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Veljo Tormis,
Estonian Composer

PhD in Music

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July 2013

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people for the help and support I have received during the research and writing of this study. Firstly, to Meurig Bowen, Artistic Director of the Cheltenham International Music Festival, who set up my first meeting with Veljo Tormis in July 2008, and who gave me time with the composer before a pre-concert talk. Also to Katri Link at Cheltenham, who interpreted from Estonian into English at this initial meeting.

I am grateful to Prof. Graham Welch at the Department of Music Education, University of London, and to his colleagues at SEMPLRE who awarded me a Gerry Farrell Travelling Fellowship on two occasions, allowing me to travel to Estonia for ten days of research both in February 2010 and February 2011. The late Dr. Farrell had been a Lecturer in Ethnomusicology at City University, London, and it is particularly moving to have been a research student at his institution. During the research trips I was thankful to Evi Arujärv, Director of EMIK, the Estonian Music Information Centre in Tallinn, for material on the Estonian choral tradition and the Song Festivals as well as much information on Tormis's legacy to other composers.

I thank Dr. Gerhard Lock at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama who provided me with useful information on contemporary music in Estonia, from a composer's perspective. Thanks also to Ursula Roosman and the British Council in Estonia, who provided financial assistance for me to speak on the 'Tormis Legacy' at the 'Baltic Musics and Musicologies' Conference in Tallinn in February 2012. I am especially grateful to Prof. Urve Lippus, Professor of Ethnomusicology at the Estonian Academy and the foremost Tormis specialist, for details on Song Festivals, on *regilaul* and its role in the Academy's programme, and for her ongoing support and enthusiasm on many other issues. Also at the Academy, Zhanna Pärtlas,

Researcher at the Academy, provided insight into the unusual Setu polyphonic song tradition.

On my 2010 trip, Dr. Janika Kronberg, Director of the *Kirjandusmuuseum* [Estonian Literature Museum] in Tartu gave me a detailed tour of Herbert Tampere's *regilaul* [Estonian runic folk song] archives, with information on the methods of early folksong collection. Dr. Andreas Kuhn, Researcher at the Museum, facilitated a visit to a traditional Setu women's choir in the remote village of Obinitsa, even in Lent, when singing is traditionally discouraged. Amongst the Setu singers from the area, Dr. Helen Alumäe was a most helpful translator into English from Estonian. On my third trip, in February 2012, composer Pekka Jalkanen provided an evening of insight into Finnish runic song, shamanism and Tormis's relationship with these, in Jalkanen's snow-bound studio outside Helsinki. Veljo Tormis has given his time on many occasions to discuss his work and his teaching of *regilaul*. He has also provided personal 'commentaries' at concerts including the Estonian Men's Chorus, who unforgettably performed *Raua Needmine* [*Curse upon Iron*], *Piispa ja Pakana* [*The Bishop and the Pagan*] and *Piikse Litaania* [*Litany to Thunder*] at the Estonian Concert Hall in February 2010. Tormis has also provided me with many hard-to-find scores, recordings and DVDs, including *Eesti Ballaadid* [*Estonian Ballads*], which is not currently available commercially.

I am indebted to Prof. Mimi S. Daitz for her book, *Ancient Song Recovered: The Life and Music of Veljo Tormis* (New York: Pendragon, 2004). I have made constant and inevitable reference to this work. Dr. Daitz has also provided many helpful and friendly elucidations by email from New York, and in person at the Baltic Musics and Musicologies conference at Christ Church University, Canterbury, in May 2011, where together with Urve Lippus we formed a 'Tormis panel'.

Finally, great thanks to my supervisor at City University, London, Prof. Rhian Samuel, who has provided me with a personal impetus into research and whose critical eye and ear and encouraging suggestions have helped me to benefit the most from this study.

Note

This study presents titles of works in Estonian, followed by the English translation in square brackets on its first mention in each chapter. Translations of titles are also given in the bibliography.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this PhD submission is my own work.

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Mark Richard Lawrence

London, 15 July 2013

Abstract

The music of Veljo Tormis (b. 1930) became well-established in Estonia during the 1960s yet remained little known in the West during the Communist period. By incorporating traditional song, *regilaul*, into his works, Tormis's name became closely associated for Estonians with upholding a sense of national identity against the Soviet regime. It is his vast output of some 500 choral songs for which he is most immediately recognised; indeed, once *regilaul* had come to dominate the 'Tormis style', he dedicated himself almost exclusively to choral composition. This study, building on the work of Mimi Daitz and Urve Lippus, examines and contextualises Tormis's life and music, and considers the domination of *regilaul* on Tormis's vision. A postscript to the dissertation examines two of my own works for choir, *The Singing will never be done* (2006) and *The Ruin* (2012). It also explores the ways in which the second of these was influenced by Tormis's choral music in general, and by his landmark piece *Raua Needmine [Curse upon Iron]* (1972) in particular.

Preface

My first encounter with Tormis's music was by chance. In 1997 in my capacity as choral conductor I was granted a Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship to explore 'Children's Music on the Fringes of Europe', visiting conductors of children's choirs and exploring new repertoire for children in, amongst other countries, Finland and Estonia. On a search for choral music from the region, I discovered the CD album of music of this composer, then unknown to me. *Eepose Väljadel [Epic Fields]*, included the choral miniature '*O Mu Hella Eidekene*' [O my dear Gentle Mother] from *Kolm Laulu Eeposet [Three Songs from the Epic]*, an unaccompanied setting of a text from the Estonian epic poem, *Kalevipoeg*. This was an early work (1954) which won the First Prize of the Soviet Union Young Composers' Competition in 1962. The setting, with its characteristic rocking 5/8 rhythm, has become inextricably associated with the crossing of the Baltic by boat from Helsinki to Tallinn on which I first heard it. Using the simplest of means, Tormis here displays a mastery of choral technique in a short piece: a memorably expressive opening theme led by the altos, '*O mu helle eideke/ kes mind armul kasvatahid*' [O my gentle tender mother/you who lovingly did rear me], answered in alternating tonic and subdominant chords by the sopranos and tenors, the interest between the choral parts constantly yet subtly shifting. This choral miniature style struck me from the first hearing as revealing the individual voice of a composer who more than justified further exploration and research. The setting seems still more poignant on knowing that it was written in memory of Tormis's own mother. The seascape which I was viewing on hearing this work was coincidentally near the village of Kuusalu in which Tormis grew up; this was the sea which Tormis's family country house overlooks, and which divided Eastern from Western Europe (Finland from Estonia) for the 51 years of Communist

rule.

At the Cheltenham International Music Festival in 2008 I had the first opportunity to meet Tormis in person, at a concert given by the Estonian Chamber Choir in Tewkesbury Abbey, Gloucestershire. The composer came across as an impossibly tall yet slight, somewhat wiry, physical presence, with a restless energy. We spoke in German, a second language for both of us, and have used this whenever there has not been an English/Estonian speaker to hand. Tormis appears at first somewhat reserved in conversation; the reserve, however, subsides easily into passion and animation when he is talking about his music, and in particular, about ancient Estonian folksong or *regilaul*. This is a subject about which he feels so intensely that its promotion and preservation have become missions in their own right. This issue will be discussed alongside Tormis's music in this study.

Introduction

Veljo Tormis (b. 1930) has lived most of his life in Soviet Estonia and most of his works were written under this regime. However, he continued to compose for most of the first decade of independent Estonia, which was established in 1991, bringing his oeuvre to some 500 choral songs, a chamber opera, 35 film scores, a full length ballet-cantata, vocal and instrumental music, a few orchestral and solo vocal works, as well as music for school children. Since 2000, when he retired from composing, his musical activity has consisted of transcribing some earlier works, arranging for the translation of texts (generally into English), and teaching folk music classes at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama in Tallinn and at the Estonian Folk Institute in Viljandi. One of the most important Estonian composers of the latter part of the twentieth century, Tormis is generally acknowledged as being the one most closely associated with the maintenance of this people's Balto-Finnic identity.¹

During Soviet times, traditional music was one means of maintaining individuality. Mark Slobin points out that traditional music 'anchors individual memory and group consciousness, placing them out of the reach of the state.'² Thus, to many Estonians, Tormis is a more important figure than Arvo Pärt (b.1935), his one-time pupil, even though Pärt's music has, ever since the 1980s, made a far greater impression internationally.

The reception of Tormis and of his music, particularly in the earlier years, has been beset with misrepresentations. He was, for example, the victim of several

¹This first paragraph, summarising Tormis's work, formed the abstract for a paper which I presented, together with Mimi S. Daitz and musicologist Urve Lippus, at the Baltic Musics and Musicologies Conference in Canterbury, May 2011.

²Mark Slobin, *Retuning Culture, Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 4.

cases of erroneous labelling. After his first work to incorporate Balto-Finnic song, *Kihnu Pulmalaulud [Kihnu Island Wedding Songs]* (1959), he was categorised by the Soviets as a ‘folk-song composer’, a term which stuck, and which lost him 50% of his commission revenue (as an ‘arranger’ rather than ‘composer’) in his early years.³ Another error of labelling was that, because of his frequent use of short, repetitive units of musical material derived from Balto-Finnic folk song, often creating a hypnotic effect, Tormis was a ‘minimalist’ in the manner of Steve Reich or Philip Glass.

Tormis seems to have been under-represented in major texts on music of his time, especially in the earlier period. Boris Schwarz, in his excellent and detailed *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970*, for example, acknowledges Estonia to be a ‘singing land’ and gives extensive coverage again to Arvo Pärt (idiosyncratically spelt ‘Pyart’), yet dismisses Tormis with the brief phrase ‘apparently a post-Impressionist’.⁴ This study was written in 1972, the same year that *Raue Needmine [Curse Upon Iron]*, received its first performance, the one Tormis work that was to be performed and to become widely known outside Estonia, even in Communist times.

The principal aim of this dissertation is to examine Tormis’s life and work. The study falls into eight chapters, beginning with general background, then considering works representative of Tormis’s oeuvre placed in their immediate contexts. Subsequently, I consider Tormis’s legacy to other composers, his reputation as a ‘choral composer’ and the implications of this for his status in general.

³Author discussion with Urve Lippus, Professor of Musicology at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, Estonia, February 2011.

⁴Boris Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1970* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1972), p. 205.

Chapter 1 considers Estonia and its history, particularly its singing and choral traditions, and the mid-nineteenth century, pan-European, ‘National Awakening’ movement, in which folk music and literature played such a vital role. Out of this grew the highly significant five-yearly Estonian Song Festivals which have contributed so much to the country’s sense of national identity.⁵

Chapter 2 details Tormis’s early biography and influences, from his formative years in rural Estonia through his training in Moscow in the 1950s. It then recounts his 1962 visit to Hungary to meet Kodály, and the profound impression this made on his early choral writing. This resulted in four sets of miniatures, *Looduspildid [Nature Pictures]* (1964-1969) set to modern Estonian texts. Tormis’s ‘contemporary’ choral idiom is discussed in a selection of these short pieces, and the categories of his composing styles are defined according to the type of text on which they are based.

Chapter 3 provides an introduction to *regilaul*, the ancient runic folk song of Estonia. This song is of enormous importance to Estonian culture, to the Estonian sense of identity, and to the works of Tormis. This chapter examines the traditional role of the song, some of its regional variants (such as that of the Setumaa region of Estonia), its collection and revival.

Chapter 4 explores Tormis’s relationship with *regilaul*, from his encounter in its traditional setting, on the Estonian Island of Kihnu, and the resulting work, *Kihnu Pulmalaulud* (1959). This is followed by a discussion of ‘original composition’ versus ‘folk song arrangement’. The chapter then examines Tormis’s

⁵The ‘National Awakening’ describes the period following agrarian reform and the abolition of serfdom in Estonia in the mid nineteenth-century. The phenomenon occurred across Europe at a time of political upheaval in the wake of rapid industrialisation and mass migration to cities. Like their neighbours in Russia, Germany, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania, Estonians found a new self-confidence in their own identity, reflected in a growing awareness of, and pride in, their folk heritage. Harri Olt, *Estonian Music* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1980), pp. 16-21.

developing *regilaul* idiom in works between the years 1959-1972. Topics include Tormis's use of choral orchestration, a distinctive trait of his style and considered one of his greatest achievements. Examples studied are ‘*Jaanilaul*’ [‘St John’s Song’] from the large-scale choral cycle, *Eesti Kalendrilaulud [Estonian Calendar Songs]* (1969,) which Tormis considers to define his ‘mature style’, *Liivlaste Pärandus [Livonian Heritage]* (1970) and finally, the choral miniature ‘*Laevamäng*’ [‘Boat Game’] from *Kolm Eesti Mängulaulud [Three Estonian Game Songs]* (1972) which encapsulates his achievement in this idiom.

Chapter 5 discusses the two most important Tormis pieces of the next decade, works that are in many ways important statements of their time. *Raua Needmine* (1972), is a ritualistic piece combining old and new texts, with a strongly pacifist message in the midst of the Cold War. This is the most widely-performed of Tormis’s works and perhaps the work which makes the most immediate impact on non-Estonian audiences. The ballet-cantata *Eesti Ballaadid [Estonian Ballads]* (1980) is Tormis’s longest and most substantial, though little-performed work, drawing strongly on the tradition and rituals of *regilaul*. As such, it is of particular importance to Estonian identity.

Chapter 6, ‘Bridges of Song’ looks at the juxtaposition of material from different periods and cultures in some later Tormis works of the 1980s and 1990s, including *Laulusild [Bridge of Song]* (1981) and *Piispa ja Pakana [The Bishop and the Pagan]* (1995). The chapter also looks at the role of Latin in *Sampo Cuditur [Forging the Sampo]* (1997). The works are set against the background of the liberalisation of eastern Europe in the last years of the Soviet régime.

Chapter 7 considers the overarching issue of this study. Tormis displays great mastery as a ‘choral composer’, yet he almost entirely abandoned orchestral

and instrumental composition (except as accompaniment, and in a small number of film scores) for the last 35 years of his composing career. While his choral achievements have undoubtedly begun to be recognised more widely in the last decade or so, he has not yet achieved the recognition of his Estonian compatriot, Arvo Pärt, for example. Has the lack of instrumental and orchestral works contributed to this? What other factors might have played a role?⁶

Chapter 8 is based on my own research in discussion with composers and musicologists in Finland and Estonia. It looks at Tormis's legacy and his influence on a younger generation of composers in the Baltic region.

In the postscript I discuss two of my own compositions written during the course of doctoral study, *The Singing will never be done* (2006) and *The Ruin* (2012), the latter forming a particular link between Tormis's work and my own practice as a composer. Drawing on a text adapted from the Anglo Saxon poem, *The Ruin*, from the Exeter Book, is indebted particularly to Tormis's important work, *Raua Needmine*.

Sources for the broad historical context of this study include Archie Brown's *The Rise and Fall of Communism* and Victor Sebestyen's *Revolution 1989*, both recent texts which have provided invaluable insights into the processes of the Soviet régime and into the reasons for its gradual demise during the 1980s.⁷ Schwarz's text, and Laurel E. Fay's *Shostakovich – A Life* have provided useful information on the challenges faced by musicians under the communist regime.⁸ Richard Taruskin's *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutic Essays*

⁶In chapter 1, I note the parallels between Tormis and Cyrillus Kreek (1889-1962), an Estonian composer of the previous generation to Tormis, who also almost entirely abandoned instrumental and orchestral writing once he had found his voice as a prolific writer of choral music.

⁷Archie Brown, *The Rise and Fall of Communism* (London: Vintage, 2010); Victor Sebestyen, *Revolution 1989: The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire* (London: Phoenix, 2009).

⁸Schwarz, *Music*; Laurel E. Fay, *Shostakovich – A Life* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

has provided insight into the Russian tradition which so influenced the older generation of Estonian composers, while *New Music of the Nordic Countries* (ed. John D. White) has helped to place new Estonian music into the broader context of Finland and the Baltic States, as well as that of Nordic countries further afield; countries which share some aspects of Estonia's musical culture.⁹ *New Music* is a particularly important text examining the topics of ritual and shamanism, and Tormis's influences on composers outside Estonia.

A small volume by Finnish musicologists Jutta Jaakola and Aarne Toivenen, *Inspired by Tradition: Kalevala Poetry in Finnish Music*, has been invaluable in revealing how influential this epic poem has been, and continues to be, in forming Finnish identity, just as the *Kalevipoeg* has been for Estonians.¹⁰ In terms of folk music, Mark Slobin's *Retuning Culture* and Philip Bohlman's *The Music of European Nationalism* have helped to place in context traditional song and associated revival movements, fitting observations on Estonia into a broader picture.¹¹ As for Estonia itself, Toivo Raun's *Estonia and the Estonians* and Rein Taagepera's *Estonia: Return to Independence* have provided essential background and context on Estonian history and culture.¹²

There are few texts in English embracing Estonian music as a whole. Harry Olt's *Estonian Music*, published in English during Communist times (1980), gives an excellent overview of the Estonian composing tradition with much historical detail and context, particularly concerning the Song Festivals found in all three

⁹Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutic Essays*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); John D White (ed.), *New Music of the Nordic Countries* (New York: Pendragon, 2002).

¹⁰Jutta Jaakola and Arne Toivenen, *Inspired by Tradition: Kalevala Poetry in Finnish Music* (Helsinki: Finnish Music Information Centre, 2004).

¹¹Slobin, *Retuning Culture*; Philip Bohlman, *The Music of European Nationalism* (Santa Barbara: CLIO, 2004).

¹²Toivo Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians* (Stanford: Hoover Press, 1987, rev. 2001); Rein Taagepera, *Estonia: Return to Independence* (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1993).

Baltic States. However, this text inevitably omits the last two important decades of Tormis's composing career. Olt's summary of the most easily recognisable elements of Tormis's 'mature' choral style is invaluable: 'imitation, parallel chords in gradual, step-by-step motion, rhythmic variations with respect to the rhythm of the text, and monotonous repetitions around certain motifs'.¹³

For background sources relating to Balto-Finnic folk song, Urve Lippus has provided many useful texts. Lippus (b.1950) is a foremost specialist in both *regilaul* and the music of Tormis. Particularly useful is *Linear Musical Thinking* in which she examines the nature of *regilaul* and establishes a link with medieval plainsong.¹⁴ Also useful is her article, 'The Baltic Tradition of Runic Song'.¹⁵ Other notable articles include 'Language and Poetic Metre in *regilaul*' by Mari Sarv, which is included on the (infrequently updated) Tormis database, and articles by Tiia Järg.¹⁶

Despite his reluctance to talk about his music, Tormis himself has contributed a number of articles about folk song and a few articles and interviews about his own music. Many composers can be evasive and even self-contradictory when speaking about their own music, and Tormis is no exception. Yet essays such as '*Rahvalaul ja meie*' [Folksong and Us] are full of conviction regarding the role of folk song in Estonian culture, and Tormis's interview with Martin Anderson, 'We should know who we are' in *Tempo* is again revealing of the importance of traditional song in forging national identity.¹⁷ *Lauldud Sõna [The Word was Sung]*,

¹³Olt, *Estonian Music*, p.148.

¹⁴Urve Lippus, *Linear Musical Thinking*. (Helsinki: Studia Musicologica Universitatis Helsinkiensis VII, 1995).

¹⁵Urve Lippus, 'The Balto-Finnish tradition of Runic Song', www.tormis.ee accessed 3 June 2011.

¹⁶Mari Sarv, 'Language and Poetic Metre in *Regilaul*' www.tormis.ee accessed 20 August 2010; Tiia Järg, *Cyrillus Kreek: Helilooja* (Tallinn: Estonian Music Information Centre, 2003).

¹⁷Martin Anderson, "We Should Know Who We Are". Veljo Tormis in conversation'. *Tempo*, New Series, No. 211, Jan., 2000, pp. 24-27; Veljo Tormis, '*Rahvalaul ja Meie*' [Folksong

a collection of papers and essays by Lippus and Tormis, published in 2003 in a very limited edition (revised 2008), is a further invaluable source of material on *regilaul*, as well as on the major Tormis works, *Raua Needmine* and *Eesti Ballaadid*.¹⁸

While Arvo Pärt has been the subject of a notable text by Paul Hillier in the Oxford Studies of Composers series (1997) and of the recently published *Cambridge Companion* (2012) edited by Andrew Shenton, Tormis, despite a number of articles in US, European and UK journals (such as *Tempo*), has to date attracted no major textbook either in the UK or Europe.¹⁹ The first, and only (as at 2013), English language textbook on Tormis is by Mimi S. Daitz, former Professor of Musicology at CUNY (City University, New York). Daitz first encountered Tormis's music by chance when attending a Choral Symposium in Estonia in 1990, at the tail end of the Soviet era. She describes the profound impression made on herself, and on her choral conductor colleagues, on first hearing *Raua Needmine* performed live. This impelled her to return to Estonia for extended research periods in the 1990s. The result, *Ancient Song Recovered: The Life and Music of Veljo Tormis* (2004), is an exhaustive and enlightening study of the composer, his works and the context of his times. Daitz in particular highlights the importance of Tormis to the Estonian sense of identity during the Soviet period.

Since the 1990s, the pace of change has been rapid, and the transition of Estonia from Soviet Republic to western capitalist democracy is complete. This study attempts to supplement Daitz's comprehensive work by examining the influence of Tormis's music on some other composers in the Baltic region, as well

and Us]. First published in *Sirp ja Vasar*, July 16, 1972, reprinted as booklet (Tartu: Kirjandusmuuseum, 2007). Also reprinted in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, pp. 59-78.

¹⁸Urve Lippus and Veljo Tormis, *Lauldud Sõna [The Word was Sung]*. (Tallinn: Estonian Association of Bookbinders, 2003, revised in limited edition, 2008).

¹⁹Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt* (Oxford: OUP, 1997); Andrew Shenton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Arvo Pärt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

as looking at some of the other composers who influenced his style. This study views Tormis's work from the point of view of a composer, attempting to identify some elements of his choral technique which have been important for me personally, and which have influenced *The Ruin*.

My study has been informed by research carried out during four trips to Estonia and Finland, in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013.²⁰ During the first visit, in 2010, I met with Tormis and Lippus at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama in Tallinn. We discussed the influence of traditional Estonian song (*regilaul*) on Tormis's work, and attempted to put this into context within the strong musical, and particularly singing, traditions, of Estonia. I also visited Estonia's second city, Tartu, to study the archive collections of *regilaul* held at the *Kirjandusmuuseum* [Estonian Literary Museum] and witnessed at first hand the singing of a 'traditional' *Setu* choir in the Setumaa region. On the second trip, in February 2011, I investigated the influence of Tormis's music on other composers in the Baltic region, through discussion with Tormis himself and a number of musicologists. My findings were presented in a paper, 'Veljo Tormis: a legacy' at the 'Baltic Musics and Musicologies' conference at Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK, chaired by Daitz, and again in the 'New Approaches to Writing Music History' conference at the Estonian Academy in Tallinn, February 2012, on a third trip to Estonia, funded with the help of the British Council.

Not 'folk song composer' nor 'minimalist' nor 'post-Impressionist': it is hoped that this study will help place Tormis's music more accurately in the context of the music of its time.

²⁰Funded by a Gerry Farrell Travelling Fellowship. The 2010 trip is described in Appendix 3.

Chapter 1

Context: Estonia and its music

Tormis's approach to composition is strongly determined by his sense of Estonian nationality. This country's rich history is interwoven with its political past, when it has been ruled by many outside dictators, from the Livonian Knights of Germany to the Soviet taskmasters of the twentieth century. Music, and particularly singing, have, since the founding of the All-Estonia Song Festival in the mid nineteenth century, provided a vital means of upholding Estonian national identity against occupying powers. This first chapter, therefore, provides a context to the musical climate in which Tormis was raised.

Estonia is the most northerly of the three Baltic States. Bordered by Russia to the east and Latvia to the South, it is a small country, approximately the size of the Netherlands, with some 1.3 million inhabitants (fig. 1).¹ Finland, with which it bears many historic and cultural links, lies across the Baltic Sea, 80 kilometres to the north at the shortest crossing point from Tallinn to Helsinki. The country's northern and western landscape is characterised by low-lying land edged by sea, forests and lakes; in the south-east of the country, around the city of Tartu, there is an area of relatively hilly land. Much of the eastern border with Russia is delineated by the large inland water, Lake Peipsi.

For many periods in history, and particularly throughout the Soviet regime (1940-1991), despite its position on the axis between east and west, Estonia remained physically and politically isolated from the rest of Europe. This sense of isolation is

¹Unless otherwise stated, information in this chapter on Estonian history and geography is taken from Rein Taagepera, *Estonia* and Raun, *Estonia and the Estonians*.

Fig. 1. Map showing Estonia and surrounding countries²



still evident in the islands and coastal fringes, much of which were out of bounds during Communist times; indeed, a number of watchtowers still stand in these coastal areas, providing a reminder of former Soviet supremacy. The western coast of Estonia was viewed with anxiety by the Soviets as one of the weakest links in the ‘Iron Curtain’.³ This remoteness, in part geographic, in part, for a time, imposed, has, however, left a rich legacy both in the unspoilt natural environment and, despite the precipitous speed of ‘Westernisation’ over the last 20 years, in Estonia’s distinctive culture. This applies particularly to its tradition of singing, which is

²Map taken from Graham Smith (ed.), *The Baltic States: The Self-determination of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania* (London: Macmillan, 1994), xii.

³Author discussion with Evi Arujärv, Estonian Music Information Centre, February 2011.

discussed later in this chapter.

Estonians had lived through almost 800 years of occupation, under often cruelly oppressive systems. The country was conquered and Christianised by Livonian Knights from Germany in 1227 and remained under their rule until 1561, taking the name ‘Livonia’. Christianity arrived here almost last in Europe, just before Latvia.⁴ Under the Livonian regime, serfdom was introduced, while pre-existing Pagan customs became entwined with the Catholic cult of the saints, creating a hybrid or ‘syncretic’ folk tradition which survived in more remote areas into the early twentieth-century.⁵ The Hanseatic League played an important part in medieval Baltic trade and strongly influenced the architectural character of ports such as Tallinn, along the Baltic coast (fig. 2).⁶ After a period weakened by famine and plague, northern Estonia fell to Swedish rule, 1561-1710, during which period a strong dividing line was established between the Lutheran north and the Catholic south, the latter controlled by Poland. The first (initially Swedish-speaking) university was founded in Tartu in 1632. Under Peter the Great’s expansion plans, Estonia came under Russian rule in 1710, and remained so until 1860. At this time, Russian Orthodoxy was introduced. Under Russian rule, the historic port of Tallinn was overshadowed as a centre of Baltic commerce by the new city of St Petersburg. Each of the occupying powers left a legacy. By the late nineteenth century, Russian was still the official administrative language (it was to become so again under the Soviets), while the German language continued to dominate cultural and academic

⁴‘Livonia’ included parts of what are now Latvia and Lithuania. Raun, *Estonia*, pp.24-25.

⁵The ‘entwining’ of pagan and Catholic traditions is evidenced in the *regilaul* folk song tradition which was to provide material for many choral works by Tormis, including *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. Taagepera, *Estonia*, p. 19. Bohlman defines syncretism, a term often used by Tormis, as ‘hybridity resulting from combining elements that are largely compatible, for example, related languages or musical repertoires’. Bohlman, *The Music*, p. 361.

⁶Raun, *Estonia*, p. 23.

Fig. 2. Tallinn Old Town showing the medieval city walls and the tower of Oleviste Kirik (Church of St Olaf)⁷



life into the early twentieth century. The last of the ‘Baltic Germans’, originating in Livonian times, whose manor houses characterise the landscape of northern Estonia, were not evicted until the Russian Revolution of 1917. Only in 1919 did German finally secede to Estonian as the official language of Tartu University. German is, even today, spoken by many older Estonians, and is still to some extent associated with the former ruling classes.⁸ The term ‘*undeutsch*’ had been used by the German overlords to describe the indigenous Estonians. Meaning literally ‘non-German’, the term survived to retain the pejorative meaning of ‘uneducated’ or ‘ignorant.’⁹

Between 1918 and 1940, following the Treaty of Tartu, Estonia was granted a period of self-government, leading to what has come to be known as the ‘First

⁷Photo taken by the author, February 2010.

⁸Author discussion with Urve Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2011.

⁹This term was discussed in the paper presented by musicologist Anu Kõlar, ‘The Complex Story of Estonian Church Music in the 20th Century’ at the conference ‘New Approaches to Writing Music History’, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, 2-4 February 2012.

Independence'.¹⁰ Briefly under the Nazi regime in 1939, the country then fell under Stalin's 'Soviet Sphere of Influence' in 1940, a situation which was to last until the fall of Communism, which began in 1989.¹¹

Throughout Eastern Europe during this latter period, there were momentous political upheavals which were to change forever the face of Estonia and the other former Soviet states.¹² Landmarks in the process were Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev's '*Glasnost*' [Openness] initiative, which relaxed censorship in the Soviet Union and eased lines of communication with the West in the mid-1980s, and the so-called Velvet (or 'Gentle') Revolution of 1989, which saw the overthrow of the Communist Czech Government in favour of President Vaclav Havel. This event was followed by peaceful anti-Communist protests in Leipzig and other former East German cities, and the, by then inevitable, fall of the Berlin Wall, the physical and symbolic barrier between the 'two Europes', on 9 November 1989 (fig. 3).

Fig. 3. The Berlin Wall, breached on 9 November 1989¹³



¹⁰Taagepera, *Estonia*, p. 3.

¹¹Sebestyen, 1989, pp. 367-379.

¹²Brown, *The Rise*, pp. 522-548.

¹³Photo taken from Sebestyn, 1989, unnumbered page.

The following year, East and West Germany were re-united after 45 years and in 1991, Estonia, along with its neighbouring Baltic States, Latvia and Lithuania, became an independent republic. Finally restored to the status of a free state, Estonia achieved what has come to be known as its ‘Second Independence’.

The Estonian language belongs to the Finno-Ugric group, an offshoot of Indo-European. Perhaps surprisingly, it bears no resemblance to the Slavic or Germanic languages of its neighbours (Danish, German, Polish, Russian, Swedish, for example), nor to those of Latvia and Lithuania. Estonian and Finnish are, however, broadly speaking, mutually comprehensible and share distant, though no longer recognisable, roots with Hungarian.¹⁴ Although entirely phonetic, the Estonian language is grammatically complex. It has fourteen cases, with suffixes used in place of prepositions; these are added onto noun-stems which in turn have several, often irregular, forms. Estonian is characterised by a preponderance of long vowels which may appear daunting to Western Europeans. Compound words add a further degree of complexity, often resulting in long strings of seemingly unpronounceable vowels, a popular example being *õueaiaää* meaning ‘edge of the garden fence’ (the doubling of a vowel such as ‘ää’ simply indicates a lengthening of the sound).¹⁵ The meaning of a word can alter according to the length of the vowel or *phoneme*, vowels being classified as ‘short’, ‘long’ and ‘very long’.¹⁶ To the listener, the Estonian language, like Finnish, falls into a natural lilting metre of long and short syllables, with the stress falling on the first syllable. Also like Finnish, Estonian is a quantitative language, whose scansion is dependent on the duration of syllables; this contrasts

¹⁴Jaan Ross and Ilse Lehiste, ‘Trade-off and stress in Estonian folk song performance’. www.tormis.ee accessed 3 June 2012.

¹⁵Information obtained by the author from the Eesti Ajaloomuuseum [Estonian History Museum], Tallinn, February 2013.

¹⁶Lippus, ‘The Balto-Finnish Tradition’ www.tormis.ee accessed 20 June 2011.

with the syllable-stress of certain European languages such as English.¹⁷ As in Italian, the characteristic long vowels are highly conducive to singing, providing flowing vocal lines on open sounds.

The collecting of folk tales and folk songs played a vital role for Estonians in establishing a sense of national identity, as it did across Europe, including neighbouring Russia, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania. The process had begun as far back as the Enlightenment. As early as 1763, Bishop Thomas Percy had published and ‘improved’ *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* from the Icelandic.¹⁸ The first song book in Estonia, in Southern Estonian dialect, was published in 1759. Folk songs were collected by the highly influential German linguist and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), who had provided an early case for the preservation of a folk heritage already seen to be dying: ‘the remains of all living folk art are rapidly falling into oblivion.’¹⁹ Herder made collections of alliterative songs from Estonia as well as an extensive collection of folk songs from neighbouring Latvia.²⁰

In Germany, the brothers Grimm (Jakob and Wilhelm) created a linguistic landmark with the publication in 1812 of the cornucopia of folk tales, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen [Children’s and Household Tales]*, better known in the English-speaking world as *Grimms’ Fairy Tales*.²¹ *Des Knaben Wunderhorn [The Youth’s Magic Horn]*, a volume of folk poetry compiled by poets Ludwig Achim and Clemens Brentano, was published between 1805 and 1808 and was later to provide

¹⁷Veljo Tormis, ‘Some problems with that *regilaul*’ www.tormis.ee accessed 21 June 2010.

¹⁸Robert Dodsley (trans.), *Five Pieces of Runic Poetry* (London: R. and J. Dodsley, 1763).

¹⁹‘Die Reste aller lebendigen Volksdenkart rollen mit beschleunigtem Sturze in den Abgrund hinab’ (tr. author), quoted in Kevin C. Barnes ‘A Garland of Songs for a Nation of Singers: an Episode in the History of Russia, the Herderian Tradition and the Rise of Baltic Nationalism’. *Journal of the Royal Music Association*, 1471-6933, Volume 130, Issue 2, January 2005, pp. 197–235.

²⁰Johann Gottfried Herder, *Stimmen der Volken in Lieder* (1818) (Germany: Roderberg, 1978), discussed in Olt, *Estonian Music*, pp. 15-16.

²¹Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen [Grimms’ Fairy Tales]* (1812-14) (Berlin: Globus Verlag, 1910).

material for setting by many Romantic composers, perhaps most notably, Gustav Mahler.²² For Western Europeans, and Germans in particular, these early collections of folk songs seemed to encapsulate the simplicity and spontaneity of a peasant culture already seen to be in decline. They also served to counterbalance the fears associated with rapid urban expansion and industrialisation. By the late 18th century, collections were widely available in print, and increasingly sought after.²³

Like many European countries, Estonia was strongly influenced by the ‘National Awakening’ in the mid-nineteenth century, the point at which a sense of ‘Estonian’ national identity and official recognition of the Estonian language could first be said to have been established.²⁴ A crucial landmark was the publication of the Estonian epic, the *Kalevipoeg*, in 1862.²⁵ This folk poem was freely reconstructed and supplemented by Friedrich Kreutzwald following the model of Elias Lönnrot’s *Kalevala* (1835), the Finnish epic which had also been compiled from oral sources and translated into modern Finnish, using Homer’s *Odyssey* as a model (fig. 4).²⁶

The *Kalevala*, like the Greek epic, features heroic characters and is transcribed from an oral tradition. The Finnish and Estonian works, the *Kalevala* and *Kalevipoeg* also share many themes: the creation of the world, the personification of celestial bodies, heroic shamanistic central figures with magical powers (Väinämöinen/Kalevipoeg or ‘Son of Kalev’), supernatural transformations, a mythical blacksmith (who forges the *sampo*/a magic sword), and epic journeys to the underworld (*Tuonela* in Finnish; *Põrgu* in Estonian). Both works have provided an

²²Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn [The Youth's Magic Horn]*, ed., Heinz Rölleke (Stuttgart: Reklam, 1987); Gustav Mahler, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1899-1901) (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2001).

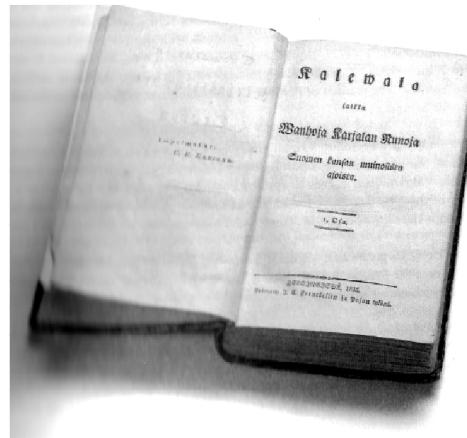
²³Barnes, ‘A Garland’.

²⁴The term ‘National Awakening’ is defined in the Introduction to this study.

²⁵Friedrich Kreutzwald, *Kalevipoeg* (1857-61) trans. W. F. Kirkby, as *The Hero of Esthonia*. In 2 volumes. (London: John C. Nimmo, 1895). There exists to date no modern English translation of this work (author’s note).

²⁶Homer, *Odyssey*, trans. E. V. Rieu. (London: Penguin, 1988).

Fig. 4. Elias Lönnrot's first edition of the *Kalevala*, 1835²⁷



important impetus for many writers, artists and composers from the Baltic region from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Sibelius being a notable example.²⁸

The early twentieth century saw the beginning of the systematic collecting and cataloguing of folk songs, a field to which Hungarian composers Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) and Béla Bartók (1881-1945) made a vital contribution. Bartók had first encountered folk music through gypsy bands playing *czardas* and *maygars* as they visited Budapest during his childhood, and recognised the need to make a clear distinction between truly *indigenous* folk music and the romantic imitations of *Volkstümlieder* ['songs in folk song style'] of the Germanic former overlords of Hungary, which he found 'trivial.' He declared in 1905 that his mission was 'to search for the music of the agrarian peasantry which was up till then completely

²⁷Photo taken from Jaakola and Toivenen, *Inspired*, p.21.

²⁸Sibelius's *The Swan of Tuonela* is an example (*Tuonela* is the 'Underworld' in the *Kalevala* epic). Jean Sibelius, *The Swan of Tuonela* (1895) (Moscow: Muzgiz, 1960). In Finland, the best-known visual artist to use *Kalevala* themes and characters was Akseli Kallen-Gallela. Heikki Kirkinen and Hannes Silvo, *The Kalevala: an epic of Finland and all Mankind* (Helsinki: Finnish-American Cultural Institute, 1985), p. 38. Amongst later composers, Kalevali Aho, Olli Kortekangas and Tapio Tuomela. Kimmo Korhonen, *Finnish Composers since the 1960s* (Helsinki: Finnish Music Information Centre, 1995), pp. 103-4.

unexplored'.²⁹ The composers' work, strengthened by Kodály's own specialist doctoral research into Folklore and Linguistics, might be considered the first truly 'scientific' study of folksong. Under their discipline, every musical nuance of a song was precisely noted down, and songs were methodically catalogued according to genre and musical characteristics. Bartók and Kodály travelled extensively between 1906 and 1918, taking in Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, and after 1918, Turkey and North Africa. In the early stages, as in folk song collection elsewhere, they focussed on texts rather than music, but later work involved meticulous melodic transcriptions (see fig. 5). Bartók attached enormous value to the folk music he encountered:

[I]t is as much a natural product as are the various forms of natural and vegetable life. In their small way, they are as perfect as the grandest masterpieces of musical art.³⁰

A crucial development in folk song collection was the invention of the phonograph, which became widely available from the late-nineteenth century. Additionally, the invention of the *portable* wax cylinder recorder enabled travel to more remote areas where folk song was most likely still to be extant (fig. 6). This technology brought an invaluable new perspective to collection. No longer bound by a single hearing, transcribers were now able to achieve great accuracy through repeated scrutiny of the original. More significantly still, it was now possible to disseminate performance of the music, taking it beyond its localised setting.³¹

²⁹Stephen Erdely, 'Bartók and Folk Music' in Amanda Bayley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bartók* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 27.

³⁰Erdely, 'Bartók' p.27.

³¹However, Bohlman calls this 'the technologising of oral tradition.' Philip Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World* (Bloomington: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.66. There is no doubt that reconstructing traditional performance from recordings 'frozen in time' is in many ways the antithesis of the 'living tradition' of folk music, although this is the practice of *regilaul* teaching, including that adopted by Tormis. Author discussion with Tormis, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2010.

