Don Kay

Interviews 1998 - 1999

Page	Date	Topics
3	22nd April, 1998	*composer in the community*
12	27th January, 1999	*posterity, teaching, motivations, Malcolm Williamson anecdote, influences, pop and art music, expression of ritual, principles and conventions, time*
22	3rd February, 1999	*"facility" - compositional process and technique, 12-note technique, teaching children, crafting, institutions, music education, ideas justifying techniques, nature as primary motivator*
36	24th February, 1999	*"abstract" concertos vs."Tasmanian" symphonies, Bach and nature, spontaneity*
49	3rd March, 1999	*words and music, strophic and through-composed, dissonance, rhythm, heart and mind, equal temperament*
61	10th March, 1999	*relationships, motivations, masculinity & femininity, decision making within composition, composition and teaching*
73	19th May, 1999	*motivations, aesthetic considerations re: hypothetical commission, drugs*

22nd April, 1998 – Don Kay interviewed by Simon Reade and Simon Barber.

Pieces: *Northward the Strait, The Edge of Remoteness, Hastings Triptych (Hastings Bay), Symphony 2*

Other topics: *composer in the community*

SR Composing for the community. How do you think composing for a community best helps a community? I'll qualify that by saying you can write music for groups in the community; is it by writing things that entertain the community or by writing things for special occasions as Britten talks about in his speech [upon receiving the first Aspen Award]? Do you think you can hold your own voice which may not be a voice which does the second thing – entertain the community – and is that relevant to a community, is it helpful in that way? So, how do you see the role of the composer in the community? And how do you see *your* role as a composer in the community?

DK You mean my personal role or the composer role in general terms?

SR Start in general terms, then specifically about you.

DK Well, I think first of all I would take this business of "serving". This is how I've done it in my own subconscious, perhaps in my conscious[ness]; serving the community as best I can; in other words responding to an invitation to do something and at the same time extending the possibilities if possible. So, I don't think I personally would be good at doing something just like "that" which complies with someone's desire of what they want in their own aesthetic terms. I would have to do things my way within a framework that is understood. In other words, if you're doing a piece for theatre, there's the text of the play that you would comply with and hopefully you'd make music that would be right for that text and they'd have to have a faith, I think, that people will see your evidence – you know, music supporting the text. The text is chosen to entertain the audience. So entertainment is a word with which I have a bit of difficulty. In other words, I think the composer, by serving the community through the music, is at the same time not just succumbing to some sort of presumed "entertainment" level but being true to your own aesthetic and stretching a point or two. Maybe it doesn't always work because I remember my piece *Northward the Strait* was commissioned by the Festival Tasmania, they called themselves, the North-West Wind Festival. I made a pice that was definitely demanding for them but very true to the idea. I think they sensed certain things that were relevant in it but had difficulty coping with some aspects of it because the players I thought I had often weren't there. This sort of thing.

SR So, a musical difficulty or...

DK A musical difficulty in that idiom, the musical language I was using was certainly true to my realisation of the text but not complying with their "semi-pop" sort of language because, first of all, I couldn't do it and, secondly, I wouldn't be sympathetic quite. So, that's the risk they took in asking me and that's the risk I took in expecting them to cope. So, it's always a mixed blessing – or can be, I think.

SR I'll explain the reason I'm asking the question because it's to do with this idea of writing the stuff. I've given a piece to the Hobart City [Band] – *Prelude and Chorale* – and I

thought by doing that I'm giving something to the community, serving the community in that way. And – it was the response of only one person but I'm sure others in the bad would feel the same thing – he came up to me and said “it's all very interesting but why do you do it? I mean it's not entertaining”. So I wonder whether...

DK Well, you should retort, perhaps, with “why do you find it interesting?”

SR Yes...

DK If that's meant: “it's all very interesting”. What is “interesting” about it?

SR I wondered whether, perhaps, I'm right in thinking that – if this is what you think as well – by writing the way you think you should do something in actual fact you're serving the community by doing something perhaps you don't mean as sincerely?

DK If you've got a text, a play of Shakespeare or Moliere or whoever, and if you've entered into the thing agreeably – you want to do it – then you can make music relevant to the text; there's some sort of coherence. But there's always a certain risk. So Shakespeare you can't say is a sort of popular theatre so you don't necessarily make popular music. Everyone acknowledges Shakespeare's a great playwright and to make music for a Shakespeare play is a humbling experience, a very challenging experience. And, of course, there would have been composers who've tried to make Shakespeare “relevant” to today's society in a pop music idiom and that's absolutely valid. So, you've got all of these choices of what the music is trying to do to support the text, support the play. If you make your piece abstract, so to speak, concert music for the band – the Hobart City Band – then you comply with certain things. You have the right instrumentation. You have the right people – committed to the piece. I don't know if they asked you or if you imposed it upon them but they would have agreed to try it so, in a sense, it's an agreed situation. So, you are doing something for them – to extend them. If you only had one person expressing reservation you're very luck, probably. But if that person meant that “it's all very interesting” then you have to get that person to qualify it. You know, “what is interesting?” or “why do you need it to be entertaining at another level?” So, of course, you're doing it for them and you hope that they will give you back something as well as the audience that is privileged to hear the darn thing.

SR OK. So, I'll put it to you then: when you wrote *The Edge of Remoteness* – a nice recent piece – where you're clearly taking “wilderness” specifically as a starting point that could be seen of relevance to Tasmania and the Tasmanian community, how do you see the language of your music that evolves from that as being...

DK … communicative?

SR Yes.

DK Well, again, that's a risk. Because I sort of assume that a lot of Tasmanians would be sympathetic with that part of the place and I responded to it truly in my own peculiar way, then I would be hopeful others would see that and identify with that landscape and therefore be led into having a kind of vested interested in wanting to understand the music. It's a bit like that. But I think I wouldn't have done that piece to, so to speak, hit the pop chart jack-pot. I would have done it from a very personal motivation. And I would have

done it feeling I could be true to the subject somehow. And if you're doing that then I'd also have the faith that a few others out there might identify with you at least. So, my starting point wouldn't have been, in a very obvious, overt way, to “entertain” or “serve” the community. It would have been to do something that was important and compulsive for me to do. But I would have been confident, as a result, that other people who knew the area – [who] were sympathetic to the bush and all of that – would perhaps identify with aspects. But that piece wasn't quite so specific as others in its reference, I think. You see, *The Edge of Remoteness* is an ambivalent kind of title. The area seems to be on the edge of remoteness geographically but it's also, perhaps, on the edge of remoteness psychologically. If you see it as a kind of metaphor.

SR Well, perhaps more in something like *Hastings Triptych...*

DK That's a bit more explicit.

SR Yes.

DK Each of the three pieces has a title. But even with *Hastings Bay* in a way it needs some sort of explaining because with the title “Hastings Bay” you would expect or perhaps anticipate some people in the audience would be looking for something about a bay. It's rather different from how, in a way, the music sort of does it. Because, as I was saying I think to you [SB] the pieces in a way are about water interaction. I had in my head the still, smooth waters indented by very light rain – that sheen thing – and the dance of the rain on the bay. Because that's what I had in my head that's why I called it “Hastings Bay”. It could have been any bay. But also I think the three pieces, I think I was conscious of this somehow, have a sense of being remote... devoid of too much human presence. I even remember saying in the program note for *The Edge of Remoteness* – even there – that was “my piece” from that area and that place seemed to me to be very much on the edge of very remote wilderness. But because it's about the place it's sort of relevant to the community. But in film or theatre music which you do with a local theatre group or a local ensemble like the Hobart City Band or any ensemble within the community, that's another angle of making your music relevant. You see, while you've been at the conservatorium, like the lunch-time concert today, you're being very much a community composer.

SB Do you think so?

DK Very much a conservatorium community composer.

SB Oh, right.

DK You're in collaboration in a very positive way as everyone picked up on, I think. You're making music however remote from this community in its explicit titling. I mean you [SR] talk about “Unfinished Business”. “What's that got to do with this community or Tasmania or anything else?”, you could argue. But at another level it's very much fashioned for that group [ibidem] to respond to. It's a many levelled thing, I think. And you're, in a sense, I think if you're thinking, making music here and now for the local community, you're in a sense trying to be practical and appropriate in serving the community. Like the dustman. Or the milkman or postman. You're making music that can be played, listened to and can contribute to a growing sensitivity and cultural awareness, one would hope. If they hate it, you'll adjust. You won't want to go round making hateful music forever that everyone

rejects and not even one hand claps. You will adjust if you're sensitive and responsive. So, we do it to contribute in a positive way. But you're always, in a sense, in a risk-taking business. I know the postman doesn't have much of a risk except the dog biting him or falling off his bike on a wet street. So, you can't be ridiculous about these equations all the time. Am I making sense?

SB Yes, for sure.

DK But, anyway, let me say this: it's always been a great pleasure to be asked by someone in the community to make a piece and I try to make a piece that I hope they'll respond to positively. And through them, others. If the ensemble plays, if they believe enough in you to ask you, like this little group at lunch time, if they play it well that gets out much better than if they play it badly in a non-committed way. But the composer needs the dedication and commitment of the performers. And they [performers] have their audience following. If the band people are a bit negative you [SR] have to will patience onto them to put the thing together, like you've already experienced. “Believe in me”, you know, “let's get it together before you make judgements”. But it's the same in the professional world of music making. I think a lot of contemporary music has problems because ensembles are scheduled too little time to live with and learn to love it. It's all about technique, too much perhaps, instead of actually taking in the language... nurturing, responding and living with it enough. That's where amateur groups or community / semi-professional groups are probably, in a way, better because they'll rehearse the thing until they get it right. Their time is more unlimited than a professional group. But in our community, here is Tassie, we've got all sorts of levels. We've got children in schools, amateur choirs, semi-professional ensembles, professional ensembles. So, the community is all of these groups at one level or another. And if you're making a piece for a military band it's bound to be different, in some aspects, to a piece for a string quartet. But there'll be a consistency of aesthetic through it if you're true to yourself. You won't have to be schizophrenic all the time. You would write pieces, I would imagine, that are true to you but through these different mediums. They'll have their own indications of different techniques, different “feels” in a way... I mean, we're all so diverse. For example, I'd like to make a march for a military band. I possibly wouldn't make it for string quartet in quite the same way. But I’m not anti march-making. Or waltz-making. Or nice, luscious tune-making.

SR So, perhaps then you take into consideration desires of performers, the community, the audience; take into consideration matters of professionalism such as making sure everything is playable...

DK I think it's just being sensible to do that. That's not to say you can't stretch a point. But the risk there is that they can't play it or they can't think it. So, if it's going to work you have to adapt a bit, I suppose. Be prepared to compromise technical aspects. But I regard it as a privilege to make pieces for them. Not condescension. That's the greatest delight really. I think you probably find that too.

SR Certainly.

DK You see, your piece at lunch time – *Unfinished Business* – was very much “you”, in a sense. And, as I said to Rae Marcellino, risk taking because you used a lot of silence. And a certain amount of intensity. But the performance, I think, was quite right. So, the risk for you was getting the back up of the audience who wanted big tunes and this, that and the

other thing. But I think it came off because they played it quite nicely. However, in another context another part of you would make something much more “entertaining” at another level. Whereas Simon [Barber] was referring to popular culture a bit more explicitly. But your [SB] pieces had a certain charm in a totally different way from your [SR] piece. Which is terrific. Without making odious comparisons.

SB What is the tension between “entertainment” and – what was the other one - “education”?

SR I suppose “education”.

DK It's a hard word “education”. I don't hesitate to try to use my experience to help them grow further in their understanding of possibilities and the way in which they can still be relevant to the purpose of education.

SR That thing of taking the possibility that music could be on the level of “interesting” rather than on the level of “entertaining” - as well as being both...

DK Yes. Well, you see – let's go back to my *Northward the Strait* for choir and band. There was a poem of Gwen Harwood's about fire. Bush fire. So I went to town. I made a piece that is very fiery and very hard to bring off. But they didn't do too badly. Bits of it anyway. But it's certainly taxing... of their sense of credibility in the putting together stages; but I feel it [the credibility] was very high. And I think they did too. It wasn't a timid little fire. So there were dissonances and there were rhythmic quick bits. So that was the risk that I took but I felt it was worth it if they could manage it technically. And of course the crafting of music is to make things appear to be, in a sense, more difficult in a way than they sometimes are. If you know your instruments and and the capabilities of the players and you know how far you can take them in the way you put things together.

SB If it's true that “familiarity breeds contempt” why do you think people aren't bursting for new experiences and embracing, say, your [Simon's] *Prelude and Chorale* enthusiastically rather than playing the same old popular tunes over and over again?

SR [shrugs]

DK I would say because – am I butting in here? - they probably aren't familiar with the language yet. That would be one aspect.

SR I think probably contempt is actually a very highly prized state of being for a lot of people. The ability to be able to be above something rather than be learning from something. A lot of people would have a lot of trouble in taking the next step into curiosity.

DK Probably you [SR] in your response and concern... which is good to have even from one person out of the band. I mean, if you're like me I would worry about that one person. A bit. So I would probably – and ignore all the praises form the other 999! - say that you would probably, in your next piece for them; something in you would respond to that person's concern and would show another part of you that would satisfy something for that person without you compromising your integrity. I don't know what it would be but that would probably happen so that they see that you are made up of more tricks than one. You've got more things in your basket...

SR … present the possibility for them to move on to that level experiencing learning...

DK … and then back again. I don't think learning is a forward, straight line. It's a spiral. Forward, back, consolidate, stretch out; forward, back... and I think that's how it goes. So, that one person might end up being a close buddy in the and in the long term having had the courage to come up. Maybe others feel that but aren't game to say yet. But, on the other hand, they have to be able to hold their judgement by your enthusiasm and your encouragement and your praise of their capacity to cope with this strange piece. You have to reconcile and adjust your way because you're the leader of the band. You have to be able to cope with and perhaps anticipate their responses. Without becoming so self-conscious that you can't or dare not move anywhere. And also one thing is to know that responses aren't uniform. They just aren't.

SR So, do you think, then, for the composer in the community who wants to be part of the community, write pieces for the community, then they can write pieces on all these many different levels – professional, semi-professional... - and their job is perhaps then to obviously craft the pieces well but also to put something of their own view and by doing so enrich culture?

DK Yes, sure. I don't think you can't not put something of your own [in] and you shouldn't be expected to otherwise it becomes a hollow little event.

SR Well, I think that's partly what I'm interested in because there's a lot of music which has just been written which is hollow. It doesn't show anything. And I just wonder whether I think perhaps that music which is also perhaps written - say somebody churns out a quick string quartet with no real concern for any ideas, but it's still within the community. Whereas you write *The Edge of Remoteness* there's still definitely a concern for the community but it's trying to educate the community on another level.

DK Yes, well, I always write music for people. Not for some abstract thing, I think. It's for people, it's for human beings. You want your players to like the thing. I mean I was commissioned to do it [The Edge of Remoteness] so I did it for Christian, Rachel and Vanessa. And I tried to bear in mind what I thought they would respond to. And I knew they were all Tasmanian. So to make something about this place wouldn't be anathema to them. I tried to bear in mind as I did it their own musicality and capability in playing, [that] was all part of it. That would explain my disappointment as opposed to deep anger at my symphony [Symphony 2] for the TSO [Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra] [not being performed]. It was written for a larger orchestra than the TSO have without augmenting itself. It was essentially for this place. So, my hurt was brought about by our orchestra not playing it - my piece written for this place. I wanted it played, as I said in my letter to the manager, first – of many, many times of course! - by our orchestra. So, as that hasn't happened or hasn't happened yet, that created a hurt in a way more than anything else. So, the community can be thought... - the world can be your community of course. You two being here at the con[servatorium], your immediate community is the conservatorium community. Beyond it the town, beyond it... of course you each have a broader community of course than the conservatorium but that's very relevant that you go beyond that through the city band and other associations you have outside this little immediate community. But the community, one would hope, would reciprocate by being respectful of your talents and commitment to wanting to serve it. And the best way, I suppose, you can make them aware is keep doing what you're doing. It's a bit hairy when someone asks you to do

something and there's no chance of collaborating. It's always fun in the theatre to talk to the designer and the director, script-writer and all of these people to put ideas around even if there are no other musicians, so to speak. You can spark off ideas for the music in colour design or staging... all sorts of things occur. The best thing one can be doing is to be making music for your fellow humans – and they're here now. You [SB] look as if you want to say something.

SB Oh, do you [SR] have an immediate question?

SR No.

SB OK. Well, I'll fumble my way through this one. I think a major impediment to people's curiosity about new experiences is the mass media. I could blame it for a multitude of sins but it does blinker people, it does launder their sensibilities to what is acceptable and what isn't...

DK True.

SB … so if you present them a new musical grammar it's not even valid in their eyes unless it's been on television...

SR Did you like the little *ibidem* note on the program?

DK Saying?

SR “As seen on TV”.

DK Oh yes, yes...

SR It's worth reading and I did dedicate it to young Matty Hindson.

DK On “Arts Today” on national radio this morning they were talking about the world of literature. There was a very interesting discussion about traditional literature in American universities and, to an extent, Australian universities; the history of literature being knocked out in favour of a broader interpretation of literature through the modern media. It's probably the same in music: there's a concern to be disdaining of history so that the models that come to us of excellence, because we're forging our own fresh, new way, we can be overwhelmed by all the learning and all the stuff of the past. You see, if you're like me you write music to be fresh, individual and to say something that has a new angle on something without having to be, in a silly way, innovative or original... just individual. If we're put down before we've even started because we don't comply with the language of the great masters from two or three centuries ago it makes it tough. So, if you're like me, you tend to put those out of your mind a bit. But, if you're like me too, you look back to these masters because you just admire their work. And why should we pretend it doesn't exist? It doesn't mean we have to imitate it. So, I'm constantly listening to a whole range of music to help me know how to be a better individual. Does that sound like a contradiction?

SR No, I don't think so.

DK But the innovators, the great innovators, they seem almost to grow out of nothing; as if

nothing ever came before them; but you can bet they came from a tradition. So, it's a matter of degree.

SB The only tradition I think we have in this very young culture is the mass media. The television tradition. Which comes from America.

DK Yes, that's right. The impact of all that contemporary media is a pretty big challenge to our capacity to be relevant.

SB It certainly is.

DK Language choices and so forth. Take heart. I mean music is simply made up of high, low; long, short; loud and soft sounds and colours of sounds. You can mix them whichever way you want. In the mixing that you make you are being true to an idea that you have.

You [SR] talk about *The Edge of Remoteness.* Now, who in their right mind, so to speak, would immediately think of the very southern wilderness parts of Tasmania as a relevant topic to contemporary society in New York? But, you see, we all respond to fundamental values in some way even in remote parts of ourselves. So, there are certain things you can tap over and over again that never become irrelevant. But they might become a bit more obscure. That is if you're prepared to jump on to every latest fashion band-wagon. But, you see, I can enjoy the most unlikely stuff on telly like anybody else [and] still go back into my obscure little world and know that they're not disconnected.

SB We still suffer from cultural cringe. What I'd like to see is media exposure for new music without being apologetic. Without being apologetic for being Australian. Without being apologetic for being slightly confident, for goodness sake, in what you're doing. Because, for some reason, it's OK for America to be completely self-referencing and almost dictatorial – no – just straight out dictatorial in what happens and what doesn't. And then everything that happens here is by way of comparison and validation to what happens in America. It isn't valid unless it's compared with America. And I want to see that go. I either want to dismiss that model or for us to truly adopt it and become confident.

DK Sure. I was talking to Christian just yesterday and I was saying that I'd like to feel in this country that there's more acknowledgement of localities and what they're doing. The good things that they are doing is all part of a national thrust, cultural thrust, and the place will only, in a sense, grow up when it can acknowledge all of these diversities, remote as well as central. Christian said “I believe it's happening”. He was talking from the point of view of being a performer, playing in ensembles and things like that. It was good to hear him say that. In other words, I think he was saying that he's more comfortable, personally, in being located in Hobart and feeling he can, you know, make his way without having to go to Sydney or Melbourne. But I think it is nevertheless tougher here. For fairly obvious reasons. As I've said to you both many times my decision to live here meant that I had to reconcile what that meant from a musical point of view.

SB Well, [to SR] we've never known any other context, have we?

SR No.

SB So, we're building it from scratch.

DK Yes, and it's a privilege to be part of that, not a burden. A privilege. If we see it as other than that I think it does become an unbearable burden. But, on the other hand, trying to be practical and realistic to get a recognition, if that's important to anybody, beyond this place as the main goal of the whole thing then that has problems.

SB I think recognition within the place is the goal. [To SR] Do you agree with that?

SR Oh yes.

DK Well, it's nice to be wanted within your community.

SR And to be able to give something to the community

DK Yes, sure.

SR A two-way process.

SB I think it's important that the job of the composer becomes acknowledged, as you say, as something as important as the postman or doctor. Because it has utility function which was recognised in German culture not too long ago. Here, I would have thought, with the vast bureaucratic network and the way we're over-governed that the job of a composer would have been... contained within that. It would have been like any other kind of profession.

DK I think the way Australian culture and society has grown up... you know enough about history... my father worked in the bush and had to do things as a youth and young an that one generation later would be unbearably difficult to contemplate doing. So, he and his forbears were in a crude frontier situation in this place doing things that had no real room for the niceties of what we think the higher arts are about. So, their entertainment, being musical entertainment, their relief from the labour of surviving would have often taken much cruder forms than we are privileged to have on generation later even. So, we're a very young society in that sense and we've moved a long way in a short time. And it's important to somehow know that, but on the other hand we're a long way short of having many centuries of established culture that we sort of slot into; find it more difficult, thereby, to be individualistic. Because we're so young we have the chance to make a really fresh contribution. And I think part of our concern right now, and a good one, is to reconcile with the Aboriginal culture. All around this country. It's part of our concern to find our roots and our history and to make sense of where we are. Most of us haven't come from outside this place. But when we're born and bred here and we're not of Aboriginal stock, it's not right to say we don't belong here. We do belong here. So, we have to find away of being relevant to here. And still live with those from a much longer time before us in a sensible, compatible way. And it's fun, isn't it? It's fun trying to work through all of these challenges and make a proper contribution. So, it means have courage, take heart, keep persevering and don't be put off by crass opinion hell-bent on wanting to comply with mundane crassness.

27th January, 1999 – Don Kay interviewed by Simon Barber with Simon Reade present.

Pieces: *Auspici Deo, March for School Orchestra, The Legend of Moinee (Land of Moinee), Evocations, Night Spaces, Moonlight Ridge, Wild Call*

Other topics: *posterity, teaching, motivations, Malcolm Williamson anecdote, influences, pop and art music, expression of ritual, principles and conventions, time*

SB What is your attitude towards posterity, bearing in mind that there is a time lapse between synthesising ideas towards making a piece, making a piece, then awaiting a performance for whatever feedback that brings?

DK Well, I think if I'm perfectly honest, which I'm sure I'm not by any means always, I would say I hope with every piece I do that it will be played more than once. I would hope for it to become a piece that can keep communicating. I don't see one definitive performance – it might be a recording, therefore frozen on the recording – as the only possible interpretation. So I would hope that a lot of the interpretations of the piece are possible because I see the role of the performer as pretty crucial as well as the performer having rights in interpretation that might just add something positive that the composer hasn't thought of. Even though a composer will establish a fairly clear intention, no notation can say it all and I do think performers can see definite insights in phrasing, dynamics, tempi and so on for balancing which add something the composer may not have foreseen. It's possible, therefore, that every new performance will establish a new freshness. But I don't particularly believe in an afterlife or something so after one is gone, in a sense, who cares? But others may care and one sort of writes for that continuing caring.

SB [At this point] I could ask you about ritual and what-have-you now but I won't skip on to that quite yet. What has been the relationship between teaching and your private composition?

DK It began as not being consciously related at all because I started out in trying to be a teacher simply to do something to earn a living and I had started to compose a long time before I started to teach. I think class-room survival mode was my early concern and syllabus' to follow were not often clearly established. With what I was lead to believe was a sound sort of curriculum within a syllabus for teaching I think I was very... how can I say... crude at interpreting or implementing. Part of that crudeness of implementation of a curriculum in an established syllabus was due to my not believing in how music was being taught. I think that was a fairly early realisation. So my teaching – trying to comply with what I assumed was wanted – I think bore little relationship [to private composition]... apart from any difficulty in establishing myself as an authority in front of young adolescents. But I think shortly before I left England in 1964 I began to get a feeling for a possibility [of a connection between teaching and composition] because I made music for the school orchestra and the junior and senior choirs at Peckham Manor School in South London. And I made pieces for special occasions in school productions and things like that. I even wrote the school song with words by the head of English called *Auspici Deo* and I called it a *March for School Orchestra*. It can be played without the words or be sung with them. Anyway, I did that and that sort of drew me closer to the needs of young people as a composer and I think I experimented then, you know, having been a teacher for about eight or nine years I began to get a feeling for how one helped the other. So when I came

back to Tasmania and started teaching at the Teacher's College in 1965 I began very much to begin to relate it to [composition] but I always thought my teaching theory was ahead of my composition. The theory of teaching music... I didn't have a sense of implementing in my personal composition yet. In other words, I was asking kids to do things that were ahead of my capacity as a composer to do them. That's partly why I use the word “elemental” [on a second edit of the 'biographical introduction'] as opposed to “primitive” because I think elemental is to do with the spirit, the elements, the spirit of earth, fire, air, water or something... trying to get children to make a really fundamental, profoundly *right* sound from very elemental motivation. A very, sort of, internal *relevant* note. It sounds very idealistic, doesn't it?

