation (between the two instruments), each following whole-tone lines, in which neither meets, nor understands, the other.²² The fourth piece, 'MXN' (Mixolydian and "mixin"?) starts out with a gentle, jazzier demeanour. But there are searching questions and when the end arrives, the trumpet's brief attempt to assert itself is in vain.

In the original (facebook) version of this text, I said I was "reminded of the comic (tragicomic) side of Beckett—but there's an objectivity in Don's music that always distinguishes it as Boustead." In Don's private response (see below), he acknowledges Beckett but cites Pinter—and of course I immediately recognised how much more apt the metaphor is (which is why I'm correcting it here). In Beckett, what might be timeless and metaphysical, in Pinter tends to be concrete and directly human (often involving menace and fear). Salman Rushdie, in a tribute to Pinter, describes:

“...Pinter's legendary intransigence and his dislike of being asked to explain his work. For him, the strength of a work of art lay in its resistance to the idea of 'meaning', or at least in the reduction of meaning to a plain verbal description of what a scene, or a play, or a novel, was about”.²³

I'm not certain, but I imagine Don felt similarly (as, for sure, do many composers). But he didn't reproach me for the (literary and anthropomorphic) metaphors—I'd been careful not to take them too far. But it's clear he knew what I was getting at.

There's also a sort-of dialectic in Don's music in 19-div—the music constantly taking advantage of contrasts between familiar and unfamiliar intervals. Thirds and sixths, fourths and fifths are recognisable and relatively familiar, if sometimes odd; elsewhere our ears may feel more warped by strangely narrow semitones, wide tones (and their respective inverse sevenths), two different 'off-tritones'—and the evident complexities of combining all this harmonically. This, I think, was also part of Don's interest, because although 12-div and 19-div have some more-or-less coincident points, overall they are quite distinct territories: the one can never be fully translated or paraphrased in

²⁰ The initial version of this review can be found on my facebook page (25 May 2021).

²¹ To my ears, there are few moments in Don's music that betray its influences. Haydn's humour, yes—but in the kind of meaning, not the sound. Asked in an interview what music had influenced him, Don replied: "I'm particularly fond of the American mavericks and those, especially, who have pioneered microtonality. The music of Harry Partch is uneven in quality but at its best is sublime." See: <http://soundlab.newmediafest.org/interview-donald-boustead>. Personally, I don't hear any direct influence of Partch. Occasionally, though, I've been reminded of Shostakovich's ultra-late music, for example in the irony or emptiness of the 14th or 15th string quartets—but again, it's less about the sound than the feeling. At a rehearsal for the premiere of the 15th quartet, Shostakovich instructed the players: "Play it so that flies drop dead mid-air, and the audience starts leaving the hall from sheer boredom." I don't know if Don had a taste for Shostakovich, but I'm sure he'd have liked this quip. See Wendy Lesser, *Music for Silenced Voices: Shostakovich and his fifteen quartets*, Yale UP, 2011, p. 262.

²² In May 2023, in the final stages of revising this text, Steve Altoft unearthed a lecture (Salzburg, 2021) in which Don says: "although you could say that [*the complete*] piece is a kind of representation of the journey to enlightenment, of becoming whole, movement 3 is called Hole. Because in my journey of life you are just as likely to fall down a hole as you are to become whole and the other things [*sic*] is that this movement is using the whole tone scale (in 19 of course)." Later: "be on the lookout for jokes. This is a serious piece with serious jokes."

²³ Salman Rushdie, *Languages of Truth*, "Harold Pinter (1930-2008)", Jonathan Cape London, 2021, p.133.

terms of the other without the musical meaning fundamentally changing.²⁴ Thus, although *19.5* might look like a relatively 'simple' work in some respects, employing familiar tropes, it is also profoundly unfamiliar. Beyond metaphors, translating music into words is kind-of forbidden; but translating music strictly into *other music* (into a radically different tuning system) is impossible without a change of meaning.

