

## Gary Kulesha

Gary Kulesha is one of Canada's most active and most visible musicians. Although principally a composer, he is also active as a pianist, conductor and teacher.

Kulesha's music has been commissioned, performed and recorded by musicians and ensembles all over the world. His *Angels* for marimba and tape has become a standard repertoire piece for percussionists and receives over a hundred performances per year. His works for Danish recorder virtuoso Michala Petri are toured by her throughout the world each year and have been recorded on RCA Red Seal; over 15,000 copies have been sold in Europe alone. Works such as *Mysterium Coniunctionis* for clarinet, bass clarinet and piano, and the Sonata for Horn, Tuba and Piano, are performed regularly in England and Europe and are often taught as part of performance curricula there. *Celebration Overture* is one of the most performed orchestral pieces written in Canada. *Four Fantastic Landscapes* has entered the repertoire of several noted pianists from Canada and Europe. Kulesha's first opera, *Red Emma*, was included in Opera America's list of "Operas which should be performed more often," beside works by Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein and Kurt Weill.

Gary Kulesha was born in Toronto, Canada, on 22 August 1954. His interest in music manifested itself in childhood. "My earliest experiences involved a mix of popular and classical music. My brother, who is four years older than me, studied classical piano and started to write music, so I sort of imitated him. At the same time, my uncle, who lived with us, listened almost exclusively to 'boogie-woogie' records. An *ostinato*-based piano style, it was the main precursor to rock 'n' roll. I became very enamoured of it and can remember teaching myself to play boogie-woogie standards on the piano. My uncle tried to play it but couldn't. I could. So the music of both my brother and my uncle was in the house and was very important to me before I did any studying. I was basically writing music from the age of about eight or nine onwards...Pop music and jazz have both been extremely important to me. I was in a lot of bands when I was young, and I think that music left an impact on me. I was involved in an incredible variety of pop music, not just one style. On top of that, I worked in a jazz band, Pete Scofield and the Young Canadians, for many years, both on electric bass and piano. So, there has been a substantial amount of non-classical content in my background as a musician."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Hopkins, "Interview with Gary Kulesha," *Canadian Winds: The Journal of the Canadian Band Association* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2010): 58-61.

Kulesha received his formal musical training at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto, where he earned an associate diploma in piano (1973), a licentiate diploma in music theory (1976) and associate and fellowship diplomas in music composition (1978). At the conservatory he was a pupil of William G. Andrews and Samuel Dolin. “I started studying piano when I was 13, but that lasted for only about a year and a half. I returned to it at about 16, when I began studies with William Andrews. He also taught me theory, and I did all of my rudiments with him. When I was about 17, he introduced me to Samuel Dolin, who became my single most important teacher, by a wide margin. He taught a course called the ARCT [Associate of the Royal Conservatory] in Composition. It was a very structured, quite complicated course, even more sophisticated than what we are teaching at the University of Toronto today...It was a very precise, strict approach to compositional training. You had to do it his way or you didn't do it at all. That was very important training for me. I completed the ARCT in the early '70s. I did not take the university route, which is again a little unusual. I do not regret that—it was the right decision for me. I received Canada Council support to go and live in London [UK] to study with John McCabe (1978-81), then in New York City to study with John Corigliano (1982).

“By then, my training was pretty much complete. The most important thing [Corigliano] helped me to understand is a master’s attitude to things, the way someone like Corigliano sees things, which was very valuable for me. We talked about music a great deal, too, as I did with John McCabe. I probably learned more about composition from McCabe than I did from Corigliano. But I learned more about being a composer from John Corigliano. His approach was very professional, and he had certain expectations about his own career and the proper way to treat performers, and so on. The way he saw the world of music was very valuable to me. There were some technical things as well, of course, but by then I didn’t need them nearly as much as I did five years earlier.”<sup>2</sup>

While establishing himself as a composer, Kulesha worked as a church organist and producer for CBC Radio in Winnipeg until 1977. During the 1980s he was resident conductor at the Stratford Festival and composed incidental music for a number of plays, including Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, *Measure for Measure* and *Henry VIII*, and Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *The Glass Menagerie*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Berton, “Composer trying to help young musicians,” *Toronto Star*, 17 June 1986.

As a conductor Kulesha was largely self-taught. “I began to conduct totally by accident. I have never taken a conducting lesson to this day. The reason I began was because my brother, who was so important to me when I was very young, was one of the people who created the Toronto Doctor's Orchestra, primarily comprised of medical students and physicians, some of which are formidably good players. He couldn't drive, so I had to drive him occasionally to the rehearsals. They were looking for a conductor, and they tried a number of people who were all sort of terrible.

“One day he said to me, ‘Why don't you try?’ I had never conducted before in my life, but I got up and discovered I was good at it. It came very naturally to me. The repertoire for the Doctor's Orchestra was all standard rep, which was again very good for me as a musician. From there I moved to the Scarborough Concert Band, where I got more regular experience working with a larger group. This led to other opportunities. For a while, I was the Assistant Conductor of the York Regional Orchestra, and I took the work wherever I could find it.

“...I used to teach conducting at the Royal Conservatory of Music, which was an interesting experience, because I had to learn to articulate all of the stuff I had never been taught myself. That conversion of practice into pedagogy was quite interesting for me. Startlingly, thirty years after I learned how to conduct myself, I came into contact with Kenneth Kiesler at the summer conducting program at the National Arts Centre. Kenneth is a brilliant conducting teacher. He teaches conducting exactly the way I had evolved my process of teaching, taken from my observations of what worked for me as a conductor. I think I must have arrived at some of the same conclusions, as so many of my ideas matched those of this great teacher.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1988 Kulesha was appointed Composer in Residence with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, a position he held until 1992. In 1993 he was appointed Composer in Residence with the Canadian Opera Company, a position he held until the end of 1995. *Red Emma* premiered on 28 November 1995.<sup>5</sup> On 1 September 1995 he was appointed Composer-Advisor to The Toronto Symphony Orchestra, where his duties include composing, conducting and advising on repertoire. In February 1998, the TSO premiered his Symphony for Two Conductors and Orchestra, with Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Gary Kulesha conducting.

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Hopkins, “Interview with Gary Kulesha.”

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Press, “Canadian Opera Company stages musical about anarchist,” 20 November 1995.

In winter of 1999, the TSO took his work *The Gates of Time* on their American tour. In February of 2000, the TSO premiered *The True Colour of the Sky* in Toronto, prior to taking it on their European tour. The TSO presented the First Symphony again in November of 2000 as part of the Massey Hall New Music Festival. The Symphony was awarded a prize at the Winnipeg Symphony New Music Festival in 2001 as the Best Canadian Orchestra Composition of the 1990s. The Symphony opened the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra's 2001-02 season, on a program with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

On 19 March 2002 Kulesha was awarded the first National Arts Centre Orchestra Composer Award, along with Alexina Louie and Denys Bouliane. This began a four-year relationship with the NACO and its Artistic Director, Pinchas Zuckerman.

In 1990 Kulesha was nominated for a Juno award for his Third Chamber Concerto. He was nominated again in 2000 for *The Book of Mirrors*. In 1986, he was named Composer of the Year by PROCANADA, the youngest composer ever so honored. Also in 1986, he represented Canada at the International Rostrum of Composers in Paris. In the summer of 1990, he was the first composer ever appointed to the position of Composer in Residence with the Festival of the Sound in Parry Sound, Ontario, returning annually to direct the Young Composers program at the Festival. In July 1998 Kulesha was, with Krzysztof Penderecki, one of the two Composers in Residence at the Banff Centre's summer session. In 2002 he came to the Banff Centre as a Fleck Fellow to direct the chamber orchestra program, returning again in 2004 and 2005.