SB On the contrary, I think it's quite down to earth.

DK Well both. It has to be down to earth if anything's going to happen of a practical nature.

SB You have commented that composition is “compulsive”, something which, perhaps, some psychiatrists would seek to diagnose and regulate; what do you think is the nature of such compulsion?

DK Well, probably to stabilise my neuroses, in part. I think people think I'm fairly steady in certain ways... but I think the compulsion is an escape from doing real things, you know, it takes me away from having to do banal things like shopping, gardening, looking after children – my own children – doing menial tasks, washing up. It must be there somewhere. But I think that's a fairly negative reason. I think the compulsion comes from a need, a spiritual need actually, to understand myself and how I fit into the world. But it's not as simple as that either.

SB When you were confronted with a class-room in England, full of children going haywire and even a tertiary institution here where discipline is still an issue – that compulsive spirit can either go on a creative tangent or become delinquent, a problem shared by all humans. How do you think people can come to discipline themselves?

DK I suppose I was a failed or successful or probably a mixture of both teacher because of my belief in human nature to respond to the best intention emanating from the so-called “authority” of the teacher. In other words, if I conveyed myself as some sort of example of belief in the art to be helpful to the nurturing of the human spirit then I hoped that would “rub off” to an extent. And the best way to do that was not talking about it: rather than “you must listen to this music of Beethoven, it is tremendous music; if you don't enjoy it I'll take off ten marks!” giving practical activities enabling self-discovery to come through the activity leading the student towards your perception of what is helpful in music to enhance one's humanness.

SB Roger Covell commented upon Malcolm Williamson's concern for memorable melodies, particularly in regard to *English Eccentrics* and *Our Man in Havana*. You were having lessons with Malcolm Williamson around that time. How did his thinking influence you?

DK Roger Covell said to me privately that Malcolm Williamson's trouble was he couldn't write a memorable melody. I remember going to the first performance of *English Eccentrics*, an opera based on the book of the English poet Edith Sitwell. Malcolm, a bit

like William Walton, lived with the Sitwells for a bit. Or at least knew them very well and she was at that first performance sitting down in the front row... the way she dressed herself... have you ever seen pictures of her?

SB No, but I've seen *Facade*.

DK Very eccentric but very interesting, the whole family were very interesting. At the end of the piece there's a big, fat, as it were “typical” Malcolm Williamson tune which is a summation and resolution of all the threads. It's a chamber opera with a chamber orchestra of probably ten players or less. I think there were six singers / characters but they all played multiple roles. So there are probably a couple of dozen of these “roles” with only six people to sing them, in that sense a chamber opera. It's a very big piece conceptually. I recall I was sitting behind a couple of friends, Janice and John Chapman who I knew well at that time in London – this is about 1963 or 1964 – and I was overwhelmed by this tune, this big, fat “chune”, as it were, that came out of all the threads of dissonance and counterpoint. And it seemed to sum up, in an emotional way that grabbed me and I leaned forward and tapped those two on the shoulder and said “Isn't that a great tune?” and Janice turned round and said “I think it's terrible!” and she qualified it somehow. The next day she rang up and apologised for her outburst because I think people around could hear.

SB How very eccentric.

DK I was taken aback, I couldn't believe how anyone couldn't respond to that. You know Malcolm wondered what was meant by “bad taste” or “good taste”. I think the perception of a lot of people to his big tunes was “bad taste”. You know, overly sentimental or overly this or that.

SB The point Roger Covell was making in his book *Australian Music* was why Malcolm Williamson would bother working in such a way if he wasn't going for Gershwin-style popularity and wasn't making the money that could be made in a popular music industry.

DK I think he was concerned about a popular appeal in one part of him and he was a converted Catholic. I remember how upset he was when the Catholic Arch-Bishop of London wouldn't allow his Popular Mass to be performed within the liturgy of the Catholic Church because Malcolm had thought he'd made a very singable, tuneful Catholic Mass service. But he wrote a lot of music for popular congregational consumption.

SB For television as well.

DK Did he? I think I know what people meant [re. good and bad taste] because I was ambivalent often. I admired his technique. I admired his capacity and facility and I still think he is a genius with his skills, his talents... if they're not always focused in the best way then that's something else. But I think my aesthetic was different from his. I liked trying to make tunes but I suspect they're nothing like “Malcolm Williamson tunes”. I think mine are responding to an aesthetic or trying to express a very different aesthetic. He's much more “overt” and “brazen”. I'm more “introverted” and “quiet”.

SB Can you mention any composers who have influenced your thinking?

DK Well, you've named some [in the 'biographical introduction']. Clearly when I was a student in Melbourne Vaughan-Williams and that English “pastoralist” group were clearly influ... why should I apologise? So I'm not, OK. But they were [influential] and a lot of Australians of my generation seemed to be similarly influenced. I can't say why except my generation and older generations had this “anglophileness”, this wanting to get back there and discover roots or something and it's still with me to an extent. I'd be dishonest if I said we've got to cut off all our tradition and pretend we're another animal altogether, I think that's sort of dishonest. But I've got it much more in perspective now. You see my whole training, my whole musical education etc. as with all of us is Western European based. We're not starting out doing tertiary [music courses] with Aboriginal instruments; didgeridoos, rhythm sticks and chanting. Not that that's good or bad, it's just a fact. But latterly we might come into ethnomusicological consideration. But as a recent teacher at the conservatorium I know that most of our experience is based on the Western European tradition. It's silly to deny that.

SB When Percy Grainger...

DK … another influence, by the way, I would say.

SB … exhorted Australian composers to look north...

DK … yes, to exotic Asia; South-East Asia.

SB … why do you think Australian composers have been slow on the up-take, if indeed they have?

DK Well, I have. I think others haven't. I think the Sydney-based composers coming out of the 1960s and 1970s have been more concerned to relate to a geographical – Asian – reality and that's fine, but I have some reservation about going out and imitating anything. I wouldn't consciously, now at least, want to imitate closely a particular style or something out of hand; I would want to sort of synthesise something and let it come through in my own way which I hope was fresh – but it's probably highly imitative without me knowing it – perhaps. I think efforts to use techniques from foreign musical cultures is difficult. I can't quite grab that. You know, like doing a Balinese, Gamelan kind of music; trying to match Balinese culture which is so different from our own. That's not to say I don't respect all of that, but I can't turn into a Balinese. So the influences other than specific composers in the Western tradition, like those I've named, would be in a very general way. But the relaxation of South-East Asia, the “exotic-ness”, would affect me but not the specifics of the technique in a conscious way. But I'm not a scholar. I mean, I'm not a great researcher so I don't spend the energy looking looking into these things. Perhaps if I was I would be a bit more rigorous about it. I tend to get on with actually composing, rather than trying to find out about other people's techniques.

SB Let's talk about *The Legend of Moinee* which makes reference to Aboriginal mythology. Would you care to comment further on Aboriginal influences, specifically Tasmanian, in relation to your work?

DK I wouldn't be aware of any because there's so little evidence of what Tasmanian Aboriginal music actually sounded like that I wouldn't purport to speculate or try. I have a sense that it was fairly lyrical. I have a sense that it was probably very different from the

Aboriginal musical cultures we know on the mainland of Australia. *[The Legend of] Moinee* was simply my own imagination responding to the mythology and the landscape as I feel it. But I must say that one or two people have heard didgeridoos in the pedal notes, in *The Land of Moinee* at the end. It certainly wasn't a didgeridoo quality I was emulating – maybe in my subconscious. But I don't really see a strong influence of didgeridoo imitation at all. Rather, the pedal notes in *The Land of Moinee* and I think elsewhere in my music is more a response to the sorts of spatial, "depthy" quality that someone like Sibelius is a master of using to suggest multiple levels of activity. A very earthy quality, a substantial, solid, quality with surface activity generating all around like offshoots – plants growing and so on – gradually developing into a solid, finished product. So, I see *The Land of Moinee* as an attempt to explore, technically, these organic growth-like techniques within the context of trying to respond to the atmosphere of the South-West; the remoteness and mystery of the landscape in all of its "panoramic-ness" and detail of certain spots. But largely in my imagination – there is no attempt to convey a specific image of a particular place. I think it's a very profound response to my feeling about the place. The business of the spirit Moinee cutting the land to make the islands – that would have been in my consciousness. So some of the vigorous bits in the music would be an attempt to convey those sorts of images I would have thought; plus the weather patterns, the incessant rain, the changeability; the colours and the intimacy.

SB Peter Sculthorpe came to a dead end in Tasmania, in researching Tasmanian Aboriginal music: the lack of evidence – has that emptiness or void teased music out of you?

DK I think not having to be accused - I hope – of imitating a non-existent music has made it easier just to be myself within this place. I think that latterly I'm more conscious of trying to fill a void, searching for some sort of cultural identification with an almost pre-historical situation. Searching for an imagined, very early culture, very early human activity. There is an allusion in *Evocations*, for example, as well as in *Night Spaces* and *Moonlight Ridge* as well as other pieces to an imagined, ghostly activity. I think the little dance patterns, the a symmetrical rhythmic patterns pop up partly with that spiritual sort of searching, partly with a response to the patterning of nature. I'm not sure which is what half the time.

SB Are you influenced by popular music?

DK I'm much more tolerant than I was as a youth. I think there would be "jazzy" sorts of rhythmic patterns embedded in certain bits. I have a great admiration for the virtuosi who play that blue-grass stuff on their fiddles, banjos, mandolins etc. I would like to have the facility to notate that sort of patterning without being closely imitative of style. Just a sense of dance and communication, lightness and joie de vivre. I think the dance qualities which pop up without being in a particular style of dancing – certainly not popular forms of rock etc. - are a symbol for the joy of living. They're characterised by two verses threes a lot of the time. The juxtapositions as well as the over-lays. Because all rhythms come down to two and three, don't they? I think that, again, is reflective of the a-symmetrical patterning in nature. The "four-squareness" of things can be an anathema, but not always because I do respond to four-squre marches. So there are contradictions in ones response. The march which is marched on two feet, or the waltz with two partners – two feet each... and the tango... they are appealing because of a certain regularity required for practical purposes in the march or a dance. But also getting out of step, losing one's way is an attractive thing. Charles Ives with his juxtapositions of very contrasting patterning in rhythm as well

as in pitch is very appealing to convey the spontaneity and duality or the “multi-ness” of all the fabrics of things going on simultaneously.

SB You mention Charles Ives. In some recent pieces of yours the marking *con alterezza* appears. I'm curious as to whether you thought consciously about the way your music could feed back into a popular culture. The reason I ask is that Charles Ives takes fairly run-of-the-mill music as well as church music and ritual music and throws it all together with an elevated frame of mind. How that feeds back into popular culture, if at all, is another question. Do you think there will always be a gap between “pop” and “art” music?

DK I think there always will be. Popular music is characterised by qualities basically meant to appeal very immediately to... popular responses... the motives behind it are to make money rather than to please people in a very profound way. I think a lot of popular culture is a bit banal because it's trying to appeal to the lowest common denominator. I think one wants, if one's honest, to make music that communicates. And in that sense one wants to communicate to everybody. But the reality is, of course, that it won't happen. If the music one wants to communicate to everybody is complex or a little bit challenging intellectually or emotionally beyond a certain point one has to know that it will never get beyond a certain response numerically. You talked earlier about posterity. One hopes in time that more people will be communicated to. But I think to want to want to become popular in the very best sense is nothing to do with “commercialism” or “mass media gratification response”. One hopes in the long term a general education will be much more considered and enable young people to grow up with a much more discriminating sense of aesthetic appropriateness and that society will be, therefore, much more receptive to the possibility of challenging art done with some sort of integrity.

SB Without sliding into decadence all over again?

DK Well, let's not get into decadence because there is good art concerned with conveying aspects of decadence. When you talk about “con alterezza” I'm talking about that moment in a piece of music trying to elevate oneself into a spiritual frame of mind because I see those bits as a core of the piece where I'm feeling particularly focused about the surrounding bits preparing for this particular bit. So I explain that as being the aesthetic core of the piece. It might be the quietest moment, not necessarily the most vigorous or the most out-going or the most “gratifying” in the normal sense.

SB That's also part of the search for a lost culture or maybe a future culture isn't it?

DK I suppose it could be. It's certainly me feeling I've got to the core of something a little bit further anyway. If I feel I've touched a moment of particular importance to me, then of course I hope that communicates to others. And I suppose that within a particular context, if there is a narrative attached in some way, it could be symbolic of having found that particular “inner sanctum” in a cultural ritual of some kind. But I'm not sure about that.

SB OK, let's be down to earth and talk about ritual. Les Murray, the Australian poet, has written of the light-hearted, take it with a grain of salt attitude to the ritual of work that many Australians have. However, I can only think of that attitude to work as coming from those who take things for granted or are a bit smug about things. Now, my question is, the composer is extended, arduously, to reaffirm ritual, why is that? If, on the one hand, people can be smug about things and on the other hand the composer works hard just to get

back, say, C major. It's a philosophical and artistic question.

DK And I think it's too hard for me without you saying it again!

SB Well, it says in Ecclesiastes “the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike”. It strikes me that those who are most successful probably don't work as hard, in a certain way, as the creative person has to work to extend themselves. What I'm asking is why does the creative person go through “labour pains”, so to speak, to present new works of art which people aren't waiting for or care whether you do it or not?

DK Well, we all do that don't we? I mean all of our pieces are doing that. Yes it's common. We all know what we're talking about, don't we? [Don is addressing Simon Reade who is remaining silently attentive]. You're certainly doing it all the time.

SB That's what Elliott Carter's *Syringa* was about.

DK I think we're trying to discover truth, aren't we? I think we're trying to get to the truth of the matter. We're trying to understand the meaning of our existence in the world, how we relate to it. And I think we feel obliged to try to give expression to our understanding in a heightened way which, if we communicate successfully, can have others share that revelation.

SB What creative activity implies then is a rejection of dogma or received technique or at least a reinterpretation of these things, doesn't it?

DK Yes, well as a teacher now, I would have rationalised this for a long time because of my own way of composing to an extent and also for reasons I said earlier, not being able to comply with conviction to an imposed syllabus which I thought was a bit fallacious in any case. I think that the important thing is to discover freshly. You see the conflict with me at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music is that I couldn't make sense, real proper sense, of the counterpoint and harmony that was being imposed as a sort of, you know, you learn the mechanics of it and presumably by doing these hundreds of exercises you become a master of understanding earlier music. Then someone like Debussy comes along, as well as Bartok, Schönberg; these people and they contravene all of those conventions like that [Don snaps his finger]. So immediately it makes a mockery of all this stuff. So I think quite early on I just divorced my own creativity from that stuff. I think I must have intuitively realised that you have to carve your own way of expression. But at the same time I wouldn't have been disrespectful of all of that theory and what it represented as an attempt to explain the creativity of earlier ages and the conventions therein. But I learnt bit by bit to separate “principle” from “convention”. So I think I tried to be true to principles and tried to realise the conventions of crafting music was something I'd have to nut out largely for myself; to carve my own language but with due awareness of the stuff around. I listen quite a lot to music, I'm not necessarily discriminating, I turn on the radio and listen to what comes on – through ABC FM which leaves a lot, often, to be desired by way of choices of programmes but, never mind, you occasionally get an interesting thing. And of course I've got a handful of CDs. I don't aim to make a big library at all because I'd never listen to it; I don't make time for myself. I listen to your music and we talk about it as a teacher and you, as a teacher, give out stuff to listen to. So one is surrounded by listening all the time so, of course, you take in what you hear. But in a scholarly, academic way I sort of separate, or keep a distance. I'm not a religiously searching-out person – I

was more once – to, how can I say, validate my own gropings. My own gropings, I believe now in any case, are responsive enough to the experience I've gathered without having to do it self-consciously. So... so what? So, the discovery process, to my mind, the individual discovery of what works for a particular context or a particular idea is much more important, profoundly much more important, than looking at the text book or score of someone else and trying to emulate that model. But at the same time I would be the first one to say to you two as students “go to the library and why don't you listen to this or that”. But in so doing I don't mean to suggest that you imitate these people. You're just learning through what is available and I have an assumption that your individuality and own personality will be active and discriminating.

SB You've confiscated my notes and I need to ask you another question. You've been generous in responding to invitations for new works, the latest being *Wild Call* for the *ibidem* chamber ensemble, obviously done for love rather than money...

DK … for ego probably.

SB Is the “compulsive”, spontaneous and, I would say, naturally generous activity of composition at odds with the world of economics?

DK It's compulsive, that's pretty sure, and of course I just like to be asked to make a piece of music for someone who trusts me a bit I suppose. So the money... I have guilt about money. If there is money to support a commission of course I'd be silly not to take advantage of that all being well. But of course I've been spoilt. I've been on a full salary all through my “professional career” as they say and now I'm on a regular superannuation. So I've still got a steady income even if it could be more than it is. Therefore that steady financial support enables me to continue to want to make pieces without having to worry about the money overly. But when you people asked me to do a piece for *ibidem* that was a great pleasure because I consider you my friends and I had trust in the group to give it their “best shot”. So, to make a piece, I started off as you recall saying “about five minutes”. I thought of it being a little piece. I wasn't really quite sure what maybe you would have wanted. Because I really always need to know the degree of “substantialness”. If whoever asks for a piece of music doesn't make it terribly clear about what's involved, say with the saxophone pieces [for the Tasmanian Saxophone Quartet], then I'm inclined to start out rather less expansively because I think maybe they mean a little piece of maybe two or three minutes. In any case a certain lack of confidence will make me start little and if the idea grabs me make it bigger. But if you are being offered, say, five thousand dollars for a piece how long do you think that would be...? Or, more likely, “I want you to do a fifteen minute piece, how much would that cost?” 'Well, according to the guidelines in the Australia Council manual that should be about eight thousand dollars'. Then it's immediately clear what the demands are. With *Wild Call* though I gave it my “best shot” within what I thought the ensemble was up to. And let me add that the delight for me is that it wasn't confined to one performance then thrown on the rubbish heap. *ibidem* played it a second time, and I think they're playing it a third time. [Here Simon Reade affirms *ibidem* are actually playing *Wild Call* a fourth time]. So, that's exactly what one hopes for. Something to do with posterity or the hope that the piece will keep living and growing in its continuing-ness and that the understanding of its intention will be enhanced because people might hear it played more than once.

SB Do you think that music is just an expression of tension and release, in a very physical kind of way? Beethoven said that music connects the spiritual within the sensuous...

DK Oh yes, it certainly does that.

SB Is that just an expression of ritual, creation, death and the recurrence of these things?

DK It would certainly do all that I'm sure but it also does lead one to greater understanding, greater compassion perhaps. I believe Mahler was extraordinarily tense about things and had the highest standards and gave his wife Alma a terrible time and rather kept her back from being realised herself as a composer because he was so self-centred. Many creative people are like that and it makes them difficult to live with but, perhaps at another level within ones inner self it creates greater compassion, understanding when you sit back, reflect and meditate about it. When I make music I fall in love with the world all over again and the people in it. If I say in a certain sense “I was thinking of you” or “I did this for you” I think I can understand it if they don't believe me or if they don't see the connection. But it's genuine. So, you do it, I think, to enhance understanding. The spiritual and the sensual is all interlocked and I think Messiaen, for example, was a very spiritual but a very sensual composer as well. I mean the sounds are very seductive. I don't see Beethoven's sounds being nearly so seductive as many others but at the same time I appreciate what he felt. And you cannot say in one sentence what Beethoven covered because, if you hear certain things in Beethoven which don't appeal to you, there's bound to be something somewhere in his output that does appeal to you for the very opposite reason. So, I would never stand in judgement about the so-called Great Composers because they're so diverse and they have such a lot to offer even though I go through phases of not responding so well to some and more to others etc.

SB So, it's a continual growth process and life, of course, will continue or does continue... well, was there before you entered the world and will certainly go on when you leave it. Do you think there's a goal to this creativity or do you think that time, this is a bit philosophical, is just an aspect of eternity and that creative is on-going?

DK I think I've got in my own music a pre-occupation with aspects of time and I think it's to do with eternity, some of the still moments, so to speak, trying to encapsulate something “timeless”. But, on the other hand, I think there are certain things where one is concerned with the rushing of time, the music gallops through time. So, there's this duality of stillness and developing time... what was your question again?

SB Is time just an aspect of eternity?

DK Well, I think I know what you mean and I'd have to say I think the answer is “yes”. It's a preoccupation. Music being a temporal art has to be concerned with moving forward but it also can allude to trying to have time standing still. I think that is one of the big concerns maybe more than in some musics of earlier times: trying to discover spatial aspects. Messiaen is an example, I'm sure what's his name... the American we talked about...

SB Cater... or Ives?

DK Well Ives and Carter are two specialists in exploring that. In another way I think Tippett

was as well. And I'm sure there are others. I think a lot of the experimentation with graphic notation where you look at alternate symbols, often quite skimpy, on one sheet and you make that piece on one page last half and hour is something to do with exploring time moving forward and standing still. And, of course, in the technique of composition one is preoccupied with retrograde, with mirror-patterning and alluding to seeing the mirror as if in space when it's happening in time. So, it's very difficult, in a sense, for the ear to capture the mirror aurally, much harder than visually in a spatial art. But it's nevertheless a preoccupation, not just a way of spinning notes out but it's a way of making sense of the relationships to do with time and reflection.

3rd February, 1999 – Don Kay interviewed by Simon Barber and Nigel Farley.

Pieces: *Night Spaces, River Views, Bird Chants*

Other topics: *"facility" - compositional process and technique, 12-note technique, teaching children, crafting, institutions, music education, ideas justifying techniques, nature as primary motivator*

SB We were talking briefly last Friday morning about the relationship between, on the one hand, "facility" and, on the other, "aspiration". I'd like to pick up where we left off and ask you to comment further on the relationship between the two.

DK Facility is something that one accumulates and aims to obtain but facility, if it's too easy, becomes a bit of a nuisance; you can fall right into your own traps of hollow pattern repetition because it's an easy solution to finding notes for extensions. So, it's a sort of danger but of course one wants facility. And aspiration – well, if your aspiration, if your aim is to go further and further then your facility is a handy thing to support it. If your aspiration fails you, you become smug and your facility perhaps takes over and becomes a bit hollow. If the aspiration is working well, in other words, you're motivated and striving to extend, facility is a great help.

SB Would you say that the benefit of working with serial technique was to break music down to elements in a very conscious manner?

DK The discipline of working with twelve notes without any tonal centre liberated me from feeling too pedantic about pitch selection in the consonant, tonal, diatonic way. Or even the modal way.

SB What do you mean by "pedantic"?

DK Well, you see, while I was doing it I wrote out all my rows, every possible version – 48 of them – before I launched into a piece, like setting up your bricks and mortar, tools of the trade, to draw on and build the house. So, I had all of those rows at my disposal. Having set out on a probably randomly chosen row I didn't have to worry about the pitch "floor", so to speak, all I had to worry about was the distribution of them vertically, horizontally and rhythmically. If I had confidence in the row – and to make a row, of course, is a compositional act – the strict Schönbergian system requires one to stick to the thing in its inverted and retrograde forms throughout all the tonal ranges possible that we have in our tuning system. The complexities, of course, can become quite horrific when you overlay the rows and you have different forms going this way and that way. One of the strict things is not to duplicate a particular pitch as they happen to coincide other than that in unison. All of that got quite involved and I used to number all my rows to keep tabs on what I was up to otherwise I would have had great difficulty knowing where I was in the patterning. But, on the other hand, one can zip along from a pitch point of view and make sonorous judgements according to the colours that the juxtapositions, horizontal or vertical, enable one to arrive at through manipulating the row. So, I was completely able, in a sense, to get the niceties of triadic [harmony] or other conventions of a traditional harmonic criteria – set criteria – for making pitch adjustments.

SB In your orchestration you could have made arbitrary timbral choices to get the colours

you wanted.

DK I don't recall doing a piece for large ensemble using the strict serial method – I did small ensemble pieces – but nevertheless in the sextet, quintet or quartet you make colour choices as you would in the orchestra. One thing I think it did help me do was to respond to minor 9ths and major 7ths, minor seconds and augmented 4ths / diminished 5ths. These dissonant intervals sharpened my ear and bit by bit I tuned those kinds of juxtapositions to nature patterning. So these dissonances, quite harsh, in another context become quite delicate given the right colour or timbral and dynamic choices.

SB How did you start to make timbral and dynamic choices? Did you ever serialise them?

