COMPOSITION IN CRISIS:
CASE STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICAN ART
MUSIC
1980-2006

Thomas Mathew Pooley

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Johannesburg, 2008
Abstract

This dissertation explores a crisis in South African composition through an analysis of the field of art music in the period 1980-2006. Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1993) and Thomas Kuhn (1970), I argue that the field of composition shifted from an autonomous to a more heteronomous mode of production during this period, and that this shift was embodied in a change of artistic paradigm. In chapter one I show how an ‘autonomous’ paradigm during the 1980s upheld the Eurocentric outlook and value system of apartheid, and how it was replaced in the early 1990s by a more ‘heteronomous’ or ‘cross-cultural’ paradigm. The composer case studies (chapters two to four) show how Kevin Volans, Peter Klatzow, and Hendrik Hofmeyr contributed to aesthetic and social change in the field, especially with regard to the inclusion of African elements. Chapter five is a critique of the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra as a ‘Proudly South African’ post-apartheid institution, showing how its programming policy is detrimental to the interests of composers. The Conclusion reflects on the dominated position of the field of composition relative to economic and political imperatives in the field of power, and considers how a prolonged and continued crisis has challenged the very notions of what constitutes artistic value in the field.
Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

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Thomas Mathew Pooley

30th day of May, 2008
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Acknowledgments

This dissertation was written in Johannesburg although some of the ideas expressed here were developed over a longer period, beginning with my studies as an Honours student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2005. Thank you to Christopher Ballantine and Beverly Parker who supervised my early research on cross-cultural art music at that institution. The subsequent development of these ideas was the product of important collaborations that happened during my time at Wits. The most important of these was the role played by my supervisor Christine Lucia. She read this work with a careful yet critical editorial eye, providing me with perspectives gained from a wide-ranging knowledge of the field, and was generous with her own research materials. She also helped me to develop a theoretical model that intersected with her own work on Pierre Bourdieu (1993), and this, together with the work of another important scholar, Thomas Kuhn (1970), helped me to develop a new way of seeing the (musical) world.

This way of seeing was complemented by a perspective from those who had first hand experience in the field during the past three decades. I undertook numerous interviews, both formal and informal during the past two or so years. Most of those interviewed were composers or arts administrators and their comments punctuate this work with invaluable insider insights. Despite the crisis in the field, all interviewees were generous with their time and resources and provided me with scores, recordings, publications, and other information that was invaluable. I am very grateful for this assistance and would like to thank the following in particular: Kevin Volans, Peter Klatzow, Hendrik Hofmeyr, Hans Roosenschoon, Roelof Temmingh, Mokale Koapeng, Sara Gon, Shadrack Bokaba, Gary Roberts, Stephen Jurisich, Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph and Michael Blake. The latter deserves special mention for lending me rare scores, recordings, and books on contemporary art. The Irma Stern Museum has kindly given me permission to reproduce the paintings Arab Priest, Congo River, and Peach Blossoms, and for this my thanks.

This research would not have been possible without a study grant from the National Research Foundation (NRF), and a Prestigious Masters Scholarship from the same
source. The University of the Witwatersrand also provided generous financial assistance towards my studies.

This work was written during a difficult period, but the pressures of life in Johannesburg were tempered by delightful times with friends and loved ones. I met Karin midway through my stay on the highveld and she has brought me endless joy. My family also deserves a special mention: Justin, Joanne, Penny, and Joanna were always hospitable and encouraging and this was greatly appreciated. Simon made some important historical observations on this work and was always a sounding board for my ideas. My most heartfelt thanks go to my mother for her unstinting support and belief, and without whom this research would not have been possible.

Thomas Mathew Pooley

Johannesburg, May 30 2008
List of musical examples

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