Kulesha was Artistic Director of The Composers' Orchestra from 1987, stepping down in 2004 in favor of three young composers. His conducting activities are extensive, premiering literally hundreds of works. He has guest conducted frequently with several major orchestras throughout Canada and has recorded for radio and CD. Although he is well-known as a specialist in 20<sup>th</sup>-century music, his repertoire is extensive, ranging from little-known Baroque music through to the music of our time. He has conducted the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Nova Scotia, Calgary Philharmonic, Victoria Symphony, Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Ensemble, the Hannaford Street Silver Band and the Encounters Ensemble.

In November of 2000, Music Canada 2000 premiered his second opera, *The Last Duel*, written in collaboration with librettist Michael Albano.<sup>6</sup> The Toronto Symphony Orchestra premiered Kulesha's

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<sup>6</sup> Greg Quill, "Brand new opera is an affair of honour," *Toronto Star*, 2 November 2000.

Second Symphony in March 2005,<sup>7</sup> and the National Arts Centre Orchestra premiered his Third Symphony in May 2007. His Cello Concerto was premiered by soloist Shauna Rolston and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra in November 2006.<sup>8</sup>

Kulesha is the Theory and Composition Department Coordinator at the University of Toronto, where he has taught since 1991, and where he is also the Director of the Contemporary Music Ensemble.

Gary Kulesha lives in Toronto with his wife, composer Larysa Kuzmenko.

Kulesha's Third Chamber Concerto was premiered in Toronto on 31 January 1984.<sup>9</sup> The work is in three movements: the first is fast and involves the basic perfect/imperfect material. The second movement is a lyrical one, built upon a thematic fragment which appears in the first movement as a secondary idea. There is no break before the third movement, which is a fast finale involving all of the thematic materials. Ultimately, the work ends with the imperfect chord, because, as the alchemists understood quite well, mortal man can never be perfected into the image of Christ.

The basic concept of the piece involves the ancient art of alchemy, although not in the form in which it is most commonly known. Christian alchemists saw the process as a reflection of the attempt to transform ordinary mortal men into the image of the perfect Christ through His teaching. This aspect of alchemy is explored in the Third Chamber Concerto. The bass clarinet functions as the alchemist, and the accompanying woodwind octet is divided into two quartets, each of which have a different version of the same chord, one "perfect" (2 oboes, one clarinet and one horn), with perfect fifths and fourths, and one "imperfect" (one clarinet, 2 bassoons and one horn), with augmented and diminished intervals. These are heard immediately at the beginning, and the rest of the work presents the struggle between the two, with the alchemist attempting to fashion the imperfect into the perfect and occasionally losing control.

In November 1984 *Angels* for marimba and tape, written for Beverly Johnston, was premiered by her in Toronto. The idea behind the work was simple – the perception of an idea that angels in the Bible were both good and evil, perfectly mirroring human behavior. The composer suggests that the line between

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<sup>7</sup> In the last week of March 2005, Kulesha's Second Symphony was premiered by conductor Oliver Knussen and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra as part of the TSO's New Creations Festival.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Rival, "The Symphonic Alchemist," *Words and Music* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 14-16.

<sup>9</sup> This piece was commissioned by the Toronto Chamber Winds (Chris Weait, music director) through the Ontario Arts Council. It was first performed by soloist David Bourque, bass clarinet, with the composer conducting.

good and evil is blurred, and that it is often difficult to know the difference. He is fascinated by images that could be either funny or horrific, possibly both simultaneously. Much of this piece is dark and dramatic, and yet, many passages can be construed as funny in a very oblique and almost psychotic way.

According to Kulesha, a colleague complained that one of the major problems with the marimba was its inability to articulate inner voices, that is, dependence on mallets made it difficult to draw different colors from different registers simultaneously, a quality that pianists take for granted. The composer solved this by asking the player to use mallets of different types simultaneously, writing a demanding counterpoint. Later he took this concept a step further in his *Toccata for Percussion and Tape*, also for Johnston. Kulesha was the first composer to introduce this technique in a serious concert work, and he later incorporated it in several other pieces. After the successful presentation of this work, Kulesha wrote several other works featuring the marimba, including *Toccata*, *Jazz Music*, *Concerto for Marimba, Bass Clarinet and Small Orchestra*, and *Quintet-Sonata*.

*Angels* has been performed all over the world and has even been choreographed at New York City Ballet by John Alleyne.<sup>10</sup>

*Second Essay for Orchestra* was commissioned by Raffi Armenian and the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra for their 1984-85 concert season.<sup>11</sup> It was dedicated to the composer's wife, Larysa Kuzmenko, "because love is the most important of those things which make us human." The work was inspired by Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as well as by the film *Apocalypse Now*, which was derived by director Francis Ford Coppola from the novel. *Heart of Darkness* deals with good and evil in the human soul and concerns one man's discovery of the evil he has hidden deep inside himself. It is a powerful story of the ancient and primitive darkness in all people, even those ostensibly civilized. The work is in three sections: man's frustration with a universe he can never know completely, followed by man being drawn into the darkness. In the second section, the composer uses the techniques of African drumming to suggest the primitive nature of this darkness. But while Conrad's novel ends with Kurtz's famous line "The horror!" Kulesha chose to add a third section, which reaffirms humanity.

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<sup>10</sup> Anna Kisselgoff, "A Festival by Any Other Name," *New York Times*, 31 May 1992.

<sup>11</sup> The commission was made through the Ontario Arts Council and was premiered on 18 January 1985 at the Centre in the Square in Kitchener.

Nocturne for Chamber Orchestra is one of composer's most personal works.<sup>12</sup> It is based upon the poem "To Night" by Joseph Blanco White (1775-1841). The poem is an allegory, comparing our fear of death with early man's fear of nightfall. The poet asks, "is it not possible that, just as the feared fall of night actually opened wide beautiful new vistas for early man, might not the coming of death actually be the beginning of something very splendid?" A solo violin "asks the questions" in the piece and then blends back into the orchestra to assist in the "working out" of the answers. The return of the solo marks the end of the anguish and the beginning of acceptance. The work ends with an "opening out" of hope.

*Complex* for electric bass and tape was written during the last part of 1985 and early 1986 for Roberto Occhipinti. Because it is for electric bass, and because he himself used to play bass in several rock and jazz bands, Kulesha felt the piece should reflect this musical background. The work is divided into two sections, slow and fast. Although not programmatic, it is organized around a central idea, that of stress in the life of a professional musician. Loosely speaking, the first section reflects the inner process of music, the duality of expressivity and the discipline of practice. The second section puts the musician into a live performance, but a nightmarish one where the drummer randomly adds and drops beats from the basic time. In this second part, the bassist must continue to keep time despite the kaleidoscopic whirling of unpredictable rhythms all around him. There is a brief regression to the inner process, followed by a return to the live performance. The composer anticipated that this piece would be performed by a bassist familiar with pop styles, so there is an improvised solo in the second part, which must carry on despite the irregularity of the backing rhythm tracks.

*Lifesongs* was written during the summer and fall of 1985 and was commissioned by the Chamber Players of Toronto for soloist Maureen Forrester.<sup>13</sup> Kulesha sketched the text of *Lifesongs* in the spring of 1985. The text is a set of four poems, all dealing with one of the oldest of humanity's preoccupations—the need to believe in some kind of order and rational plan in a hostile world. The need to understand

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<sup>12</sup> This composition was written for the Canadian Contemporary Music Workshops and premiered by conductor Scott Irvine in Toronto in 1985.

<sup>13</sup> *Lifesongs* was premiered by the Chamber Players of Toronto with soloist Maureen Forrester and conducted by Agnes Grossmann in Markham, Ontario, on 18 November 1985.

why things are as they are, the need to perceive something rational in the senseless patterns of everyday life, is as basic among well-fed middle-class North Americans as it is among those people struggling for their physical survival.

