



## ‘I AM A TEXTURAL COMPOSER’: JANE STANLEY ON THE CREATIVE PROCESS, IMMERSIVE TEXTURES, GLOW AND A NEW SONG CYCLE

Jane Stanley  and Judith Bishop 

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**Abstract:** This is the transcript of an interview with Glasgow-based Australian composer Dr Jane Stanley. The interviewer is Dr Judith Bishop, an Australian poet and lyricist whose words appear in two of the works discussed: ‘14 Weeks’ (from *Interval* (UQP, 2018) and ‘The Indifferent’ (from *Event* (Salt Publishing UK, 2007)). The interview was recorded at the University of Glasgow on 29 May 2023 and edited for clarity, length and concision. It was recorded a day after the world premiere of Jane Stanley’s *14 Weeks* at the Glasgow School of Art Choir Composer concert in City Halls, Glasgow. In response to a recent survey which revealed huge gender inequalities in the granting of music commissions, Composer had commissioned seven female composers to write choral works of around ten minutes, of which *14 Weeks* was one. The interview ranges widely, from the composer’s textural style to her creative process, and touches on her forthcoming composer portrait album, to be released by Delphian Records in 2024.

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### The Composer Commission, *14 Weeks*

**JB:** How do you feel now that the Composer concert is over and *14 Weeks* (see [Example 1](#)) has finally seen the light of day, after all the delays of COVID lockdowns?

**JS:** I feel a combination of relief and happiness. I know the piece now and what it can be. Of everything I have composed, this piece felt particularly risky because of the aleatoric nature of my material. The fact that I’ve used mobiles – melodic cells that are repeated independently by the singers to create an immersive texture – means that I could not very easily have constructed a representation of that as I was composing. To some extent I did audition certain passages using my Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), but it would have taken a long time to record a hundred different tracks of me singing the whole piece. So I still needed to hear the piece performed live to know how the resultant textures were going to sound and how the succession of passages would gel as a form.

**JB:** It seems very original. Is this one of the more experimental pieces you’ve written and how does it differ from your previous works?

Smooth, gliding, distant, glowing, subtle

10" 20"

Soprano 1 *PPP* enter individually, various speeds  
When

Soprano 2 *PPP* enter individually, various speeds  
when you

Alto 1 *PPP* enter individually, various speeds  
When

30" 40" 50" finish by 1'00

S1 when you be gan

S2 when you

A1 when you when you

Alto 2 *PP* enter individually, various speeds  
be - gan

1'00 1'10

S1 *cresc. ...* it was *mod. slow* it was whe-ther or not *accel. ...*

S2 *cresc. ...* it was *p* it was

A1 *accel. cresc. ...* be - gan *p* it was

A2 *p* finish by 1'20  
be - gan

Bass *p* enter individually, slow  
when you

chorus divides into 2 groups overleaf (chorale group and chorus)

Example 1:  
Jane Stanley, *14 Weeks*, p. 1.

**JS:** It's not the first piece in which I've used aleatoric or indeterminate notation, but it's one of the first in which I've engaged with this approach so extensively. One of my earliest pieces to use elements of indeterminacy, going way back, is *Spindrift/Interiors* (2004), for recorder, mandolin and piano. But the first piece in which I delved deep into indeterminate notation was *D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y* (2015), for mezzo-soprano, piano and percussion. Taking that approach creates affordances for really magical results to be produced, specifically the effects of hearing multiple lines coinciding in unpredictable ways; these in turn generate composite rhythms and textures that would be difficult or impossible to craft if I composed them in a more conventional and prescriptive way. But this inherent unpredictability of course comes with risks.

**JB:** You've talked before about the inception of the piece, how you started working with some textures, then a melodic idea, and then you looked for the text. What exactly happened when you found the text? How did that inflect the work or help it to develop?

**JS:** I had this abstract musical idea in my mind on which I ruminated for some time. It was basically a descending stepwise three-note figure in a minor mode. The rhythm which had evolved in my mind along

with these pitches turned out to fit very naturally with the opening words, 'When you began', of your poem *14 Weeks*. I came across your poem simply by Googling 'Australian female poets'.<sup>1</sup> For some reason I felt drawn to abstracting and deconstructing a text in the pursuit of building texturally driven material. The relative brevity of your poem was appealing as it suggested to me an opportunity to repeat individual words a lot.