Fig. 5. Turkish folk song transcribed by Bartók during field research in 1936



Fig. 6. Portable wax cylinder recorder as used by Estonian folksong collectors in the early 20th century³²



The first collections of Estonian alliterative folk songs, or *regilaul*, were made by nationalist folklorist Jakob Hurt; later collections were made by folklorist and linguist Oskar Kallas.³³ There followed the first formal academic study of *regilaul* in 1910: a doctoral dissertation by the Finnish composer and ethnomusicologist, Armas Launis,

³²Photo taken by the author at the Kirjandusmuuseum [Estonian Literature Museum], Tartu, February 2010.

³³Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.45.

whose research stretched to Lapland and Karelia as well as Estonia itself.³⁴ Large collections of songs were made by musicologists, who often worked alongside student collectors on their field trips. Volumes were catalogued and archived at the Kirjandusmuuseum in Tartu.

The earliest field recordings in Estonia date back to 1912, but by 1930 collection had gained impetus through the work of the Estonian folklorist and musicologist duo, Herbert and Erna Tampere, who collated and edited the material in the five volumes, *Eesti Rahvalaulu Viisidega [Estonian Folksongs with Notations]* between 1956 and 1965.³⁵ Herbert Tampere played an important part in bringing *regilaul* to the general public through presenting a radio series on Estonian folk music in the late 1960s. He also organised concert performances of *regilaul* at the Music and Theatre Museum in Tallinn in the last years of his life. An anthology of his original field recordings of *regilaul* was first published in 1967, and a second followed in 1970. An example of the Tamperes' transcriptions is given in fig. 7.

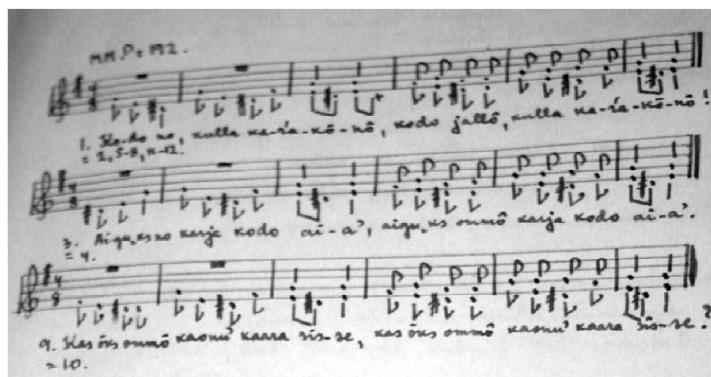
Alongside the folk music tradition, Estonia, in common with its Baltic neighbours, Latvia and Lithuania, has a strong tradition of choral singing which dates back to the period of the Germanic overlords. In the eighteenth century, almost every Lutheran church was said to have had not only its German clergy but a German organ.³⁶ With it came an organist of German descent and training, ensuring that the congregation was immersed in a staple repertoire of Bach organ works and Lutheran hymns. The singing tradition was further influenced in the eighteenth century by the

³⁴Similarly, large collections of Russian folk songs are held in the University archives of St Petersburg. Frances Dullaghan, 'Galina Ustvol'skaya, Her Heritage and Her Voice', unpublished PhD Dissertation. City University, London, 2001, p.37.

³⁵Herbert and Erna Tampere (eds.) *Eesti Rahvamuusika Antoloogia [Anthology of Estonian Folk Music]*. Field recordings remastered as 3-CD set, with booklet containing transcriptions of *regilaul* by the Tamperes, and CD sleeve note by Janika Oras. (Tartu: Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum, 2003). ISSN 1736-0528, EMKCD 005.

³⁶Daitz, *Ancient Song*, pp. 79 and 91.

Fig. 7. *Regilaul* transcribed by Herbert and Erna Tampere from their own field recordings³⁷



Pietists, missionaries of the Herrnhut Movement, a branch of the Lutheran Church originating in northern Germany.³⁸ The Pietists played a significant role in Estonia's cultural development, and especially its nascent choral tradition, introducing literacy and congregational hymn-singing, in return for the abandonment of animist religious beliefs with their closely-associated pagan traditions of folk song and dance.³⁹

The 'Laulupidu' [All-Estonia Song Festival, literally 'Song Party'], which built on the Estonian singing tradition, has played a crucial role in musical life and in the formation of Estonian national identity since its inception during the National Awakening in 1869.⁴⁰ This highly competitive, five-yearly festival, (a tradition shared also by Latvia and Lithuania), is somewhat akin to the Welsh *Eisteddfod*. It was founded on a Swiss model developed by, among others, the educationalist Johann Pestalozzi, in the belief that choral singing was an essential part of the moral

³⁷Photo taken by the author at the *Kirjandusmuuseum*, Tartu, February 2010.

³⁸Ringo Ringvee, 'The Moravian Movement' in 'Estonica: an Online Encyclopedia about Estonia', www.estonica.org accessed 12 November 2010.

³⁹*Regilaul* is discussed in Chapter 3.

⁴⁰The Russians (and the Soviets later) were never comfortable with the idea of the Song Festivals. The first festival in 1869, was only permitted by the authorities in the guise of a '50th anniversary celebration of the liberation of the Estonians from serfdom'. Olt, *Estonian Music*, p. 21.

education of both children and adults.⁴¹ In the early Song Festivals, at a time when the population was still predominantly rural, singers would have deserted their farm work at the busiest point in the farming year, testimony to the great significance which the event gained within the Estonian calendar.⁴² The arrival of the railways in the mid-nineteenth century made possible the mass transportation of singers to such events.⁴³

The first Song Festivals were held in Tartu, the Estonian city most associated with the Estonian nationalist movement. The Festival moved to Tallinn in 1880 and, in 1960, to the purpose-built ‘*Lauluväljak*’ [Song Bowl], a huge shell-shaped stage built in a natural amphitheatre just outside the city, able to accommodate up to 30,000 participants (fig. 8).⁴⁴ The Festival continued throughout the years of the Communist regime, even though the Soviets were wary of its potential as a platform for demonstrations of dissent. For this reason, choirs were required to include propagandist texts to counterbalance those of a more nationalist flavour.

The first festivals involved the massed singing of the core Western choral repertoire, such as Mozart’s *Ave Verum Corpus* and Beethoven’s *Die Ehre Gottes aus der Natur*.⁴⁵ By 1891 repertoire had, however, expanded to accommodate Estonian folksongs, harmonised and arranged for choirs in a traditional Western choral idiom. Subsequent festivals increasingly incorporated works especially written. An important example is the nationalist song, ‘*Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm*’ [‘My Homeland is all my Joy’]. This text, by nationalist poet Lydia Koidula, was set to music firstly

⁴¹Barnes, ‘A Garland’, p.200.

⁴²Olt, *Estonian Music*, p.21.

⁴³Bohlman, *The Study*, p.113.

⁴⁴The Estonian Ministry for Culture puts a considerable amount of funding into Song Festivals, and there exists an entire government department to run these events. The Song Festival tradition is shared by the neighbouring Baltic States of Latvia and Lithuania. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.85.

⁴⁵Olt, *Estonian Music*, p. 26.

Fig. 8. The 100th All-Estonia Song Festival in the Tallinn ‘Song Bowl’, 1969⁴⁶



by Aleksander Kunileid in 1869, and subsequently by Gustav Ernesaks, in a version which has come to be accepted as the ‘unofficial Estonian national anthem’.⁴⁷

A gathering in July 1988 provided an important landmark in Estonia’s recent history. The song, ‘*Mu Isaama*’, which had been suppressed by the Soviets for its nationalist content, welled up spontaneously from a crowd of 300,000 singers (that is, almost a third of Estonia’s population). A popular anecdote from the time describes how the Soviet guards turned their backs on the crowd, allowing the singing to continue unchallenged. Given the emotional nature of the event, it is easy to imagine the impact on that occasion of Ernesaks’ melody, with its wide melodic range, surging up from its low opening register (A below middle C) to its climax on top F# (ex. 1).

The Song Festival of 1988 represented, then, an important landmark for Estonians on their long road to independence. In this period, a ‘Singing Revolution’ was taking place, a term describing the non-violent drive for self-determination which

⁴⁶Olt, *Estonian Music*, Appendix II, unnumbered page.

⁴⁷Ernesaks was the founder of RAM (the Estonian Male Voice Chorus). Urve Lippus described the song thus in a conversation with this author in February 2010.

Ex. 1. Ernesaks. ‘Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm’,⁴⁸

The musical score for 'Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm' features four staves. The top two staves are for the choir, with the piano part on the bottom two staves. The vocal parts are labeled with dynamic markings (mp, mf, cresc.) and performance instructions (e.g., '2.3.s.', '1.s.', '2.s.', '2.3.s.', '2.s.', 'mf 3.s.', 'f'). The lyrics are written below each staff in both English and Estonian. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 72.

swept the Baltic States during the years 1987 to 1991.⁴⁹ This phenomenon, which exploited the loosening grip of the Soviet State, featured many participants of the folk song revival movement in leading roles. The Singing Revolution also comprised a significant rock music contingent alongside the more traditional choirs, thus giving a voice, and sense of solidarity, particularly to young people.⁵⁰

⁴⁸The source of this work is Gustav Ernesaks, ‘*Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm*’ (Helsinki: Warner/Chappell, 2005).

⁴⁹Slobin, *Retuning Culture*, pp. 8-9.

⁵⁰Toomas Haug, sleeve note to CD, *Singing Revolution Estonia* (Erdenklang, 1994). The Estonian ‘Singing Revolution’ is documented in a (somewhat partisan) DVD of the same name by American film makers Maureen and James Tusty (2006) (noted by author). A discussion with Evi Arujärv at the Estonian Music Information Centre in Tallinn, in February 2010, suggested to the author that the ‘Singing Revolution’ has been interpreted rather simplistically, becoming romanticised and mythologised, particularly in the US.

Estonian ‘classical’ music in the first half of the twentieth-century was dominated by the 19th century Russian Romantic tradition.⁵¹ Tallinn’s Music Conservatory (now *Eesti Muusika- ja Teatriakadeemia* [the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama]) was founded in 1919; up to this point, its counterpart in St Petersburg (founded by Anton Rubinstein in 1862) provided training for the early generation of Estonian composers. Among these were the founding fathers of the ‘Estonian School’, Rudolf Tobias (1873-1918) and Artur Kapp (1878-1952), who studied under Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908). Of this generation, Mart Saar (1882-1963), Cyrillus Kreek (1889-1962) and Heino Eller (1887-1970), are three more composers considered central to the formation of Estonia’s musical identity.⁵² A notable woman composer, organist Miina Härma (1864-1941), played an important role in taking new music to rural Estonia, as well as conducting Song Festivals. Eller, whom conductor Neemi Järvi considers the ‘father of modern Estonian music’, was an influential teacher at the Tallinn Conservatoire who strongly believed in cultivating individuality among his students.⁵³ These had included Eduard Tubin (1905-1982), the most widely-performed Estonian composer of his generation, who emigrated to Sweden following the tightening of the Soviet regime under Stalin in 1944.⁵⁴

Saar and Kreek were both enthusiasts and collectors of Estonian folk song and their work continues to exert a significant influence on a younger generation of Estonian composers.⁵⁵ Anu Kõlar, a musicologist at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama whose recent doctoral dissertation on Kreek (currently only in Estonian)

⁵¹Olt, *Estonian Music*, pp. 33-45.

⁵²Kapp’s son Edgar and nephew Villem (1913-64) were also significant composers. Robert Layton, *Baltic Voyage, Heroic Symphonies from Estonia*, CD sleeve note (BBC, 2001. MM210).

⁵³Immo Mihkelson, ‘A Narrow Path to the Truth: Arvo Pärt and the 1960s and 1970s in Soviet Estonia’ in Shenton (ed.), *Arvo Pärt*, p.12.

⁵⁴Kurt Mortensen, ‘Pärt of a Wider Picture’, in *Central Europe Review*, www.ce-review.org accessed 12 November 2010. Neeme Järvi (b.1937) and his sons Kristjan (b.1973) and Paavo (b.1963) are all established international conductors, particularly as interpreters of Estonian music. Layton, *Baltic Voyage*, CD sleeve note.

⁵⁵Author discussion with Evi Arujärv, Estonian Music Information Centre, February 2011.

is one of the few published works on this composer, points out that Kreek and Tormis share many characteristics.⁵⁶ Both composers display a strong affinity with the rural locality of their birth, in particular with its natural surroundings and local traditions. Kreek was, like Tormis later, strongly committed to the preservation of folk song (fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Cyrillus Kreek, 1935⁵⁷



Like Bartók, Kreek undertook field trips as a student collector in 1911, assembling a folk archive of over 5,000 songs. In the 1930s he also collected ‘folk hymns’ from the (Catholic) Estonian-Swedish community in the west of the country, with whom he worked. He arranged these for choirs, or incorporated the material into larger works, among the best known being the cycle *Taveti Laulud [The Psalms of David]* (1923). The choral crescendo from the first song of the set, ‘Taveti Laul 104’ recalls the rich, *divisi* writing of the Rachmaninov’s *Vsenoshchnoye Bdeniye [All-Night Vigil]* or

⁵⁶Anu Kõlar, *Cyrillus Kreek ja Eesti muusikaelu* (Tallinn: Eesti Muusikaakademia, 2010).

⁵⁷Photo taken from Tiia Järg, *Cyrillus Kreek: Helilooja* (Tallinn: Estonian Music Information Centre, 2003), p.26.

Vespers] (1915); both works would have been well known to Tormis (ex.2).

Ex. 2. Kreek. *Taveti Laulud*, no. 104, bb. 23-45⁵⁸

A characteristic of Kreek's use of folk song was to retain the entire melody intact in the manner of *cantus prius factus*, while weaving changing accompanimental patterns around it. This was an approach later adopted by Tormis in his own idiosyncratic use of *regilaul* in many choral works.⁵⁹ Kreek, like Tormis later, was a prolific composer of almost exclusively *choral* music, almost abandoning

⁵⁸The source of this work is Cyrillus Kreek, *Taveti Laulud* (1923) (Tallinn: SP Muusikaprojekt, 2003).

⁵⁹Järg, Kreek, p.31.

instrumental composition in his most productive years. He also shared with Tormis the personal attribute of reticence, resulting in a reluctance to promote his own work. As a result, a number of Kreek's works are receiving their first performances outside Estonia some forty years after the composer's death, counterbalancing the neglect suffered during Soviet times, when works with religious texts were heavily discouraged if not banned from performance altogether.⁶⁰

In contrast to these more traditional voices, Eino Tamberg is considered the 'first modernist Estonian composer'. Tamberg took an interdisciplinary approach to composition, collaborating on work with dancers and visual artists; he was also a highly influential teacher for a younger generation of composers.⁶¹

Arvo Pärt, also a pupil of the 'Eller School', is the first Estonian composer of modern times to gain a wide international audience; indeed, to many audiences outside Estonia, Pärt represents the first (and often, only) contact with Estonian music. Pärt's best known works are characterised by the influences of Eastern Orthodoxy and the musical traditions of Scandinavia and Western Europe where he lived (in Vienna, then Berlin) from 1980-1991.⁶² A modernist period of dodecaphonic writing in the 1960s included the orchestral piece *Nekrolog* (1960-1), which notoriously brought him into violent conflict with the Soviet authorities, and *Credo* (1968) for piano, chorus and orchestra, which, both in its title and in its warring tonal and atonal elements, was seen as a further act of defiance.⁶³

⁶⁰*Taveti Laulud* received its first UK performance at the Spitalfields Festival, London, June 2012 (noted by author).

⁶¹Olt, *Estonian Music*, pp. 38-44.

⁶²Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, p. 24, and Mortensen, 'Pärt'. The author noted on a research trip to Estonia in February 2010 that Pärt had, however kept an apartment in Tallinn, and returned to live in the city in 1991.

⁶³Of *Nekrolog*, Khrennikov commented, 'Our young experimenters should realise that there is a difference between freedom of creative searching and lack of principles... [A] work like Pärt's makes it quite clear that the 12-tone experiment is untenable.' Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, p. 36.

After a period of near silence, Pärt's *tintinnabuli* or 'sounding of bells' style emerged in 1976, with the short piano piece *Aliinale [For Alina]*. Hillier, in his comprehensive text on the composer, describes the basic principles of *tintinnabuli*.⁶⁴ In essence, this technique employs two musical lines in a fixed relationship, one moving mostly by step (which Hillier terms the 'M' voice), the other based on the notes of the tonic triad (the 'T' voice). The result is a form of harmonic stasis, which Hillier describes as 'a single moment spread out in time'. This is exemplified in the opening bars of *Aliinale* (ex. 3).

Ex. 3. Arvo Pärt, *Aliinale*, bb. 1-8⁶⁵



⁶⁴Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, pp. 86-97.

⁶⁵Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, p. 88.

With its predominance of simple triads and apparently traditional harmonies, the *tintinnabuli* style is probably Pärt's most immediately recognisable fingerprint. However, in works such as *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978) and *La Sindome* (2005), with their carefully wrought, mathematical underlying structures, it has also been argued that Pärt's return to 'tonality' may not be as straightforward as may first appear.⁶⁶ Having established the style, Pärt entered a fiercely creative period in the late 70s and 80s with works such as *Fratres* (1977), which he rearranged for many different instrumental combinations, *Summa* (1977), *Cantus in Memoriam Benjamin Britten* (1977), *Tabula Rasa* (1977) and *Passio* (1982). Most of these works are now well established within the international concert repertoire.⁶⁷

Representing the younger generation of Estonian composers, Erkki-Sven Tüür (b.1959) is probably the best known outside Estonia. Tüür employed dodecaphony, as did Pärt, in certain works. However, his style is eclectic, synthesising, for example, Gregorian Chant and twentieth-century influences such as minimalism and progressive rock.⁶⁸ Tõnu Korvits (b. 1969) represents a somewhat neo-romantic idiom, often making reference to the older generation of composers. His *Kreegi Vihik* [*Kreek's Notebook*] (2007) is a choral cycle based on those folk hymns collected by Kreek, thus furthering by another generation the tradition of collecting and arranging folk material. Other significant composers, both students and contemporaries of Tormis such as Ester Mägi, Lepo Sumera and Tarmo Lepik are discussed later in this study.

⁶⁶Shenton, *Arvo Pärt*, p.6.

⁶⁷Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, p.75.

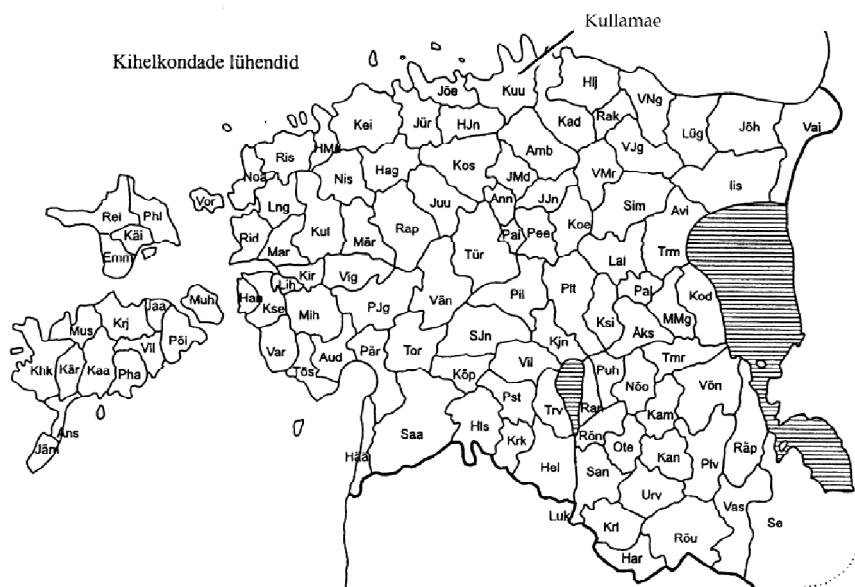
⁶⁸Tüür was formerly a member of the Estonian rock band *In Spe*. Mortensen, 'Pärt'.

Chapter 2

Veljo Tormis: background, training and influences; *Looduspildid*

Veljo Tormis grew up, and, apart from his period of study in Moscow, has chosen to remain in, the part of Estonia in which he was born and from which his family originated.¹ This is in marked contrast to the cosmopolitan life-in-exile of Arvo Pärt. Tormis was born five years before Pärt, in 1930, in the small village of Kuusalu, forty kilometres east of Tallinn, and (as at 2013) divides his time between a rented flat in the so-called ‘Composers’ Building’ at Av. Lauteri 7c, near the centre of Tallinn, and his family’s farmhouse in Kullamäe, on the borders of the Lahemaa National Park in the north east of the country (fig.10).

Fig. 10. Map of Estonian parishes showing Tormis’s birthplace at Kullamäe²



¹Unless otherwise stated, details of Tormis’s biography are from Daitz, *Ancient Song*, pp. 91–123, and from the biography by Urve Lippus www.tormis.ee accessed 3 June 2012.

²Tormis is always careful to acknowledge in scores the parish from which *regilaul* material derives. Map taken from Veljo Tormis and Ülo Tedre, *Uus Regilaulik [The New Regilaul]* (Tallinn: Muusikaprojekt, 1975, revised 1997), p. 294.

The Lutheran Church provided Tormis's earliest musical experiences. His father, Riho Tormis (1899-1967) was an amateur violinist and *köster*, a post akin to that of Sacristan, combining the roles of choirmaster, organist, and organiser of concerts.³ Tormis's mother, Ann Udritz (1902-1953) was a keen amateur singer and sang alto in the church choir which Riho conducted.⁴ The Tormis parents also sang together in a local choral society and were enthusiastic participants in the Song Festivals.⁵

In 1942, Riho Tormis arranged organ lessons for his son with his own teacher, August Topman, who also taught the most established organist-composer of the time, Edgar Arro.⁶ It is, then, inevitable that the organ played an important part in Tormis's early musical development and informed his earliest musical experiences. Tormis recounts, for example, that, at the age of eight, he was already aware of the way in which the instrument's timbre could be modified through changes in registration: 'the loud organ, made by a village master, attracted me; five ranks of pipes lured me into the pleasure of pulling out a stop and changing the sound.'⁷ He was also, even at this early stage, aware of the almost shaman-like power of the organist and of his or her potential to absorb and move an audience.⁸ Tormis claims that, through this early experience of sitting beside his father at the organ in church, he was first made aware of 'the acoustics of a space.' He remembers being fascinated

³The name 'Tormis' is a translation of the original German family name, 'Sturm'. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.95. The term '*köster*', as well as its role, was imported by the Swedish overlords. *Ibid*, p.79.

⁴Urve Lippus, *Veljo Tormis: Laulu Palju [Heaps of Songs]*, CD sleeve note (Stuttgart: Carus-Verlag, 2000).

⁵Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 95.

⁶This generation of composers produced significant amounts of work for organ, perhaps influenced by the Germanic legacy. For example, Arro published a 6-volume set of Estonian folk tunes for organ in 1921. He also encouraged Tormis even at this early stage to look at Estonian folk song. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 101.

⁷Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.100.

⁸Tormis's role as the shaman drum leader is presented in *Raue Needmine [Curse Upon Iron]* (1972), discussed in Chapter 5.

by how the organ manuals were physically detached from the source of the sound and how ranks of pipes could be made to speak in different spaces in the building. In the case of a large instrument, the physical space between the organ console and some ranks of pipes can of course be virtually the whole length and height of a church.⁹

However, in discussion with the author and others, Tormis has declined to recognise the influence of the organ at all on his music. Instead, he is even disparaging about the instrument, considering it to have ‘a very limited range of colours and sonorities’.¹⁰ He is also reluctant to acknowledge the influence of organ registration on his choral writing, and particularly, on his ‘choral orchestration’ (an important Tormis trait, discussed in Chapter 4).¹¹ One positive influence of Tormis’s organ studies must, however, be significant: the repertoire of the time included the popular arrangements of Estonian folk songs by the teacher of his organ tutor, Edgar Arro, and these works were widely performed in the 1940s. So this was, effectively, Tormis’s first, early, encounter with *regilaul*.¹²

Tormis’s prejudice against the organ is perhaps explained by the historical events of this period. In 1944 he had begun organ lessons at the Tallinn Music School, followed by studies at the Tallinn Conservatory in 1947. He was forced abruptly to end studies when the organ course was suppressed by the Soviets because of the instrument’s close association with the Lutheran church.¹³ This was in 1948,

⁹Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

¹⁰Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July, 2008, also in Tallinn with musicologists Urve Lippus (Estonian Academy of Music and Drama) and Evi Arujärv (Estonian Music Information Centre), February 2010.

¹¹Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.100.

¹²Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.104. Arro’s music has recently seen something of a revival in Estonia and more widely, with a number of recordings being issued (noted in author’s discussions with Evi Arujärv at EMIK during a research trip to Estonia, February 2010).

¹³Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (London: OUP, 2005), pp. 8-9.

the period of *Zhnadovchina*, the notorious ‘Zhdanov purges’.¹⁴ In 1946, Stalin had appointed Andrei Zhdanov (1896-1948), to lead Soviet Cultural Policy. Zhdanov subsequently appointed a minor composer, Tikhon Krennikov, (1913-2007), to lead the Union of Soviet Composers, the body which had immense influence on the commissioning, publishing and promotion of new works, as well as on the programming of repertoire for performances and broadcasts.¹⁵ The Union could censor any composition which failed to comply with those ideals of Socialist Realism and which was considered to display any element of ‘formalism’. Works considered ‘modernist’, ‘decadent’ or ‘undesirable’, were suppressed, with dire (and often quite absurd) outcomes.¹⁶

Lippus cites Vano Muradeli’s opera *The Great Friendship* (1947) as one such work. Following a decree by the Central Committee of The Communist Party, this work was criticised for its formalism and for its lack of ‘folk-tunes, songs of folk motifs, which the musical compositions of the peoples of the Soviet Union are so rich in’.¹⁷ The teaching of the conservatoires was criticised as an underlying cause, and Tormis’s future Professor of Composition, Vissarion Shebalin, was removed from his post for three years. The conductor Gennadi Rozdestvensky, studying at the Conservatoire at this time, recalls the terrifying but often quite absurd situations which *Zhnadovchina* created for young composers. For example, on announcement of a visit from inspectors to the Moscow Conservatoire, students would be seen furiously ‘erasing every dissonance, replacing seconds and sevenths with thirds and

¹⁴The Zhdanov period is covered in detail in Schwarz, *Music*, pp. 204-248.

¹⁵Schwarz, *Music*, pp. 398-399.

¹⁶However, little censoring was done of film music; hence many composers found this a safe outlet for a more modernist idiom. Schwarz, *Music*, pp. 135-137.

¹⁷Lippus and Tormis, *Lauldud Sõna*, p. 110.

fifths.¹⁸ Shostakovich, whose opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District* had in 1934 famously provoked Stalin's condemnation as 'muddle not music', later described the period of *Zhnadovchina* as 'nothing but ashes and corpses'.¹⁹

When his organ course was closed at the Tallinn Conservatory, Tormis was obliged to take up choral conducting with Jüri Variste. He disliked conducting from the start and abandoned the course. As he played no other instrument, Tormis began, 'by default', composition lessons with Villem Kapp, another senior figure in the 'Estonian School'.²⁰ During this period he composed a number of songs and choral pieces, winning first prize from the Ministry of Culture for his choral piece, '*Ringmängulaul*' ['Circle Game Song'] in 1950.²¹ At this time he was also immersed in the staple Estonian orchestral repertoire of Kreek, Saar, Tubin, Tobias and Kapp, works heavily coloured by Sibelius and late Russian Romantics such as Rimsky Korsakov. Kreek and Saar were accomplished choral composers and had made extensive use of Estonian folksong in their works, which were widely performed during this period, as now, within Estonia and the Baltic region.

When in 1951 Tormis gained a place at the Moscow State Conservatory, he was introduced to a wider European sphere of influence.²² He studied composition with Shebalin, a prominent composer and highly respected teacher, now reinstated in his post. Despite this hostile musical climate in Moscow, Shebalin had the courage to introduce his students to the then-forbidden ground of Stravinsky, Debussy and

¹⁸ Transcribed by author from *The Red Baton/Notes Interdites*, DVD, directed by Bruno Monsaingeon (France: ARTE, 2003).

¹⁹ Monsaingeon, *Notes Interdites*, DVD sleeve note.

²⁰ Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

²¹ Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 102; Veljo Tormis, '*Ringmängulaul*' [Circle Game Song] (1950) (unpublished).

²² Among fellow students of Tormis at the Conservatory were Gennadi Rozhdestvensky and Estonian composers Ester Mägi and Anatoli Garshnek, as well as Alfred Schnittke (1934-98). Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 107.

Ravel. The French School was disapproved of as ‘decadent’ under the Soviet regime, yet Shebalin insisted that these scores, long hidden away in libraries, be ‘sought out, discussed, listened to, and performed in secrecy’.²³ Tormis greatly valued Shebalin’s advice, and particularly his insistence that Tormis study the use of motif in Debussy’s music. He found this liberating, as it provided a welcome contrast to the ‘classical-romantic tradition’ of the older generation of Estonian composers in which he was raised.²⁴

Since Stalin had famously pronounced folk music ‘nationalist in form and socialist in content’, composition students at Conservatoires were obliged to incorporate some element of traditional song into their works. Shebalin recommended that composers take a ‘non-romantic’ approach to this material: rather than use folk melodies as a starting point for symphonic development, the melodies should be preserved ‘complete’ within a composition. This followed a Russian tradition of folk song treatment that had roots as far back as Glinka.²⁵ It was a procedure passed on to Tormis, and will be examined in chapter 4.

A second prominent influence at this time was Tormis’s teacher of orchestration, Yuri Fortunatov, to whom Tormis long acknowledged a great debt of friendship. Fortunatov directed Tormis towards detailed study again of Debussy’s works as models of the use of orchestral colour. A decade later, Debussyian traits were to feature prominently in Tormis’s only opera, *Luigelend [Swan’s Flight]* which, together with the set of choral miniatures, *Sügismaastikud [Autumn*

²³Helju Tauk (ed.), *Six Contemporary Estonian Composers* (Tallinn: Eesti Raamat, 1970), p. 136.

²⁴Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008 and at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2010.

²⁵Richard Taruskin, *On Russian Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp. 29-30, and author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008. The use of *regilaul* in Tormis’s work is discussed in Chapter 3.

Landscapes] was dedicated to Fortunatov.²⁶ Tormis's chamber opera could indeed be said to echo Debussy at times almost to the point of pastiche.

The opera is based on a novel by Oscar Tooming which explores the conflict between humanity and nature. Nature is represented by the wistful calls of the swan, depicted by a female choir.²⁷ The interlude, '*Luikede Saabamine*' [Arrival of the Swans] is an illustration of the impressionist style of this work. Here, the chorus sings repeated motifs, filled out with chords, over a long pedal note (ex. 4).

Ex. 4. Tormis. *Luigelend*, Interlude, '*Luikede Saabamine*', bb. 1-4²⁸

²⁶Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.108, and author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

²⁷n.a. *Swan's Flight*, CD sleeve note (Tallinn: Finlandia, 2001), 8573-8, 9876-2.

²⁸Taken from Veljo Tormis, *Luigelend* (1965) (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 1971).

This movement has distinct echoes of ‘Sirènes’ from Debussy’s orchestral suite, *Nocturnes* (1897-99) in its use of repeating motifs in the wordless upper voices, against a wash of orchestral colour (ex. 5).

Ex. 5. Debussy. *Nocturnes*, no.3, ‘Sirènes’, bb. 28-30²⁹



Tormis is now dismissive of *Luigelend*, considering it a ‘work of the past’ which is ‘now forgotten’.³⁰ *Luigelend* has rarely been performed; it has not yet received a production outside Estonia, although an orchestral suite which includes ‘*Luikede Saabamine*’ has been performed as a concert piece and was recently recorded.³¹

The influence of Shostakovich, who had taken considerable interest in the

²⁹The source of this example is Claude Debussy, *Nocturnes* (1897-99) (Paris: Jobert, 1964).

³⁰Author discussion with Tormis, Estonia Concert Hall, Tallinn, February 2011.

³¹N.a., *Swan's Flight*, CD sleeve note.

student Tormis's work, is keenly felt in Tormis's *Kolm Prelüüdi ja Fugaat Klaverile* [Three Preludes and Fugues for Piano] (1951-58).³² Written during his Conservatoire years in a style of detached Neo-classicism, on the recommendation of Shebalin, the Preludes and Fugues show a clear sense of balance and structure. This can be seen in the opening prelude in G minor with its three-part canon whose chromatic material unfolds lugubriously (ex. 6).

Ex. 6. Tormis. *Kolm Prelüüdi ja Fugaat Klaverile*, Prelude No.1 in G minor³³

Andante con moto $\text{♩} = 108-112$

³²Daitz notes that Shostakovich, as Chairman of the Moscow State Conservatory, had recommended the 'highest grade' for Tormis's graduation. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 108.

³³Taken from *Kolm Prelüüdi ja Fugaat Klaverile* (1953) (Tallinn: Fennica Gehrman, 1996).

Despite the technical proficiency of the Preludes and Fugues, the listener has a sense that these well-crafted pieces represent a stopping off point on a journey to somewhere else. There is as yet perhaps little sense of an individual ‘voice’ at work, nor of the composer having yet settled on the landmarks of a personal style. This is perhaps an example of the rigidity of the Soviet music education system of the time, which through ‘guided choice’ stressed the uniform teaching of musical technique in preference to freedom and creativity.³⁴

Post-Moscow, in 1956, Tormis returned to Tallinn to teach at the Tallinn Music School (a type of pre-Conservatoire which he had himself attended), where he set out with the high aspirations of founding a creative circle aiming to ‘broaden the minds of students in every possible way’.³⁵ This was an aspiration perhaps perceived to be possible in the (short-lived) ‘Cultural Honeymoon’ which followed Krushchev’s denouncement of Stalin that year.³⁶ Tormis’s own students in theory and composition in Tallinn included Tarmo Lepik, Lepo Sumera, and Kuldar Sink, a composer and harpsichordist who, like Pärt, experimented with serial techniques. Another Tormis student was Arvo Pärt himself, from 1956-7 (fig.11).³⁷

The orchestral work *Avamäng II* [Second Overture] dates from 1958 (the First Overture was withdrawn by Tormis).³⁸ *Avamäng II* is the only one of a small handful of Tormis works for orchestra in the concert repertoire, and the only one written specifically as a concert piece, the three others, *Ookean [The Ocean]* (1961), *Luigelend* (1971) and *Kevade [Spring]* (1973) being suites adapted from music

³⁴Schwarz, *Music*, p. 322.

³⁵Daitz, *Ancient Music*, p. 298.

³⁶Mikhelson, ‘A Narrow Path’, p. 12.

³⁷Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, p.27. Sumera and Lepik, both of whom were to acknowledge the profound influence of Tormis on their own music, are discussed in Chapter 8.

³⁸*Avamäng II* (1959) (Leningrad : Sovetskij Kompozitor, 1961).

Fig. 11. Tormis (on the left) and Pärt in 1958³⁹



respectively from a play, opera, and film. *Avamäng II*, lasting 11 minutes, is for orchestra, including two military drums and contrabassoon. The piece owes a distinct debt to the Russian tradition in its scoring, particularly via Tubin's 5th symphony, while the use of repeated short motifs displays the clear influence of Sibelius (ex. 7). With its bold orchestral strokes, *Avamäng II* displays a technical facility and confidence with orchestral writing, yet the style is yet hard to reconcile with the 'voice' of Tormis's choral works. When it was completed, as Tormis reported to Daitz, he felt that 'something had ended with it', as if the work marked a process through which he had to pass before 'moving on'.⁴⁰ *Avamäng II* is the one Tormis orchestral piece to have been widely performed outside the Baltic region; it was included, for example, in a concert by the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in 1997, and was recorded the same year, together with *Ookean*, by the Estonian-Finnish Symphony Orchestra directed by the Estonian conductor Anu Tali, a major exponent

³⁹Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 115.

⁴⁰Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 252.

Ex. 7. Tormis. *Avamäng II*, score fig. 2⁴¹

The musical score consists of four systems of staves, each representing a different instrument or section of the orchestra. The instruments include strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. The score is written in 2/4 time, with various key signatures and dynamic markings such as 'cresc.' and 'decresc.'. Measure numbers 1 and 2 are indicated above the staves. The notation includes a variety of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. The overall style is complex and rhythmic.

of these few Tormis orchestral works.⁴²

In the late 1950s Tormis heard Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* (1935-36) performed in Tallinn. He made an immediate personal connection with the piece, drawn by the pagan nature of the texts, the earthy driving rhythms and the simple,

⁴¹Taken from Veljo Tormis, *Avamäng II*.

⁴²N.a., *Swan's Flight*, CD sleeve note.

parallel harmonisations.⁴³ These were musical elements which were to become an inseparable part of his own musical language, particularly in later settings of Latin texts such as *Sampo Cuditur [Forging the Sampo]* (discussed in Chapter 6). *Carmina Burana* provided Tormis, then, with a viable alternative to both the modernist and serialist approaches of his contemporaries (such as Arvo Pärt and Kuldar Sink) as much as to the late Romanticism of the earlier generation (ex. 8).⁴⁴

Ex. 8. Carl Orff. *Carmina Burana*, no. 5, ‘Ecce Gratum’, bb. 1-9⁴⁵

⁴³ Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

⁴⁴ Author discussion with Tormis, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2010.

⁴⁵ The source of this and the example from this work in Chapter 5 is Carl Orff, *Carmina Burana* (1935) (London: Schott, 1996).

In 1950 the Soviet ideological campaign provoked by Muradeli's opera *The Great Friendship* culminated in the VIII Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party, when a number of Estonian composers were condemned as 'bourgeois nationalists'. Lippus, in the collection of essays written jointly with Tormis, entitled *Lauldud Sõna [The Word was Sung]*, points out how the subsequent Soviet insistence that folk song form an inherent part of composition turned out, ironically, to be positive for Tormis, for 'it guided him towards a niche that was natural and acceptable to him'.⁴⁶ Thus, following composition in 1959 of *Kihnu Pulmalaulud [Kihnu Island Wedding Songs]*, his first folk song-based choral cycle, (discussed in Chapter 4), Tormis was labelled a 'folk song composer' by the Soviets. This status reduced his commission fee by 50%, since the work was perceived to be an arrangement of folk material rather than an original composition in its own right.⁴⁷

In 1960 Tormis was accepted into the Estonian Composers' Union (for which he also worked for a time as a consultant), a branch of the Soviet Composers' Union. Membership provided support from the Ministry of Culture in the form of purchase of scores, as well as the guaranteed printing, publication and promotion of his music. He was allocated an apartment in the official 'Composers' Building' at Av. Lauteri 7 in Tallinn. This building, which has housed many notable Estonian composers, including Arvo Pärt, remains his Tallinn address to the present day.⁴⁸ As a State-approved artist, Tormis was granted, amongst other 'privileges', stays in 'Houses of Creativity', establishments situated in rural parts of the Union where accommodation

⁴⁶Lippus and Tormis, *Lauldud Sõna*, pp. 99-100. Lippus also highlights the contradiction in the Soviet standpoint: while they criticised Estonian national music as being a part of a bourgeois culture, they also hailed it as a democratic form of art based on folklore. She also pointed out to the author that the Soviet concept of 'folk song' was nearer to that of *Volksstümslieder*, the artificial confection of 'folklore music performed in traditional dress', that was much derided by Bartók, than to the authentic *regilaul* employed by Tormis. (Author discussion with Lippus, February 2013).

⁴⁷Taruskin, *Defining Russia*, p. 52.