The first poem concerns knowledge, “knowing” that there is a quest for truth, and that it is a solitary quest because each person needs different answers which he may or may not find. The second poem is addressed generally to loved ones, specifically to the composer’s wife Larysa. “Loving” is the most important of those things which are especially human; art is another. But while these things make existence more bearable, they do not provide any answers beyond themselves. The third poem deals with “dancing,” an abstraction of day-to-day life. We “know the steps” for living and often have to rely upon this learned stylization when the senselessness of life becomes unbearable. Finally, the fourth poem deals with “needing” answers and with the difficulty of accepting reality. The text quotes the Torah, the New Testament, the Koran and the Upanishads, all of which affirm that faith requires acceptance, even in the face of senseless reality. The ultimate faith is the ability to believe despite the world, not because of it.

Sonata for Cello and Piano, written for Vladimir Orlov in 1986, was the first large work of serious intent Kulesha wrote after the song cycle *Lifesongs*. *Lifesongs* was concerned with the need to believe; this Sonata is concerned with what happens when one finds nothing in which to believe. According to composer’s notes, while writing the work, he went through a period of depression, which emerges as the Third Movement, “Soliloquy with Memory.”

The first movement, “Musica Contra Machina,” presents first the emptiness of the cosmos, then the song of the individual contrasted with the machinery of the universe. The individual is eventually drawn into the workings, but finally moves again into nothingness. The second movement, “Scherzo,” is the brutal joke of existence in a meaningless world. After the Soliloquy, the fourth and final movement, “The Dance and the Persistence of Memory,” represents movement out of the self into the “dance” of the universe, with brief doubts, but always with the persistence of the things which matter to the individual. There are two musical quotes to represent these things: Beethoven’s Piano Sonata, op. 110, which appears twice as a representative of the art of music, and Larysa Kuzmenko's “Grimoire,” to represent the composer herself.



In his Third Piano Sonata<sup>14</sup> Kulesha became interested in the idea of working with strict classical forms in a slightly new way: an exploration of how the sonata-allegro form might work on an unconscious level. The work is in two large movements. The first movement consists of a slow introduction, a main subject derived from it, followed immediately and abruptly by a second idea. The development section is both organic and disjunctive, at times allowing logical transitions between ideas, at other times simply leaping to a new gesture. The recapitulation is abbreviated. The second movement begins with a simple “minimalist” theme which then undergoes transformation into more complicated forms. The composer wanted to parallel the movement from the so-called “oceanic” level of the unconscious to the total structuring of the superego. The work ends with a fugal working-out of the earlier material, representative of the highest level of consciousness, which, in a sense, is what the fugue is for music.

Serenade for String Orchestra<sup>15</sup> in four movements (Chorale, Scherzo, Romance, Finale) is an homage to great string pieces, such as the Tchaikovsky Serenade, Vaughn Williams’ Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis and the Barber Adagio. This music relies somewhat less on atonality than most of Kulesha’s work up to and since this piece. Although the overall aim of the piece is as traditional as the intent of Kulesha’s models for it, he attempted to blend certain elements into the language which were unthinkable in any of the earlier works, including tone clusters, pattern music and certain elements of popular music.

*Jazz Music*<sup>16</sup> for brass quintet, marimba and piano is intended as an homage to many of the jazz big bands, in particular, the Stan Kenton Band. The jazz influence is strongest in the first and second movements, although it is never obvious in the tonal and harmonic language of the work.

The first movement is built in the form of an arch, with a sharp rhythmic opening idea, followed by an equally rhythmic, but somewhat sparser second idea. In the middle section, the piano and marimba set up *ostinati* over which a trumpet and the trombone play solos. Although the solos are written out, the performers are free to improvise if they wish to do so. The movement “reverses” by reprising the second idea, then closes with the opening material.

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<sup>14</sup> Third Piano Sonata was written for Angela Hewitt to premiere at the Guelph Spring Festival in May 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Serenade for String Orchestra was commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra and was premiered by the MCO on 27 November 1985 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, conductor Simon Streatfeild.

<sup>16</sup> *Jazz Music* was written for the York University Faculty Brass Quintet and was premiered by them in Toronto, with Beverley Johnston playing marimba. Kulesha played the piano part.

The second movement is also a compressed arch, built on extremely austere material. The piano starts with a statement under clusters in the brass and marimba. The horn then states a more lyrical line, in which it is joined by tuba. The centre of the movement is an improvised piano solo of indeterminate length. This is followed by a fragment of the lyrical idea, and then the movement closes with the cluster and piano theme. The finale is loosely modelled on a rondo. The muscular opening idea leads into a similar first episode. Following a modified repeat of the opening, the marimba sets up an *ostinato* over which the piano states a static lyrical idea. The brass pick this up and elaborate on it extensively, becoming increasingly less lyrical. A *fugato* in the piano and marimba leads into a complex canon in inversion and diminution between tuba and trombone, which in turn leads into a section which opposes the two main ideas of the movement. A final statement of the opening leads into a virtuoso coda for the entire ensemble.

Concerto for Marimba, Bass Clarinet and Small Orchestra was the first work written as a result of Kulesha's tenure with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra as Composer in Residence. This piece had been influenced by Berg's Chamber Concerto. The choice of the solo instruments was not accidental. The bass clarinet is already a solo instrument of choice in European new music circles, because it can do most of what a normal clarinet can do and more. The marimba is just beginning to emerge as a solo instrument, but Kulesha believes that it will be one of the major solo instruments of the future because of the richness and variety of its sound (as compared to either a xylophone, which it resembles, or a vibraphone.)

The piece is in three or four movements, depending on how one interprets the opening minute-and-a-half. The concerto begins with a statement of basic material in both solo instruments. This is picked up by the orchestra and restated. The section closes with high strings chords, which set up the first movement proper. The entire first movement is for marimba only and orchestra. It is a set of variations on the opening material. The actual design of the variations is such that each one successively "admits" shorter note values, so that the overall effect is one of protracted acceleration. The movement ends in a flurry and leads directly into the solo marimba cadenza.

This in turn leads directly into the second movement, a *cantabile* rooted firmly in E-flat Major. This movement features bass clarinet and moves from the simplicity of the opening through increasingly dense and "neurotic" music to an extended dark passage for bass clarinet and strings, over which the

oboes and horns play freely in quasi-improvisational fashion. This in turn leads inevitably to the climactic return of the opening. The bass clarinet cadenza follows and leads directly to the finale, for both instruments and orchestra. The finale is based on the same material as the rest of the work, combining the materials of both the first two movements. The recurring motto of this movement is a unison line for the soloists. After a climax featuring the material of the second movement, the work ends with a bravura coda, followed by a series of “snapshots” of the entire work, viewed from the end. This work is not a double concerto in any way. Although there are two soloists, they rarely play together. And they frequently disappear into the orchestra as part of the texture. This *concertante* treatment of soloists has characterized much of Kulesha’s solo concerto writing.

*Secrets* for flute and piano was written in four days in 1980. The first two movements were written in one afternoon each, and the finale was written across one afternoon and one morning. According to the composer “such concentrated creativity is quite rare for me, but the music just seemed to flow.”<sup>17</sup>

This piece is in three movements. The first is quick and rhythmic, with interchanges of material between the flute and piano. The second is more pensive, even dark. The piano sets up a mood with parallel minor triads moving in steady 8th notes, and the piano left hand and flute state a somber theme. This is dispelled in the finale, by far the brightest of the movements, which features rhythmic piano *ostinati* and brilliant passage work in the flute. The title does have an extra-musical meaning which will remain, not surprisingly, a secret.

In his review of a recording of *Mysterium Coniunctionis* the critic Alex Ross wrote: “By far the best [work on the disc] is Gary Kulesha's *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, a five-movement, eighteen-minute suite for clarinet, bass, clarinet and piano. It’s one of the finest contemporary clarinet works I've come across...The disc is almost worth buying for this one work.”<sup>18</sup>

*Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1980) is scored for clarinet, bass clarinet and piano. “David Bourque and I had planned a recital of music for bass clarinet and piano and had invited Gwill Williams to join us on clarinet. I agreed to compose a new piece for this combination, to give us an ensemble piece to play. I managed to complete it roughly six hours before we premiered it.

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<sup>17</sup> Gary Kulesha’s web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.