I also liked that it was about pregnancy. Finding this poem was very timely as I had recently had my second child. The meaning expressed in your poem resonated deeply with the sonic ideas which had been percolating in my imagination, things to do with slowly evolving sustained clouds of harmony, and an overall immersive atmosphere. I was also triangulating this with the parameters of writing for an amateur choir. How could I make my music accessible to sing? And I knew that it would be wise to write something that had a strong sense of tonal centre, which is not common for me – I tend to write atonally.

**JB:** So that idea of a sound cloud, and obviously the texture of that, which is so important in *14 Weeks*, is that an idea that you've always been interested in? I'd love to hear how that evolved.

**JS:** In my work there are typically moments at least where a signature texture happens, and that's to do with resonance and sustain. I've always felt driven to create musical material which resembles clouds of sound. The word 'resonance' is something that applies a lot when I look back at my body of work. If I'm writing for piano, I love putting the sustain pedal down as a means to maximise resonance. I also like using the middle pedal of the grand piano where you can sustain certain notes and leave others 'dry'. The use of aleatoric repetition of cells is very compatible with creating continuously flowing textures, and the affordance to metamorphose one texture into another. In doing this I like to build the density of textures over time, but then at certain moments to cut in with something contrasting to create formal definition.

**JB:** The idea of a sound cloud connects for me to a word that keeps recurring in the instructions for your music, which is 'glowing'. Can you talk a bit about what that means for you sonically and musically?

**JS:** In *14 Weeks*, when I think about glowing, I think about the triadic harmony that I'm using and the feeling of resolution and agreement, as opposed to cluster-type harmonies where there's a lot of tension. Take, for example, an E major triad: it glows because it contains the major third. There's a colour to the harmonic language which has a glowing quality for me. It's bright. And it's also to do with the richness of a large ensemble, all partaking in and contributing to a texture which continues – which is sustained.

### **On Being a Composer and a Working Mother**

**JB:** You mentioned in the pre-concert panel event for Composeher that, despite the disruptions that motherhood can bring to the creative process, you might not have written a piece like this if it wasn't for that experience of motherhood. Would you like to say more about

<sup>1</sup> <https://jacket2.org/poems/poems-judith-bishop>.

this – how becoming a mother has changed your practice as a composer?

**JS:** Perhaps if I had not yet experienced motherhood I might not have selected that particular poem to set. But in terms of my practice, I feel like motherhood has improved my feeling of confidence in my compositional identity. It has also affected my working method, making me much more pragmatic. I'm better with time and the decision-making process. You just never know when a child might wake up, or your schedule goes out the window for various reasons to do with childcare. So I use time much more efficiently. That's not to say there's not still time to experiment and to dream things up; that's still a key part of my process. If you have a distant deadline then there's lots of time to experiment. But I feel less self-conscious about what I'm doing now. That may be partly a product of ageing, too – because you get to know yourself better as you get older. I'm not looking over my shoulder as much or comparing myself with my peers. Now I feel like people want to hear difference and originality. What is it that I have to say? And sometimes it feels uncomfortable to be different. But the value that I think I can contribute to a community, to an audience, has to do with ways in which I am different from others.

### The Practice of Composition and the Nature of Inspiration

**JB:** When do you tend to write and where – those very practical aspects of space and time?

**JS:** I compose whenever I can. I'm nearing the end of a year of research leave. It would otherwise be unusual for me to be able to spend a whole day working on a piece, and usually even then it's broken up with different projects. I'm interested not just in composing but in other forms of research which are related to composing. So, for example, I'm piloting some music-based activities in a nursery and thinking about educational outreach. But when I'm engaged in a different task, I often find inspiration to channel into my composition projects. For example, when I observe young children playing or improvising, sometimes that could inflect what I do in my next piece. Ideas spring to mind unexpectedly too, often when I'm doing something physical. I might be driving, or I could be in a supermarket, or I could be doing some domestic chores and I will sketch things down on whatever piece of paper I can find, or perhaps record ideas into my mobile phone.