⁴⁸Author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2013.

was provided free-of-charge in return for a completed work at the end of the stay.⁴⁹

From 1969 he was able to exist as a freelance composer.⁵⁰

Like many artists of the period, Tormis expressed covert criticism of the Soviet régime in a number of works. An early student piece, '*Lenini Sõnad*' [Words of Lenin] (1955), for example, 'appears' to be celebrating Soviet principles, yet by the clever omission of parts of the text, actually implies that the Union has not been true to its founders. Daitz suggests that while those Tormis works based on Balto-Finnic folk music (forming around 65% of his output) do not seek specifically to make political statements, they can still be seen to be, at least obliquely, a form of political protest. Many of these folk music-based works represent a response to the russification of non-Russian Soviet Republics at this time, and to the subsequent loss of their cultures and their music.⁵¹ A vivid example is the set of six choral cycles, *Unustatud Rahvad [Forgotten Peoples]* (1970–1989) which draws on the traditional music of the Ingrians, Vots, Livonians and Karelians, communities which have now either been subsumed into neighbouring countries (such as Latvia) or dispersed from the region through emigration. Examples from this cycle are given in Chapter 4.

Soviet reactions to Tormis's music varied widely. While the overt folk-based material fulfilled Soviet goals of Socialist Realism, other works provoked a less positive response. The most widely performed Tormis work during the Communist period, *Raua Needmine [Curse Upon Iron]* (1972) (discussed in detail in Chapter 5), an uncompromisingly pacifist work which employs a more modernist choral idiom than heard in Tormis's folk-based pieces, was initially banned by the Soviet regime

⁴⁹Kiril Tomoff, *Creative Union: The Professional Organization of Soviet Composers, 1939-1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 55.

⁵⁰Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 115.

⁵¹Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 203.

for its open denunciation of war. Yet the piece was soon rehabilitated, since in 1974 Tormis was awarded the State Prize of the Soviet Union for his choral works, including *Raua Needmine* itself.⁵² By the end of the same decade, Tormis was awarded a prestigious commission from the authorities to mark the opening of the Tallinn element of the 1980 Olympic Games. The result was his longest work, the ballet-cantata *Eesti Ballaadid [Estonian Ballads]* [1980] (also discussed in Chapter 5). In 1981, in a concert programme by the Chamber Choir of the State Philharmonic, some Tormis songs were withdrawn by the authorities from the programme owing to their ‘inferior artistic quality and because some of the words have a nationalistic tint and anti-Soviet content,’ yet by 1986, Tormis had again returned to favour, as is reflected in a statement from Jaan Raats of the Estonian Composers’ Union:

Tormis’s music is deeply international. His works are popular in all of the sister republics . . . Tormis’s musical language is based on the intonations of folk music; it is therefore genuinely democratic.⁵³

A profound influence on Tormis’s music arose in 1962, when he was invited to Budapest to join the 80th birthday celebrations of Zoltán Kodály.⁵⁴ Tormis already knew of some of Kodály’s theoretical writings on music, published in Estonian in the journal *Muusikaleht* in the 1930s.⁵⁵ On this Budapest visit, he noted with enthusiasm that ‘the person and choral music of Kodály exerted a great influence over me.’⁵⁶ As one who has often spoken of needing a justification to compose beyond the music

⁵²Tii Järg, *Eepose Väljadel [Epic Fields]*. CD sleeve note. Forte Classics, 1995. FD 0030/2.

⁵³Daitz, *Ancient Song*, pp. 127-128.

⁵⁴Tormis claimed that, had he not encountered *regilaul*, his choral style would have remained close to what he called the ‘impressionistic’ [sic] style of Kodály’s ‘landscape’ pieces. Tormis interview with author, Cheltenham, July 2008.

⁵⁵Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 128.

⁵⁶Daitz, *Ancient Song* p. 121, and Daitz, ‘Estonian Calendar Songs and Nature Pictures: Two Major Works by Veljo Tormis’, www.tormis.ee accessed 15 December 2010.

itself, Tormis found in Kodály a kindred spirit who seemed to validate in many ways what he himself was trying to achieve. The two composers shared, firstly, a passionate desire to keep alive the folk song traditions of their countries, and saw their own folk-inspired compositions as playing an essential role in this. Tormis also shared with Kodály a strong affinity with the natural world. Greatly moved by a number of Kodály's choral settings of nature and landscape poems which reflected this interest, Tormis returned from Hungary with renewed confidence to compose *Sügismaastikud* [Autumn Landscapes] (1964), settings of texts recently written by the young poet Viivi Luik (b. 1946).⁵⁷ Over the next five years Tormis was to compose three further sets of pieces, collectively entitled *Looduspildid* [Nature Pictures]: *Kevadkillid* [Spring Sketches] (1966), *Talvemustrid* [Winter Patterns] (1968) and *Suvemotiivid* [Summer Motifs] (1969), each set to texts by a different poet.

Sügismaastikud consists of seven songs, none lasting more than a couple of minutes, each exploring different choral textures and tonalities. Though simple in concept, there is sense of progression through the work from the subdued *pp* opening of 'On Hilissuuvi' [It is Late Summer] to the explosion of the richly voiced *fff* chord (with soprano high C as its top note) in the final song (ex. 9). The first song of the cycle, 'On Hilissuuvi' where the opening soprano melody line floats above wordless chords in the lower voices over a bass pedal, surely owes much to Kodály's much-performed choral setting from 1938, 'Esti Dal' [Evening Song] (ex. 10). The fifth

⁵⁷Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008. Tormis was unable to recall the exact titles of the Kodály works which affected him on hearing them in Budapest, although 'Esti Dal', as described above, seems likely to be one. All four sets of were originally written for women's voices. Tormis later arranged *Sügismaastikud* for mixed chorus. The wistful nature of the texts e.g. 'Summer will never return again' seems particularly poignant from such a young poet and Tormis was much moved by these poems.

Ex. 9. Tormis. *Sügismaastikud*, ‘On Hilissuuvi’, bb. 1-8⁵⁸

Ex. 10. Kodály. ‘Esti Dal’, bb. 1-12⁵⁹

song in the *Sügismaastikud* set, ‘Tuul konnumaa kohal’ [‘Wind over the Heath’], bears trademarks common to both Tormis and Kodály, especially in the contrasts

⁵⁸The source of this and all other examples from this work is Veljo Tormis, *Sügismaastikud* (1964) (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 1996).

⁵⁹The source of this example is Zoltan Kodály, ‘Esti Dal’ (London: Boosey and Hawkes, 1969).

between sustained, impressionistic chordal sections and driving rhythmic parallel chords on repeated phrases. The use of *parlandi* fragments in lower voices at the end is a Tormis trait much exploited in later works (ex.11).

Ex.11. Tormis. *Sügismaastikud, 'Tuul konnumaa kohal'*, bb. 48-56

The musical score consists of two systems of four staves each, representing Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.).

System 1 (bb. 48):

- Soprano (S.):** Sustained notes.
- Alto (A.):** Rhythmic patterns.
- Tenor (T.):** Sustained notes. Lyrics: "kõ-hi-nal nae - ris" and "rat - tl - ing laugh - ter". Marking: "mistico (parlando)".
- Bass (B.):** Sustained notes.

System 2 (bb. 52):

- Soprano (S.):** Sustained notes.
- Alto (A.):** Rhythmic patterns.
- Tenor (T.):** Sustained notes. Lyrics: "kõ-hi-nal nae - ris" and "rat - tl - ing laugh - ter". Markings: "morendo" and "(sussurando)".
- Bass (B.):** Sustained notes.

As the 1960s progressed, Tormis began to employ a wider range of choral language and techniques, moving beyond the more traditional tonal language of Kodály. In 1963 he had travelled to Warsaw to attend the Autumn Festival, where he had met Penderecki and heard the music of John Cage. Later, in 1975, he returned to Warsaw

and met Lutoslawski.⁶⁰ Tormis was, therefore, well aware of trends in new music beyond Estonia. In *Talvemustrid [Winter Patterns]*, the second set of *Looduspildid*, for example, he expands his choral palette to include timbral effects. Although reluctant to acknowledge an influence, Tormis was undoubtedly aware of contemporary choral works as Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna* (1966), where at the opening, the four sopranos and four altos enter one after another, in imitation at different speeds, producing the effect of the sound 'panning' across the performing space (ex.12).⁶¹

Ex. 12. Ligeti. *Lux Aeterna*, bb. 1-8⁶²

The musical score consists of three systems of vocal parts. The top system is for Sopranos 1-4, and the middle and bottom systems are for Altos 1-4. The vocal parts sing the words 'lux' and 'ae-' in a staggered fashion, with each part entering at a different time. The score is in common time, with dynamics pp semper. Measure 5 shows the continuation of this pattern.

⁶⁰Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 117.

⁶¹Author discussion with Tormis, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2011. György Ligeti, *Lux Aeterna* (1966) (Leipzig: Peters, 1966).

⁶²The source of this example is György Ligeti, *Lux Aeterna* (1966) (Leipzig: Peters, 1966).

In ‘*Virmalised*’ [Northern Lights] from the *Talvemustrid* set, Tormis explores extended vocal techniques such as chord clusters, *Sprechstimme* and ‘swoops’ of choral sound without specific pitch. These create a striking effect as the female chorus, divided into 8 parts, depicts the movement of light across the night sky of the awe-inspiring Aurora Borealis. The text consists of only a few words, in rhyming pairs, which not only offer great potential to a composer now concerned with word sound and colour, but also reveal the potential of setting the Estonian language: ‘*virmalised, vievendavad*’ [Borealis, shimmering, glimmering]; ‘*Rebastuled rebenevad*’ [Foxes flaming, ripping, rending’].⁶³ In the first 20 bars, a most dramatic effect is created through the simple device of semiquavers in descending chromatic scales, moving rapidly between the parts (ex. 13).

Ex.13. Tormis. *Talvemustrid*, ‘*Virmalised*’, bb. 16-18⁶⁴

The musical score for 'Virmalised' consists of four staves, each representing a different part of the choir. The parts are labeled S.I, S.II, A.I, and A.II. The music is in common time and features a key signature of one sharp (F#). The vocal parts are primarily composed of semiquavers (eighth notes) in descending chromatic scales. The lyrics, written in Estonian, are repeated in each staff. The lyrics include 'vir - ven - da - vad, vir - ven - da - vad...', 'glim - mer, shin - mer, glim - mer, shin - mer...', 'vir - ma - li - sed vir - ven - da - vad, bor - e - al - is', 'shim - mer, shin - mer, shin - mer...', and 'PPP sotto voce' markings. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

⁶³The Northern Lights are known as ‘*Revontulet*’ [Foxes’ Tails] in Finnish, to which this text no doubt alludes (noted by author).

⁶⁴The source of this and all further examples from this work is Veljo Tormis, *Talvemustrid* (1968) (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 1996).

At the climax, glissandi of unspecified pitch play on the words ‘*Virmalised*, *virvendavad*’ [‘flashing Northern Lights’], creating a sense of childlike excitement and wonder (ex. 14).

Ex. 14. Tormis. *Talvemustrid*, ‘*Virmalised*’, bb. 74-81

The musical score consists of four staves, each representing a different vocal or instrumental part. The parts are labeled S. I, S. II, A. I, and A. II. The music is in 2/4 time. The vocal parts sing lyrics, while the instrumental parts play glissandi. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p (pianissimo) and poco a poco cresc. (gradually increasing in volume). There is also a note indicating that the 'x' symbol represents Sprechstimme (relative pitches). The lyrics are in Estonian and describe the 'Virmalised' and 'virvendavad' (flashing Northern Lights).

It is evident in the later *Looduspildid* cycles that Tormis was becoming pre-occupied not only with his musical material, but, increasingly, with exactly how the material should sound in performance, developing during this period an acute ear for choral

sonority. Through the 1960s, he was manipulating choral material in an almost ‘orchestral’ manner: works began to be ‘scored’ through carefully-placed voice combinations, constantly shifting doublings, changing textures and sonorous parallel chords, with precise dynamics allotted to specific voices in order to achieve a desired effect. It is often the details of pieces that are the most revealing. For example, the texture created at the beginning of ‘*Külm*’ [‘Cold’] from *Talvemustrid*, where the first sopranos sing their phrase *legatissimo* in thirds, while the second sopranos sing the same notes, *secco*, on alternate quavers, is surely a choral recreation of the effect of pizzicato strings punctuating a legato woodwind phrase (ex.15).

Ex. 15. Tormis. *Talvemustrid*, ‘*Külm*’, bb. 1-9

p legatissimo

S. I
Käl - dris
Käl - lars
p secco

S. II
käl - me - ta - vad
käl(l) - me - ta - va(d) - i(n)g
Ke(l) - dri(s)
Ce(l) - lar(s)

A.I
filled - with - cool - ing
fü(l)led - wi(th) - co(ol) - i(n)g

A.II

mf

öu - nad
- ta - toes

öu - nad
- ta - toes

öu - nad
- ta - toes

pp

Kel - dris
Cool - ing

käl - me - ta - vad
ap - ples and po -

Ma - ja - del
Hous - es with
mf

Ma - ja - del
Hous - es with
mf

Ma - ja - del
Hous - es with
mf

Ma - ja - del
Hous - es with

Tormis also began to display in a number of works from this decade subtle changes in dynamics of pieces, often in only one or two vocal parts, to create striking colouristic effects. For example, in ‘*Suveöö*’ [Summer Night] from *Suvemotiivid* (1969) (for

upper voices) a small crescendo from *pp* in the clusters in the first alto part, followed by a crescendo in the second soprano part, moves the focus towards the final three-note cluster in the first soprano part, left hanging timelessly. The result is an invitation to engage the senses in the sultry summer evening ('*vaata . . . kuula . . .*') ['see now . . . hear now . . .']. It is all the more seductive for its inconclusiveness, as seen in the final six bars of ex. 16.

Ex. 16. Tormis. *Suvemotiivid*, 'Suveöö', bb. 43-54⁶⁵

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff features vocal entries with lyrics: 'Vaa See' and 'ta, now,'. The middle staff contains the lyrics 'ko - ne - leb: mur - mur - ing:' followed by 'Vaa See ta, now.'. The bottom staff contains the lyrics 'kuu hear' followed by 'la ... now ...'. The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *f*, and *pp*.

⁶⁵The source of this and all further examples from this work is Veljo Tormis, *Suvemotiivid* [Summer Motifs] (1969) (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 1996).

Further examples of the subtle use of dynamics in specific voices will be seen in *regilaul*-based pieces from the 1970s, discussed in Chapter 4. Tormis's growing confidence with these more explorative choral techniques anticipates their later use in his seminal work, *Raua Needmine [Curse Upon Iron]* (1972), discussed in Chapter 5. Of the four sets of *Looduspildid*, *Talvemustrid* and *Suvemotiivid* are the most adventurous in terms of choral writing. In several songs, Tormis introduces 'cumulative chording' a technique by which each note of a phrase is held while the next is sounded.⁶⁶ This produces the effect of an artificial echo, and serves to blur the tonality. The effect is seen in the downward moving clusters of the previous example, 'Suveöö', and in both upward and downward moving phrases in 'Tuisk' [Blizzard] (ex. 17).

Ex. 17. Tormis. *Talvemustrid*, 'Tuisk', bb. 1-4

⁶⁶'Cumulative chording' is the author's own term for this procedure, echoing as it does the term 'cumulative scoring', which is often applied to another of Tormis's choral techniques.

While *Talvemustrid* was composed two years after Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna* (1966) and in the same year as Stockhausen's *Stimmung* (1968), it is more likely that the influence on Tormis will have come via Finnish composers via the wave of Finnish Modernism in the mid-1960s; such composers as Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928) and Aulis Sallinen (b. 1935) were, and still are, much performed in neighbouring Estonia. The harmonic vocabulary of these composers is often enriched with dense, cluster-like chords.⁶⁷ The technique of 'cumulative chording' was also extensively employed by Britten, a composer whose works, particularly the operas, Tormis knows intimately, and whose scoring he has studied in detail.⁶⁸ This 'echo effect' is Britten's work is notably seen in the choral plainsong writing of *Curlew River*, and, and in the 'Kyrie' chorus writing in *Death in Venice*, where Britten alludes to the sound of the bells of San Marco (ex. 18).

Ex.18. Britten. *Death in Venice*, Act II, 'Kyrie' chorus, score fig. 219⁶⁹

⁶⁷Korhonen, 'New Music of Finland' in White (ed.) *New Music*, p. 173.

⁶⁸This was witnessed by the author as Tormis pored over the orchestral score of Britten's *Albert Herring* prior to attending a performance of the opera in Helsinki (Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2011).

⁶⁹The source of this example, and that in Chapter 5, is Benjamin Britten, *Death in Venice* (London: Faber, 1979).

The same technique of cumulative chording, creating an echo-like effect, is seen frequently in the work of, for example, the contemporary American choral composer, Eric Whitacre (b.1970), as at the opening of his setting of the Edmund Waller poem, ‘Go, lovely Rose’ (ex.19).

Ex. 19. Whitacre. ‘Go, Lovely Rose’, bb. 1-3⁷⁰

During the 1960s Tormis had begun his exploration of *regilaul*, concurrently with employing the ‘contemporary’ choral style of *Looduspildid*. It is now apparent that Tormis could ‘switch’ between choral styles, according to the nature of the text with which he was working. These styles fall broadly into four categories:⁷¹

1. Twentieth-century Estonian texts. For examples, *Looduspildid*, discussed above, and the central, ‘modern warfare’ section of *Raue Needmine*, (discussed in chapter 4), which employ a musical vocabulary drawing on the contemporary choral music of their time (influenced by works such as Ligeti’s *Lux Aeterna*). These works include extended techniques: vocal glissandi, wailing, vocal clusters, *Sprechstimme*, wide vocal ranges, and more dissonant harmony.

⁷⁰The source of this example is Eric Whitacre, ‘Go Lovely Rose’ from *Three Flower Songs* (London: Chester Music, 2009).

⁷¹Author discussion with Urve Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2011.

2. Works which use Estonian folk song (*regilaul*) treated freely. Here, the original material is harmonised, lengthened and expanded. In other words, the folk song serves as a *starting point* for a choral piece. This is perhaps the most ‘conventional’ approach to folk song-based composition. This approach is seen in Tormis’s first choral work employing *regilaul*, *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*, discussed in chapter 4.
3. Works which use Estonian folk song (*regilaul*) presented intact. Here, the original folk melody (and words) remain totally unchanged and intact throughout, while changing choral textures are created around them. This is the style most recognisably ‘Tormis’, and is found in many works from 1969 onwards, such as ‘*Laevamäng*’ [Boat Game], *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* [Estonian Calendar Songs] and Tormis’s largest scale work, *Eesti Ballaadid* [Estonian Ballads], also discussed in chapter 4.
4. Works using a medieval or Latin text. This idiom, influenced perhaps by Tormis’s experience of Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, appears to develop in the 1980s. Here, Tormis will draw on the language of plainsong, with extensive use of parallelism, and sparser textures. This idiom is seen in works such as *Piispa ja Pakana* [The Bishop and the Pagan] and *Sampo Cuditur* [The Forging of the Sampo]. These are discussed in chapter 6, ‘Bridges of Song’.

The next chapter will provide an introduction to this Estonian traditional song, or *regilaul*, which was to play such a fundamental role both in Tormis’s music and his life.

Chapter 3

Regilaul, the ancient folk song of Estonia

Regilaul was to become an intrinsic part not only of Tormis's most recognisable musical style, but also of his personal ideology. As it is so fundamental to any study of Tormis, it demands some examination here.

The term is derived from the two Estonian words: '*regi*', meaning 'verse', and '*laul*' (plural '*laulud*'), meaning 'song', although Tormis claims that 'the term cannot be translated exactly into English.'¹ The term *regilaul* had been applied to Estonian alliterative or 'runic' verse by collectors such as the theologian-folklorist Jakob Hurt as far back as the nineteenth century but Tormis asserts that he and folklore scholar Ülo Tedre, in their themed anthology, *Uus Regilaulik [The New Regilaul]*, were the first to extend the term to apply to both the authentic words *and* the melody. The two are inseparable in traditional *regilaul* practice. The melodies alone had previously been known by the same name both in Estonia and Finland: *runolaul*, i.e. 'runic song', or 'old song' and this is the term still used in Finland.² Traditions similar to those of *regilaul* once flourished in Estonia's neighbouring communities around the Finnish Gulf: the former communities of Vots, Izhorians, and Karelians. Here, as in remote rural areas elsewhere, folk song formed an essential part of everyday life well into the twentieth century.³

In his essay, 'Some problems with that *regilaul*' Tormis defines the

¹Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

²Tormis, 'Some problems'.

³These have ceased to be distinct communities, becoming absorbed into the neighbouring countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. Lippus, 'The Balto-Finnish Tradition'. Material from the regions around the Finnish Gulf, drawn from the Tampere collections held in Tartu University, is used in Tormis's extensive cycle, *Unustatud Rahvad [Forgotten Peoples]*.

characteristics of *regilaul* as follows:⁴

- *Regilaul* is an oral tradition
- The core principle of *regilaul* is repetition (reinforcement of information, not development or improvisation)
- *Regilaul* structure consists of an eight-syllable melody line, and verse repetition by a lead singer and choir
- It is the phonetic sounds and words that are sung, rather than ‘notes’
- Singing does not follow the rules of spoken language
- Pronouncing the *regilaul* language is more important than ‘expressiveness’ or timbre
- *Regilaul* singing is a continuous activity, an unbroken flow, where there is no grammatical phrasing
- *Regilaul* is a ritual song, not a means of communication⁵

Lippus further points out that *regilaul* melodies are fundamentally *linear* in character: that is, they are early monophonic melodies that exist without an implied underlying chordal structure. These differ distinctly from the ballads, lullabies and other end-rhymed ‘folk’ songs from Western Europe (via the Swedish and Baltic German overlords) that were to supplant them in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁶ This linear aspect of *regilaul* was to have a marked effect on Tormis’s choral writing.

The oral tradition from which *regilaul* stems certainly predates the Christianisation of Estonia in the 13th century, and in view of the similarity in character between songs deriving from different Baltic tribes which later dispersed, it

⁴Tormis, ‘Some problems’.

⁵Lippus clarified to the author Tormis’s use of the term ‘ritual’, explaining that he means that the song derives from a functional context, as an inseparable part of the repeated routines of traditional working life. Performance is dispassionate, and lacks the fundamentally ‘expressive’ qualities of later end-rhymed western folk song. (Author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2013, also Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 48).

⁶Lippus, *Linear Musical Thinking*, pp. 10-11. Lippus does qualify this point by saying that the harmonic dimension is not entirely missing; it exists ‘in the acoustic nature of musical notes’.

is likely to originate from the first Millennium A.D.⁷ The pagan origins of *regilaul*, identified by subject matter based on rituals of the farming and working year, rites of passage and ancient festivities, were often obscured by the later substitution of Christian texts, an attempt by Lutheran overlords to impose a ‘civilising’ mark on what was perceived as a ‘primitive’ culture. Daitz cites examples where new words were added to the old melodies; songs were given ‘new’ themes such as Christian holidays and the coming of Christ, and even updated to include historical events such as conscription into the Czar’s army.⁸

Folk songs have, of course, undergone a similar transformation elsewhere. Many ‘traditional’ songs were given new religious texts and became popular hymns, a famous example being 16th-century German folk-style song ‘*O Innsbruck ich muss dich lassen*’ [O Innsbruck I must leave you], reputedly by Heinrich Isaac (1450-1517), which was later to become the Lutheran hymn ‘*O Welt ich muss dich lassen*’ [O World I must leave you], famously employed by J. S. Bach in the cantata *In allen meinen Taten*.⁹

Likewise, in the Soviet Union, after the beginning of collectivisation of farms in 1929, once ‘authentic’ folk songs were given new words incorporating political messages, thus turning these into Soviet propaganda.¹⁰ In the realm of classical music in Soviet Russia, entire operatic libretti were rewritten to fit the revolutionary spirit of the time: for example, Puccini’s *Tosca* became *The Battle for the Commune*

⁷Armas Launis, doctoral dissertation (1910), ‘Über Art, Entstehung und Verbreitung der Estnisch-finnischen Runenmelodien’ (Germany: Kessinger, 2010), discussed in Lippus ‘The Balto-Finnish Tradition.’

⁸Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 44. Bohlman discusses the phenomenon of borrowing of a well-known tune for new texts in American folk music, in Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music*, pp. 20-21. The evolution of text and melody from the ritual to the everyday is also true of British folk song: ‘Many of the formerly ritual songs are now boisterous and jolly, sung to catchy but rather simple tunes... a reverberation from our distant past.’ Roy Palmer, foreword to *English Country Songbook* (London: Omnibus, 1976), p.1.

⁹James L. Brauer, ‘*Musica Contrafacta*: Can secular melodies be recycled for new hymn texts?’ *Missio Apostolica*, 6, 1, 1998, pp. 38-46.

¹⁰Slobin, *Retuning Culture*, p. 18.

and Bizet's *Carmen* became *Carmen and the Soldier*.¹¹

The rhythmic character of *regilaul* is usually based on the metre of the four-footed trochee.¹² The first syllable of each foot is stressed, and the final syllable of the line lengthened.¹³ Texts are closely linked in metre and alliterative qualities to the texts of *runo* songs of neighbouring Finland; both Estonian *regilaul* and Finnish *runolaul* have characteristically short melodic lines with a small vocal range, rarely wider than a fourth or fifth, and often as small as a third.¹⁴ *Regilaul* may be sung solo, or antiphonally between two soloists or a soloist and chorus. In the latter case, the chorus will often begin on the leader's last note, creating a seamless 'chain' of melody varied only by the evolving text. This is demonstrated in '*Laevamäng*' [Boat Game], a traditional boating song employed by Tormis in a work of the same name, and explored further in chapter 4 of this study (ex. 20).

Ex. 20. '*Laevamäng*', *regilaul* from Jõelähtme parish¹⁵

The musical notation consists of two staves of music in 2/4 time, treble clef. The lyrics are as follows:

So - ua, lae - va, jo - ua lae - va, lae - va,
 lae - va, So - ua, lae - va, jo - ua lae - va,

So - ua, lae - va, sin - na maa - le, maa - le.
 maa - le. So - ua, lae - va, sin - na maa - le.

¹¹Schwarz, *Music*, p. 64.

¹²Sarv, 'Language'.

¹³Lippus cautions against applying 'classical' linguistic terms to *regilaul*. Lippus, 'The Balto-Finnish Tradition'.

¹⁴Lippus makes a clear distinction between *regilaul* and *runo*, *rune* or *runic*, which refer to the ancient inscriptions found in Finland and elsewhere in Scandinavia. Lippus, *Linear Musical Thinking*, p. 22.

¹⁵The source of this and all other examples from this work is Veljo Tormis, '*Laevamäng*' from *Kolm Eesti Mängilaulu* [Three Estonian Game Songs], (1972). This song is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The similarity in both rhythmic and pitch contour between Estonian *regilaul* and Finnish *runolaul* is evident when compared with the opening lines of the *Kalevala*, (ex. 21)¹⁶.

Ex. 21. The first lines of the *Kalevala* in its traditional Finnish *runolaul* setting¹⁷

Leader or Chorus 1

Mie - le - ni mi - num te - ke - vi. le - vi,

Chorus 2

ke - vi, ai - vo - ni a - jat - te - le - vi,

Lah - te - a - ni laul - la - ma - han, ma - han.

ma - han, saa' - a - ni sa - ne - le - ma - han.

Typical *regilaul* themes are farming: herding, sowing, reaping, and harvesting; children's games and lullabies; courtship songs and wedding ceremonies in which the customs of 'mocking of the groom' and 'lamenting of the bride' are seen; 'bear wakes' (animistic practices where the 'spirit' of the bear is celebrated following the hunt); songs for singing aboard ship; laments, spells, and particularly, songs for large-scale festivals in the calendar of the year such as '*Jaanipäev*' (St John's Day or Midsummer's Eve), the most important festival even today in Estonia and other Nordic countries. This still involves extensive dancing, drinking, communal singing and the lighting of huge bonfires.¹⁸ Although there are exceptions,

¹⁶This song is employed in a later Tormis work, *Laulusild* [Bridge of Song], and is discussed in Chapter 5.

¹⁷Taken from Tormis, *Laulusild* (Helsinki:Warner/Chappell, 2006).

¹⁸Tormis, note in score, *Eesti Kalendrlaulud* [Estonian Calendar Songs] (Helsinki: Edition Fazer, 1996).

almost all *regilaul* is sung unaccompanied.

There are, of course, distinct regional variations. *Regilaul* in northern Estonia, the material most employed by Tormis, tends to be monodic; in contrast, the Setu style from the south-eastern part of Estonia (shown in fig. 12) employs two-part singing, the lines sometimes independent enough to be termed polyphonic.¹⁹ As witnessed by the author on a research trip to the Setu village of Obinitsa in February 2010, songs in parts of Setumaa are still claimed to be taught in the traditional manner, that is, by oral transmission from parents and grandparents; notebooks are used only as an *aide-memoire* for words.²⁰

The term *leelo* is applied to both the style of singing of these choirs, and to the form of the songs. *Leelo* songs consist of a main part, the *torrō* which is sung unaccompanied by a leader and then echoed by the choir, creating a ‘chain-like’ overlap. Against the choir, a soloist sings a subsidiary part or *killō*, usually above, but sometimes below, the main melody. The vocal delivery of *Setu*-singing style is influenced by that of neighbouring ‘Slavic’ styles. It is sung with an open-throated technique which provides a greater projection of sound than that the singing of northern and western Estonian *regilaul*. The *leelo* singing style also features prominent vibrato.²¹ *Leelo* choirs consist almost exclusively of women (fig. 13).²²

¹⁹Author discussion with Lippus at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2011. Unless otherwise stated, information regarding Setu choirs was supplied at these discussions and at first hand on a visit to a *leelo* choir in Obinitsa, during the author’s research trip in February 2010.

²⁰However, a paper given by musicologist Liisi Laanemets, ‘The Folk Music Movement in Estonia in the 1960s and the Institutionalisation of Setu *leelo* choirs’, at the conference ‘New Approaches to Writing Music History’, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama , Tallinn 2-4 February 2012, cast doubt on the ‘authenticity’ of the Setu tradition. She pointed out that after collectivisation of the farms in 1929, the need for traditional herding songs, etc, and hence, the original function and context of the songs, was removed. She suggested that Setu choirs are, as folk music in so many other places, a *reconstruction*, but that ‘the Setu publicity machine is very powerful; people want to believe in authenticity because of this being a small, remote and vulnerable community.’

²¹Ernst Emsheimer, ‘Some remarks on European Folk Polyphony’. *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, Vol. 16, 1964, pp. 43-36.

²²Men’s choirs do exist, but the repertoire is distinctly different and tends towards ‘drinking songs and songs with heroic action’. (Author discussion with Dr. Andreas Kalkan in Tartu, February

Fig. 12. Map of south-eastern Estonia, showing Tartu and the Setumaa region²³

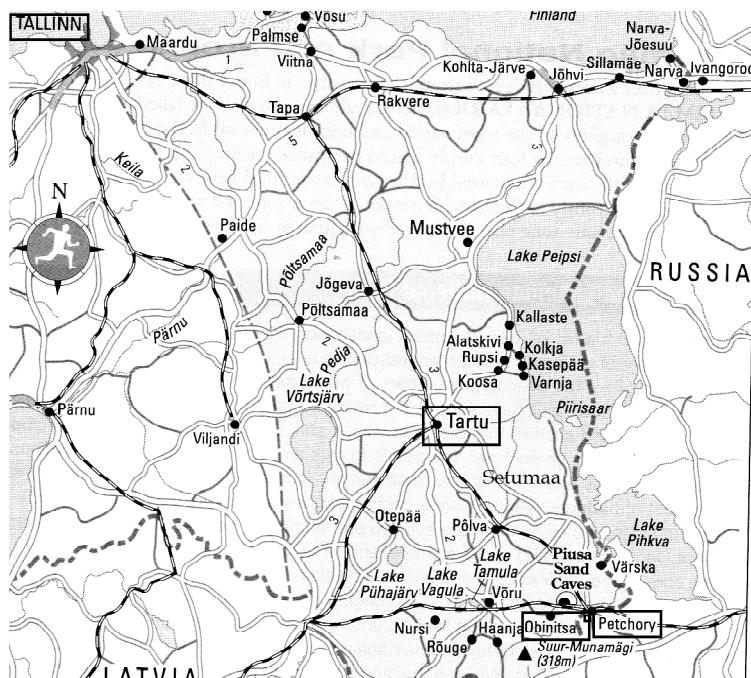


Fig. 13. Archive photo showing Setu *leelo* singers in traditional performance²⁴



2010). Lippus points out that, in Orthodox regions of Estonia, i.e. those bordering Russia, folk song was relatively unaffected by the incoming rulers. In Protestant areas, i.e., the north, where education and therefore singing under German rule were highly organised, the ‘old’ song tended to be quickly superseded. Lippus, ‘The Balto-Finnish Tradition’.

²³Map taken from Jonathan Bousfield (ed.), *The Rough Guide to the Baltic States* (London: Rough Guides, 2008), p. 129.

²⁴Undated photo taken from Olt, *Estonian Music*, appendix I, page unnumbered.

A particularly interesting musical trait of the *leelo* style is the unusual one-and-three semitone scale (ex. 22a), demonstrated in the Setu song, ‘*Käte käskumine*’ [Bidding Hands to Work] (ex. 22b).

Ex. 22 a) ‘Setu scale’ of alternating one and three semitones



b) Setu song, ‘*Käte käskumine*’, which employs this scale²⁵

The image shows two staves of musical notation for a Setu song. The lyrics are written below each staff. The first staff includes the lyrics: ‘A - vi - da aks no Ju - ma - la - ko - no, le - lo, le - lo, le' - lo.’ The second staff includes the lyrics: ‘A - vi - da nuud Ju - ma - la - ko - no, le - lo, le - lo, le - lo.’ The music consists of eighth and sixteenth note patterns.

This scale was to be employed with striking effect by Tormis in the eerie, otherworldly final movement, ‘*Kalmuneiu*’ [The Bride from the Grave] from *Eesti Ballaandid* [Estonian Ballads], an important work to be discussed in Chapter 5.²⁶

If the Setumaa region does indeed preserve a living tradition of singing, then this is partly due to its physical isolation and a static population, particularly during Soviet times. Elsewhere, as in most of the developed world, the oral folk-song tradition disappeared long ago, the decline being precipitated by the migration of farm labourers to cities, as well as the introduction of the ‘Western European style’ of

²⁵Tampere (eds.), *Eesti Rahvalmuusika*, CD booklet.

²⁶*Eesti Ballaandid* is discussed in Chapter 4. The issue of Setu scales and tonality was expounded to the author by ethnomusicologist Zhanna Pärtlas at the Estonian Academy February 2010. Pärtlas is researching specifically the multiphonic Setu style of singing.

strophic folk song (and folk dancing) during the eighteenth century, by Swedish and Germanic overlords. The new style employed melodies built on by a strictly diatonic chordal foundation (ex. 23).

Ex. 23. Silcher. ‘Aannchen von Thara’, example of Germanic-style end-rhymed song (1875)²⁷

2. Aannchen von Thara.

Mäßig.

Friedr. Silcher.

1. Aann - chen von Tha - rau ist, die mit ge - fällt,
Aann - chen von Tha - rau hat wie - der ihr Herz
sie ist mein Le - ben, mein Gut und mein Geld.
auf mich ge - rich - tet in Lieb' und in Schmerz.

Aann - chen von Tha - rau, mein Reichthum, mein Gut,
du mei - ne See - le, mein Fleisch und mein Blut!

2. Räm' alles Wetter gleich auf uns zu schlahn, wir sind gefünt bei
einander zu rahn. Krankheit, Verfolgung, Beträbnß und Pein soll unsre
Liebe Verhöhnung sein. Aannchen von Thara ic.

3. Recht als ein Palmenbaum über sich steht, je mehr ihn Regen und
Hagel ansicht; so wird die Lieb' in uns mächtig und groß durch Freud' und
Leid, durch allerlei Noth. Aannchen von Thara ic.

By the end of the nineteenth century, this ‘European-style’, end-rhymed verse had, as elsewhere, replaced traditional Baltic alliterative poetry everywhere but on the islands and in the remote rural communities such as Setumaa. The demise came earlier to towns and cities and in Lutheran areas of the north, where education was more formalised. The *regi*-style song survived for some time longer, however, in the form

²⁷The source of this example is Freidrich Silcher and Ludwig Erk, *Allgemeines Deutsches Commersbuch*, 18th ed. (Lahr: Schauenburg, 1875), p. 278, quoted in Barnes, ‘A Garland.’

of children's games, riddles and proverbs.²⁸

Although the collection and promotion of folksong has been a life's mission for Tormis, he was never a collector of authentic folk music from original sources in the manner of Bartók and Kodály, or even Cyrilus Kreek and Mart Saar in Estonia earlier in the twentieth century. Tormis undertook a number of field trips with students in the 1950s and witnessed the traditional style of singing at first hand, but the larger part of his experience of *regilaul* has been acquired through the Tampere collections held in the Tartu Kirjandusmuuseum archives.²⁹ In what Tormis called his 'Non-interview' with Madis Kolk, he stated that he had heard in total 'about twenty' authentic *regilaul* singers, mostly in the Livonia region (a region now absorbed into Latvia).³⁰

The following chapter will explore the way in which Tormis encountered *regilaul*, and the way in which it came to influence his choral technique.

²⁸Author discussion with Urve Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2010.

²⁹Tampere, (eds.), *Eesti Rahvamuusika*.

³⁰Madis Kolk, 'Veljo Tormis does not answer' in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, 243-256.

Chapter 4

Tormis's *regilaul* choral technique:
Kihnu Pulmalaulud, 'Laevamäng', *Eesti Kalendrilaulud*, *Unustatud Rahvad*

It is not I who make use of folk music;
it is folk music that makes use of me.¹

Tormis already knew of *regilaul* from an early age. He had played the organ works of Edgar Arro in the 1940s with his teacher, August Topman, many of which incorporated melodies of this traditional song. Tormis later discussed at length the use of folk song in composition with his teacher, Vissarion Shebalin, at the Moscow Conservatory. But it was Tormis's experience of *regilaul* at first hand that fundamentally changed both his style of composition and his sense of musical mission.

It is interesting to consider why Tormis was particularly drawn to this ancient song. Brought up in rural Estonia in the 1930s he would have seen the impact of Soviet collectivisation on traditional farming, where ancient rural customs and practices, together with ritual songs and dances, disappeared from everyday routine. Feeling his roots to be in this rural community, he has described how he felt a sense of the impending loss of a living tradition.² As a composer, embracing *regilaul* also provided a solution to the fundamental dilemma of style, one which faces many composers at some point in their development. Exposed through his training in Moscow in the 1950s to the impressionist repertoires and subsequently to contemporary trends in serialism and modernism, Tormis found that none of these provided an idiom which felt 'true' to his own voice.

¹Tormis, quoted in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 56.

²Author discussion with musicologist Eerik Jöks, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2012.

For many twentieth-century composers, the solution to the dilemma of style was to look to music from the past. Ligeti, for example, had been drawn to Ockeghem, whose canonic techniques were to influence *Lux Aeterna* amongst other works.³ Many composers began as modernist/serialists and then underwent an about-turn; Pärt had rejected modernism in the 1980s in favour of a personal style influenced by Russian Orthodox church music and leading to his hallmark *tintinnabuli* style (discussed previously).⁴

Regilaul had influenced many Estonian composers before, and alongside, Tormis. Writer and composer Harry Olt, in *Estonian Music*, mentions Anatoli Garshnek (1918-1998), another pupil of Heino Eller (discussed in chapter 1).⁵ A native of Setumaa, Garshnek both collected and used Setu folk song as compositional material. Of Tormis's own generation, Ester Mägi (b. 1922), a pupil of Mart Saar (also an avid collector of traditional song) and a pupil of Shebalin with Tormis in Moscow, also draws on Setu song. Her choral piece, 'Vahtralt valgõ pilve päälle' ['Maple Way to Milky Clouds'] (1984), for example, exploits the imitative qualities as well as the (apparent) irregular metric groupings of the Setu folk style.⁶ Mägi uses simple parallel triadic harmony with extensive repetition of the melody. Variety is achieved by simple transposition and varying the texture by alternation of in different groupings between voices; there are procedures also followed by Tormis. Of the same generation, another composer influenced by *regilaul* is Anti Marguste (b. 1931), who employed traditional material in his large output for organ.

