

The Three Musketeers: Too “Inauthentic” for a Real Reconstruction? Thoughts on the Compositional Material

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A process that seems to mark a paradigm change has recently been observed within music-scientific and music-theoretical circles. The subjects of many research topics and personalities, who were long considered purely pejoratively and not in any analytical focus are now being systematically and aesthetically investigated.

The British composer and Oscar winner Sir Malcolm Arnold (1921-2006) is one such case. Arnold has composed symphonic concertante music, and his oeuvre consists not only of nine symphonies but five ballets and numerous instrumental concertos, he has also composed more than 130 movie soundtracks. Arnold's large symphonic opus has often been disparaged by the music-theoretical circle, and has not been discussed within the German-speaking musicological community, or in Great Britain. He was, so-to-speak, an "unobserved" subject of research.

As interest in Arnold's work has increased, relatively unknown compositions are now widely performed - an action which, at first, warrants no critical remark. However, one tendency becomes obvious: instead of accompanying these premieres from an edition-critical view ("Urtext"), new paths are preferred. These new paths often lead to market-appropriate solutions that neglect the composer's original intent, and render them aesthetically questionable.

In 1975 Malcolm Arnold sketched out detailed ideas for a new ballet based upon Alexandre Dumas' novel "The Three Musketeers." Personal circumstances meant that he never completed his ideas, and only two sets of sketches remain (one is known, the other is a new set recently discovered by the author while working on his Ph.D. on Sir Malcolm's symphonic music). In 2006 the public was suddenly confronted with the announcement of a "new" Arnold ballet, which actually is only a composite score of his famous orchestral compositions, using only a tiny piece of the original sketches' music.

By referring to and analysing the "real" original sources, this article illustrates the huge amount of musical ideas and compositional identity that exist, and how they could be used for an aesthetically real, albeit fragmentary, construction of Arnold's real intentions and insights. It critically compares the form of today's production to Arnold's highly advanced structures.

"The Three Musketeers," in its current, distorted form, caters only to the perceived desires of an audience. Reconstruction, as witnessed with Mahler's Tenth Symphony by Deryck Cook, may help us to trace Arnold's true intentions.

I

In 1956, the British composer Sir Malcolm Arnold confronted us with a statement in which he described his aesthetic view on composition:

When I am asked to write music for ballet, a school orchestra, a film or a revue, I write exactly what I would like to hear if I were to go to the particular entertainment for which the music has been commissioned. On quite a number of occasions, my ideas have coincided with other people's – from which you will gather that my stars have been lucky indeed! (ARNOLD 1956:169).

Sir Malcolm Arnold unfortunately never experienced an audience's enthusiasm for his reconstructed ballet, *The Three Musketeers*. He was secluded in Attleborough, Norfolk, his mobility greatly limited by illness, and he was, therefore, unable to attend the production. He passed away on the day of the premiere, which took place in Bradford at the Alhambra Theatre on 23rd September 2006.

However, "reconstructed" is perhaps an inexact description for the opus created, and which is now available to the general public. The idea of writing a new ballet for the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, harks back to a creative meeting in 1975 between the composer and two British ballet choreographers and designers, David Drew and Terry Emery, but the

scenario sketched out at that time has not been realised, at least not in the production's current form.

Malcolm Arnold, known to the British public as an experienced, productive, and elegant creator of orchestral compositions, immediately fell in love with this project and enthusiastically sketched out drafts for the ballet in the form of short piano scores. The sketches consist of 13 fully-completed short pieces of composition, usually limited in length to one page and labelled with programmatic titles taken from Alexandre Dumas's original novel. There is no further information available regarding how Arnold planned to elaborate on the sketches. From a superficial perspective, the pieces could be described as piano pieces of moderate difficulty, often evoking an impromptu character.

There may be economic and technical explanations for why protagonists and promoters of the new stage version of the ballet prefer to present a conglomerate piece, formed from Arnold's famous orchestral works – with the single exception of an original composition entitled *Constance's Sad Dance* – rather than using the new material to produce a reconstruction.

Perhaps the reasons were less complicated. It is likely that they were not aware of the existence of the unknown drafts of *The Three Musketeers*, in contrast to the sketches which are available from the Royal College of Music collection. On the one hand, these drafts underscore that Malcolm Arnold did prepare sketches in ways that correspond to the typical and more realistic images of a composer: a composer working on his musical ideas, polishing motifs, carefully considering his inventions, and, as a final step, arranging his first drafts by rewriting a piano short score for the subsequent orchestration process.

