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On a New Formula: Reassessing Hooper Brewster-Jones

Kate Bowan

One autumn day in 1923, in Adelaide, a city expatriate artist Stella Bowen was later to remember somewhat ungenerously from the safe distance of cosmopolitan Europe as 'a queer little backwater of intellectual timidity,'[1] Hooper Brewster-Jones sat down, took up his pencil, and began to sketch a little prelude to which he was to give the highly suggestive subtitle 'on new formula.' For at least the next two years the idea of a 'formula' occupied his creative imagination and resulted in a handful of works whose brevity in no way matches their historical importance. This article discusses Brewster-Jones's *Prelude on New Formula*, a set of six preludes he called *Formula Series* and other relevant pieces from the same period, arguing that they represent a significant early Australian foray into a world beyond tonality and as such pursued an aesthetic agenda that resonated with artistic developments in Europe and North America.

The son of a country school teacher, Brewster-Jones was born in 1887 in the tiny settlement of Black Rock, at the foot of South Australia's Flinders Ranges. As a fourteen year old, he went to Adelaide to take up a scholarship at the Elder Conservatorium, where he studied with the Welsh pianist and composer Bryceson Treharne. Treharne had been a student of the Royal College of Music between 1897 and 1900, and was intimately acquainted with adventurous musical and literary trends of the Naughty Nineties. Through Treharne, Brewster-Jones was exposed to a radical fringe in both art and literature; one that was dissident, questioning and anti-establishment. Significantly, Brewster-Jones remembered that Treharne had introduced

[1] Stella Bowen, *Drawn from Life: A Memoir* (1940; repr. Sydney: Picador, 1999) 4.

him to the 'latest moderns' in music.[2] Treharne's other interest was radical British and European drama; he later founded the Adelaide Repertory Theatre in 1908, the first such company in Australia.

An Elder Scholarship allowed Brewster-Jones to travel to London in 1906 to take up a place at the Royal College of Music. The next three years in Edwardian London proved to be a formative period for the young composer. There he met expatriate Australian composer, George Clutsam. A successful opera composer in his day, Clutsam is now remembered primarily as a composer of light music. Clutsam, like Treharne, was a devotee of modern music, and he belonged to a small group of musicians in London who were intensely interested in continental musical developments, particularly those occurring in France and Russia. He wrote detailed theoretical articles for the *Musical Times* on the whole-tone scale and the late harmonies of Alexander Scriabin.[3] He was also the music critic for the *Sunday Observer* between 1908 and 1918, and as such served as an important channel to modern musical developments for Brewster-Jones. Clutsam's reviews illustrated the range of musical ideas available to the young composer.[4] As Brewster-Jones's mentor, it was likely that Clutsam not only informed his young protégé of upcoming modern music concerts but also conceivably took him along to them. After returning to Australia, Brewster-Jones threw himself into Adelaide's musical scene of the 1910s and '20s, even founding an eponymous orchestra with the aim of championing the French and Russian moderns.

Brewster-Jones was remarkably prolific during the 1920s. He produced hundreds of piano miniatures during this decade using a large array of ideas, techniques and materials. His manuscripts survive in a fragmented and uncatalogued state. The bulk of his output is held at the University of Adelaide, the rest remains in three family collections, one in the possession of his granddaughter, Anne Bartsch, and the other two in two different attics in the South Australian seaside resort of Victor Harbor.[5] Many of his miniatures are aphoristic, even fragmentary, and many of the manuscripts are virtually illegible sketches. Works such as *Bird Call Impressions*, *Horse Rhythms* and the series of *Nature Preludes* are products of his passionate interest in the natural world. His mimetic *Bird Call Impressions* reveal a rigorous empiricism. They are the product of the many hours spent in the bush with his friend, the painter Hans Heysen, jotting down birdcalls to add to his enormous body of research that included collections of articles on birds from around the world. This ornithological fascination makes an interesting comparison with Messiaen, but predates the French composer's extensive use of birdsong by two decades. Other miniatures, such as the works under discussion in this article, investigate

[2] Notes for a lecture for the Lyceum Club, in Lisa-Jane Ward, 'The Piano Music of Hooper Brewster-Jones: With Special Reference to the Sonatas and Suites,' BMus (Hons) thesis, University of Adelaide, 1992, 6.

[3] See, for example, George Clutsam, 'The Whole-Tone Scale and Its Practical Use', *Musical Times* 51 (1910): 702–6; George Clutsam, 'The Harmonies of Scriabine,' *Musical Times* 54 (1913): 156–8, 441–3, 512–14.

[4] See, for example, George Clutsam, 'Music: Russian Music, New and Old,' *Sunday Observer* 31 May 1908: 5; George Clutsam, 'Music: Concerning Debussy,' *Sunday Observer* 28 Feb. 1909: 5.

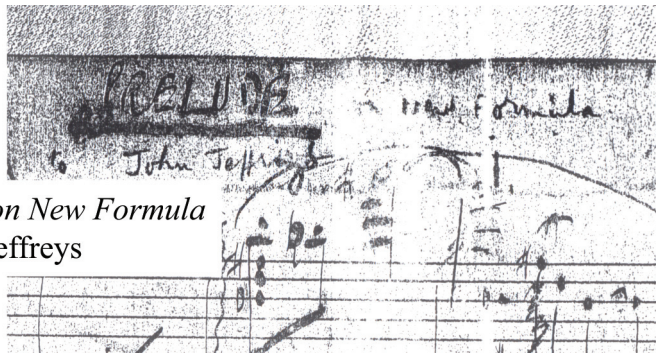
[5] See University of Adelaide: Barr Smith Library, Special Collections; Hooper Brewster-Jones Papers (uncatalogued); National Archives of Australia: Australian Broadcasting Commission; C663/T1, H. Brewster-Jones, 1939–1955; National Archives of Australia: Australian Broadcasting Commission; C1737/P1, H. Brewster-Jones [hereafter NAA: C1737/P1]; National Archives of Australia: Australian Broadcasting Commission; SP1011/2, Brewster-Jones, H., 1939–1955; Hooper Brewster-Jones Papers: Private Collection in the possession of Anne Bartsch [hereafter HBJ Bartsch]; Hooper Brewster-Jones Papers: Private Collection in the possession of the Brewster-Jones Family, Victor Harbor, SA.

matters primarily musical. A distinct stream can be isolated within the latter body of work in which he developed his own idea of 'the formula.'

The notion of a formula suggests objectivity, calculation, abstraction, method, process and system, and it resonates strongly with the early machine-age functional modernism of visual artists such as the Russian Constructivists, Rodchenko and Malevich, or the Dutch modernist Piet Mondrian. It also has something to do with what Robert Morgan has described as the 'unprecedented emphasis on purely formal elements at the expense of conventional representational ones,' found in the paintings of French post-Impressionist artists Seurat and Cezanne and the poetry of Mallarmé, Verlaine and Rimbaud.[6]

Brewster-Jones's first experiment with what he himself called a 'new formula' is found in a prelude he composed in May 1923. Three versions of this piece survive. Two are particularly significant: the ink-over-pencil version (see Figure 1), the only one to include in the title the critical words 'on new formula,' and the other much rougher pencil sketch (see Figure 2) that has crucial marginalia in the top left corner, revealing his compositional method.[7]

Figure 1. Ink-over-pencil copy of the prelude with words 'on new formula'



Prelude on New Formula
to John Jeffreys

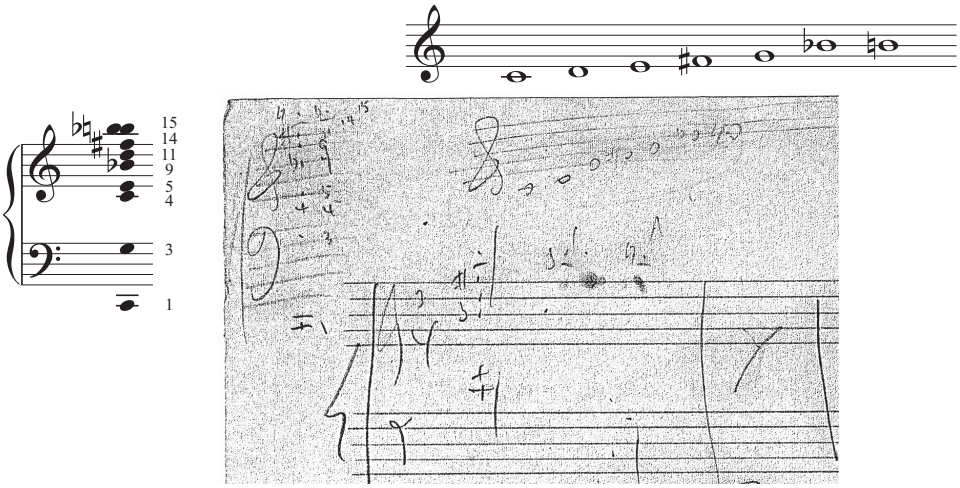
The marginalia, shown in Figure 2, consist of the pitch collection found in the prelude's opening bar and next to it its linear expression. The proximity of these two things shows that Brewster-Jones was trying to think both vertically and horizontally using the same material and is a clear example of his desire to create a 'unity of musical space.'[8] Furthermore, Brewster-Jones has allocated certain numbers to the pitches making up the vertical sonority. These numbers describe the position of the notes as partials in the overtone series over the fundamental tone C1. Although the choice of which pitches to take from the series was his own, the overtone series as his point of reference fixes the pitches of the sonority in a certain register and so determines the spacing of the vertical sonority. The relation of the pitches to each other is thus fixed regardless of transpositional level.

