Peter Sculthorpe's String Quartet no. 14: A Musical Response to Social Injustice *

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Tasmanian-born composer Peter Sculthorpe wrote his String Quartet no. 14 (1997) in response to a brutal incident reported to have occurred during the early nineteenth century at Quamby Bluff, a rather forbidding, mountainous outcrop in Northern Tasmania. According to Sculthorpe's account, colonial government soldiers drove a tribe of indigenous Tasmanians to the bluff's edge and gave them the option either of being shot or of jumping. As they jumped, they cried out 'Quamby!', meaning 'Save me!', and the bluff was so named from that time.[1] The social justice issues that inspired the composition of the String Quartet no. 14 have been the creative impetus for many works throughout Sculthorpe's oeuvre. This article will consider Sculthorpe's response to the events at Quamby Bluff in his String Quartet no. 14, and the significance of several pre-existing musical sources and other compositional techniques used symbolically to represent the incident and the landscape.

Sculthorpe has composed several works that raise social justice issues pertaining to the indigenous population of Australia. His exploration of historical events and sacred places in his works, his depictions of the Australian landscape, and his use of Aboriginal titles reflect his desire to create a nexus between his music and indigenous Australia.[2] The first real evidence of Sculthorpe's interest in indigenous culture appeared in 1946, in the form of a piano piece (now lost) entitled *Aboriginal Legend*.[3] However, as Sculthorpe biographer Graeme Skinner points out, despite the evocative title, the composer 'admits that there was no "legend" as such' behind the work.[4] *Aboriginal Legend* was followed in 1949 by the *Two Aboriginal Songs* for solo voice and orchestra, which borrowed indigenous melodies collected by H.G. Lethbridge.[5]

* I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Anne-Marie Forbes, Heather Monkhouse and Graeme Skinner in the preparation of this article.

[1] Peter Sculthorpe, *Sun Music: Journeys and Reflections from a Composer's Life* (Sydney: ABC Books, 1999) 162.

[2] Roger Covell, 'Peter Sculthorpe,' *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 23, 18.

[3] Deborah Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993) 36.

[4] Communication from Graeme Skinner, March 2006.

[5] Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe,* 39; communication from Graeme Skinner, March 2006.

After completing an undergraduate degree at the University of Melbourne Conservatorium of Music (1945–50), Sculthorpe returned to Tasmania and began researching surviving references to the musical traditions of the local indigenous population. In addition to collecting indigenous music, he studied the insular languages of the local tribes, and continued the compilation of a dictionary of native words that he had initiated as a child, and which still awaits completion.[6] This research heightened Sculthorpe's awareness of the intimate relationship between the Australian landscape and its indigenous inhabitants, and contributed to his belief that the modern Australian composer should seek a similar affinity.[7] Until this time, he had accepted the popular belief in Tasmania that the island's full-blood indigenous population had been effectively extinct since 1876. His plan to collect and recover the records of the local culture could in fact be viewed as an early addressing of social justice issues.[8]

Sculthorpe's study of indigenous culture during the early 1950s led to the composition of several works that carry indigenous associations.[9] In 1954, Sculthorpe composed the Piano Sonatina and *The Loneliness of Bunjil* for string trio. Based on an indigenous legend, the Piano Sonatina carries the subtitle, 'For the Journey of Yoonecara to the Land of his Forefathers, and the Return to his Tribe,' while the original version of *The Loneliness of Bunjil* was inscribed with a description of the 'Great Spirit' Bunjil.[10] The following year, 1955, saw the appearance of the first of the works of the *Irkanda* series (1955–61), *Irkanda I for Violin Alone*, which refers through its indigenous title to a 'remote and lonely place.' The exploration of sacred places and the use of Aboriginal titles for such works reflect Sculthorpe's desire to create a connection between his music and indigenous Australia.[11]