Otherwise, I'll just be based in my home office, which I regard as my primary composing space. I have a digital piano, so I can turn the volume down low or listen through headphones when the children are asleep. I compose a lot at the piano when I'm improvising, and there's a lot of improvisation involved in my process. I like the idea of coming up with musical gestures which could be deployed in any number of pieces. Currently I'm working on two projects simultaneously, one for Red Note Ensemble (*Oνειροι*) as well as a piece for The Hermes Experiment (*The Indifferent*). I might be consciously working on ideas for my Hermes Experiment piece, and a little idea for piano might come to me which feels compatible with the piece I'm writing for Red Note Ensemble. So I just write it all down and then I file away these 'seed' ideas in different folders.

**JB:** It sounds like you have a composition practice that allows you to draw in different material and different experiences; you're moving

through the day and various things are happening and it's all consolidating and coming together. So it's not that you have to be in a particular space, this idea of a room of her own; it sounds like the magic, for you, can occur wherever you happen to be.

**JS:** Yes, and something else that occurs to me is that the more time I spend working on a project, the better and more plentiful the ideas will generally be. I won't always come up with something that I like straightaway and I might reject a lot of the ideas that I come up with during that process, but I can either be at my piano or I can be somewhere else.

Key to my process is that it involves setting my mind to a creative problem to work on. It's as though I'm feeding something into my subconscious and then ideas will pop up when I'm doing something else. The idea of 'sleeping on it' – that's another way of telling my subconscious to work on an idea. Consequently, that moment which we might refer to as a 'flash of inspiration', I think that is simply my subconscious landing on some sort of solution to the problem that I previously fed it. I trust in this process. I sit down and I think, 'these are the instruments I'm writing for'; 'I'm going to improvise a little bit and then walk away and come back'. A lot of the time I'll just be 'playing' ideas over and over in my mind. I don't think I'd be very successful in my process if I worked purely in my composing space. I need to do a combination of being away from it and not consciously thinking about something – that idea of the unconscious and subconscious. I'd like to really understand that, and I don't take it for granted.

**JB:** When you compose, are you hearing the music in your mind or seeing the score? Or a combination of the two?

**JS:** Imagery is something I've just scratched the surface of in my own research. I know there's a lot written by psychologists who are researching the creative process. I've been speaking to some specialists in the area and I'm reflecting on my own process, applying what I've read to what I do. I think about gesture in terms of musical ideas which have the feeling of some sort of energetic flow – thinking about Denis Smalley's definition of gesture<sup>2</sup> in electroacoustic composition but applying that to the realm of instrumental performance. I will frequently visualise a performer playing an idea, often in a specific performance venue, which is one type of imagery, or, thinking about *14 Weeks*, I just remember this idea: a cloud image, a red glowing cloud which for me links with imagery of a foetus in the womb. That glow was relevant to the piece. So that's another example of imagery that is central to my process.

**JB:** This idea of energy is very interesting to me, too. Is there an emotional feeling to the gesture? And how do you know 'This is it. This is the gesture that I need here'?

**JS:** I suspect I do a lot of that, albeit subconsciously. It's something that I'm becoming increasingly aware of. The piece in which I really started to build from gestures and to draw more on my instinct was a suite for flute and marimba, *Four Desert Flowers*. That was a turning point for me. Prior to that I was more focused on processes and patterns and seeing what certain musical processes would generate. In

<sup>2</sup> Denis Smalley, 'Spectro-Morphology and Structuring Processes', in *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*, ed. S. Emmerson (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 61–93.

*Four Desert Flowers* I felt less concerned about individual pitches and durations at the 'molecular' level and focused more on the top-down impression that ideas created, on shapes and on contrasting types of energetic flow suggested by material. I keep coming back to certain shapes, and they are often associated with water, how water flows, for example, waterfalls and trickling motion, like in *Oneiroi*, the piece I'm writing for the Red Note Ensemble (see [Example 2](#)).