[6] Robert Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music: A History of Musical Style in Modern Europe and America* (New York: Norton, 1991) 40.

[7] The ink-over-pencil version whose title includes the works 'on new formula' was found in the family's personal collection in Victor Harbor in 2004, whereas the other two versions are held at the Barr Smith Library archive. The third surviving manuscript is a fine copy that throws no extra light on the compositional process involved.

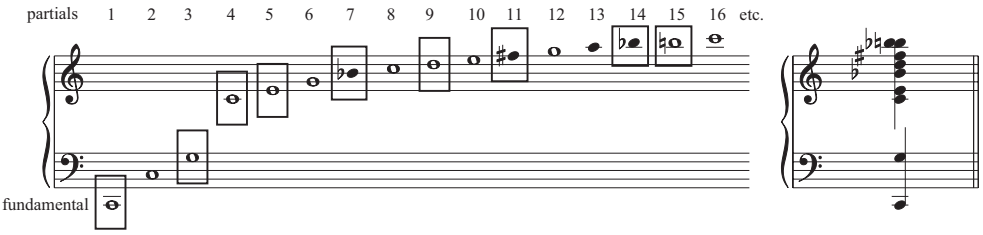
[8] Jim Samson, *Music in Transition: A Study of Tonal Expansion and Atonality, 1900–1920* (London: Dent, 1977) 144.

Figure 2. Pencil sketch of the prelude showing marginalia in top left hand corner



The overtone series forms part of the selected pre-formed material from which Brewster-Jones selects his governing sonority (see Figure 3). In this prelude, the opening nine-note collection undergoes five transpositions cycling through a chain of fourths before breaking the pattern and returning to the opening chord (see Figure 4). This movement by fourths gives a quasi-tonal stability to the work. In this way it is close to the music of the Russians, Alexander Scriabin and Nikolai Roslavets, who also often moved their collections by fourths. They were part of a larger group of composers from this period who were interested in the possibilities of quartal harmonic structures as an alternative to functional tonality. Like the music of Scriabin, Roslavets and others during this period, Brewster-Jones's music is transitional, falling into the post-tonal category of centric music. It still references tonality but, in spite of the anchoring bass lines such as that found in the above example, it no longer relies on functional harmonic progressions and traditional voice leading for its musical sense.

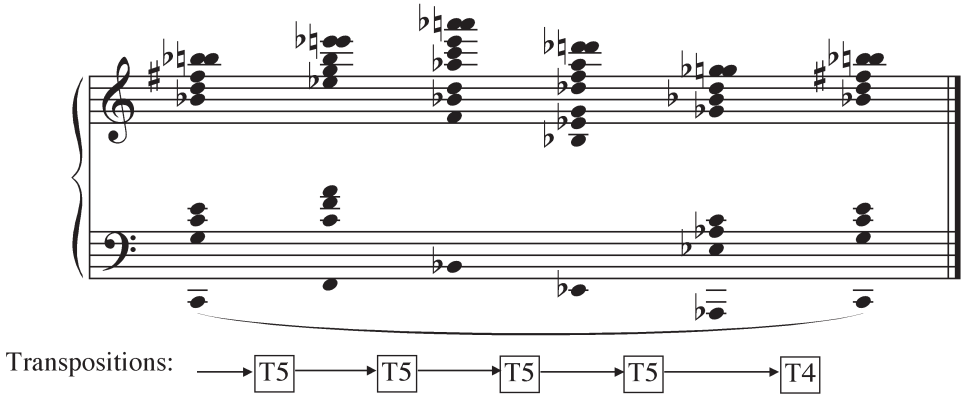
Figure 3. Overtone series and its relation to the opening sonority to *Prelude on New Formula*



Furthermore, like Roslavets, who belonged to the next generation of Soviet composers after Scriabin, Brewster-Jones marked his transpositional shifts by pedal changes and so developed a system remarkably like that of his contemporary.[9] Brewster-Jones's reduction of

[9] For Roslavets, see Larry Sitksy, *Music of the Repressed Russian Avant-Garde, 1900–1929* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994) 38–59.

Figure 4. Harmonic plan of *Prelude on New Formula*



the sonority into a synthetic scale invites comparison with other contemporary investigators of synthetic scales including the aforementioned Roslavets and his *synthetakkord*, Busoni and his 'invented scales,'[10] and the music theories of Joseph Schillinger, another Russian-turned-American composer and theorist, in particular his theory of the kaleidophone, presented some years later in his book *Kaleidophone: New Resources of Melody and Harmony; Pitch Scales in Relation to Chord Structures*.[11] According to William Hoffman, the long-standing music critic of the *Canberra Times* daily newspaper, and a student of Brewster-Jones's during the thirties and forties, Brewster-Jones had rejected Scriabin's music by the mid-1930s; it is clear from this prelude, however, that Brewster-Jones was aware of how Scriabin's later music worked.[12] His personal library contained many of Scriabin's late piano works, including a beautiful red-and-gold Belaieff edition of the ten piano sonatas.

Together with the revealing sketches, the prelude provides evidence that Brewster-Jones was looking beyond functional tonality. Indeed, his interest in the overtone series is vitally important. It shows that Brewster-Jones was looking for other ways of organising sound.[13] He himself alluded to this later in a lecture broadcast in 1932 in which, during a discussion about 'formulas of today,' he credited the equal temperament of the piano with the emergence of twelve-tone music, saying:

> The significance of this tuning has only recently been realized by composers. Out of the equal temperament system of tuning has sprung, suddenly—two centuries later—an *harmonic expansion of almost limitless possibilities*. Harmony has suddenly discovered the new basis of the twelve divisions of the octave and the Pure scale has been thrown overboard in composition. [It] has opened up the vast possibilities of the 'Duodecuple'

[10] See Ferrucio Busoni, *Sketch of a New Esthetic of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1911).

[11] Joseph Schillinger, *Kaleidophone: New Resources of Melody and Harmony; Pitch Scales in Relation to Chord Structures; an Aid to Composers, Performers, Arrangers, Teachers, Song-Writers, Students, Conductors, Critics and All Who Work with Music* (New York: Witmark, 1940).

[12] William Hoffman, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2005.

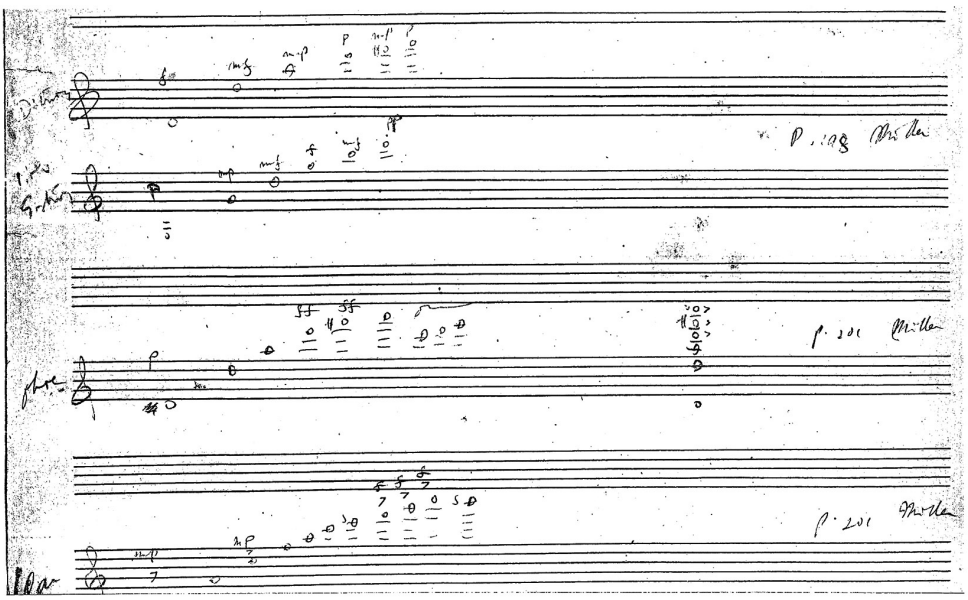
[13] Brewster-Jones's interest in the overtone series as a possible alternative to conventional tonality presages Hindemith's more concerted efforts based on a similar premise as found in his *The Composer's World: Horizons and Limitations* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1969). Hindemith systematically explored the intervallic hierarchy suggested by the overtone series and its harmonic implications.

