

BEYOND NATIONALISM IN *IRKANDA I*: THE REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY OF  
PETER SCULTHORPE: DMA DOCUMENT PROPOSAL

Many composers are remembered at the expense of others; some gain international status whilst others dissipate into a state of limbo. Musicologists have long been intrigued by this phenomenon, as the plentiful references devoted to this topic attest. Whilst each scholar provides invaluable insight, none relate this information to an Australian composer.

The art of value judgement proves to be a popular topic amongst musicologists. Carl Dahlhaus explores the relationship between analytical procedures and aesthetic judgements, arguing that personal taste contributes to the overall perception of music.<sup>1</sup> Music deemed valuable in this process is ultimately accepted into the canon, defined by Joseph Kerman as a “an enduring, exemplary collection of books, buildings, and paintings authorized in some way for contemplation, admiration, interpretation, and the determination of value.”<sup>2</sup> Kerman and Jim Samson provide a thorough overview of the musical canon, which they see as a litmus test for composers, whilst others note the limitations of this procedure.<sup>3</sup> As Marcia Citron and Philip Gossett highlight, these limitations result in the marginalization of composers.<sup>4</sup> Such an example is evident in the representation of Peter Sculthorpe (b. 1929).

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Analysis and Value Judgement* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1983), vii.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Kerman, “A Few Canonic Variations,” in *Canons*, edited by Robert von Hallberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 177.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Samson: ‘Canons (iii)’, *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 4 October 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

<sup>4</sup> Marcia J Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 190; Philip Gossett, “History and Works that Have No History: Reviving Rossini’s Neapolitan Operas,” in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons*, edited by Katherine Bergeron and Philip Vilas Bohlman, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 97.

Numerous musicologists perceive Peter Sculthorpe as a nationalist.<sup>5</sup> Carl Dahlhaus and Richard Taruskin provide valuable insight into anachronistic nature of nationalism. Taruskin develops this notion further, proposing that such exoticism is merely a case of tourist appeal or passport profiling, given that a person's views are often jaded by stereotypes.<sup>6</sup> Francis Toye and Sydney Grew even claim that nationalism and music are contradictions in terms, given that a composer cannot reflect upon an entire nation.<sup>7</sup> Its segregating quality is explored by Boyd Shafer, who states that "nationalism [is] the major sentiment uniting and separating people," a view echoed by Ricardo Lorenz.<sup>8</sup> Although Lorenz refers to Latin American composers, parallels can be drawn in the representation of Peter Sculthorpe and his absence from the musical canon.

Sculthorpe was the first composer considered to write music with a distinctly Australian flavour, incorporating traditional Aboriginal dances and songs and the sounds of native birds into his music. The stark contrasts of lush harmony and desolate, clashing chords are said to depict the variety in Australia's landscape. His distinct harmonic language and soaring melodic lines ensured his popularity in Australia and the occasional performance around the globe. Despite this, there remains little sustained interest in Sculthorpe internationally.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it must be determined how a composer achieves international success.

---

<sup>5</sup> Anne Boyd, "Not for Export: Recent Developments in Australian Music," *The Musical Times* 111, no 1533 (1970), 1097-1100; Bernard Holland, "Music: No Melody, Just Raw Nature Observed," *New York Times*. 02 November 1988, p20; David Matthews, "Sculthorpe at 60," *Tempo* New Ser. No 170 (1989), 12-17; David Wright, "Cry of the Earth. Known by Reputation Rather than by Performance in Europe, Peter Sculthorpe is a Composer who 'Communicates Powerfully,'" *The Musical Times* 133, no. 1793 (1992), 339.

<sup>6</sup> Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 39; Richard Taruskin, 'Nationalism,' *Grove Music Online* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 12 October 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>

<sup>7</sup> Francis Toye, "A Case for Music Nationalism," *The Musical Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (1918), 12; Sydney Grew, "National Music and the Folk-Song," *The Musical Quarterly* 7, no 2 (1921), 172-173.

<sup>8</sup> Boyd C Shafer, *Nationalism: Its Nature and Interpreters* (Washington: American Historical Interpreters, 1976), 4; Ricardo Lorenz, "Voices in Limbo," Unpublished paper, 1999, 98.

<sup>9</sup> Wright, "Cry of the Earth. Known by Reputation Rather Than Performance in Europe, Peter Sculthorpe is a Composer Who 'Communicates Powerfully,'" 339.

Such achievement can be measured in a number of ways. For example, repeated performances ensure a composition's inclusion into the repertoire, defined by Marcia J. Citron as music of the common-practice period.<sup>10</sup> Incorporation in the repertoire however, does not guarantee a place within the canon. Kerman clearly distinguishes these terms, claiming "repertoires are determined by performers, canons by critics."<sup>11</sup> Works included are regarded as exemplary; they become a model to which others are compared.<sup>12</sup> To ascertain the motives behind Sculthorpe's exclusion, the canonizing process must be scrutinized. Musicologists expect the music of certain composers to adhere to their nation's identity (or stereotype). Consequently, numerous composers are labelled as nationalists. However, as Dahlhaus declared in 1989, nationalism is merely a frame of mind, not a reality.<sup>13</sup>

This document explores these arguments with regards to Sculthorpe. Part one examines his classification as a nationalistic composer, his relationship to the canon, and how this dual dilemma has sentenced him to a state of limbo. Part two outlines his rise as a prominent Australian composer, tracing his early life and the emergence of his mature style. An analysis of *Irkanda I for Violin Alone* (1955) is included within this section, thereby creating a hypothetical position for this work within the canon.

---

<sup>10</sup> Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon*, 27.

<sup>11</sup> Kerman, "A Few Canonic Variations," 182.

<sup>12</sup> Samson, "Canon (iii)."

<sup>13</sup> Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 39.

Low, N - violin