In 1958, Tormis read an article by the Estonian ethnomusicologist Ingrid

³Richard Toop, *György Ligeti* (London: Phaidon, 1999), p. 115.

⁴Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, p.3.

⁵Olt, *Estonian Music*, p. 39. Garshnek was another pupil of Shebalin in Moscow in the 1950s, together with Mägi and Tormis.

⁶Ester Mägi, 'Vahtralt valge pilve päälle' (Tallinn: SP Muusikaproject, 1984).

Rüütel describing the wedding ceremonies of Kihnu, a small island off the west coast of Estonia.⁷ These ceremonies, which often lasted for several days, were at that time still being performed traditionally, with all their songs, dances and ancient rituals. That year, Tormis undertook a research trip to witness *regilaul* performed in its authentic setting, spending a week on the island with a group of student researchers. Out of the experience came the impetus for *Kihnu Pulmalaulud [Kihnu Island Weddings Songs]* (1959), the first Tormis work to incorporate the ancient song.

Kihnu Pulmalaulud consists of four songs: 1. ‘*Ei või õnneta elada*’ [‘I cannot live without Love’], 2. ‘*Peiu Pilkamine*’ [‘Mocking of the Bridegroom’], 3. ‘*Ilu kaob õue pealt*’ [‘Beauty disappears from the Courtyard’] and 4. ‘*Sööge, Langud!*’ [‘Eat, my Inlaws!'], all set for four part SATB choir (without *divisi*). The melodies are given in ex. 24.

Ex. 24. *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*. *Regilaul* material of the four songs⁸

Song 1

Song 2

Song 3

Song 4

⁷Ingrid Rüütel, ‘Wedding Songs and Ceremonies of the Kihnu Island in Estonia’, *The World of Music*, UWB Berlin, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2002, pp.131-151. Off the west coast of Estonia, Kihnu island was out of bounds in Soviet times, thus preserving its traditions for longer than on the mainland. (Author discussion with Veljo Tormis at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2010).

⁸Example taken from Rüütel, ‘Wedding Songs.’ Rüütel points out in this article that the rhythms of these, as in many folk songs, derive from an everyday activity. In the case of these songs, this would probably be the movement of an object such as a cradle or swing, or stamping feet. This fact underlines the functional nature of the original songs.

The melodies of songs 1 and 2 are of course closely related; Song 3 is a transposition of 2; 4 a rhythmic variant of 1. The dominant rhythm of songs 1-3, a quaver-crotchet movement, is characteristic of *regilaul*. The four phrases of Tormis's 'setting' of '*Ei vōi õnneta elada*' are given in ex. 25.

Ex. 25. *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*, no. 1, '*Ei vōi õnneta elada*', four-phrase melody, bb. 9-24



It is seen that, while phrase 1 is authentic *regilaul*, phrase 2 (repeated in phrase 3 but for one small pitch change), and phrase 4 derive either from other songs, or are Tormis's own invention. In 'authentic' *regilaul*, the first phrase ('Song 1') would have formed the entire song: this would be repeated many times, with changes only in the words and meaning. In '*Ei vōi õnneta elada*' Tormis has therefore created his own ('conventional') four-phrase song with a distinct melodic shape (ABB¹C). In Tormis's setting the four phrases are first heard over a wordless countermelody in sixths in the alto and tenor parts above a bass tonic pedal, making the *regilaul* stand in relief against the texture (ex. 26). At the end of the first verse (and at bb. 64-72) this accompaniment wells up into a wordless melisma, consisting of variants of the accompanying material in a higher vocal register. This material has a close intervallic relationship to the first verse of the song. Each of the phrases, characteristically for

Ex. 26. Tormis. *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*, no. 1, ‘Ei või õnneta elada’, bb. 1-12⁹

The musical score consists of three staves of music in 3/8 time. The top two staves are in treble clef, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. The key signature is one flat. The first two measures show sustained notes with dynamic *pp*. The third measure begins with a note followed by a short rest. The fourth measure shows sustained notes with dynamic *pp*. The fifth measure begins with a note followed by a short rest. The sixth measure shows sustained notes with dynamic *pp*. The seventh measure begins with a note followed by a short rest. The eighth measure shows sustained notes with dynamic *pp*. The ninth measure begins with a note followed by a short rest. The tenth measure shows sustained notes with dynamic *p*. The eleventh measure shows sustained notes with dynamic *p*. The twelfth measure shows sustained notes with dynamic *p*. The lyrics are: Nei - u - ke - ne , noo - ru - ke - ne ! Mäd - chen , lie - bes , Mäd - chen , jun - ges ,

regilaul, is contained within the compass of a perfect fourth (ex. 27).

Ex. 27. Tormis. *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*, no. 1, ‘Ei või õnneta elada’, bb. 64-72

The musical score consists of two staves of music in 3/8 time. The top staff is labeled SA (Soprano) and the bottom staff is labeled TB (Tenor Bass). The key signature is one flat. The dynamic is *mf* throughout. The first measure shows eighth-note chords. The second measure shows eighth-note chords. The third measure shows eighth-note chords. The fourth measure shows eighth-note chords. The fifth measure shows eighth-note chords. The sixth measure shows eighth-note chords. The seventh measure shows eighth-note chords. The eighth measure shows eighth-note chords. The ninth measure shows eighth-note chords. The tenth measure shows eighth-note chords. The eleventh measure shows eighth-note chords. The twelfth measure shows eighth-note chords. The lyrics are: Ah, Ah.

⁹Taken from Veljo Tormis, *Kihnu Pulmalaulud* (1959) (Bremen: Eres Edition, 1996).

The melisma becomes a wordless extension of the four-phrase song melody between verses, and later, becomes an extended coda reflecting on the emotions of the original song (bb. 81-107). This procedure is to become a characteristic Tormis trait: subsidiary material derived from the original melody is extended and harmonically enriched in some way. This material creeps in at first almost unnoticed, but gradually takes on a more dominant role. The procedure is well illustrated in ‘*Laevamäng*’ [‘Boat Song’], discussed later in this chapter.

Throughout *Kihnu Pulmalaud*, and characteristically of Tormis’s choral writing in general, there is a constant shifting of interest between the voice parts. The vocal textures of each of the four songs vary between melody with accompaniment, and writing with independent vocal lines which often employ dramatic canonic effects and imitation. This is illustrated in the final song, no. 4, ‘*Sööge, languid!*’ (ex. 28).

Examining *Kihnu Pulmalaud* against the work of other composers who employed folk song, a fundamental question arises: to what extent is this an original composition, rather than merely an arrangement of the traditional folk song? There are countless precedents from the twentieth century (and earlier) where composers have arranged folksongs to create new works. From Hungary, Bartók and Kodály, discussed in Chapter 1, and from the US and UK respectively, Copland and Vaughan Williams are good examples. Britten arranged six sets of folksongs for solo voice with piano (or guitar, in Set 6) which for many audiences have become almost inseparable from the original songs. In his arrangement of ‘The Ash Grove’ from the first set (1943), for example, a beguiling Welsh folk melody actually from the 18th century, becomes a sophisticated art song through the addition of a revealingly clever piano accompaniment. This begins innocuously in canon with the vocal line, but

Ex. 28. Tormis. *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*, no. 4, ‘Sööge, languid!’, bb. 47-55

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff has four voices: soprano, alto, tenor, and bass. The middle staff is for the piano/basso continuo. The bottom staff is for the piano/basso continuo. The score includes lyrics in Estonian and musical dynamics like p (piano), cresc., and mf (mezzo-forte). Measure numbers 47, 50, and 53 are indicated.

becomes increasing dissonant as the lover's hopes are dashed and disillusion sets in.¹⁰

The sophistication of the piano accompaniment conveys the composer's *interpretation* of the original song and places it unmistakably in the realm of art music. Similarly, the ingeniously banjo-like piano accompaniment in Copland's arrangement of the American campaign song ‘The Dodger’ makes fun of a naive player, relentlessly stuck on one chord: all the more tender when a full chordal harmonisation appears for the lover who will ‘hug you and kiss you and call you his

¹⁰The use of canon was a Britten idiosyncrasy. Robin Holloway, CD review of Britten's *The Beggar's Opera*. *Tempo*, New Series, No 189 (June 1994), pp. 39-41. Holloway quotes Britten's own pun for his procedure: 'canonising'.

bride.¹¹ In ‘*A Rossz Feleség*’ [The Heartless Wife] from *Székely Ballada és Dalok* [Ballads and Songs from Transylvania] (1925), Bartók creates, as in the Britten, a sophisticated interplay between voice and piano. His aim was to ‘collect the most beautiful Hungarian folksongs and raise them to the level of art songs by providing them with the best possible piano accompaniment’¹². The introduction with its bass drone creates a folk-song-like atmosphere, but the use of harmony belongs, again, to the world of the art song (ex. 29).

Ex. 29. Bartók. ‘*A Rossz Feleség*’, bb. 1-18¹³

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff is for the piano, featuring a bass line with sustained notes and rhythmic patterns. The bottom staff is for the voice. The score begins with a dynamic of ***ff strepitoso***. The tempo is **Allegro con brio.** The key signature changes from A major to G major. The vocal part starts with a lyrical melody. The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns and dynamics. The vocal line continues with lyrics in Hungarian, German, and English. The tempo then shifts to **Lento.** The piano part has a sustained note, and the vocal part enters with a melodic line. The lyrics are: „Jöjjön ha-za, é - des a - nyám! „Kommt nach Hause, tie-be Mut-ter! „Come home quickly, mother dear-est, espr.

In Vaughan Williams’ arrangement of the English folk song, ‘The Turtle Dove’ for baritone solo and unaccompanied choir, from *Five English Folk Songs*

¹¹Like Britten, Copland displays a keen ear for piano sonority in these ‘arrangements’.

¹²Erdely, ‘Bartók’, p.27.

¹³Taken from Bela Bartók, *Székely Ballada és Dalok* [Ballads and Songs from Transylvania] (1932) (Budapest: Editio Musica, 1932).

(1913), a staple piece for many amateur choirs in the UK, the composer places the folk song melody of the first verse, as Tormis does, in ‘*Ei vōi ūnneta elada*’, in one vocal part (in this case, solo baritone) against a wordless chorus. The melody is then heard in four-part harmony (sung words) for the two middle verses, before returning to the solo and wordless chorus texture for the last. Believing that he was intervening as little as possible between the audience and the original folk song, Vaughan Williams said of ‘The Turtle Dove’ that he was aiming to ‘re-create the old song as the singer of today [would sing it]’ (ex. 30).¹⁴

Ex. 30. Vaughan Williams. ‘The Turtle Dove’, bb. 1-7¹⁵

The musical score consists of five staves. The top staff is labeled 'BARITONE SOLO' and has a dynamic of *p*. The lyrics for this section are: 'Fare you well, my dear, I must be gone, And leave you for a while; If I roam a way I'll come back again, Though I'. The subsequent staves are labeled 'SOPRANO 1 and 2', 'ALTO', 'TENOR', and 'BASS'. Each of these three parts has a dynamic of *pp* and the instruction '(closed lips)' written above them. The tenor and bass staves are identical.

¹⁴ Michael Kennedy, *The Works of Ralph Vaughan Williams* (Oxford: OUP, 1964), p. 135.

¹⁵ Taken from Ralph Vaughan Williams, ‘The Turtle Dove’ from *Valiant for Truth* (1913) ((London: Curwen, 1913).

Vaughan Williams was perhaps aiming for simplicity while Britten shows, in ‘The Ash Grove’ a high level of sophistication which sets the audience at a greater distance from the original folk material. Reviewing Britten’s arrangement of popular ballads in his *Beggar’s Opera*, Robin Holloway pointed out that Britten’s re-interpretations could sometimes appear ‘clever’ and ‘cold’, a ‘parody or patronage of the naive originals’, as if the original song lacked sufficient interest of its own.¹⁶ The same accusation could perhaps at times be made of the folk song arrangements, revealing and memorable though many are.

The addition of even the simplest musical material to a traditional song of course puts the composer between the original and his audience. However, effective folk song arrangements (and ‘clever’ ones, in the case of the Britten) can preserve the spirit of the original song in some way, without claiming to be ‘authentic’. Such arrangements can, for example, illuminate aspects of the original melody (through harmonisation or countermelody), intensify or dramatise the words, introduce humour or irony, and often, help the audience to hear anew a song that may have become over-familiar.

The Britten, Bartók, Copland and Vaughan Williams examples given are, then, clearly arrangements. The traditional melody and words are absolutely central; the composer has added an accompaniment, either choral or instrumental, of a greater or lesser complexity, which is totally subservient to the original words and melody. So, how is Tormis’s *Kihnu Pulmalaulud* different from a folk-song arrangement? The answer perhaps lies in the nature of the *regilaul* starting points. As discussed earlier in this chapter, *regilaul* differs from ‘western style’ folk song in that it consists of only one or two short phrases, often of no more than eight notes, and of only four

¹⁶Holloway, *The Beggar’s Opera*, pp. 39-41.

or five pitches which are repeated many times (in traditional practice the song can extend to fifty or more verses), varied only by meaning and alliteration. Yet simplicity offers more possibility; in Bartók's words, the 'simpler a folk melody is, the more complex the harmony can be'.¹⁷ The slightness and simplicity of the *regilaul* necessitates, and then emphasises the presence of, the composed musical material. We hear *Kihnu Pulmalaulud* not as a collection of harmonised folk melodies, but as a choral work in its own right. The lilting, wordless introduction and the concluding melisma of the first song, drawn from the song melody, embody the emotions of the song as powerfully as the *regilaul* melody itself. This returns us to Tormis's quotation at the beginning of this chapter: folk music has 'made use of' the composer.

The short song, 'Laevamäng' from *Kolm Eesti Mängulaulu [Three Estonian Game Songs]* (1972) provides a striking contrast with *Kihnu Pulmalaulud* of thirteen years earlier, revealing how far Tormis has come in his journey towards what he acknowledges as his 'mature *regilaul* style'. The song describes a ship setting sail, apparently to a childlike 'land of dreams', to find birds and animals 'made of gold'. But the skipper is warned of rocky reefs; the wind changes direction and the ship is wrecked. No longer will the sweep net reveal treasures, but instead, the dead bodies of sailors. The *regilaul* melody comprises two eight-note, near-identical melodic phrases, differing only by three pitches, all contained within the interval of a perfect fourth (ex. 31). Seen in conventional tonal terms, the centre is F, which would imply an underlying F major or D minor chord. However, Tormis's setting begins, strikingly, with a chord of A major, sustained as a triad, doubled cumulatively in octaves, firstly in the bass, then in the tenor, then soprano registers: this is perhaps a

¹⁷Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music*, p. 64.

Ex. 31. ‘Laevamäng’, *regilaul* melody

The musical notation consists of three staves of music. The first staff starts with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are: So - ua, lae - va, jo - ua lae - va, lae - va, lae - va. The second staff begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: So - ua, lae - va, so - ua, lae - va, jo - ua lae - va. The third staff begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: So - ua, lae - va, sin - na maa - le, maa - le. The fourth staff begins with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics are: So - ua, lae - va, sin - na maa - le.

choral equivalent of increasing organ registration. The augmented major seventh chord which results at the end of each phrase of the *regilaul* imparts a distinct sense of unease, hinting, subtly at first, of the disaster to come. This unease is further enhanced by the restless oscillations, in irregular metre, between the chords of A and G major (ex. 32).

Ex. 32. Tormis. ‘Laevamäng’, bb. 1-8

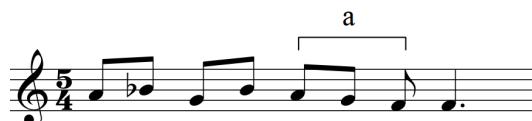
The musical score is for a choir with five parts: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Bassoon (B.). The tempo is marked as *Con movimento* $\text{J}=100$. The score includes dynamic markings such as *d.d.*, *ppp*, *f*, *p*, and *f*. The vocal parts sing in unison, with lyrics appearing below the staff: Sōu - a, lae - va, jōu - a, lae - va, Sōu - a, lae - va, jōu - a, lae - va. The bassoon part provides harmonic support with sustained notes.

This *regilaul* melody is repeated without a break, alternately by the first and second altos, a total of sixteen times, with only the slightest of melodic additions (on the sixth and then tenth time, the addition of a semiquaver). The onward direction is provided solely by the incremental crescendo in the chording, from *ppp* to *ff*, with a correspondingly subtle halving of note values in the accompanying chords. There is a sense of an ‘unbroken state of transformation’ here, that ‘music without beginning or end’ which was Ligeti’s intention in his monumental work, *Atmosphères* (1960).¹⁸

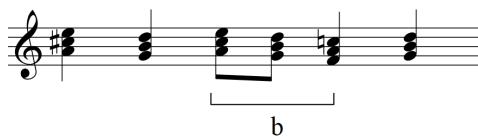
It was observed of ‘*Ei või õnneta elada*’ from *Kihnu Pulmalaulud* that subsidiary material, derived in some way from the original *regilaul* melody, is used by Tormis to form, in that case, an underlying accompanimental texture, and at the end of the verse, a melisma embodying the emotions of the song. Here in ‘*Laevamäng*’, the same principle is developed further. The subsidiary idea consists of an element of the *regilaul* melody (ex. 33a), filled out with parallel triads (ex. 33b).

Ex. 33. Tormis. ‘*Laevamäng*’

a) melody



b) subsidiary material



The wordless ‘subsidiary’ choral material has taken centre stage by the end of verse 16, now sung *ff*, and presenting a very much more threatening face: if the danger was subtly present from the beginning of the song, then only now does it reach its full

¹⁸Toop, *Ligeti*, p.76.

force. The dramatic climax consists of four superimposed triads, widely spaced, using all 12 notes of the chromatic scale. Fragments of the now-dismembered *regilaul* theme, to the words ‘*Arju sepp, minu armas venda*’ [Make me a net of steel whereby I shall draw men from the sea], are passed between the sopranos and altos. Through the use of bitonality, the melody and harmony are now unrelated, creating the impression that, with the loss of the ship, there also been a loss of a stable tonality (ex. 34).

Ex. 34. Tormis. ‘*Laevamäng*’, bb. 32-38

The musical score consists of two systems of music. The top system begins with a forte dynamic (f) and includes lyrics in parentheses: '(kõlevalt, kajavalt) (sonoritüd)'. The soprano (S. solo) and alto (A. solo) parts sing fragments of the 'regilaul' theme. The lyrics are: 'Ar... ju sepp, mi... nu ar... mas ven... da,' and 'Ar... ju sepp, mi... nu ar... mas'. The bottom system continues with lyrics: 'tie mul... le te...' and 'ven... da,'. The score features multiple staves for different voices and instruments, with various clefs (G, F, C), key signatures, and dynamic markings.

‘Laevamäng’ is a mature Tormis work which could, on first hearing, attract an inaccurate categorisation for its composer: that of minimalism.¹⁹ Fragments of motif-like material are, after all, repeated, apparently relentlessly, against a slowly evolving harmony. The starting material is stripped down to its essence, and the piece has no non-essential or decorative elements. But Tormis’s piece takes its character from the original *regilaul* words and melody. The setting serves the authentic text; the repetition is the *regilaul* song tradition, just as traditional African drumming or Balinese gamelan are by their nature, based on repeating and evolving rhythmic and melodic patterns. ‘Laevamäng’ could only be termed ‘minimalist’ if this term can be applied to the style of the *regilaul* tradition itself, which is clearly impossible. Minimalism was a specific movement to which Tormis has never claimed any adherence. The fact that some of his works superficially bear some of the ‘minimalist traits’ described is accident, rather than design.²⁰

A further striking example of Tormis’s manipulation of choral sound is seen in ‘Jaanilaul’ [‘St John’s Song’], the final song of *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* [Estonian Calendar Songs] (1966-67). Each of the five sets of this cycle is based on a different aspect of the traditional Estonian calendar, related to practices and rituals of rural life and farming. The four sets of *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* are scored alternately for men’s and women’s voices; not until the last set, *Jaanilaulud* is the whole mixed choir heard together.²¹ ‘Jaanilaul’ refers to the most important festival in the traditional Estonian calendar, ‘Jaanipäev’ [St John’s Day]. This occurs on 23rd June, just after

¹⁹This issue was mentioned in the Introduction to this study, under the ‘erroneous labellings’ of Tormis’s music.

²⁰Lippus has pointed to the author that it would have been almost impossible for Tormis to have gained access to recordings or scores of American minimalist works under the Soviet regime of the 1960s and 1970s. (Author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, 13 February, 2013).

²¹The five sets of Tormis, *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* (1969-72), with a total of 29 songs, are ‘Maardilaulud’ [Martinmas Songs], ‘Kadrialaulud’ [St Catherine’s Songs], ‘Västlalaulud’ [Shrovetide Songs], ‘Kiigelalaulud’ [Swing Songs] and ‘Jaanilaulud’.

the longest day of the year when, in the ‘White Nights’ of the Baltic region there is almost no darkness. It was believed, in the hybrid Catholic-pagan tradition from which *regilaul* originates, that St John brought prosperity to farmers by increasing yields of milk and encouraging healthy and abundant crops. The day is still marked throughout countries of the northern latitudes by the lighting of huge bonfires, as well as communal singing, dancing, drinking and feasting. Traditionally the bonfires were lit in the belief that they would encourage the growth of grass and crops and the productivity of cattle, as well as purge evil from the past year.²² The *regilaul* melody of this final song, ‘*Jaanilaul*’ is given in ex. 35.

Ex. 35. ‘*Jaanilaul*’, *regilaul* melody²³



Tormis’s setting of ‘*Jaanilaul*’ has a wide emotional spectrum, progressing from hushed reverence (awe in anticipation of the Saint’s appearance) at the opening, to an ecstatic coda (his arrival). Tormis achieves the tense onward movement through judicious choral scoring, the grouping of voices changing with each new entry. For example, doubling of the melody at the upper or lower octave, altos and basses (bars 8-14) against held pedal notes, with some simple imitation (shown in ex. 36);

²²‘*Jaanipäev*’ is still widely celebrated in Nordic countries including Latvia, Lithuania, northern Germany, and Scandinavia, and the Shetland Islands in the UK. (Author discussion with members of Setu choir in Obinitsa, Setumaa, February, 2010).

²³The source of this and all other examples from this work is Veljo Tormis, ‘*Jaanilaulud*’ (Helsinki: Edition Fazer, 1996).

Ex. 36. Tormis. '*Jaanilaul*', bb.1-8

Andante
♩ = 66-69

Soprano (S): Laa-mi val-la Jaa-ni kai-ma, jaa-ni, jaa-ni, kas om Jaa-nil kah-har paa, jaa-ni,
Jaa-ni,

Alto (A): sis om-ma kes-va kee-ru-lid-se, jaa-ni, jaa-ni, kaa-ra kat-so kan-di-lid-se, jaa-ni
Laa-mi val-la Jaa-ni kai-ma.

Tenor (T): - - - - -

Bass (B): sis om-ma kes-va kee-ru-lid-se, jaa-ni, jaa-ni, kaa-ra kat-so kan-di-lid-se, jaa-ni

parallel triads in the upper *or* lower voices (but not together) (bb. 34-48), and parallel 11th chords, rearranged into close clusters, in the upper voices only (bars 49-68).

Not until the final entry at bar 104 is the choir heard as a whole. The melody is now harmonised in parallel 11th chords, doubled at the octave. The dynamics are held in check, *p*, then, as the texture gradually thickens, dynamics increase through to a dramatic *fff*. The procedure creates the effect of a great force, at first held back, now unleashed; this technique could be said to imitate the organist's use of a full registration on the swell of an organ 'with the box closed', or, as Tormis commented to the author after a performance of the work, 'an animal let loose from a cage: a very dangerous animal' (ex. 37).²⁴

Lippus has emphasised the linear characteristic of *regilaul*, that is, that it consists of monodic melodies which exist without an implied underlying harmony.²⁵

²⁴Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

²⁵Lippus, *Linear Musical Thinking*, p. 11.

Ex. 37. Tormis. ‘Jaanilaul’, bb. 104-107

Even in his first *regilaul* work, *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*, Tormis had demonstrated strongly linear element in his choral writing (illustrated in the final song of the set, ‘*Sööge, langud!*’). In ‘*Jaanilaul*’, which is perhaps most memorable for its dramatic use of cumulative chording, there is also considerable independence of vocal parts. Short imitative fragments, often consisting only of a few notes, and each with a different combination of voices, are heard with each new entry of the melody. Tormis overlaps the movement between verses, exploiting the apparent ‘irregular metre’ to create an effect of continuous movement without cadence (ex. 38). This overlapping increases the onward motion of the song until the first lessening of movement at the *ritardando* through bars 102-103, making the hushed final entry at bar 104, leading into *crescendo e più estatico*, all the more dramatic (ex. 39).

The final bars of ‘*Jaanilaul*’ are an illustration of the subtle colouring achieved by Tormis’s variation in the details of the dynamics of the different voice parts, as was seen to great effect in ‘*Suveöö*’ [Summer Evening] from *Suvemotiivid*

Ex. 38. Tormis. '*Jaanilaul*', bb. 21-28

21 *p*

sis om-ma kes - vä kee - ru - lid - se, jaa - ni, jaa - ni,
then bar-ley will grow in - tri - cate - ly, jaa - ni, jaa - ni,
- ni, - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni,
- ni, - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni,

25

kaa - ra kat - sō - kan - di - lid - se, jaa - ni. Lää - mi väi - lä
oats will grow so an - gu - lar - ly, jaa - ni. Come out, come out,
- ni. jaa - ni.

kaa - ra kat - sō - kan - di - lid - se, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,
oats will grow so an - gu - lar - ly, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,
- ni.

Ex. 39. Tormis. '*Jaanilaul*', bb. 100-107

100

köö - de kul - last kon - du müü - däl, jaa - ni - ka.
walked a - long the gol - den bar - rens, jaa - ni - ka.

rit.

jaa - ni - ka.
jaa - ni - ka.,

104 *Piu largo (♩ = 56)* *poco a poco crescendo e più estatico*

Lää - mi väi - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,
p *poco a poco crescendo e più estatico*

Lää - mi väi - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,
poco a poco crescendo e più estatico

Lää - mi väi - lä Jaa - ni kai - ma, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,
Come out, come out, look at Jaa - ni, jaa - ni, jaa - ni - ka,

[*Summer Motifs*]. After the final *tutti* chord in bar 133, the tenors and basses continue to hold the chord while the sopranos and altos repeat it an octave lower, but wordlessly, and *ppp*, finally surrendering to the most subtle of echoes, a hummed chord, *pppp*, from the tenors and basses, an octave lower still. Given the spatial dimension of a live performance, this creates a stunningly resonant effect, quite at odds with the apparent simplicity on the written page (ex. 40).²⁶

Ex. 40. Tormis. '*Jaanilaul*', bb. 130-142²⁷

²⁶*Eesti Kalendrilaulud* won the Prize of Soviet Estonia in 1970 and was performed in Arezzo, Italy, the following year. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 181.

²⁷A parallel twentieth-century work displaying cumulative scoring is Ravel's *Boléro* (1928). Here the composer maintains tension by varying the scoring of an obsessive and repetitious melody, achieving a great sense not only of crescendo but of accumulating texture, leading to the climax. In *Boléro*, the cumulative effect is, as in the Tormis, enhanced by thickening the melodic line with doublings in unisons and octaves, then with parallel diatonic chords. In one cycle of the melody, Ravel adds parallel harmonics using celesta and piccolos, much as an organist adds brightness to registration through the use of mixtures and octave doublings (the 'added' notes not being perceived as a 'pitch' on their own).

During the period of writing *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* in the late 1960s, the positioning of singers on- (and off-) stage began to take on a great importance for Tormis, demonstrating his increasing awareness of issues beyond the score itself. Tormis cannot have been unaware of contemporary works such as Stockhausen's *Gruppen* (1955-57), in which Stockhausen creates the impression of a multi-dimensional space with an orchestra of 109 players and three conductors. At one point, a chord 'pans from one channel to another' in imitation of electroacoustic practice.²⁸ In giving specific instructions as to the positioning of performers, Tormis is, of course acknowledging a tradition dating back to the sixteenth-century. Gabrieli exploited the acoustics of St Mark's, Venice, by using a choir or instrumental group first on one side of the church, followed by a response from the musicians on the other. Indeed, he is considered to be one of the first composers to have written for, and to have given instructions for, the specific acoustics and layout of a given space.²⁹

Twentieth-century choral examples, where a semi-chorus is placed away from the main performers are found in Holst's orchestral suite *The Planets*, (1916). In the last movement of Holst's work, an offstage, wordless female chorus is used to dramatic and (literally) other-worldly effect in the final movement, 'Neptune, the Mystic', as it recedes into the infinity of space and silence through the final closing of a stage door. Britten's *War Requiem* (1962) is another example, where a semi-chorus of young voices sings the liturgical mass from a gallery, detached from the main choir and orchestra as if in another world. This achieves the effect of transcending the

²⁸Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise* (London: Fourth Estate, 2007), pp. 395-396. Many works by contemporary Estonian composers, particularly Erkki-Sven Tüür and Helena Tulve, demonstrate a preoccupation with recreating electronic sonorities through *acoustic* means. Author discussion with composer Dr. Gerard Lock, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2010.

²⁹David Bryant. 'Gabrieli, Giovanni' in Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> accessed July 10 2011.

brutal First World War realism of Owen's text, delivered by the tenor and baritone soloists.³⁰

Tormis is insistent that the physical layout of the choir be adhered to in places indicated in the score, believing that the positioning is 'as important as the music itself'; he feels disappointed when conductors fail to adhere to his wishes.³¹ In comparison with many twentieth-century works where composers request specific physical layouts, often minutely detailed in the form of diagrams in the score, Tormis's physical placing of singers is relatively elementary: 'to the side of the stage', 'behind the stage', '*in distanza*', although the effect can be surprisingly dramatic, especially in live performance.

The large-scale choral cycle, *Unustatud Rahvad [Forgotten Peoples]* consists of six sets, totalling 59 songs, written between 1970 and 1989, and in many ways continues to develop the approach to *regilaul* seen in *Eesti Kalendrilaulud*. A number of the songs exploit the idea of physical positioning on stage. One example is '*Lindude äratamine*' ['Waking the Birds'], the opening song from the first set, *Liivlaste Pärandus [Livonian Heritage]* (1970). Four solo voices (two sopranos and two tenors) are placed 'behind the stage', delivering the *regilaul* theme against a pedal unison octave held by the altos and basses of the main choir. This procedure enhances the ritualistic aspects of this simple folk song, creating something quite elemental; by creating this 'otherness' of vocal timbre, Tormis enlarges the impression of physical space. It is as if the incantation is coming from another, primeval world (ex. 41). There are echoes here of the opening of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* (1913), in which the timbral world of the plaintive high bassoon solo, itself a

³⁰Anthony Milner, 'The Choral Music' in Christopher Palmer (ed.), *The Britten Companion*. (London: Faber, 1984).

³¹Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008. Tormis was on this occasion evidently frustrated that Paul Hillier, conductor of the Estonian Chamber Choir did not place the voices for *Jaanilaulud* as he had instructed in the score.

Ex. 41. Tormis. *Liivlaste Pärandus*, ‘Lindude äratamine’, bb. 1-8³²

2(3) Soprani soli
 2(3) Tenori soli
 (from a distance, behind the stage)
 Soprani
 Altis
 Tenoris
 Bassi
 Min.
 Min.

Tši-tšor-lin-kist, tši-tšor-lin-kist, ni um aai - ga il - zō nuu - zō,

(Lithuanian) folk melody, is set distinctly apart from the rest of the ensemble.³³ In the Tormis, the spatial effect is heightened by the subtle use of dynamics (as was previously seen in *Looduspildid* [Nature Pictures]) on the accompanying choral pedal G. The note is sung alternately by the altos and basses, creating a ‘stereophonic’ effect with a constantly shifting shading of colour. Tormis’s choral technique of shading notes and vowel sounds is to reach a climax in *Raue Needmine* [Curse Upon Iron] (1972), discussed in Chapter 5. Tormis’s ‘spatial’ technique is used again in ‘Karjametsas’ [At Pasture], the second song of the same cycle. Here, the solo tenor, in the role of a herd-boy, sings from ‘behind the stage’. The sense of other-wordliness is now heightened by means of bitonality: the body of the choir

³²Taken from Veljo Tormis, *Liivlaste Pärandus* (Helsinki: Edition Fazer, 1996).

³³Richard Taruskin, ‘Russian Folk Melodies in *The Rite of Spring*’. *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 33 (1980), pp. 501-512.

sings the *regilaul* theme in the Mixolydian mode on D flat while the tenor solo enters with the tonally, and dramatically, unrelated E, D and B natural melody at the words ‘*Ur tagan, uruu!*’ [‘Oh, go back!'] (ex. 42).

Ex. 42. Tormis, *Liivlaste Pärandus*, ‘Karjametsas’, bb.13-26³⁴

The musical score consists of six staves. The top staff is for Tenor solo, with lyrics 'Uf, ta-gan, uf, ta-gan, u-fuu!' and dynamics 'p' and 'Moderato (the herdboy's call, behind the stage)'. Below it are three staves for Alto (A), Soprano (S), and Tenor (T). The lyrics for these voices include 'nu-ka ja-ra.', 'joo-da.', 'vež - ki juuok-söbl!', and 'Uf, ta-gan, uf, ta-gan, u-fuu!'. The bottom two staves are for Alto (A) and Tenor (T), also with lyrics 'joo-da.' and 'Uf, ta-gan, uf, ta-gan, u-fuu!'.

The final song from *Liivlaste Pärandus*, ‘*Laulis isa, Laulis poega*’ [‘Sang the Father, Sang the Son’] further exploits techniques of choral orchestration and physical positioning of singers. This is a rollicking drinking song in 6/8 time to which Tormis adds a new dimension. To the words, ‘*Kui se ummó, kustó tulab, Ne aat pääginvoltó juuonõd*’ [‘What’s their secret, how does it come that their singing goes

³⁴Composed between 1970 and 1989, the 5 cycles of *Unustatud Rahvad* [Forgotten Peoples] resulted from Tormis’s visit to Livonia with students from Tartu University in 1969. Daitz, *Ancient Music*, pp. 244-246.

so well? They've been drinking a lot of beer'], a tremendous sense of onward motion is achieved not only through use of a gradual accelerando, but through the cumulative choral scoring. The *regilaul* theme progresses from lower to higher voices, from basses to full choir, while the accompanying chords, built of superimposed fifths, also thicken. At just the moment where a frenzied climax is expected, Tormis makes a most dramatic gesture by reintroducing the off-stage tenor. This voice interrupts the choir with a distant, haunting reprise of the opening material, and at the original (slow) tempo (ex. 43).

Ex. 43. Tormis. *Liivlaste Pärandus*, 'Laulis isa, Laulis poega', bb. 63-70

The musical score consists of several staves of music. The top section shows four staves of choir parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in G major, 2/4 time, with lyrics 'ral - la,' repeated. The bottom section begins with a solo tenor part (Tenore solo) in F major, 2/4 time, with dynamics 'f' and 'Andante sempre (♩, ♪)' and lyrics 'Loo - liz - i - za,'. This is followed by a transition to 'Allegro molto sempre' with lyrics '- lal - lal - lal - lal - lal - la.' The score then continues with the choir parts, and finally concludes with a solo tenor part (T. solo) with lyrics 'loo - liz - puu - o - ga, loo - list - kak - ſi'.

By this means, Tormis creates an unexpectedly poignant conclusion to the cycle. All is obviously not as it seems: the choir ends not in uproar, nor of drunken oblivion, but in a state of inconclusiveness, on a long-held chord of open fifths.

Of this important period, Tormis considered his five-set cycle *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* to have been a turning point in his musical development.³⁵ He had now, through the complete integration of *regilaul* into his style, found the confidence to create significant and substantial choral works. He had found exactly that ‘justification’ which he was seeking in order to compose.

³⁵Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

Chapter 5

Two landmark pieces: *Raua Needmine, Eesti Ballaadid*

This is a code of ancient morals remaining relevant today. The feeling of guilt and responsibility, relations between people, between man and Nature and man and the Universe must affect each of us personally.¹

Raua Needmine [Curse Upon Iron] (1972) which was to become Tormis's most widely performed work, is considered by Lippus to be the 'summit of Tormis's achievement'.² This piece employs both traditional *regilaul* melodies and contemporary Estonian text, and thus bridges two of the categories of Tormis composition styles defined in Chapter 2. These are, firstly, a contemporary Estonian text set to a contemporary choral idiom, and secondly, *regilaul* material, freely arranged into a new composition. Before looking at the work in some detail, it is perhaps important firstly to set *Raua Needmine* in its historical context.

The early 1970s saw the height of the Cold War, a period in which people of the Soviet bloc were as aware as those in Western Europe of the tensions between East and West and, in the decade following the Cuban missile crisis, of the real possibility of nuclear war.³ Tormis was inevitably affected by the political climate. As a pacifist, he began to see his mission now as extending beyond that of preserving *regilaul* to embracing wider political statements. Like many artists, Tormis found himself preoccupied with 'sympathies, passionately held convictions and profound beliefs' such as those that had provided Britten with the impetus for his *War Requiem*

¹Veljo Tormis, preface to score, *Eesti Ballaadid [Estonian Ballads]* (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompositor, 1987).

²Urv Lippus, trans. Luuk and Lippus 'Magnum Opus: Veljo Tormis, *Curse upon Iron*, an analytical study. The article, originally published in *Theater Muusika Kino*, II (1985), pp. 20-29, forms an entire chapter, 'A Modern Shaman's Call', in Daitz, *Ancient Song*, pp. 153-172.

³Sebestyn, *The Rise*, 301-303.

(1962).⁴

Raua Needmine is a vehement outcry against the contemporary terrors of war, and in particular, the modern fear of nuclear annihilation. The title comes from the ninth rune of the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, in which a curse is cast upon the element, iron, as it constitutes the raw material of weapons and warfare.⁵ The ancient text, selected by August Annist, is juxtaposed with contemporary text by Estonian poets Paul-Eerik Rummo and Jaan Kaplinski, which describe modern warfare. Thus, ‘modern deities . . . cannons, tanks, aeroplanes, nuclear warheads’ form the modern counterparts of ‘knives, spears, axes, halberds, sabres’ in the ancient text.

Raua Needmine is the Tormis work most performed and best known outside Estonia. During Communist times, it was one of the few to be widely performed outside the Soviet bloc. The first performance was given in Estonia in May 1973; it was then performed in Russia, Finland, Hungary and Sweden. Further performances abroad included many in the United States, where Daitz reports it has even been performed by high school choirs in its original Estonian.⁶ It has also been made into an Estonian TV film, and was awarded the State Prize of the Soviet Union in 1974.⁷

There are several possible reasons for the work’s popularity over other Tormis works, and it has been the most widely recorded. Firstly, because of the sheer impressiveness of its choral writing, the work has an undoubted immediacy for audiences not necessarily initiated into the Estonian tradition, and even for ‘non-classical’ audiences. Secondly, *Raua Needmine* uses colouristic choral effects which have an immediacy in themselves and do not require an understanding of the Estonian language. Finally, the work’s pacifist message has a universal value which cuts

⁴Donald Mitchell, ‘The Church Parables’, in Palmer (ed.), *The Britten Companion*, pp. 215-6.