<sup>18</sup> Alex Ross, “Crossroads, James Campbell, CENTREDISCS CMC-CD 4392,” *Fanfare*, March/April 1993.

“The title is taken from a book by Carl Jung, whose work has been a profound influence on me both artistically and personally. This particular book is concerned with the art of alchemy as an allegory for the search for the self and, by extension, the individual’s search for truth. The title means ‘mystery of conjunctions,’ and both the book and my piece are about the unification of diverse elements, symbolically in alchemical process, but functionally within the human psyche. I used the alchemical allegory again in 1983, in my Third Chamber Concerto, which also features the bass clarinet.”<sup>19</sup>

There are five sections played without a break in this piece; each is concerned with a different stage in the alchemical process. The first section, “Materia Prima,” presents the basic, raw materials. In the work these are a simple, four-note tune, articulated immediately by the clarinet, and a series of four chords stated by the piano at the end of the first section—D-flat Major, D minor and their relative dominants, A-flat Major and A Major. These materials provide the basis for the entire piece.

The second section, “Nigredo,” represents the next stage in the process of refinement. “Nigredo” means ‘black,’ and at this point, the alchemist has heated the material sufficiently to begin to draw off all the basic impurities. The middle section is “Albedo,” or ‘white,’ the first significant stage in the purification process. The fourth section is “Rosa Alba,” which means ‘red stone.’ This is the penultimate part of the process, and excitement is high. Musically, the piece has moved through all the four basic triads and has arrived at F Major/minor, the note F being the shared note between the fundamental chords of D-flat Major and D minor. The final section is totally and peacefully in F Major and is called “Philosopher’s Stone.” This is the ultimate stage in the alchemical process and represents the achievement of inner psychic coherence and strength.

In a review of Concerto for Recorder and Small Orchestra music critic Robert Everett Green wrote “...Lucky Toronto Symphony, to have a composer as smart, articulate and capable as Kulesha to provide it with music. Kulesha's Concerto was the best reason to attend [the] concert...It was simply the most interesting music on the programme.”<sup>20</sup>

In his notes about this piece Kulesha acknowledged: “I have been lucky enough over the years to compose music for some truly extraordinary performers. This has given me the luxury not just of some

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<sup>19</sup> Gary Kulesha’s web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.

<sup>20</sup> Review of a Toronto Symphony Orchestra concert, where pieces by Handel, Telemann, Kulesha and Walton were presented (Michala Petri, soloist, Hugh Wolff, conductor) in *The Globe and Mail*, 29 January 1994.

exceptional premieres, but also of having contact with the personalities of these remarkable people. There is no more stimulating experience for a composer than to work with performers of the caliber of Michala Petri.<sup>21</sup> I realized that, despite the fact that the recorder has been associated almost exclusively with Baroque music, it is in fact quite an interesting sounding instrument for contemporary music. There is a quality almost like a Japanese Shakuhachi's in its sound, and I admire this. I chose to write a work which, while it contains some subliminal suggestions of Baroque concerti, is totally contemporary. I counterpoint the solo with both the harpsichord, its traditional partner, and with a marimba, a genuinely contemporary instrument."<sup>22</sup>

The first movement is a passacaglia, with the theme first stated by the basses and cellos after a cadenza-like introduction from the recorder. This theme is always present through this very dark movement, which builds to a climax and then skulks away.

The second movement is quite lyrical and features the alto, or treble, recorder. A build up leads to a passage for very high violins and recorder alone, which in turn leads to a free exchange between the recorder and harpsichord over a throbbing repeated note in the violas, not unlike the slow movements of some of Vivaldi's recorder concerti.

The finale begins with great energy, which it sustains throughout. The repeated 16th-note figure which the violins begin immediately is present almost throughout the entire movement, which is a kind of *moto perpetuo*. A climax leads to an extended cadenza for the solo recorder, which includes some singing into the instrument while playing. This leads into the final section of the piece, a ghostly flickering of the opening material, the *moto perpetuo* and some references to traditional Baroque concerti. The work ends softly.

The Second Sonata for Piano was composed in 1980.<sup>23</sup> There is no subtext to this piece—it is a bravura work for solo piano in three movements, the first of which is rather like a set of variations on the opening material. The second relies on related material in the form of triads and is built almost like a passacaglia, with a static harmonic progression taking the place of a repeated theme. The finale is again

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<sup>21</sup> The concerto was premiered by Michala Petri on 5 February 1992 with the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Simon Streatfeild.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Kulesha's web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.

<sup>23</sup> The Sonata was commissioned by Christina Petrowska through the Ontario Arts Council. It was premiered by Larysa Kuzmenko in Edmonton in 1984. She also played the Toronto premiere in 1987 and has performed the work often.

built on the same material and is a fairly traditional toccata for piano. The work contains several quotes from Liszt, although only dedicated performers of Liszt could possibly recognize them all.

*Ghosts* is a work for bass clarinet, piano, tape and live electronics.<sup>24</sup> Few performers have premiered more of Kulesha's pieces than David Bourque. The title of this piece refers to several things, but primarily to the fact that flickering "ghosts" of all of the previous works Kulesha wrote for Bourque appear throughout the piece. The title also alludes to the fact that one summer, while they both worked at the Stratford Festival, the two musicians co-rented a haunted house to live in for the season. This work is in three connected sections, the middle of which is a discourse by the bass clarinet. The piano part is strictly accompaniment.

Of his Fifth Chamber Concerto<sup>25</sup> Kulesha said it: "fulfilled my desire to write a work exclusively for myself. By this I mean that I was feeling certain artistic needs immediately after completing my previous work, *The Midnight Road*, for the Toronto Symphony. That work was broad and quite tuneful. I saw it as something made out of wood, cherry or walnut. I felt the need to write something made out of steel and stone."<sup>26</sup>

The work is in three movements. It is impossible to characterize the first movement's tempo, since the oboe and the ensemble never play in the same tempo at the same time. They explore the same basic materials without metric synchronization. The second movement is quite slow at both ends, with a quicker middle section. A cadenza connects the second movement to the third, which is fast and very bravura for both the soloist and the ensemble. The work ends quietly, literally running out of notes.

The title of *The Midnight Road* is taken from a poem by Dylan Thomas. This piece is not programmatic and does not follow the course of the poem. It is intended to be atmospheric and is totally concerned with the working-out and development of the basic musical material. (Hence its more abstract subtitle, *Third Essay for Orchestra*.) However, the mood of the work is suggested by the imagery of the Thomas poem. In the broadest sense, it is about deception and the betrayal of innocence and about the darkest

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<sup>24</sup> This work was commissioned by David Bourque through the Canada Council and completed in 1988.

<sup>25</sup> This work began as part of his series of Chamber Concertos, which have all been works for ensemble with featured instruments. The last two were written for the Canadian Chamber Ensemble. The Fifth was written in 1990-91, when Kulesha was the Composer in Residence with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, of which the CCE is the core ensemble. The solo part was written for James Mason, the principal oboe of both the KWSO and the CCE. The premiere took place in Waterloo on 11 April 1991, with James Mason, the CCE and Kulesha conducting.

<sup>26</sup> Gary Kulesha's web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.

aspects of the human experience. In this way, it is closely related to *Second Essay for Orchestra*, which was loosely based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

The basic material of the entire piece is laid out immediately in a violin solo. The composer regards the solo violin as his own voice in one or two of his most personal works. In the context of a large orchestra, it is vulnerable, and yet determined, in an intensely human way. Here it asks the basic questions of the piece. The orchestra then picks up the ideas and works them through. There is a temporary resolution with the first climax, where the full brass section states the material as a chorale. This apparent harmony does not last long, and the work darkens again, gradually thickening and building towards a second climax. The preparation is interrupted, however, as in the Thomas poem, where the final image is of a threatening thunder storm which never breaks. Instead of the huge climax promised, the solo violin returns to re-ask the questions of the beginning, while the orchestral violins play crystalline and impersonal statements of the same material. The violin solo leads to the final and darkest statement by full orchestra. Unlike his *Second Essay for Orchestra*, which ends with an affirmation of humanity in the face of reality, *The Midnight Road* ends with darkness triumphant.