> scale, with its twelve semitonal divisions, the 'Tonal' scale with its six tonal divisions and *other empirical divisions of the octave as the bases for harmonic and melodic writing*.[14]

It is the 'other empirical divisions of the octave' that were under investigation in this prelude, written almost a decade earlier. Despite this prelude's simplicity of conception and organisation, it stands as a wonderful instance of early twentieth-century experimental music in Australia.

Further evidence of Brewster-Jones's interest in this area is found on the back of the manuscript of another prelude, dating from 1928, in the form of some preliminary sketches outlining the harmonic series of the G and D strings and, notated above this, a kind of dynamic plan (see Figure 5).[15] Next to the sketches are page numbers and an author's name, 'Miller.'

Figure 5. Sketches taken from Miller's *The Science of Musical Sounds*



These page numbers refer to the 1916 book *The Science of Musical Sounds*, by the American acoustician Dayton Clarence Miller.[16] Miller, who won a Franklin Institute Medal for his invention of a 32-element harmonic synthesizer, made his most important contribution as an acoustician by developing the 'phonodeik' in 1909.[17] That Brewster-Jones should look to the world of science for material with which to forge a new musical language betrays, according to

[14] Hooper Brewster-Jones Papers, 5CL Radio Broadcast Transcripts: 'Modern French Piano Music,' private collection in the possession of Anne Bartsch; 28 June 1932 (emphasis added).

[15] Brewster-Jones Papers, Victor Harbor.

[16] Dayton Clarence Miller, *The Science of Musical Sounds* (New York: Macmillan, 1916).

[17] Miller's phonodeik 'incorporated a diaphragm of thin glass closing the end of a receiving horn' allowing an analysis of 'waveforms of various instruments—by means of a thin wire attached to the centre of the diaphragm, which passed over a spindle pulley, the rotation of the spindle (due to movement of the diaphragm) was recorded by light reflected from a mirror affixed to the spindle. See James F. Bell, R.W.B. Stephens, Murray Campbell, 'Miller, Dayton Clarence,' *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, accessed 31 Jan. 2006, <www.grovemusic.com>.

Chris Rodrigues, an 'almost scientific attitude to research'; such an attitude was characteristic of the avant-gardists, who were 'sure of the value of their exploratory work as being part of a progressive unveiling of the truth of the modern world,' and who possessed 'a supreme self-consciousness of being part of a new set of sensibilities, a new way of looking at the world.'[18] Leon Botstein, too, has argued for an understanding of '[e]mpirical experimentation (following the example of science)' as an 'essential part of musical modernity.'[19]

Brewster-Jones's interest in the overtone series specifically can find a more immediate and local provenance in his friend and fellow composer Elsie Hamilton. Previously a student at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide as was Brewster-Jones, Hamilton pursued her piano studies with Xaver Scharwenka in Berlin before turning to composition. Hamilton had become interested in the overtone series herself after discovering Rudolf Steiner's spiritual movement, anthroposophy, and soon after meeting the British music archaeologist and fellow anthroposophist Kathleen Schlesinger in 1916. After studying Steiner's philosophy on the relation between art and nature, and guided by her mentor and collaborator Schlesinger, Hamilton turned to just or, as she called it, 'natural' intonation derived from the overtone series. In this way she became Australia's earliest microtonal composer.[20] There is evidence that Brewster-Jones and Hamilton were not only close friends but also musical kindred spirits in the mid-1930s; it seems, therefore, unlikely that he did not know of her experiments with the overtone series earlier on. It is also relevant to note that Dayton C. Miller is among the large body of pre-eminent musicians and comparative musicologists acknowledged in the preface of Schlesinger's magnum opus *The Greek Aulos*.[21]

The overtone or harmonic series continued to interest Brewster-Jones for the next five years. A lost violin sonata with the subtitle 'On a New Formula' is listed, with no date, in John Antill's 1951 catalogue of Brewster-Jones's works, made while working as Music Editor for the ABC.[22] In 1925 Brewster-Jones also wrote two piano preludes, one on the G string and the other on the D. Loose among his manuscripts is a title page, *Preludes on Harmonic Series Formula*, which probably should precede these two pieces.[23]

Brewster-Jones's most substantial foray into the formula was a set of six preludes, the *Formula Series*, written in 1924.[24] The term 'formula' has moved to centre stage. It is a startling title, one for which it is hard to find many musical counterparts. It resonates with the aesthetic stance of artistic groups such as De Stijl, Constructivism and the French Purists encapsulated in Le Corbusier's proclamation: 'There is a new spirit; it is a spirit of construction and synthesis, guided by a clear idea.'[25] Perhaps realising the restrictions of the overly determined nature of

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[18] Chris Rodrigues and Chris Garratt, *Introducing Modernism* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2001) 30. This is also seen in Brewster-Jones's exhaustive work on birdcalls, research that was essentially empirical but also drew on secondary sources.

[19] Leon Botstein, 'Modernism,' *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, accessed 21 June 2004, <www.grovemusic.com>.

[20] I am currently engaged on research into Hamilton and Schlesinger's long collaboration.

[21] Kathleen Schlesinger, *The Greek Aulos* (London: Methuen, 1939) xiii.

[22] NAA: C1737/P1.

[23] Hooper Brewster-Jones Papers, Victor Harbour.

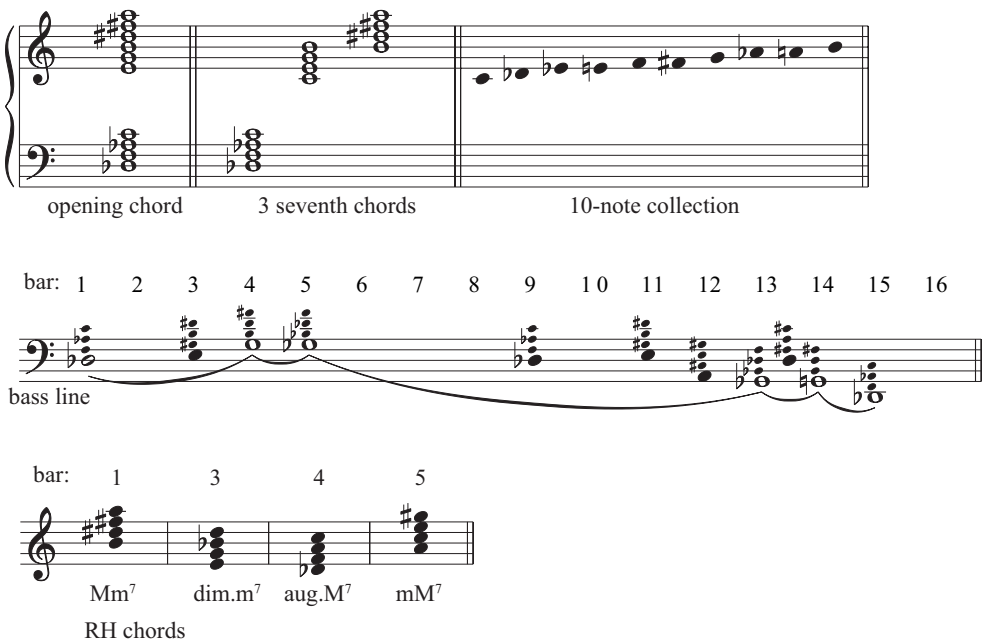
[24] My edition of the miniatures discussed in this article is forthcoming from Keys Press (Perth, 2008).