⁵Veljo Tormis, preface to score, *Raua Needmine*.

⁶Author discussion with Daitz, Canterbury, May 2011.

⁷Tiiia Järg, footnote to score, *Raua Needmine*.

across cultural boundaries for audiences, thus giving the work an ‘extra-musical’ appeal. The work also contains a compelling theatrical element, using a shaman drummer as a ‘character within a drama’. This dramatic aspect of the work is heightened by stylised movements made by the performers during the ‘modern warfare’ section, indicated on the score: ‘gesture of fright’, ‘all cower’, ‘stand to attention’, ‘hands held high’.⁸ *Raua Needmine* was completed in 1972 and first performed in 1973 in its original version for men’s choir, tenor and baritone soloists. It was the first Tormis work to employ the shaman drum; this will be discussed presently. Tormis has rearranged many works for vocal combinations differing from the original, and *Raua Needmine* is no exception. It was rearranged in 1991 for mixed chorus.

Raua Needmine is one of the most tightly and economically organised of Tormis’s works. It is in three sections, the material of the two outer (‘A’ and ‘C’) sections consisting of the *Kalevala* text, delivered in the form of an incantation, sung to its authentic *regilaul* melody, and central (‘B’) section set to contemporary Estonian text, and using more extended choral technique. This first section is introduced, and then supported by, the shaman drum, which relentlessly pounds out a hypnotic pulse. After the initial sounding strokes diminish, the basses sing a wordless accompaniment of changing vowel sounds ‘in the style of a Jew’s harp’. Formed of the changing diphthongs *joi, jai, jäi, jäü, jau, jõu, jöü, jöi, jei*, these ‘vocal harmonics’ create a mysterious, unearthly effect from the outset (ex. 44). The ‘A’ section consists of two prominent melodic ideas, defined by Lippus as a ‘cursing’ and a ‘telling’ melody (exx. 45a and 45b).⁹

⁸These gestures were, however, omitted from the performance attended by the author, by the Estonian Men’s Choir at the Estonian Concert Hall, Tallinn, in February 2010.

⁹Lippus, ‘Magnum Opus’.

Ex. 44. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*, score fig. 1¹⁰

Parmupilli imitatsioon.
Imitating the jew's harp.

oi - joi - joi - jai - jai - jai - jää - jää - jau - jau - jou - jou - jou - jou - jöu - jöu - jöü - jöü - jöi - jöi - jei - oee - yoe - yoe - yoe - yae - yae - yae - yaw - yaw - yaw - yaw - yow - yow - yow - yow - yow - yow - yoe - yoe - yae - yae -

Ex. 45. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*

a) ‘Cursing’ melody (8 bars after score fig. 1)¹¹

O-hoi sin-da, rau-da rais ka, o-hoi sin-da rau-da rais ka.

b) ‘Telling’ melody (5 bars after score fig. 4)

Tean ma sun-di su so - ge - da, ar-van al-gust su o - e - la!

The ‘cursing’ melody (*‘Ohoi sinda, rauda raiska!’*) [‘Oh cursed, evil iron!?’] is an oscillation on the interval of a minor second, an interval which is also the principal element of the underlying harmony. The ‘telling’ melody (*‘Tean ma sündi sua sõgeda, arvan algust su õela’*) [‘Your beginnings reek of malice, you have risen from

¹⁰This and all examples from this work taken from Veljo Tormis, *Raua Needmine* (Helsinki: Warner /Chappell, 2006).

¹¹Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 157.

villainy'], itself an authentic *regilaul* melody, is based on the interval of a minor third, as seen in the previous example. This interval, deriving from this *regilaul* melody, in fact provides the tonal structure for the whole work. Representing the division of the octave into four parts, the result is four key centres: A, C, Eb and F# (ex. 46a). These pitches form the tonal centre of melodic lines in the form of rising octatonic scales (ex 46b).¹²

Ex. 46. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*

a) Key structure¹³



b) Rising octatonic scale in bass line, score fig. 12

The image shows two staves of a musical score. The top staff is in 12/8 time, B-flat major, with a bass clef. The bottom staff is also in 12/8 time, B major, with a bass clef. Both staves show a continuous line of eighth-note patterns. Below the staves, lyrics are written in two lines: 'Sur - ma sôi - tis soo - da möö - da, tau - di tal - ve - tee - da möö - da,' and 'sur - ma sôi - tis soo - da möö - da, tau - di tal - ve - tee - da möö - da,'.

The ‘B’ section, beginning at score fig. 23 (‘*Uued ajad, uuued jamalad*’) [‘new times, new gods’] depicts modern warfare, using the new (Estonian) text by poets Rummo and Kaplinski. Here, Tormis creates dissonant chords out of the pitches of the octatonic scale, sung simultaneously; also, wailing, shouting at indeterminate

¹²The interval of the second, this time major rather than minor, was to become a Tormis preoccupation throughout *Eesti Ballaandid* later in the decade. Lippus, ‘Magnum Opus.’

¹³Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 157.

pitch, and *glissandi* where both chromatic scales and indeterminate pitches are sometimes heard together (ex. 47).

Ex. 47. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*, 5 bars after score fig. 28

The musical score consists of seven staves, each representing a different voice part: Sh. dr. (Sh. dr.), T.S. (Tenor Soprano), B.s. (Bass), S. (Soprano), A. (Alto), T. (Tenor), and B. (Baritone). The score is set in common time and includes lyrics in English and Latvian. The vocal parts are primarily in soprano and alto ranges, with bass and tenor providing harmonic support. The score includes instructions for 'morendo' and 'gliss.*'.

Sh. dr.

T.S. morendo

B.s. morendo

S. te - ra - se, kroo mi, ti - taa - ni, u - raa - ni, plu too - ni - u - mi ja pal - ju - de
steel and i - ron, chro - mi - um, ti ta - ni - um, u ra - ni - um, plu to - ni - um and
gliss.*

A. te - ra - se, kroo mi, ti - taa - ni, u - raa - ni, plu too - ni - u - mi ja pal - ju - de
steel and i - ron, chro - mi - um, ti ta - ni - um, u ra - ni - um, plu to - ni - um and
gliss.*

T. te - ra - se, kroo mi, ti - taa - ni, u - raa - ni, plu too - ni - u - mi ja pal - ju - de
steel and i - ron, chro - mi - um, ti ta - ni - um, u ra - ni - um, plu to - ni - um and
gliss.*

B. gliss.*

The ‘wailing effect’ is used most strikingly at the climax of the work, the ‘siren’ section, to the words ‘*tapma ruae, terase*’ [‘killing with iron, steel’], culminating in a scream from the whole choir (ex. 48).

Tormis, as in so many works of his mature period, sustains interest through *Raua Needmine* by the use of constantly changing vocal combinations and dramatic interactions between parts of the ensemble. For example, a striking effect is achieved by the choir’s answering of the tenor and baritone. The tenor solo

Ex. 48. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*, score fig. 28

28

Sh. dr. *ff*

T.s. *ffff*
aa...
ah...
gliss. (sireeni imitatsioon/imitating the siren)

B.s. *ffff*
gliss. (sireeni imitatsioon/imitating the siren)

S. *ffff*
tap - ma rau - a, te - ra - se,
kill - ing with i - ron, steel,
2
A. *ffff*
tap - ma rau - a, te - ra - se,
kill - ing with i - ron, steel,
2
T. *ffff*
tap - ma rau - a, te - ra - se,
kill - ing with i - ron, steel,
2
B. *ffff*
tap - ma rau - a, te - ra - se,
kill - ing with i - ron, steel,
2

[valveseisang lakkab]
[return to initial position]

announces the ‘cursing’ theme, against the mysterious ‘Jew’s harp’ effect in the basses; this is echoed by the altos, *pp* but ‘sharply accented, through the teeth’, at the tenor’s pitch. Similarly, the ‘telling’ melody (at score fig. 5) is announced by the baritone soloist, then echoed by altos and basses. At the culmination, ‘new times, new gods’, the two soloists beg for protection (using the ‘telling melody’) while the choir shouts violent interjections: this is a particularly dramatic moment in live performance (ex. 49).

Ex. 49. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*, 2 bars before score fig 25

The musical score consists of two staves: Tenor (T.S.) and Bass (B.S.). The lyrics are in English and Estonian. The vocal parts are supported by rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as [ehmatusliigetus] (gesture of fright) and tutti f.

T.S. (Tenor) Lyrics:

- kait - se kau - ni - ke Ju - ma - la, et ei kaoks see
- grant us safe ty, God Al might y, so that man kind
- [ehmatusliigetus] (gesture of fright)
- kuu-li - pil-du-jad, len-nu-kid.
- arm-ed war-fare, air - planes.
- [ehmatusliigetus] (gesture of fright)
- tan - kid, tan - kid,
- tanks, tanks,
- ka - hu-rid,

B.S. (Bass) Rhythms:

- 3/8 time signature throughout.
- 12/16 time signature indicated in several measures.
- Rhythmic patterns include eighth-note triplets and sixteenth-note groups.

It is highly unusual for Tormis to use such a strict formal structure as is seen in *Raua Needmine*. The musical material is subservient to an overall ‘scheme’, yet the scheme in turn derives directly from a *regilaul* melody (the ‘cursing’ and ‘telling’ themes). The result is probably the least ‘conventionally tonal-sounding’ of all of Tormis’s works, and the one Tormis work which gives the strongest impression of belonging amongst the contemporary choral music of its time. There is no sense here of arrangement or extension of folk material; Tormis has found a language of raw modernity which matches the uncompromising theme.

At the time of composing *Raua Needmine*, Tormis saw his role as more than that of a composer; it was rather that of the shaman himself. He played the drum in the first performances with the Estonian Philharmonic Men’s Choir, and as recently as 2006, in a performance with the Swedish Choir, the Svanholm Singers (fig. 14).¹⁴

¹⁴Tormis himself played the drum in a performance of *Raua Needmine* with the Swedish Choir, the Svanholm Singers, as late as 2006. Veljo Tormis, *Veljo Tormis: Works for Men’s Voices*, CD sleeve note (Toccata Classics, 2006) TOCC 0073, 2007.

Fig. 14. Veljo Tormis with shaman drum, as used in *Raua Needmine*¹⁵



Tormis had first encountered this instrument when he heard a visiting group of drummers from Siberia performing during his time as a student in Moscow. He long planned to incorporate it into one of his works, as he was fascinated with the raw, elemental sound and with its role within shamanistic practice.¹⁶ In shamanism, the drum represents the ‘soul’ of the drummer and performs many functions, including that of healing.¹⁷ Shaman drums (and shamanism) are found throughout the Arctic Circle, in areas including Russia, Karelia, northern Finland, Lapland, Greenland, Iceland and Alaska. Shamanism has influenced the works of many other composers from the Baltic region, particularly in Latvia and Lithuania, an example being the Lithuanian composer Bronius Kutavičius (b. 1932), in whose work motifs derived from Lithuanian traditional music are often used in a quasi-minimalist way to create a trance-like atmosphere.¹⁸ There is (as yet) no historical evidence linking the shaman

¹⁵Photo by Tõnu Tormis taken from www.tormis.ee accessed 23 July 2011.

¹⁶Author discussion with Tormis, Tallinn, February 2011.

¹⁷Information on Shamanism held at ‘Arktikum’, the Museum of the Arctic, Rovaniemi, Finland, accessed by author, February 2011.

¹⁸Author discussion with Beata Baublinskienė, musicologist at Vilnius Academy of Music, Lithuania, at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama in February 2012,

drum to Estonia; Tormis is convinced that it played a role in ancient Estonian folk practice, and that this will one day be proven.¹⁹ Tormis was to use the shaman drum in a number of other works, including *Piikse Litaania [Litany to Thunder]* (1973), *Eesti Ballaadid* (1980) and *Kojusaatmis-sõnad [A Sending-Home Spell]* (1981).

In the midst of potential 20th-century conflict, Tormis's 'mission' is now seen to be linked inextricably with his personal and political convictions. He now uses *regilaul* not only as a means of preserving a lost tradition, but as a way of using the ancient past to make a political statement about the present. By looking to that 'code of ancient morals remaining relevant today', Tormis invites us to look to the moral values of an ancient past to arrive at solutions to problems of our own time.²⁰ This theme is explored further in *Eesti Ballaadid*, which, at 100 minutes in length, is by far the longest and most substantial of Tormis's works.

The years 1978-82 have come to be known as the 'Era of Stagnation' in the Soviet regime.²¹ After a certain thaw in relations with the West during the early 1970s, there followed an intense burst of Russification under Brezhnev during which Estonian identity was more repressed more than ever. This resulted from an overreaction by the Soviet authorities to a student demonstration in Tallinn in 1978, leading to a period of significantly increased censorship.²² Given the Soviet attitude to works such as *Raua Needmine*, which they had suppressed, it seems somewhat bizarre then that Tormis should have been approached with a large-scale commission for a high-profile international event. *Eesti Ballaadid* was commissioned for the XXII Olympiad of 1980, some of whose events were to be held in Tallinn.²³ Tormis

¹⁹Author discussion with Lippus and Tormis, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama Tallinn, February 2011.

²⁰Tormis, preface to score, *Eesti Ballaadid*.

²¹Brown, *The Rise*, pp. 398-418.

²²Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 202.

²³Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the event was boycotted by 64

agreed to the commission on the condition that it could incorporate *regilaul*. The original brief was for an opera; however, Tormis turned this down, compromising on the idea of a ‘Ballet-Cantata in which music, words and movement would be inseparable’.²⁴

In *Ballaadid*, Tormis aims to create an all-embracing art form aspiring to Wagner’s concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, that is, one integrating dance, theatre and ritual, while using the forces of large choir and orchestra, solo voices and dancers.²⁵ Early critics drew clear comparisons with Stravinsky’s *Les Noces* (1923).²⁶ Stravinsky, in this ‘Dance-Cantata’, had also been inspired by folk rituals, this time from rural Russia.²⁷ He aimed in *Les Noces*

to compose a sort of scenic ceremony, using as I liked those ritualistic elements so abundantly provided by village customs, which had been established for centuries in the celebration of Russian marriages, but reserved to myself the right to use them with absolute freedom.²⁸

In these two works, Tormis and Stravinsky bear similarities in their approach. *Eesti Ballaadid* has a cyclical structure of six movements, introduced by a Prologue and interspersed with four ‘Epigraphs’. The extended text, consisting of 998 lines of traditional verse, is a *regilaul* anthology devised by Tormis’s wife, Lea (b. 1932), an established and highly respected writer and lecturer in Theatre at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama in Tallinn. The texts take the theme of women and their roles as mothers, wives and daughters. Lea Tormis grouped the ballads in pairs

countries including the US. There followed in retaliation a Soviet boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympics, held in California. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.202.

²⁴Lea Tormis, ‘The Story of Estonian Ballads’. www.tormis.ee accessed 25 July 2010.

²⁵Wagner coined the term ‘Gesamtkunstwerk’ in 1849, aspiring to re-create the type of ancient Greek drama which embraced all the arts. The term was closely associated with the aspirations of liberation and revolution of the mid 19th century. Barry Millington, *Wagner*, Master Musicians Series (London: Dent, 1984), pp. 41-42.

²⁶Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 191. Daitz insists that *Eesti Ballaadid* cannot be appreciated as a concert piece, and is only valid in live performance with its dance element. Email to author, 18 December, 2010.

²⁷Roman Vlad, *Stravinsky* (London: OUP, 1960), p.68.

²⁸Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Conversations with Igor Stravinsky*. (California: University of California Press, 1980), p. 47.

in order to present opposing aspects of human behaviour: for example, the ballad entitled ‘*Karske Neiu*’ [‘The Chaste Maiden’] counterbalances ‘*Eksinud Neiu*’ [‘The Lost Maiden’] and ‘*Mehetapja*’ [‘The Husband Killer’], ‘*Naisetapja*’ [‘The Wife Killer’].²⁹ The Narrator (mezzo-soprano) is a ‘mother figure’ but remains, as in all traditional *regilaul* performance, totally dispassionate both in role and style of performance.

The moral values of this work appear to need some clarification for modern audiences. Lippus points out, for example, that ‘in the folk tradition, the mother who has drowned her daughters (where, perhaps, poverty determines she would be unable to feed them), would be an object of compassion, not contempt’.³⁰ This finds a parallel in folk tales from other cultures. In the preface to an edition of the Grimm *Household Tales*, for example, author Russell Hoban asserts that ‘the characteristic of the myth-based tale is the absence of emotion where one would expect to find it. This is not story-story, it is the transmission of mythic elements in story form; it is proto-story’.³¹ The themes of the Ballads are bleak and violent, but Tormis explains that he was less interested in the events themselves than in the ‘humanity of the heroes, their emotional and ethical attitudes to these events’.³² Lea Tormis asserts that in their directly-voiced ethical views, *Eesti Ballaandid* bear a close resemblance to ancient tragedies.³³

Eesti Ballaandid is scored for mixed chorus, soprano, mezzo, alto, tenor and bass soloists, and a large orchestra including celesta, harp, piano, traditional Finnish zither or *kantele*, and five percussionists. This is one of the few Tormis works of the

²⁹Lea Tormis, ‘The Story’.

³⁰Author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2010.

³¹Russell Hoban, preface to *Household Tales* (London: Picador, 1973).

³²Veljo Tormis, preface to score, *Eesti Ballaandid*.

³³Lea Tormis, ‘The Story’.

1970s to employ an orchestra. Since his opera, *Luigelend [Swan's Flight]*, of 1964, there had been a long break from orchestral writing until a film score, *Kevade [Spring]* in 1973, and a dance score, *A Tantsupeo Muusika* [Music for the 1980 Dance Festival], written five years later.³⁴ It is therefore of great interest to know what form his orchestral writing would now take. *Eesti Ballaadid*, with its epic and dramatic themes, would appear to offer great potential for the composer to exploit large orchestral and vocal resources.

Surprisingly for a composer who could produce such vivid orchestral colouring as he did in his opera, *Luigelend*, Tormis seems in *Eesti Ballaadid* almost tentative in his handling of the orchestral medium. The orchestra is used in short, often fanfare-like introductions to movements, but then plays an almost exclusively accompanying role. There are occasional orchestral punctuations of the solo vocal and choral lines, yet, surprisingly, no orchestral interludes or postludes. Indeed, in the entire work there are rarely more than a few bars without a vocal line, often with no interlude between verses.

For example, the longest orchestral section is the ten bars of introduction to *Epigraaf 9*, consisting not of new material, but of a re-statement by the horns of the opening theme, in major seconds, with two interruptions by woodwind, trombones, strings and timpani. There are surprisingly few instances of an orchestral *tutti*; instead, the ensemble is used as a collection of chamber groupings. Colouristic effects from small groups of instruments are employed, with a preference for certain recurrent combinations (such as marimba and harp).

Is Tormis, then, perhaps reluctant to acknowledge the presence of the vast forces of the orchestra after such a long absence? Is it possible that he has lost the

³⁴Both of these scores are unpublished (noted by author in discussion with Tormis).

confidence in the orchestral writing which he displayed in earlier works such as *Avamäng II* [2nd Overture], or perhaps that he simply finds that the *regilaul*-based material in *Ballaadid* is so predominantly vocal that the orchestra becomes, in a sense, superfluous?³⁵ Asked specifically by the author about this balance of the orchestral to the vocal/choral material, Tormis simply remarked that he ‘did not consider it necessary’ to exploit the orchestra in a more substantial way.³⁶

Tormis compensates for the lack of ‘orchestral presence’ in *Eesti Ballaadid* through the use of some unusual percussion instruments, each of which has some form of ancient or ritualistic significance. Examples are the *vurr*, a traditional Estonian child’s toy. This comprises a bone strip spun rapidly on string stretched between the hands, creating a whirring sound (‘*vurr*’). This instrument is employed at the climax of ‘*Mehetapja*’ to heighten tension when the Wife desperately seeks a place to hide among the aspen trees, having killed the young Bridegroom whom she had been forced to marry (fig.15).

The *suristi*, or bull-roarer, is another ancient device. This consists of a slat of wood swung rapidly around the head to create a sound which carries over long distances. The instrument is found in ancient times in cultures as diverse as tribes in Mali, the Australian Aborigines and the North American Indians, where it had a ritual significance. It was also found in Scotland, where it was known as the ‘thunder-spell’ and believed to afford protection from lightning. The bull-roarer has also been used in the modern orchestra, especially in a number of film scores.³⁷ In the last ballad, ‘*Kalmuneiu*’ [‘The Bride from the Grave’] the instrument is used to create a

³⁵ Yet Tormis has, as recently as 2010, orchestrated a number of earlier choral works to form his 80th birthday celebration work for the 2010 Nargen Festival, *Reminisciae*. Author discussion with Tormis and Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2011.

³⁶ Author discussion with Tormis, Tallinn, February 2011.

³⁷ Alfred Blatter, *Instrumentation and Orchestration*, 2nd ed., (Belmont CA: Schirmer, 1997), p.229.

Fig. 15. ‘Vurr’, as used in *Eesti Ballaadid*³⁸



supernatural atmosphere at Peeter’s words ‘*Kui mul kasvab kaunis kaera . . . Mina kalmust naise naidan.*’ [‘If my oats thrive... my barley thrives, I will take a wife from the grave . . .’] (ex. 50).

Ex. 50. Tormis. *Eesti Ballaadid*, ‘*Kalmuneiu*’, bb. 9-16, showing the *suristi* or bull roarer³⁹

Жужжалка-вертушка *

Suristi

8

5 13-16

1. Г. soli
2.3.

13. Коль ов са даш вен на аи во.
14. мие яи мень даши вен на аи во.
15. на бе ру с по гос га де ау.
16. на зо ау же ной сво с оло.
13. Kui mul kas vab kau nia kae ra,
14. kau nis kae ga, kii du kes va —
15. mi na kal must nai se nai dan,
16. lii vas ta neit si ni mit sens.

4. Об

8

³⁸Photo taken from catalogue of the Estonian Folk Museum, Tartu, accessed online 30th June 2012.

³⁹This and all other examples from this work taken from Veljo Tormis, *Eesti Ballaadid* (Leningrad: Sovetsky Kompositor, 1987).

The ‘other-worldly’ nature of this section is further enhanced by the unusual and haunting ‘1-3-1’ scale of alternating minor seconds and minor thirds, characteristic of the Setumaa region in south-east Estonia (discussed in Chapter 3).⁴⁰ This scale is found in older song genres such as work songs and calendar songs, although in ‘authentic’ performance, the intervals of the scale would not exactly match the notes of the Western chromatic scale (ex. 51).⁴¹

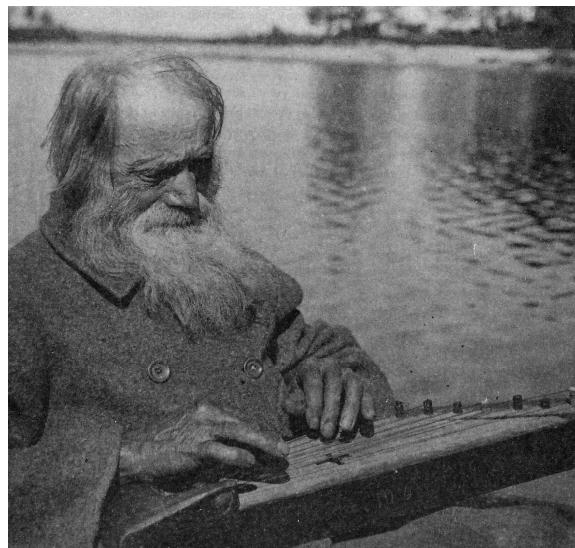
Ex. 51. Tormis. *Eesti Ballaadid*, ‘Kalmuneiu’, bb. 256-261

The *kantele* (Finnish) or *kannel* (Estonian) is the ancient zither, as played by the hero Väinämöinen in the epic poems, *Kalevala* and *Kalevipoeg* (fig. 16).

⁴⁰ An example of this scale is given in Chapter 3.

⁴¹ Author discussion with Zhanna Pärtlas, researcher in Ethnomusicology, specialising in Setu song, at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama in Tallinn, February 2010. Setu song is discussed in Chapter 3.

Fig. 16. *Kantele* player Teppana Jänis, 1916⁴²



This instrument, which has seen a considerable revival and is widely played in both Finland and Estonia through an extensive education programme, provides an ethereal accompaniment in '*Eksinud Neiu*' at the point where a baby miraculously starts to sing, its life having been saved by magical intervention. These percussion instruments have close associations for Tormis with ancient rituals, and particularly with *Kalevala* settings. For example, in another work, '*Kalevala Seitsmeteistkümmes Runo*' ['The Seventeenth Rune of the *Kalevala*'] (1985), Tormis employs five *kanteles* (or '*kanteleet*' in the Finnish plural) and three shaman drums, as well as bullroarer and rattle.

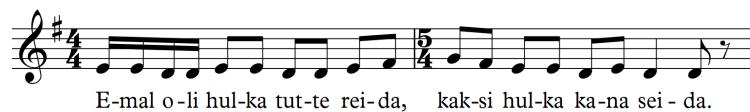
The opening motif of *Ballaadid*, played by the horns, consists of an oscillation between the pitches E-D, a motif deriving from the work's all-pervading *regilaul* melody. Lippus draws comparisons between the ambiguity of this musical motif, which appears to be constantly in a state of flux (settling on neither of its two pitches

⁴²Photo taken from Jaakola and Toivenen. *Inspired by Tradition*, p. 42.

throughout the work), and the duality of the themes of the *Ballaadid* themselves.⁴³

The *regilaul* melody, from which the motif derives, is repeated, unchanged, extensively throughout the work (ex. 52). Variety is achieved through changes in harmonisation (for example, octave unisons, parallel seconds and parallel-7th chords) both in the orchestral and choral parts, as is familiar Tormis practice (ex. 53).

Ex. 52. *Eesti Ballaadid*, Prologue, principal *regilaul* melody



Ex. 53. Tormis. *Eesti Ballaadid, Epigraaf I*, harmonisation of principal *regilaul* melody, bb. 3-6

A musical score for three voices (Soprani, Alto, Tenori) and piano. The vocal parts sing eighth-note chords in unison. The piano part provides harmonic support with eighth-note chords. The vocal parts sing "aa" and "A" respectively. The piano part includes dynamic markings like ff and f.

⁴³Urve Lippus and Veljo Tormis, *Lauldud Sõna* [The Word was Sung] (Tallinn: Estonian Association of Bookbinders, 2003, revised in limited edition 2008), p. 172.

In the Epilogue, the ‘morals’ of the Ballads are revealed. For example, from the first ballad: ‘the mother understood and answered, the father wisely spoke up, good for you, our daughter young, for having guarded your honour, and slaying the great dog’ and from the second, ‘Annus, the son of the Island’s lord, beat himself on the breast as if with an oaken battledore: ‘this is my work, my deed, that boy is of me, he is my own.’ In a clever stroke creating a musical and dramatic apotheosis, Tormis overlays the *regilaul* melodies of the six *Ballads*, each sung by its own semi-chorus in its own key and at its own tempo, and with its own instrumental grouping, in a gradual *tutti* crescendo. This cumulative, aleatoric overlay of textures had been explored by Tormis earlier in *Naistelaulud [Women’s Songs]* (1974-75), a work which, although smaller in scale, in many respects anticipates *Eesti Ballaandid*.

Charles Ives (1874-1954) was a pioneer in the overlaying of unrelated textures, in pieces such as *Central Park in the Dark* and *The Unanswered Question* (both 1906), whereas Stravinsky’s *Petrushka* (1911) and the Three Pieces for String Quartet (1914, publ. 1922) include early ‘written-out’ examples of this phenomenon; it is of course a fundamental feature of electronic music. By the time of Britten’s *Death in Venice* (1974), the technique was well established in the ‘live’ medium. In the ‘Hotel Scene’ from Act I, for example, which Tormis is certain to have known well, material for soloists and groups of singers (hotel staff and tourists) is freely overlaid in unrelated keys, building to a climax at which the orchestra heightens tension with a *tutti tremolando*.⁴⁴ The chaotic, multilingual buzz of the hotel is then abruptly cut off by the other-worldly sonority of the vibraphone, taking the listener

⁴⁴Tormis is a Britten aficionado. The author noted Tormis’s detailed study of the score of Britten’s *Albert Herring* during a research trip to Estonia in February 2010. Tormis was shortly to attend a performance of this work at the Finnish National Opera in Helsinki. He noted to the author that he had attended performances of *Albert Herring*, *The Rape of Lucretia* and *The Turn of the Screw* by the English Opera Group, on tour in Leningrad in 1964, where he also met Britten. These performances by the EOG are described in Eric Walter White, *Benjamin Britten: his Life and Operas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p.83.

into a different timbral world of complete stillness and suspension of time for the first appearance of Tadziò (ex. 54).

Ex. 54. Britten. *Death in Venice*, Act I, Scene 4, 5 bars after score fig.72

The musical score for Ex. 54 consists of ten staves, each representing a different character's part. The characters are: Girl, French Mother, American, Mother, German, Father, Danish Lady, English Lady, Pole, Nanny, Mother, Father, and H. Port. & H. Welt. The music is set in a slow tempo, indicated by the instruction "slow dim." repeated at the end of each staff. The lyrics are in various languages, including French ("Ma man le di - ner, quand se - ra-t'il ser - vi?"), German ("Komm' mein Kind - chen, Lass' uns hi - ren, was die Wel - len dir er zäh - len."), and English ("What was that you said, dear?"). The musical style is dense and harmonic, with many voices overlapping.

Eesti Ballaadid ends with a restatement of the opening *regilaul* melody, now for full forces. The text bears a (not entirely hidden) political message:

*Ei olnud õige, mis sa ütlid,
Ei olnud tõsi, mis sa tõotid!
Anna nüüd meile, mis sa annad,
Tõota, veljo, mis sa tõotad!*⁴⁵

[‘It wasn’t true, what you told us,
It wasn’t right, what you promised!
Now you must give us what you’ve pledged,
You must fulfil your promise, brother!’]

⁴⁵Veljo is Estonian for ‘brother’, the choice of text a possible play on Tormis’s first name.

The principal *regilaul* melody is now harmonised in parallel-15th chords, rearranged as clusters in the orchestra over a pedal bass note on A. These cluster-like chords in the orchestral part serve to ‘blur’ the sense of conventional tonality (ex. 55).

Ex. 55. Tormis. *Eesti Ballaadid*, finale, score fig. 10

10 Andante
Tr-be, Tr-ni T-ro
p
ff

11 Coro grosso
Andante maestoso $\text{J} = 63$
A. ff unis.
T. ff
B. ff
Her ni_ ko _ ro, kto no _ ja _ le _ et,
El o _ le ar _ mu _ an _ di _ ja _ da,
pri _ go _ lu _ bnt, o _ bo _ gpe _ et,
e _ ga _ rea _ si _ li _ ta _ ja _ da.
ff Ottoni con sord.
gloss
S

There is a distinct echo here of the D minor ninth chord opening Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, the work which had so affected Tormis when he first heard it in the 1950s (ex. 56). This chord had also featured prominently (in parallel descending motion), in the Act III Interlude of Berg's opera *Wozzeck* (1925), ('*Invention über eine Tonalität*').

Eesti Ballaadid presents many challenges both for the listener and in practical terms of performance, and these may account for its lack of performances to date outside Estonia. Tormis has insisted that performances should sound ‘authentic’,

Ex. 56. Orff. *Carmina Burana*, ‘*O Fortuna*’, bb. 1-4

The musical score consists of five staves, each representing a different vocal part: Soprani, Contralti, Coro, Tenori, and Bassi. The vocal parts sing the same melody in unison. The bassi part is prominent, featuring rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings such as **ff**, **Pesante**, and **$3/8 = 60$** . The score also includes lyrics in Latin: "O Fortuna, vel ut Luna sta - tu va - ri - a - bi - lis," repeated three times. A performance instruction "poco stringendo" is placed above the bassi staff. The score concludes with a dynamic marking **8b**.

that is, avoiding the sound of ‘trained singers’ for the folk-based material.⁴⁶ This creates the immediate practical dilemma between using trained opera singers able to project against an orchestra and authentic ‘folk’ singers more at home with the *regilaul* idiom, yet needing to be amplified on stage.⁴⁷ No recording of *Eesti Ballaadid* is currently available commercially, the only one made being the 1986 performance on the Soviet *Melodiya* label, with the Estonian Theatre Orchestra under Tõnu Kaljuste, using professionally-trained singers.⁴⁸

The dance aspect of *Ballaadid* has also presented problems. In the 1980 production, a contemporary dance idiom was used, choreographed by Mai Murdma of the Estonia Theatre in Tallinn. In the second (2004) production, a collaboration between Nargen Opera and Von Krahel Theatre, the ballet element was re-conceived

⁴⁶ Author discussion with Tormis, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2011.

⁴⁷ Author discussion with Lippus and Arujärv, Tallinn, February 2010.

⁴⁸ A copy of this recording, which is currently unavailable commercially, in LP format, was given to the author by Tormis in February 2010.

as Japanese *butoh* dance by Peeter Jalakas. The detached manner of *butoh* performance was felt by both Lea and Veljo Tormis to suit the dispassionate manner of traditional *regilaul* performance, but this failed to convince many critics.⁴⁹

Eesti Ballaadid demands a great deal from an audience. The choral writing lacks the colour and variety, of, for example, *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* [Estonian Calendar Songs] or *Raue Needmine* [Curse Upon Iron]. The ‘Jaanilaul’ [St John’s Song] theme from *Kalendrilaulud* (discussed in Chapter 4), is subjected to subtle changes of texture and choral orchestration over its five-minute length; yet, at almost two hours, the *Ballaadid* can at times appear almost unrelentingly monotonous to an ear unaccustomed to the *regilaul* tradition and language. This fact is further compounded by the detached, inexpressive manner required of performers. To some extent, there is compensation in a number of instrumental effects and colourings which help to sustain musical interest, but it seems that Tormis is at times willing to sacrifice musical interest for the sake of ‘authenticity’.

Eesti Ballaadid is held in high esteem in Estonia, where, since its first performance in 1980, it has been closely associated with a sense of national identity. But it would appear that the respect given to the work by Estonians is, at least in part, extra-musical. This may in part be due to the climate in which it was composed, that is, at the turning point between the Cold War and before the first signs of weakening of the Communist system in the early 1980s.⁵⁰ During this period, increasing value was attached, as elsewhere, to indigenous traditions, and especially to folk music.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Author discussion by email with Daitz, August 10, 2010.

⁵⁰ The gradual breakdown of the Communist system during the 1980s is analysed in detail in Brown, *The Rise*, pp. 421–618. Brown considers that the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, followed by the ‘Prague Spring’ of 1968, although unsuccessful and violent, made revolt against the Communist system at least appear a possibility. The recognition of the trade union *Solidarity* in Poland in 1981 was without doubt one of the most important landmarks on the road to the eventual breakdown of the former Soviet bloc. By the time of the ‘Singing Revolution’ in the Baltic States, from 1988 (discussed in Chapter 1), the inevitable change was already well under way.

⁵¹ Veljo Tormis, preface to score, *Eesti Ballaadid*.

Eesti Ballaadid has yet to make an impact on the wider world. Lippus and Daitz, the principal authorities on Tormis's music, are convinced that *Eesti Ballaadid* is one of Tormis's greatest achievements.⁵² Daitz has fought, as yet unsuccessfully, to secure a first fully-staged, US performance. Lippus has argued, also unsuccessfully, for a shortened 'concert version' to be made by Tormis in order to facilitate performances outside Estonia. The work was performed in a full concert version at the Estonia Hall in Tallinn for Tormis's 80th birthday celebrations in August 2010. However, it appears that any performance of the work outside Estonia may, at least in the current climate, incur a considerable element of risk for a concert promoter.

⁵²Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 171, author discussion by email with Daitz, December 2010 and author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2011.

Chapter 6

Bridges of Song:
Laulusild, Piiskop ja Pakana, Sampo Cuditur

*Kui ma hakkan laulemaie, alleaa, alleaa,
Laulemaie, laskemaie, alleaa, alleaa.*

When I start to sing, *alleaa, allea*,
To sing, to spin a yarn, *alleaa, allea*.¹

The ability of music to bridge time and cultures, and thus techniques, has been a preoccupation of many composers since at least the mid twentieth-century. Rhian Samuel, in her preface to *The New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, cites many examples of eclecticism, including Sofia Gubaidulina's use of the *bayan* (a Russian button accordion) in *Seven Last Words* (1982) and numerous cross-cultural combinations, such as Chinese and Scottish folk song in the music of Judith Weir (b. 1952).² An example from the contemporary Estonian repertoire is Erkki-Sven Tüür's choral work, *Triglosson Trishagion* (2008), in which texts from the Orthodox prayer book in Estonian, Russian and Greek are juxtaposed, thus embracing three cultures with shared religious roots.

Maxwell Davies and Birtwistle exploit the juxtaposition of material in many works. Maxwell Davies's *Missa Super l'Homme Armé* (1968), for example, takes an anonymous fifteenth-century text dealing with the betrayal of Christ by Judas Iscariot. The work begins with an arrangement of the anonymous fifteenth-century original, overlaid with contemporary comments. The material is gradually taken apart and grotesquely parodied, eventually to become a foxtrot. This casts new light on the

¹Opening lines of *Laulusild [Bridge of Song]*, trans. Kaja Kappel (Helsinki: Warner/Chappell, 2006).

²Rhian Samuel, 'Women's Music: A Twentieth-Century Perspective' in 'Preface' to Julie Anne Sadie and Rhian Samuel (eds.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Women Composers* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. xiii-xvii.

theme of betrayal for a contemporary audience.³

The idea of a ‘musical bridge’ appears to have become increasingly important to Tormis, also, in the last two decades of his composing career (1980-2000). This was, of course, a period of momentous political upheaval across Eastern Europe, with the weakening and eventual fall of Communism following the opening of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, finally leading to Estonia’s independence in 1991. In 1981 Tormis had already sensed that ‘the gates of the Western world [had] started slowly to re-open for Estonia’, as he was commissioned to write ‘*Laulusild*’ [*Bridge of Song*].⁴ The imagined ‘bridge’, spanning the Baltic Sea between the countries now known as Estonia and Finland, is mentioned in ancient folksongs and in the Estonian national epic, *Kalevipoeg*. During Communist times, forming a part of the Iron Curtain, this span of sea also represented the physical and symbolic division between eastern and western Europe. ‘*Laulusild*’ united the young people of the two countries, 80 kilometres apart across the Baltic, in a joint performance by their two most prestigious youth choirs, eight years before the Iron Curtain fell.⁵

Tormis sets the opening lines of the *Kalevala* (in Finnish) to its traditional melody, ‘*Mieleni minun tekevi/Aivoni ajattelevi/Lähteäni laulmahan*’ [‘I have a good mind/to take into my head/to start singing’] followed by their Estonian equivalent ‘*Kui ma hakkan laulemaie, alleaa, alleaa/Laulemaie, laskemaie, alleaa, alleaa*’ [‘When I start to sing, *alleaa, allea*, To sing, to spin a yarn, *alleaa, allea*’] and creates an interplay between the two themes in subsequent verses (ex. 57). Tormis claims that both the melody and words of these lines ‘would be familiar to all Finnish and

³Mike Seabrook, *Max, The Life and Music of Peter Maxwell Davies* (London: Gollancz, 1994), pp. 101-102.

⁴Veljo Tormis, *Bridge of Song*. CD sleeve note (Finlandia, 1995), 4509-96937-2.

⁵The Ellerhein Children’s Choir, Tallinn, under their conductor Heino Kaljuste, and the Tapiola Children’s Choir, Helsinki, under their founder-conductor Erkki Pohjola. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 201.