On the other hand, in spite of their brevity, the sketches reveal that Arnold's inventions would easily have provided a suitable basis for further elaboration. The first step in his procedure, creating piano short scores for ballet compositions, is not out of character, as can be established by referring to the autographic piano short scores for *Electra* and *Sweeney Todd*. Arnold himself said he had used this procedure in the case of his earlier ballet, *Homage to the Queen*. In a letter addressed to David Webster, the general administrator of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, he pointed out:

“...Please forgive me for troubling you but I have been working on a ballet for the last eight weeks which is now complete and only remains to be orchestrated...As it will take all of my time for the next six weeks to orchestrate this ballet. I would be most grateful to receive a letter setting out the customary terms of agreement over a work like this...” (HARRIS/MEREDITH 2004:133).

Visitors to the premiere of *The Three Musketeers* were confronted with an arrangement that fulfilled the “requirements of the market” rather than the fragmented but original musical text. The arrangement was put together in a suite-like form and was advertised as an original ballet by Arnold.

The argument in defense of the current production, that a large part of Arnold's symphonic works were narrative in nature so that using a composite score of famous works was preferable to using the original sketches of the intended ballet, does not stand up over time.

To further argue that the brevity of the sketches made them inappropriate for a proper reconstruction or revision, in the form of a new orchestration by a competent composer, is also questionable. The existing original piano short scores (particells) for Arnold's earlier ballets could have assisted a composer in drawing conclusions about how Arnold sketched basic thematic ideas for a ballet, in order to process them into a full orchestral score.

Therefore, I believe that the sketches for Arnold's ballet *The Three Musketeers* can be viewed as complete in a thematic and compositional sense. Nothing would have prevented a later elaboration by Arnold. No ostensible "inauthenticity" or "poor quality" of material prevented Arnold from writing this ballet or beginning the actual orchestration process. Arnold simply decided not to take the next step because no immediate market demand, economic need or contractual necessity existed. He had not received a formal request; in fact, the project had, in a way, been thwarted by Arnold's own clumsy intervention.

In the following pages, I will review the RCM sketches, as well as Arnold's first drafts and his Ur-sketches. By comparing the musical Ur-substance to another Arnold ballet, *Homage to the Queen*, I would like to demonstrate that the thematic sketches of *The Three Musketeers* go entirely against prevailing opinion and perceptions concerning the normative formulae Arnold followed in each composition. In conclusion, the requirements for a reconstruction of the Ur setting will be described.

II

The Ur-sketch, in comparison to the RCM sketch, reveals a substantially briefer initial approach. Arnold often uses repeat signs (*Faulenzer, repeat slashes*), in order to avoid having to write out harmonic ostinato patterns. A few scribbles and corrections can be found; however, they are minimal, as Arnold tends to notate musical ideas in a very fluid way. Only when he is absolutely sure that he is pleased with an idea does he write it out. Except for a single piece, in which scribbles and corrections can be found, he composed 15 short character pieces, named in the Ur sketch as follows: 1. *Milady* 2. *Buckingham* 3. *Musketeer's Dance* 4. *Porthos* 5. *Athos* 6. *Rochefort* 7. *D'Artagnan?* 8. *Aramis* 9. *King* 10. *N.N., Moderato* 11. *Constance's Sad Dance* 12. *M. Bonacieux* 13. *One for All* 14. *D'Artagnan* 15. *Cardinal Richelieu* (also titled as *Cardinal, Buckingham, Pas de deux*).

The Musketeer's Dance reveals a clear physical image for an archetypal Malcolm Arnold piece; its clean typeface makes it easy to transcribe and reconstruct. At the beginning of the $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz, Arnold confronts us with an easy diatonic melody, supporting the primacy of the melody and creating a joyful and humorous impression with its dotted rhythms. At bar 6, Arnold adds a new component in the form of seventh chords accompanying the melody. At bar 14, he changes into $\frac{2}{4}$ time, creating the notion of a foxhunt, or a galloping horse, through his use of a roguish melody in the lower voice combined with quiet, and typically Arnold rhythms, in the higher voice.