DK I think I might have in an experimental way. If you have a hierarchy most people go from pitch to rhythm, dynamic and timbre. I'm not convinced about that, so on occasion I would have organised timbre and dynamic in a serialised manner. In small bits, I think. Not in a very big, long-winded way. I suppose if I'm honest about it pitch and rhythm are the most taxing things. I think rhythm I find, in a way, the most engaging. The colours, timbres, sonorities, registrations support these things. So often when I'm trying something out, if I try a combination of pitches at one registration I'll test them by taking them up or down or spreading them out before I pass that cluster of pitches. I try it from every angle I can think of if I had a doubt about its logic. Also the inversions of these clusters of chords, turning them inside out and upside down as well as spacing them out helps one aurally to make them suitable to the idea. So, the criteria for making judgements are really based on a logic of the progression according to an extra musical idea, a narrative or some sort of patterning based on some sort of response to a visual idea, maybe, or just an abstract sound idea. So, often you hit notes and for the love of you, you can't explain why that chord sounds good after that one and to me it's a bit futile to overly try to theorise about it. It comes down to the ear desiring it. But sometimes the ear has to, in a sense, be affirmed by some sense of intellectual logic that you can identify. Sometimes you can't. Sometimes pure colours associated, let's say, out of a narrative idea of some kind – for example I'm doing a little bird piece for piano at the moment. Now the colours, in a sense, are entirely illogical. They just seem to be right within my image. And they seem to bear little relationship to any known system that I can think of. But of course they must have some relationship otherwise they wouldn't sound logical to me. In other words, I must choose things that come out of some tradition of known ways of doing things. It's not that original. It can't be for me.

SB If working with serial technique opened up your ears to dissonance could you have just used “chance” procedures to achieve the same thing?

DK What do you mean by “chance”?

SB Well, aleatoric.

DK I must have experimented somehow, sometime. I can't think specifically at the moment. “Chancy” elements are bound up with intuitive processes somehow. Sometimes you put something in [a piece] without really it being other than a chance. The thing just seems to be right. Now that's a bit different from a strict application of Cageian aleatoric procedures I know. It can have a similar sort of randomness and of course a person like Boulez or Stockhausen would rationalise mathematically their apparent randomness or

aleatoric processes very differently to Cage I imagine. So, there would sometimes be rationalised aleatoric effects, so to speak, “chancy”, random effects. Other times there would be intuitive random effects. And again, we have talked about *Night Spaces*, there would be elements of both of those things in that piece as well as in other pieces. A certain “countering” - in the little bird piece that sort of thing is happening. And it's happening more easily because birds, when they make their sounds, when they move, when they flutter, when they do whatever they do, there's no sense of predictability but it all adds up to a certain overall logic. I mean they do things that they do, but they do them unpredictably and one species do them differently from another species. When they're all in there doing it together it creates a sense of chaos... but acceptable chaos. And a certain freedom, but within a framework one can comprehend because we all know what birds get up to in a general sense, if we're at all open.

SB Could just throwing dice or tossing coins given you intervals to play with and could that have been enough logic for their organisation conceivably?

DK I think you can take anything and make it do something. In earlier years I said to students, as well as myself, pick up a shell, a beautiful object from nature, or a rock or a bit of driftwood or something and the feel of it, the weight of it, the colour will suggest patterns and sounds. Those patterns might seem sort of random if the rock is heavy and spiky, with jagged edges. It might suggest a jagged cluster of notes close together. You can mathematically serialise that cluster of pitches if you have a desire to do it. But that initial cluster is the spring board for all that goes from it. You can always take anything and make it go somewhere but if you do that the challenge is to turn it into something that is very logical, accessible and comprehensible to the fairly “lay” ear *or* be true to the original sound of it and just make, so to speak, a lot of rock sounds or shell sounds which don't conform to normal, conventional musical behaviours.

SB So, was finding a way of organising sound another aesthetic decision?

DK Of course. When teaching children I would give them these sorts of things to do. They would make shell sounds or whatever sounds in groups, mucked around together, find descriptive words like “jagged”, “heavy” or “brightly coloured” to stimulate their musical imaginations and they were, in a sense, non-developmental. I used to create a suggestion of development by giving little subgroups a different motivation, a different natural object then sequence each group.

SB You would sequence each group.

DK Yes, as a kind of Master of Ceremonies when they had worked out their patterns. I would say “which order would you like the groups to go in?” And of course when the groups decided which order they wanted to go in that created a form. We might have had “rock”, “driftwood”, “shell” and something else in a sequence of five or six slightly elongated patterns in themselves. Each group's challenge to make a satisfactory form was their particular motivation. It was highly imposed of course but the way they solved it was very personal.

SB Did you ever experiment the way Murray Schafer did with getting contrapuntal textures going?

DK Absolutely. I would get great pleasure conducting these outcomes. It was a mixture of me being Master of Ceremonies and their responses to an idea which was their own outcome.

SB So you get the children focussed, their willingness to contribute concentrated and then you can direct that enthusiasm?

DK Yes, that's right. I did that with young children as well as tertiary students. It was easier to do these things when we had what we called “Creative Music”. We didn't have overly formalised classes called “Theory” with an expected historical reference or a certain expectation of teaching traditional skills in a fairly understood way by conventional academic type people.

SB Did you experiment in this way in England at all?

DK I did a tiny bit at Peckham Manor because I was in despair about how to get these adolescents engaged. When I went back to England in 1976 I took an all day workshop in Sheffield with twenty or thirty teachers, general teachers, principle teachers and a couple of music specialists. I was again a sort of Master of Ceremonies. Because they were very good teachers in a very positive environment it was a tremendous time. All sorts of interesting discussion came out of that. One of the participants was an ex-colleague of Murray Schafer and this person likened me to him and of course I was highly flattered at the time. What I did was all, in a sense, self-discovered but there must have been an environment in the air around the world that had certain people doing these things simultaneously. It just seemed to be a time when these things could happen and needed to happen.

SB Do you think if you introduce your “Creative Music” program to primary school and encourage spontaneous creativity within that context, that's sufficient for music curriculum and if people want to go away and learn orchestration or formal methods of playing instruments that's their own concern? Or do you think that's unbalanced as well?

DK My ideal program which I was never able to implement as a practising teacher in a high school or primary school...

SB … or here at tertiary level?

DK Well, here I was only responsible for certain units. But I used to try to propagate the idea to teachers of children in music at primary or secondary level 'going to town' on the creative music to get that confidently entered into without putting the skills acquisition through playing instruments, traditional repertoire as the main priority; but not to relegate these skills to oblivion. One can make an analogy with children doing things with their hands, for example, a young person learning to do carpentry, to saw wood or hammer a nail. That is a skill that demands time and special attention. If you give young children a nail with a very narrow head, rather than a broad head, and a hammer far too big or heavy they will have a terrible time. So, you have to get them the right materials so that they can hit the thing [nail] without damaging themselves or the material too much... and sawing they have to have the right wood, not too hard or soft and the right weighted saw to be able to do this. That's a bit analogous to learning to play an instrument. Whereas if in another part of their craft / art course they are given paper to make things within in three

dimensions or cardboard and paint to slap around on paper to experiment with colours, that's analogous to making sounds with minimal effort from the point of view of skill in playing an instrument. That's why percussion and things you can hit, shake and carry are such terrific sound sources for young children to be creative with rather than people feeling they have to learn the flute for five years before they dare make a melody. These things must go hand in hand. A wise person knows certain things can happen with certain materials and other materials have to be patiently nurtured. My balanced, ideal program is to have both things happening in a proper, coherent and united way so connections are made.

SB You have stressed, gently but firmly, in composition class and in private lessons the importance of “crafting”. What do you mean by “crafting”?

DK You should know, you've been listening to me for some time now to know about it! I don't know what I mean. I think for a conviction of patterning in composition. A conviction of the practicality of whether it's able to be performed. Simple things like don't ask the violin to play below or above its range or any instrument to play within its idiomatic possibilities without constraining oneself from drawing out a few extending techniques. Of course, know what instruments can do which isn't easy when you don't play them. You have to find out by listening and looking, going to texts and scores to find out how they work, to try to comprehend the mechanics; that sort of thing.

SB “Crafting” would include the practicalities of orchestration?

DK Yes, all of that. Knowing if two instruments together at certain registrations will obliterate each other, so to speak, or whether they will sound good together. You can read about a lot of this stuff in good texts but it's silly to take too much on trust until you've tried it out yourself. But how do you try it out without an orchestra at your disposal? It's sort of like a blind man trying to paint a picture up to a point. So, it's terribly important that at the institution - primary, secondary or tertiary – students of music can test their sound at every level. Not just create them and leave them on paper, but realise the proper sound. So, all students of music should be composers as well as practical players of instruments. They should do all of these things. But clearly some prefer in a specialised way to be performers or critics and others prefer to be composers. But I think they should all enter into a whole realm of music making for long periods before they specialise. And they need to start as young as possible – in the ideal general education system which we haven't got yet. But it should aspire to that so that discrimination is refined and by the time little people grow into big people they really know what makes the world tick – the world of artistic expression.

SB Do you think that the hesitation of institutions embracing more enthusiastically “creative music” is to do with assessment criteria?

DK I think it's fear of loss of control. I think administrators like to have it all neat and easily assessed. There is a fear that the students would get out of control and do what they like. But if they [students] are properly motivated, I believe, and if they're properly nurtured and if there's a sort of trust between teachers and students it won't be out of control. It will become exciting, informing, stimulating and open ended to go goodness knows where, as far as possible. I think we're loaded with traditional ideas about what is good to learn, still, and [yet] to set up an environment where students are actually led towards learning and not imposed with facts that they don't yet see as relevant – a bit like me at the

conservatorium as a student. Doing my harmony and counterpoint – I wasn't ready for it. I was doing hollow things for much of my time. I wasn't wisely lead into a way of making sense of this stuff sufficiently. If someone had picked up on my desire to compose and supported that as a principle experience rather than a kind of “in the cupboard” experience which I had to sort of “nut out” for myself, then I reckon it would have been much more stimulating and for my other student colleagues who were bored stiff most of the time. Most of them only wanted to play their instruments, you know, but what's the point of playing an instrument unless you understand what you're playing it for. So, I believe in a broad base coming toward some sort of pinnacle – specialisation – rather than the other way round. Rather than starting at a point and broadening out bit by bit in a vague hope of somehow becoming a whole person that way.

SB Let's talk about composition. I'm referring to your lecture notes: in a process of finding an idea, establishing an idea and communicating an idea you mention having a compelling musical idea “is in fact stage two in the process. That musical idea which excites us symbolises something, and that something is really the first idea or concept”. By this I suppose you mean that the origin of the musical idea is not clearly understood or identified.

DK It can be like that, yes. I think one can get excited about a musical idea. I think we often sit down and improvise on an instrument and we like what we're doing without quite understanding the implications of it. So we puddle around sometimes, if others are like me, trying to make it go somewhere and we're expending a lot of energy, maybe, puddling around not knowing how to assess the quality, sort of hoping for the best. I believe if we could find out what that idea represents in our experience a little bit more easily then it helps us to know how to fashion the idea.

SB Could you talk or expand upon finding an idea in ones experience?

DK Well, you see, ideas are all around us and I've said elsewhere so often, the major motivation areas are natural environment, human-made environment, fantasy, history and individual experience. Any idea that excites you comes from one of those or a combination of those areas. So, you walk in the bush. If your antennae are extended, which for creative people they often are, and we're all creative people so... some more attuned at certain stages than others... you might see something in the bush that captures your attention. it might be a colourful thing, a moving thing, a fluttering thing or a sound, shape, goodness knows what... it proliferates with images and sounds. There are a thousand ideas there that strike one as maybe possible. The trouble is how to control it, grab it and make it do something. How to select the best one of all those ideas that are there for the taking. So, I suppose something strikes one more often – as more important – than the others. I think in my process of composition I've sometimes had so many possible things I've wanted to do that they crowd each other out so I get confused. Experience and time has told me not to worry. If something strikes you, you go for it and if you forget the next day what it is you thought you came for don't worry, something else will be there to come in and take its place. That sounds sort of contradictory. Let's say a sound... a bush sound... say, a crackling. Someone's walked... or an animal: you hear a crackling in the undergrowth. Now that might just spark myriad possibilities. You want to capture that crackling sound somehow on conventional, acoustic, traditional instruments because that's what most of us work with still. It sounds a bit crazy, you know, to want to “crackle”. But that crackle might be associated with a whole lot of things that form a kind of narrative evocation of the bush.

So, your piece might start with your attempt to make a crackle and then go onto other things that vaguely or very clearly come to mind in your bush experience.

NF Because you wish to evoke these sounds associated with – for instance using natural climate as a source...

DK It's evoking an atmosphere which is a response to sound and images. So, images don't make sounds per se. The sounds that you make might be evoking an atmosphere which is a response to a visual image. Not necessarily a sound image.

NF In that response, is that a way of, for yourself, having some sort of personal involvement with creating – the fact that you have personal involvement with the natural environment? By emulating it, by capturing it, in a sense you're creating it...

DK Well, desiring to encapsulate it for sharing. I think it somehow gives me a pleasure to recreate that feel[ing] and to shape it into something sort of repeatable. To shape it into something you can then communicate to others to get in touch with what you felt you got in the initial impulse. I think there's a desire to capture this thing that strikes you as so worthwhile to share it in communication. To communicate things which you believe in is what it's all about surely. So, evocation is a part of it. Evocation, creating an atmosphere, also styles musical thinking: doing it through literal attempts to imitate sounds, through abstract patterning, metaphoric suggestion and just pure playing with the sounds without, in a sense, being able to explain why. So, I think there are a lot of these mixes in my composition. Go through different styles, make up little stories with characters chasing each other or getting involved with each other in the instrumental strands of the music; in and out of something literal, metaphoric, abstract. They get, in a sense, all mixed up to help one go further to create something which is true to the initial impulse. Somehow or another. I compare it to organic type growth in nature. I trust this process of connecting intuitive responses to things. I believe these patterns that result from the responses have a sense of logic in their own right which, as we're doing it, we don't always comprehend. But we try to make it sensible in our refining of the form. They [our responses] lead us into combinations of colour, pitch and rhythm that otherwise wouldn't be happening if we were following overly inherited academic type convention without tuning into what is around us in the real world and imagining and allowing our fantasy to play with these things.

NF So, a literal response isn't necessary...

DK Literalness is part of it, I think. I find it's very difficult on a piano, let's say, or any instrument that could sound like something that makes a very different sound from that thing. So you sort of compensate somehow. A trilling piano high up is really not like a bird, but it's the best the thing can do. But there are other ways of trying to emulate the bird, I think, by registration, rhythm and so on.

NF A certain free license, artistic license?

DK Well, you've got to have a freedom but I don't mean a chaotic freedom. A freedom of approach that enables you to discipline your genuine response to the motivation.

SB What is it you believe in – if you say you want to express something worthwhile?

DK Something worthwhile to me is something that moves me and goodness knows how you explain that. I mean, I am moved by all sorts of things. We all are.

SB So, it's not enough just to say it's an expression of “life” or “praise of life” as one composer termed it?

DK Well, it's a celebration of [life] rather than praising. I wouldn't choose that word myself. It's a celebration of aspects of the world. One's trying to understand the world which you're in and you find things about it that are worth getting excited about.

SB Do you take the good with the bad or are you more selective than that?

DK I wrote a piece called *River Views* a few years back which was at one point by one person negatively commented on for not dealing with a historical reference when this was a response to the Derwent River and the beauty, the contrasts of the different surfaces at various times of the day and seasons. I think this person said it might have been enhanced if it had taken due account of the pollution caused by the Risdon...

SB Zinc Works.

DK Zinc Works, yes. My response to that comment was “Well, it's just in my head, I'm just responding to what I saw”. In that instance I didn't have a historical reference. But in another piece maybe it would have been something I would like to explore. When you say “take the good with the bad” I would strive to make things ugly in order to shape them to make an acceptable musical form. For instance, this morning I was sitting at my piano making my little bird thing – my *Bird Chants II* – and I wanted at this moment to have a little bit of a furore, a frolic, a little bit of a flurry. I suppose I was trying to make the right degree of ugliness, so to speak, to suggest the flurry. The dissonance before some sort of resolution and return of calm. But if the ugliness isn't right then it's uglier than it ought to be.

SB One could say that Schönberg in *Verklärte Nacht*, for example, was responding to natural environment in a way. But there's so much internal, psychological music with that, that it comes out as very non-literal.

DK Oh yes, well let me say as I've mentioned *River Views* immediately I say to you that in that piece, and others of course, I was particularly conscious of an emotional, internal response in that very calm last movement. There is a passage or two that is my personal emotional response to that picture I'm trying to paint.

SB So part of your artistic integrity lies in representing the literalness of things and...

DK No, when you say literalness it can't be exact for me. It's metaphoric, through literalness, you might say an attempt. You see, you can't make sounds for images. The blue sky is soundless so to speak. You can only allude to it with sound, it's metaphoric; a metaphor of some kind. But if you're trying to do sound like a car going down the street or bird sounds you can get closer to it, with acoustic instruments, than the sound of the blue sky. But you will fall short because you're not a bird, you can't be that literal. But you can strive to get the literalness of the pitches right and... well, I would fall short. But I might go near enough for people to recognise the bird I'm trying to identify. So if you're, as it were,

painting a visual picture in sound that's a further remove, isn't it? And how do you allude to that? That's one of the great enchantments of striving to do these things. So... you've heard so much music where it seems to be like a certain time of day; say Delius *In a Summer Garden*. You can picture it's Summer and it's in the countryside.

SB I suppose what I'm trying to understand is do you make a choice on what emotional content you're going to express on top of the literalness?

DK Not necessarily in advance. There might be something as I'm composing that I come to in the piece and at that moment I can't bear but respond emotionally to it; the very thing I'm trying to create. So it's not necessarily pre-determined.

SB At that point you'd be responding to the sounds themselves as much as anything else, wouldn't you... at the piano?

DK I suppose so. But I'm not blaring it out saying “This is what you've got to recognise”. It's all mixed in somehow. When you think you're being literal, when you think you're making a metaphor, how can you separate the attempt to be objective to the object you're making the sound image of – how can you separate that from an emotional response? It's not easy to separate or to know when you've totally integrated or detached. At certain points I think I know when I'm conscious of being this or that but that's no guarantee an audience will know that.

SB That's interesting.

DK Because music is so, as it were, perceived as an abstract art form that it's just not sensible to say “this is that”; the composer saying “this music represents that and there's no ambiguity about it”.

SB I suppose it depends – from composer to composer – on what they're sensitive to and what their stimulus is. I mean your chosen or preferred stimulus is natural environment.

DK Well, it's a strong one but it's certainly not exclusive. When one talks about other areas they're all in there somewhere. Fantasy comes into it I think quite a lot, doesn't it? And some kind of historical thing must be entering it.

SB Would politics be tied up with history... or individual experience?

DK It all is – you can't be too clear cut about it I don't think. Whatever you think of can be identified within those five areas, I believe. If you sit at the piano, which is the instrument I use, if I twiddle about and find sounds I like but don't know why it is I like them, then I try to identify them more knowingly than I once could many years ago. You see I might say “I like that” and then add a phrase which balances that – now where do I go from there? Then another one and another one. Build it up that way without really quite knowing what I was doing in experiential terms. If I can know why I like it, as it were, because of an awareness of motivational possibilities, then it helps me to focus. It helps me to know if the balancing phrase is shorter than the original or longer. It helps me to know if it should be regular or a symmetrical or whether it should be short or fat, thin and drawn-out or spatial or... all of these things. So, if I have to go by some sort of text book that says good music should do this and do that in a conventional way rather than according to basic principles, let's say,

which books are sometimes not good at differentiating; then I'll be stymied because I'll have to emulate the models that are laid down for me from some time ago. But if I have confidence in my capacity to manipulate the sounds according to the motivation that I'm aware of, from one of those areas or a combination, that helps me enormously justify my sounds. Too bad if the listener doesn't pick that up. But of course my concern is to objectify myself as a listener and become a person in an audience, like everybody else, and I assess it that way. So, one is not so unique that one separates oneself from other listeners. You can try every which-way to test the validity. If I make outrageous sounds, outrageous to me, I have to say “are they going to be totally unacceptable to other people?” And, if they are, seemingly so, how do I make them acceptable within the context of the idea I'm trying to shape? So that's where principles come in as opposed to tawdry convention.

NF Musicians come into this as well, I'd imagine, from a performance angle.

DK Well, performers are terribly important because they add a dimension and have an opinion. The notation on the score ought to be as precise as possible but it can't be totally indicative of what you want and performers might have ideas about phrasing and dynamics and this, that and the other thing which you haven't, in fact, thought of. So, performers keep the thing fresh and variable. That's why I think one performance frozen on a recording is a bit limiting. I think one wants a piece to be performed more so that fresh interpretations can be allowed for and continuing communication.

SB When you have a musical idea that evokes a mood, specific event or is mood-less and non-specific, does that constitute a stage in tracing the origins of the idea?

DK I think it can do because if you are intent on evoking that “summer's day”, let's say, an idyllic spot by the river, you're just trying to evoke the atmosphere that you seemed to feel that day, then that might be an end point, a middle point or a starting point for something that is yet to emerge. You see, it might be a little episode and you like it for what it is but is that enough to make a piece that is substantial enough for what you're wanting to do? So that “summer's day” might be juxtaposed with something else in your internal narrative which may or may not be spelt out in the title or a program note depending upon, I suppose, how overt you want to be in your communication of specific ideas for the piece.

SB On establishing the idea, having found it, you mention in your lecture notes four types of thinking: pure, abstract, literal and metaphoric. Would you care to comment on how they combine?

DK I think they're a means of helping one know how to go forward in the piece. So, we've talked about literal bird sound or car sound, wind in the trees sound or goodness knows what; so that literal thing might turn into something quite abstract because you like those combinations of pitches and rhythms: that pattern. So, you might play with it in a purely abstract way because you just love it. And you want to mirror it, vary it, muck it about because it can bear it. Then it might lead you to a new part of your private story. The abstract bit, so to speak, might be a joining bit; a bridge into another moment of conscious metaphor... or literalness... or something.

SB So, there's no hierarchy with these?

DK I'm not sure that there's any hierarchy, really. I think most people think abstract expression is on top of the pile. I'm not sure about that because I think when people talk about abstraction they're often, I think, not aware of what personal experience has led them to make of the expression. You see, I often think if we're very emotional, someone's made us very sad or very happy or something, we might express that mood which seems very abstract... very happy, OK this is a joyful piece about nothing in particular... but we might know if we search into ourselves what it is in particular. And we might, therefore, enable that experience, in a conscious way, to lead us into other directions to complement that joyful expression.

SB If you have been lead to individual experience from a specific event can the five areas of motivation blend together?

DK Yes. I think they all weave in and out of each other quite often. Sometimes we're not conscious of it. Sometimes it's retrospective knowing.

SB These stages of composition are not static: one, two, three, finished result. It's always in flux.

DK Yes, I think so. And it's sort of unpredictable. In the act of composition you can fall on these ways to help you know how to go: “is this metaphoric?”, “what does this represent?”, “what mode of thinking am I exploring?”. If you call on these knowings it can help you know where to go in the piece if you're stymied. If you are trying to justify that “strange” sound here that knowingness or reference might help you accept that sound or shape it differently to become acceptable. So, it's got to match up to the criteria that you're developing in yourself.

SB So, when it comes to communicating the idea, or stage three, you've reached a sufficient level of knowingness to do that. Is it only by this stage that form is taken into consideration?

DK I think form is there all the time. I think you're, so to speak, shaping the thing all the time. So if, for example, music is temporal therefore it's in time, if I think “that's too short” then I lengthen it to match the idea and that's to do with form. Formal shaping. So the form gradually emerges. But you can pre-determine an ideal. In other words you can say I want to make a fifteen minute piece. The fifteen minutes must be justified by the way the events happen with the fifteen minutes. So, you can pre-determine at the same time being flexible in arriving at the shape.

NF Do you use bits you've written in the past which you haven't used in pieces and actually transfer them into a present piece?

DK I find myself cross-referencing quite a lot, not necessarily from other pieces but from bits within the same piece. I noticed you doing that, you people, too. I like this idea of taking up an idea seemingly randomly from earlier in the pieces and putting it into a new context and transforming it. It's a way of cohering, but it's also a bit risky. You could be accused of running out of ideas so you take something from earlier on, I suppose. But if it's done with conviction it all adds up. Look, if you picture yourself standing in the bush and letting the eye rove around certain images recur. Your eye wanders over to the west and you've go those rolling hills. You then let your eye go to the north and you've go a patch of

sea in the distance. Then you go south and you've got a great big mountain behind you. Now I, in my pieces, don't sort of look in one direction, deal with that, in another, deal with that; I might let my eye go back and forth and cross-reference the images and the same with ideas.

NF So it's not some sort of linear framework.

DK Well, it's sort of linear. Music happens in time going forward but it can allude to spatial, retrospective, three-dimensional, timeless, frozen moments. I think it's fun to try to suggest standing still qualities. I think music can do that. I think in our time a lot of music has conveyed that very well, more than perhaps in earlier ages, and I find myself caught up in that a little bit.