[25] This is taken from the opening issue of the Purists' monthly magazine *L'Esprit nouveau* (1920), in Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* 155.

the 1923 prelude, but not wanting to move away from the well-tempered system, Brewster-Jones has expanded his idea of the formula. Instead of the narrow focus on the possibilities of the harmonic series, evident in the 1923 prelude, here he systematically experimented in each prelude with a different musical element, including vertical sonority, interval or scale. This is music about musical matters. These pieces are examples of what art critic Clement Greenberg, the voice of American high modernism, called the 'pure self-referential art object.'[26] Each prelude creates its own unique, self-contained sound world. Despite the clinical character of the title, the overall affect of these six preludes, like the *Prelude on New Formula*, is one of rich, almost supine, languor, that is redolent of the intoxicating and, for some, overripe decadence of late Scriabin. There are very few general indications of tempo and expression in the sketch-like manuscripts, but those that are there are slow.

The striking opening chord of the first prelude consists only of superimposed major and minor thirds, forming a ten-note pitch collection (see Figure 6). Considering this chord in the context of the whole work, it becomes clear that it has been conceived as three stacked seventh chords. Throughout the work, the left hand (LH) consists of one particular seventh chord, a major triad with an added major seventh. The LH chord appears in various transpositions, travelling from D♭ via G to G♭. This order is then reversed to reach the final D♭, creating an almost symmetrical structure. Immediately from the opening chord, the right hand (RH) provides variety with different combinations of seventh chords: augmented, diminished and minor triads with added major or minor sevenths. The melodic material is created through the arpeggiation of these chords.

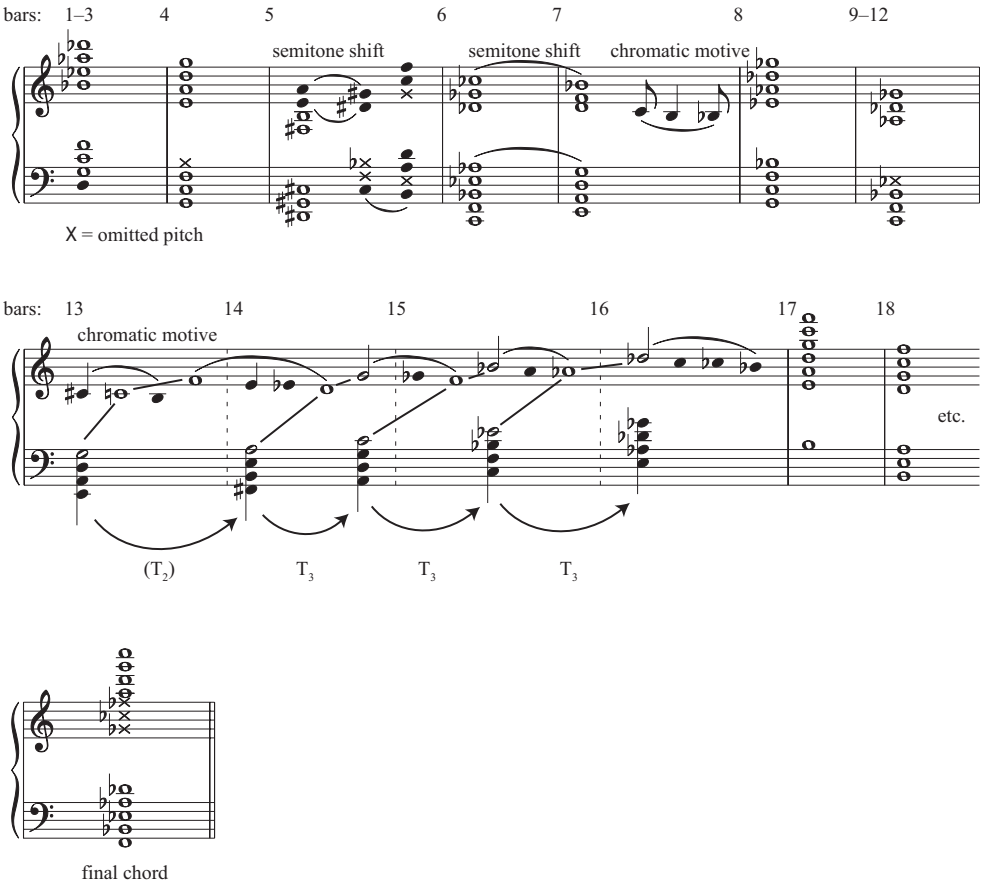
Figure 6. Reduction of *Formula Series*: Prelude no. 1



[26] Referred to in Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983) 30.

The second prelude centres almost entirely around the interval of the perfect fourth. Seven- and occasionally eight-note chords are built upwards from the bass (see Figure 7). When certain pitches have been omitted, Brewster-Jones spaced the chords so that they could be inserted without interfering with the pattern of stacked fourths. The crosses in Figure 7 show omitted fourths, as is seen clearly in the spacing of the final chord. If the omitted pitches are added into the equation, the final chord would consist of all twelve tones. Contrast is offered by way of the semitonal shift first seen at bar 5. This is then transformed from the vertical to the linear in bar 7 and becomes an important melodic motive in the central section. Even here, however, the chromatic line ascends by fourths. The final two chords separated by a semitone highlight the importance of the interval, a fact heightened by the D-D♭ grace note in the last bar.

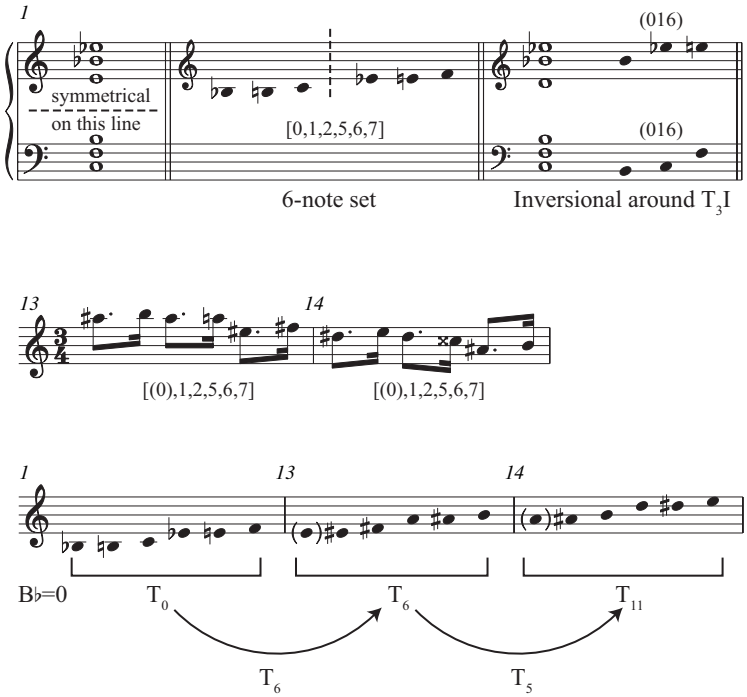
Figure 7. Reduction of *Formula Series*: Prelude no. 2



Inversion is central to the third prelude (see Figure 8). The opening chord—C, F, B, E, B♭, E♭—provides the basic material for the work. It is a synthetic chord, forming the symmetrical pitch-class (pc) set (012567) and is voiced so that the RH is an inversion of the left. The LH pitches C, F and B form the subset (016), and the RH presents its inversion (B♭, E♭, E) around E♭ at T_3I. The chromatic melody of the middle section, although aurally quite different to the opening, is also derived from a subset of the original pc set and appears at T_6 and $T_1$1 (in both

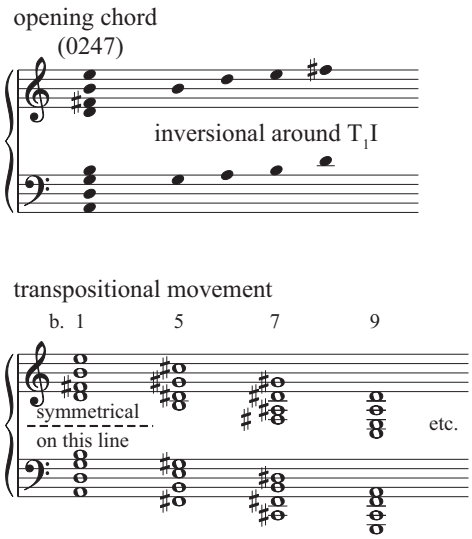
cases the first pitch is omitted). These transpositional levels themselves form the subset (016) allowing the micro elements to inform events at a more general level.