The parallel motion of seventh chords is also a special stylistic means used by Arnold in almost every one of his orchestral compositions.

Musketeer's Dance

Malcolm Arnold

The image displays a musical score for 'Musketeer's Dance' by Malcolm Arnold, consisting of five systems of piano accompaniment in 3/4 time. The first system begins with a 'Vivace' tempo marking and a forte (*f*) dynamic. It features a melodic line in the right hand with a trill and a rhythmic bass line. The second system starts at measure 8 with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and includes a trill in the right hand. The third system begins at measure 14 and features a complex, rhythmic texture with many beamed notes. The fourth system starts at measure 19 and includes a triplet in the right hand and a 'sic?!' marking in the bass line. The fifth system begins at measure 23 and concludes with a triplet in the right hand and a final cadence in the bass line.

Figure 1: Transcription, based on the Ur sketch

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Arnold's idea for a thematic piece for the character of Rochefort has remained only a fragment; nevertheless, he sketched out his inspiration for a complete single melody composition in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. The sketch is of enormous informative value, giving us an understanding of his composition process.

He generated a tone row of the name R O C H E F O R T, using his chromatic letter notes alphabet. Figure 2 illustrates the Rochefort tone row, consisting of eight notes.

Nevertheless, he has not become a slave to his own system. While generating the letters "R" and "O" from the letter notes alphabet, the next letters, "C" and "H", have been equated with the notes from the normative tone scale. He completely renounces the "E" (French language, muted "e"). The letters "F", "O", "R", and "T" are again generated from the letter notes alphabet.

In order to musically 'round out' the subject, which has so far been marked by its frequent tone repetitions, he adds new complementary material which is notated a system lower than the Rochefort subject. This is not based on the letter notes alphabet at all. Rather, Arnold complements the Rochefort melody with the still-missing notes from the chromatic scale, creating a counterpole between the two materials.

The concurrent side effect becomes more visible. He stacks two different diatonic structures on top of one another: if the Rochefort melody is taken from the C-major Ionic scale, the second part represents the B-major scale, starting on its second note (therefore, one could describe it as "B Dorian").

It becomes obvious that Arnold has pre-posed this contrasting effect within the subject material by using these two scales, narrowly crossed (by only a semitone) with each other. He has, therefore, predetermined a compositional status with high meaning right from the start.

Flute or Piccolo

Oboe

1st Clar.

2nd Clar.

SAXOPHONOBLIGATO

Bassoon

Horns

1st Trump.

2nd Trump.

Tromb.

Drums Triangle Tam-tam etc.

Banjo

1st Violin and Oblig.

2nd Violin

Viola

Cello

Bass

Piano

Figure 2: Page 4 of the Ur sketch, Rochefort subject

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In the piece *Milady*, the compositional material can also be traced back to the letter notes alphabet. However, the system by no means overpowers Arnold. The first letter "M" corresponds to the expected note C, but already the letter "I" (which would have meant G sharp) is substituted with G, the latter more supportive of the tonality Arnold wishes to express. The next two notes, B and A, can be equated with the letter "L" (letter notes alphabet) and the letter "A" (onomatopoeic A=A); for the letter "D", he notates the two

possibilities in his sketch: D (onomatopoeic) or D sharp (letter notes alphabet); the final tone, B flat, stands for "Y" (*cf.* illustration).

Arnold then proceeds comparably to the Rochefort subject. He complements the material by using the full chromatic scale, and composes, in command of a twelve-tone row, a waltz in his own voice. Above all, the contrast between the melody voice and the accompanying chords is very interesting. He opposes the first five notes, virtually settled on white keys, with a highly chromatic and dissonant chord setting in the form of an ostinato, lasting two bars (bars 1-4). As soon as the tonal material of the melody line approaches the black keys, Arnold changes the tonal character of the accompanying chords. He then prefers substantially consonant sounds (for example, the C-minor seventh-ninth chord in bar 8).

Nevertheless, the switch between black and white keys – between upper and lower voice – occurs in an overlapping way; it does not start at the first initial black note, E flat, in bar 5. This may point back to bar 6: the two-bar ostinato has not yet been completed.