With regard to your question about emotion, I recall the first time I ever heard *Dido and Aeneas* by Purcell, specifically Dido's Lament, which has a recurring descending bass line. Descending lines tend to resonate with sadness and sorrow. There's something physical about that; low mood will often be reflected physically in our posture. But I am certain there will be all sorts of ways that my mind is picking up on subconscious signals from my body, things I'm totally unaware of that somehow inform the design, selection and placement of my musical ideas. This was certainly the case with *14 Weeks*. The process of composing that was very embodied – my body was undoubtedly feeding information to my imagination subconsciously.

### The Arc of a Work and Its Provisional Nature

**JB:** That leads nicely to my next question – how do you think about the overall arc of a piece?

**JS:** In different pieces the arc can take on different forms. In *14 Weeks* I definitely wanted to create a sense of a single overarching form. There are different sections within that, but a driving ambition was to create a continuous amoebic kind of growth. I spent a long time writing that piece and there were hundreds of draft pages of sketches in which I kept changing my mind and second-guessing myself. Probably if I'd gone with the first idea I had it would have sounded fine, but in the final result that we heard on the weekend there's a greater extent of foreground differentiation than I had originally conceived. There's also a sense of arrival towards the end which provides the preceding feeling of continuous growth with a sense of purpose and cathartic relief.

I'm glad I did that, because it gives listeners a bit of a reward for hearing all that growth in the texture over an extended period, and the clarity of the words is better too. So there's a lot of tension and then there's a feeling of agreement and arrival at the end of the

The image shows a musical score for two systems. The first system is for piano and gossamer wing. The tempo is marked as c.52. The piano part has a dynamic marking of mf and a slur over the first few notes. The gossamer wing part has a dynamic marking of p and a slur over the first few notes. The second system continues the piano part with a dynamic marking of mf and a slur over the first few notes. The gossamer wing part has a dynamic marking of p and a slur over the first few notes. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

Example 2:  
Jane Stanley, *Oneiroi*, waterfall  
gesture played by piano.

piece. It's an overarching form. I did think about the feeling of climax, and I was very concerned also in that piece about how it finishes. And it finishes with a questioning character, because there's this sense in your poem of questioning, 'is it or isn't it?', right from the start: 'When you began, it was whether or not'. So it felt purposeful to finish with a question.

In terms of *The Indifferent*, that's a song cycle with five songs in it, five different texts. So your text provides an important thread. Musically, I was not deliberate in planting thematic links between the songs. I really wanted to differentiate as much as possible each of those songs. If anything, it's actually the words which create the consistency.

**JB:** And then at some point, do you think about the transitions between them? You can't reorder the songs, because the text is what it is.

**JS:** Yes, funny you say that! In one of the songs, part of me wishes that the musical material belonged to the fifth song. I toyed with the idea of composing bridging music between the songs but opted not to in the end. I prefer to think of these as five individual songs with contrasting musical characters (see [Example 3](#)). I think to myself, 'How does it sound moving from the first song to the second song?' This question prompted me to print out little snapshots of the first score page of each of them, almost like a storyboard, just so I could give my mind this idea of checking, 'Does it sound OK to have this coming after that, as an overarching form?' So, yes, it's something I'm aware of. As I'm going along, I'm constantly checking those relationships.

### Composer Portrait Album with The Hermes Experiment and Red Note Ensemble

**JB:** Tell me a bit about how this project came about?

**JS:** A number of years ago, it must have been 2018, when I was having my second baby, I remember thinking seriously about wanting to release an album dedicated entirely to my own music. The resulting album is going to contain several pieces performed by Red Note Ensemble and a song cycle performed by The Hermes Experiment.

I wanted to showcase pieces that I've composed over the years with which I'm really happy, and I also wanted to create an opportunity to

Example 3: Jane Stanley, *The Indifferent*, the beginning of each of the five songs.

Example 3:  
Jane Stanley, *The Indifferent*, the  
beginning of each of the five songs.

Example 3:  
(Continued)

$\text{♩} = 76$

Soprano  
light-ly light-ly gone...