The impetus to write *Toccata for Percussion and Tape*<sup>27</sup> came from the fact that Kulesha's friend Beverley Johnston had just purchased a set of three tuned gongs from Germany. She asked him to write a work for her which would exploit them. According to composer, "they were pitched low D, F and C-sharp: thus the basic motivic material of the work was in place before I began to compose. In fact, this figure dominates the piece, right from the beginning. All of the material is concerned with working out the 'D minor' implications of these three notes and their various transpositions and inversions."<sup>28</sup>

The models for this work were actually both *Toccatas* and *Partitas* by J.S. Bach. Thus, the structure is not identical to any specific model. The closest it comes is to the opening *sinfonias* of the *Partitas*. There is a big, rhetorical statement for tape and percussion immediately, which works through a quiet transition to a middle section for marimba alone. This section is very difficult, involving four mallets, the outer two of which are harder than the middle two. Thus, at times, it sounds as though two marimbas are playing, one doing an inner *ostinato* and the other playing a dialogue between the outer voices.

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<sup>27</sup> *Toccata* was written for Beverley Johnston through an Ontario Arts Council commission, completed in 1988 and premiered on 22 January 1989 at the St. Lawrence Centre in Toronto.

<sup>28</sup> Gary Kulesha's web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.

The final section begins after a soft, almost Gregorian chant-like passage in the marimba. The entire final section is a fast toccata, with a middle section based on strict fugal procedure. The work ends with a reminiscence of the opening, followed by a hard and fast coda.

The original idea of *Shaman Songs*<sup>29</sup> involved using elements of Inuit culture in some way. Kulesha was initially hesitant about this, as there is an inherent earthiness in Inuit poetry and legend, which stands in fairly radical opposition to both his music and his process. After reading some Inuit poems in translation, he finally decided to use several as departure points and to write his own texts based upon them. Thus, the texts for *Shaman Songs* are not genuine Inuit poems, but rather liberal adaptations.

“The Inuit are a profoundly musical people,” wrote Kulesha in his comment about the piece, “although not in any way that is related to Western culture. I was surprised and intrigued to find that music is so completely integrated into their lives that they do virtually every activity with it...There is no attempt in *Shaman Songs* to use musical material which is in any way related to Inuit music. I have attempted in this piece, as I do in all my pieces, to synthesize several influences. These range from traditional choral writing to African drumming to Elliot Carter, György Ligeti and Alfred Schnittke. Like most young composers, I am no longer interested in writing things which are ‘new’ and ‘revolutionary.’ I am instead attempting to embrace many things in a powerful scene.”<sup>30</sup>

In autumn 2000 music publisher Boosey and Hawkes released *Shaman Songs* for SATB and chamber ensemble.

*Crossings* for children's choir and orchestra is in five movements, two of which are for orchestra without choir. Movement One, “Icebergs,” is a prelude. It suggests the strangeness of the North Atlantic crossing and the drama of encountering icebergs off the coast of the new world. Movement Two, “Ancient Land,” concerns the children of the native people dreaming about the coming of new children to their land. Dreaming is a recognized method of foretelling the future in a shamanic culture. The third movement, “Old World,” is a prayer from the children of the settlers who are about to embark on the perilous journey to the new land. Here again, the children suggest that they are having strange dreams

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<sup>29</sup> This piece was requested by James Campbell for the Festival of the Sound in 1990, but was actually commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

<sup>30</sup> Gary Kulesha's web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.



about strange children who make strange music. The European children also question, in simple and innocent ways, the preconceptions of their parents about what they will encounter in the new world.

Movement Four, “Journey,” is a dramatic depiction of the dangers and exhilaration of the sea voyage and ends with an evocation of the approach to the shores of the new land. Movement Five, “New World,” alternates between the voices of the native children and the voices of the newcomers, and is a celebration of what is possible when two strong cultures meet and mix. Throughout, the point of view is that of children, who are less susceptible to negative preconceptions than their elders.

Kulesha wrote *Two Pieces for Piano* in 1994, without a commission. Serialism in various forms had already been part of his vocabulary. The composer wrote these pieces to experiment with this particular form of serialism, influenced greatly by the work of the Darmstadt composers during the 1950s and '60s.

Integral serialism has always been in Kulesha’s vocabulary, although he had generally used it only for sections of pieces. The composer mentioned that he has “long suspected that a rigid serial approach would not yield good results in longer works, and these pieces confirm my suspicions.” Although the composer likes these brief studies very much, it is difficult for him to imagine a much longer work using this approach. As a result, these pieces stand outside the body of his work. “I expect their influence to continue to be heard in parts of my works in the future.”

*Sinfonia for Brass Band with Harp and Piano* is almost a symphony for brass, but falls short in duration and in the depth and variety of material. For the composer, a symphony is a psychological odyssey that ends in a different spiritual condition than it began. This three-movement work moves from dark and dense material, to the redemption of the finale and spans emotional conditions ranging from deep philosophical despair, through anger and guarded acceptance, to incompletely realized ecstasy.

The first movement is a complicated passacaglia in which the basic tune evolves through several statements to a suddenly optimistic statement towards the end of the movement. There is not enough energy to maintain this state of mind, however, and the movement sinks back to the sounds of the opening.

The second movement is a *moto perpetuo* scherzo. The “joke” is a grim one, however, and the music is relentlessly intense, with only brief instants of relaxation. The trio section is built on a constantly changing *ostinato* in the marimba. It ends with a series of huge chords, which are the only measures in the movement without sixteenth-note motion. The scherzo is recapitulated in shortened form, in a much more “chamber music” fashion, with thinner texture and important solo lines replacing the big unison statements of the first part of the movement.

The finale starts with a chorale and moves without stop into a gentle, undulating statement of a tune derived from the material of both the passacaglia and the scherzo. This serene beginning leads to an abrasive second idea, which in turn relaxes abruptly into the heart of the movement and the most personal statement of the entire piece, an extended euphonium solo. The undulations of the opening creep back in and, after being diverted briefly with second thoughts, the movement ends with a *tutti* statement of the opening sonorities of the work, modified by the journey taken.

Composers are often called upon to create works for specific functions on a program, and *Celebration Overture*<sup>31</sup> was designed to be a traditional overture, with all the traditional elements. It opens with a fiery flourish of activity, which leads to the first major tune of the piece. Throughout the work, melody is the major element. A small developmental section leads to a slow and very lyrical middle section. After a luxurious climax, the opening returns. The work ends as it began, with a string flourish, leading to the final F-Major chord.

The title *Concertante Music* refers to the fact that the soprano saxophone, while featured a great deal, is not actually a soloist. Many of the most important statements are given to the saxophone, and the second movement is designed as a soliloquy for it, but it is not a genuine soloist.

This work was one of many in which Kulesha attempted to absorb pattern music into his vocabulary. While he is not interested in “pure” pattern music, he has found it useful in creating rhythmic background textures, preferable in most ways to simple *ostinati*. This was the first piece in which Kulesha experimented with a technique that has grown in importance in his work over time, his first attempt to write music in which two “musics” existed simultaneously without having anything to do with each other. In several subsequent works, he grew bolder with this method. His Symphony (1997-

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<sup>31</sup> Kulesha composed *Celebration Overture* for the Etobicoke Philharmonic Orchestra, which premiered it under the baton of Eugene Kash in 1985.

98) goes further, using two conductors. He is very interested in “elastic” or relative time, although convinced that simultaneity is pointless when each individual element is so abstruse that the ear cannot perceive the unfolding of each stream of aural logic. In this piece, the simultaneous materials are extremely simple, really just two contrasting lines harmonized in block chords. In the Symphony, the musics are quite complex and atonal, although they are still designed to have clear individual characters.