Ex. 57. Tormis. ‘*Laulusild*’, bb. 15-18⁶

Estonian school children’.⁷ ‘*Laulusild*’ demonstrates Tormis’s ability to exploit the specific strengths, as well as to adapt to the needs and limitations, of young choirs. The material is entirely diatonic, for example, and avoids the technical challenge of parallel major seconds and sevenths in adjacent voices, a familiar trait in many other works for professional choirs.⁸ In ‘*Laulusild*’, the melodic lines are transparent, often doubled at the octave, and thus given space in which to ‘ring’. The rhythmic character of the folk melodies is well displayed when performed by young voices.

⁶The source of this and all other examples from this work is Veljo Tormis, *Laulusild*.

⁷Footnote to score, *Laulusild*. This Kalevala melody is illustrated in chapter 2.

⁸*Laulusild* was originally written for upper voices, then, like many Tormis works, rearranged for mixed chorus. Note in score, *Laulusild*.

‘*Laulusild*’ is propelled forward through a continually varying scoring, just as might have been seen in ‘*Jaanilaul*’ [St John’s Song] from *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* [*Estonian Calendar Songs*]. The Finnish ‘*Kalevala*’ theme is heard at first above a drone, sung antiphonally with the ‘Estonian’ theme. The latter is in turn thickened out with thirds and fifths and a transposition up a fifth, leading to a climax. The opening ‘*Kalevala*’ theme is then finally heard dissolving away over a wordless accompaniment.

The post-Communist period saw an increasing number of commissions from choirs in the US and in Western Europe, as well as invitations to Tormis to tour, workshop and lecture about his music. Tormis appeared belatedly to be experiencing the kind of ‘thaw’ in the Soviet hold which Lutoslawski had experienced following the death of Stalin in 1953. The latter had led to the founding of the Warsaw Autumn Festival of Contemporary Music.⁹ Now in the post-Communist period, Tormis was just beginning to tap into the new potential of commissions from countries outside the former Soviet bloc, such as would have been unimaginable in Communist times.

Piiskop ja Pakana [*The Bishop and the Pagan*] for unaccompanied male voices (1992) began as an opera, *Lalli*, based on a play by Eino Leino (1875-1926). However, work on this had hardly begun when Tormis was struck down by a serious heart attack in the summer of 1991. This illness had a profound effect on the composer, drastically reducing his ability to compose and affecting his confidence. After a long recuperation, he abandoned the idea of the opera, but reworked some of the material as a choral work, commissioned by the King’s Singers in the UK.

Piiskop ja Pakana illustrates Tormis’s ability to bridge styles and cultures in his later works. The text describes the death of an English warrior, the Christian

⁹Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.117.

missionary, Bishop Henry, at the hands of the peasant farmer, Lalli, in Finland, in 1158, a story well known to Finns as a representation of rebellion against authority.¹⁰

Piiskop ja Pakana was premiered by the King's Singers in the 1993 Berlin Biennale.

The work exists in two forms: an original 1992 version for six solo voices (two counter-tenors, one tenor, two baritones and one bass) as first performed by the King's Singers, and an arrangement made in 1995 for male chorus, with two countertenor solos and one tenor soloist.

This piece, remarkably, juxtaposes two authentic historical sources, both texts and melodies, from their corresponding cultures and traditions.¹¹ The two texts are the Gregorian chant, *The Sequence of Saint Henry*, and a sequence of ancient Finnish runic songs adapted by Sakari Puurunen, depicting the event from the point of view of the Finnish 'pagan' farmers. Tormis enhances distinctions in the musical material of the two opposing sides: that of Bishop Henry and the English Knights, deriving from Gregorian chant, is sung by upper voices (countertenor, tenor solo), in Latin; that of Lalli and the Finnish peasants is *runolaul* (the Finnish equivalent of *regilaul*), sung in the lower voices (baritone, bass) in Finnish. Together with the two distinct musical traditions are contrasts in articulation and phrasing: plainsong in long, legato phrases, in free rhythm, and *regilaul* in short trochaic phrases, accented and staccato. Contrasts are also made in vocal range (the *regilaul* contained within the typical small compass of a perfect fifth) and accompaniment (the *regilaul* melody is accompanied by a hummed rhythmic figuration in bare fifths; the plainsong is harmonised in parallel chords). At the climax the upper ranges of the voices, with countertenor at its extreme upper limit, raise the emotional tension of anger against the invading Bishop.

¹⁰Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p.38.

¹¹Daitz notes that Tormis was, as usual, painstaking in acknowledging the sources of the material, attaching photocopies of the original documents to the manuscript score. *Ancient Song*, pp. 221-2.

A sudden, urgent increase in tempo precedes the final blow which ends the Bishop's life (ex. 58).

Ex. 58. Tormis. *Piiskop ja Pakana*, score figs. 47-49¹²

Daitz notes that in the original six-voice version, the solo tenor leads the Gregorian chant at the opening, on the side of the English, changing sides to the Finnish side at the words '*Minä laulan Turun miehen*' ['It is I who cast a spell over the man from Turku'], and concludes that this was an intention on the part of the composer to emphasise the equality of the two sides. However, this attractive theory is dismantled

¹²Taken from Veljo Tormis, *Piispa ja Pakana* (1992/1995) (Helsinki: Edition Fazer, 1997). The translation of this example is 'It is I, I who am cursing him! That is what Turku gets from me, and the Pope's garrulous Priest, and the hymning Cross-bringer!' Translation by Kaja Koppel, taken from score.

by what appears to have been a mere matter of musical expediency on Tormis's part: in the later version for male chorus and three soloists (1995), with more voices available, the tenor solo stays resolutely on the side of the English. Because the musical material of both sides is historically authentic, Tormis achieves in *Piiskop ja Pakana* a synthesis, preserving the perspectives of, and carrying the audience's sympathies with, both. *Piiskop ja Pakana* is a pacifist piece which is, in some ways, a sequel to *Raua Needmine*.

Some aspects of the work recall Judith Weir's *King Harald's Saga* of 1979, also a setting of a medieval Nordic text. Like *Piiskop ja Pakana*, this work tells of an (attempted) invasion: that of England by the Norwegians in 1066, ending with the defeat at Stamford Bridge, shortly before the Battle of Hastings.¹³ Weir's short virtuosic piece uses an unaccompanied solo soprano in nine different sung roles, covering both the English and Norwegian perspectives, each announced in a spoken voice and then defined musically by a variety of material and vocal ranges: even Harald's two wives are depicted, one in the soprano's lower, and one in upper, register. Weir makes playful use of 'Grand Opera' flourishes, and employs a comic irony not present in Tormis's work; however, some of the intentions (the futility of battle and warfare; ancient material used as a comment on the present) are certainly shared by the two works.

As models for *Piiskop ja Pakana*, Tormis was perhaps looking more towards Pärt, who had been strongly influenced by plainsong.¹⁴ In 1976 Pärt had remarked

¹³ *King Harald's Saga*, 'Grand Opera in 3 Acts for solo soprano', commissioned for soprano Jane Manning by the Arts Council of Great Britain, text by the composer after the saga '*Heimskringla*' by Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241). N.a., Judith Weir, *Three Operas*. CD sleeve note, (Cala United, 1995, 88040) and score, Judith Weir, *King Harald's Saga*, (London: Novello, 1982).

¹⁴ Lippus notes the enthusiasm with which early music was embraced when performances reached Estonia around 1967. Urve Lippus, 'Stylistic Change in Estonian Music: Tormis and Pärt in the 1970s'. Paper presented at the AMS Annual Conference, New York, 1995. www.tormis.ee accessed 3 June 2012.

at the moment that my own tintinnabular style was about to be born, I was tightly bound up with the Estonian Hortus Musicus and its leader Andres Mustonen. At that time the world of ancient music opened up before us and we were full of enthusiasm. The atmosphere had the effect of a midwife on my new music.¹⁵

Pärt was also absorbed during the 1980s in early polyphony, particularly Machaut, and drew from it

an understanding of how to create a fluid melodic line, which effortlessly renews itself through constantly displaced stress points and half-cadences, but which, viewed as a whole, is satisfactorily balanced and expressively refined.¹⁶

Tormis would, in the mid-1990s, have been acutely aware of Pärt's rapidly establishing reputation, as the latter's works such as *Cantus In Memoriam Benjamin Britten* and *Tabula Rasa* (1977), and choral works such as *Berliner Messe* and *The Beatitudes* (both 1990), were becoming widely established and performed worldwide. With the east-west block to communication finally removed, Tormis would be looking at ways of making his own work more universal and less regionalised.

A final example from this late Tormis period is *Sampo Cuditur [The Forging of the Sampo]* (1997).¹⁷ It is again the *Kalevala* on which the composer draws for this text; the *sampo* is some form of metal shield or totem with magical powers, never exactly identified in the poem.¹⁸ It is forged by the blacksmith, Seppo Ilmarinen, who for his labours is rewarded with Louhi, enchantress daughter of Pohjola, the Underworld. Interestingly, Tormis uses a modern Latin translation of the Finnish text. This of

¹⁵ Set up in 1972, Hortus Musicus at first specialised in Gregorian Chant, and later, in early music from many cultures. Among works which Pärt wrote for the group was *Fratres* (1977), one of his best known works. Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, pp.77-9.

¹⁶ Tormis and Pärt have maintained their friendship and contact from the time that they were teacher and student in the 1950s. Daitz email to author, December 2010.

¹⁷ Commissioned for the Mädchenchor Hannover (Hannover Girls' Choir) for performance at EXPO 2000. Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 314.

¹⁸ The original text of *Sampo Cuditur* is from 10th rune of the *Kalevala*. N.a., *Sampo Cuditur*, footnote to score (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 2003).

course provides an easier alternative to Estonian for a native German choir, and therefore perhaps renders the prospect of future performances more likely.¹⁹ However, in an interview with Martin Anderson in 2000, Tormis casts further light on the way that Latin was seen during the Communist period. He remarks that Estonian songs would be translated into Latin ‘in order that our Communists would not understand: they knew only Russian.’²⁰ It may be that Tormis retained some of this rebellious sentiment towards Latin, even seven years after the fall of Communism. In the same interview, Tormis points out that Latin translations suit both the *Kalevala* and the *Kalevipoeg*, since both the Finnish and Estonian epics share the quantitative verse of the Greek and Latin epics on which they were based.

Sampo Cuditur is scored for three-part upper-voice choir (subdividing into six parts). A later arrangement was made for mixed choir. The voices are punctuated and accompanied solely by two unusual pitched percussion instruments with strongly ritualistic associations: a small anvil, providing the ‘forging’ flavour of the title, and two ‘log drums’. There are many instances of the use of the anvil as an orchestral instrument in the nineteenth-century; famously, in Verdi’s *Il Trovatore* (1853) and in Scene 3 of Wagner’s *Das Rheingold* (1869), for example. In the twentieth century Varèse had incorporated the instrument into his percussion work, *Ionisation* (1931), and Britten, in the opera *The Burning Fiery Furnace* (1966); more recently, Louis Andriessen wrote a long solo for two anvils in *De Materie* (1989). In *Sampo Cuditur* it is the anvil that seizes attention, introducing the commands to Ilmarinen with its insistent motif (ex. 59).

¹⁹Translated into Latin by Tuomo Pekkanen from Lonnrot’s original 19th-century Finnish text.
²⁰Anderson, ‘We Should Know’, pp. 24-27.

Ex. 59. Tormis. *Sampo Cuditur*, bb. 1-6²¹

Moderato $\text{♩} = 112$

Anvil
Log Drums

Moderato $\text{♩} = 112$

I
II
III

"O tu fa-ber Il-ma-ri - nen, mal-le - a - tor sem-pi -"
"O tu fa-ber Il-ma-ri - nen, mal-le - a - tor sem-pi -"
"O tu fa-ber Il-ma - ri - nen, mal-le - a - tor sem-pi -"

In this ‘fourth category’ of musical style associated with plainsong (or Latin text), (defined in Chapter 2), Tormis’s musical language is pared back to the minimum (as in the plainsong elements of *Piispa ja Pakana*). Unisons and simple block triads dominate; there is an added dissonance of a second or seventh here and there, but almost no chromaticism. Tormis inevitably distributes the interest between the choral parts, using small details of imitation, but there none of the explorative choral techniques of works from the 1960s and 1970s. There is prominent use of transposition to heighten tension: the material of bb. 231-234 is repeated five times, each time a semitone higher than the last. The onward drive derives not from any form of cumulative choral scoring, but from the relentless rhythms set up by the percussion (ex. 60).

In the narrative verses, the log drums provide a restless rhythmic energy, building to the climax (at bar 336), where the forging of the *sampo* is completed. In celebration, both anvil and log drums are hammered out against the choir’s *fortissimo*

²¹The source of this and other examples from this work is Veljo Tormis, *Sampo Cuditur*.

Ex. 60. Tormis. *Sampo Cuditur*, bb. 270-281

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff, labeled 'A.', starts with a dynamic of *p* and a tempo of *4/4*. It features a continuous eighth-note pattern followed by a forte dynamic (*f*). The lyrics 'cre-scens vi - det fir - ma - men - tum.' are repeated three times. The bottom staff continues the eighth-note pattern and ends with a forte dynamic (*f*). The second staff begins at measure 276, labeled '276 solo'. It has dynamics of *ff* and *soli*, and a tempo of *ff*. It shows a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The bassoon (Bassoon) part is also indicated.

parallel chords in their upper register. The instruments then fall silent as the choir, *subito piano*, asks, with reference to the blacksmith's reward, '*Iamne virgo mihi datur?*' ['Will you give me now the maiden?']. Tormis cleverly leaves the ending musically unresolved, and with the percussive drive halted, the question is left hanging in the air (ex. 61).

Ex. 61. Tormis. *Sampo Cuditur*, coda, bb. 375-380

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff starts with a dynamic of *p* and a tempo of *3/4*. The lyrics 'Iam - ne vir - go' are followed by a question 'mi - hi da - tur?' with dynamics of *(p)*. The middle staff continues with the same lyrics and question, also with dynamics of *(p)*. The bottom staff follows the same pattern. The music concludes with a final question mark over the last note.

Sampo Cuditur is, like *Piiskop ja Pakana*, economical and musically conservative in means, although the economy of means is counterbalanced by a strong dramatic impetus. The melodic material is, interestingly, Tormis's own invention, rather than authentic *regilaul*. However, the melodies bear strong *regilaul* traits, determined as they are by the rhythmic character of the text. Other characteristics are, as outlined in the summary in Chapter 3, short phrases, repetition with few rhythmic variations, and a small vocal compass. In the melodic line, rising and falling perfect fifths are prominent, an element not often found in *regilaul*.

Sampo Cuditur was written eight years after east and west Europe were finally bridged. In writing for a German youth choir, and setting a traditional Finnish text in Latin, Tormis seems to have been acknowledging, albeit on a small scale and rather cautiously, a more international position as a composer. It is perhaps rather poignant then, that, soon after the 'Bridge of Song' had become a reality, and the world seemed to be opening itself up to new possibilities for Estonians, Tormis should be compelled to retire from his composing career.

Chapter 7

Veljo Tormis: choral composer

It is now, in 2013, over twenty years since the Velvet Revolution which led to Estonia finally becoming an independent republic. During this time, the pace of change in the post-Soviet world, as elsewhere, has been immeasurable; Tormis's music, at one time only rarely heard outside the Soviet bloc, is now performed worldwide. Yet it has yet to become as established in the 'musical' public's perception as that of fellow Estonian Arvo Pärt, for example. There remain questions to be asked about whether Tormis has been 'overlooked' in the musical public's perception, and if so, why?

It seems that enthusiasts of Tormis's music fall broadly into three groups:

- Estonians themselves (and people from the surrounding Baltic States and Finland), who still, in post-Soviet Estonia, indelibly link Tormis's name and his music with their own sense of national identity. Tormis remains in Estonia a 'household name', an attribute which could rarely be applied to any contemporary composer in Western Europe.¹
- Enthusiasts of what could be called the 'Tormis cult', that is, those who would not perhaps normally attend choral concerts but for whom some aspect (often extra-musical) of Tormis's music has an appeal. These aspects include the ritual, shamanist and 'primitive' aspects of such works as *Raua Needmine [Curse Upon Iron]*, which tie in with a certain ethos of 'alternative' or 'New Age' philosophy.
- The principal 'international' audience, which is the 'choral community', that is, the cognoscenti who are involved in singing, conducting and as audiences of, specifically, choral music.

This third group, the 'choral community', is probably the most significant for the purposes of this study. What factor is missing for the perception of Tormis to extend *beyond* choral enthusiasts into the wider concert-going public?

¹Author discussion with Urve Lippus, Evi Arujärv, Ursula Roosman of the British Council in Estonia, and many Estonian musicologists during research trips to Tallinn in February 2010, 2011 and 2012.

A significant part of the answer must lie in the fact that the balance of choral instrumental/orchestral music in Tormis's output is so vastly disproportionate. Some 500 choral songs compare with a mere handful of orchestral pieces, of which only two or three (*Avamäng II* [2nd Overture], *Ookean* [*The Ocean*], the suite from *Luigelend* [*Swan's Flight*]) are performed, and those, rarely. Tormis had displayed dexterity in handling the orchestra, a facility with form and structure and an acute awareness of instrumental colour and sonority in these works. There appears to be no technical reason why he should not have continued to compose for the wide span of genres handled by most composers. Yet he has restricted himself almost entirely to vocal, and mainly unaccompanied choral, works for the final 25 years of his composing life, precisely from that point where *regilaul* had begun to play such a dominant role in his work and life. So was this exclusive devotion to choral music entirely personal choice?

When asked, Tormis is apt to deflect the question, while Lippus wrily suggests that his preference for choral composition may be due partly to 'pure laziness'. Tormis has complained that 'writing for orchestra involves a lot of note writing, up and down over 32 lines. I prefer to write . . . my thoughts develop better, over four lines of choral music.'² Effort aside, Tormis's starting points were Lutheran church music: the world of choirs, hymns and organ music. He did not learn an orchestral instrument in his early years in Kuusalu, nor at the Moscow Conservatoire. He disliked conducting lessons there, and when organ lessons were suppressed by the Soviets, he opted for composition instead, by process of elimination. He had always felt at ease in the choral world: this was, after all, the medium of the Song Festivals in which his parents so enthusiastically participated

²Lippus and Tormis, *Lauldud Sõna*, p. 187.

and which are still such a prominent event every five years in Estonia.

As discussed previously in the study, choral music perceived as having a folk song base was one relatively safe route for a composer under the Soviet system. Tormis had seen the effects of the 1948 purges on Shostakovich and others, and was nervous of falling foul of the Soviet authorities with accusations of formalism. Tormis found both a voice, and his own security, in *regilaul*, with its traditional melodies and texts relating to the rural culture of his childhood, which he saw disappearing. Moreover, like many composers (such as Britten in the twentieth century), Tormis responded so readily to text, finding a great affinity between the poetic and the musical image.³ The ‘non-*regilaul*’ cycle of the 1960s, *Looduspildid [Nature Pictures]* (discussed in Chapter 3) is testimony to this sensitivity of word setting.

In the post-Soviet era, Tormis has found self-promotion difficult. Unlike younger contemporary Estonian composers such as Erkki-Sven Tüür or Tõnu Korvits, he is not comfortable with self-analysis, nor with formal interviews. Despite some facility with English (although more with the written than spoken language), and reasonably fluent German, he will give pre-concert talks and workshops only in Estonian, with an interpreter provided. He prefers to discuss only the works in hand, and steers away from personal issues; he says he will not take part in formal interviews.⁴

Despite a nightmarish era of repression, the Soviet system had afforded a certain cushioning for Tormis. During Communist times, he had little need for self-publicity, since his works were guaranteed performances and the scores published

³Particularly notable in the cycles of the 1960s. Britten’s predilection for text is discussed in Peter Porter, ‘Composer and Poet’ in Palmer (ed.), *The Britten Companion*, p. 272.

⁴Tormis comments that he habitually refuses simply because ‘[he does not] like being interviewed’. Kolk, ‘Veljo Tormis’.

centrally. This allowed him to exist as a freelance composer without the need for an academic position (or similar) for income, even though such a position had been sought on several occasions.⁵ The adjustment to the westernisation of Estonia since 1991 has not been an easy one for Tormis. He sees the widespread following for Pärt's music, for example, outside Estonia, and wonders why his own is not better promoted.⁶ He has, in an attempt to correct this, developed a (rarely updated) Tormis databank containing details of performances and articles on his work, in a concession to the globalised world of communication. Tormis, a naturally reticent character, has often explained that he feels in some way personally 'exposed' when writing music 'for itself':

Never in my life have I merely constructed music. I have always had another purpose, some *idée fixe*, a desire to express something, to emphasise an idea of some sort, even a political one. Not a musical one.⁷

One such factor is a sense of 'mission'; writing 'for the sake of *regilaul*' puts him at one remove from his work. *Regilaul*, both in its incorporation into his music and in the mission to keep it alive, has fulfilled this need, while shaping his individual voice. Thus, at the point where he had become truly absorbed in *regilaul*, he began to redefine his sense of 'self' as a composer, that is, as a preserver of ancient song. The orchestra played no part in this mission, and so was effectively excluded for the almost-twenty central years of his career. Even when the opportunity arose (through necessity), to display his orchestral writing in *Eesti Ballaadid [Estonian Ballads]*, Tormis did not seem to exploit the situation. Instead, in this work, he opts to use the orchestra mainly as small-scale accompaniment. Here, he writes for chamber-like combinations and rarely invokes the strength of a *tutti*, giving the orchestra little

⁵Author discussion with Daitz, Canterbury, May 2011.

⁶Email discussion with Daitz, December 2010.

⁷Kolk, 'Veljo Tormis'.

independence.

In the series of essays '*Lauldud Sõna*' [The Word was Sung] Tormis reflects that composers can often make pragmatic choices which defy the analyses of critics. A practical, even trivial explanation, may exist, where a more profound one is assumed by critics. He cites his former student, the modernist Kuldar Sink (1942-1995), a prominent Estonian composer, who expressed a preference for the chamber over the symphony orchestra. It transpired that, being short-sighted, Sink could not see a whole page of manuscript at once; he could, however, cope well with the half-page of score demanded by chamber forces.⁸

There are almost certainly a number of practical reasons why Tormis's music still remains the preserve of the somewhat specialised 'choral community'. With the exception of the Ballet-Cantata, *Eesti Ballaadid*, itself an esoteric piece making significant demands on an audience's familiarity with the Estonian language and culture, there are few Tormis works which are longer than ten minutes in length. Such cycles as *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* [Estonian Calendar Songs] and *Unustatud Rahvad* [Forgotten Peoples] consist of sets of many short songs, not necessarily intended for performance as a whole. Daitz suggests that while *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* has succeeded in a concert when performed in its entire five sets (29 songs), *Unustatud Rahvad*, a very significant cycle totalling 50 songs, would be too demanding for even an initiated audience.⁹ Choral concerts involving large numbers of short pieces are taxing from the point of view of conductors, performers and audience alike. *Raua Needmine*, the single most widely-performed Tormis work, with a duration of ten minutes, is certainly substantial enough within a concert programme, but the sheer technical demands of this piece (more so for non-native Estonian speakers) precludes

⁸Lippus and Tormis, *Lauldud Sõna*, p. 188.

⁹Email to author, 22 August 2010.

it from performance by many choirs, and certainly, amateur choirs.¹⁰

Alongside the issue of the length of works, the ‘pagan’ theme of much of Tormis’s work precludes what could be called some of the ‘traditional outlets’ for choral music: the church. A complete absence of liturgical settings, and the pre-Christian nature of Tormis’s *regilaul*-based works, prevents inclusion within many traditional choral programmes alongside Christian texts. This strongly contrasts with the situation of the religious text settings of, for example, Pärt, whose hour-long *Kanon Pokajanen [Penitential Canon]* (1997), combines Russian, Greek and Finnish texts. Similarly, Erkki-Sven Tüür, whose *Triglosson Trishagion* (2008) formed the core of a touring concert by the Estonian Chamber Choir during 2010.¹¹

One more important factor is the Estonian language, which without doubt presents an obstacle to wider performances of Tormis’s works. With the exception of a few, mostly later, pieces such as *Piispa ja Pakana [The Bishop and the Pagan]* and *Sampo Cuditur [The Forging of the Sampo]* (which include settings of Latin), Tormis has set almost exclusively Estonian texts, often in ‘obscure’ regional dialect. Pärt, in comparison, has frequently set Estonian, Russian, English, Latin and German; Tüür, Estonian, French and Latin. Estonian is not difficult to pronounce, being entirely consistent and phonetic once simple rules have been learnt. For a singer, the language is, like Italian, rich in long, open vowels. However, the unfamiliarity of the Estonian language to those outside the region (as previously discussed, it bears no kinship with languages from Germanic, Romantic or Slavic roots more familiar to

¹⁰Although University High School in Orlando, Florida, US achieved an accomplished performance in June 2007, viewable on YouTube. www.youtube.com/watch?v=eHf7t1eqv8o. accessed 28 September 2010.

¹¹This programme was heard by the author in the Niguliste (St Nicholas Church), a prominent concert venue in Tallinn, by the Estonian Chamber Choir, directed by Daniel Reuss, in February 2010, in the presence of Pärt and Tüür. The choir toured the programme to, among others, the Walestonia and Vale of Glamorgan Festival in Wales, in September 2010. The *Kanon* was premiered by the Estonian Chamber Choir under Kaljuste in 1998 in Cologne, and commissioned for the 750th anniversary of the building of Cologne Cathedral.

Western European ears) is an obvious deterrent for the less courageous conductor or singer.

An apparent solution may lie in translation, at least as an introduction to the repertoire. Indeed, when Tormis heard the Portland State University Choir perform on tour in Estonia in 2003 under their director Bruce Browne, he specifically requested that the choir make a recording of his music in English.¹² Unfortunately, when Tormis's former publisher, Fazer, was taken over by Fennica Gehrman (Helsinki) in the mid-1990s (and subsequently by Warner Chappell), Tormis endorsed performing translations by Riitva Poom, an established Estonian writer living in the United States.¹³ These prove to be at best ungainly and at worst, nonsensical, often displaying a complete lack of awareness of the natural word inflections of English: in other words, of what is, and what is not, naturally 'singable'. These poor translations somehow appear to have slipped through the net of current editors and publishers. This is illustrated in ex. 62, the opening of '*Valusalt punased lehed*', translated by Poom as 'Painfully red are the leaves on way', from *Sügismaastikud [Autumn Landscapes]*. Not only is the translation unidiomatic (should 'way' not be translated as 'path' or 'track'?), but 'way' makes no sense without a preceding article, 'the'. Furthermore, the word stresses of 'leaves on way' are simply odd: the longer, minim, stress falling unnaturally on the preposition 'on'. These translations not only do Tormis a huge disservice, but the apparent lack of care and professionalism could act as a deterrent to performance to a conductor looking through sheet music as potential new repertoire.

¹²The resulting CD album was *On American Shores* (see discography). Tormis believes strongly in performance in the local language, or at least the use of surtitles, e.g. in opera (discussion with author, February 2010). Daitz strongly disagrees with the translation from Estonian in performance, arguing that the language is eminently singable and, once simple rules are learnt, not difficult for non-Estonians to approach (email to author, 22 August 2010).

¹³Daitz email to author, August 2010.

Ex. 62. Tormis. *Sügismaastikud*, no. 4 ‘*Valusalt punased lehed*’, bb. 1-9

Allegretto L=92

I Soprani
II Alt.
Tenori
Bassi

Va - lu - salt
Pain - ful - ly
pu - na - sed
red
le - hed
leaves on
teel.
way.

po - ri - seks
mud - died and

5 I söt - ku - tud
trod - den - a
teel.
way.

II A. I - met - len
Mar - vel - ing.
neid
awed
ma
ja
am

T. I - met - len
Mar - vel - ing.
neid
awed
ma
ja
am

B. I - met - len
Mar - vel - ing.
neid
awed
ma
ja
am

Emphasis has been placed in this study on the inseparability of text and melody in Tormis’s *regilaul*-based work. It is therefore surprising to learn that Tormis recently (2009-2010) undertook a complete *volte-face*, unthinkable a few years before.¹⁴ For his 80th birthday celebrations at the Nargen Festival in August 2010 he produced *Reminiscentiae*, a suite for string orchestra derived from a number of choral pieces. In a promotional leaflet from his publishers, released on the occasion of his 80th birthday, he describes the experience of revisiting these past works as ‘like gazing from the top of a mountain top back over the road travelled during a long creative life’.¹⁵

Transcription, arrangement, or original composition? In *Reminiscentiae*,

¹⁴Daitz email to author, August 2010.

¹⁵Josep Sang, ‘Veljo Tormis: Torchbearer, Nonconformist and Shaman’ in *Nordic Highlights*, newsletter from Fennica Gehrman, publishers (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, Spring 2010), p.4.

Tormis transfers the original choral lines almost note-for-note into the string parts.¹⁶

The parts show little exploitation of the wide tessitura of stringed instruments, nor of any performing techniques except simple *arco* and *pizzicato*. On the printed page, as has so often been observed of Tormis's work, the score appears somewhat lack-lustre and conservative. One of the songs, '*Kutse Jaanitulele II*' ['Call to the Midsummer Bonfire II'] has seen an extraordinary three-stage journey from its original archive *regilaul*, recorded by Herbert Tampere in the 1950s, through the widely-performed choral version in *Jaanilaulud [St John's Songs]*, and in turn to this further version for strings. The vocal lines are transcribed almost note for note for string quartet, and yet small details such as an occasional added ornamentation in the melodic line, or a few small changes in rhythm here and there, reveal that there is still a distinctly composerly mind at work. In *Reminiscentiae*, Tormis has, after all, re-conceived the original material.

Does *Reminiscentiae* stand on its own without the listener's awareness of the choral work behind it? Of course the work lacks the sense of purpose associated with text, as has become the expectation in Tormis's huge output of choral works. But one does sense in the work a distinct integrity, which takes it beyond the realm of a mere transcription and the dance-like rhythms of '*Kutse Jaanitulele*' transfer from voices to strings with a surprisingly youthful vitality.¹⁷

And yet it seems that there have really been no *new* compositions since Tormis's declaration in 2000. The 'Composer Emeritus' remains just that; '*kõik*', written on Tormis's final score, really does mean what it says.¹⁸

¹⁶The score is as yet unpublished, existing only in manuscript to which Tormis says he does not have access. Author discussion with Tormis, Tallinn, February 2011.

¹⁷Lippus informed the author that Tormis was continuing (as at 2013) to make arrangements of some of his choral works for instrumental ensembles, although details were not given (author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, 13 February, 2013).

¹⁸'*Kõik*' means 'that is all' or 'that's it'.

Chapter 8

Tormis's legacy

In the year 2000 Tormis announced his last composition. *Lauliku Lopusõnad [The Singer's Closing Words]* is a setting for mixed chorus of the last text from the *Kalevala*. The lines are spoken by the shaman figure, Väinämöinen, in old age. The passage ends with the words, 'Now my song remains completed', implying that it is time to surrender their speaker's power to a younger singer. Traditions from the time of the *Kalevala* perhaps survive in the Estonian consciousness up to this day; in the text, Väinämöinen departs to make way for the new, and for a renewal of life forces.¹ Indeed, on the score, Tormis has marked 'to conclude my composing work'.

In an interview at the Cheltenham International Music Festival in July 2008, my first meeting with Veljo Tormis, I asked him whether his announced retirement still held true, or whether he could imagine following the example of composers (like Brahms), who later resumed writing on a smaller scale. Can it, in any case, ever be said that a composer had 'completed' his or her work? In response, Tormis handed over a business card embossed with the words 'Composer Emeritus', adding 'I don't need to write any more. I have earned this.' He feels that any future attempt at composition would merely involve repeating what has been said before: 'Let others do that now.'² His decision was preceded by a long and considered period of winding down. He had been forced to abandon *Lalli* after his heart attack, and following *Piispa ja Pakana [The Bishop and the Pagan]* there was a quiet period during which

¹Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 151.

²Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

he catalogued his work.³ Subsequent compositions were small in scale, consisting mainly of folk song arrangements and re-arrangements. At Cheltenham, Tormis stated ‘I do feel that I have completed my mission.’⁴

Having ‘completed’ his work as a composer, could it be said that Tormis has left a legacy to younger musicians and composers? Certainly, he has made a huge contribution to both the awareness of, and survival of *regilaul*, both in Estonia and beyond. Tormis is the composer most widely credited with the survival of the ancient folk song during the Soviet period.⁵ This mission has been achieved firstly through the integration of *regilaul* into his music and secondly through his teaching of the song. This teaching was at first informal, as Tormis worked with community groups in cities and towns across Estonia. More recently (as at 2012), he has taught in a more formal context, contributing to the Ethnomusicology degree course at the Estonian Academy of Music and Drama in Tallinn, and at the Music Institute in Viljandi, where he is ‘self-appointed Professor’.⁶

Tormis emphasises the importance of ‘authenticity’ in teaching *regilaul*, yet there is a notable contradiction here. He declares that the song must be taught ‘as closely to the original as possible’, meaning orally. He insists that meticulous attention be paid to the sound of the language and to the variations in character of the song within each parish.⁷ And yet we know that Tormis has, in turn, learnt most of material at second-hand, through Tampere’s archive recordings.⁸ This practice

³Daitz, *Ancient Song*, p. 151.

⁴Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

⁵Author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2010.

⁶Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008. Viljandi is a town in the south-west of Estonia which has a strong *regilaul* tradition. Author discussion with Lippus and Tormis, Tallinn, February 2010.

⁷Tormis, ‘Some problems’.

⁸Author discussion with Lippus and Tormis, Tallinn, February 2010.

removes a sense of spontaneity, excluding as it does the continuous change and evolution inherent in genuine folk music. The result is Bohlman's 'technologising' of folk music, that is, a completely *inauthentic* approach.⁹

The revival of *regilaul* is paralleled by that of the indigenous music of many other areas of the world, a movement propelled by an almost universal interest in minority cultures.¹⁰ In the United States, the mid-century popular folk revival was spearheaded by American folk singer Pete Seeger (b. 1919), following the lead of his father Charles who, as an academically-trained musician, succeeded in linking musicology to other disciplines and cultures.¹¹ This was, however, long after folk song was popularly disseminated in Britain via arrangements of the material for schools, for instance, the celebrated *English Folk Songs for Schools*.¹² In Communist eastern Europe, amateur folk song performances took place in defiance of the authorities.¹³ To Estonians, as elsewhere, they provided a way of upholding individuality against the faceless regime of the Soviet Union: a means of cultural resistance.¹⁴ Folk traditions were therefore, on the whole, followed 'behind the back of the state'.¹⁵

The revival of *regilaul* in Estonia has gathered huge momentum in the decades since the Velvet Revolution.¹⁶ In the post-Soviet era, many annual Estonian folk festivals now exist, including a large-scale annual event at Viljandi in which

⁹Bohlman, *The Study of Folk Music*, p. 66.

¹⁰Author discussion with Tormis, Cheltenham, July 2008.

¹¹Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, pp. 271-72.

¹²S. Baring Gould and Cecil Sharp, *English Folk Songs for Schools* (London: Curwen, 1908).

¹³Slobin, *Retuning Culture*, p. 5.

¹⁴Slobin, *Retuning Culture*, pp. 8-10.

¹⁵Mark Slobin, *Folk Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), p. 5.

¹⁶The popular term for the non-violent fall of communism, in the countries of the Eastern bloc in 1989, centred particularly on Prague and Leipzig. Sebestyn, 1989, pp. 367-379.

regilaul regularly features.¹⁷ However, the authenticity of ‘traditional’ music becomes blurred with time. As older generations die out, it can be increasingly difficult to distinguish between a ‘true’ ongoing tradition and a self-consciously revived one. The role of ‘traditional’ singing has, of course, changed dramatically in the developed world. Removed from its function within a work or ritual context, traditional song is today ‘performed’, and as such, has become a form of entertainment rather than a function. However, official recognition of the importance of traditional music within Estonian culture has been marked by the opening of the National Folk Music Research Centres at Värska (in southern Estonia). This has a parallel in Finland’s *Kansanmusiikki* [Folk Music Institute], established in 1974 in the north west of the country at Kaustinen, a village which is home to another large-scale annual summer folk festival.

However, Tormis’s legacy extends beyond the corpus of music he has completed; indeed, he has influenced a number of successful younger composers, in Estonia and beyond. Four composers in particular (two Estonian and two Finnish) have specifically acknowledged the influence of Tormis on their work.¹⁸ Estonian Lepo Sumera (1950-2000) was well-known as a symphonist and his work is today widely performed in Estonian concert programmes. Sumera was highly prolific in the 1990s, a time when the new-found freedom after the fall of Communism caused a creative

¹⁷Author discussion with Tormis, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, February 2010.

¹⁸Information gained by the author from research in Tallinn and Helsinki, February 2011. Part of this chapter concerned with Sumera, Lepik, Jalkanen and Kostianen was presented by the author as the paper, ‘Veljo Tormis: a legacy?’ at the Baltic Musics and Musicologies Conference at Canterbury Christ Church University in May 2011, forming a ‘Tormis panel’ with Daitz and Lippus.

surge in Estonia.¹⁹ Sumera's style is eclectic, influenced by the founders of the 'Estonian style' earlier in the twentieth century: these include his teacher, Heino Eller, as well as Cyrus Kreek and Mart Saar, yet he was also a pioneer in electro-acoustic and computer music (fig.17).

Fig. 17. Lepo Sumera



Tormis remarked that in one work, *Saare Piiga Laul Merest [Island Maiden's Song from the Sea]*, for double mixed choir, Sumera had specifically acknowledged his debt to the older composer. Perhaps it was the ritual sea-setting of this piece, drawn from Estonia's folk epic the *Kalevipoeg*, that impelled Sumera to turn to quasi-*regilaul* melodies, with their characteristic, eight-syllable word rhythms and a small vocal compass (ex 63a). Unlike Tormis, who usually insists on 'authenticity', these are, however, of Sumera's own making. But in the Tormis manner, these *regi*-like melodies are varied by transposition, without thematic development. A more chromatic section provides contrast. At the opening, one choir whispers fragments of

¹⁹Author discussion with writer and musicologist, Evi Arujärv, at the Estonian Music Information Centre, Tallinn, February 2011.

the text while the other sings, heightening the sense of ritual: the sparse choral textures, using the small-compassed folk-like melody in various transpositions against bare fifths, recall Tormis's treatment of *regilaul* in, for example, '*Mistes Jaani Oodetesse*' [Why St John is awaited] from *Jaanilaulud* [St John's Songs] (ex. 63b).

Ex. 63 a) Sumera. *Saare Piiga Laul Merest*, entry of choir 2²⁰

b) Tormis. '*Jaanilaulud*', '*Mistes Jaani Oodetesse*', bb. 1-2

²⁰The source of this example is Lepo Sumera, *Saare Piiga Laul Merest* (Ettlingen: Edition 49, 1988).

Tarmo Lepik (1945-2001), like Sumera, was a composition pupil of Tormis in his formative years of High School in Tallinn (fig. 18). Less prolific than Sumera, Lepik was more influenced by the avant-garde movement of the 1970s. He keenly acknowledged Tormis's influence on his choral music, once telling Tormis that he had 'taken his ideas and developed them'.²¹

Fig. 18. Tarmo Lepik



This is evident in *Kolm Betti Alveri Luuleltust [Three Poems by Betty Alver]* for male chorus (1974). Looking through the score of this cycle together, Tormis drew my attention to the third song, '*Räägi Tasa Minuga*' [Speak to me silently]. Here a baritone solo sings a small-compassed *regilaul*-like melody above a wordless choral accompaniment built up with staggered entries upwards through the voices, beginning with a bottom C in the basses (ex. 64). The texture vividly recalls the layering of

²¹Author discussion with Lippus and Tormis, Tallinn, February 2010.