B♭ Clarinet  
mp

Harp  
E-F-G-A  
B-C-D  
mp  
let ring as much as possible throughout  
A<sup>b</sup>

Double Bass

Example 3:  
(Continued)

$\text{♩} = 78$

Soprano  
where here and now the squid's

Bass Clarinet in B♭  
p mf p mf p

Harp  
E-F-G-A  
D-C-B  
mf  
lv throughout

Double Bass  
mf heavy, bulbous, profound p mf p

Example 3:  
(Continued)

$\text{♩} = 85$

Soprano

B♭ Clarinet  
f pp

Harp  
E-F-G-A  
D-C#-B  
p f p p f  
lv throughout unless otherwise stated

Contrabass  
f p f mp



♩ = 64 Sustained, mournful, but glowing at the same time

Soprano

B♭ Clarinet

Harp

Double Bass

*p*  
E F# G A  
D C# B lv throughout

flautando

*pp* *mf* *pp*

Example 3:  
(Continued)

develop two new big pieces. One of them is *The Indifferent*, for soprano, clarinet, double bass and harp, and the other is *Oνειροι*, for flute, clarinet, violin, cello, piano and percussion, which is a substantial reworking of material from an earlier piece *D-re-A-mi-N-gl-Y*. In curating the selection of pieces for the album, I am very concerned about maximising contrast. I constantly ask myself, how do all of the pieces fit together as an overarching form on the album? So there has been a lot of planning and decision-making about what goes on to the album and how it's showcasing my compositional identity.

### A New Song Cycle: *The Indifferent*

**JB:** A portrait album is an interesting opportunity for you to take stock of where you're at. And then to be able to add some new work is quite exciting, I think. So let's talk a bit more about *The Indifferent*, this piece you're writing now. Just listening to the opening song, I was really struck by the emotional quality of that. Were you intentionally writing to a certain emotion?

**JS:** Yes, in the first song I'm conscious of the feeling of weariness, specifically of a character who is feeling weary about their relationship. I don't know at what point in the process of writing this song that this image and feeling really crystallised. I came up with fragments of material initially, and gradually ideas started to coalesce. By the time I placed the various gestural elements in the context of this song, it felt right. The clarinet plays a little sighing motive, concert pitch C–A $\flat$ –G. As for the singer, I recall coming up with the vocal line early, perhaps even before I settled on the clarinet's material. The soprano's part features a lot of wavering motion, often involving quite wide leaps. This wavering to me suggests ambivalence, of getting stuck in something. There's quite a lot of descending motion, too, which one could associate with weariness and being worn down. And then there's also the imagery of waves lapping on the shore and of these waves washing over objects and wearing them down (see [Example 4](#)).

**JB:** It's interesting to hear that you wrote the vocal line first and then the clarinet. At certain moments it sounds like those are speaking to each other in some way. Was that something that you were intentionally developing – the relationship between those two lines?

Example 4 is a musical score for Soprano (Sop.), Clarinet (Cl.), Harp (Hp.), and Double Bass (Db.). The score is in 4/4 time and features melodic oscillation. The Soprano part has lyrics: "time" and "per - haps". The Clarinet part starts with a fortissimo (fff) dynamic, followed by piano (p) and forte (f) dynamics. The Harp part starts with fff, followed by p, ff, and pp dynamics. The Double Bass part starts with f, followed by f, p, mf, and pp dynamics. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Example 4:

Jane Stanley, melodic oscillation in *The Indifferent*, movement 1, bars 45–46.

**JS:** Yes. Initially, for me, things are not composed in score order. I remember vividly working at the piano, singing the vocal lines, thinking about the natural speech rhythms and the text, and just ensuring that it all made sense as much as possible, and then thinking, well, what are the other instruments going to do? And I can't recall if I'd already written some of these little phrases in the clarinet, or if they came to me once I had the vocal part in place, but then I can place things and create that dialogue. So I definitely don't sketch the music out from beginning to end initially. ... It's not that sort of piece. I recall there being some trial and error in experimenting with selection and placement of phrases and considering the harmonic implications of layering phrases upon one another (Figure 1).