SB Could you expand on “stillness” in music?

DK Stillness can be suggested by movement. Let me take the birds again because I'm preoccupied with them at this moment. If you were standing in a glade in the forest and it's still, nothing is moving, it's a sunny, beautiful autumnal day... autumn has a suggestion of nostalgia let's say... and you're hearing these different varieties of birds with their different calls – they're getting interlocked and so forth – but they're essentially creating that stillness. Time is passing very slowly, the sun will eventually go down of course, but it's indiscernible. So, the repetition of these sounds, not developmental but over-lapping like a kaleidoscope, can allude to a certain stillness. It's not totally still of course, it's moving forward in time. Movement helps create stillness otherwise we'd just have silence like John Cage's famous piece called...

SB … 4:33...

DK Exactly... wasn't meant to be silent. It was meant to embrace extended sounds in the environment, people coughing, pages turning, chuckling, sneezing, traffic or whatever.

NF So, stillness in your music... could you say that there's a subtle balance between consonances and dissonances?

DK Yes, tension and relaxation. A balance between tension and relaxation or musical terms “consonance” and “dissonance” is central. You were talking about Beethoven last week, weren't you?

SB Yes.

DK That's partly what he would have been referring to [the relationship between the sensuous and the spiritual].

SB In regards to texture, vertical and horizontal, are there any general principles that you apply to your own work to gauge the degrees of dependence and independence between parts?

DK I'm sure there are. Because, I mean, when you're shaping a passage one's always asking oneself “is this too high?”, “is this too long?” If there's another incident going with it are they too far apart? Or too close? Or should there be more of a bit of that and a bit of

this? So, again, the principle is guided by the idea that lies behind the reason for doing the piece. So, we all know that bird sounds, a lot of them, are very high; higher than acoustic instruments can properly attain. So, my piano piece tends to be high, in general terms. If I go down low, which occasionally I will do, that's probably to convey a sense of turbulence, a sense of emotional response that is not in a literal category. If you're doing a Bach-like counterpoint, then you're confined I suppose to those sorts of conventions.

SB Entries of voices and what-have-you.

DK Yes, all of that. But, you see, these things again get mixed up a little bit because we're all responsive to the repertoire we inherit through our ears and our eyes and everything else. So, I mean, I will concern myself with a compliance with not-too-severe-for-too-long – when I say “severe” I'm talking about “dissonance” or “tension” - but again that has to comply, more fundamentally, with the idea motivating it. So, I'm conscious of these birds “chanting”, rather than the piece complying with a “Bach” convention. But at the same time I'd be concerned to have some sort of suggestion of counterpoint as opposed to homophony. So, a certain amount of contrapuntal “mucking about” as opposed to vertical compliance without any sort of interest in the relationship between the parts, so to speak.

SB If you are working with aspects of stillness and “non-linear” progression, there's no goal to the counterpoint, is there? Or there is no harmonic goal?

DK There might be a residue of sound, like a pedal sound, a soft-pedal sound, that goes through the silence. The silence may not be literal. There may be a sound to suggest a silence. It's contrived to allude to that possibility. And the surface sound of the birds twittering might be more to the fore in this underlying pedal “residue” sound. But of course there would be literal silence, there would be total silence in there as well. And that has a function to prepare one for the next bit, or to have one recover from the last bit, to an extent. In other words, the eye might have, and the ear might have been taken with this little bit of activity over there, then you shut your eyes and turn off for a moment. It's all about placing and alluding to and imagining yourself being enchanted by this.

SB I've been searching for analogies and there's one that springs to mind: the flexing and relaxing of a muscle. It hasn't moved anywhere, it's just extended itself and then contracted. Could a piece of music operate in the same way?

DK I'm sure it does. Very concentrated bits which might be a diminution of the rhythms and the intervals or an elongated, spread-out bit. This sort of accelerating the whole bit, wriggling it up, intensifies the activity and brings it to a point of unbearable tension. So it needs silence to relieve it.

SB So, the movement is non-linear, isn't it? It's not concerned with going from A to B, it's concerned with observing the whole [process]...

DK I think it's concerned with both somehow.

SB It is?

DK I think it can be. I mean, it's all about allusion. And I'm not sure if I'm always aware of it.

SB Well, I suppose if you're making up narratives it can mean...

DK The narrative can be very loose. It can be seen as a party-trick to excuse all sorts of unacceptable behaviour. But, more seriously, it's an attempt to use every which-way of looking at what you're trying to make to assess its viability within the idea.

SB Would you care to comment on “good” and “bad” taste?

DK Well, that's very difficult, isn't it? I think I know what appals me sometimes. And I know when I'm absolutely “turned on”. But asking me to define it is another thing. I think people who are really tuned into things, by that I mean are super-sensitive to things around them, have a capacity to pick up minutiae and regard it with reverence, so to speak, as opposed to crass banality at the expense of...

SB ...so, you would hope that “good taste” would be something a person, a human being, could acquire over a life-time as their sense of discrimination improves?

DK I do think our system of education has the potential to develop “aesthetic taste” and it has the potential, I suppose, to do the opposite if teachers are totally insensitive and new experiences are crass. But, ideally, I think it should be concerned to develop an aesthetic discriminatory potential in the student. Personally, I think, my aesthetic sense has refined but I clearly remember when quite young responding to certain things that no-one around me seemed to respond to. I mean I got moved – still do – very easily by lots of things. Perhaps I'm overly sentimental too, I think that comes into it a bit. So, sometimes I feel sort of peculiar if I get moved by certain things that no-one else does; I think maybe I'm a bit odd or something. But I generally tend to trust my intuitive responses. As hard as it is I think we should be concerned about “aesthetic development”. I really do. Because we must find a way of becoming more discriminating.

SB So, a principle towards that, from a composer's point of view, if you're giving it your “best shot” at a point in time it won't, that is the piece, won't lose aesthetic value but hopefully you'll produce better pieces as you go along.

DK Hopefully. Every piece is a stepping stone. But sometimes we prejudge our own work because we don't have the opportunity to know the importance of it. Or perhaps one performance. If we are lucky enough to have sequence of performances of the same piece then it can help us know the potential of our own work. It lives more. If we're locked into just reading the score and not hearing it physically, or hearing one mediocre performance and judging it on that evidence, that's a shame. That's partly why I would urge everyone not to chuck away their music if they think it's no good because of a lousy performance or no performance – someone's rejected it and therefore you think it's no good. I think if you believe in what you've done it's important to hold onto. One day it might resurface for you. If not as exactly as it is, to be taken up and be shaped into something else. To hold on to that pearl of an idea that's embedded in the oyster. So, it's all about patience and faith and goodness knows what. I really think it's tough for the composer in many ways. So, an important criterion for being one is to have faith and to have resilience and perseverance, stamina and a touch of naivete, too. Because if you're not that way you quickly get disillusioned... basic optimism I suppose.

24th February, 1999 – Don Kay interviewed by Simon Reade, assisted by Simon Barber.

Pieces: *River Views, String Quartets 2 & 3, Flute Quintet, Bird Chants II, Rhapsody, The Legend of Moinee – Tasmania Symphony, Symphony 2 – The South Land, Concert Music for Viola and Strings, Violin Concerto, Piano Concerto, Night Spaces, Land of Moinee, Cello Sonata, Saxophone Dances, String Quartets, Serenade, Dance Movement for Orchestra, Dance Concertante, Rondino*

Other topics: *"abstract" concertos vs."Tasmanian" symphonies, Bach and nature, spontaneity*

SR Don, your music, especially many of the larger works have characteristic elements relating to your desire to be identified as Tasmanian. In some ways your concertos, beginning with the concert music and going through the violin and piano concertos seem

to be at odds with this; working with what on the surface are simply abstract musical patternings. Could you:

a) explain how this is the case in the concertos;
b) how this is *not* the case;
c) and how you reconcile this with works that have strong Tasmanian connections such as
your two symphonies bearing in mind that *Legend of Moinee* has certain concerto-like aspects?

DK Right, what a complex question! First of all the viola piece – *Concert Music for Viola and Strings* – was the first one written in the 1970s. At that time I was still... not overly conscious of trying to make a Tasmanian music. I was just trying to make music and trying to establish my credibility a bit as someone who, first of all, could do a concerto. I wasn't game, I thought it didn't qualify perhaps. In spite of Peter Komlos who asked me to do it saying "of course it's a concerto". But the second movement, the *cavatina*, does consciously respond to the area called Bonnet Hill south of Hobart, going towards Kingston. The weather patterns... I was conscious of although in the score there's no evidence of that by the title of the movements or anything. So I think that particular movement built my confidence about responding to local, environmental patterns. But it wasn't overt.

The *Violin Concerto* for Jan Sedivka in 1982 was a piece I wrote for him – it was a commission. Again – because of that word "concerto" - I felt perhaps I hadn't in my own head equated "concerto" with a kind of narrative or extra-musical association. So, although I had made pieces that were responsive to aspects of Tasmania I saw that concerto – as did other people – as not part of that concern. So, it's important, I think, that I'll continue to make pieces that aren't particularly to do with Tasmanian responses. I always have and I suppose always will but in more recent years I've been conscious of wanting to do that, exploring Tasmanian responses, and acknowledging that it's affected my musical language.

So, the three concertos, each in their separate ways, were really an attempt to just write a concerto in a way that had a credibility and could be identified as just that: something that featured a solo instrument with orchestral accompaniment. So I just, I suppose,

chose not to make the association with external factors evident in those pieces. They're each quite different by the way. I wanted the *Violin Concerto* to bear in mind something to do with Jan Sedivka's personality. So, I think there's an allusion to central European aspects. In fact, some people said they found it a bit like, of all people, Janacek. That wasn't a conscious thing at all. But I think trying to think of Jan Sedivka's personality, there might be something of a central European quality about it, perhaps, but not in a too self-conscious way.

The *Piano Concerto* for Beryl Sedivka... Beryl asked me when I was doing it, she said "Is it anything like Moinee, has it some Tasmanian association?"... "Oh, no Beryl it's quite abstract". I think she was disappointed somehow. She didn't say but I sort of sensed she hoped it would have an association with something local. But I'm not entirely accurate when I say it has nothing to do with something local because the middle movement, the slow movement, I do have something in mind, if I'm honest. I have in mind a Tasmanian summer's day. A laid back, relaxed, summer's day feeling. Whether that is conveyed through the music is another thing. But that was in my head. I don't call it that [*"A Summer's Day"*], I just call it slow movement, you know, second movement.

SR Yes, I think with that movement, certainly in the context of your language, has some reference to those concerns. What I was particularly interested in, I think, with the concertos vs your symphonies – sort of taking a classical, traditional point of view; the big, symphony orchestra works, your symphonies are so wholly concerned with this place – Tasmania – and your concertos are, on the surface, so different. I just wonder how these connections are, because also considering *The Legend of Moinee* is a concerto in the sense that it does have a soloist, but it's still a symphony.

DK Yes, well someone I respect thought it was more like a symphonic poem because it had that association with extra-musical concerns. I see it as a symphony with 'cello as a featured solo instrument. I think it has a symphonic structure. I like to think it stands up without having anyone aware of its "Moinee" connection. And, of course, the 'cello solo isn't featured at all in the fourth movement. I had to rationalise all of that in the context of the structure so, in a way, it's more like, I suppose, Berlioz' *Harold in Italy* – which Paganini rejected at one point because it wasn't hard enough. And I think Christian [Wojtowicz] at one point said as a concerto it wouldn't gain attention from 'cellists because it didn't have 'cello virtuosity as a main criterion – and I absolutely agree with that. I think with the other two, let's say the *Piano Concerto* and the *Violin Concerto*, I was thinking of the piano and violin being virtuosic soloists as the primary concern. With *The Legend of Moinee* I was thinking of, so to speak, relating the legend of Moinee with the spirit of Moinee being an important ingredient. Not necessarily in a virtuosic [instrumental] sense. Not that I thought I was making a highly virtuosic piano or violin concerto. I was thinking of the two people who were playing them, their personalities and not, sort of, spinning patterns for the heck of it in a kind of totally abstract way. I'm a bit confused about all of this. But certainly I thought of those three pieces [the concertos] as primarily abstract pieces. But allowing for slow movements in two of them as being a bit different. I also think the *Violin Concerto*, I must admit, again in the slow movement I thought of that as having associations with the cosmos. I experimented with aleatoric "star-twinkling", for example, as in *Night Spaces* much later. So, there were extra-musical associations. I can't claim they're totally abstract.

SR Does the *Violin Concerto*, with its basis in the five piano duets...?

DK Yes, absolutely – thanks for reminding me; they all had extra-musical associations. *Stars at Night, Mirror Patterns, Swaying with Syncopation, Morning Song...* yes, it was very much based on those small piano pieces for young performers. The tunes I took. So, in a sense, I had those qualities in my mind...

SR Well, to me it just seems that there's a connection between all these things.

DK The *Violin Concerto* I remember having to rationalise the sequencing of the movements to sort of justify the inclusion of all these tunes in a bigger piece for an eminent performer like Jan Sedivka. And with a fully professional orchestra like the TSO involved. How to make what started out as childish, well, pieces for children, blow up into a professional piece worthy of those performers? But I found that a fascinating challenge. I don't think too many realised that, you know, that that was how I went about it. But also, though, I hadn't yet arrived at a stage of consciousness about how I fitted into a Tasmanian aspiration.

SR I think it shows an interesting progression because the symphonies are generally later... the piano concerto sits in between the two...

DK Yes. Remember when I talked about learning as a spiral. You go forward, go back, consolidate and extend out a bit. I think the *Piano Concerto* was in my consolidation phase rather than in an extension phase. But a piece of that dimension is also very challenging, you know, trying to get all the balances and satisfy one that it was doing the right thing by the pianist and the orchestra – that sort of thing you know. Because of these differences I value all of these pieces for different reasons. If it hasn't got an overt Tasmanian connection it doesn't mean I value it less. You see, in all of us there are all sorts of possibilities.

SR Perhaps the concertos come along the way of consolidating your thoughts through the virtuosity of the person for whom you are writing. As opposed to being an extension of your ideas in this abstract context which is only for yourself like writing *Land of Moinee* in 1983 which is an extension into something new.

DK I think all of that does come into it because in a way in concerti you are writing for a particular personality as a primary objective, you know, hopefully that that person comes to be gratified with. It's complex. Now, when I wrote my cello sonata [*Sonata for Cello and Piano*] for Christian, I say in the little note in the front page of the score “although I regard it as an abstract pieces it is a result of my developing musical language that is response to landscape, ecology, environmental factors”. But I think I've used that language in more of an abstract way. I mean that's what I think. Whether it's perceived that way by the listener is another thing.

SR I think that a listener familiar with a range of your music – it certainly would be the case that your more abstract works are part of this cycle of thinking. Whereas the *Saxophone Dances,* which are simple dances...

DK But, again, I have little stories within them. I call the first one *Bell Dance*. Absolutely nothing to do with Tassie [Tasmania]. Or any specific place. Except I have in that first movement the idea of bells clanging. I suppose, in part, because of the open intervals. When a lot of bells are clanging they're kind of unpredictable in their rhythm patterns. So,

although it's a fairly ordered sounding piece, I think I do hear something that is consistent with the title somehow. The *Round Dance*, the second movement, I have a ritual circling... people in a circle... as has cropped up in other pieces. In the last one, *Processional*, that has a ritualistic sort of thing too. It's something to do with ancient European...

SR You get these rituals which – are just by the nature of your writing them – relate to pieces which are rituals in more specific ways like *Night Spaces*.

DK *Night Spaces?*

SR Being a work where the ritualistic nature of the piece is defined as being night sounds and conveying that.

DK I think of ritual as a formal display of something that is quite vague, often. I think of *Night Spaces* as more of a nature piece. I think of *Saxophone Dances* as ritualistic, in the sense that vaguely, let's say, I'm somehow thinking of bells clanging in a medieval township. I'm thinking of *Circle Dance* as being at a time like that. Not in our place and time. And also the *Processional* for some reason.

SR But I think the way in which the music goes forward on these processes that there are always going to be connections between whatever the reasons for writing the pieces is, whether it's a “nature piece” or whether it's a [ritualistic piece].

DK Oh, I think so. I've said before that each piece is a stepping stone, there are residues from one piece to the next. So, when you talk to me I'm reminded of these connections outside the purely abstract in that they crop up in what I think are abstract pieces. But I still think the concertos are more tending to be abstract and complying with what people think of as concertos, you know, fast movement, slow movement, fast movement with a couple of cadenzas thrown in etc. Like an expected format. So, in that sense they're not at all innovative. But I hope they are personal. I hope they can be identified with my other pieces... by the nature of the quirks, you know. Which, of course, are part response to nature patternings. Which is just integral.

SR The way you're talking about concertos is seeing them as complying with tradition. When you come to write other works like the symphonies... actually, perhaps, your string quartets comply with tradition in whatever sense that is; but when you come to write the symphonies maybe because the symphonic tradition has been so expanded over the course of the century they really don't comply with, necessarily, a standard symphonic tradition in the same way as your concertos do. So, I wonder how do you reconcile feeling bound to a tradition and not feeling bound to it?

DK I'm not sure if I do! It might simply be I felt less confident making a concerto than a thing I call a symphony. I suppose I think I felt freer, in a sense, than in the concerto because the focus on the performer being displayed was primarily in my mind in the things called “concertos”.

SR A lot of concertos written this century do comply with tradition. If they don't they are usually given another title as if they are nothing to do with the concerto tradition. I know I've done that and I can't really explain why. Do you think the concerto, in that [traditional] sense, is a fairly dead entity... if you're calling “it” a “concerto”?

DK I think in my head it seems to inhibit possibilities, you might say. I mean *River Views* for trombone and orchestra happened because Simone de Haan invited me to do a piece for the conservatorium. “Use whatever you like”, he said. So I thought of the string orchestra and wanted Christian [Wojtowicz] too somehow be involved – conducting the ensemble. The most easy to get together and rehearse was clearly the string ensemble because there's a weekly class called “string orchestra”. So, that was neat. Christian did it, so that was neat and then I thought perhaps I should include Simone as he is the person who asked me. To do something for trombone and strings seemed an unlikely combination but I wanted to do something for the place. For other reasons I've done other pieces similar to that; for similar reasons but slightly different, doing pieces for the con[servatorium]. There was a problem, I think, to know what to call *River Views* other than *River Views* because it's not a concerto. It's like a string orchestra piece with trombone obbligato or something. The trombone has a central place in bits of it. So, it's slightly quirky from the point of view of categorising. Someone who reviewed was troubled by the predominance of trombone in certain bits and not in others and tried to explain it in a way that sort of reconciled two aspects of the trombone's uses as a soloist in some bits and a kind of ensemble player in other bits. At the very first rehearsal Simone was standing in front as if he were playing a concerto or solo. But because of the balances we quickly decided he should go to the back of the ensemble.

SR I was just about to mention that. The way it was set up in the performance with Simone at the back of the Stanley Burbury theatre it really indicated a different look.

DK I think apart from anything else to call it *River Views for Trombone and String Orchestra* is a much better thing than calling it a “concerto” or something else. I think, in a way, partly for hat reason, I called *Concert Music for Viola and String Orchestra* that because I wasn't convinced it was a proper concerto – first attempt in any case. Now I think it is a concerto but I'm not going to change the title because that would take away a historical fact in the conception of the piece. Certainly Anthony Clarke said it was a kind of “interaction”, not like a normal concerto or something because the orchestra had its independence from the soloist. But I don't think he's entirely right. I see the orchestra as accompanying the soloist, not competing with it. But concertos can have competition between soloist and orchestra or compatibility. Mendelssohn is a good case for compatibility – the E minor violin concerto. Brahms is a good case for competition between violin solo and orchestra. But usually most concertos have some sort of reconciliation and some sort of conflict, at some point, between them. So, I think that would be the case in my three pieces. You're absolutely right though. It complies more with a classical model. And I think, in my case anyway, because I'm thinking of the personality playing the thing as the focus. Next question.

SR I don't know whether I have another question on this topic at the moment.

SB We could talk about the quartets.

SR I don't know whether I could. I don't really know what to ask about them yet.

DK Well, what they represent. I still value the second quartet very highly. I think I value all of them in their own ways but they've got nothing to do with what I think you're wanting to see: a Tasmanian connection.

SR Just looking at the completion dates the first one was finished at the beginning of the 1970s and they were all finished very quickly, one on top of another. Obviously there were people to play them.

DK There are several years between them.

SR Yes, but compared to the concertos which are spread out over ten years.

DK I suppose so. That's partly because people don't always ask you to do these things. It's not because I necessarily didn't want to or couldn't or anything.

SR Well, no. But the concentration of them and then the lapse, the complete removal of...

DK Well, again you see, they'd been written because there were quartets here who wanted them.

SR It's difficult to work out where they fit. They certainly seem to fit into their own world as a trio – not having heard the first one but seen it on the score: it certainly goes through its processes of reconciling the twelve tone music of its beginning.

DK The first one? Yes.

SR Then in the second creating this very large, tight structure which goes through a 35 minute form...

DK Yes, well, that second one in 1975 I felt at the top of my form. I felt very confident I wanted to do something like that and I felt good about the quartet being available. I was trying to demonstrate a slap in the face for somebody who, I thought should have known better than to discourage me from doing a big orchestral pieces which I felt ready to do. So this was a compensatory invitation to write for the *Rialannah Quartet*. I thought I would really do as good a pieces as I can to show something – which you could say was in the mind of the person who didn't encourage the support of an orchestral piece. Even as I did it, it was commented on as being in a conservative idiom. That was right at the time when avant-gardism, novelty and innovation were perceived as the current fashion to be part of. I never did see myself as part of that. I always tried to make pieces true to myself, so I was trying to express something that I felt I could do well.

SR That fashion of serialised music you've reconciled in the first quartet and then it's moving on from there.

DK But there are residues, particularly in the third movement, of serial, chromatic something or others...

SR And you've said before you assimilate these techniques and then you use them where they're appropriate.

DK A bit of a magpie really.

SR Fair enough. What I was just going to say was, just thinking about the second and third quartets where you can't really say that there's any extra-musical...

DK Yes, you can. But it's hidden in the...

SR Well, what I was going to say was there are certainly echoes of various pieces that you can hear like some of the moments in the second quartet, maybe the beginning of the last movement has certain echoes of the *Flute Quintet* which I know you said had certain connotations of an awareness of being able to make something about and for Tasmania. So, there are these connections. And maybe the third movement of the third quartet as well. That seems to use some of those...

DK … spatial qualities?

SR Yes.

DK Yes, I think you're absolutely right. But you see in the two quartets – the second and the third – there were very personal, emotional involvements. In both of the quartets I was experiencing marriage break-up. And the second movement, I thought, the marriage was being saved, let's say. The second movement, particularly, is a very heartfelt...

SR Of the second quartet?

DK The second quartet, yes.

SR Well, that one you wrote about in an article saying that had reminiscences of...

DK … the avenue of pine trees?

SR Yes.

DK Up near Stanley. Yes, but that was a metaphor for nostalgia and wishing all the pain would go away and I could return to childhood. That's in that as well.

SR Yes, a kind of Mahlerian attachment to the...

DK Mahlerian?

SR … maybe; attachment to earth as being a metaphor for lost innocence?

DK Yes, I see, I suppose...

SR The third quartet seems to got from real abstraction into what seems like a safe home. It's a very interesting work because it moves through these three very different movements. It seems to reach a home of some assurance in the third movement but really doesn't end that way. It ends very up in the air.

DK Yes, I think you're right again. I think it sort of “settles” for a kind of open-ended, almost mystical, spatial thing off into infinity. But so does the second quartet. More than some of the later pieces that would purport to be less referential to external events or landscapes which might be seen as a metaphor for personal, psychological things. The quartets are each very personal in a very conscious way, I suppose you could say. But at the same time they're just called quartets one, two and three.

SR In that way it's sort of going with the tradition of quartet writing... as also we were talking about with the concertos... but then also not because, I mean, certainly you've got movement structures but particularly in the third those movements are so independent of one another in a lot of ways; it's also going against a tradition of quartet writing in a Bartokian or Beethovian sense.

DK Yes. I must say in earlier years Bartok was quite a model. I'm going back to the 1960s. I think I responded to Bartok then more than anybody and I suspect that in the quartets and in the concertos I'd be aware of Bartok as some kind of influence. I'm not sure about complying or not with tradition. I mean, they're all personal. The obvious framework of three or four movements is kind of there. I mean, a four movement quartet, like the second one, is much more – in that superficial sense – complying with tradition than either the first, which is in one movement, or the third which is in three movements. But I think the third quartet, in the second movement perhaps, serves the purpose of a slow movement and maybe some sort of a bridge too. Because, as I recall, it ends with a sort of cadence that is half closed and leads into the third movement, even if it's very different; it's like, sort of, letting go of something a bit tense.

SR Well even the first movement sort of expires into the second movement.