Figure 8. Reduction of *Formula Series*: Prelude no. 3



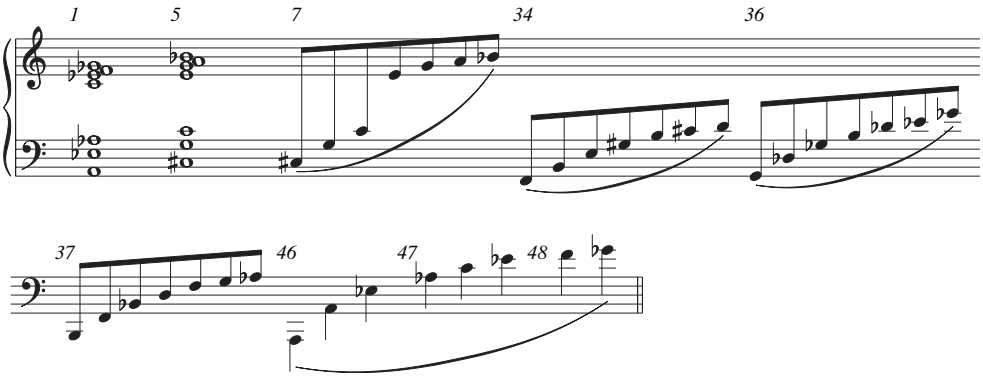
A similar procedure is found in the fourth prelude (see Figure 9). The opening chord is again voiced so that the hands are mirror images of each other. Again, the pc sets (0247) played in each hand are inversions of each other, this time around C at T_1I. The sonority travels through various transpositional levels before coming to rest.

Figure 9. Reduction of *Formula Series*: Prelude no. 4



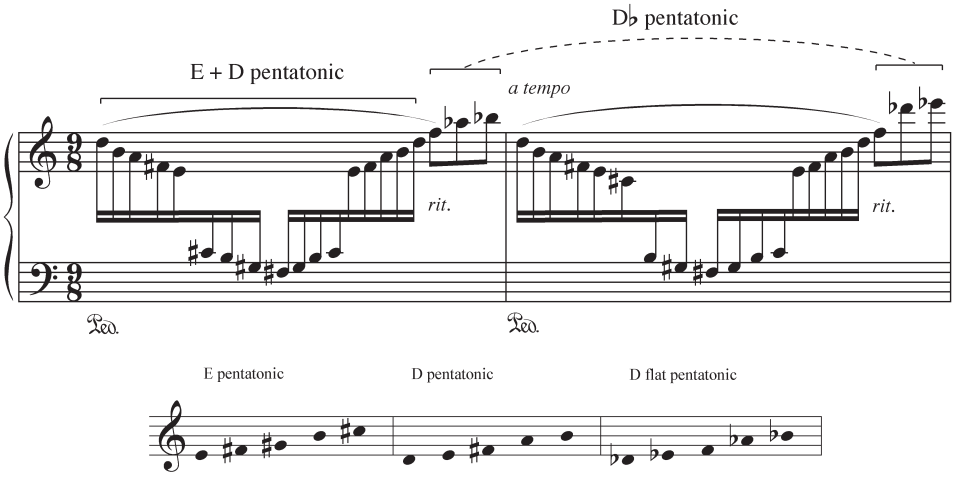
In the fifth prelude, as in the *Prelude on New Formula*, Brewster-Jones again concentrated on the transformation of the vertical into the linear (see Figure 10). This can be seen in the LH, where the opening vertical sonority comprising a six-note subset of the octatonic collection (013469) becomes a prominent melodic feature in subsequent transpositions.

Figure 10. Reduction of *Formula Series*: Prelude no. 5



In the final prelude of *Formula Series* we find three pentatonic scales combined—a kind of polypentatonicism (see Figure 11). Combinations of two or three pentatonic scales appear throughout the work. The opening two bars contain three: E-pentatonic, D-pentatonic and D♭-pentatonic. Combinations of two or three pentatonic scales appear throughout the work. From bar 3, each hand has its own pentatonic scale creating a more obvious 'polytonal' effect. The music slides between pentatonic scales by means of common tones.

Figure 11. *Formula Series* no. 6, bb. 1–2 (three pentatonic scales)



This work indicates another preoccupation of Brewster-Jones: 'exotic' or non-Western scales.[27] He used the 'exotic' pentatonic, whole tone and octatonic scales thereby dipping into a

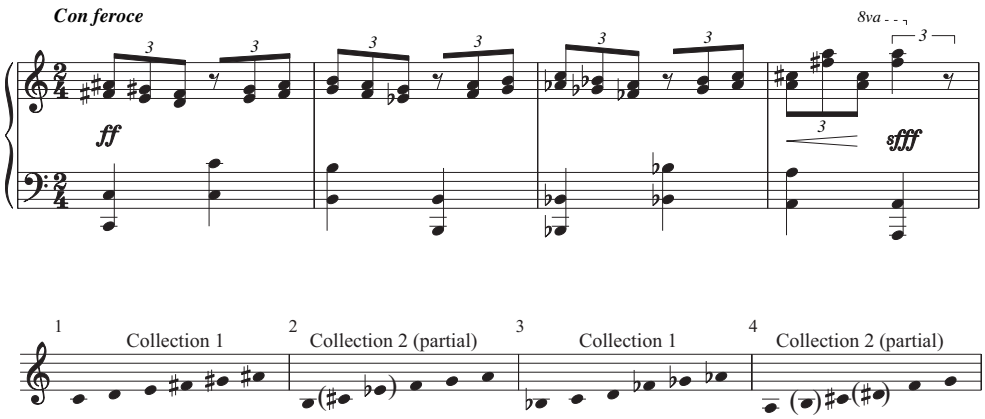
[27] For a discussion of Brewster-Jones and musical exoticism, see Kate Bowan, 'Pastoralism or Exoticism? Re-evaluating Australia's Music History,' *Sounds Australian* 67 (2006): 46–50.

'tradition of musical experimentation' established earlier by Russians such as Rimsky-Korsakov and Mussorgsky.[28] A prominent feature of this tradition, Morgan suggests, was 'the use of modal and "exotic" non-Western scales, especially those with symmetrical qualities such as the whole-tone and the ... octatonic (regularly alternating half steps and whole steps).'[29] This tradition had a profound impact on Debussy, particularly through the music of Mussorgsky. For Brewster-Jones, the whole-tone scale was a sonority of 'rare beauty.'[30] He gave his own interpretation of historical events, acknowledging the whole-tone scale's Russian roots:

> Claude Debussy was generally supposed to be the originator of the whole tone scale. Academic circles heaped anathema upon his head for the crime. That was twenty years ago. Now there are many claimants for the honour of introducing this useful adjunct to harmonic expression. There are even Academic claimants! So time changes; Debussy did not use it first. It was a vogue in Russia much earlier.[31]

Brewster-Jones does not use these scales to decorate a tonal framework, but rather uses them as alternatives to functional tonality. The first of his *Ten Etudes* (1928–29) engages with this scale exclusively, using the major third as the main feature—the descending chromatic movement in the bass forces an alternation between the two whole-tone collections (see Figure 12). In its ferocity of attack and dynamic it presents an atypical use of this scale in terms of affect, which is more often the gentle murmuring in works such as Debussy's *Cloches travers les feuilles* and also calls to mind his prelude, *Les tierces alternées*, despite the stark contrast in tempo.

Figure 12. Etude no. 1, bb. 1–4 (whole-tone collections)



The octatonic collection, another 'post-tonal favourite' (to borrow Joseph Straus's words), forms the material of the fifth etude of this series (see Figure 13).[32]

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[28] Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* 55.