The idea that this black-and-white painting is a compositional coincidence seems doubtful. Although intuition might have played a role, Arnold always tends to create a balance between the diatonic and the chromatic. Arnold reveals this aesthetic view in his conversation with Murray Schafer in 1963. Acknowledging his preference for the diatonic system and seeing the danger of arbitrariness within the chromaticism of contemporary music, he tries to explain his own standpoint. Arnold's inclination to integrate elements, the diatonic and the chromatic, into his own approach to writing tunes now seems explicable. In order to create a balance within the logic of the melody, both elements are required:

Arnold: "A melody must have both strength and weakness if it is to be expressive. To my ear, the diatonic system affords the best opportunity for creating melodic ideas that possess both these features to a maximum degree. The further a melody moves away from its tonic, the weaker it becomes, and the more it needs the tonic to complement this weakness. This is what I have against atonal music: it leads to a state of musical meandering. This is of course personal to my ear, and is in no way a criticism of anyone who writes that way..." (SCHAFER 1963:153).

ANDANTINO

MILADY

9

1 2 3 4 5

6 7 8 (6) 9 10 11 12

(SECOND TIME ONLY)

BIRD AND PAUSE AL FINE

DA CAPO

figure 3: Page 9, excerpt from *Milady*, RCM sketch. (The numbering of the notes is added by the author.)
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The image shows a handwritten musical score for the Milady tone row. The score is written on multiple staves, each labeled with an instrument. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute or Piccolo, Oboe, 1st Clar., 2nd Clar., SAXOPHONES (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass), Bassoon, Horns, 1st Trump., 2nd Trump., Tromb., Drums (Triangle, Tam-tam, etc.), Banjo, 1st Violin and Oblig., 2nd Violin, Viola, Cello, Bass, and Piano. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are also handwritten annotations and corrections throughout the score, including the name 'MILADY' written vertically on the Saxophones staff and 'OR WINTER' written on the Bassoon staff. The score is divided into measures, with some measures containing complex rhythmic patterns and others containing simpler notes.

Figure 4: *Milady* tone row, excerpt from the Ur sketch (see “M.”)

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III

The presented sketches can probably only be referred to as principal theme overviews. Arnold does not outline any thematic structures or contrapuntal additions, but it is very likely that he would have added them in the final process of orchestration. By following a ‘mind

game', this point can be underscored further: if one compares his ballet *Homage to the Queen* to the sketches for *The Three Musketeers*, Arnold's composition procedure becomes obvious. The former ballet was composed in 1953 to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, and it too consists of short pieces with thematic as well as functional titles (*Earth*, and *Water*, and simply, *Pas de deux*). It is very easy to reduce the pieces from *Homage to the Queen* to their monothematic or dualistic main structures. If one does so, the fact that the sketches for *The Three Musketeers* appear pure or naïve no longer seems at all surprising.

But why should we only compare these two pieces? There are several reasons. The quoted letter, already mentioned, shows that Arnold did write piano short scores. The fact that, in the case of *Homage to the Queen*, the short scores no longer exist does not prohibit but rather supports the use of a methodical, comparative approach. Furthermore, the formal construction, the applied harmony, and the compositional core elements are, in many places, the same.

Both works have an introduction in which a fanfare-like melody is used, creating a majestic opening frame. While in *Homage to the Queen*, the long E-flat pedal note evokes vague associations with Mahler's 1st Symphony, in *The King*, Arnold uses pedal triads in the form of a tonic upper-fifth octavo setting (from bar 1 on, B flat, from bar 3 on, C). The triads work very effectively as accentuations. Possible support from the full orchestra apparatus is also indicated by the descant voice. It does not require a lot of imagination to see the bombastic orchestration Arnold could easily have applied.

The first eight bars are followed by a short transitional episode: interplay between the woodwinds and the brass. The woodwinds answer the brass section's fanfares in the same phraseology and in its reverse. From the letter A on, Arnold shows off: other wind fanfares are supported by accented quick figurative runs in the strings – but they serve no thematic function, and lead only to the march, beginning in letter B and marked *marziale*.

Hommage to the Queen Prelude and Opening Scene

M. Arnold

The image displays a musical score for 'Hommage to the Queen' by Malcolm Arnold. It is divided into two main sections: the initial fanfare and the marziale theme.

Initial Fanfare (Allegro moderato): This section begins with a piano (pp) dynamic. The score is written for strings and timpani (Str./Timp.), trumpets (Trump.), and horns (Horns.). The tempo is marked 'Allegro moderato'. The music features a fundamental bass line in the left hand, moving in a stepwise motion in minims. The right hand contains complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs.