DK But in the second quartet, the third movement, I've called “half-cadence” - whatever the Italian term is – and it's kind of like a little “breather” between the second (slow movement), which is quite extended (it's a ten minute long movement) and the finale. It's like a little – I don't know what.

SR An interlude?

DK Sort of. But it's also riddled with its own strange echoes of the second movement.

SR Just going back to the *Flute Quintet* that's sort of what the third movement there does as well but it's retrograde and...

DK … mirror patterns...

SR … mirrors, yes. It provides a bit of aural relief between the second and the fourth movements which you mention when you talk about that on the broadcast. About those two being the movements you felt most strongly about.

DK In the *Flute Quintet*, because it is a first attempt to make a piece for that combination, part of me is very tentative. So, one is trying to, at least me, I'm trying to impress with my ability to demonstrate my grasp of certain traditional capacities. I suspect the second symphony, *The South Land*, is less concerned with adhering to these formalities and yet, even though it is in one movement, it's still in three sections. It's pretty hard for me to escape the notion of having the fast followed by a slow followed by a fast movement. All contrasts. But, I mean, I think I must have a confidence in the natural world, let's say, being formally pretty well put together. So, any human contrivance by way of formal shaping can take nature as its model with some confidence. In my last interview with you where I'm talking about – in *Bird Chants II* – contrapuntal things a la Bach a little bit and I'm saying if you're true to the original impulse and motivation, in that case birds chanting simultaneously in a sort of “bird chaos”; if you do it truly the form should be OK. Just as

Bach in his abstract contrapuntal language was also responding in some way to nature. But it's so formalised at this remove in time; so seemingly abstract and so intellectual, mathematical in a way, that we can overlook the emotional impact that surely he was experiencing in “god's world”, so to speak. So it would have been wrong of me to have conveyed that because Bach is using formal procedures; something separate from responding to the world around him... I only thought of that when I was reading it [the transcript from 3rd February] yesterday because I wasn't quite happy with you saying that if it's not linear form it somehow makes the harmony have no point. And I'm saying, without saying it very well, that harmony, texture, pitch and rhythmic organisation, colour, dynamics are all considered as well as you can to make the form right. And, of course, music is linear in that it is a temporal art but it can allude to spatial, “standing still” qualities. That doesn't make it or any aspect or element of it, e.g. the harmony or melody somehow pointless. It's just another way of responding formally to an impulse with a convention that is different from a convention of another time. I mean Bach signed his pieces “to the glory of god” and I suspect he's often responding to the most profound, fundamental, human qualities. I suppose we all are. But [he] preferred not to explain the processes he went through. Perhaps he did but we haven't had them documented yet.

SR Staying with your more abstract pieces I want to go to pieces which seem to me to be relatively minor pieces for whatever reason – maybe just the performance I've heard is less. I'm thinking of things like the *Rhapsody* you wrote for Jan and Beryl Sedivka and the *Serenade* you did for piano trio. Even *Saxophone Dances*. How do you justify to yourself wanting to write these abstract pieces that seem to have no real connection – although we've talked about the *Saxophone Dances* having some on the surface.

DK The *Rhapsody* was done for Jan and Beryl by request. I was thinking of those two people who often play together having a friendship over the years and admiration for the way they play as an ensemble. And a conscious awareness of something of their cultural background. All of these things come into my mind as a sort of preparation for making the piece. I suppose I tried to make a piece that would please them. And in striving to do that – whether they were pleased or not is another matter – one would take into account their technical capacity to cope with whatever you give them and something of their cultural milieu as you understand it, rightly or wrongly. I would have done that piece with great affection. Just as much as any other. The *Serenade* for violin, 'cello and piano was done as a request of Jan Sedivka for the 80th birthday of Lady Burley – Victoria's mother – and I would have done that with the same affection. Trying to make a piece that was suitable for that person at that stage of life somehow. And again something the three players could enjoy playing together without it being too demanding or requiring hours and hours of rehearsal. An occasional piece. A piece that would give me great pleasure in being able to fit the occasion.

SR So, writing for occasions and giving to people: that's obviously important. Thinking of a connection – maybe – the *Dance Movement for Orchestra* or the *Dance Concertante* you did for the Tasmanian Chamber Players, in a sense, those were occasional pieces. A given thing that's actually given for whatever... and I suppose the occasional piece for the Stravinsky [birthday celebration] given to his celebration.

DK I think in both pieces [*Dance Movement for Orchestra* and *Dance Concertante*] there's certainly a celebration happening. I think the Stravinsky [piece] was my first piece

for professional orchestra. I only had three weeks to do it. I had a three minute time frame for the piece, like all the others. So I sort of had to quickly make up my mind about doing that and I thought the primary goal was to celebrate the birthday. And in so doing I probably was conscious of what I understood of Stravinsky so it probably has superficial, stylistic resemblances here and there. Not too strong, I would have thought, because I'm not Stravinsky and I couldn't be emulating the mastery of Stravinsky. But I was quite pleased to be invited, first of all, and delighted to have the opportunity. And three weeks to do it. But I think it's characteristic of me at that time. I think there are certain characteristics, don't you think...?

SR Certainly.

DK ...that sort of binds these pieces together. The *Dance Concertante* was another pleasure to do with the Tasmanian Chamber Players. And, again, the idea of that was to feature the leaders of the sections in the “concertante”. The “dance type” thing is a way of expressing the celebration. It was a spring tour so new growth in the air and that sort of thing. But even then in that piece the “shimmering” bit in the middle I have local reference in mind there. I'm thinking of out in the country, a pond with reeds and the wind ruffling the surface of the water. Like a little oasis right in the middle of the piece before the celebratory dance themes happen on either side of it. That was my narrative, my way of making the piece have internal sense for me. But I think listeners would take it in the abstract. The most they could say is that it seems to be full of rhythm, life, which is what I hoped. But there's an inner narrative that wouldn't be overtly explained unless people like you want that kind of information.

SB Why do you choose to sometimes make these “inner narratives” public and sometimes to keep them private?

DK When I say “not public”, it's public through telling you right now, isn't it? I suppose there's a time and a place. I'll tell anybody anything if they can draw it out of me, probably! I think in the occasion of *Dance Concertante*, if there's a program note invited of me, which there wasn't, or if there was a very brief like, you know, twenty words or something; in the context of that sort of opportunity there was not time to talk about that sort of detail. Simple as that, I think. But in an extended conversation or writing an essay I wouldn't hesitate to say anything. But if you call something *Dance Concertante* or if you call something *Dance Movement* or whatever other titles I've used, in a way that's enough to let people take it as they want to take it. *The Legend of Moinee* is different because the very title is provocative: who's Moinee? What does this mean, what's all this about? So, you need to give a bit more information. There's nothing secretive though, as far as I'm concerned. A bit like Percy Grainger, I like people to know the process. But you can't bore people to death with a great long screed about a piece two minutes long. Carry on. Does that answer satisfy you?

SB Not entirely because you choose to make the piece public and that's partly because it's commissioned. You then have always encouraged us as students to provide program notes and actually make a point of saying “Have you got your program notes?”

DK Yes, even if it's saying very straight-forward, basic things. I think it's good to – and I include myself in this – to try to say something about it. Whether you give any secrets away or not is another thing.

SR I'm just interested in how you connect these. Because when I'm thinking about my own music I – certainly more now – find it very difficult to find a reason to write something unless it's got strong connection to the sort of things I've been thinking about. I find it very difficult to start... [e.g.] “I want to write a piece for Jan's 80th birthday” - your *Rondino*. Just to come up with that and put it away. It's obviously a gift. But has very little obvious connection – possibly no connection to what the body of your work is saying.

DK Well, let me put it this way, some things are a pleasure; they're just a giving. But everything I would do – like the *Rondino,* the *Serenade*, the *Rhapsody* and things like that; I would do it with all the expertise or integrity or whatever you want to call it I could muster; to be pleasing for the people who are experiencing it. And I would have a confidence that in so-doing the language of it... that there would some sort of consistency between them and the bigger pieces. Not necessarily better pieces. But bigger pieces. I would regard them all as being my best. But some would clearly be seen as more or less important than others.

SR Do you see works as being more or less important? How do you respond yourself to a work? Like... *Rondino* is a nice example. It's a very short piece.

DK Well, I only heard it once but I loved hearing it on that one occasion. And part of my “thing” was to get in a bit of “Happy Birthday”. It sounds silly, doesn't it? But sort of hide it there in the texture and unless I mention it people may not pick it up. If they didn't know it was written for Jan Sedivka's birthday they may not be looking for it, you see. I get fascinated by these little... I mean, we're so diverse, each of us in ourselves, we can do all sorts of things. So, I use music to get multi-pleasures from. But I would hope there would be a consistency in it with other very different pieces. In other words: you know how we can recognise Mozart in most of his big and little pieces, or Bach or Beethoven; all great composers. I'd be pleased if you were to see a consistency in my little pieces with the other pieces.

SB There's also quite a nice, delightful little risk involved in being asked to write a short piece – will'o the wisp – and you have to condense an awful lot into that to have it live up to your standard.

SR Just passing over to Simon [Barber] for a second. That piece you wrote for Rebekah, for her birthday, the other day; I mean you did it in one night. And you've given me a couple of pieces, one you wrote for double bass, one you wrote for 'cello where they're just spontaneous sorts of inspirations without necessarily the same rigour that goes through some of your other works. So, I just find it very interesting at the moment because as composers I don't think we really like to think of writing major works and minor works – I know I went through that and I don't like it at all so I got rid of all the other ones...

DK So, the “composer in the community” that you're concerned to be... one has to have an adaptability, a versatility to make music for all kinds of events.

SR I think also the role of the composer, and it's a role they give themselves, [is] they are true to themselves all the time so it's just very interesting when you come up with such spontaneous inspiration you want to give it to someone.

DK Yes.

SR How can you justify that to yourself?

DK Can I come back to these areas of motivation, yet again? All of these little or bigger pieces, important and less important or nothing pieces all stem from these areas. And I would justify everything by that kind of awareness.

SB Yes, indeed, that's *the* answer; particularly to the double bass piece which I wrote for Mark and Rebekah's violin piece: they are musical ideas that come out of a general musical activity whether I'm thinking about music, copying scores or listening to music I'm always poised to write it. And it's just an excuse to be spontaneous with enough confidence that I'm not writing something trivial or mediocre.

DK It's interesting you are asking me this because you've done these things yourselves.

SR Well, yes, and a lot of those pieces in hindsight are tossed away because I mean something by them – I didn't mean enough by them.

DK Well, don't you get pleasure from your own crafting, in retrospect still? Do you look at a score, even if it's a little piece and take pleasure in how you structured it?

SR I find that just being a composer... if someone's to come to your music then I wonder whether things like off-shoot pieces which sort of go away from the point of what you are doing are actually misleading, they're actually damaging.

DK Well, in a way that's implied in your questions to me about “abstract” vs other ones. As if somehow the so-called “abstract” pieces are less important than the other pieces. But it could well be argued the other way round.

SR Precisely. What I'm hoping to be able assert [is] that they are all equally important for different reasons *and* also for the same reasons. That's why I'm sort of interesting in getting everything so that you can understand why everything is important.

DK Sure.

SR For the same reasons, as well as for their own reasons.

DK Yes. If you said to me that you could see links, you could see stylistic consistences, say, allowing for diversity of expression. If you saw a thousand different personalities in me...

SR What I think I'm saying is something like the *Saxophone Dances* which are very abstract and a less important work, though a very nice work; and *Land of Moinee*, something I regard as very important. I can see why they are good pieces for their own reasons but also why they are good pieces for the same reasons. I just want to assert that that is sort of the way you’re thinking.

DK I think I would try to put my very best into every piece that I do knowing as I'm doing them they are less weighty than others. In a way you might be saying “why bother doing that little piece when you could be putting the effort into another bigger piece?”

SR Or “why put that much effort into doing this piece?” “Why not put a year's effort into that little piece?”

DK It's a bit like a jig-saw puzzle you see. I reason that all of your work was made up of little and big; shapes and colours and somewhere at the end of it all they all complement each other. They're all part of a pattern. I would like to be thought of as just someone who wrote towards one big multi-faceted work.

SR Or at the same time someone who wrote pieces that had no relation to one another.

DK Yes. At the same time, to be contradictory, I'd like people to be able to see that all of these pieces seem to be from the same personality. If one is perceived as a dull personality, you know, that leads a very uneventful life, if that seems to come through the work that would disturb me.

3rd March, 1999 – Don Kay interviewed by Simon Barber and Simon Reade.

Pieces: *Songs of Come and Gone (Very Old are the Woods), The Golden Crane, Northward the Strait, Southern People and Places, Time Moods, The South Land, Piano Sonata, Four Songs from Robert Graves, Quiet Waters, Gloria*

Other topics: *words and music, strophic and through-composed, dissonance, rhythm, heart and mind, equal temperament*

SB I want to talk about vocal music today. Starting generally, can you give me some idea of what the relationship between words and music is?

DK Words conjure up images. They can predetermine the form and content of the music through the imagery. They have always been a prime means of making music – song. Also, words are all about those five areas of motivation in one way or another. So, there you go. But I think music can – certain songs or settings of words – can transcend the words which might be quite ordinary. Or hang on the words so the words remain more important than the music; or complement the words so that they're fairly equal. Schubert was pretty good at transcending the words; making the words seem better than they perhaps were without the music.

SB So, in the process of composing do you sometimes give more weight to music and sometimes more weight to text?

DK I would try to support the text appropriately. I think I would always tend to look for imagery, find a ways of colouring the narrative or image in the poem or the text with appropriate music. So, music can, in a sense, flesh out the imagery. I sort of go along always at the same pace as the words. There might be an interlude or a bridging bit between stanzas in a strophic sort of setting where each stanza has the same musical setting.

SB Let's talk about “strophic” and “through-composed” for a second. Do or did you start off writing strophic music to see what kind of nuance and variation you could get out of a set form? Then elaborate, later on, into “through-composed” music?

DK I'm not really sure, I don't know if I can remember. I think if the music is the same in succeeding stanzas there'd be subtle adjustments of rhythm to the text and maybe to the actual accompaniment. I honestly can't remember whether I started out doing strophic stuff or not. I would have thought that making strophic songs is no easier than making through-composed songs because the words would have to be seen to be appropriate to the same music with each succeeding stanza and therefore if there's too much irrelevancy between one and the other it would be a bit odd. I think that's where composers are dependent on a very good interpreter or two – the singer and the accompanist. For example, Fischer-Dieskau was a master of colouring, subtly, the interpretation of each stanza in, say, a Schubert strophic song where there might be up to six or eight stanzas [with] the music always the same. But the narrative appears to be going along with the music somehow adapting without appearing to be overly repetitive.

SB With *Songs of Come and Gone*, for example, there are songs which are characteristic of strophic writing and... when I think of *Very Old are the Woods* that has more of a

through-composed feel because of the “elasticity” of the music. You have mentioned that was an important landmark...

DK I think it was from the pint of view of using unrelated “triadic” type of harmony with the occasional “wrong-note” thrown in to colour the invocation the words were conveying. The poem obviously made a bit of an impression which sort of encouraged that kind of harmonic exploration. So, in that sense it's perhaps a bit more extending than the other eight songs in that group. I'm trying to remember if the others are strophic or otherwise, They're all really quite short. I think that's partly why I called them *Songs of Come and Gone*, you see, they've gone before they've come almost. But, on the other hand, that line is taken from a poem – that poem *Very Old are the Woods*. So that was a neat little chance.

SB Thinking of harmony, rearranging and juxtaposing unrelated triads, in that song it would have allowed you to dwell on the words for as long as you wanted really.

DK In a sense. I recall I worked out the harmony right through the thing and then just adjusted the words to those changing harmonies. But I think the changes of the harmony or the triad would have been placed in a particular way to point [to] the significance of a particular word or phrase. So, it wasn't random. I knew how many harmonies there were to be, how many chords I think. So, in that sense, the harmonic scheme was predetermined. I think the second stanza was a kind of inversion of the first. In other words the progression went the other way round. Instead of going down a minor third or whatever it was [going] up a third.

SB Did the reading of the text give you the harmonic scheme or did you have some chords that liked and you just found the right poem?

DK No, the poem suggested that quality. The poem was the motivation for whatever came. I found the rhythm a bit challenging, actually. The harmony [was] predetermined in response to the sentiment of the poem, including the “wrong notes” in the bass part. When I say the “wrong notes”, the discordant notes a semitone away from what you expect in the root of the chord to suggest the... “decadence” I suppose of the ancient woods, you know, the rotting of the floor of the forest. Dissonant notes are a means to convey, in a consistent way, that aspect of antiquity in the forest. I found the rhythm the most challenging bit to do having worked out the concept of the harmony, the unrelated triads. I think always rhythm is the most exacting thing, in a way, to get right in word-setting. If the rhythms aren't correct, somehow, the thing falls apart a bit, lacks conviction. So, I think I've had a concern, like others, to make the rhythm of the words seem natural, not forced into emphasising weak syllables.

SB Which suggests breaking out of strophic or iambic pentameter framework.

DK Sort of. It also often involves changing meters between bars, a bit of a throw-back to a freer type of rhythm. Before bar lines were invented to sort of force words to comply with symmetrical patterning. I think that particular poem has a certain rhythmic relaxation about it, if I can put it that way. That is part of conveying a sense of timelessness. The open, triadic harmonies are part of that you know. I mean they have a logic in their progression, they convey a certain “floating”, timeless quality. So you can't say it's “tonal” although it's not dissonant in essence. It's just floating.

SB Can we expand on what we're starting to talk about – the way text extends your musical language and vice versa? This is in relation to what we've been talking about over the last couple of weeks as far as developing a musical language is concerned. Have you been conscious of applying your musical language as it has developed over the years to more appropriate texts or, rather, confidently applied to specific texts to give them a unique interpretation – a *confident* unique interpretation?

DK I'm not sure if I'm conscious of that. I've not written, so to speak, texts or poems or music to texts in a consistent way as a major thing. It's been sporadic and therefore a sort of continuity of development I'm not conscious of in that sense. Having worked with Gwen Harwood in four pieces all involving, obviously, texts that perhaps gave me more a measure of understanding about the relationship I suppose. Of course, Gwen's words were always a delight to set. It's as if she had, as she seemed to convey to me verbally, a sixth sense about what sort of music I was likely to set to her texts. So, as she was writing her words she said she heard the music in advance somehow. She seemed to have a very good sense of the pacing, rhythm and imagery. It seemed to call out appropriate music. But I'm not really conscious of... let me put it this way: in doing theatre music which is to do with image and text, things not directly concerned with but stimulants for music, in a way you can sort of be bolder in order to realise the text. You can be bolder in the musical language than some [other] time. Because if you're working in a purely musical, abstract way, a kind of intellectual logic doesn't perhaps allow one to take leaps into the unknown like a text or a theatrical situation invites.

SB That was my next question. I was wondering if having the opportunity to take those risks, if you like, you must have discovered more music coming out of the songs which you could then apply in an abstract context.

SR Perhaps something like your opera *The Golden Crane*.

DK Yes, I'm sure that would have happened. And the same would apply to the theatrical stuff. *The Golden Crane* is a theatre piece, it's not incidental music – it's central to the thing. But I would say the same about puppet music or anything. You have to, in a sense, be bold and quick; make quick decisions to comply with the time frame people are demanding. You know they always give you too little time to do these things. But with *The Golden Crane* time was no problem because that was a personally motivated thing. I imposed it, as it were, on the conservatorium and therefore I took my time over composing it and when I thought it was right I offered it. But there was of course Gwen's imagery, her interaction between characters invited all sorts of things to realise those possibilities. For example, I would never have done a quasi folk-type Japanese song if she had not provided the play within the play. Yrushima's song is like this character conveying an age old folk tale within the play. So, to do that more appropriately I contrived a quasi folk-type song which was separate from the idiom or the language of the rest of the piece. The rest of the piece wasn't modelled at all on any Japanese-type language at all. If it caught anything it would be its economy of expression which somehow I equate with Japanese No-Theatre.

SB I'm starting to wonder is the idea of exploring a new musical grammar and language in the context of text-setting part of your [Simon Reade's] concern about diversions which are potentially misleading as far as ones whole body of work is concerned?

SR Well, what I was going to ask, which is something you [SB] were trying to ask, is do you find that your vocal music has tended to gravitate more to responding to Tasmania, not all of it but obviously it's been an increasing trait? I'm thinking of later pieces like *Northward the Strait* and *Southern People and Places*.

DK Yes, that more particularly.

SR Even things like *Time Moods* where you dispense with words altogether while using voice.

DK Yes, in that one with no words – because I couldn't find any, that was one thing – the words that were suggested that I'd consider weren't acceptable for me. I just thought conveying vocal sounds to suggest local-type changes of day. I can't but be connected with the local diurnal pattern. I can't pretend I'm in Brisbane. I'm here.

SR If that is a concern, that your vocal music should also have the same concern, has that been a reason why vocal music has sort of fallen away a bit? You've cut down vocal music as opposed to instrumental music.

DK I don't think so. I think – you know me – if someone asked me to set some words that I thought were OK I'd probably want to do it as part of someone trying to be relevant to the community. No, I don't think that's got anything to do with it although words can be liberating in one sense but constricting in another. One is also concerned about the capabilities of the singers. *Time Moods* was commissioned by the Jane Franklin Consort. They were eight singers of semi-professional status. From the local point of view they were most sophisticated people to make vocal music for. All the other vocal settings – from a choral point of view – were for choirs [which], as good as they are, can't be considered adult or professional: The Rosny Children's choir, Tasmanian Girl's Choir, The Orpheus Club's arrangements of folk songs. They're all very much constrained by the limits of the singers. I think technique of singers is generally more constricting than technique of instrumentalists. But I think in some things I would have made accompaniments more sophisticated and extending technically than, say, what is being sung by the singer. Some of the solo songs would have really been quite demanding because I would have had professional singers in mind. But in the choral music – including *The Golden Crane* – the only part that I thought demanded a professional singer, in that sense, would have been Ujisan. For the chorus and the smaller parts one is bearing in mind that it's for students or children or semi-professional adults or amateur adults.

SB Thanks [SR] for reminding me about *Time Moods*. I wanted to ask about wordless music. Is there perhaps a movement toward trying to make a new language specifically for singing? Because if you're just playing around with vowels, phonemes and consonants without any specific language in mind you're going to end up with a new vocabulary, aren't you?

DK I suppose it's possible. In my case I doubt if I've been that extreme. But anything is possible. I think with *Time Moods* I was just conscious of the range of the voices. Conscious of the length of the piece according to the commission which was eleven, twelve or thirteen minutes or something. And conscious of trying to have four movements. So, within those kinds of constraints and also aware of their skills I was trying to give them something technically I thought they could handle and yet, at the same time, be extending.

I think the language of them is not uncharacteristic of other stuff. But I don't know if you're saying you're hearing a different language in the vocal music than the instrumental music. I think it's all the same brush stroke.

SB I hadn't even begun to think about that, now you mention it.

DK No, if I'm honest I'm not developing a new vocal language. If I were asked to do lots of wordless vocal music and had a tremendously good group of singers that might be another thing. I might extend into those sorts of areas to, as it were, match what instruments can do language-wise. But you see, singers often don't have absolute pitch and therefore one has to be very careful about how demanding the intervals are horizontally and how they can hold their pitch accurately vertically in the complex of the chords. So it's a matter of degree and being sensitive to their realising the music accurately. If they're not very excellent singers you have to be careful of not asking them to do the impossible. Otherwise it's a mess.

SB I just thought Elliott Carter, for example, makes equal demands on singers as he does on instrumentalists and I suppose that's because he has the opportunity to do so.

DK Well, it could be. He might be uncompromising. I have no idea. He may have been commissioned to do pieces from very good ensembles and consequently risen to what he thought they could do.

SB Trying to write music suitable for a context doesn't necessarily imply value judgement. I mean if you're composing for people with limitations, composing for people in the community, it doesn't mean that it's a second-rate product.

DK Absolutely not, no. I'm not saying that what I'm doing has been successful or the best way of doing it. I suppose all I'm saying is I've tried to be conscious of what I understand the singers can cope with technically and aesthetically. I would always be true to my own aesthetic. I wouldn't compromise myself musically. In other words, I'd try to do the est within what I understand. So Elliott Carter, if he's got a very technically challenging vocal language, it would be because no doubt he's very confident he'd get a good result in performance. I think in *Northward the Strait* the choral parts were quite demanding for the conservatorium chorale under Edward Talbot. Whereas I set out originally to make it for a kind of north-west coast ad hoc choir brought together just for that piece. In retrospect, apart from the difficulties of the band parts, the vocal parts would have been very demanding I think. At the same time the vocal parts were less demanding than the instrumental parts from a technical point of view for the reasons I said before. But the choir, at the same time, seemed to enjoy the piece whereas the band had greater difficulties in coping, not least because the players weren't consistency at rehearsal. Also, I was a bit misled by the resources. But there was enough in the outcome for me to sort of feel next time around with the same resources I could stretch things without it being overly technically demanding.

SB Stretch things more than you did?