In *Poetry* (Part 2), the music really gets going. In 'Love You Hate You', there's a painful dialogue between trumpet and percussion of mutually irritated time-points. It's a bit like some of Don's earlier music in which it was frequently the case that some 'rhythmic motor' seemed to drive the music on; but here, the movement—and its awkwardness—are more subtle, more pointed. There's also a lovely moment, right at the end of this stuttering, fractious duo, where the trumpet momentarily turns into a snare drum.

The next piece, 'She Goes', is clearly a continuation (or outcome) of 'Love You Hate You', because at the beginning it momentarily takes up the same repeated D/D# (small semitone) which was insistently repeated in the preceding piece, and for a while the music seems numb, lost in an aimless circling of chords on the malletKAT. Then—around four minutes in—comes some extremely beautiful music, a lonely, heartrending trumpet melody, over some not dissimilar chords, and shows how much can be said with limited forces and few notes. In 'Life is about Life and Death and Death and Death and Death' the tone has changed abruptly, starting out with some terrific canonic counterpoint, an ironic jauntiness and Don's cool sense of musical humour: dry and black. When decline seeps in, the jauntiness tries to return but is overwhelmed, and finally a trumpet Gb is left hovering almost inaudibly over the percussion. In 'Walk in Straight Lines', is someone trying to (drunkenly?) extricate themselves from the above predicaments? Or is this some slightly inebriated circus music? Either way, I've enjoyed *Poetry* a lot.

It's perhaps in *Spirit* (Part 3) that we find the most challenging music. Actually, I'd like to call Part 3 "Act 3"—because the leaps from each Part to the next are considerable, almost as if *19.5* were 'a pared-down opera'—as if each 'Act' takes place 'A few years later...' In any case, the story restarts, and the ninth movement 'all is not as it seems' begins enigmatically: somebody is waiting for something—but what? The performance direction is 'Weird and Fragile'. Perhaps there's a foghorn—is it sounding because we're surrounded by a deep mist? The malletKAT part keeps rising in pitch, slowly, awkwardly—the trumpet punctuates and resists—the malletKAT insists... After three and a quarter minutes there's a proper halt, and a new marking: "Ethereal". The process restarts, but muted, pianissimo, and the trumpet now obediently steps upwards, in regular 19-div steps as if finally in some tentative but reluctant agreement. Something has been found, or accepted: perhaps loss?

In 'Shut Your Fat Mouth' (marked 'Smooth and Jazzy'), the malletKAT presents a carpet of fluctuating arpeggios over which the muted trumpet tries to play a tune. The tune is a repeated tone (C#-D#, C#-D#...) itself then repeated together with a higher falling tone (C#-D#-F#-E). These shapes repeat, transposed, inverted. It's as if someone is trying hard to learn how to enjoy themselves again. Then, for a little while, the almost-jazz takes off, becoming actual-jazz. Don wrote that the subject of *Spirit* is "'spirituality' ... suggested by the use of increasingly stark musical forms and the presentation of material against a backdrop of silence". That's very clear in the other three pieces in Part 3. But here, the title ('Shut your Fat Mouth') and the music's drive for jazzy pleasure confronts us with a sort of Buddhism, perhaps. That's also Don, I think.

'What You Believe Will Come True', the penultimate movement, is by far the longest—and starkest. Overall, it somewhat resembles an Eastern ritual, and it's remarkable that, without sounding remotely incongruous, the pitch combinations conjure sonorities reminiscent of the Tibetan *Gyaling* or Korean *P'iri* with native percussion. Not far into the piece, at bars 27 to 35, the malletKAT strikes a bell-like sonority exactly 19 times, against which are pitted 11 (not 12...) attacks in the trumpet. There must be something significant here, but what it is? Right across *19.5*, the gradual erosion of melody as a prime agent arrives at its most intense point. Some of this music feels like walking in a dream...

The twelfth and final movement is entitled 'MAJI'. Does this bring us back to the beginning ('MAJ') but now transformed into *Magi*... wise men? Or does 'JI' refer only to 'just intonation'? Both, I guess. Marked 'Remote, Ceremonial', the music is characterised by an insistent beating rhythm, and for the first time there is a repeat, in fact almost the whole piece (bars 1 to 66) is taken again—leaving only a tiny four bar coda. There is a strangely enigmatic intensity in this final movement. Once it's been heard a few times, it becomes oddly gripping and compelling, closing things off at the same time as pointing to an unknown future. The last four bars—the repeated falling 19-div small semitones A-G#, G-F#—echo in the mind.