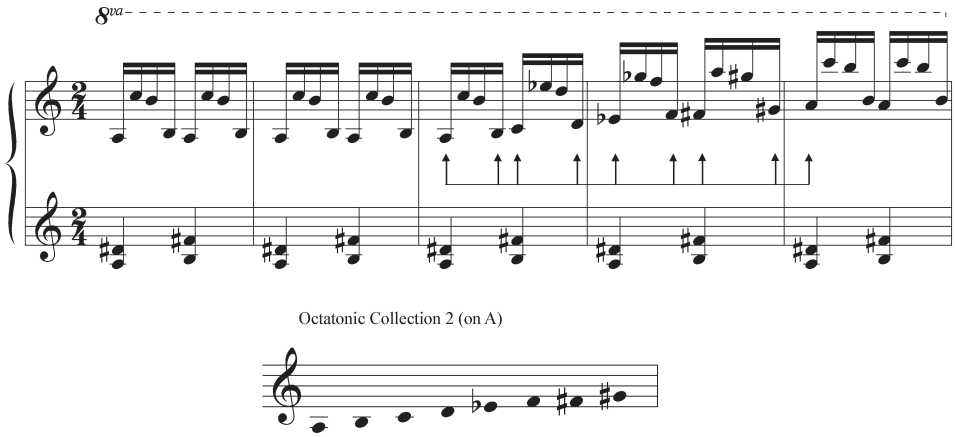
[29] Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Music* 55.

[30] Brewster-Jones, 'Modern French Piano Music.'

[31] Brewster-Jones, 'Modern French Piano Music.'

[32] Joseph Straus, *Introduction to Post-tonal Theory*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000) 97.

Figure 13. Etude no. 5, bb. 1–5 (Octatonic Collection 2)



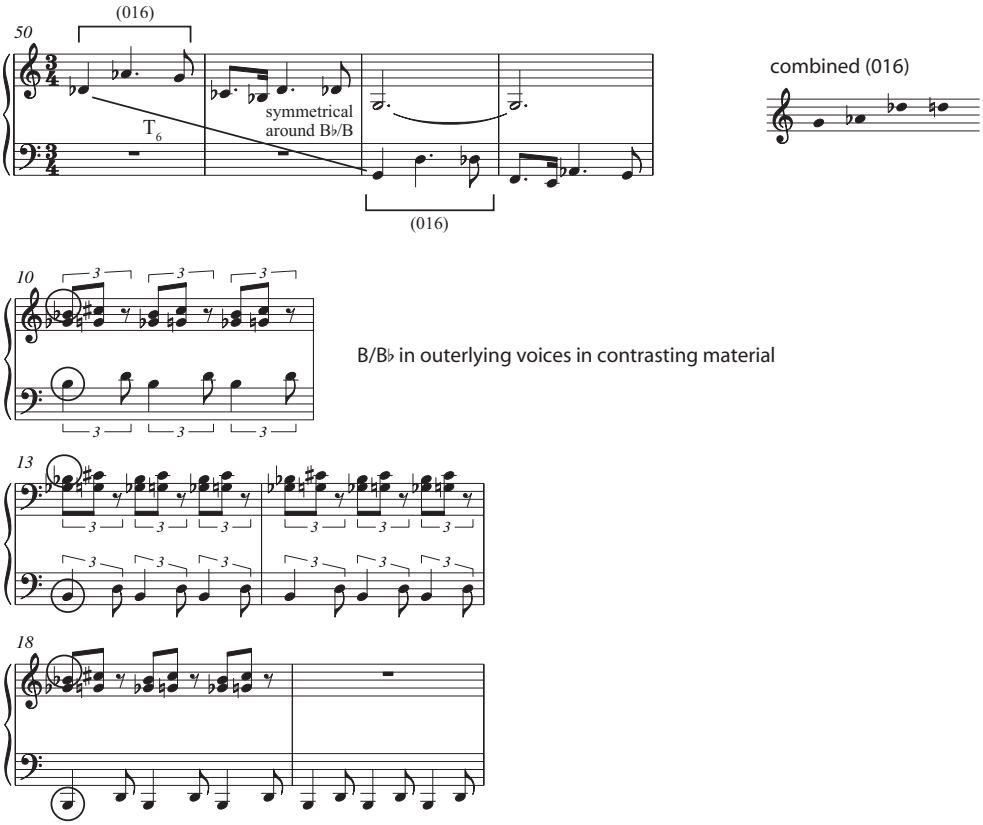
The patterning of the RH not only provides a technical study of tenths but also outlines the ascent of Collection 2 as two voices a minor third apart over an accompanying ostinato figure drawn also from the collection. These two etudes are unusual in their uniform adherence to and simplistic, almost crude, treatment of the two scales. Importantly, though, the scales are not embedded in a tonal framework. By making these scales substance rather than filigree, orientalism is moving from ornament to form. Now it is the properties of these scales that inform the constructive or organising principle of the work.

Other works from this period (and even earlier) use or allude to the octatonic collections in more subtle and sophisticated ways.[33] Many of these miniatures explore the possibilities of the octatonic scale. As we have already seen, the fifth prelude from *Formula Series* is based on a large six-note subset of the octatonic collection. Other works, such as Preludes 2, 6 and 8 from the set of Twelve Preludes commenced towards the end of 1923 and completed in January 1924 (six months before commencing the *Formula Series*), feature the non-triadic pc set (016). This trichord, which figures importantly in the music of Bartók and in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, occurs eight times in the octatonic scale. The opening phrase of Prelude no. 2 begins with two expressions of the pc set (016), themselves a tritone apart, taking advantage of the common tones of G and D♭ (see Figure 14). The ending of this symmetrical phrase in turn dictates the transpositional level of the second canonic expression starting on G, again a tritone from the opening. The two trichords together form a symmetrical subset of the octatonic scale (0167); in this expression the inversional axis is B♭/B, two pitches that assume priority in the odd contrasting punctuations at bars 10, 13–14, 18–19 and also concludes the work.

The symmetries and tonal ambiguities of these scales render them non-teleological and, by using them, Brewster-Jones set his music free to circle on itself. Possibly taking a cue from the repeat patterns of birdcalls, he began to use repetition as a device; repetition transforms

[33] Lisa-Jane Ward has discussed the presence of octatonicism and bitonality particularly in Brewster-Jones's Piano Suites and Sonatas also written during the 1920s, as well as his earlier *Anzac Suite,* also for piano, written in the mid-teens. See Ward, 'The Piano Music of Hooper Brewster-Jones.' Even so, in general the language in Brewster-Jones's large scale works retains closer ties to his more conventional tonal style, described by McCredie as the 'orthodoxy.' See Andrew D. McCredie, 'Hooper Brewster Jones 1887–1949: A Post Centennial Tribute,' *Miscellanea Musicologica* 16 (1989): 24.

Figure 14. Octatonicism in Prelude no. 2



phrases into patterns, creating a kind of musical abstraction. This approach is not dissimilar to the idea of decoration sought by well-known early twentieth-century Australian painter, Margaret Preston, who understood 'pattern as a dominant element of design,'[34] and who, like Brewster-Jones, used non-Western cultures as sources of inspiration. These little preludes are filled with instances of repeating patterns—not normative conventional patterns, but patterns that are unique to the work and contribute to its own characteristic sound. The patterns occur not only at different transpositional levels but also, even more unusually, as extended straight repetitions, in some cases of one sonority only. To continue the fine-art parallel, Brewster-Jones provides an instance of 'decorative' modernism in music. As art historian Mary Eagle suggests, '[i]n fine art in the first decades of the twentieth century, "decoration" meant the work of creating a design to express an idea.'[35]

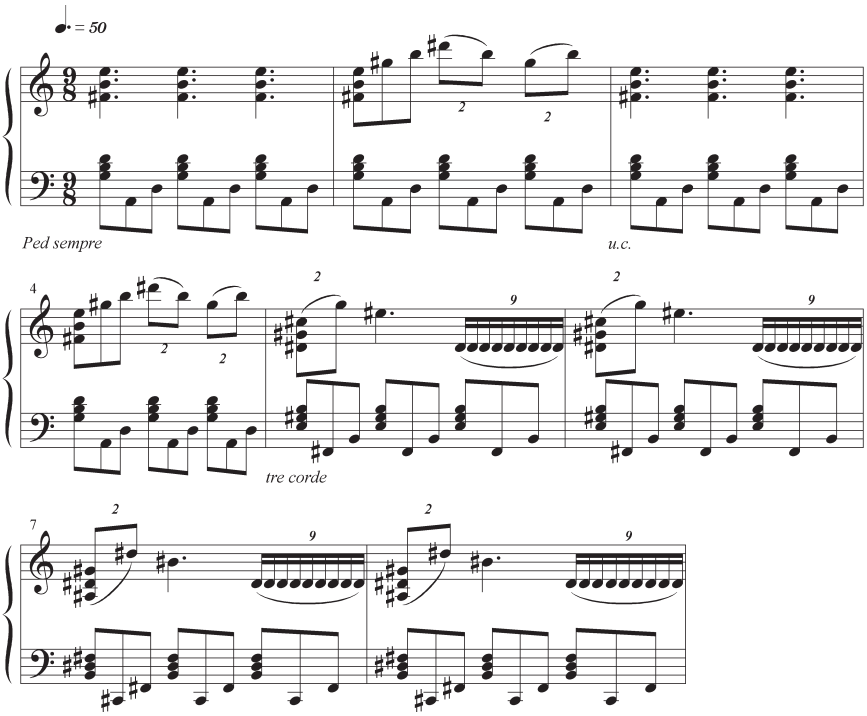
Formula Series no. 4 exemplifies this approach to repetition (see Ex. 15). The opening sonority moves unchanged to different transpositional levels taken from the intervals of the sonority itself. The ostinato-like accompaniment (a common feature of these pieces) heightens the feeling of aimlessness. This effect is achieved more insistently by the repetition of the D♯ that transforms toward the end of the piece into an F♯ over an unchanging G sonority. The approach