Ex. 64. Lepik. ‘Räägi Tasa Minuga,’ bb. 1-4²²

The musical score consists of four staves of music. The top staff is labeled 'trill.', the second 'm', the third 'dix.', and the bottom 'solo'. The music is in common time (indicated by '3'). Measure 44 begins with a dynamic of '2p'. The vocal parts are positioned at the extremes of their ranges. The vocal parts are labeled 'trill.', 'm', 'dix.', and 'solo'. The music continues with dynamics '2p' and 'b.ch.'.

wordless voices in the haunting opening of Tormis's 'Kutse Jaanitulele I' from the last set of *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* [Estonian Calendar Songs]. Here, the close imitation of two solo voices *in distanza* additionally creates a dramatic sense of space. It must be said that Tormis is somewhat more sympathetic to his tenors and basses than is Lepik, who places them uncomfortably close to the extremes of their ranges (ex. 65).

As discussed elsewhere in the study, there is a great cultural affinity between Estonia and Finland. Tormis had from early in his composing career built a close

²²Taken from Tarmo Lepik, *Kolm Betti Alveri Luuletust* (Tallinn: SP Musikaprojekt, 2008).

Ex. 65. Tormis. *Eesti Kalendrilaulud*, ‘Kutse Jaanitulele I’, bb. 1-3

Andantino ♩ = 72
(in distanza)

VELJO TORMIS (1967)

2 Alti soli

Sopranos I & II

Alto

Tenor

Bassi

relationship with, and written for, many Finnish choirs and their conductors.²³ Pekka Jalkanen (b. 1946), is a Finnish composer whose first compositions drew on folk music and jazz. While acknowledging a fascination with Ligeti and Lutoslawski in the 1970s, Jalkanen also recognises an influence by the American minimalist movement in the following decade – Reich, Riley, and later, in Estonia, Pärt (fig. 19). Tormis described how he met Jalkanen in Helsinki in the late 70s during a performance over several days of his epic choral cycle, *Unustatud Rahvad* [Forgotten

²³An overview of the robustness of the musical climate supporting contemporary composers in Finland, is given in Tim Howells, *After Sibelius* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 263-284.

Fig. 19. Pekka Jalkanen



Peoples]. Jalkanen greatly admired this, and Tormis recounted how the composers spent an entire day talking in depth about Estonian and Finnish culture and the *Kalevala*.²⁴ Speaking about the influence of Tormis on his music, Jalkanen specifically drew attention to one work: this time, an instrumental piece. *Viron Orja* [*The Serf of Estonia*] is written for string orchestra, and won first prize at the prominent international folk Festival in Kaustinen, north Finland, in 1980. Based on the *Kalevala*, this Orphic tale recounts the creation of the *kantele* or ancient Finnish zither. Jalkanen uses a Finnish *pelimanni* melody to depict the secular world, distinguishing this from the ‘sacral, hypnotic world of *Kalevala* music’ to which he gives the rarified timbre of string harmonics.²⁵ Although the procedure of phased entries is perhaps more reminiscent of American minimalist works such as Reich’s *Vermont Counterpoint*, in *Viron Orja*, Jalkanen specifically attributes to Tormis his use of short, repetitive motifs derived from *runolaul* (ex. 66). Jalkanen also

²⁴Author discussion with Lippus and Tormis, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, February 2011.

²⁵*Pelimanni* is a form of traditional Nordic dance music which can be clearly distinguished from the much older *runolaul* by its more ‘Westernised’ tonal character, and by its rhythmic qualities. Discussion with Dr. Tina Ranmarine, Lecturer in Ethnomusicology, at the conference, ‘Baltic Musics and Musicologies’, Canterbury Christ Church University, 26 May 2011.

Ex. 66. Jalkanen. *Viron Orja*, bb. 1-3²⁶



acknowledges Tormis's influence on the way in which he seeks to create a contrasting 'meditative atmosphere in the manner of archaic *Kalevala* song'.²⁷

In 1986 Tormis visited Jyväskälä, a university city in central Finland, to hear a performance of *Karjala Saatus* [*Karelian Destiny*], another part of the *Unustatud Rahvad* cycle. The work was conducted by Pekka Kostiainen (b. 1945), now one of the most established and respected Finnish choral composers (fig. 20). Kostiainen writes that he was 'completely infatuated' with Tormis's music after that first encounter, and went on to incorporate ancient Finnish *runolaul* or rather, its 'essence' into many of his own works. '*Pakkasen Luku*' ['The Frost's Incantation'], another *Kalevala*-based work, is a set of short songs for mixed choir in varying combinations. As with the Sumera, the musical material is entirely Kostiainen's own, but based on *runolaul* principles. Melodies are of a very limited compass, mostly spanning only a minor third, which the composer points out is typical of the 'oldest (Finnish) *runolaul* style'. Some songs follow the traditional performance procedure of a leader's part

²⁶The source of this example is Pekka Jalkanen, *Viron Orja* [*The Serf of Estonia*] (1980) (Helsinki: Fennica Gehrman, 1980).

²⁷Email from Jalkanen to author, February 2011.

Fig. 20. Pekka Kostiainen



echoed by the chorus, the last notes of each line being doubled by the singers of the next line, thus forming a continuous ‘chain’ of sound. Kostiainen echoes Tormis in his approach, but is less purist; he will combine themes and mix authentic and composed melodies within the same works. The third song of this cycle, ‘*Kyll’ on sulla kylämistä*’ follows Tormis’s principles of a repeated, unchanged original melody varied only by choral scoring. A sense of onward movement is created by cumulative thickening of the choral texture. The bare, angular theme of ‘*Kyll’ on sulla*’, with its prominent diminished fifth, reinforces the glacial theme of the *Kalevala* poetry (ex. 67). This ‘cumulative’ technique of choral orchestration, identified as the most recognisable characteristics in Tormis’s music, was described in Chapter 4 of this study.

An unexpected direction which Tormis’s music has taken is into the realm of contemporary rock music: Tormis’s music has featured in a ‘remix’. The album *Laulu Jarvääse Seadus [The Law of Conservation of Song]* (issued October 2009) demonstrates the flexibility of *regilaul* material when interpreted in a contemporary,

Ex. 67. Kostianen. 'Kyll' on sulla kylämistä', bb. 1-5²⁸

The musical score consists of two staves of music. The top staff is for voices S.I and S.II, and the bottom staff is for voices A.I and A.II. The lyrics are written in Finnish, with some words underlined. The first section of lyrics is:

KYLLÖN SUL-LA KYL-MÄ-MIS-TÄ,
PAL-JO-KI PA-LE-LE-MIS-TÄ,
IL-MAN IH-MI-SEN I-HOT-TÄ,
E-MON TUOMAN RUU-MI-HIT-TÄ

The second section of lyrics is:

KYLHÄ SOITA, KYLHÄ HAI-TA, KYLHÄ KYLMI-Ä KI-U-Ä,
PA-LE-LE VE-SI-PATU-JA, PA-NE HAAVAN PAAKURO-TÄ

Accompanying the vocal parts are various rhythmic patterns and dynamics like 'poco a poco crescendo' and 'semper cresc.'.

somewhat 'New Age' idiom.²⁹ Electronics and drum kit replace the shaman drum of the original in *Raue Needmine*, for example. Tormis is keen to embrace the 'youth market' and to win new audiences, and it may be that he perceives remixes to be one means of achieving this. He has remarked on what he considers the effectiveness of the translation to this idiom, feeling that it 'preserves the spirit of the original *regilaul*'.³⁰

It appears that Tormis has only latterly become aware of the 'music market' and the need for self-publicity. A substantial part of his career was spent under the shadow of, and initially promoted by, the Soviet regime. He seems readily to support

²⁸The source of this example is Pekka Kostianen, *Pakkasen Luku* (1983) (Helsinki: Sulasol, 1983).

²⁹*Laulu Jarvääse Seadus*, CD (Germany: Ulmaplaadid, 2009).

³⁰Email to author from Maria Mölder, Estonian Composers' Union www.helilooja.ee accessed 18 Nov 2009.

and enthuse about initiatives which afford his music wider coverage, particularly with younger audiences in Western Europe and the US, even when their musical value is at times perhaps somewhat questionable.³¹

Pekka Kostainen, in a recent communication to the author, provides a neat summary of Tormis's legacy: 'I feel the most significant achievement of Tormis's music is how he . . . emphasises the most relevant characteristics of 'real' folk music. The product is clearly archaic, but yet clearly music of our time.'³²

Fig. 22. Tormis in rehearsal with Metsätöll folk band³³



³¹Email to author from Daitz, December 2010.

³²Email to author from Kostainen, March 2011. Translated from Finnish by Jari Eskola, Director of the Finnish Music Information Centre, Helsinki.

³³Photo by Liis Trejmann, taken from 'Nordic Highlights', newsletter from Fennica Gehrmann, publishers. January 2010.

Postscript

Veljo Tormis and my work as a composer

In this postscript I link this study of Veljo Tormis to my own work as a composer, making reference to two of my choral works, one, *The Singing will never be done* (2005/6), written at the beginning of this doctoral study, and therefore dating from before the influence of Tormis, and one from the end of the period, *The Ruin* (2012). These pieces were written, respectively, for an amateur and a semi-professional choir and are scored for similar forces, that is, mixed choir with organ and percussion, though *The Singing* also includes harp. Tormis's influence can be seen, often explicitly, in the second work, *The Ruin*, a piece which was inspired by his landmark choral piece, *Raua Needmine [Curse Upon Iron]*.

One Tormis trait I share without reservation: he has stated on many occasions that he requires a stimulus from beyond the music itself in order to create a composition, as do I. As he puts it, he needs 'some *idée fixe*, a desire to express something, to emphasise an idea of some sort, even a political one. Not a musical one.'¹ This statement, explored in Chapter 7, is certainly one factor which accounts for Tormis's near abandonment of instrumental and orchestral writing in the early 1960s, the very point in time where he established an inseparable personal bond with text. This began with contemporary Estonian poetry (as in *Looduspildid [Nature Pictures]*) and was followed by his immersion in *regilaul*, from *Kihnu Pulmalaulud [Kihnu Island Wedding Songs]* onwards. The stimulus of his political beliefs, and most explicitly, pacifism, found its most powerful expression in *Raua Needmine*.

As a composer I similarly recognise in my own work the need for an initial stimulus which comes from beyond the music itself. This stimulus is often provided

¹Kolk, 'Veljo Tormis'.

by an image, or a dramatic situation, as is the case of *The Singing will never be done*. But it is text itself that for me provides the greatest stimulus and the firmest structure on which to build. For this reason I am, like Tormis, drawn to word setting, and, also like Tormis, particularly to choral composition, even though I do not share his abandonment of other media.

The Singing will never be done

This piece was commissioned by the Phoenix Choir, a proficient amateur choir in Bristol, who performed it at the church of St Mary Redcliffe, Bristol on 5 December 2006, alongside Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, under their conductor, Dr. Leslie Bunt. Musical forces were determined by the scoring of the accompanying Bernstein work, which was given in the composer's reduced scoring, that is, mixed choir with organ, harp and percussion. *The Singing*, additionally, uses a marimba. Below, I discuss this work with regard to the following five topics: text; structure; the role of the choir, instrumentation and tonality.

1. Text

The stimulus for the piece was a theme topical at the time of the commission: the death in autumn 2005 (at the age of 101) of Alfred Anderson, the last surviving veteran of the extraordinary 'Christmas Truce' of 1914. Recorded in the account of Captain J. C. Dunn, an unexpected peace took over from First World War hostilities that Christmas Day.² Soldiers on both sides, enemies just moments before, spontaneously pronounced a ceasefire after a British sergeant held up a banner proclaiming 'Merry Christmas. We not shoot. You not shoot.' Carols were sung,

²Captain J. C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry knew*. London: P. S. King, 1938. Reissued by Abacus edition (London: 1994), pp. 101-102.

rations shared (including a barrel of beer, exchanged for a plum pudding), and a game of football played between the opposing sides. The following day, hostilities were resumed and momentary friends became enemies once more. This ‘unofficial armistice’ was, not surprisingly, covered up by the authorities, and only came to light some years later.

For this choral setting I created a short ‘collage’ of text from Dunn’s accounts of the Christmas Truce, and followed this with Siegfried Sassoon’s (1886-1967) well-known visionary poem, *Everyone Sang*, which is generally regarded as a ‘War Poem’ even though it was actually written in 1919, after the end of the hostilities. The full texts are given below.

(1) Text adapted by the composer from the Dunn account

No Man’s Land
At Christmas,
A day of peace in time of war:
Christmas Day, nineteen fourteen.
Out of the darkness, lanterns appeared.
(Fraternisation, do not trust them,
Fraternisation with the enemy!)
They spoke in signs,
They had no common language,
They shook hands.
(An unofficial armistice!)
They shared Christmas carols,
They exchanged a barrel of beer
For a plum pudding.
(An unofficial armistice!)
They played games,
They shared a game of cards,
They played a game of football
(Fraternisation! an unofficial armistice!)
And there was singing . . .

(2) Siegfried Sassoon: Everyone Sang

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prison'd birds must find in freedom,
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark-green fields;
On- on- and out of sight.
Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;
And beauty came like the setting sun:
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror
Drifted away . . . O, but Everyone
Was a bird; and the song was wordless;
The singing will never be done.³

Through the juxtaposition of these texts, I aimed to create an 8-minute piece in which the temporary peace of the Christmas Truce would proceed seamlessly into the enduring vision of Sassoon's poem, where 'everyone was a bird and the song was wordless'. *The Singing will never be done* is therefore written to be performed as a whole, without a break between sections.

2. Structure

A table giving content and structure in *The Singing will never be done* is given in Fig. 21. It will be seen that the work is roughly symmetrical in form. The slow introduction, which sets the scene of the truce, is balanced by a coda of roughly the same duration, in which the choir unites on the repeated phrase, 'The singing will never be done', the *dénouement* of the piece. The two main sections (marked 'A' and 'B' in the table), each of a similar duration (approx. 2 minutes) provide an exposition of the main body of the texts. The first narrates the events of the real truce while the second, the Sassoon setting, is intended as an extension of the emotions of this event. These two sections are joined by a short central section comprising a melismatic setting of the word 'singing'. This structural symmetry is further

³ Siegfried Sassoon, used with permission of George Sassoon on behalf of the poet's estate.

Fig. 23. Content and Structure, *The Singing will never be done*

Section	Introduction	A	Bridge	B	Extended coda
Bar numbers	1-28	29-153	154-170	171-219	220-245
Duration	1' 05"	2' 51"	0' 33"	2' 30"	1' 03"
Instrumentation	Choir, organ, marimba, harp	Choir, organ, marimba, harp	Choir unaccompanied; choir with organ, marimba, harp	Choir, organ, marimba, harp tenor drum	
Source of text	Lawrence, adapted from Dunn	Lawrence, adapted from Dunn	Lawrence, adapted from Dunn	Sassoon	Sassoon
Topic of text	Depiction of the setting of the Christmas Truce	Narration of the events of the Truce (TB) alternating with warnings from the authorities (SA)	Melismatic setting of the word ‘singing’, serving as bridge into the following text	Sassoon text: ‘Everyone suddenly burst out singing’	Reiterations of the phrase ‘the singing will never be done’
Choral texture	Homophonic	Upper voices in opposition to lower voices	Homophonic	Homophonic, with some independent part writing	Homophonic writing, with gradual crescendo and increasing intensity
Pitch centre	A minor/ A major/ C major	C minor/ Ab major/ C# minor/ G# minor	C major (Lydian)	C major/E major, with episode based on tritone Eb-A	A major (Lydian), ending on superimposed chords of G and Eb major

reinforced by the nature of the choral writing: the slow introduction and coda are predominantly homophonic in texture (as is the central bridge section), while the ‘A’ and ‘B’ sections include independent melodic lines.

3. Role of the choir

The choir takes on differing roles in this piece. In the introduction, it begins as a narrator; in the ‘A’ section it divides, so that upper and lower voices work in opposition to each other. Here, the tenors and basses, as if witnesses to the truce, provide descriptions of the events, while the sopranos and altos become the voice of the authorities, reacting to events with accusation and suspicion: ‘fraternisation with the enemy’, ‘an unofficial armistice!’ This conflict adds a dramatic element to the piece, as well as reversing choral stereotypes whereby male voices traditionally tend to represent roles of power.

In the ‘B’ section, ‘Everyone sang’, the four voices are reunited. The choir is initially unaccompanied, but there is a gradual build-up of instrumental accompaniment through to the extended coda. In a work which attempts to portray the uncertainty of times of war, an uneasy opposition is provided by these accompanying instruments.

4. Instrumentation

The structure of the piece is further delineated by its instrumentation. The introduction and coda comprise, at opposite ends of the dynamic range, choral material underpinned by sustained chords in the organ part, with motivic material in the harp and marimba. Moving inwards, the ‘A’ and ‘B’ sections employ both harp and marimba to form rhythmic accompaniments based on arpeggios or dyads (to be

discussed in more detail later); the short central ‘bridge’ section uses another texture: a combination of sustained organ chords with quaver-arpeggio movement in the marimba.

An important function of the instrumentation in the ‘A’ section is to intensify the conflict between the narrators of the Truce (i.e. tenors and basses) and the voices of the authorities (sopranos and altos). This is achieved through abrupt changes in instrumentation: from marimba accompanying the lower voices, to harp accompanying the sopranos and altos (bb.33-42), for example. Further delineation of these roles is described under the heading of tonality.

In terms of the individual instrumental writing, the organ material is principally *sostenuto* and chordal, providing added support for the (amateur) choir for which it was written. The harp is used in several different roles: melodically, introducing the short motifs during the slow introduction (bb. 4, 7 and 8); as a rhythmic accompaniment to the tenors and basses (alternating with the marimba at bb. 38-44 and 50-56), and sonorously. In this latter capacity, it provides the delicate timbral colouring of harmonics at the words ‘drifted away’ (bb. 212-215) and, in great contrast, the *fortissimo glissandi* which provide a sense of dramatic anticipation before each of the climactic chords on the word ‘done’.

The percussion part comprises both pitched and unpitched instruments (marimba and snare/tenor drum respectively). The marimba, while providing forceful *martellato* semiquavers at the climax, also provides, in its middle range, a transparent texture of chords in alternating thirds at the words, ‘and there was singing’, thus setting the choir’s sustained chords in relief (ex. 68).

Ex. 68. Lawrence. *The Singing will never be done*, bb. 154-157

The musical score consists of six staves. The top three staves represent a choir (Soprano, Alto, Tenor) singing in unison. The fourth staff represents the Bass (B) part. The fifth staff is for the Marimba, which plays eighth-note patterns. The bottom staff is for the Organ, which provides harmonic support with sustained notes. The vocal parts sing the words 'And there was sing'. The Marimba part is marked 's.s.' (softissimo). The Organ part is marked 'pp' (pianissimo) and includes the instruction '(ped.)' indicating the use of the pedal.

The drums, on the other hand, bear militaristic associations: the snare drum at the choir's climax in the 'Truce' section (at the words 'fraternisation with the enemy', bb. 139-142) and the tenor drum in the final bars of the piece, where its faltering semiquavers suggest the distant patters of gunfire: a reminder that, despite aspirations to peace, warfare is never far from the surface.

5. Tonality

Like the majority of my compositions, *The Singing will never be done* employs an extended tonal idiom. The piece uses conventional triadic harmony and diatonicism, with chromatic inflections. As indicated in Fig. 21 above, the tonality of the work helps to delineate its structure; the piece is based on pitch centres related by the interval of a third. Thus, the introduction and coda centre on the pitch of A (nominally, A minor in the introduction; A major in the coda), and the central bridging section, on C. The 'A' and 'B' sections are also related to these by the

interval of the third: the ‘A’ section, C minor alternating with Ab major; the ‘B’ section, a further third apart, E major, with a contrasting section of tritonal writing (A-E \flat) at ‘my heart was shaken with tears’ (bb. 206-216).

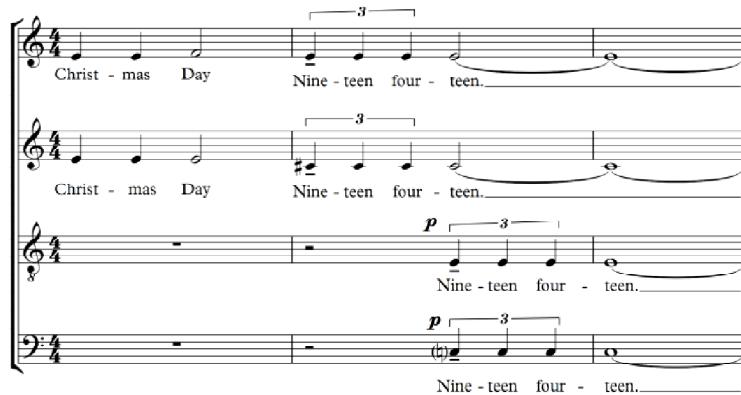
The tonality is disrupted in two principal ways. The first of these is by unprepared, often abrupt, changes of key. An example is the dialogue in section ‘A’ between the upper and lower voices. Not only does the accompaniment change suddenly from marimba to organ, but the tonal centre drops abruptly by a semitone (C#/G# to C \natural /G \natural), thus emphasising the dramatic gulf between the narrators and the authorities (see ex. 69).

Ex. 69. Lawrence. *The Singing will never be done*. bb. 33-42

The second ‘disruption’ is that of tonal ambiguity. This is used throughout the piece to create a sense of instability, reflecting both the desolation of the First World War, ‘No Man’s Land’ setting and the fragility and impermanence of peace. The technique is achieved by a number of means, at different times. One is the use of key centres a third apart, often superposed to create bitonality. The slow introductory

section, for example, wavers uncertainly between the tonal centres of A major and C major (connected by A minor) (see Fig. 21). The ambiguity is prepared by the first note heard in the piece, the minor second C-D♭ in the organ pedal, held at the very bottom of the instrument's (32 ft.) range, barely perceptible as an ominous rumble. The introductory harp figurations have similarly ambiguous implications: pitches G-F-E (C major) or G-[F]-E-C♯ (A major). This ambiguity of tonality is evident from the choir's first entry (ex. 70).

Ex. 70. Lawrence. *The Singing will never be done*, bb. 26-27



Ambiguity is further achieved by the use of dyads in the instrumental parts which fill out the accompanying texture. In the marimba part of ex. 69, for instance, these consist of C♯-D♯ and F♯-G♯, which could imply C♯ major or minor, or F♯ major or minor.

It is interesting to note that, although this work was written before my study of Tormis was underway, dyads (in the form of parallel seconds) are employed similarly in much of Tormis's choral writing, also to create a blurring of tonality. These are seen in his conductus-like harmonisations of *regulaul* melodies, an excellent example

being '*Jaanilaul*' ['St John's Song'], discussed in Chapter 4 and illustrated in ex. 39.

Another example is the climax of *Piispa ja Pakana [The Bishop and the Pagan]*, in a section representing the anguished cries of the vengeful 'pagan' farmers calling for the life of Bishop Henry (ex. 71). In *The Singing will never be done*, dyads are heard again in the marimba part in the final bars (ex. 72).

Ex. 71. Tormis. *Piispa ja Pakana*. Score fig. 48 (tenor and bass chorus parts only)



Ex. 72. Lawrence. *The Singing will never be done*, bb. 242-243



Bitonality features prominently in the coda of *The Singing will never be done*.

Here, the voices (and indeed, the idea of 'singing' itself) attempt to hold out defiantly against an increasingly dissonant accompaniment in a sequence of six soundings of the word 'done'. Beginning at b. 220, each chord change involves greater dissonance and is accompanied by an increase in dynamics. The choral chords involve a pair of superposed triads, one of which is at first incomplete (B - F#); on the fourth and fifth soundings of 'done', two complete major triads, a tritone (C-F# and then a major third (G-Eb) apart, are sounded. Harp, marimba and organ manuals oppose these

sustained sonorities with *martellato*, semiquaver arpeggios, rising in sequence by semitones. These arpeggios are dissonant with the choral chords, thus increasing the sense of fragmentation. The organ pedal note (the lowest C) provides an anchor, as it has at many points in the piece (ex. 73).

Ex. 73. Lawrence. *The Singing will never be done*, final chords on the word ‘done’

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for Soprano (S), the middle for Alto (A), and the bottom for Bass (B). All three sing the word 'done' in unison. The harp and marimba provide harmonic support with sustained notes and arpeggiated patterns. The organ (pedals) provides harmonic support with sustained notes and dynamic markings like f, ff, and fff. The score shows three distinct sections of chords, each ending with a sustained note on 'done'.

The Singing will never be done was written specifically for a good amateur choir, and the choral writing was intended to address both the strengths and limitations of this situation. For example, the dissonant chords climaxing on the word ‘done’ in the final section (as shown in the example), require confident pitching, yet, at other times, choral entries are cued in the instrumental parts. The choir is often provided with a unison starting note or beginning of a phrase, for example, at the first entry, ‘No Man’s Land’ and, in the Sassoon setting, in the lines ‘The singing will never be . . .’. Unlike their occurrence in the choral music of Tormis, the use of

parallel seconds in *The Singing will never be done* is restricted to the instrumental parts, since choral lines employing these can prove challenging even for professional choirs.⁴

The Ruin (2012)

The Ruin uses Tormis's *Raua Needmine* as a starting point, and in recognition of this, it is dedicated to Tormis himself.⁵ This is the only composition to date which I have consciously modelled on a Tormis piece, or indeed, on one specific work by any other composer.

Daitz has spoken of a number of American student composers who have set out to use *regilaul*, treating it 'as would Tormis', in their own compositions, employing Tormis's techniques of choral orchestration.⁶ However, Tormis's music is a phenomenon born of the culture from which it has grown; I have no desire, myself, to try to 'recreate' it. I have not, then, used *regilaul*, nor any western European 'equivalent'. Instead, I have tried to reinterpret Tormis's work, following some of the structural and musical principles of *Raua Needmine* to create a piece that is distinctly my own.

The Ruin was performed by *Voce* Chamber Choir, a London-based semi-professional ensemble of experienced young singers. The choir's technical expertise

⁴This has been noted by the author on a number of occasions in performances of Tormis's works. One example was the performance of 'Jaanilaul' by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir under Paul Hillier, at the Cheltenham International Music Festival, July 2008, where even this most experienced of professional choirs suffered minor pitching problems in the passages involving parallel seconds.

⁵The two works also share a similar duration of around 12 minutes.

⁶I have discussed this with Daitz on a number of occasions, and the topic was also brought up at the conference, 'Baltic Musics and Musicologies' in Canterbury, UK, May 2011. Daitz has to date been unable to supply more details regarding these composers or their work.

permitted more demanding and complex choral writing than was possible in *The Singing will never be done*, and in this sense, *The Ruin* is closer in its challenges to the majority of Tormis's choral works for professional choirs. *The Ruin* received its première by *Voce* under their conductor, Susan Digby, at St Peter's Eaton Square, London, on 4 November 2012, in a concert alongside Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and Duruflé's *Requiem*.

The principal influences of *Raua Needmine* on *The Ruin* can be summarised under the following headings:

1. Use of an ancient text to cast light on contemporary issues
2. Juxtaposition of an ancient language (Finnish *regilaul*/Anglo Saxon) with its modern equivalent (Estonian/English)
3. A musical structure encouraged by the text
4. Melodic and harmonic material which prominently features the tritone and the octatonic scale
5. Use of the shaman drum/bass drum to enhance 'primitive' aspects of the text
6. Use of muttering/chanting/incantation, contrasting with conventionally sung sections
7. Use of 'choral orchestration', a key trait of the 'Tormis style'. This influence derives from Tormis's choral works in general, rather than *Raua Needmine* in particular.

1. Text

As discussed in Chapter 5, *Raua Needmine* is a setting of an ancient Kalevala text alongside a new text (by August Annist, Paul-Eerik Rummo and Jaan Kaplinks) in modern Estonian. The overriding 'message' of *Raua Needmine* is a pacifist one, and stems from a period of particular tension between the former East and West of

Europe, during which the fear of nuclear annihilation was never far from the surface.⁷

In response to the Tormis work, I wanted to find an ‘ancient’ English text which could also make a comment on the present. The search led me to *The Ruin*, a well-known, anonymous Anglo Saxon text from the so-called ‘Exeter Book’, also on the theme of destruction.⁸ This text describes the city of Bath (in the west of England) as it was discovered by the Anglo-Saxons in the 8th century, three centuries after the departure of the Romans.⁹ In awe of the ruined Roman city, the Anglo-Saxons called this ‘the work of Giants’.¹⁰ This once-grand place (‘Wrætlic is þes wealstan’) [This masonry is wondrous], had fallen into complete decay (‘wyrde gebræcon’) [by fates broken] by the time the Anglo Saxons arrived. All that remained of a great civilisation, where ‘bright were the castle buildings, many the bathing halls . . . great the noise of the multitude’, was desolation and the ghosts of the once-mighty warriors. The full text follows; underlined text indicates those lines selected for setting in my choral work. I have used the translation (1922) by the Early English scholar, Nora Chadwick (1891-1972).¹¹

⁷Sebestyn, *The Rise*, pp. 301-303.

⁸Also known as the *Codex Exoniensis*, this book was donated to the library of Exeter Cathedral by Leofric, the first bishop of Exeter, a miscellaneous collection of Christian and secular Anglo-Saxon poems now held in the British Museum. Alexander, *The Earliest*, p.13.

⁹Bath had been an important Roman trading city and spa town, with a highly sophisticated infrastructure, opulent villas, public baths and many trappings of a highly ‘civilised’ life. Built on natural hot springs, the city was given the Latin name of ‘Aqua Sulis’ after Sul, one of the three Roman water goddesses (the others being Minerva and Coventina). Of the Roman buildings, the impressive baths survive intact today. Stephen Bird, ‘Roman Bath’ in Michael Forsyth, *Bath* (London: Pevsner Architectural Guides, 3003), p.29.

¹⁰Alexander, *The Earliest*, p.29.

¹¹Nora K. Chadwick, *Anglo Saxon and Norse Poems* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), accessed 31 July 2012 via www.archive.org

Wrætic is þes wealstan
wyrde gebræcon;
burgstede burston,
broſnað enta geweorc
hrungeat berofen,
hrim on lime,
scearde scurbeorge scorene, gedrorene
ældo undereotone.
Eorðgrap hafað
waldend wyrthan
forweorone, geleorene,
(heardgripe hrusan)
ob hund cnea
werþeoda gewitan
Oft þas wag gebad

ræghar ond readfah rice æfter oþrum,
ofstonden under stormum;
steap geap gedreas.
Wonað giet se . . . num geheapan,

fel on . . . grimme gegrunden
scan heo . . . g orþonc ærsceaft
. . . g lamrindum beag
mod mo . . . yne swiftne gebrægd

hwætred in hringas, hygerof gebond

weallwalan wirum wundrum togædre

Beorht wæron burgræced,
burnsele monige eah horngestreon

heresweg micel
meodoheall monig mondreama full,
oppæt þæt onwende wyrd seo swipe.
Crungon walo wide,
cwoman woldagas,
swylt eall fornom secgrofra wera;
wurdon hyra wigsteal westen stapolas,

broſnade burgsteall.
Betend crungon
hergas to hrusan.
Forþon þas hofu dreorgiað,

This masonry is wondrous
by fates broken;
Courtyard pavements smashed,
the work of giants decaying.
the frosty gate is ravaged,
frost on cement
chipped roofs torn, fallen,
undermined by old age.
The grasp of the earth possesses
the mighty builders
perished and fallen
the hard grasp of earth,
until a hundred generations
of people have departed.
Often this wall, lichen-grey and
stained with red,
experienced one reign after another
remained standing under storms;
the high wide gate has collapsed
till the masonry endures in winds cut
down
persisted on . . . fiercely sharpened
she shone . . . g skill ancient work
. . . g of crusts of mud turned away
spirit mo . . . yne put together
keen-counselled
a quick design in rings, a most
intelligent one
bound the wall with wire brace
wondrously together.
Bright were the castle buildings,
many the bathing-halls, high the
abundance of gables,
great the noise of the multitude
many a mead-hall full of festivity,
until Fate the Mighty changed that.
Far and wide the slain perished,
days of pestilence came.
Death took all the brave men away,
their places of war became deserted
places,
the city decayed.
The rebuilders perished,
the armies to earth.
And so these buildings grow desolate,

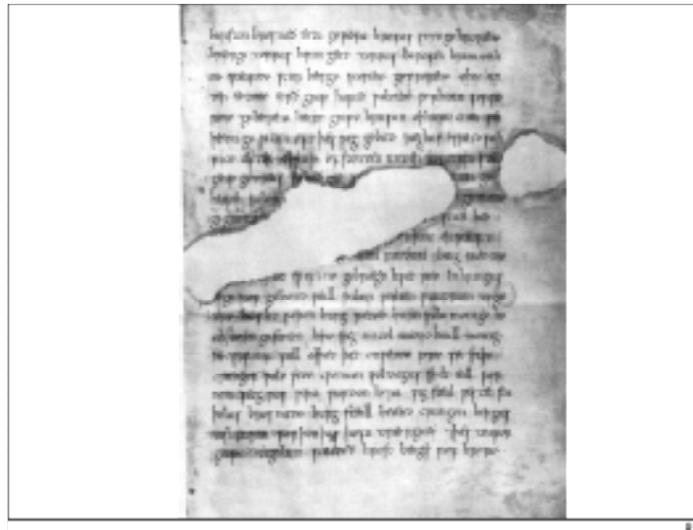
ond þæs teaforgeapa tigelum sceadeð
Hryre wong gecrong gebrocen to beorgum
þær iu beorn monig
glædmod ond goldbeorht gleoma
gefraelwed,
wlonc ond wingal wighyrstum scan;
seah on sinc, on sylfor, on searogimmas
on ead, on æht, on eorcanstan,
on þas beorhtan burg bradan rices.
Stanhofu stodan, stream hate wearp
widan wylme; weal eall befeng
beorhtan bosme,
þær þa babu wærон,
hat on hrebre.
þæt wæs hyðelic
Leton þonne geotan
ofer harne stan hate streamas
un . . .
. . . þþæt hringmere hate
þonne is . . .
. . . re; þæt is cynelic þin
huse . . . burg . . .

and the red-curved roof parts from its tiles of the ceiling-vault.
The ruin has fallen to the ground broken into mounds,
Where at one time many a warrior joyous and ornamented with gold-bright splendour
proud and flushed with wine, shone in trappings of war,
looked at treasure, at silver, at precious stones,
at wealth, at prosperity, at jewellery,
at this bright castle of a broad kingdom
The stone buildings stood, a stream threw up heat
in wide surge; the wall enclosed all in its bright bosom,
where the baths were hot in the heart
That was convenient
Then they let pour hot streams over grey stone.
un . . .
until the ringed sea, hot
Then is . . .
. . . re, that is a noble thing,
house . . . castle . . .

The *Exeter Book*, from which *The Ruin* is sourced, was one of the few collections of Early English literature to escape destruction in Danish (Viking) raids in the 11th century. The manuscript did not go unscathed, however, as at one point it was burnt through with a fire brand; this left some of the text fragmented, with lines incomplete or missing altogether, giving only suggestions of their intended meanings. I felt that that the resulting incompleteness lent a particular poignancy, enhancing the sense of loss (fig. 21).¹²

¹²Alexander, *The Earliest*, p.29.

Fig. 21. Fire-damaged page of *The Ruin* manuscript¹³



While the prevailing mood of destruction and desolation in *The Ruin* is undeniably bleak, I have nevertheless chosen to develop what I feel to be a visionary element in the poem. As one of the casualties of the damage to the manuscript, the inconclusive phrase, ‘þþæt hringmere hate’ remains unexplained. Alexander translates this as ‘ring tank’ but I found Chadwick’s phrase, ‘the ringed sea’ is certainly the more evocative for setting.¹⁴ I have chosen to interpret this ‘ringed sea’ as a visionary place of the imagination, ‘beyond the ruins’; somewhere which transcends the surrounding disaster and destruction. This interpretation is reflected musically in the consonant harmonies formed by chords of the 11th and 13th accompanying the two statements of the word ‘ringed’ at the climax to the piece (ex. 74).

¹³Photo taken from Stuart Lee, *Old English, the Story of a Language* stuart.lee@ell.ox.ac.uk accessed 25 June 2012.

¹⁴Alexander, *The Earliest*, p. 31.

Ex. 74. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 247-254 (choral parts only)

The musical score consists of four staves of music for choral parts. The lyrics are written below each staff. The first three staves begin with 'un - til' and end with 'the ringed'. The fourth staff begins with 'sea,' and the fifth staff begins with 'Where the baths were,' followed by 'hot in thdearth,' repeated three times. The sixth staff continues with 'hot in the hearth,' followed by 'hot in thdearth,' repeated three times. The seventh staff ends with 'the ringed sea.' The eighth staff begins with 'sea,' and the ninth staff ends with 'the ringed sea.'

2. Juxtaposition of ancient and modern text

It will be seen that I have, like Tormis in *Raua Needmine*, chosen to use passages both in the original Anglo Saxon and in modern English. The modern English translation achieves an immediacy of communication and narrative, while short passages in Anglo Saxon are sufficient to convey some of its dramatic and expressive strength.

There are two areas of fragmented text in the manuscript of *The Ruin*: lines 17-30 ('Oft þæs waggebad ræghar ond readfah rice æfter oþrum') [bound the wall with wire brace wondrously together], and the final 12 lines, from 'þær þa baþu waeron' [where the baths were...] to 'huse . . . burg' [house . . . castle]. I have set all of the text except for the first of these two fragmented sections. Wonderfully alliterative though these lines are ('weallwalan wirum wundrum togædre'), I felt that the detail concerning 'the wall', not to mention the large number of missing words at

this central point, would have rendered this section distracting. I also wanted to save the sense of fragmentation until the end of the work. From the body of text I have chosen, I have also omitted line 67 in Appendix 2, ‘þæt wæs hyðelic’ [that was convenient] as this seemed for my purposes to disrupt the flow of text. I have also adjusted the phrase ‘shone with war trappings’ (line 56) to ‘shone with trappings of war’, which more singable; it also enabled me to place a dramatic bitonal chord, twice, on the climactic word, ‘war’ (bars 192 and 194).

3. Structure

The sections of *The Ruin* are further delineated by tonality, the nature of the choral writing and texture, and instrumentation. These are illustrated under headings in fig. 23a. Fig. 23b provides a comparison, under the same headings, with *Raua Needmine*. From the latter it will be seen, as discussed in Chapter 5, that the structure of *Raua Needmine* is delineated by its text. This work is in modified ternary form, creating an arc-like structure. The two outer parts are settings of the original *Kalevala* text: the first, ‘A’ section curses iron as the element of war; the central ‘B’ section, in modern Estonian, draws parallels between ancient and contemporary warfare, and a recapitulation which returns to the ancient text.