In 1958, Sculthorpe left Australia for England where, under the supervision of Wilfrid Mellers, he set to music poems about the Australian bush by D.H. Lawrence. Sculthorpe was particularly attracted to Lawrence's descriptions of the Australian landscape and, in particular, the sun. The idea of the sun as a giver of both life and death inspired the composition of several works, including the Sun Music series (1965–1969) and the orchestral work *Sun Song* (1984), while Lawrence's poetic descriptions of the Australian landscape influenced works such as *Irkanda IV* (1961) for chamber orchestra and *The Fifth Continent* (1963) for speaker and orchestra.[12] In *The Fifth Continent*, a narrator reads an excerpt from Lawrence's novel, *Kangaroo* (1923), while the orchestra musically depicts the scene:

> But the bush, the grey, charred bush … It was so phantom-like, so ghostly, with its tall pale trees and many dead trees, like corpses, partly charred by bushfires … And then it was so deathly still. Even the few birds seemed to be swamped in silence. Waiting, waiting—the bush seemed to be hoarily waiting … It was biding its time with a terrible ageless watchfulness, waiting for a far-off end, watching the myriad intruding white men.[13]

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[6] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 29–30.

[7] Michael Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe: His Music and Ideas, 1929–1979* (St Lucia, Qld: U of Queensland Press, 1982) 9.

[8] Communication from Graeme Skinner, March 2006.

[9] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 30.

[10] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 31–33.

[11] Roger Covell, 'Peter Sculthorpe,' 18.

[12] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 58–61.

[13] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 60–61.

This passage, like so many of Lawrence's literary works, establishes an identity between the indigenous people and the land. Through the personification of the trees, Lawrence describes the indigenous Australians, many of whom are already dead, 'like corpses,' watching and waiting for the intruding white settlers. The inclusion of this evocative text in *The Fifth Continent* further establishes a link between the indigenous population and the landscape in Sculthorpe's compositional output.

During the early 1960s, Sculthorpe also developed alliances with other forms of Australian culture. In 1962 he met the Australian painter Russell Drysdale (1912–1981), and they subsequently shared a long and fruitful association. Drysdale lived and worked with many indigenous Australians in the country towns of northern Queensland, frequently using them as subjects for his canvasses. His graphic depictions of stark outback landscapes with their native inhabitants were characterised by the use of bold colour, particularly reds and ochres, which integrated both figures and surroundings into one entity. Fine examples of such works include *Mullaloonah Tank* (1953), *Man in a Landscape* (1953), *Shopping Day* (1953) and *Group of Aborigines* (1953). These works were of considerable sociological importance in the early 1950s, as they highlighted the plight of the indigenous population.[14] Sculthorpe acknowledges that Drysdale's work and views on the welfare of indigenous Australians further encouraged his personal vision.[15]

Indigenous issues of one sort or another recur frequently in Sculthorpe's music. In 1986, he composed a hymn tune based on a traditional melody from Saibai, an island just south of Papua New Guinea, in the Torres Strait.[16] Sculthorpe later used this melody in his *Songs of Sea and Sky* (1987) for clarinet and piano, in which it appears as the main theme, 'Saibai,' and in a varied form as the 'Mission Hymn.'[17] At the conclusion of the piece, 'the melody is reworked as a "Lament" for what has been lost of traditional [Torres Strait] islander culture … another social justice response.'[18]

Sculthorpe's exploration of indigenous issues in his music has also raised his concerns about environmental depredation and overpopulation. In the orchestral work *Memento Mori* (1993), he addresses the environmental effects of a population explosion among the indigenous people of Easter Island.[19] Several other works address humanitarian issues, such as the (now lost) *Music for Vietnam* (1968), composed to raise money for the Anti-Vietnam War campaign, and more recently, his String Quartet no. 16 (2005), which responds to the 'heart-rending testimony [of] the inhumane treatment of refugees, including children, in mandatory detention.'[20]

Many of Sculthorpe's earliest compositions were inspired by the landscape surrounding Launceston, in northern Tasmania, where he spent his childhood. He recalls that one of the movements in the lost String Quartet no. 1 (1944–47) commemorated the historic church

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[14] Lou Klepac, *The Life and Work of Russell Drysdale* (Sydney: Murdoch Books, 1996) 137–38.