The work has in five separate movements. It is slightly unusual in that it has only one slow movement. The first, third and fifth movements are fast and rhythmic. The third movement is a Scherzo and Trio, in which the Trio resembles a chorale. The second movement is a quasi-improvised soliloquy for the saxophone, with a static accompaniment. The fourth movement is a dance-like Minuet and Trio.

Concerto for Accordion was written for Joseph Macerollo and the Hannaford Street Silver Band, who premiered it, with the composer conducting, in early 1998. Kulesha says: “Among all of my works, this must be one of the strangest.”

The concerto is built in a fairly simple way: there are 5 movements (fast-slow-fast-slow-fast,) each of which is built on a “dramatic” concept. The first movement is labelled “Stubborn and awkward” and is a battle of will between the accordion and the brass band. The second movement is a chorale of a sort, with dense chordal passages being exchanged between the soloist and the band. A tolling bell signals the end of the movement. The third movement is a dramatic encounter, with explosive chords striving towards a resolution that never comes. The movement ends with repeated, shattering chords. The fourth movement is a soliloquy for the soloist, almost unaccompanied. The finale is a violent toccata, aggressive and obsessive.

The combination of accordion and brass band is odd, but Kulesha was very drawn to it right from the beginning. There are several similarities in the way the accordion and brass instruments make sound: they are all wind instruments. The accordion, despite its piano-like keyboard, can sustain and shape single sounds, exactly like a wind instrument. This quality is exploited throughout the piece.

Joe Macerollo has been the composer’s friend for over 20 years, and Kulesha felt that he had to write “something worthy to say for the accordion.” In the spring of 2000, the Hannaford Street Silver Band released a CD with Kulesha's Accordion Concerto, featuring Macerollo as soloist.

*Cages* for solo percussion and tape was composer's first electroacoustic piece since *Ghosts* in 1987. Although most of his work is in the area of acoustic music, Kulesha was actually an early adopter of contemporary computer music technology, having become involved in 1983. He has tried to keep current, and when the opportunity arose to write this piece, Kulesha agreed at least partly because he felt that the technology had become sophisticated enough to be used invisibly.

*Cages* in is three parts: metal, wood and skin. Each section uses percussion instruments of the given type, and each section's tape part relies on concrete sounds derived from these materials. Kulesha has always seen electroacoustic pieces as perfect for exploring the boundary between the conscious and unconscious mind. It is his intention that sounds can seem familiar, but somehow obscure, as though they are half heard or dreamt. The listener should occasionally be able to identify a sound definitely, but then lose his way in the obscuring processing. Ideally, *Cages* should be highly suggestive, even atmospheric, without being concrete or obvious. The first section explores metals, but not in a traditional way. Metal instruments tend to be the loudest, but this section exploits not just high volume, but extremely low dynamics as well. The second section relies on wood sounds, suggestive of more natural and organic images. The third relies on skinned drums and perhaps suggests that skin can be a kind of cage as well.<sup>32</sup>

Concerto for Strings, Harp and Percussion has some similarities to the *concerto grosso* format of the Baroque era. There are important solos for the principal players of each section. The continuo of the Baroque concerto is replaced with the combination of harp and mallet percussion. Generally, the outer movements are structured with solos, duets and trios, flanked by tutti statements of the basic themes. However, the second movement owes more allegiance to the symphony, as it is a fast scherzo, totally lacking in any references to the Baroque concerto. The third movement is a dark nocturne, featuring a cello solo.

The composer has always been interested in the similarities between Baroque music and jazz, and in this piece, he has attempted to find the middle ground. In a Baroque concerto, a solo is generally accompanied by a keyboard instrument playing chords and a cello playing a bass line. In jazz

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<sup>32</sup> On October 31 2003 Aiyun Huang premiered *Cages* for solo percussion and tape at the Music Gallery in Toronto.

improvisation, a solo is generally accompanied by a keyboard or guitar playing chords and a double bass playing a bass line. The *continuo* harpsichord and cello function very much like the rhythm section in a jazz band. In the Concerto, there is no Baroque music, and there is no jazz, but in the finale in particular, the duet between the two principal violins and the trio for principal viola, cello and bass demonstrate a quasi-Baroque counterpoint and rhythm accompanied by a quasi-jazz accompanying figure in the rhythm section. The harp and percussion are not just accompanying instruments, but they are also not soloists. They are not any more or less important than the principal players of the string sections.

The horn trio is by definition an acoustically imbalanced ensemble. No two instruments in this group actually balance each other, or blend with each other. While we have grown accustomed to the ensemble of violin with piano, they don't actually work together very well. The horn, similarly, blends well only in brass chamber music, or in orchestral music. Hence writing for this type of trio poses serious problems for the composer. Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano, like most of some of Kulesha's other chamber pieces, is cast in a traditional form. There are four movements, alternating slow, fast, slow and moderately fast. The first movement is a lyrical fantasy, featuring long lines in the horn and violin, floating on lingering harmonies in the piano. The composer was so inspired to write this movement that it took only three days, an unusually short period of time for more than three minutes of music. After a brief break, the second movement begins, a rhythmic scherzo with a lyrical middle section. This leads into a piano solo, which starts the third movement. A brief duet with violin leads to a violin cadenza, followed by a horn solo. The fourth movement begins immediately after this, in the piano.

Trio no. 2 was commissioned by The Gryphon Trio, which had championed Kulesha's first trio, written in 1991. For this reason he was delighted to write a new one just for them.<sup>33</sup>

Kulesha is passionate about chamber music. Although he has been closely associated with orchestras and conducting through most of his career, chamber music remains Kulesha's greatest source of joy. "Among the earliest music, I listened to as a child," admitted Kulesha, "were the great chamber works of Schubert, in particular, the 'Death and the Maiden' quartet, the great Quintet in C and, of course, the piano trios. Perhaps my fondness for Schubert's Trio in B flat explains why I love the piano trio format so much. I believe I actually prefer it to the string quartet."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> It was written during late 2000 and early 2001, and was premiered by the Gryphons in June 2001 at the new Assembly Hall concert venue in Etobicoke.

<sup>34</sup> Gary Kulesha's web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.

This is not to say that this particular trio sounds even remotely like anything by Schubert. It is cast in a traditional fast-slow-fast three-movement form, more like Haydn and Beethoven than Schubert, but the language of this piece can only have been spoken in our contemporary world. Kulesha believes that it is an artist's duty to help audiences explore contemporary experience. "We must speak about our world, not the world of the past, and we must speak in a language that can encompass the incredible range of emotions we experience. We live in a world which seems to oscillate wildly between violence and frustration, and compassion and tenderness. I want my music to speak to all these things and to help us accept that they are all part of us, no matter how much we would prefer to avoid confronting these things within ourselves."<sup>35</sup>

The first movement of the trio combines a fleeting, unsettled music with jagged and obsessive "head-banging" rhythms. The second is very lyrical, a flowing song tinged with sadness. The third is a true paean to the contemporary world and is deeply influenced by rhythm-and-blues pop music. "It may seem odd to speak of Schubert in the same breath as contemporary pop music, but these things, and many things between, are all part of me, and they are all necessary for any understanding of contemporary human experience."

A handful of traditional forms represent the ultimate challenges for a composer. "For me, these are the symphony, the violin concerto and the string quartet. While many people may believe that the opera is the most formidable of undertakings, in fact, the structure of an opera is largely determined by the libretto, and the division of an opera into scenes and set pieces makes it less difficult to control than the large-scale structure of the symphony. I have written two operas, one symphony and one violin concerto. One day, I will attempt a string quartet."<sup>36</sup>

"What makes a symphony?" asked the composer. "It is a spiritual journey in sound. Too often, composers (including some very great ones) have applied the term to any large orchestral form, but I believe that the title should be reserved for pieces which attempt to take the listener on a voyage of understanding. My symphony was brewing within me for 10 years. I had had the concept of an 'autobiography' symphony as early as 1988. This is not a programmatic work. It does not tell a clear story. Instead, it is a release of the memories and emotions which I have come to understand at the half-way point of my journey."

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Kulesha composed a String Quartet in 2014.