DK With knowing. I mean, you gain through experience. The opportunities for challenge locally has its limits when you're working with largely amateur groups.

SB Did that provide any impetus to write a subsequent piece for voices in it?

DK Well, you see, I've never been asked to do something for an abstract choir from somewhere else outside this town or this state. So, I can't answer that. Had I been asked I would have. I don't think I'd write an opera or something in the abstract without having some idea of a possible performance at the end of it. It's the same with the conservatorium. *The Golden Crane* I did trying to be aware of the resources and that was challenging for them. So, they were stretched to do that. But nevertheless it was practical enough for it to be realised. A little bit more than *Northward the Strait,* I'd say.

SB Another formal question...

DK Why formal, why can't it be informal?

SB Because I'll be able to improvise once I've got a bit more momentum under way! As music enhances interpretation and allows for limitless interpretation of text and words, can or do you apply the four modes of thought simultaneously to the text?

DK I'm not sure if that conscious. As I said earlier, within the text there are all kinds of integral aspects of those areas because most texts, well all texts, would be dealing with those areas. So, if I'm making a musical image from a phrase, from a Gwen Harwood poem let's say, that image could well take on an aspect of fantasy that Gwen hadn't envisaged – and still be true to the poem, I would like to think. Because, you see, music can't be pinned down to specific events.

SB Perhaps part of the freedom you find in setting text is that it invites a “pure” mode of thinking – sounds for their own sake.

DK Oh, sure. Certain words invite repeating rhythms that take on a kind of...

SB … hypnotic, engaging character?

DK Yes, all that stuff. Now, I think I should add something to the previous question. I'm very much a person who has either been liberated or held back or both by the local...

SB … now it comes out!

DK … resources. Well, it's always come out! I'm very conscious of the constraints of the resources to either help or hinder. But I don't think that sort of acknowledgement stops the Tasmanian relevance. It possibly helps it. I'm not sure.

SR Just going on a bit of a tangent: being conscious of the resources, have you ever really tried being conscious of *not* writing for the resources, just in the abstract?

DK Oh, I'm sure I have. Those early 1960s [pieces] writing for no known performance would have been me doing just that, I think. And probably the first ten years of trying to compose without any thought of anyone performing it.

SR Do you think that in later years as you've been more concerned to write so that it is

performed, do you think that's been a motivating factor?

DK I would have thought writing for young people, children, is just as much fun as writing...

SR I'm just thinking of things like the second symphony *The South Land* where you've written for the TSO [Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra] plus slightly altered...

DK Well, I've written it for a large orchestra...

SR Yes, but I mean the TSO was a...

DK I hoped the TSO would augment itself to play it.

SR I just wonder whether concerning a piece like a symphony, which is a piece conceived in the abstract and then putting [it] on to a context which then rejects you; do you think that's, in a sense, a dangerous ploy?

DK Ah, well it's a risk. You see to make a piece without anyone asking for it is always a risk. Particularly a big piece where you spend so much time and energy. But in a funny kind of way I thought that that gesture of giving would be reciprocated by a gesture of giving which I think they set out to do. That's why they volunteered to play which was exciting to have them do. I think the withdrawal of the performance was due to their budgetary constraints which was beyond the management's control. It was the interim committee who controlled the purse strings. I have nothing contrary to believe otherwise. So, it was just unfortunate circumstances. Your [SB] letter to the premier was a very nice gesture of support and I think his response was encouraging as far as he could go. One thing I wondered: did you mention *The Legend of Moinee* in your letter to him?

SB (nods)

DK That's why he said maybe in the future that piece could be performed?

SB Yes.

DK So, it wasn't his initiative?

SB No.

DK OK.

SB I'm putting words in his mouth. I would make a good public servant.

SR I'm just thinking when you're talking about writing choral music and being concerned with what the performers can do, does it appeal to you, if you found the right text, to take a leap into the abstract and do something as you see it could be done rather than constraining yourself?

DK I think what you're saying is you're looking for such a thing to potentially happen or you would have liked it to have happened...

SR … well...

DK Let me say that I'm conscious of my limitations. The language that has evolved that I do things with is hard won. I think just to experiment with sound, to come up with radical changes to the language that's evolved, I wouldn't at this stage be terribly interested in because I really want to express things close to the heart as opposed to predominantly the mind. In other words, I don't want to play abstractly in mathematics but rather things that emote a bit. So, I believe that whatever I do is the heart and the mind trying to work in balance. If that results in a more conservative language than people would require that's just unfortunate.

SB It's interesting you mention that because I was looking through a piece I wrote a couple of years ago in which I consciously applied mirror patterns, a technique I picked up in the first year from you, and I always thought it was the weaker part of the piece but I nevertheless applied it for technical reasons. Listening to it again the other day I thought it was the only good part of the piece because it help expressive potential which I hadn't yet tapped into.

DK That's what I thought at the time when you made your comment actually.

SB Right. So, how do the abstract techniques begin to fuse with the heart?

DK Well, it's a very good question. I think now what I do is more intuitive than what I once did. You'd be in a better position, a more objective position perhaps than me, to know whether you see the language as still developing or static or going backwards.

SB That's Mr Reade's department. I'm not that perceptive.

DK I think my musical language is still evolving. I think it's a bit surer than it used to be in spite of being very intuitive. But I still do little technical things. I'm very conscious of mirror patterning or inverting or other things mathematically. But it's always the servant of the expressive idea. The emotional impact of the idea.

SB But you would have begun to hear new dissonances out of writing twelve note music and using the techniques that you do.

DK Yes.

SB Did you just pick up on the correspondences which emerged out of that which you already liked and begin to work like that? So, if you had some inversions and some retrogrades, mirrors – things like that – did you engineer it in a way to get the modal kinds of sounds that you wanted? Or did you allow yourself to be...

DK Oh, I think the modal thing was very natural right from the beginning. I think the other bits and pieces of patterning, of bringing in what one could reasonably call dissonant intervals, would be the result of me attuning my ear through trying out those techniques. In fact, becoming attracted to them in a way where they became also instinctive. So, a gradual extension of the language to then take on board as part of a natural thing, you see. But we're constrained by the tuning system. You know you've got the twelve chromatic notes. Part of me, from time to time, I suppose like so many – like Percy

Grainger wanting his “free music”; like the electronic composers going through the cracks making the sound spectrum absolutely...

SB … seamless?

DK ...yes, sliding through sounds and all of that - I suppose I have felt from time to time desirous of having that capacity. But, on the other hand, I rationalise to myself there's plenty I want to do with the accepted tuning system.

SB So you, in a sense, dragged your ear through the tuning system of Bach and if you arrived at a discovery like *Very Old are the Woods* you felt well pleased and satisfied because you'd married the intellectual rigour you'd gone through with a natural modal language which pleased your ear.

DK Yes, I suppose so. But again, you were touching on earlier the constraints of the performers that you have at your disposal, the resources, are a factor in all of this. Plus the aesthetic. So, I suppose I err on the cautious side in a way. But what I feel I come up with is true to what I intended more or less. I mean is never satisfied for heaven's sake!

SB You mention that you've been facilitated and held back by working and writing within this community...

DK Well, held back as well as liberated. It's a two-way thing.

SB … that would have always been a part of your thinking in composition, wouldn't it? Thinking about limitations, about extending, all this sort of thing.

DK Yes.

SB And that would have led your ear and your heart and mind as much as anything else?

DK Yes, I think so. If I'm judged by being inadequate from a technical point of view, a language, boldness or conservative point of view then so be it. I'm just doing the best with what I have at my disposal, not good enough ever but the best I can do. So, there'd be some pieces, for example, say a string quartet or a soloist like Ian Munro or Christian Wojtowicz or someone...; one could say what I ask them to play could still have the same constraints on language that the other pieces which are less technically demanding to play have. So, even with those sort of players at my disposal it doesn't mean I've suddenly become all experimental or outrageously sort of... what's the word?

SB Eccentric?

DK Well, eccentric perhaps or unapproachable.

SR I wonder whether perhaps a work like the *Piano Sonata* [Sonata for Piano] is... I mean it's in a key for god's sake!

DK Well, you see, that piece is essentially a fairly light piece.

SR Is that perhaps more radical? Giving [the piece to] somebody who is of virtuoso

standard?

DK Well, I think it is. I think that middle movement does represent something quite bold because of its essential tonality and its simplicity. But when Ian asked me about its Scottish kind of folk-song quality I simply said part of the heritage that I'm conscious of is hearing my father singing old Scottish, Irish ballads while he was shaving when I was a child. So that movement is, in a sense, a summing up of that nostalgia. It represents something a bit special – also consistent with my personal acknowledging of a kind of Anglo-Saxon heritage. I don't think we should pretend that there's nothing there. The other two movements are a bit more sort of characteristic of my little rhythmic quirky ways I suppose. But there are cross-references, all the movements interlock. Even if perhaps on the surface it's not immediately apparent. But you [SR] are quite right. I remember once asking Michael Kieran-Harvey if he ever played simple pieces. He immediately answered me by sitting down and playing marvellously, beautifully a quote from straight-forward Bach: “does that answer your question?” I felt a bit stupid having asked. But, on the other hand, of course performers will usually, more easily, respond to pieces that seem to challenge them technically as well as aesthetically. Which is not to say the very best will shy away from playing simple pieces. I wrote the piano sonata [Sonata for Piano] I think being aware of Ian Munro; what I think is something in his personality.

SB Let's talk about some singers that you've written for specifically. I mean Jane Manning gave a rendition of some songs...

DK Oh, yes but of course I didn't write them for her. I wrote those for Janice Chapman.

SR Which songs were they?

DK *Four Songs from Robert Graves*. At the time, in 1964, I was extending myself I think. So, the piano accompaniment and the vocal part were... well, they weren't holding back. But I think at this remove in time I can see how I would do them better. If I re-worked them I would make, I think, certain adjustments to make them more effective. But the language of them at the time is quite bold for me. But nothing much to do with the serialism that I'd been coming out of three years of exclusively using. They are chromatically fairly liberated. But even the last one *Henry and Mary* is sort of quite folk-like. It's like a reversion to something. But rhythmically it's quite sophisticated.

SB Who else have you had occasion to write for? Singers?

DK Janice Chapman I think I've written three or four lots of songs for...

SB Were they commissioned or invited?

DK Well the first lot – the *Four Songs of Robert Graves* – I did them for her as a friend. I knew her and her husband John quite well. John was on the teaching staff at Pckham Manor. *The Golden Crane* songs, that is the excerpts and interludes from *The Golden Crane* I would have done for Janice by commission from the Alexander Ensemble. The *Quiet Waters* five songs for soprano and string quartet I would have done with Janice in mind for the Petra Quartet's tour of England. They asked me to do them. I've written three songs from Orsonius, the Latin poet, then I added two poems by Brett Parson, the local Tasmanian poet, to make up five songs. And when I expanded from three to five I was very

conscious of Janice Chapman. Of course there was the challenge to find two poems which complemented the Orsonius poems.

SB So, there was an empathy with Janice Chapman that you felt made you want to keep working...

DK I think there must have been. She was a friend. I admired her as a person, as a singer. She lives in England and has for donkey's years. But my memory of our time in England was quite strong. So I suppose that's why I did it. I think she commissioned me from afar, as it were. And it's terrifically exciting to have that opportunity. She she's sung more in England as well as here.

SB Have you felt after hearing Jane Manning sing some songs...

DK Oh, I was thrilled to death.

SB … that you wanted to write for her specifically?

DK Well, I gave her other songs and I hoped that she would consider those. But she's nearing the end of her career now, she's sixty I think this year. She's still a fine singer and she at the time said she would like to record the *Four Songs from Robert Graves* – do them properly because she was upset she'd got a word wrong or something in the text at the time. The recording they made was little favouring the voice. The piano wasn't balanced enough with the voice which was unfortunate. So, I was absolutely thrilled to death that she sang them and seemed to respect them, as with Ian the accompanist. Songs I've done for Marie-Rose Jones I've put my best shot into. That's the most recent set. To her own poems. She gave me a lot of her poems from which I selected those four. We both wanted it [the songs] to be about Tasmania. I felt quite comfortable having selected the poems because her sentiments, as well as mine, were about this place. As I set them I was very conscious of her understanding something about Tasmania. The poems are all concerned with some sort of historical concern for women.

SB That was my next and possibly final question: do you have and have you had preferred texts and have they changed over the years?

DK Well, you see, I've nearly always been someone who's responded to invitations to do things. So, in a sense, it's me making the most of an opportunity that's been invited or commissioned. Now, if I was somehow sitting in my ivory tower exclusively writing songs and studying all the available texts knowing ideally I would have been rewarded financially for inventing my own outcome it might have been a different story. But all the texts that I've set I've been happy to set, let's put it that way. Some obviously I would have preferred than others. But it's been the same with all my music. Most of it's been done through invitation.

SR With a text like the *Gloria* – how did you approach setting a text like that?

DK Well, that was imposed, that's definite. How did I approach it? Well, you see, although I'm not a conventional believer I am a believer in some sort... well, I think I have a spiritual belief. I'm a responder to things that stir the heart and mind. But I can't say I'm a conventional believer in the deity and all of that. But I've set words before that are to do with religious things. Not that much. And it hasn't created a terrible problem. So, if the

Gloria is glorying [sic] some deity, let's say, I can respond to that and just think myself into the mood of celebration which it essentially is.

SB That's part of becoming relevant to the community.

DK I think it is. It's not a forced thing. I wouldn't have done it tongue-in-cheek, I would have done the best I could do.

SB Leaving the Puckish character to one side?

DK I suppose so. Puckishness pops up even perhaps in the *Gloria*.

SB These texts of Marie-Rose Jones that she gave you; you said you both wanted them to be something about Tasmania and in some ways about women. Was that you or her or both?

DK Well, I had to select from what she gave me. I selected four poems I felt I could respond to. Others that she'd given me I couldn't have responded to very comfortably. But I happily worked with all those [selected] texts. Not being a woman you could say “how could a male deal with women's issues?” We all have imagination.

SB Schumann did it rather well, didn't he?

DK Well, absolutely. It's a tremendous song cycle... *Women's Love and Life* if that's what you're talking about. Yes. Marie-Rose has sung those by the way. Not that that is terribly pertinent to what we're talking about. But, I mean the composer has to have an imagination, like an actor, to get into role playing. Then you take ownership.
SB It's a growth process, isn't it? I mean it develops your empathy, your imagination...

DK Yes, sure. I mean one is always trying to understand the other gender by virtue of close relationships. It's a life-long way of becoming more understanding.

10th March, 1999 – Don Kay interviewed by Simon Barber and Simon Reade.

Pieces: *River Views, String Quartets 1-3, Love Voice of Moinee, Wedding Day, Domestic Suite, Cradle Song for Emma, Four Songs from Robert Graves, The Legend of Moinee, The Edge of Remoteness*

Other topics: *relationships, motivations, masculinity & femininity, decision making within composition, composition and teaching*

SB In very general terms let's begin to talk about, maybe from a historical perspective, the influence of relationships on the activity of composing, particularly the influence of women.

DK Why women in particular?

SB Because that's an intimate "significant other".

DK Yes, because of the domestic situation...

SB … among other things.

DK Well, it's been, I'd say, generally positive! But it's also had its constraining capacity. Because in a close relationship, in two marriages, there have been... how can I put it... constraints due to having to attempt to be responsible to the relationship. Not just wives but children. So I think that, as I'm sure I've said in the past, tensions are generated which can have both negative and positive aspects or outcomes. If, for example, in a very simple way I'm spending too much time composing and not doing the responsible domestic thing it creates a tension that can have a negative outcome which can in the long run end up perhaps restricting or changing or limiting the outcome of the composition in ways I'm not sure I could detail because I'm not sure how I could do that. But if one sort of writes music for people – I often think of someone close – I dedicate the piece to that person; thinking of that person affects the outcome in a positive way, I hope. I don't think I've even written music out of bitterness toward anybody. All I'm saying is in trying to keep up good relationships with people close to you one has to be conscious of the time factor and doing the routine things of domestic life etc. which I feel must affect aspects of what you do in your composition, keep you, to an extent, down-to-earth more than you might otherwise be. More on the "straight and narrow" or something. It must have an affect. Like any experience, life experience, has an affect. But I would say, to be quite honest, that relationships to women – the very few that I've had strong associations with...

SB … we can talk about "off the record" relationships as well if you like.

DK Oh, in very general terms it's had a very great effect because it's given me a reason for being. You know, if you think of all music as being love – for love – the different levels, aspects and definitions of love, it's all done for love. Certain pieces are done more specifically. Others for certain aspects of what that means – that word.

SB Before we perhaps identify some influences on the music – your music – were you aware at any stage in a domestic situation of sharing a "plight" for want of a better word with previous composers? For example, Haydn had a pretty tough time of it in the

domestic situation...

DK Oh, yes. I think that the string quartets – 2 & 3 – were both written at the time of very conscious personal plight due to marriage difficulty – first marriage difficulty. Both pieces I feel quite good about... the agonies involved in making the pieces, particularly the second, slow movement of the second quartet as well as the second movement of the third quartet. Trying to make those pieces – in the case of the second quartet a kind of retrospective, nostalgic kind of love song in essence when I thought perhaps things were on the mend temporarily in 1975. The third quartet was I think written when the marriage was irrevocably lost, probably, that piece showing a sort of uncertainty. But at the same time I think the end of the third quartet, that you [SR] pointed out recently, has an open-ended philosophical, almost "resigned" quality. Which is not pessimistic. Both the quartets sort of spin off into some kind of infinity.

SB In a sense a sympathetic partner is pretty crucial, isn't it? Richard Strauss wrote the *Domestic Symphony* where he made fun, or at least could reflect upon, the tensions of a domestic situation – the business. Perhaps – I'm not sure about this – his wife was on his "wavelength" so to speak and [he] had it a little bit easier because of that.

DK It could well be, yes. I don't think his marriage was that easy. I don't know the details of the situation but I'm sure the *Domestic Symphony* would have tried to document in musical terms every day events. I don't think I've ever tried that. I've just expressed emotional states of mind as a result of events. I think, though, the *Love Voice of Moinee*, the second movement of the symphony *The Legend of Moinee*, is a direct expression and the legend is... well, let's put it this way: the direct experience enables that movement to be written with more personal conviction.

SB Mahler, differently, was very "stressed out" to use a vernacular expression. And his wife felt the effects of that. Negatively. Though she was supportive of his endeavours. Have you been aware of trying to "fine-tune" a balance in a domestic situation based upon the precedence that you've read or learned from other composers?

DK I don't think so. I'm told half the time I'm not aware of what's going on in my own internal make-up and I only express it through the music which is hard to pin down in a specific way. I think the male species is often not terribly articulate in words about their states of being and all that stuff. But I've learnt to be better in knowing and expressing in words, I suppose, with the blessing of my second marriage. But no, I haven't made a big deal of it, I just do my pieces and inevitably they reflect aspects of my experience. I am conscious in the pieces I've mentioned of these things. I wrote a little piece called *Wedding Day* for my second marriage. A very simple piece so I could play it. And I hope to arrange it for *ibidem* – it's one of the new pieces which I think I mentioned I intend to call a "domestic suite"; made up of unrelated miscellaneous pieces from the past sequenced in a way that conveys a sense of looking back. Marriage, pregnancy, waiting for birth... so the little piece I wrote for my grand-daughter – *Cradle Song for Emma* – in my current thinking will end up being scored for four or five instruments. So, in a way, at this late stage, it's a conscious effort of "domesticating" certain experiences in a slightly falsified way but nevertheless it sort of shows an attempt to focus on those aspects in a slightly nostalgic way.

SB Why nostalgic?

DK Partly because I regret that I didn't do things better as both a husband and a father. That's not to say my children and I don't get on very well and all of that sort of thing but I'm terribly conscious of the fact that children of broken marriages must feel it even if it doesn't manifest in a very obvious way. So, I've always felt sort of sorry about all of that – very sorry.

SB It's a learning experience, isn't it? Because when you come to the second relationship it's a whole different...

DK Oh, absolutely. Everything is a learning stage. Life enriching. Which is not to recommend that everyone go through a whole lot of broken relationships to become enriched. Not at all. But ultimately you see life as a celebration, you know, if you're a reasonable optimist. And I'm told optimists are sometimes stupid people. To be optimistic is to be stupid and to be a pessimist is to be a realist.

SB Pessimists bore me so I'd rather be stupid. Let's be categorical – I need to be Aristotelian and just break things down into neat categories for the sake of conversation – could you begin to describe perhaps... I have three areas - intellectual, spiritual and emotional – of human existence. Could you describe the way that women perhaps have influenced those three areas in relation to your music?

DK Well, they're all intertwined, I think. I reckon I've been most conscious of the emotional and spiritual but the intellectual, of course, is a constant determinant of how one rationalises. So... well, when you say women let me talk about my current – second – marriage. I think I'm very conscious of our relationship being very much a process of talking through in an intellectual way about emotional and spiritual states a lot of the time. So, it's either each of us talking about our own situation or each of talking about the other's situation. Frances has got a major thing to contribute to my well-being... it's to encourage me, not force me, but to encourage me to talk through all sorts of things that I'm eternally grateful about. She writes as well, she's articulate and the encouragement to help me articulate aspects of my own psychological state has been a good exercise. And it must affect something in the way I feel about composing. If you're lucky enough to have a partner who isn't averse to [music] even if they claim, as she would, that she's no musician but tolerates, in fact encourages it, then that's a blessing. My first wife was always tolerant and encouraging, I think you could say to an extent, anyway putting up with it, let's put it that way; but I was, nevertheless, conscious of being irritating. If I'd had decent accommodation, you know, like a palatial home with large sound-proof rooms, or at least rooms with an east-wing a thousand miles from the rest of the house, I suppose some of these irritations wouldn't have been conveyed. Just the physical sounding of pieces, over and over, testing them – I very much appreciate the irritation I would have caused. But, as I say, in my current domestic situation the experiences of talking through, which is all about putting your thoughts succinctly requires intellectual endeavour. [Talking] largely about emotional states and spiritual well-being and all of that kind of thing I've found tremendously helpful.

SB Has that “freed up” composition for you?

DK Well, I think it must. If you feel at some stage, I'm not saying at all stages but at some stages – hopefully the majority of stages – relaxed and secure in a situation it helps one compose with a little less tension. So, that must affect some aspects of the form of the

piece. It might encourage one to compose about things to do with “spiritual topics”, if you like. Or topics which are less fraught with passion, chasing band-wagon junk. Doing things to please the partner rather than yourself. So I've always driven my women-folk dotty with seeking some kind of comment on the piece. Even if I can't play it very well. I will shove scores under their noses and say “look at that, what do you think about that?” knowing, of course, that it's only abstract dots over the page. But they'll often say “it's pretty” at least or “it looks interesting”. But if I can sit at the piano and fumble through the sound more or less accurately then I crave some sort of comment. Even if it's just “oh, well done” or “that sounds interesting”. That will do me. It's just a craving for some sort of reassurance. And I think most people need that. Go on [SR]...

SR I was just going to say do you find that sometimes Frances will say something that you weren't actually wanting to hear?

DK Oh yes. If she does that I welcome it although she always feels awful if she says something other than what she thinks I want to hear. But I welcome anything. That gives me something to react to. So no comment is awful. I welcome any feedback, you see. That helps me immensely. Not that, in a way, I need it because I think that I can judge for myself but I think most creative people want to be loved, for heaven's sake! That's why they do it.

SR If you come up with something you're very confident about...

DK … and someone knocks it...

SR … yes, somebody you respect...

DK … oh that's disappointing. But it won't essentially shake my confidence I don't think. If I feel really properly about it, you know, if I've thought it through properly and had faith in it... yes, I'd be disappointed and a bit hurt but it won't shake me although it might make me forget the piece for a bit. But I'll come back to it eventually. Reassess it. And reaffirm what I'd thought in the first place!

SB Has the opposite happened? You mentioned that you dedicated the *Love Voice of Moinee* to Frances and that enabled you to write the piece with a great degree of conviction. If you get feedback which is contrary-wise to the way you felt about it, have you ever experienced a complete change of mind or shift in focus where you can take upon the other's point of view and throw away or to one side what you were so convinced about and have something completely fresh emerge?

DK In other words: can someone make a comment that's so well put, so convincingly put, that it'll make me change my mind entirely about my piece? Is that what you're saying?

SB Effectively, yes.

DK Well, I've always tried to take the other point of view or seriously think about it, fret about it. I don't think I've ever chucked something out completely as a result of someone else's comment.

SB That's interesting. At what point does a composer reach a maturity of conviction where you can do that? Simon [Reade] and myself, as your students, listen to what you say and I

know that we've thoroughly revised what we've been convinced about to the point of bordering on non-recognition of what we initially came up with.

SR Just to extend that: I know that with the *Oboe Sonata* I've just finished for Renée - which I began two years ago - I did a lot of sketches she wasn't overly convinced about and I've come up with an end product which she's much more happy with, much more interested in.

DK In other words, you're open to a proper, collaborative...