²⁴ Aaron Andrew Hunt's hilarious and biting version of the *Star Spangled Banner* (the American national anthem) in 19-ET is a wonderful example of how reformulating a piece in a different tuning system can transform its meaning (or effect). See: <https://soundcloud.com/uz1kt3k> (search the page on 'star spangled banner').

In a sense, the whole of *19.5* is relatively simple, direct and approachable (although increasingly austere in the last Part). Given the basic 'ontology' of the materials, these qualities invite a certain kind of concentration, introspection, at once accessible yet demanding of our imagination. Such positive attributes are reinforced by the (mainly) short movements, themselves presented in smaller units that don't outstay their welcome. This is mature music, maturely considered. And like Don himself, it has an evident honesty and directness ('direct' that is, once you 'get it').

Planetary self-destruction aside... we can easily imagine a future in which *A Woldgate Requiem* will reward organists and audiences. But who knows what the future holds for music in 19-div? It takes courage to commit oneself to a musical conception where 'legacy' is so uncertain. But given how infinitesimally few artists in any field are remembered and make a lasting mark, such choices needn't worry us: composers must simply do what they believe in. Don managed to do that, an achievement in itself. He was also fabulously lucky to have artists such as Stephen Altoft and Lee Ferguson around to support the journey and make this and other terrific recordings of his music.

If you need post-romantic outburst and exultation; if you need to be impressed by hyper-invention or get turned-on by a certain kind of hyperactive new music fecundity; if your semitones must be exactly where they usually are, or your tritones split the octave down the middle... [*these comments are not intended as barbs for anyone!*]... then possibly this music isn't for you. On the other hand, perhaps *19.5* is a true antidote to outworn habits...? I'm thinking of myself as much as anyone...

Conversation²⁵

After I posted the original version of this text on facebook, I received a private message from Don:

DB Wow, Patrick! I am speechless—thank you so much! I had tears in my eyes—not out of flattery but out of the depth of insight. The nod towards Beckett is interesting—I was really into Beckett in my 20s but also Pinter and I think you've got the measure of all of these undercurrents which are always there in me and in my music. I love the pared-down opera analogy too. Thank you so much for your attention to this piece! You are right, not many people 'get' my music and I'm sure many won't get this—but hopefully these words will at least direct a few people to it and give it a bit more consideration than they might otherwise have done. You have certainly made my day!
My year actually!

POL Happy to hear that! Was bit worried you'd say... "nah, mate—it's nothin' like that at all!"

DB :-D [*laughing emoji*]

POL I hope some people will read it... and listen! It is music that has to be listened to, and I'm not sure how many people, even amongst our circle etc, actually do that any more! Yes, Pinter... a better analogy. Long time since I read him.

DB Indeed. I have probably been guilty of not listening too. But I have rectified that recently and have enjoyed rediscovering as well as uncovering. Such a difficult thing to fathom really why some music appeals and other music doesn't (to a wider audience). Much of the time it seems to be beyond music—more based on personality, having something which mysteriously people latch on to. Anyway, I'm not interested in that—but I would very much like a few more people to listen to my music for sure!

POL Yes, I've looked at my CD Spotify stats... very sobering! I think that as composers it's necessary NOT to listen sometimes, sometimes for long periods. We have to get other people's music out of our ears! But then listen seriously when we do...

Re the great mystery of why people latch onto things... perhaps that's not in our gift ever to know. And who knows, when we're gone maybe some folks somewhere will listen. It is strange to think we'll never know...

DB Yes indeed—and yes I agree with all this.

²⁵ I didn't consult Don before writing the 'mini-review' for facebook, and was anxious he might find it irritating. In the Salzburg (2021) lecture he described it as 'an absolutely wonderful review', so I was delighted to have it confirmed that he was really genuinely in accord with it.