**JB:** Perhaps we can talk about the second song and then come back to that interrelationship between the different instruments and what they're doing in the piece. The second song felt a bit edgier to me. There was something happening with the double bass, a sort of spikiness. Could you talk a bit about how this movement was structured? Because it sounds quite different from the first.

Figure 1 is a sample page of sketches for *The Indifferent*. It shows handwritten musical notation on staves, with various annotations and markings. The sketches include notes, rests, and dynamic markings. There are several yellow circles and lines highlighting specific parts of the music. The annotations include phrases like "Q. Hum - too much happy voice?", "some time of 4/4 in it, 3/4 in the second of 4/4", "can hear a 'wandering' of / for some time here, stationary", "1/4", "2/4", "3/4", "4/4", "5/4", "6/4", "7/4", "8/4", "9/4", "10/4", "11/4", "12/4", "13/4", "14/4", "15/4", "16/4", "17/4", "18/4", "19/4", "20/4", "21/4", "22/4", "23/4", "24/4", "25/4", "26/4", "27/4", "28/4", "29/4", "30/4", "31/4", "32/4", "33/4", "34/4", "35/4", "36/4", "37/4", "38/4", "39/4", "40/4", "41/4", "42/4", "43/4", "44/4", "45/4", "46/4", "47/4", "48/4", "49/4", "50/4", "51/4", "52/4", "53/4", "54/4", "55/4", "56/4", "57/4", "58/4", "59/4", "60/4", "61/4", "62/4", "63/4", "64/4", "65/4", "66/4", "67/4", "68/4", "69/4", "70/4", "71/4", "72/4", "73/4", "74/4", "75/4", "76/4", "77/4", "78/4", "79/4", "80/4", "81/4", "82/4", "83/4", "84/4", "85/4", "86/4", "87/4", "88/4", "89/4", "90/4", "91/4", "92/4", "93/4", "94/4", "95/4", "96/4", "97/4", "98/4", "99/4", "100/4".

Figure 1:  
Sample page of sketches for *The Indifferent*.

**JS:** In composing the second movement, I was definitely conscious of attempting to create some contrast with the first song. Thinking about the words as well – it was always about the words first, but how do I set the words ‘lightly lightly’? I experimented with my voice, and it took a long time to get to the final version. To some extent I responded to what you had indicated with the speech inflections in your analysis of the poems, but I combined this with my own personal reading. So in places where I felt like if I wanted to go up where you had indicated to go down, I just went up because it felt like ‘How would I say it?’

**JB:** You were saying it took a bit of time to come up with the music for ‘lightly, lightly’. Were there points where the words were kind of getting in the way of what you wanted to do?

**JS:** Yes. Actually, this might be an example of that. In the third song there are the words ‘where, here’, and I’ve set that phrase in a way to suggest that the words are ‘We’re here’ (see [Example 3](#)). If you can’t see the text, I may be making you hear ‘We’re here’. That’s not what you wrote.

**JB:** But it’s homophonous, so, yes, it could be either!

**JS:** Yes, I like being a bit ambiguous. And I just really liked the melodic shape which arose from improvising, so I prioritised that.

**JB:** Now I’m wondering if you could talk a bit about the way that the third movement ends (see [Example 5](#)). It feels like there’s this moment of ascension in the soprano line, which highlights what, for me, is also a pivotal moment in the poem in quite a powerful way. So I’m very interested to hear how you imagine that point in the text and in the score.

**JS:** The final phrase of text in the third song is ‘the final, vertical, invisible path’. I recall being very aware of wanting to create a springboard into the fourth song and, in hindsight, this ascending motion reinforces the image of a vertical, invisible path, particularly due to the suspenseful and unresolved way that this musical phrase ends. There is a sense of walking up to the edge of a cliff and then looking over the edge.

**JB:** The fourth song is where the bee comes into the poem, where it’s being dragged into the sea, and this movement to me feels full of

45

Sop. *mp* *pp*  
in - vi - si - ble path

B. Cl.

Hp. *p* *pp* *mf*

Db.

Example 5:  
Jane Stanley, *The Indifferent*, end of  
the third song.

tension, and there are some really dramatic pauses. Again, I'm interested in how you envisaged that relationship between the words and the music in this song.