The Ruin, similarly, falls into three sections, although the structure is looser than in the Tormis. The first section (‘Wrætlic is þes wealstan’) (bb. 9-76), which establishes the presence of the ruined city, draws on the Anglo Saxon original. The middle section (‘the grasp of earth possesses the mighty builders’) (bb. 77-154) uses modern English, providing a directness of expression for the descriptions of the builders and inhabitants of the city. The third section (‘the Ruin has fallen to the ground’) (bb. 155-218), also in modern English, provides the *dénouement*, revealing

Fig. 24a) Content and Structure, *The Ruin*

Section	Introduction	A	B	C	Coda
Bar numbers	1-8	9-76	77-154	155-218	219-295
Duration	0' 37"	3' 0"	5' 20"	5' 03"	2' 34"
Instrumentation	Organ, bass drum and tam tam	Choir, organ, bass drum and tam tam	Choir, organ, snare drum and bass drum	Unaccompanied choir with organ (upper register), temple blocks and tam tam	Choir, organ and tenor drum
Source of text	N/A	Anglo Saxon	Modern English	Modern English	Anglo Saxon and modern English (incomplete text)
Topic of text	N/A	Description of the ruined buildings	Description of the inhabitants of the city	Description of the fallen 'Ruin'	Description of the process of decay
Choral texture	N/A	predominantly homophonic, singing with chanting and shouting in rhythm	contrapuntal and homophonic	predominantly homophonic, triadic	monodic (choral melody taken from organ introduction), then homophonic, underscored by rhythmic chanting
Pitch centre	E (loosely built on Phrygian mode)	A	Octatonic scale on E	C/G	E/A

Fig. 24b) Content and Structure, *Raua Needmine*¹

Section	A	B ¹	B ²	A ¹
Rehearsal no.	0-11	12-22	22-30	31-36
Duration	3'40", 2'56"		1'54"	1'34"
Instrumentation	Choir, tenor and bass soloists and shaman drum	Choir, tenor and bass soloists and shaman drum	Choir, tenor and bass soloists and shaman drum	Choir, tenor and bass soloists and shaman drum
Source of text	<i>Kalevala</i> , rune IX (adapted)	<i>Kalevala</i> , rune IX (adapted)	<i>Kalevala</i> , rune IX (adapted), interpolated with new text (1972) by Annist, Rummel and Kaplinski	<i>Kalevala</i> , rune IX (adapted)
Topic of text	Cursing iron and telling the story of its origins (the god Ukko puts iron on earth, the blacksmith Ilmarinen decides to make tools with it)	Evil enters the picture (Ilmarinen inadvertently lets a hornet temper iron instead of a bee carrying honey), continues to alternate between telling the story of iron and cursing iron	Ilmarinen begs the god for protection from iron's evil (<i>Kalevala</i> text), set against newly composed text referencing elements of modern warfare	Reflection on the story and a final call for peace, interspersed with text cursing iron
Pitch content	Based on A-Bb-C trichord	Expands to octatonic groupings A-Bb-C, C-D-Eb, E-nat-F#-G), culminating in octatonic sound mass	Newly composed text is predominantly spoken by the choir, while <i>Kalevala</i> text is delivered in parallel tritones by the tenor and bass soloists. Culminates in a chromatic sounds mass and scream	Returns to the A-Bb-C trichord groupings, with juxtaposition of the Bb-C-Dd trichord

¹ Table taken from Jacob Sagrans, 'Pitch content and meaning in Veljo Tormis's *Raua Needmine*, from folk to modern', paper given at the Baltic Musics and Musicologies Conference, Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK, May 28 2011.

the ‘Ruin’ of the title. An extended coda (‘the stone buildings stood . . .’) (bb. 219–295) combines both ancient and modern texts, and in so doing, aims to bridge past and present.

To emphasise this arc structure, the ‘outer’ parts of *The Ruin* (introduction and coda) are closely related by their melodic material. The melody based on the pitch centre of E, heard as an organ solo in the introduction, returns in augmented note values to become the choir’s unison line, to the words ‘the stone buildings stood, a stream threw up heat . . .’ (from b. 220). The intention here was to create a sense of realisation, as if the downfall of the city were already contained within the first melodic idea of the piece (exx. 75a and 75b).

Ex. 75. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, melodic line serving as

a) organ introduction, bb.1–8



b) choral line in final section, bb. 220-222

A musical score for the choral line in the final section, bb. 220–222. The music is in common time, treble clef, and consists of two staves. The top staff shows a melodic line with dynamic markings: forte (f), dynamic diminution (3), forte (fp), and forte (f). The bottom staff shows harmonic progression with various chords. The lyrics are written below the notes:

The stone buil-dings stood, A stream threw up heat in wide surge. ah ah ah ah
The wall en - closed all in its bright bo - som.

The arc-like structure of *The Ruin* is further reinforced by contrasts in the nature of the choral material. The first sung section (marked ‘A’ in Fig. 23) and the coda employ conventional singing, juxtaposed with muttering or chanting at unspecified pitches. Examples of the latter are the half-sung, half-muttered phrases ‘burgstede burston . . . hrofas sind gehrorene’ [‘courtyard pavements smashed, roofs

are fallen'] (bb. 25-31) and shouting at ‘scorene, gedrorene, ido unterotone’ [‘torn, broken, undermined by age’], described later.

In the coda of *The Ruin*, the chanting returns in the lower of each pair of voices of the now *divisi* choir (SSAATTBB), *sotto voce*, to the words ‘þær þa þá þá wæron, hat on hrere’ [‘where the baths were, hot at the hearth’] forming a rhythmic *ostinato* under the sustained melody in the upper voice of each pair which links back to the earlier material (ex. 76).

Ex. 76. Lawrence. *The Ruin*. bb. 263-267 (choral parts only, in reduced score)

The central sections of *The Ruin* (marked ‘B’ and ‘C’ on the table) consist entirely of conventional singing, without extended techniques. Section ‘B’ is dominated by octatonicism (described and illustrated under the next heading) and section ‘C’ is the most straightforwardly traditional in its triadic harmony. This will also be described under the next heading.

4. Prominence of the tritone and octatonic scale

Raua Needmine provides a model of economic writing. Tormis draws almost all the

melodic and harmonic material from the ‘cursing’ and ‘telling’ *regilaul* melodies, used both in their entirety and in their constituent parts (illustrated in ex., Chapter 5)¹⁵. For example, the minor third, derived from the ‘cursing melody’ (i.e. the octave divided into four equal parts), determines the octatonic tonal structure of *Raua Needmine*, giving rise to the four pitch centres A, C, Eb and F# (previously discussed in Chapter 5).

While the octatonic scale is, of course, ubiquitous from Glinka through Stravinsky, Bartók and Messiaen, *The Ruin* represents the first time I have employed it in a choral piece of my own. My decision to do so was certainly influenced by Tormis’s use of the scale in the ‘incantations’ of the first section of *Raua Needmine* (ex. 77a and 77b).

Ex. 77. Use of the octatonic scale

- a) Tormis. *Raua Needmine*, rising scale in bass line, score fig.12



- b) Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bass line, bb.77-82



Closely linked to this equal division of the octave is the interval of the tritone, which features prominently in the melodic writing of *The Ruin*. The interval is heard in the first choral entry of the piece, determining the harmony throughout the first (Anglo-

¹⁵Lippus explained that, despite common assumptions to the contrary, this was a genuine *regilaul* melody, rather than one of Tormis’s own making. (Discussed at the Conference ‘Baltic Musics and Musicologies’, Canterbury, UK, May 2011).

Saxon) section of the piece, which is strongly coloured by the resulting diminished chords (ex.78).

Ex. 78. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, examples of tritone in melodic writing, soprano line, bb. 14-20 (tritones marked with square brackets)

This weal - stan
div.
f

Wraet-lic is this weal - stan, _____ This weal - stan, This weal - stan, This

Raua Needmine, with its sparse musical materials and taut tonal organisation, is a rarity amongst Tormis's works for its complete absence of traditional triad-derived (or -implied) harmony. In contrast, the third, 'C' section of *The Ruin* (from the words 'the ruin has fallen to the ground') employs a conventionally tonal vocabulary with extensive use of chordal harmony, creating a marked contrast with the octatonic writing and dissonant harmonies which go before it. An example is my setting of the words 'joyous and ornamented' (ex. 79). By using triads, the most fundamental of harmonic building blocks, I was perhaps aiming to convey the 'wholeness' of the civilisation before its destruction. Whereas the upper and lower voices in the first half of ex. 79 move in contrary motion to each other, there are many examples in Tormis's choral scores in which parallel, conductus-like, writing can be seen. The sections marked *moderato* in '*Lindude äratamine*' ['Waking the Birds'] from *Liivlaste Pärandus [Livonian Heritage]* are such instances. In the following example the *regilaul* melody (in this case in the soprano part) forms the top note of a series of parallel seventh chords (ex. 80). As discussed in Chapter 4, the use of parallel harmonisation is a hallmark of Tormis's choral style and this practice has certainly made an impression on my own composition.

Ex. 79. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 181-183



Ex. 80. Tormis. 'Lindude äratamine', score fig. 4

In ex. 79 from *The Ruin*, above, the falling triads on the word ‘ornamented’ are clearly one such instance.

5. Use of the shaman drum/bass drum and percussion

Raua Needmine is scored for mixed (originally men’s) chorus, accompanied by shaman drum, the drummer being an important presence on stage. Tormis himself, who has at times seen himself in a ‘shamanic’ role, played the drum in the first

performance, and in many performances subsequently.¹⁶ I had originally planned to use the same forces in *The Ruin*, intending that the shaman drum emphasise the ‘ancientness’ of the Anglo-Saxon text. Use of the shaman drum would also have created a parallel with the Tormis work, alongside which I provisionally hoped it might at some stage be performed. In the course of composition, however, I modified the plan in favour of a more extended (and more technically demanding) percussion part, consisting of bass drum, tam-tam, tenor and snare drums, as well as suspended cymbal and woodblocks. The percussion plays a prominent part in the drama of *The Ruin*, creating a wide range of sonorities which enhance the imagery of the text. The tam-tam, for example, has always borne associations with ‘elemental forces at work’ in orchestral scoring (as in the famous opening of Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, ‘O Fortuna’, which so influenced Tormis); through the combination of organ pedal, bass drum and tam-tam in the slow introduction to *The Ruin*, I aimed to create a similar sense of impending menace (ex. 81).

Ex. 81. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 1-4

The musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Organ, indicated by a brace and the word 'Organ'. It shows sustained notes and chords. Above the Organ staff are two percussion staves: the left for the 'bass drum' and the right for the 'tam tam'. The bass drum has a dynamic of *mf* and the tam tam has a dynamic of *pp* followed by *f*. The score is in common time.

¹⁶The recording made in 2006 with the Svanholm Singers is the most recent instance. CD, *Works for Men’s Voices*. Svanholm Singers, conducted by Sofia Söderberg (Toccata Classics TOCC 0073, 2007). Tormis’s connection with the shaman drum was further discussed in Chapter 5.

The addition of snare and tenor drum adds dramatic punctuation, as well as a sense of ongoing energy in the piece. This energy is felt particularly in the chanted section before the reprise of the introduction (bb. 63-73), where the choir's triplet rhythms form a dramatic dialogue with the tenor drum. Tormis uses the shaman drum to great dramatic effect in *Raua Needmine*, where its relentlessly pounding quaver beats in much of the 'A' section depict an almost primeval heartbeat as the evil qualities of iron are expounded (ex. 82).

Ex. 82. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*, score fig. 6

The musical score consists of four staves. The top staff is for the Sn. (Snare drum) with 'dr.' below it, showing a continuous pattern of eighth-note triplets. The second staff is for the B.s. (Bass drum), also showing eighth-note triplets. The third staff contains lyrics in both Latvian and English. The fourth staff contains lyrics in English only. The vocal parts are: 'üks see lüp-sis mus-ta pii-ma, üks see lüp-sis black, the liq-uid from one maid-en, black, the liq-uid sest sai rau-da peh-me - e - da, sest sai rau-da turn-ing in - to duc-tile i - ron, turn-ing in - to tei - ne val - ge - ta va - la - si, White milk flow-ing from the oth - er, sel - lest teh - tud on te-rak-sed, tem - pered steel from this a - ris - ing.' The bottom staff contains lyrics in English only: 'üks see lüp-sis mus-ta pii-ma, black, the liq-uid from one maid-en, sest sai rau-da peh-me - e - da; turn-ing in - to duc-tile i - ron.' There is a dynamic marking '(pp)' above the middle vocal staff.

Throughout the passage 'until a hundred generations of people have departed' in *The Ruin*, I employ the bass drum, played with a snare drum stick, to similar effect. This creates the same sense of the relentless pounding of 'Fate', the destroyer of the vitality of the civilisation (ex. 83). In the third section, the triplet figurations which were heard earlier on the snare drum (for example, bb. 38-41) are transferred to the tenor drum, an instrument which, with its military connotations, is a chilling reminder of the many warriors, 'joyous and ornamented', whose spirits now haunt the ruined city (ex. 84).

Ex. 83. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 88-94

Bass Drum

snare drum sticks

bass drum beater

Ex. 84. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 288-291 (organ and tenor drum parts only)

6. Use of muttering/chanting/incantation, contrasting with sung sections

The striking opening of *Raua Needmine* (score figs. 1-3 are shown in Appendix 2) includes a *tutti* anguished cry on a minor second (emphasised by the shaman drum) followed by *pianissimo* incantations. This inspired me to use a similar gesture in *The Ruin*: a *fortissimo* first choral entry to the words ‘Wraetlic is this waelstan’, followed by a passage of *sotto voce* muttering, alternating with singing (ex. 85).

Ex. 85. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 30-31

The words ‘scorene, gedrorene’ [‘torn, broken’], form the culmination of the first section of *The Ruin*, shouted in rhythm by sections of the choir in turn (ex. 86).

Ex. 86. Lawrence. *The Ruin*. bb. 65-67 (choral parts only)

This passage recalls the climax of *Raua Needmine*, ‘*tapma raua, terase*’ [‘killing with iron, steel’] in which the choir shouts the words in unison in the given rhythm, against

a sustained tritone (B♭-E) in the tenor and bass solo parts, a passage which, like *The Ruin*, depicts destruction (ex. 87).

Ex. 87. Tormis. *Raua Needmine*, 3 bars before score fig. 28

(hääl "murdub"/the voice "breaks")

(hääl "murdub"/the voice "breaks")

2

tead - ma - ta kao - ta - ma, tap - ma, tap - ma, rau - a, te - ra - se,
hope - less - ly im - po - tent, kill - ing, kill - ing kill - ing with i - ron, steel,

In the coda of *The Ruin*, the unpitched ‘muttering’ material returns, now **p**, in short phrases, in the alto, tenor 2 and bass 2 parts, using both Anglo-Saxon and modern English (‘there tha bathu waeron, hat on hrere’[‘where the baths were, hot at the hearth’]). This muttering provides an underlying punctuation for the final, sustained chords in the other choral parts (‘that is a noble thing’) (ex. 88).

7. Choral Orchestration

Perhaps the most significant influence of Tormis on my own choral writing is his technique of choral orchestration, a Tormis fingerprint which I consider to be one of his most important legacies. In chapter 4, I discussed and exemplified some of the

Ex. 88. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 263-267 (soprano and alto parts only)

The musical score consists of three staves. The top two staves are for Soprano (S1), and the bottom staff is for Alto (A1.2). The key signature is A major (no sharps or flats). The time signature is common time (indicated by '4'). The vocal parts sing in unison. The lyrics are: 'That is _____ a.. no-ble thing' (repeated twice), followed by 'There tha ba-thu wae-ron, hat on hre-re.' The vocal parts sing in unison. The Alto part features sixteenth-note patterns in the lower register.

ways in which he applied this procedure to create, in pieces such as '*Laevamäng*' ['Boat Game'] (examined in Chapter 4), constantly shifting choral colourings, which impose a sense of onward movement and structure on the simple, repetitive *regilaul* starting points. The melodic material of *The Ruin* did not lend itself literally to this approach, of course. Nevertheless, my piece does display some tangible influences of Tormis's choral techniques. I provide a few examples below.

The use of 'cumulative chording' (where one note is left to sound while the next is added, thus creating an 'artificial echo') is certainly a hallmark of Tormis. This technique is heard, for example, in the early, pre-*regilaul* sets of miniatures of the 1960s, such as the opening bars of 'Tuisk' ['Blizzard'] from *Talvemustrid [Winter Patterns]* (ex. 89).

Ex. 89. Tormis. *Talvemustrid*, 'Tuisk', bb. 1-2

The musical score consists of four staves: Soprano I (S.I), Soprano II (S.II), Alto I (A.I), and Alto II (A.II). The key signature is A major. The time signature is common time. The vocal parts sing in unison. The lyrics are: 'Vin - ge vōi - gas val - ge hui - le Ghast - ly fierce - some win - try bel - low' (repeated twice), followed by 'tor - mab pea - le hii - gel-pui - le storm - ing on - to mass - ive fir tree' (repeated twice). The vocal parts sing in unison. The dynamics are marked with 'ff' (fortissimo).

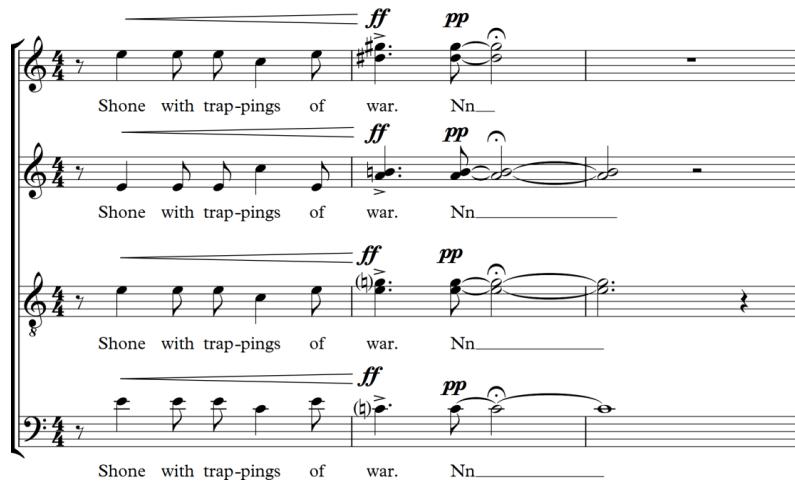
In several instances in *The Ruin*, I have used a similar technique of cumulative chording. This is common choral procedure of course, but my familiarity with the Tormis repertoire at the time of *The Ruin*'s conception certainly influenced specific passages. One instance of this 'chordal accumulation' is 'bright were the castle buildings' (and subsequent phrases), in the second section of the piece, in which the initial chords are built, bottom upwards (ex. 90).

Ex. 90. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 96–98 (choral parts only)

This upward chordal accumulation was seen to striking effect in the opening bars of Tormis's '*Kutse Jaanitulele I*' ['Call to the Midsummer Bonfire'] from *Jaanilaulud [St John's Songs]*, the same passage which Tormis identified as having influenced Tarmo Lepik so strongly in his song for baritone and chorus, '*Räägi Tasa Minuga*' ['Speak to me silently'] from *Kolm Betti Alveri Luuleltust [Three Poems by Betty Alver]* (exx. 64 and 65, discussed in Chapter 5). In several instances in *The Ruin* I have used the inverse of this technique, that is, a chord progressively thinned out (as

if releasing the fingers one by one from a chord on the organ keyboard).¹⁷ This is exemplified in the chord following the word ‘war’ in the third section of the piece, (ex. 91), and again, on the word ‘fallen’ from further on in the same section (ex. 92).

Ex. 91. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 193-195



Ex. 92. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 174-177

¹⁷Lippus described to the author that she had observed Tormis at work on compositions on many occasions. Contrary to what might be expected from a composer so indelibly linked with the voice and with choral orchestration in particular, he works almost exclusively at the keyboard, transcribing, for example, the characteristic parallel choral chording exactly as it falls under his hands. (Author discussion with Lippus, Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, 13 February 2013).

Piispa ja Pakana, smaller in scale than *Raua Needmine*, but nonetheless a highly significant Tormis work, has provided for me as a composer a further model of choral technique. Like both *Raua Needmine* and *The Ruin*, this work employs ancient texts (in this case, medieval Finnish with English Gregorian chant, as discussed in Chapter 6) to cast light on the present. Several points in *The Ruin* display the work's influence. One example in the central part of the Tormis work is the use of *divisi* upper voices (i.e. the Christian invaders) on a wordless vowel ('ah') to bring into relief both text and melodic line in the tenor and bass parts (i.e. the peasant farmers) (ex. 93). I have used wordless upper voices in a similar way in the 'A' section of *The Ruin*. Here, the sopranos and altos are given the same vowel sound; I then reverse the material between upper and lower voices. Furthermore, doubling the bass line at the octave with the tenor brightens the sonority: a reminder perhaps, of Tormis's organ-registration-like choral scoring, discussed in Chapter 3) (ex. 94).

Ex. 93. Tormis. *Piispa ja Pakana*. Score figs. 28 and 29

The musical score consists of two staves of music. The top staff features soprano and alto voices singing a sustained note with a 'b>' dynamic, indicated by a wavy line above the note. The bottom staff features bass and tenor voices singing the same sustained note with a 'b>' dynamic. The music is divided into two sections: measure 28 (ff, tenuto) and measure 29 (ff). The lyrics in measure 28 are 'Sen Tur - ku mi - nus - ta saa - pi,' and in measure 29 they are 'pa - jat - taa - pi paa - vin pap - pi,' followed by 'kiit - te - le - vi Ris - tin Kie - sus.'

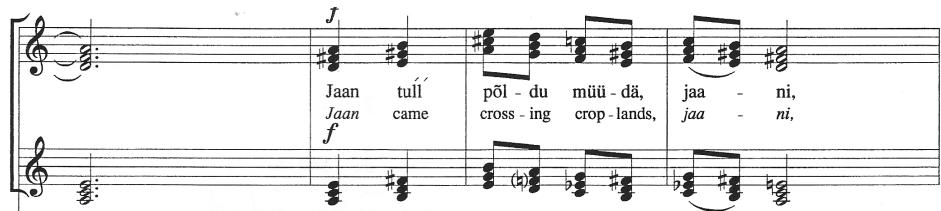
Ex. 94. Lawrence. *The Ruin*, bb. 45-4

The musical score consists of four staves. The top two staves are soprano and alto, both marked with 'f.p.' dynamics. The bottom two staves are tenor and bass. The lyrics 'ah' are placed under the soprano and alto staves. The lyrics 'Hrim on li-me,' are placed under the soprano and alto staves. The lyrics 'Scear-de scur-be-or-ge.' are placed under the tenor and bass staves. The music features various chords and rests, with some notes having three stems.

The above passage is also an example of the use of dyads in this piece, this time in the choral parts (in *The Singing will never be done*, these were restricted to the accompaniment). Dyads occur on the words ‘hrim on lime’ [‘frost on lime’] but take the form of two sets of overlapping thirds in the soprano and alto lines: easier to pitch when perceived by singers as thirds apart. This is a practice I may have borrowed from Tormis, who uses it frequently in his choral writing. An excellent example is the final section of ‘Jaanilaul’ [St John’s Song] from *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* [Estonian Calendar Songs], a landmark Tormis work to which I have referred throughout this study. In this final section of the song, both sopranos and altos are given parallel triads which overlap, creating the effect of cluster-like chords. These blur the tonality and yet remain true to the original *regilaul* (ex. 95).

Tormis’s music has made a strong impact on me as a composer. From the early Kódaly-inspired choral miniatures, *Looduspildid* [Nature Pictures], the large choral cycles, *Eesti Kalendrilaulud* and *Unustatud Rahvad* [Forgotten Peoples], through to seminal works such as *Raua Needmine*, Tormis achieves a directness of

Ex. 95. Tormis. '*Jaanilaul*', bb. 48-51



expression, yet a simplicity of means which is a valuable model for any contemporary composer. Without doubt, his music has much to say to a twenty-first century audience, and despite certain difficulties which it imposes, deserves better and more widespread exposure both within and beyond the specialised 'choral community.'

My personal journey during the past seven years into both Tormis's music and the wider choral tradition of Estonia, both ancient and contemporary, has been fascinating. It seems inevitable that Tormis's invaluable legacy will continue have a significant, even if more oblique, bearing on my future work.

Glossary

Estonian and Finnish words relevant to this study

<i>Eesti Kirjandusmuuseum</i>	Estonian Literature Museum, Tartu
<i>Kalevala</i>	Epic Finnish folk poem closely associated with national identity
<i>Kalevipoeg</i>	Estonian equivalent of the <i>Kalevala</i>
<i>Lastekoor</i>	Children's choir
<i>Meeskoor</i>	Men's choir
<i>Naiskoor</i>	Women's choir
<i>RAM (Eesti Rahvusmeeskor)</i>	Estonian National Men's Chorus
<i>Regilaul (pl. -ud)</i>	Ancient Estonian folk song
<i>Runolaul (-u)</i>	Finnish equivalent of <i>regilaul</i> , folksong in 'Kalevala metre'
<i>Segakoor</i>	Mixed chorus; SATB
<i>Setumaa</i>	Region of south eastern Estonia where some <i>regilaul</i> is supposedly still performed in the traditional manner
<i>Tallinn</i>	Capital city of Estonia
<i>Lauluväljak</i>	Tallinn Song Bowl, a large open-air arena, built in 1960, site of the 5-yearly All-Estonia Song Festival
<i>Tartu</i>	City in south-east Estonia, 190 kms from Tallinn. Perceived by many Estonians to be the country's emotional and cultural capital. Home to Estonia's oldest university (1610); centre of the Estonian National Awakening in the mid-19 th century

Glossary of names referred to the study

Aho, Kalevei	(b.1949) Contemporary Finnish composer who studied under Rautavaara
Alver, Betti	(1906-89) Estonian poet, well-known before the Soviet period. Set by, among others, composer Tarmo Lepik
Annist, August	(1899-1972) Estonian folklorist and poet
Arujarv, Evi	(b. 1952) Estonian musicologist and writer, director of the Estonian Music Information Centre (EMIK); author of recent (2009) book on Estonian composer Ester Mägi
Arnim, Achim von	(1781-1831) German Romantic writer, compiler (with Brentano) of the collection of German folk songs, <i>Des Knaben Wunderhorn</i>
Arro, Edgar	(1911-78) Estonian organist, composer and teacher, one of the first to incorporate <i>regilaul</i> in his compositions
Brentano, Clemens	(1778-1842) German Romantic writer, compiler (with von Arnim) of the collection of German folk songs, <i>Des Knaben Wunderhorn</i>
Daitz, Mimi S.	(b. 1945) New York-based musicologist, writer and conductor; author of the first English language biography of Tormis (2004)
Eller, Heino	(1887-1970) Composer and important teacher at the Tartu Higher School of Music, one of the Founders of the so-called 'Estonian' School of Composition
Ernesaks, Gustav	(1903-93) Choral conductor, composer and founder of RAM, the Estonian Male Voice Choir. Composer of 'Mu Isamaa on Mimu Arm', the adopted Estonian National Anthem
Faehlman, Friedrich	(1798-1850) Lecturer on the Estonian language at Tartu University, whose work led to the compilation of Estonia's national epic, the <i>Kalevipoeg</i>
Fortunatov, Yuri	(1911-1998) Russian composer; Tormis's teacher of orchestration at the Moscow Conservatoire in the 1950s
Grimm, Jakob	(1795-1863) and Wilhelm (1806-1859) Brothers who, both philologists, are best known for their compilation in 1812 of folk tales, <i>Kinder-und Hausmärchen</i> [known in English as <i>Grimms' Fairy Tales</i>]

Härma, Miina	(1864-1941) Estonian woman composer and choral conductor, who brought new music into rural areas of Estonia
Hurt, Jakob	(1839-1907) Estonian folklorist and nationalist; first collector of <i>regi</i> texts
Jalkanen, Pekka	(b.1946) Finnish composer with jazz and ethnomusicological background, strongly influenced by the music of Tormis
Järg, Tiia	(b.1943) Tallinn-based musicologist with particular interest in the music of Tormis
Järvi, Neemi	(b. 1937) Estonian conductor living in the US; champion in particular of Pärt and Tubin
Kallas, Oskar	(1868-1946) Estonian writer specialising in folklore and linguistics; played a significant role in maintaining Estonia's identity under early years of Soviet occupation
Kallen-Gallela, Akseli (1865–1931)	Finnish painter, best known for works based on the <i>Kalevala</i>
Kaljuste, Heino	(1925-89) Estonian choral conductor who founded the Ellerhein Children's Choir
Kaljuste, Tõnu	(b.1953) Estonian conductor, particularly known for directing the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, a major exponent of Tormis's music
Kaplinski, Jaan	(b.1942) Estonian poet, linguist and philosopher who contributed text to Tormis's <i>Raue Needmine</i>
Kapp, Artur	(1878-1952) Estonian composer, who, with Kapp and Eller, was seen as a founder of the 'Estonian School'
Kapp, Villem	(1913-1964) Estonian composer, nephew of Artur, who studied with Topman and Eller
Kirby, W. F.	First translator of the <i>Kalevipoeg</i> into English
Koidula, Lydia	(1843-86) Nationalist poet and dramatist who played an important part in the Estonian 'National Awakening', best known for her text to the 'adopted' Estonian National Anthem', 'Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm'
Korhonen Kimmo	(b.1958) Finnish writer and musicologist specialising in contemporary Finnish music

Kortekangas, Olli	(b.1955) Contemporary Finnish composer who has employed <i>Kalevala</i> themes in his work
Kreek, Cyrius	(1889-1962) Estonian composer, teacher, choral conductor and collector of folk songs
Khrennikov, Tikhon	(1913-2007) Russian composer, Head of the Union of Soviet Composers from 1948 to 1991. Under Zhdanov, he was responsible for censoring music composed during the starker years of Stalinism in the late 1940s
Kreuzwald, Friedrich	(1803-82) Principal collector of the national epic, <i>Kalevipoeg</i> , during the period of the Estonian National Awakening in the mid 19 th -century
Kunileid, Aleksander	(1845-1875) Composer of the first version of the ‘adopted Estonian National Anthem’, ‘Mu Isamaa on Minu Arm’
Kutavičius, Bronius	(b. 1932) Lithuanian composer whose work, like that of Tormis, includes shamanistic elements and employs motifs derived from traditional music
Launas, Armas	(1884-1959) Estonian ethnomusicologist who played a major part in the early collection of <i>regilaul</i> and wrote the first doctoral thesis on the subject
Leino, Eino	(1878-1926) Early 20 th century Estonian poet who used the <i>Kalevala</i> metre
Lepik, Tarmo	(1946-2001) Estonian composer, one-time pupil of Tormis, who acknowledged the influence of Tormis’s music
Lippus, Urve	(b. 1950) Professor of Musicology at the Estonian Academy of Music, Tallinn, with particular interest in music of Veljo Tormis
Lönnrot, Elias	(1802-63) Compiler of the <i>Kalevala</i> , writing in modern Finnish (1835)
Luik, Viivi	(b. 1946) Poet and novelist whose texts were set by Tormis in <i>Sügismaastikud</i>
Mägi, Ester	(b. 1922) Estonian woman composer who studied with Tormis under Shebalin in Moscow, and also made use of <i>regilaul</i> in her work
Pohjola, Erkki	(1931-2009) Founder-conductor of the Tapiola children’s choir (Helsinki) and prominent Finnish educationalist

Pärt, Arvo	(b. 1935) Internationally prominent Estonian composer, particularly known for his works in the <i>tintinnabuli</i> style
Poom, Ritva	(b.1944) Estonian-American writer responsible for some of the ‘translations’ into English of Tormis’s choral works
Rautavaara, Einojuhani	(b. 1928) Prominent Finnish composer of large-scale works including symphonies and operas, initially writing as a modernist and later in a neo-romantic idiom; influential on younger generation of composers in the region
Rummo, Paul-Eerik	(b. 1942) Estonian poet and politician
Rüütel, Ingrid	(b. 1935) Prominent Estonian ethnomusicologist whose work first led Tormis to study <i>regilaul</i> at first hand
Saar, Mart	(1882-1963) Estonian composer whose extensive choral repertoire is widely performed in Estonia today
Sallinen, Aulis	(b. 1935) Prominent Finnish composer whose output includes 8 symphonies and 6 operas; highly influential on younger generation of Finnish composers
Shebalin, Vassarion	(1902-63) Russian composer and highly esteemed teacher; Tormis’s teacher of composition at the Moscow Conservatoire in the 1950s
Sink, Kuldar	(1942-1995) Estonian composer who studied with Tormis in Moscow who experimented with modernist techniques including aleatoricism
Sumera, Lepo	(1950-2000) Estonian composer, influenced by Tormis, as well as Estonian Minister for Culture during the period of the ‘Singing Revolution’ in the late 1980s
Tamberg, Eino	(1930-2010) Estonian composer who studied under Kapp. Considered part of the ‘New Wave’ of experimental Estonian composers in the 1960s
Tampere, Herbert	(1909-1975) Important Estonian musicologist, writer and broadcaster who collected field recordings and published editions of <i>regilaul</i>
Tedre, Ülo	(b.1928) Estonian writer and folklorist specialising in <i>regilaul</i> . Collaborated with Tormis to produce <i>Uus Regilaulik</i>
Tobias, Rudolf	(1873-1918) The first ‘professional’ Estonian composer and symphonist. Studied with Rimsky Korsakov in St Petersburg, and later taught in London at the Royal Academy of Music

Topman, August	(1882-1968) Estonian organist and composer. Teacher of Riho and Veljo Tormis
Tormis, Lea	(b. 1932) Esteemed Estonian writer and lecturer in Drama at the Estonian Academy; wife of Veljo Tormis
Tubin, Eduard	(1905-1982) Prominent Estonian composer and symphonist, increasingly performed outside the country
Tuomela, Tapio	(b 1958) Finnish composer and conductor
Tüür, Erkki-Sven	(b.1959) Internationally prominent Estonian composer
Zhdanov, Andrei	(1896-1948) Soviet politician responsible for purges in the arts during the Stalin period

Appendix 3

Diary of SEMPLRE-funded research trip to Estonia, February 2010

In February 2010 I made a first research trip to Estonia, funded by a Gerry Farrell Travelling Award, overseen by Professor Graham Welch and SEMPLRE. I had planned the trip with several aims in mind:

- to discuss Tormis's music with some of the main authorities and to try set it into context
- to seek out some singing from one of the areas where *regilaul* song still survives and forms part of a living culture
- to visit the folk song archives in Tartu which hold the material central to Tormis's work.

Monday 11 February 2010

Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn. Discussion with Dr Gerhard Lock, a German composer teaching at the Academy, and Zhanna Pärtlas, a Russian musicologist, and Veljo Tormis. The conversation was conducted in German (with Lock, Tormis and the author) and English (with Pärtlas translating from Estonian). Pärtlas is researching into the *regilaul* of Setumaa used by Tormis in works such *Eesti Ballaadid*. We discussed the tradition of Estonian choral music in general: both professional and amateur choirs are thriving in Estonia, perhaps even more so in the globalised world (the 'new' Estonia has been quick to embrace technology and particularly the internet). There were record numbers at the 2009 All-Estonia

Song festival, as well as growing numbers both attending and performing in the many regional summer folk festivals such as Viljandi, Rakvere and Tartu.

I asked Tormis about his teaching methods in his *regilaul* classes: he considered that the songs were nowadays best learnt from archive recordings rather than orally as this means offered ‘the nearest to authenticity’. All students at the Academy take a basic course in Ethnomusicology. Both Urve Lippus, Professor of Musicology and Zhanna Pärtlas give an overview of *regilaul* to first-year music students who are taught a number of melodies orally in the sessions, reflecting the traditional approach. In Tormis’ own *regilaul* classes, there is a ‘choir leadership’ option for students specialising in folk music. Tormis described the manner in which he teaches *regilaul*: the singer uses the entire breath, continuing across ‘lines’ of verse until the breath is exhausted; the chorus sings the last notes of a phrase so that there is a continuous overlap, producing an unbroken chain of sound.

Tuesday 16 February 2010

Estonian Academy of Music and Drama, Tallinn, discussion with Urve Lippus, Professor of Musicology. Lippus has been linked with Tormis’s music since the 1960s and is a leading authority on his work and on *regilaul*. Lippus described the way in which *regilaul* influenced the previous generation of composers, as well as traits of the song itself, and its regional variants.

Wednesday 17 February 2010

Discussion with Evi Arujärv, Musicologist and Director of EMIK (the Estonian Music Information Centre). Further discussion of the influence of *regilaul* on previous generations of composers, revealing Tormis's music to be more a part of an ongoing tradition than I had previously thought. *Regilaul* had been used in diverse and innovative ways by Estonian composers from the 19th century onwards particularly Mart Saar and Cyrus Kreek, and of Tormis's generation, Ester Mägi, on whose music Arujärv has recently published a book.¹ A younger generation of composers, including Tormis's pupil Lepo Sumera (1950-2000) and Urmas Sisask (b. 1959) have also used 'Tormis principles' in their work. The 'Tormis influence' has also affected Finland, in particular two composers Pekka Kostianen (b. 1944) and Pekka Jalkanen (b. 1945).

Evening concert at the Estonia Concert Hall at invitation of Tormis. The Estonian Men's Chorus perform a programme interspersing the music of Tormis with Pärt, providing revealing contrasts in material and style. Witnessing *Raue Needmine* in live performance was particularly interesting, as it brought home the dramatic nature of this work, much of which is lost in recording: in particular, the presence on stage of the shaman drummer.²

¹Tallinn: Estonian Music Information Centre, 2010.

²In a *sotto voce* commentary during the concert, Tormis described Pärt's music as 'up there' as he pointed upwards, and his own, 'down there'. The shaman drum is not indigenous to Estonian folk music, but is heard in many communities around the Arctic Circle including the Karelians and the Saami. Tormis revealed that he had first heard the drum in Moscow in the early 1960s, played by a travelling band from Siberia. It had a profound effect on him, and he stored up this potential of raw ritualism effect to use against the text of *Curse*; the drummer (Tormis played himself in early performances) effectively becomes a character on the stage.

Friday 19 February 2010

*Kirjandusmuseum Tartu.*³ Tour of *regilaul* archives by the museum's director, Dr. Janika Kronberg. Among many of the artifacts was one of the phonographs used by early collectors of the folksong, together with its accompanying knapsack. Herbert Tampere's vast collections of over 800 recordings and 10,000 manuscripts, from which Tormis drew for much of his material, are here.⁴

Saturday 20 February 2010

Obinitsa, Setumaa.⁵ Visit to rehearsal of an all-women's *leelo* choir in the Setu choir tradition.⁶ The choir performed a variety of typical Setu songs, describing the

³190 kms south-east of Tallinn, Tartu is in many ways the 'cultural' capital of Estonia; as such it maintains an intense rivalry with Tallinn despite, with a population of only 100,000, being only a fifth of the size of the capital. As well as being home to the oldest Estonian university, Tartu was the centre of the Estonian National Awakening, the site of the First Song Festival in 1869, and home to many literary figures associated with the Nationalist movement during the 19th century.

⁴Tampere being the most significant collector and broadcaster of *regilaul* as well as a former director of the Museum. He categorised the songs using card indexes where he cross-referenced themes with an approach similar to that of Bartók and Kodály. The entire collection has now been digitally stored.

⁵Obinitsa is in the south east corner of the country, on the border with Russia. Arrangements had been made through Dr. Andreas Kalkan, a *regilaul* researcher at the Tartu museum.

⁶*Setu* is the Estonian adjective; *Seto* the regional language. The meeting of the Obinitsa choir was somewhat at variance with tradition: in this Orthodox region, singing is usually prohibited in Lent, which had just begun. Setumaa has a population of only some 4,000 yet it sees itself as vehemently independent from the rest of Estonia (itself a country of only 1.5 million). The Setu language also deviates enough from Estonian to be near to official recognition in its own right. As in many parts of Estonia, festivals play a major part in the calendar: these were (like Christmas and Easter) former pagan festivities onto which Orthodox festivals were imposed. The major festivity in this region is 19 August, *Passipäev* [The Day of the Dead], when large parties are held in churchyards not just to honour dead relatives but to 'include' them in celebration. Members of this group of 15, all women (men's choirs exist separately and with an entirely different repertoire), are believed to have been taught the Setu songs orally, through parents and grandparents, in a tradition lasting into the 21st century.

main genres: working songs, lullabies, wedding songs including ‘mocking of the bride’ (the theme employed by Tormis in *Kihnu Pulmalaulud*). The author was asked to contribute an English folk song and taught the group the sea shanty ‘John Kanaka’, of which the choir learnt the chorus in English. Members remarked on the similarity both in form and melodic line with certain Estonian ‘Sea Songs’, where a simple chorus of nonsense words is sung by the group in response to verses sung by a solo singer.

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