[34] Elizabeth Butel, *Margaret Preston* (Sydney: ETT Imprint, 1995) 11.
[35] Mary Eagle, personal communication, 22 Mar. 2006.

to harmonic rhythm in these extremely brief pieces has a profound affect on our perception of musical time. They capture in sound the timelessness suggested in Blake's lines:

> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> And eternity in an hour.[36]

Figure 15. *Formula Series* no. 4, bb. 1–8

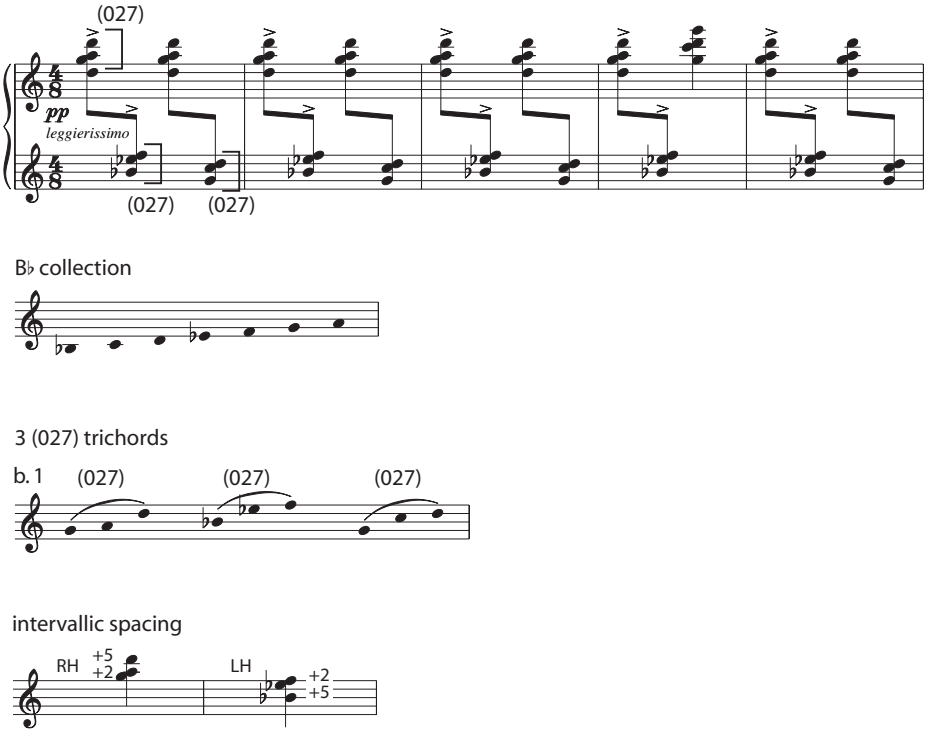


Much of Brewster-Jones's experimental music is non-developmental. It is not organic. In this music things do not transform into other related things; rather the music is of non-teleological shifting blocks of sound. Responding to the requirements of the new material, the forms have shaped themselves through the working out of the material.

Brewster-Jones's use of the diatonic collection in these miniatures is, as is often the case with post-tonal music, again in Joseph Straus's words, 'without the functional harmony and traditional voice leading of tonal music.'[37] In the second of his *Ten Etudes*, the opening section uses the diatonic collection on B♭ (see Figure 16). This larger referential collection is reduced to three (027) trichords. The non-triadic partitioning in terms of voicing and spacing of the chords undoes the 'functional' content of the pitch collection. Straus has stressed the importance of the pc set (027) in his discussion of the diatonic collection, noting its marked presence in Stravinsky's diatonic music.[38] In this etude, the spacing of the trichord is constant throughout and is arranged symmetrically. The intervals of the RH are arranged as <+2, +5> while the LH plays the inversion: <+5, +2>.

[36] William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence,' *Poems and Prophecies* (London: Dent, 1959) 333–7.
[37] Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* 94.
[38] Straus, *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory* 95.

Figure 16. Etude no. 2, bb. 1–5, non-tonal treatment of the diatonic collection



We know from both his personal library of scores and his lecture broadcast on modern French piano music in 1932 that Brewster-Jones had a wide knowledge of contemporary French composition.[39] In the lecture alone he mentioned a wide range of French composers including Debussy, Dukas, Magnard, Ravel, Roussel and Sévérac, as well as older figures such as Saint-Saëns, Franck, d'Indy and Fauré, and the younger generation including *Les Six* (the 'six young innovators') in addition to Schmitt, Inglebrecht and Rhené-Baton. The music he selected for special mention reveals his attraction to the 'low brow' allusions in this music, which can be detected earlier in some of his own work from the 1920s. He highlighted works such as Auric's *Adieu New York* (which he describes as a humorous fox trot); Louis Durey's *Impressions de Cirque*; Milhaud's *Printemps* ('which is only an index to his remarkable sense for harmonic colour of a new order'); Germaine Tailleferre *jeux de plein air* for two pianos (which 'has created a sensation in musical circles'); and Poulenc's Sonata for four hands ('a humorous reaction against the profundity of the philosophical and profound works of the classical masters').[40]

It was through his exposure to modern French music that Brewster-Jones became acquainted with polytonality. As he told his listening audience in 1932: 'Polytonality is one of Music's most recent developments,' and 'an extremely important one.'[41] Its sources were in nature, he explained:

[39] I have been unable to ascertain when Brewster-Jones obtained that large number of French scores in his library.

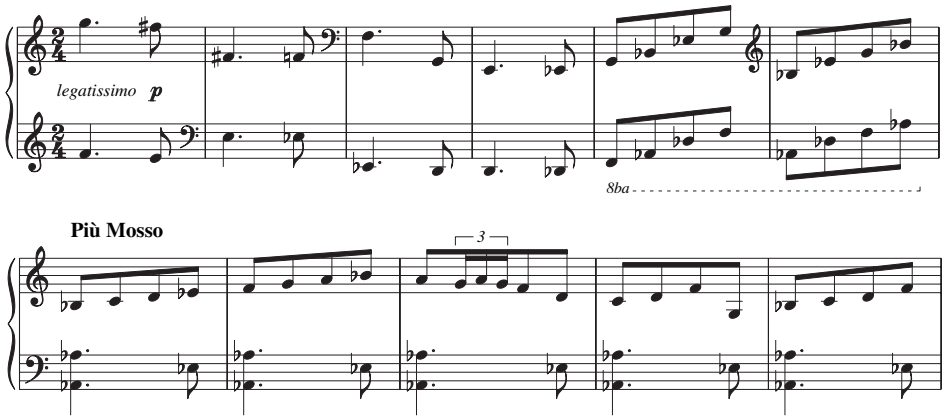
[40] Brewster-Jones, 'Modern French Piano Music.'

[41] Brewster-Jones, 'Modern French Piano Music.'

> Our aural perception is strained still more by the 'Polytonality' of today; but if we listen to nature as the murmuring stream ripples its accompaniment to the sighing of the breeze, we know that the tinkling cow bells in the distance, although they be pitched in a third key, do not sound discordant—but harmonic with the dual tonalities of breeze and stream. To repeat the analogy; when the mating birds of Spring awaken the day with refulgent sound their mixture of tonalities and timbres [is] not discordant.[42]

He described Francis Poulenc as a 'self-styled Polytonalist,' 'a young apostle of "Simplicity."' But, he claimed, Poulenc's polytonality 'only exhibit[ed] itself at rare intervals in some of his works.'[43] The same can be said of Brewster-Jones's use of polytonality. Nonetheless, he was detained by its possibilities. It found expressions in other of his piano pieces in addition to the last of the *Formula Series*. The opening of the third etude is not polytonal in the true sense, as neither of the musical lines can be understood in terms of a key, but the gliding melodic line featuring a recurrent octave shift appears in unison but a tone apart (see Figure 17). The distance of a tone is retained for the second part of the Prelude in which the left hand is resolutely prioritising A♭ under a B♭-major melody.