**JS:** Your words brought to mind the image of sporadic movement and a bee that is limping along. So there are disjointed, staccato utterances in the voice to suggest this. It's not a continuous phrase but rather a number of short phrases – two or three notes or single notes at any one point – and it's a very disjunct melodic shape as well. The other instruments too are playing staccato, disjointed, pointy, edgy, syncopated lines, filling each other's gaps in a hocket type of way (see [Example 3](#)).

**JB:** That's really interesting and it works for me with the ideas in the poem of the 'grinding' and being 'out of tune'. There's something there that really is a conflict and a struggle, and it's interesting to see how that's transferred into the world of staccato movements and these angular aspects of the music. So the fourth song has in some way, I suppose, set up the fifth. How did you see the transition between the fourth and the fifth?

**JS:** I was conscious of achieving some form of resolution in the fifth song: not necessarily answering the questions raised in the previous songs but providing a feeling of arrival and dissolution of the tension that had led up to this point. To achieve this I've created very sustained lines in the clarinet and the double bass. These convey a gelatinous type of motion. Combined with this is a very simple harp part which has the effect of punctuating the texture periodically like a bell.

**JB:** And that works with the way the poem itself trails off. It has that ellipsis at the end.

**JS:** Yes, I definitely feel a sense of musical trailing-off here. A lot of my pieces do trail off, you know – that's a personal signature.

**JB:** So, we talked a bit about the soprano line and the clarinet being in dialogue. But how do you envisage the contribution of each of the instruments, and does it change?

**JS:** Yes. Overall, the contribution of the instruments does shift around. There are songs where individual instruments are foregrounded in different ways. For example, in the fourth song the clarinet has some very virtuosic outbursts. In the first song, the double bass plays more of a supportive type of role, featuring broken chord lines which reinforce the harmony. In other movements the bass has greater independence and colouristic exploration, including harmonics and pizzicato, and reaching up into its high register.

### Hauntology and Textural Composition

**JB:** You mentioned that you've been asked to write about Derrida's idea of hauntology<sup>3</sup> as it relates to your compositional practice, in particular your piece *Pentimenti*. I wondered if you'd like to say a little about the hauntological aspects of your work or your creative practice.

<sup>3</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), p. 2.

Example 6:  
Jane Stanley, *Pentimenti*, trickling  
gesture, bars 30–33.

**JS:** I connect with the idea of hauntology through the concept of the palimpsest. For many years I have been drawn to the idea of layers, of overwriting, layers bleeding through audibly, but also as a compositional process. I love the idea that you can have a manuscript and then rework it and overwrite something. I remember the first time I was really conscious of this concept of palimpsest was writing a piece for brass ensemble for the Tanglewood Music Centre, several years ago, and I was researching pieces by other composers that used the word ‘palimpsest’ in the title. There are examples by Iannis Xenakis and by George Benjamin. I like the idea of a palimpsest both as something which informs my process as a composer – a provisional kind of idea that can be overwritten and interjected upon – and as an audible material.

In *Pentimenti* there are two pianos, and I was very inspired by the idea that having two of the same instrument not only creates the opportunity for dialogue but also echo effects; there are lots of ways in that piece where one piano haunts the other. I have a waterfall, trickling type of gesture which I frequently return to in my piano writing: it comes in one of the pianos and then, moments later, you can hear it being echoed in the other piano (see [Example 6](#)). That’s an obvious way you get this gesture of haunting, where material punctures through a texture which had been evolving. So as a formal strategy I use the term hauntology to describe a layer which seems as though it has always been present but protrudes at specific times into the musical foreground.

**JB:** And does this come through in any of your other compositions?

**JS:** In *14 Weeks* I do something similar with a chorale-like idea that emerged quite far into the process of composing. I had initially been working with textures built from indeterminately repeating cells, but I felt that it needed another dimension to sustain interest. This chorale idea, where everyone sings in rhythmic unison as opposed to singing independently, has the effect of sounding like it is bleeding through to the surface and then receding into the background. And I felt it was very effective on hearing it. It gives a little hint of something without suddenly changing gears. You’re just introducing another layer and there’s a tension there (see [Example 7](#)).