SR Well, maybe. Perhaps more that just what seemed originally in the material is pointed out to someone else, whether it be Renée or whether it be you, as being not necessarily the whole picture and I've had to go back and re-think it from somebody else's point of view to get back to my own point of view.

DK Ah, I suppose that's happened. But I think more in earlier years.

SR So with Malcolm [Williamson]...

DK Oh, absolutely. If he condemned something that was carte blanche to go back and completely revise it. As you possibly know in recent years I've taken things up that he wouldn't have a bar of, I thought, not that he was ever vicious. But you read between the lines.

SB But that still has more to do with intellect than heart doesn't it really?

DK Well, possibly... to do with technique. For example, the first song in my *Four Songs from Robert Graves* he thought was overly dominated by the augmented fourth, if I'm remembering correctly. And therefore was fatally flawed I suppose you could say. Too predictable or something. So that made me lose interest in it and probably the song. I think the augmented fourth is a fairly predominant interval throughout the four songs. I thought he was saying it was dull because of that. When Janice Chapman, many years after I wrote them in 1964, took them up twenty years later; when I heard her do them finally it changed – you see I hadn't heard them – it changed my opinion about them.

SB That's the heart feeding the intellect...

DK Well, they're interlocked. You see, if the augmented fourth or whatever the interval is, is persistently present, and naggingly so, it symbolises something that has to do with an emotional state I suppose. And perhaps Malcolm said he didn't like the idiom. He didn't like the sound. Perhaps he didn't like the poem because those poems were very much to do with a woman's point of view and he probably felt very anti-sympathetic.

SR Just a related question again: say a musician, somebody like Christian [Wojtowicz] whom you respect very much, does something, really changes something – in interpretation or whatever...

DK Well, he did that in *The Legend of Moinee*. I mean I put down things in the notation – phrasing, bowing... I guess bowing; performers take great liberties with whatever bowing marks I put down, understandably. But Christian, for example, would try to interpret it as he

saw it and I don't think his interpretations have been other than convincing. But, in a technical sense - I think it was in the first movement – there is a passage of harmonics when in the narrative the “hurling” is happening and [Moinee] coming down to earth, as it were. During bits there he put the harmonics on different strings to those I'd marked and made it work more effectively. When he played it to me before the event in his room he said something about that. I don't think I would have known. It sounded as I meant it to sound. But know and then he would break, say, a little phrase into two bits instead of one long phrase: that kind of thing I think the music allows for.

SR Do you change things because of what a performer will do? Do you change the manuscript?

DK Very occasionally, very minutely I have. I don't think I changed anything because of Christian's interpretation. In fact Christian and I don't do much talking. For example, the current sonata – *The Edge of Remoteness* – I just handed over the score. No comment. They just did it. I listened to it in rehearsal and it seemed to be doing what I thought it should be doing. So there was no cause for revision.

SR What about something like Larry Sitsky where he's taken your transcription of *Love Voice of Moinee* and added so many octaves...

DK Yes, well, I believe he does that to any music, almost. I believe he's always doing it. He can't leave it alone. But I also remember Ian Munro playing it with Christian. I offered Ian my original version and Larry Sitsky's version. He chose my version. He simply said – I don't know how conscientiously he looked at both, he simply said mine was the more effective. And I'm not sure if that's true or not. But I looked at what Larry had done and I think that it's another angle. But I was quite pleased with what I'd done. But I would respect Larry, intellectually, and I respect his pianism. You know, his wanting to double the odd octave or something for more resonance or a more orchestral sonority that I, perhaps, would think was absolutely necessary. But, on the other hand, it might add a touch that that, to my mind, is not significant. But it's the same with orchestration. If I transcribe something for orchestra from a piano piece or vice versa, something like that, I know as I'm doing it there are a thousand different ways you could do it each with their conviction. So, I don't think I would worry myself too much about, say, all of these possible options. It's a matter of temperament and personal choice. If I feel confident about my crafting, then that's it. If somebody else wants to muck about with it, which Larry kind of did on that occasion, I was slightly worried that I was seen as imperfect in what I'd done. But I don't think it was done in that spirit. I think he just couldn't leave it alone, he wanted to add his own touch. And Christian, of course, was impressed with what he'd done but Christian didn't object to playing my original with Ian either. If he heard the difference. I presume he was conscious of that.

SB If the options, the choices before you, intellectually, are pretty much-of-a-muchness, extra motivation to make a choice, to make a decision has to come into play. When you mentioned mood and temperament, I thought “heart”.

DK Yes.

SB Referring back to women having an influence on temperament and mood: there must be some kind of decision-making prompt to make you go one way rather than another way.

DK Yes, of course. I think it always comes back to what I said a few interviews ago about being true to the idea. But, for example thinking of Larry Sitsky again and that transcription - piano transcription from the orchestral version and not the other way around -, he “doubled” notes, that's really what he did. He would double notes to add a certain sonority it didn't trouble me to do do. I was possibly made to feel inadequate for while about “why didn't I think of that?” So, the next stage is to come down to assessing which is the better way. My original way or his way. And I would say they probably both have a certain conviction. A bit like a Liszt transcription of a Schubert song or something. You know, this added thing. Larry really didn't add things like new harmonies or rhythms. So, it's really quite subtle.

SB Do you think he made it more “masculine”?

DK Why do you ask that? You're equating loudness with masculinity?

SB Robustness or boldness.

DK Maybe. I don't know. More like the orchestra perhaps So,... anyway, it doesn't particularly trouble me. But if he did that wholesale, if he had access, you know, that might have troubled me. I remember when he saw me a few years after the event I think, last year or the year before, the first thing he said to me was he hoped I didn't mind about him doing that and I said “not at all”. And it really didn't worry me. In fact, I think I was a bit flattered that he'd taken the trouble to do something like that. I think music can take these things, if it's any good, you know. As long as it's not completely transformed into something quite unrecognisable. I'm sure not sure if I've answered your original question.

SB Well, let's move on to another one: did your music become, or can you sense it becoming, more masculine as you developed intimate relationships with women?

DK Ah, I'm not sure about that! I think we all have our – and thank God for that – masculine and feminine sides. I think if you are exploring certain areas of your psychological state you explore very intimate, softly expressed, quietly expressed aspects of your make-up. I suppose in lay-terms that would be regarded as exploring the feminine part of oneself. I'm conscious of a lot of my music, in a sense, being quite gentle. Quite intimate sounding, perhaps. And I think that perhaps is to do with what I've just said but also, within my masculine make-up, a certain shyness or reticence; or a certain liking for peace and tranquillity by nature. Which is perhaps nothing to do with masculinity or femininity. So I suppose these things can get all mixed up a bit.

SB If an intimate partner is giving comment on a work in progress have you found yourself making things bolder, more extroverted, as a response? Or even the opposite: quietening things down?

DK Can you say that again?

SB Well, I'm just trying to understand... it depends upon your frame of mind as well: as you mentioned we've got the male-female polarity within our [individual] psyche and if one is connecting with somebody else they're going to stimulate your, probably, biological “root” which is masculine... and tease out that quality more in a heterosexual relationship...

DK Oh. I don't see that at all. I'm not conscious of that at all. It probably happens. I think I'm open. I'm open to experience. And I think that the art, the music, explores these different states without it becoming a terribly sexual thing, you know, in real terms. So, if one is exploring a gentle side of ones nature I'd like to think that can be quite masculine.

SB Have you discovered other sides to your nature being involved in intimate relationships?

DK Like what? What's left apart from masculine and feminine?

SB Well, you mentioned a natural liking for gentleness, calm and tranquillity. That's you. It must have been shaded, or coloured differently, through interaction. Through sharing at close range.

DK That's too hard for me, Simon. I mean I don't quite know what you're getting at.

SB OK, let's return to decision-making. If you have an array of options, they all remain studies or etudes until you make a heart-felt decision to go this way and then go that way for very specific, unified, reasons.

DK Yes.

SB Now, the motivation to make decisions – I know I'm experiencing it in my own life currently – is that you find the heart to go with that intellectual decision at a point in time. So that inevitably makes things more extroverted. I think it does...

DK I think – who am I to say? - a lot of my stuff is quite intellectually extroverted. It's sort of up-front, straight, direct. But I don't know how you equate that with femininity or masculinity. I think its very complex. Let me put it this way: I don't think it's “feminine”, so to speak, to be intimate in a particular emotional way any more than it's “masculine” to be direct, hard-edged and intellectually rigorous.

SB Sure.

DK In other words, I think a good composer of whatever gender should be able to write a hard-edged, rigorous contrapuntal passage and vice versa with a very coloured, emotional chord sequence to do with something very sensitive in its expression, you know. I don't hold, at this stage, any theories about what gender is better at doing what. But, if we're thinking, feeling people we should be able to enter into all sorts of imaginary worlds.

SB Help me out [to SR]?

SR I think I’m agreeing. Just being able to do these things or not being able to do them is very much divorced from gender. I'm thinking of just a few Australian women composers. Someone like Mary Finsterer is so hard-edged and aggressive almost all the time. Someone like Ann Boyd is so meditative. That seems to have no real bearing on either of their genders because then you find other people – Arvo Pärt – writing meditative music. You find Schnittke writing very hard-edged music.

SB I don't think I'm seeking to make generalisations as to masculine and feminine

traits. What I'm trying to understand is the way aspects of ones personality are teased out and brought forward by an intimate. Music changes through having that kind of contact because ones life changes.

DK Yes, well, I think if one is sort of open to experience and one is enriched by the accumulation of experience can can sort of mature through it all it's bound to affect and hopefully enrich the expression. But if one sort of goes through life, as it were, so blinkered as to exclude certain things and only include certain other things then I think it's narrowing. I think I've talked a lot about the influence of this, that and the other thing from the natural world, history, fantasy... I think if one's got imagination and one is sensitive to what is going on in the world around then that's what it's all about. And I believe my own musical language and expression has benefited from that. Being open to those possibilities. Now, on the other hand, I'm sure people have accused me, from time to time, of limiting my experience. So, it's a matter of balancing between how much you go out seeking new experience for the sake of it to enrich oneself, so to speak, as opposed to actually getting on with cultivating the craft, the art. If one's got a reasonable imagination and is open in a general attitude, so to speak, then I think that's important. If one is insensitive to certain things that's limiting the possibilities. And I'm sure, like every other human being, I'm very limited in my capacity to be aware of what's going on in certain aspects, but I try to be open. Without being a rigorous seeker-afterer of information that I don't see as immediately relevant to what I'm on about. So, I'm not in that sense a researcher or a scholar. I get an idea and go for it with whatever it is that I have to bring to bear. So, I haven't gone through a rigorous exploration of all the literature that there is before I go out and do my own thing. I've tended to come at it the other way round: seek out information as I've needed it rather than get the information before I dare plunge in the deep end.

SB Having domestic responsibilities: does that give you added focus and added interest?

DK Well, I feel my life, my whole intellectual, emotional and spiritual state is enriched by having a reasonable domestic situation; let's put it that way. And I think if I hadn't had those experiences I'd be much less a whole person. And consequently it would probably affect the art in some way. That's me saying that. I'm not saying anything about anybody else.

(Here the interview is adjourned temporarily in order to try to further clarify masculine and feminine qualities. The session recommences as Don begins to talk about motivations behind decision-making processes)

DK When composing and one is getting to the narrative, the prime narrative, to help you know how to make a piece go somewhere, you're getting into very private, intimate kinds of thoughts that can't be articulated in words. The music in a way is a manifestation of the realisation of the narrative. That can be terribly intimate, terribly spiritual and terribly intellectual – all of those things at the same time I think. And an earlier question abou thod do you make the choices: well, the choices are made within the moment of realising the narrative, so to speak. I don't know if "narrative" is the best word but it's the only one I can think of to explain this unravelling story and the interaction of the characters.

SB You have mentioned before moments where you've just realised *that's* the right decision, whatever "that" is.

DK But as I do that it has a conviction for me but I'm not saying it's an exclusive resolution to the problem.

SB Perhaps not exclusive but it's the only one...

DK It's the only one I need at that moment. Another time, another mood and all of that I might come up with a different solution. Even this morning, last night rather, copying out my *Bird Chants II* I realised I needed, I don't know why but suddenly something hit me – I needed another little bit in the passage to make it better. And when I say I don't know why – it's very hard to verbalise – it's like extending a little phrase and alluding to some reference elsewhere in the piece to give it more credibility. It's terribly hard to justify in clear, rational, verbal, intellectual terms.

SB It's some kind of symbolic consistency you're after anyway...

DK Yes, the material I think I want to put in to make it better is all relevant to the kind of narrative – the unfolding of the idea – that gives it for me more conviction than if I didn't do it, I think. I double-check that I know what I'm going to do. Until I've sort of worked it out and slowed it all down and put the notes down I won't be absolutely sure.

SB How did you get the heart into twelve note music, when you were writing twelve note music?

DK The heart? The heart's always there. The very opening phrase of my first string quartet for solo viola is all heart. But it's also on a twelve note row unaccompanied. And the heart is like asking a question with a twelve note row. And it's to do with contour and the rhythm, dynamic, tempo...

SB If you had that heart-felt gesture is there a temptation to then serialise that gesture, serialise the rhythm?

DK The rhythm isn't serialised in that instance, the rhythm is intuitively felt, the pitches are predetermined according to the row but I'm comfortable with it because I probably based the row on that sort of initial phrase before I completed it somehow. My crafting skill, for what it's worth, made the rest of the passage appear to be convincing, appear to make it seem right.

SB So, like Schönberg, you discovered a row that you liked and responded to, were able to...

DK Well, the row has to be able to be managed in a diverse range of contexts within the piece. So, to make a row, that is a compositional act. It's not just an arbitrary, random, mucking about with twelve pitches. I don't think. But on the other hand I can contradict myself. I talk about a rock, picking up a rock which has a random pattern to it in its tactile surface. And I believe you can even do that and turn it into something meaningful; if you're thinking of the implications of the rock as the idea.

SB Would you talk a bit more about that?

DK Yes. If, in a sense, you're trying to convey the essence of “rock” which has a certain weight, shape, surface, colour; if it's an object you think worthy of trying to express in musical terms then you won't be embarrassed about that rock as the reference to all the patterns in the music that flow out from that. So, if a cluster of notes, say on the piano,

seems to suggest the jaggedness of the surface of the rock, that cluster of notes could be a chord, it could be horizontally stretched out and sequenced – you determine the pitch sequence which could be mathematically contrived to become some sort of a row, not necessarily a twelve note row, but perhaps a twelve note row to use all the available pitches of the octave. That sort of intellectual, mathematical manifestation of the implications from the initial cluster is your security in sort of weaving the patterns for the contours, rhythms and colours that come out of that... true to the initial impulse of the rock. So, you might call it “rock music”. And hope that people would expect something very different from what they'd be getting. That's being mischievous. I bet someone has written a rock music that isn't what we'd be expected from what we call rock music.

SB So, in a sense, intuition is poised somewhere between the mind and the heart, in a constant dialogue between the two... does that sound fair enough?

DK Oh yes. A striving for balance. You see one has to justify this emotional pull, I think. There's a temptation to indulge in emotionalism without having a kind of intellectual rigour, I suppose. So, something's got to be convincing in the form which is the result of intellectual balance with emotional states. The pieces of mine which I think are the most emotional have to be... they're not passed by me unless they pass the formal, abstract, so to speak, criteria.

SB Form can change, can't it? You can work out the form of a piece, begin to write it and in the process of writing the form can become something different.

DK The form can emerge. It can be partly predetermined. I think I've said this before. But the form can emerge and suddenly strike you as being right within a predetermination to guide you towards a suitable form. You know, you might realise the original intention fairly closely but I think if you're too dogmatic about it you can create trouble. So I think form is partly predetermined and then hopefully, magically, emerges out of this partial predetermination.

SB Right. Let me ask you this then: if you reach a point in a piece where intellectually you're drained, you don't know what you're going to do next, that's when you need the heart and intuition to come into play. Often that just doesn't come into play, you have to find something to provoke it.

DK I think one leads the other and then you try to be true to the original motivation, the impulse. That then - perhaps externally to music - an experience you can identify with is your reference to give credibility to the patterning that you then come up with. Does that make sense?

SB It does.

DK In other words it's harder to get stymied now than it used to be at your age. Because at your age I didn't have... I didn't know what to call on for help so easily. I would have been more sort of just playing with patterns without knowing what they represented or symbolised. And I agonised and agonised and wondered why I couldn't be as good as so and so. So the odious comparison thing isn't so important to me know, a model...

SB … So you can keep going as long as the idea...

DK … is dealt with truly.

SB …. yes, and remains abstract.

DK Remains abstract? Well, I think you have to have known criteria to help you determine the value of what you're doing. Abstraction is often regarded as at the top end of the hierarchy, I suppose. For example, it's been interesting for me, sometimes with people, to respond positively to something that I've composed without knowing the narrative, so to speak; listening to it in the abstract.

SB To take the example of *River Views*: you wouldn't think, would you, that you've exhaustively depicted scenes from the Derwent [River]...

DK Good heavens, no.

SB … no, so there's plenty more to do...

DK Oh, absolutely.

SB … to draw on. In that sense the idea remains abstract.

DK Does it?

SB I think it does because there's so much it's virtually limitless what one can do and one can really justify just about anything.

DK *River Views,* if it was deemed successful, would have to be seen to be having a satisfactory form about it: to to with shape, contrast, tempi, tension, relaxation; all of those factors would come into it. Which I suppose is a means of determining satisfaction in an abstract way, formally. At another level I suppose it would determine its success by how well it seems to realise the images that are the impulse behind the various movements. I would like to think it could stand up, or any piece could stand up, in the abstract; I guess you're right... justify anything?

SB Yes. Or at least find reasons later on why you did it. I mean in that sense I don't think art will ever dry up, I don't think humanity will ever be without art because life is essentially mysterious – always remains so. Even though you have speculative theorists who say in an idea society artists won't be needed; presumably because people can understand one another completely.

DK God help us if we never need some form of human expression.

SB Just to finish up: if you took the last movement of *River Views* – there's enough music there to explore for the rest of your life in a way, isn't there? If you were to just focus on that aspect.

DK Oh, yes. I'm conscious of just skimming over the surface, touching upon things that ought to be returned to again. Yes, I think worthwhile things to explore are able to be returned to again and again.

19th May, 1999 – Don Kay interviewed by Simon Reade and Simon Barber.

Pieces: *The Golden Crane, Night Spaces, River Views, The Edge of Remoteness*

Other topics: *motivations, aesthetic considerations re: hypothetical commission, drugs*

SR We have a hypothetical commission for you. For a large chamber ensemble, including four woodwind players, three brass, one percussion, one keyboard and/or harp, four string players; to to fifteen minutes duration designed to be conducted and ready for performance in a year's time.

DK Why does it have to be conducted?

SR Because I want to conduct it!

DK Ready for performance in a year's time is a good time. Full score, require parts...

SR Parts at performer's expense. You just have to do the full score.

SB And the piece has to have something to do with autumn, specifically autumn sunsets.

DK Autumn sunsets? Is there something about an autumn sunset that distinguishes it...?

SB Yes, it seems to be much slower in duration than other sunsets throughout the year; there's more colour and depth to the skies.

DK Right. Are you sure that's not in your imagination because you saw an outstanding Autumn sunset?

SB I'm fairly sure.

DK Perhaps you're looking at it through changing coloured trees or something that somehow effected its impression.

SB That would be part of it certainly.

DK Well I did years ago - in my 25 early little piano pieces – I did a think called *Autumn Leaves* about that long [Don is holding his fingers about four inches apart].

SR OK, the commission has just been extended. We'd like you to do a development of that early piece.

DK Well, you don't have to demand that. But I would say it's still valued and I would say that if you're talking about sunsets as opposed to Autumn leaves...

SR That's a good starting point and we'd like a ten to fifteen minute chamber ensemble piece...

DK Something to do with Autumn, that's what you're saying...

SB The challenge of a sunset is that it's purely visual and express that musically...

DK When you talked before about ecology you mean sounds of nature?

SB Yes, you can only hope to make references to sounds in nature, I would imagine anyway...

DK Well, if you weren't quite too restrictive about the sunset but just an “autumnal thing” that one could envisage a sunset as being part of, the ecology is bout to come into it to be complementary to the visual aspect of it. Apart from the wind and the trees, the bird sounds... depending where you are of course – if it's a rural, countryside setting as opposed to some other place... why “autumnal” though? Would you have something in mind about “gentleness”?

SR It may be part of the commission that the event planned is an early evening autumn concert.

DK A-ha. Because certainly *Dance Concertante* was for a spring tour and I think that affected the brightness...

SR Perhaps it may be possible for sunlight to be part of the concert.

DK Why are you adamant about the scoring? Do you associate the harp...?

SR Oh no, it's just an option.

DK Well, the harp is an interesting thing to include because it has the potential to have a gentle...

SR Yes, it's nice just for an ensemble size which is big enough to be a large ensemble and capable of a sustained sort of [texture].

DK Percussion is an interesting thing to include because, again, wind sounds and rustling sounds...

SR I'm thinking of group sizes such as *Elision* and the *Sydney Alpha*... *Intercontemporain* – which is a bit bigger – *Ensemble Modern* – those sort of sizes of ensembles – standard contemporary music ensemble sizes.

DK Well, I mean crunching leaves, footsteps in the leaves or something... through the park... I mean percussion lends itself to that kind of quality. So, I mean again talking about “literal” [thought] and so forth... going into something like that I'd think about literal sound and responding directly to a hypothetical sunset. But it would also turn into a metaphoric, atmospheric, creative piece no doubt that popped up, as it were, by certain sounds in the ecology. I'd be delighted to have a year to do a piece ten minutes long. What if it got longer than ten minutes... would you give me more money?

SR Let's talk about the practicalities of commissioning and composing.

DK What are your resources to be able to afford to commission this piece from me?

SR We're hoping you'll give us some idea of what your compositional time and effort is worth to you.

DK I'd go strictly by the minimal *Australia Council* guidelines for composition. I wouldn't ask in excess of that from a commissioning group in Tasmania knowing that you very likely have to fork out certain money from your own resources. It used to be 25% was required. And 75% comes from the Australia Council or Arts Tasmania. With a maximum length of 15 minutes one could ask three or four thousand.

SB Is that all?

DK That's all I would think would be necessary to fit into that guideline. I might be underestimating. Why do you say "is that all"?

SB It seems very "discounted" in a way.

DK It possibly is with that size ensemble. 13 lines multiplied by 15 @ $300 per minute...

[SB does some calculations which reveal a more realistic figure of $6000]

SR With those instruments what choices immediately occur?

DK I'd think of muted brass and four winds including oboe and clarinet, flute and a bassoon would be good because oboe and bassoon have nice sort of outdoor, nasal, pastoral qualities and a bit of a "bite" so it would be good to include those. And the brass... a trumpet, trombone and a horn. In the percussion I think I'd want "tinklies" - glockenspiel, marimba and xylophone perhaps as well as wind chimes. I reckon I'd include the harp.

SR The four string players could be a string quartet but it wouldn't have to be. You could have three 'cellos and a violin or something like that.

DK It's a fairly similar chamber orchestra to the one I used for *The Golden Crane*. I would have long, sustained sounds, interrupted sounds...

SR How do you go about thinking about knowing you've got a ten to fifteen minute form and you've got those instruments and autumn aesthetic...

DK It's too early for me to easily answer that I'd probably have in my mind muted, sustained sounds with interruptions and changing colours; a kind of "drooping" quality in the melodic lines and I'd imagine sweet, astringent harmonies – not too severe perhaps, depending on how soft they are – but I'm sure I'd get around to using my normal kinds of harmonies; making up fourths, fifths and minor seconds and all of that to suggest open space. Yes, I'd have an open sound about it I think. With form I'd want to be fairly precise as to whether it's going to fifteen or ten – if your monies can't determine that I'd have to settle for ten minutes if you're unsure about getting the dough. If the dough is not a problem I'd maximise it to fifteen without knowing why yet except if you've got the opportunity to use that ensemble for fifteen minutes that's about right I think.

SR If you're commissioned like that where money wasn't an issue and you had that

ensemble for whatever duration you wanted how does that strike you?

DK I don't think... usually in a commission one is given fairly precise times. If I was given “open slather” I think I would get an idea, a musical idea, and just try to determine how long I could sustain it. On the other hand it might be “autumn” as part of a three movement suite or it might be different aspects of autumn in a multi-movement piece which could be twenty minutes or something. I can't see how I would sustain at this moment an autumnal idea for more than twenty minutes easily.

SR When you had that commission for *Night Spaces*...

DK That was twenty minutes and that was a bold thing to sustain – twenty minutes in one movement. The structure was determined by the early evening to pre-dawn. So I fairly readily worked out that I'd lead up to the middle bit which was more animated – like an arch – so that the sounds at the beginning come back to an extent after the middle bit; what I call the “starry” bit. It starts out with evocative sounds which have ecological, rustling water and insect sound in my imagination; then it goes into the night, the stars; then it has the fantasy bit like a half-sleep, the mind restless; then it comes back to the stars, the insects and water lapping before the bird calls pre-dawn. That's how it goes. So, I worked that out early on as a formal structure. I can understand why at least one listener on first hearing said it sounded like a series of sound effects. The challenge was to make it seem a logical musical sequence in spite of the idea of following a pattern that I've just described.