Figure 17. Etude no. 3, bb. 1–6 and 23–27; the two voices are set a tone apart



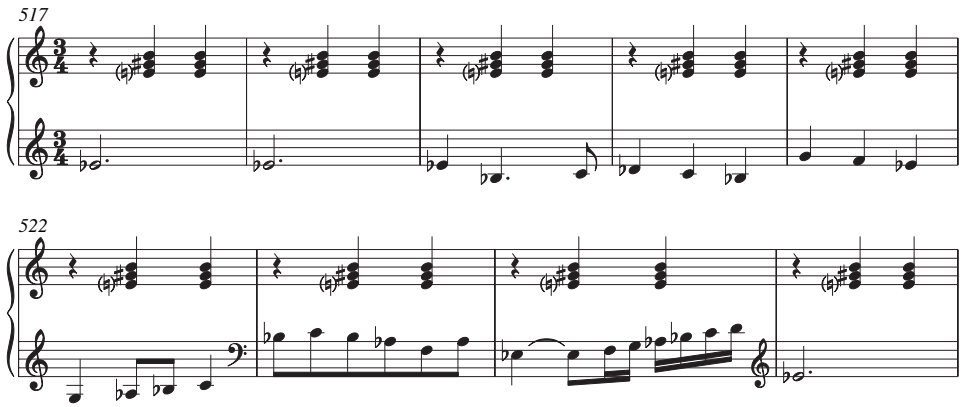
The *Ballet Prelude* no. 17, subtitled *Waltz Prelude*, of 1925 is more straightforward (see Figure 18). This ironically elegant little waltz is indisputably pitting the graceful E♭-major melody against an unchanging, even comically insistent E-major triad. The dissonant clash of the semitone throughout creates a parodistic, almost grotesque affect.

Implicit in the affective content of this work is a sense of emotional distance. Brewster-Jones's use of popular dance types produced witty and sophisticated music. The W*altz Prelude* is only one example of highly stylised popular dance type. The tenth and eleventh of his Twelve Preludes, the grotesque *Valse Prelude* and the deliberately vulgar *Fox Trot Prelude*, are further examples of the brief, highly stylised musical vignette.

In appropriating popular styles, Brewster-Jones joined others such as Busoni, Stravinsky, Casella, even Schoenberg, who used these distorted dance patterns. But it was a style most often associated with the anti-romantic sensibility of interwar French neoclassicism. Brewster-

[42] Brewster-Jones, 'Modern French Piano Music.'
[43] Brewster-Jones, 'Modern French Piano Music.'

Figure 18. *Ballet Prelude* no. 17, bb. 1–9, E♭/E major



Jones, like the members of *Les Six*, heeded Cocteau's call to order that brought about a major cultural and aesthetic shift during the interwar years: one that not only privileged clarity of composition and economy of means but also sought to evoke the dance and music halls, the cafe-concert and jazz band as a means of dispersing the 'Debussian mist' and 'Wagnerian fog.' Brewster-Jones remained open to popular music, particularly jazz, and it was often the subject of his newspaper articles.

The above discussion suggests that it is incorrect to claim, as some have, that Brewster-Jones's music 'is always tonal', even allowing for the varied and flexible definitions of tonality at our disposal.[44] His compositional approach is unlike any other in Australia at the time. It did not, however, outlast the 1920s. His last known work of the 1920s, the final etude, written in 1929, ends with a perfect cadence in C major, an extreme instance of reversion, a sigh of exhaustion or resignation. For reasons unknown, he only wrote one work in the 1930s, a short commissioned piece for the Centenary of the founding of South Australia, and very few in the 1940s, including a piano sonata written in 1945 and a set of Preludes in which the musical language now seems ossified and stagnant. These brief experiments from the 1920s are fundamentally different from the rest of his considerable musical output. Here is a searching mind fascinated by new techniques, new possibilities—the very elements of music itself.

Despite the waning of Brewster-Jones's compositional energies, he did not lose his passion for new art. During the 1930s he found new outlets of expression, turning instead to broadcasting and journalism. The many broadcasts he gave for radio 5CL in the first years of the decade covered a large array of topics including not only modern music but also another of his abiding enthusiasms—the music of other cultures.[45] The substantial body of writing he penned for the South Australian journal, *Progress in Australia*, the Adelaide *Advertiser*, the *Register* and, in his final years, the *News*, chronicled Adelaide's musical life and raised public consciousness about the contemporary arts. His almost obsessive interest in the new is found in his feature articles on Surrealism, jazz, and film music, as well as in his many interviews

[44] See for example, Elizabeth Wood and Adrian A. Thomas, 'Brewster-Jones, Hooper,' *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, accessed 30 July 2004, <www.grovemusic.com>.

[45] See transcripts, HBJ Bartsch.

with visiting artists.[46] Schnabel, Eileen Joyce, members of the Budapest Quartet and many others were grilled for information on recent musical developments. Schnabel was called upon to describe his personal friendship with Schoenberg and admitted an admiration for many contemporary composers including Berg, Krenek, Milhaud, Hindemith, and Stravinsky. Although the latter two composers proved too much for Joyce, she had recently performed concertos by Prokofiev and Shostakovich, and mentioned an upcoming engagement to play Pizzetti's piano concerto under the baton of Bernard Heinze. Mr Rolsman from the Budapest String Quartet reminded Brewster-Jones that the Debussy and Ravel quartets had long since taken their place in the repertoire and that recent quartets by Bartók and Schoenberg deserved serious attention.[47]

Like many Australians, Brewster-Jones was captivated by the *Ballets Russes*. He covered their visits to Adelaide in fine detail and displayed lavish photographs in his feature articles. A protracted disappointment for him was their failure to perform *Petrushka* in Adelaide during their first two tours. He agitated publicly (and successfully) for this to change, rallying around him a group of like-minded campaigners who made their demands heard through letters to the *Advertiser*. He drew upon personal contacts within the dance company when he, along with his student William Hoffman and the painter Ivor Hele, founded the Adelaide Arts Club in 1936 in order to promote new local work. The choreographer Michel Fokine, of the Stravinsky-Fokine-Bakst triumvirate, agreed to be the club's official patron.[48]

I doubt the expatriate Stella Bowen would have laid the charge of intellectual timidity at Brewster-Jones's feet. His little musical experiments of the 1920s are important historical documents that provide a valuable and welcome addition to the current discourse of Australian music history. Like any major city early last century, Adelaide was a complex and contradictory place. It is a city that has often been portrayed negatively: accused of apathy, or, to draw again from Bowen's selective but vivid memory, of being 'filled to the brim with an anguish of boredom.'[49] It has also, perhaps paradoxically, produced many of Australia's most challenging and interesting early twentieth-century artistic and literary figures. These include not only Bowen herself, but also Margaret Preston, Dorrit Black, Max Harris and the Jindyworobaks. Brewster-Jones takes his place among this group, but should also be understood as belonging to an international cultural field: one of a group of composers who, in the early decades of last century, sought new means of expression.

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[46] Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Surrealism—Exploitation of the Dream World,' *Advertiser* 27 June 1936: 11; Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'The Musical Significance of Jazz,' *Advertiser* 18 May 1935: 11; Hooper Brewster-Jones and Robert Brewster-Jones, '"Scat" Singing and "Swing" Rhythm Now,' *Advertiser* 20 June 1936: 9; Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Crooning,' *Advertiser* 23 July 1935; Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Juggling with the Sticks: Drummer's Place in Jazz,' *Advertiser* 4 Jan. 1936: 9; Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Music with the Films,' *Advertiser* 3 Oct. 1936: 11.

[47] Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Dr. Artur Schnabel. Eminent Pianist in Adelaide,' *Advertiser* 20 June 1939; Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Eileen Joyce in Adelaide,' *Advertiser* 19 May 1936; Hooper Brewster-Jones, 'Budapest String Quartet. First Adelaide Concert Tonight,' *Advertiser* 6 July 1937.

[48] William Hoffman, personal communication, 8 Oct. 2005.

[49] Bowen, *Drawn from Life* 4.