The first two movements are joined. Two conductors are necessary to coordinate the complex time relationships between sections of the orchestra— in fact, the first and second movements actually end at the same time. They contain significant solos for piano, violin, flute, trombone, double bass, bass clarinet and tuba, rather like significant individual voices speaking clearly out of the massed forces of the full orchestra. The third movement features solos for viola and English horn. The complicated interplay of tenderness and sorrow will be familiar to married people everywhere. In the finale, the second conductor reappears, because the tumultuous first part of the movement layers memories of all of the previous musical threads. Just at the point where the texture grows unbearably dense, huge waves sweep up and down the orchestra, washing away the accumulation of memory, clearing the way to the future. The ending is ambiguous and very quiet, stretching into silence.

This work was premiered by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, with Jukka-Pekka Saraste as principal conductor and Kulesha as second conductor, on 11 February 1998.

Kulesha's Violin Concerto no. 2 was written in 2002 as part of his four-year term as an Award Composer at the National Arts Centre Orchestra. Unlike his first violin concerto, this work is not scored for a large orchestra, but for an ensemble of soloists. Although the solo violin is clearly the focus of the piece, each of the players has featured passages, generally in a duet with the soloist. There are frequent sub-ensembles in the piece, where a small chamber group evolves within the overall group. In the finale in particular, the textures are designed around three quartets (flute + oboe + clarinet + bass clarinet, 2 bassoons + 2 horns and string quartet) with the marimba and bass assuming the role of continuo, or rhythm section. The composer conceived this piece as a hybrid of a chamber work and an orchestral work. The *tutti* passages are fully scored and orchestral in their weight, while much of the rest of the piece is far more transparent. The concerto is in four movements, with a dramatic and muscular first movement, a lyrical and expressive slow second movement, a scherzo-like third movement and a highly jazz-inflected finale.

The Violin Concerto was written for Gwen Hoebig and was commissioned by David Jaeger and the CBC. Kulesha began composing on 4 August 1998 and completed it on 20 February 1999. There are few things more daunting than composing a violin concerto. The symphony and string quartet are probably the only traditional forms which compare in terms of the intimidating existing repertoire and complexity of problems involved. Composers are all too often asked to write works like these when, for

artistic considerations, they may not actually be prepared to undertake them. Gwen Hoebig had played several of Kulesha's chamber works before she asked him to consider composing a violin concerto for her. "I consider Gwen to be one of the finest musicians I have ever known and felt quite flattered and honored to have been asked. I had just completed my Symphony and felt that the time was right for me to undertake this concerto."<sup>37</sup>

The work is cast in four movements, and each is developed in a similar fashion. In a way, this is a "chaconne concerto," because each movement is essentially a set of variations on a series of sonorities which are first heard in the cadenza-like opening. There is no chaconne theme, just a basic chord progression, which mutates across the course of the work. The sonorities are evolved from the very first sound heard, a rising arpeggio-like figure in the solo violin. The first movement is constructed from chords derived from this figure. It is a moderately slow movement, somewhat thoughtful and provocative. The second movement is, rather unexpectedly, a scherzo, in which a brittle, fragmentary theme is contrasted with a more lyrical second idea. The first two movements are complementary, almost as though the containment of the first movement must be answered with the edginess and hyper-activity of the second.

The third movement is a slow movement, which contrasts somber materials with more lyrical ones. At the climax, the solo violin gradually disappears into the overwhelming orchestral texture. The fourth movement is a clear finale. It is highly rhythmic, based largely on the timpani rhythm, which is heard at the beginning. The ending of the work attempts a resolution of the tonal tensions inherent in the opening figure of the piece.

In January 2000 Gwen Hoebig premiered Kulesha's Violin Concerto in Winnipeg, with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra conducted by Bramwell Tovey, as part of the WSO's New Music Festival.

Kulesha remains a prolific composer working in a broad variety of forms. On 20 July 2012 his Piano Quartet was premiered at the Seattle Chamber Music Festival. On 6 January 2015 the New Orford Quartet premiered his String Quartet in Toronto. On 29 March 2017 mezzo-soprano Krisztina Szabó and the National Arts Centre Orchestra, conducted by Olari Elts, premiered Kulesha's song cycle *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*. On 19 December 2017 the Montreal Symphony Orchestra conducted by Kent Nagano premiered *Le Canoe d'Écorce*, and on 10 March 2018, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra,

<sup>37</sup> Gary Kulesha's web site, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.garykulesha.com>.



conducted by Peter Oundjian, premiered Kulesha's Double Concerto, with soloists Jonathan Crow and Teng Li. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, on 28 April 2020 Kulesha premiered his Barcarolle for solo piano during an online concert presented by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, and on 22 October 2020 the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra and conductor Giordano Bellincampi premiered his Oboe Concerto with soloist Bede Hanley.

Gary Kulesha's abundant and multifaceted creative history ranges from early works influenced by jazz and pop, to modernist serial works, to lyrical chamber works which draw inspiration from a variety of philosophers and poets, to massive symphonies and operas. He stands out among Canadian composers in his tireless activity as composer, conductor and teacher. As his most requested and performed work, *Torque*, commissioned by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra in 2009, has become one of Canada's most popular orchestral works and has been performed by orchestras throughout Canada, and also in the United States and Israel. Gary Kulesha has proved to be one of Canada's most influential, innovative and successful musical figures.

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### For Orchestra

- Divertimento for String Orchestra (1975)
- Concerto for Brass Quintet, Strings and Piano, after Handel (1976)
- *Essay for Orchestra* (1977)
- *Second Essay for Orchestra* (1984)
- *Celebration Overture* (1985)
- Nocturne for Chamber Orchestra (1985)
- Serenade for String Orchestra (1985)
- *Journey into Sunrise*, for saxophone quintet and orchestra (1987)
- *Dreams* (1988)
- Concerto for Marimba, Bass Clarinet and Small Orchestra (1989)
- *The Midnight Road (Third Essay for Orchestra)* (1990)
- *The Gates of Time* (1991)
- Concerto for Recorder and Small Orchestra (1991)
- Symphony no. 1 (1997)
- Violin Concerto (1998)
- Partita for Piano and String Orchestra (1999)
- *The True Colour of the Sky* (1999)
- *Syllables of Unknown Meaning* (2000)
- Concerto for Strings, Harp and Percussion (2001)
- *The Rose*, companion piece to *Syllables of Unknown Meaning* (2002)
- Second Concerto for Violin and Chamber Orchestra (2002)
- Cello Concerto (2005)
- Symphony no. 2 (2005)
- *Fireworks and Procession* (2005)
- Symphony no. 3 (2006)
- *Torque* (2009)
- *Pan American Overture* (aka *Festival Overture* aka *Northern Lights Overture*; 2011)
- *Le Canoe d'Écorce* (2017)
- Double Concerto (2018)
- *Non-Destructive Classical Music* (2018)
- Oboe Concerto (2020)

### For Large Ensembles

- First Chamber Concerto (1981)
- Second Chamber Concerto, for solo trumpet, solo piano and wind ensemble (1982)

- Third Chamber Concerto, for bass clarinet concertante, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons and 2 horns (1983)
- Fourth Chamber Concerto, for brass and percussion concertante, woodwinds and strings (1988-89)
- Fifth Chamber Concerto, for solo oboe and thirteen players (1990-91)
- Concerto for Viola and Chamber Orchestra (1992)
- *Concertante Dances* (1993)
- Sinfonia for Brass Band, Piano and Harp (1995)
- Concerto for Accordion and Brass Band (1998)
- Sixth Chamber Concerto, for oboe, English horn, bassoon, contrabassoon, 2 violins, viola, cello and double bass (2002)
- Concerto for Trumpet, Horn, Trombone and Brass Band (2008)
- *Streets of Fire*, concerto for 2 trombones and wind orchestra (2019)