SB What kind of patterns could you find in autumn?

DK Well, if you're talking about sunset as a part of it I would think strands of sustained colour that change somehow. But you just can't have strand of woodwind, string, harp and percussion blandly holding each strand the same pattern. There'd have to be some activity to justify the elongation. So, it would seem to invite repeating rhythm patterns which are subservient to the colour.

SB Why repeating rhythm patterns?

DK To suggest a static image. Trills and pedal sounds. I'd probably interrupt it by imagining I'm looking at it through the branches of a tree with its different coloured leaves falling from time to time. That's how I'd break it up a bit. I'd twiddle and muck it about so it conformed with a reasonably conventional idea of musical form somehow. The odd bird would fly down and break up the picture possibly. There could be, if one's looking out on the river, a passing yacht or a fairly strident motor-boat choofing up the river which seems at odds with the serenity of the scene. They're the sorts of things I'd play with in my imagination.

SB How would you go about managing changes of colour?

DK Well, if you've got a particular chord, say through the four wind instruments, the same chord might be taken over in stages by the four string instruments. So, it changes from a wind sound to a string sound. And it might be a different registration of pitches, more widely or more narrowly spaced. The muted brass might take over again. It might be homogeneous. It might start out with all the instruments duplicating across the spectrum that chord or that series of chords and then one particular colour predominating, taking

over from the others, then back again. And maybe the chords would also change, get darker as the sunset fades.

SB Do you have in your imagination, not necessarily just to do with this piece, any strong colour associations with harmonies?

DK I said straight away I'd have a flute and maybe a piccolo. I think high, “silvery” sounds one associates with bright colours and darker colours low, muted brass, horn and trombone. The pitches close together rather than spread out can suggest colours. Yes, I'm sure I have a strong sense of colour. I think it's to do with blues and greens and the general landscape.

SB But it's not as specific as Messiaen's colour associations.

DK No, although on occasion it would be...

SB … within the context of a fresh piece. You'd make up your colour associations anew with each piece.

DK Well, a colour to me can suggest warmth or coolness or this or that or the other; so a harmony and a timbre can suggest coolness or warmth. So, a cool colour rather than a warm colour would enter the head to be associated. I'm not sure what comes first. When I did *River Views* I thought of warm colours, cold colours just on the water's surface. So, I had in my mind warm and cold times of the year. And that would have effected the choice of the harmony and density of the chords. And I'm sure it would happen here. If you're demanding autumnal, open spaces... well, those considerations are bound to come in. There would be warm glows, absolutely. Say, a gong sound to suggest “glowingness”. Accompanied though. With shimmering textures on the strings. Maybe muted tremolando strings. Maybe harmonics with a soft gong shimmer. The mind boggles.

SB You're describing in essence timbral shifts...

DK And harmonic shifts, densities, intensities; dynamics and interruptions. Anything to excuse my interrupting with funny little characteristic quirky irrelevancies. And I'd explain that by saying “that's a bird sound” or a “flight” or “an obtrusive boat sound”.

SB So, it's not enough for you to have completely static expression like Messiaen sometimes does?

DK Does he have a completely static expression?

SB In some cases he does, certainly.

DK Really? I'm sure there's more going on than meets the eye or the ear, is there not? I think he's a master of sustaining, elongating in a timeless way certainly.

SB Sure. Almost trance-inducing. There's a certain quality to the trance which isn't a losing [of] focus, rather a gaining [of focus]. More and more focus.

DK But when you say completely static – I know what you mean but I'm sure things are

happening.

SB Instead of “static” maybe “cyclical”.

DK Sustained sounds with shifting colours and internal rhythm activity that alludes to static type of qualities... oh, I'd do that sort of thing.

SB But could you do a whole piece without the “interruptions”? Could you find enough interest...?

DK Well, the nearest I've done to that would be *Night Spaces*. *Night Spaces* has a residue in the memory of stillness and elongated sounds. The middle bit which is really quite active for a little while seems to fade from the memory. One is left with the residue of stillness and spaciousness, is one not? So, it's as if the activity in there - quite busy somehow – is unobtrusive in retrospect. So a whole piece...? Well, that's the nearest I've done to a piece that had that memory of something sparse and stretched out. Not the only one, I’m sure.

SR When you're faced with someone like Simon [Barber] asking you to write a piece with very specific aesthetic considerations do you just dismiss it?

DK Oh, no. I'd want to be true to your desire. I've talked about it in a very general way. Your questions help me already to get ideas – only some of which I could use probably. I might be saying more than I can handle in the piece. But I'd call on all of these things if I needed to and more I haven't thought of yet.

SB Let's shift into the practicalities of composition. If you have an idea about timbral shifts and your “interruptions” that's more than enough to play with...

DK See that bird out there right now? He just fluttered with his tail sitting up on top of that autumnal tree looking very evocative of a mood beyond itself. There's a drama implied. It's been joined by its mate and they both fluttered. Shortly they'll go off I suppose. But there's a sort of narrative in that in itself.

SB There's your beginning then. How would you start to develop this narrative?

DK I'd go to the piano and I'd find ideas consistent with those images. Obviously with music all you've got is rhythm, pitch, duration, timbre and dynamics. So one could find appropriate mixes. I might get one idea that I think can generate... I'll probably start with the sunset thing as that's what you come into the house with. And that might be my starting idea from which I would go forth meaning that the idea of sunset may not be the start of the piece but it might be the part of the piece I'll work on first.

SB If you start with a fluttering – a trill – somehow or other on the piano, how would you then relate that gesture to the event of the colours changing in the background?

DK I'd go to the piano and let my fingers dabble on the keyboard and I would find something in a harmony, no doubt soft and sustained, that would appeal to my idea of colour and then I'd have to move from there to somewhere else. So I could well get a chord sequence without rhythm being considered yet. Just a series of chords that seem to relate and no doubt they would contain these intervals – open intervals – no doubt they

would possibly be seventh chords and thirds up to ninths to generate a sequence of “sweet dissonance” so to speak. Not too astringent, not too blatantly diatonic. I could well start like that. And then find a way of organising it rhythmically.

SB So, rhythmically that could start to organise the rate of the cycles, the repeating chord sequences; once you've begun to get a feel for how frequently these harmonies recur that's when you can start to get extra colour into your piece with interjections. Those interjections will colour your harmonies differently somehow.

DK Yes, I might do that. I can't really say much more than I have until I actually got stuck into it because I would be pretty intuitive from this point and the actual working on the piece itself... it would be pretty hypothetical until I got something specific to respond to in working out how it develops.

SB OK. So, responding spontaneously to the fluttering of a couple of birds: when do you start to think about form?

DK I think very early on but without being... you see the fifteen minute span immediately gives me a framework. I can sy now it would have a slowish tempo because I would associate these sweet, dissonant colours with a slow tempo and a falling phraseology, falling patterns that would recur at different registrations and no doubt at different “tonalities”, so to speak. In other words the same material might recur with a different colouring an din a different key. And if one's not thinking in a “key”, but a free “chromatic” texture, one can still modulate, as it were, that texture so that it all recurs a fifth down or a fourth up or a third down or something.

SB The reason autumn interests me, as a “co-commissioner”, is that you can actually take a literal fifteen minutes of sunset time.

DK Yes, you could do that. That's an interesting way of doing it. That hadn't occurred to me.

SB What rationale would you have for truncating events or speeding up events if you had a mind to [work like that].

DK I think it's all about allusion. You see, the piece can't become the actual sunset so fifteen minutes to try to portray literally a very gradually fading thing may not work musically. I would think about means – which I was referring to flippantly as those “interruptions” - to hold the attention over the fifteen [minute] span and still be true to the idea of an elongated, not in “real time”, event. Like *Night Spaces*: twenty minutes trying to suggest many hours.

SB Particularly the sun rising at the end of *Night Spaces*, with the dawn chorus and what have you, everything is coming to life and there are these slow shifts of colour on the piano which seem to occur at exactly the right moment that wouldn't necessarily have anything to do with the literal passing of time...

DK … not in “real time”, no...

SB … but psychologically it's satisfying. So what kind of “pacing” do you consciously think

about for its psychological appeal?

DK What a difficult question! In *Night Spaces* those triads coming up a third, ordinary, plain piano triads; they were intuitively felt across the backdrop of these random sounding bird sounds, so to speak. And when they occurred they were meant to have a kind of “spiritual” effect, I suppose you could say. But because they were rising they're also meant to suggest the coming of the day. But they were meant to have the allusion of being regular but very spaced out against the randomness of the birds. Whereas earlier in the piece the plucking on the [piano] string - which in my imagination, as I've often said to you, suggested the stars randomly twinkling but static in their positioning – was mathematically worked out in a very precise way. But I don't often do that really. I'm more dependent on intuitive pacing. And my way of testing it would be to simply go over and over it in the correct tempo, reading it through knowing that it needs something at a particular point to keep the ear or attention engaged. I would try to allude to a much longer time than fifteen minutes, I would think. I don't think I would literally sit and look at the sunset for fifteen minutes and try to be that precise in time. But it's a valid way of doing it. So, if I thought of a piece about autumn I could either think a bit like that – with the sunset being the main thing – or sunset as being part of a broader reference to autumn; have a series of “autumnal” images.

SB That refers back to Simon's question about “splitting” the idea.

DK It might be, I think, a one movement piece. But I could think of a little series of short pieces. If I took the earlier piano piece called *Autumn Leaves* which is under twenty bars I would think, I could certainly take the idea of falling leaves – a bit like in [John] Paynter's *Autumn*; you know those minor thirds and wait until they pile up. I could well take that and just play with those melodic and rhythmic patterns and stretch it out into a bigger piece which is falling leaves, so to speak, within the idea of an autumnal sunset. I suppose I could do that. So, there's no end of possibilities. I'd have to get myself excited and pinned down about all the possibilities. At this point I can only speculate hypothetically. I wouldn't want to commit myself now because it wouldn't be fair to myself to say this is what I would do, full stop. I'd have to experiment with these ideas which is what I always do. But you'll get your autumn piece if you find the dough! But, of course, music is such an interesting art form. I could do a piece with no notion of autumn and do a deception. How can you prove, apart from the title I give it? So, it's a matter of trust and honour and I would certainly, as an honourable person, be motivated by the concepts I'm talking about now. But there's no guarantee though it would be heard by you as anything to do with autumn.

SR When I wrote *Spring and Autumn* I wrote it because my grandfather wanted me to call it “Spring and Autumn” but I could have really called it “XYZ” because it had nothing literally to do with spring or autumn. But at the first performance people came up to me and said “I heard spring rain in there”.

DK Are you quite sure there's nothing in there [to do with spring or autumn]?

SR There's nothing conscious.

DK You were thinking, in a general way were you, about the spirit of your grandfather's heartfelt desire?

SR I think so. I think it had more to do with him than to do with any seasons.

DK If you've got twenty people doing sounds with their hands and if you do that [lightly clapping hands] – imagine 20 people doing that. It conjures up straight away autumnal rain on the back or front lawn. And to have autumn rain through these instruments... you see, there's nothing to say I can't have all of those – twelve players did you say?

SR Thirteen.

DK Thirteen players each, as well as their legitimate instrument, with a tambour: put down your trumpet or bassoon and pick up the tambour and go [tapping]. I remember Barry Tuckwell with his horn here visiting Hobart with his Swiss ensemble years ago. He put down his horn at one point and picked up a tambourine as the others in the ensemble picked up something different from their instruments and did just that sort of thing.

SB The idea of taking that gesture of rain as a percussive beginning and then shifting that into a pitch could open up a field of possibilities...

DK Oh, absolutely. Fifteen minutes: you'd have to pace the thing so it didn't seem overly crowded, it would have to seem right, the events pertaining to the autumnal concept within the fifteen minutes.

SB There you've got a beginning of a movement: the fluttering of the birds and the patterns of rain can have a relationship.

DK Exactly. I talk about music as a symbolic art. These symbols can transform themselves. A flute trill can suggest a bird sound in a very general way just as a tambour "pitter-pattering" can sound like gently falling rain. The rhythm of the tambour "pattering" can become the rhythm of the trill, can become the threatening tremolando on the clarinet in its chalumeau register. So, these transformations can happen and that's one of the delights – to control it is the challenge. To make it convincing. So, if people though hear different things like you [SR] were just saying in your *Spring and Autumn* piece different to what you were conscious of it doesn't matter two hoots. And, if you feel true, though, to the concept of spring and autumn that's the main thing; even if it takes a different form for the listeners.

SR Well, it's just the "abstract art" kind of thing really.

DK Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique.* I knew that piece, sort of knew it, for many years before someone pointed out within the actual program he said something about a dog barking in a village late at night. I never heard that until it was pointed out. But when it was pointed out "that's the dog bark" then I could immediately hear it, if that was Berlioz' intention. But Berlioz wouldn't have minded, I'm sure, two hoots if it was just [perceived as] a sort of event in the texture.

SB It's just whatever makes the piece work.

DK Yes. He needed that no doubt to justify his own patterning strategy.

SB How many of those "patterning strategies" would you need? It's a bit of a silly question.

You've got the birds, the pattering of rain...

DK … you've got the sunset changing slowly, the boat going up the river...

SB OK, but let's lust stay with what we can unify for the moment. There is a very clear relationship between the birds fluttering and the rain “pitter-pattering”.

DK Well, there could be. There doesn't have to be.

SB No, but it's a fairly clear connection. How many of these events do you need to begin feeling excited?

DK I only need one of them. But others would proliferate.

SB Do you need one event or one relationship between two events?

DK Oh, I just need one. Just the idea of the colours of sunset is enough to get one going. But, as I said earlier, to sustain the interest I wouldn't be content to hold that for as long as possible – maybe I would – but at this pint I don't think I'd want more than that perhaps. But I'm not sure. I heard a little piece by Arvo Pärt the other day. I think it was a string piece, and it just made a fascinating appeal; not that much was happening but I thought “that's the composer”. It just had its appeal. It had an individual sound that I associated with the composer. It was just so well managed. He must have, I think, maximised the possibilities within his very meagre material. And that appeals to me. Without turning into a kind of so-called “minimalist”.

SB Well, there's Stravinsky...

DK … being mean with material, yes. “Minimalism” is a bit of a misnomer. The particular style of the American minimalist is very identifiable and it is a term applied to them. I don't think one calls the European people particularly “minimalist”. Andriesonn is called a minimalist, I suppose. His sounds are often easily identifiable with the American idea of minimalism. But there are others who work with minimal material in a maximal kind of way who are not called minimalists. So, you've talked me into having plenty of ideas if the piece came to happen. It's the opposite of [what happens in] my *Little Domestic Suite*. In the idea of events in a domestic sequence you've got seemingly unrelated ideas joined by the notion of being part of the domestic situation. All quite short but all different, one after the other.

SB So, is that particular invitation to compose the *Little Domestic Suite* – is that ready Mr Kay?

DK Ah, I'm up to number five. Page twenty-six to be exact. So, it will go to about thirty-three pages.

SB When you're commissioned rather than invited...

DK … well, there's not much difference really...

SB Well, “commissioned” I would think would be being paid money and “invited” is...

DK … yes, well it doesn't make any difference to me. If I commit myself to do a piece for somebody, that's it.

SB Do you feel more pressured to write when there's money involved?

DK No.

SB So, you're working at a pretty consistent pace as long as you've got, as long as you give yourself, enough time to complete the commission.

DK Yes, well Christian Wojtowicz once said I'm the only composer he knows who actually writes to time. I think that's far from accurate. I think he meant it when he said it. But composers notoriously don't submit on the deadline and they jolly well should because they have to be business-like and professional or able to be. If they don't...

SB So what do you do when you find there aren't any ideas?

DK Well, you shouldn't accept the commission unless you're fairly confident you can comply.

SB Oh right.

DK I don't think you should. If you're just “money hungry” and say “yes, I'll do it”... but I know what you mean. You can't sort of guarantee things. But I believe the composer must dig for ideas and not just sit around waiting for things to happen. By the way, there was a program on SBS a couple of nights ago about the effects of drugs, a particular drug the name of which...

SB What would it be – ecstasy?

DK No, no.

SB LSD?

DK Pr...

SB Prozac?

DK Prozac, yes.

SB The anti-depressant?

DK Yes, that's right. The effect of that drug on the creative process. they had a pop musician, a novelist, a painter and a poet. The pop musician was very young and was working in cohorts – he was the lyric writer – working in cohorts with the musician. The novelist was a middle-aged lady who'd just lost her husband a year ago, they were both writers. So, she was in a state of wanting to write after the shock of losing her husband. The poet was an editor for some fairly high-profile literary magazine in London. They were all English. The painter was also very established – mind you, I hadn't heard of him; I couldn't tell how successful they were. But their comments were interesting.

SB … it was a pharmaceutical drug, wasn't it?

DK Yes. They all agreed to go on it. The chap interviewing them was doing some sort of experiment to judge the effects of... now, why are we talking about that?

SR You've lost me I'm afraid!

DK Oh, meeting deadlines. I think, myself, that I would avoid anything like that. Frances keeps telling me that I'm very stable, very level-headed. I'm sure that's not true. But I think you get your high from actually being creative. If you take a stimulant to get you into it I think that's a bit dicey. And I'm not sure if the product is true. For example, the painter was quite satisfied with the way he painted, he just wanted to see if it had any effect on him. He did very abstract patterns which showed some of his stuff. The effect of the drug, if I remember correctly, was to relieve him of the pressure. It relaxed him so the canvas wasn't demanding action from him. He was just making designs, abstract designs without feeling quite so tense about it.

SB I think there has to be a balancing of these processes. There has to be – to use a composer's example – a manuscript paper making demands on you but there also have to be time to just play around freely with ideas.

DK Well, I do think so. But yet again, I think if you are aware of where ideas come from to an extent and you've got these motivational “consciousness-es” and you understand something about how you operate with your styles of musical thinking then it's a great support. Because if something doesn't work then you go on to something else. And it prompts the other areas. The way you think and the way you get motivated.

SB Yes. Sooner or later one has to make sense of what one is imagining. I've used marijuana in the past to free up my guitar playing – incidentally not since I've been at the conservatorium – and it worked. It certainly did.

DK Yes. One has alcohol. One might smoke a bit – tobacco – I mean we all are... none of us are absolutely pure. You can even have a bar of chocolate to get some sort of...

SR Sugar high!

DK Yes, exactly. I mean it happens at all sorts of levels. But basically if you become dependent, overly dependent I reckon it would interfere somehow.

SB It just disintegrates into nothing. That's the problem. It [drugs] can open things up but you still have the fundamental challenge of making sense of things. And drugs aren't going to make sense for you. They're just not. They can facilitate things.

DK First of all the body and the mind have to be in good working order, I think. And I suspect that if you're as healthy as you can be physically and mentally then you work better.

SR What about a figure like Gesualdo who was, from all reports, fairly unstable mentally but his music is incredibly interesting?

DK We can all be very unstable. When you're actually being creative you can be terribly unstable. You can be very neurotic. He would no doubt composed for therapy in part, which is fine. I mean you have something nagging at you to get out: you have to get it out to regain stability or repose within yourself. We all go through that, don't we? I know when I rang Frances up in England I was half way through the *Edge of Remoteness*, I said “I think I'm going mad”. I didn't really mean it, but I sort of meant it. I remember in that piece I was about two thirds of the way and I was trying to decide whether I could justify the recurring of a passage towards the end. It just sort of goes over and over in a way, a slow “re cycling”. To get it right in my head I had to enter this sound world which no-one else could enter and so in trying to do that I thought I was going “nuts”. Or in a way had to almost be like that in order to solve the problem. So, to be objective in that state is very hard to do but it's so exciting though. Because you know you're into something that's all your own. When I'm in that state I try to bear with it and don't become immediately judgemental. I have to cool off in stages. It would be the same in doing my “autumnal” piece, I’m sure. My way of doing things is just to go over and over and over reading it through and adding to it or deciding it needs something there or whatever it is. It sounds funny saying it that way. In other words I can't be too consciously “coolly” intellectual in the conventional way. I think I have to judge the pacing and the amounts of activity by going over and over – imagining it being played in front of an audience. And imagine also the performers getting bored with it or getting involved with it. Any means to try and understand what the hell is going on is in order. Now, if you call on something external to yourself – you have to get drunk or high or something – I'm not sure that your judgement is accurate when you're in that state. You have to be cool-headed at some point.

SB You need both.

DK Yes, I think you do. Anyway, personally I find getting excited about the idea is as much as I can cope with without stimulants. But I’m not that pure either. I can enjoy stimulation external to the idea. But I don't think I can compose in a state of false stimulation, if you know what I mean.

SB You can't be rational.

DK Although being irrational is a part of it too.

SB Yes, you have to rational about irrationality.

DK Yes. So I am speaking generally. I don't think I could comment on how others are helped. But I did go along and see Brett Whiteley's retrospective after he died in Melbourne the very day after I saw the Turner exhibition. I was so overwhelmed by the Turner exhibition that to go into the Brightly the next day... did I say “Brightly”? - Whiteley – Wet Brightly! - the potential for him to be negated by that close comparison was there. But I was impressed with the Whiteley exhibition. Also, I was interested to try to find the ones that were done under the influence of drugs as opposed to not as far as I could tell. The distortions in the image making that the drug taking brought about in his work was interesting.

SB I don't think it's quite so much a matter of distortion...

DK I'm sure the effects of the drugs brought about a certain insight which resulted... when I

say “distortion” - the images being less representational.

SB Yes, it is less representational. But the problem with taking drugs is that it can open up a lot of insights which the the rational side of the brain can't actually make sense of. You can open up too many things too quickly. What often happens in a drug [taking] situation with an artist is that they settle for a lesser product for the sake of the creative freedom they have. But they cease to make sense after a certain point.

DK I thought control too would be...

SB Well, that's relinquished.

DK Well, the act of physical brush strokes under the influence would be more difficult I imagine. I don't know if the memory of the experiences of the drug would be the way to do it and paint when you're cool and more stable let's say. Or painting during the experience of drugging. I don't know how it's done or how he would have done it but probably a bit of both I could imagine.

SB If you look at it like this as well... if you look at Jackson Pollock who had the freedom to do what he did within his medium and you look at Elliott Carter and the similar abstraction in his work: Carter becomes clearer and clearer and Pollock disintegrates.

DK What do you mean “disintegrates”?

SR Well, he died!

DK Oh, like Whiteley?

SR Yes.

SB So, it can be the same kind of experience but your response to the experience could be destructive.

SR I can't know – I'm not a painter – but I wonder whether because the act of painting is so much more immediate...

DK … but if your hand is wobbly or shaky or whatever it might manifest...

SR Yes, but there's still going to be a result If your hand is wobbly and shaky and you can't write any notes down there's nothing to [show].

DK But to write a rough score – if you're inspired and all hyped up – to scribble notes down would be easier than making a fine brush-stroke necessary to realise this “distorted”, so to speak, image. I mean the act of painting is very physical. You have to have finely controlled hand. In composition you have to have a finely controlled mind, of course, but when you're writing noes down you don't have to make it pretty. You know what I'm trying to say?

SB I do and I don't.

DK Well, in writing out my score, my fair copy, of course I have to be steady. But I don't have to be that way – do I? - if I was drugged up or something; I can be very shoddy in the actual act of writing the notes down.

SB Can you?

DK Well, can I?! I imagine it's less important than putting down a brush stroke.

SR In extreme inebriation I don't think I can hear anything particularly. Because of the physicality of painting I wonder whether maybe a great artist like that [Pollock] who found they can retain some physicality in what they were doing and then sort of burn out. But with someone like Carter who can't do things unless it's cool, calm and collected – in order to keep his art going he has to stay at that level and won't burn out like a Jackson Pollock.

DK Yes, well I would associate myself more with the Carter than with the Pollock. Which is not to say I don't admire what Pollock and Whiteley got up to. But I'd be concerned about their health, you see. the both ended prematurely and it's such a shame. I would have liked to have thought that they could have both gone on better for not having got to that state of physical decline due to alcohol and drugs and everything else.

SB Drugs also make you lazy. They make you very ego-centric.

DK So I understand. Brain cells are destroyed.

SB Exactly. The ability to rationalise in order to communicate becomes diminished. These egos like Whiteley and Pollock become absolutely obnoxious to be around.

DK I understand that Whiteley, though, indulged at some point simply out of curiosity; he wanted to know what it was like. In a sense I respect that. But I wouldn't dare personally. I just wouldn't be tempted. It's a bit like me not doing electronic music. I'm not tempted. I've got enough to do with what I'm trying to do. It's slightly analogous... in a sense you're daring things all the time but not in an overtly dramatic way necessarily. So, if my autumnal piece didn't do something a bit new then that would be disastrous. In other words, it would have a mild dose of “daringness” in it, no doubt. Like every other piece. Even my *Autumn Leaves* at the age of eighteen.