Marziale (Marziale): This section is marked with a 'B' in a box and a 'Marziale' tempo. The dynamic is forte (f). The score is written for strings and woodwinds (Str./WW.), brass (Brass), and basses (Bassi). The music features a fundamental bass line in the left hand, moving in a stepwise motion in minims. The right hand contains complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs.

Figure 5: Transcription of *Hommage to the Queen*, initial fanfare (excerpt) and the marziale theme

Hommage to the Queen, op. 42

Music by Malcolm Arnold

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Both marches show very similar characteristics. Both have a fundamental bass, moving in a stepwise motion in minims, later in pulsating crotchets when a two-bar sequence

motif follows, based upon a simple descending major scale. The single sequence steps are chromatically descending in form, in bar 12 on F, in bar 14 on E, and in bar 16 on E flat. The subjects of both marches are based on diatonic triad notes of the respective beat harmony.

Rhythmically, the *Homage to the Queen* march may be more inventive because of its extremely dotted notes at the start, which later appear in a quaver movement and in a triplet movement at the end. However, in the *Homage to the Queen* march, one cannot find such an interesting syncopation effect as in *The King* march (cf. b. 18-19).

In *Homage to the Queen*, Arnold tends to combine harmonic chord progressions through the use of leading tones, e.g., the G-sharp-minor seventh chord will lead into a C seventh-ninth chord (leading tone procedure). In bar 5, and thereafter, we can find the same method; he applies either a leading tone continuation or a chromatic modulation (the D-flat chord is approached by the preceding C-major chord with its added major seventh).

In *The King* march, it is interesting to note how Arnold “dyes” the diatonic chord setting of the first part, sometimes enriched by seventh suspensions (bars 6-11), into a substantially more dissonant chord setting in the second part of the march. While the bass follows a sequence model (as already described), the melody and the rhythmic structure – consisting of mainly dotted notes in the first part of the march – are then more fully developed by Arnold.

The purpose of this analysis is to point out the common characteristics in the compositional annex of both ballets – consequently underscoring their compositional equivalence. It is, therefore, difficult to understand the reasons why almost no original material from *The Three Musketeers* was used in the current production.

MARCIA *Allegro* THE KING ⑥

The score is a handwritten sketch for a piece titled "THE KING" by RCM. It is marked "MARCIA" and "Allegro". The piece is in 4/4 time and consists of four systems of piano and right-hand parts. The first system includes markings for "SUA. I", "PED.", and asterisks. The second system includes "SUA", "f", "SEMPRE SUAS", and "PED.". The third system includes "TO CODA" and "Loco". The fourth system includes "CODA" and "DAL SECONDO". A large bracket on the right side of the score groups the second, third, and fourth systems together.

Figure 6: The King, RCM sketch. (The structural elements are similar to the opening scenes from Homage to the Queen.)

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IV

Given the scope of this study, not all pieces in the various sketches can be discussed in detail, but we can identify a basic trend. Malcolm Arnold's original compositional material, composed in a highly creative moment full of passion, could definitely serve as a basis for further elaboration, leading to a full ballet composition. In some places, he could have renounced the usual stereotypical patterns, for example in formal, rhythmic, or harmonic regards (*cf.* the much too frequent use of *da capo al coda/al segno*). Arnold did not work out the details; however, this is not surprising, since he was working on *sketches*.

Considering the fact that similar sketch material – in particular concerning Arnold's use of the letter notes alphabet – is available, and that Arnold once composed a full-length, three movement-long 7th Symphony by writing only five sketch pages, it is even more incomprehensible that the architects of the current *Three Musketeers* production did not think of careful reconstructing the original material.

Returning to Arnold, I conclude that the available sketch material should either be academically discussed or used by experienced composers to reconstruct the composer's vision of the original ballet. *The Three Musketeers*, in its current, distorted form caters only to the perceived desires of the audience. Reconstruction or supplementation techniques may help us to trace Arnold's true intentions.

One would almost certainly have to renounce the creation of another “full-length” Arnold work, with a faithfully reconstructed, yet still fragmentary, ballet. One could then receive a true insight into Arnold's thoughts, his hopes, and his longings.

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