### **For Band and Wind Ensembles**

- *Stardrive* (March in F), for concert band (1974)
- Variations for Winds (1975)
- Divertimento for Concert Band (1976)
- Overture for Concert Band (1977, rev. 1983)
- Concerto for Tuba (1978-81)
- Ensembles for Winds (1979)
- March in B Flat for Concert Band (1979)
- Concertino for Flute and Wind Ensemble (1979)
- Two Pieces for Band (educational; 1983)
- *The Greatness of the New Found Night*, for large wind ensemble (2008)
- *The Confusion of Tongues*, for orchestral wind and percussion and large wind ensemble (2011)
- Dance Suite for Concert Band (2017)

### **Chamber Music**

- Trio for Violin, Viola and Cello (1971)
- Sonatina for Tuba and Piano (1972)
- *A Study in Time*, for tuba and piano (1972)
- “The Green Apple Two-Step,” for tuba and piano (1973)
- Divertimento for Brass Quintet (1973)
- Variations on a Theme by Paganini, for trumpet and piano (1974, rev. 1982)
- “Humoreske,” for tuba and piano (1974)
- “Burlesque for Tuba and Piano”
- Sonata for Horn, Tuba and Piano (1975)
- “Visions,” for tuba and piano (1975)

- *Three Lyric Pieces*, for recorder (or flute) and piano (or organ)
- Prelude and Fugue for Trumpet and Piano (1976)
- Bohemian Dance for Tuba and Piano (1976)
- Sonata for Tuba and Organ (1976)
- “Three Complacencies,” for bass clarinet and tuba (1976)
- Duo for Bass Clarinet and Piano (1977)
- Divertimento for Brass Quartet (or Quintet) (1977)
- Sonata for Trumpet, Tuba and Piano (1978)
- 3 Caprices for Solo Violin (1977-78)
- Trio for Flute, Cello and Piano (1979)
- *Concertante Music*, for soprano saxophone and woodwind quintet (1979)
- Suite for Two Trumpets (“The Grand Canyon”; 1979)
- *Attitudes*, for clarinet and piano (1980)
- *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, for clarinet, bass clarinet and piano (1980)
- Divertimento for Brass Trio (1980)
- Two Pieces for Brass Quintet (1980)
- *Secrets*, for flute and piano (1980)
- Song and Dance for Violin and Piano (1980)
- “Invocation and Ceremony,” for solo Saxophone (1981)
- Nocturne and Toccata for Piano and Percussion (1981)
- Passacaglia Cadenzas and Finale, for trumpet, tuba and piano (1981)
- Suite for Percussion Quartet (1981)
- *Encore and Reggae*, for marimba and tuba (1981)
- Second Suite for Two Trumpets (“Pike's Peak”; 1981)
- Capriccio for String Quartet (1982)
- *Festival Dances*, for accordion, viola, cello, bass and percussion (1982)
- *Pentagram*, for 5 trumpets (1982)
- Canticles for Brass Quintet and Organ (1982)
- 6 Bagatelles “from the Devil's Dictionary” for Woodwind Quintet (1971-93)
- Piece for Tuba and Piano (1983)
- *Fanfare for 10 Trumpets for Queen Elizabeth* (1984)
- *Jazz Music for Brass Quintet, Piano and Marimba* (1984)
- *The Emperor of Ice Cream*, for clarinet quartet (rev.1985)
- *Soundings for Brass* (1985)
- Sonata for Cello and Piano (1986/87)
- *Political Implications*, for clarinet quartet (1987)
- “I saw how strangely the planets gathered...” (1989)
- *Fantasia Quasi Una Sonata for Violin and Piano* (1991)
- Trio for Violin, Cello and Piano (1991)
- *A Book of Mirrors*, for two pianos and percussion (1992)
- “...and dark time flowed by her like a river...” for violin or viola or cello and Piano (1993)
- *Masks*, for recorder and guitar (1994)
- *Pro et Contra*, for violin and cello (1995)
- *Conceits*, for solo recorder (1995)

- Quintet-Sonata for Marimba and String Quartet (1996)
- Sextet for Flute, Oboe, Vibraphone, Piano, Violin and Cello (1998)
- Trio no. 2 for Violin, Piano and Cello (2000-01)
- Variations on a Theme by Benjamin Britten (2003)
- Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano (2004)
- “Without Fanfare,” for 4 trumpets (2006)
- *Sonatine pour Orgue* (2008)
- *Imaginary Birds*, for flute, oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet and piano (2008)
- “Dark City,” for 2 trumpets and piano (2010)
- Sonata for Bassoon and Piano (2011)
- *Zephyrs*, for 2 oboes and English horn (2011)
- Quartet for Piano and Strings (2012)
- Sonata for Flute and Piano (2013)
- *In Memoriam*, for violin and piano (2014)
- String Quartet (2014)
- Sonata for Trombone and Piano (2014)
- *Lyric Sonata for Oboe and Piano* (2016)

### **Electro-Acoustic Music**

- *Angels*, for marimba and tape (1983)
- *Complex*, for electric bass and tape (1986)
- *Demons*, for tuba and tape (1987-88)
- *Ghosts*, for bass clarinet, piano or vibraphone, tape and live electronics (1988)
- Toccata for Solo Percussion and Tape (1989)
- *Cages*, for solo percussion and tape (2004)

### **For Solo Piano**

- Piano Sonata no. 1 (1970)
- Three Sonatinas (1969-71)
- Sonata for Two Pianos (1970-72)
- “Monument,” for four hands (1978)
- *Aphorisms* (1978)
- Piano Sonata no. 2 (1980)
- Piano Sonata no. 3 (1986)
- *Mythologies*, for 2 pianos (1987)
- Two Pieces for Piano (1994)
- *Four Fantastic Landscapes* (1996)
- Fugue and Postlude (2007)

- Barcarolle (2020)

### **Incidental Music and Film Scores**

- *The Sandbox* (1972)
- *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1973)
- *...a film by...* (film score; 1975)
- *Pawn's Play* (film score; 1976)
- *All's Well That Ends Well* (1982, 1986)
- *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1982, 1984)
- *The Merchant of Venice* (1984)
- *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1984)
- *Measure for Measure* (1985)
- *The Glass Menagerie* (1985)
- *Henry VIII* (1986)
- *Nora* (1987)
- *Three Men on a Horse* (1987)
- *You Are Not Alone* (film score; 1991)
- *The Bacchae* (1993)

### **Opera**

- *Red Emma* (libretto by Carol Bolt; 1986-95)
- *The Last Duel* (libretto by Michael Albano; 1999-2000)

### **Vocal Music**

- Two Songs on texts by Emily Dickinson, for SATB:  
"Within my garden rides a bird" (1973, rev. 1979)  
"Most she touched me by her muteness" (1979)
- *Love Songs*, for voice and piano (text by composer; 1980)
- *Lifesongs*, for alto and string orchestra (text by composer; 1985)
- *Night Music*, for voice and piano (texts by William Shakespeare, Percy Bysshe Shelley and George Byron; 1987)
- *The Drift of Stars*, for children's choir and orchestra (text by composer; 1988)
- *Snake*, for bass baritone and chamber ensemble (text by D. H. Lawrence; 1988)
- *Four Canadian Folk Songs*, for voice and saxophone quintet (1989)
- *Shaman Songs*, for SATB, clarinet and string quartet (text by composer; 1990)
- *Wild Swans*, for SATB, harp, piano, marimba and cello (text by W.B. Yeats; 1991)

- “Blue Heron on Old Mill Bridge,” for soprano and piano (text by Raymond Souster; 2000)
- “Give Us Peace,” for 2 sopranos, 2 altos, 2 tenors and 2 basses (text by composer; 2002)
- *Night Watch*, for SATB and clarinet (text by Charles G.D. Roberts; 2003)
- “Darkness Comes,” for solo voice and piano (text by composer; 2008)
- *Wave*, for soprano and piano trio (text by Virginia Woolf; 2009)
- “We Have Fallen,” for SATB (text by Jalāl ad-Dīn Rumi, trans. Coleman Barkscity; 2010)
- *From the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (2017)