**JB:** And it works beautifully with your interest in textures and layers, which we’ve been talking about.

**JS:** Yes. I am a textural composer. I feel very driven to create interesting textures. It’s odd for me to write an obvious melody, although I have been doing it lately, especially when I’m working with voice. But, generally, I tend to be drawn to texture as the sort of sonic entity that I’m seeking to create.

7 2'20

S. ch. when you... be - gan

A. ch. when you... be - gan

T. ch. when you... be - gan

B. ch. when you... be - gan

S1. dai - ly rhy - thm in my heart.

S2. but now the bur - geo - ning kicks in and spins

A. your o - pe - ning phra - ses out

T. it was whe - ther or not

B. be - gan

Example 7:  
Jane Stanley, *14 Weeks*, chorale idea  
layered with aleatoric texture, p. 7.

**JB:** You've mentioned Pierre Boulez and Iannis Xenakis. Are there other composers who have influenced you in terms of that textural aspect of your practice?

**JS:** Early on, when I was an undergraduate student, Olivier Messiaen was a key influence. I just loved the *Quartet for the End of Time*, especially the first movement, which features a complex layering of independent textures. That piece informed the approach that I took in *Spindrift/Interiors*, which layers very independent material for the piano, the recorder and the mandolin. So the idea of layering is something that has captured my imagination throughout my career. And thinking about the idea of hauntology, it gives that process a purposeful way of extrapolating meaning from what I'm creating. It's a lens through which one can view my music.

**JB:** We haven't really spoken about your development as a composer. Was there a particular point in time at which you became aware of the sort of composer you would be?

**JS:** Yes. I started composing at the age of nine. But the first piece in which I felt I had struck upon the seeds of an individual style was



Figure 2:  
Interior of Sma' Shot Cottages,  
Paisley, photo credit Judith Bishop.

something that I composed during my first year at university. It was a piece for clarinet and piano entitled *Drought*. I'm from Australia, so drought is something that is a very prevalent issue there, and I used that visual imagery to connect with my musical material.

**JB:** It sounds like you now feel you're coming into your own as a composer. You know yourself better and you know what you want to do.

**JS:** Yes. I'm sure my style will continue to shift and evolve over time, but the pieces that I write serve as artefacts punctuating points in the course of that evolution.

**JB:** I guess that is another kind of palimpsest, isn't it, the creation of your own work, that makes a distinctive archaeology of yourself as a composer.

### **A Future Project: Historical Domestic Soundscapes of the Glasgow Region**

**JB:** Now you and I have started exploring some ideas relating to the sounds of domestic life in the early decades of the nineteenth century, in part prompted by the discovery I made of an ancestor, Christian MacDougall, who lived in Paisley [in the Glasgow region] in the early 1830s and was married to a weaver there. These days there's a fair amount of interest in eco-acoustics and historical soundscapes, and in a previous conversation you mentioned the idea of sound walks as one manifestation of this interest. As a composer, what is attractive to you in the idea of historical soundscapes and potentially composing something related to early nineteenth-century domestic soundscapes (see [Figure 2](#)) in music?

**JS:** It's a good question. Purely in terms of a learning dimension, I'm excited by the idea of potentially recording and using some electro-acoustic techniques in my work. But it gives it that purpose if it's based on something which has been thoroughly researched.

**JB:** So, another kind of text. You're bringing some of the sonic textures of the physical world into the instrumental soundworld.

**JS:** Yes. And just now it occurs to me that even with all of the research that we plan to carry out, ultimately we'll be creating a piece which is based on what we imagine life sounded like, because of course there

are no audio recordings that date back that far. We have to base ideas on what we've read about or what we've seen in terms of historical artefacts. This gives me something to really sink my teeth into. And I like the idea of investing time into something which is interrogating a female experience, because that is even more unique. By shining a light on what things may have sounded like, what life may have sounded like back then, one impact may be that I'll reflect on my own current sound environment. And any listener who comes to hear what I'll eventually compose might reflect on that as well.