[15] Peter Sculthorpe, email to the author, 18 May 2004.

[16] Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe,* 77.

[17] Most traditional Torres Strait music is strongly influenced by the religious music introduced in the nineteenth century by missionaries.

[18] Communication from Graeme Skinner, March 2006.

[19] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music,* 269–70.

[20] Peter Sculthorpe, program note, Musica Viva Australia, Tokyo String Quartet, concerts 5 to 12 November 2005.

graveyard at Longford, one of his favourite towns, which is just south of Launceston.[21] Such student works display an attraction to the pastoral and commemorative dimensions of the Tasmanian landscape. This is not surprising considering Sculthorpe names Delius, Vaughan Williams and the English pastoral composers among his earliest influences, and views their music to be 'quite appropriate to the Tasmanian landscape.'[22] It was not until his late teens that Sculthorpe began contrasting this pastoral aesthetic with depictions of the unique, rugged wilderness of Tasmania. At the age of eighteen, he commenced writing the fourth String Quartet (1947–50) which, subtitled 'Recollections of Holidays spent in a Country Village in Tasmania,' refers to the composer's home town of St Leonards.[23] The work opens with a Prelude that is intended to be suggestive of the Tasmanian wilderness. This is contrasted with a melancholic second movement, openly titled 'Pastorale.'[24] In the third and final movement, 'Country Dance,' the two opposing landscapes are juxtaposed. A detailed discussion of the use of opposing elements in Sculthorpe's oeuvre is provided by Martin Ball in his articles discussing the 'Pastoral and Gothic' in Sculthorpe's works.[25]

Although Sculthorpe has chosen to live his adult life in Australia's larger cities, he has continued to be inspired by his Tasmanian heritage, and many of his more recent works continue to portray an interest in the island's rugged terrain. In 1963 he composed the score to *The Splendour and the Peaks*, a documentary film that follows a mountaineering group climbing on the Freycinet Peninsula.[26] This was followed in 1980 by the solo piano work *Mountains*, which reflects the character of the island's varied landscape. More recently, Sculthorpe composed *Port Arthur: In Memoriam* (1996) in response to the senseless massacre of thirty-five people at the historic site of the notorious former penal colony in southern Tasmania. This tragic event had deep repercussions for the Tasmanian community, as have similar events in the state's complex history. It is likely that Sculthorpe associated his response to this event with his pre-existing feelings towards the Quamby Bluff incident, and this triggered the composition of String Quartet no. 14 the following year.

As a child, Sculthorpe was told about the history of Quamby Bluff by his father, as the bluff is geographically close to Launceston, where the composer spent much of his childhood. Figure 1 shows the locations under discussion, while Figure 2 shows a nineteenth-century view of Quamby Bluff itself. Sculthorpe's version of the Quamby Bluff incident (an act that allegedly contributed to the extinction of the indigenous Tasmanians) is one of several that circulate in present-day Tasmania. His account, however, does not appear to be entirely supported by either historical accounts, such as the journals of George Augustus Robinson (an agent of the Tasmanian colonial government employed to 'conciliate' the indigenous Tasmanians into ending the 'Black War'),[27] or by more recent literature, such as the publications of historians

[21] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music,* 11–12.

[22] Sculthorpe quoted in Hayes, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 13.

[23] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music,* 28.

[24] The second movement of the fourth string quartet is derived from the first movement (also titled 'Pastorale') of the (now lost) String Quartet no. 3 (1949).

[25] Martin Ball, 'Pastoral and Gothic in Sculthorpe's Tasmania,' *Triquarterly* (Summer 2003): 115–18; 'Reflexions on Peter Sculthorpe's String Quartet no. 12,' *Siglo* 10 (1998): 14–18.

[26] Communication from Graeme Skinner, March 2006.

[27] N.J.B. Plomley, ed., *Friendly Mission: The Tasmanian Journals and Papers of George Augustus Robinson 1829–1834* (Hobart: Tasmanian Historical Research Association, 1966).

Figure 1: Map of the north coast of Tasmania, showing the geographical proximity of Quamby Bluff to Launceston

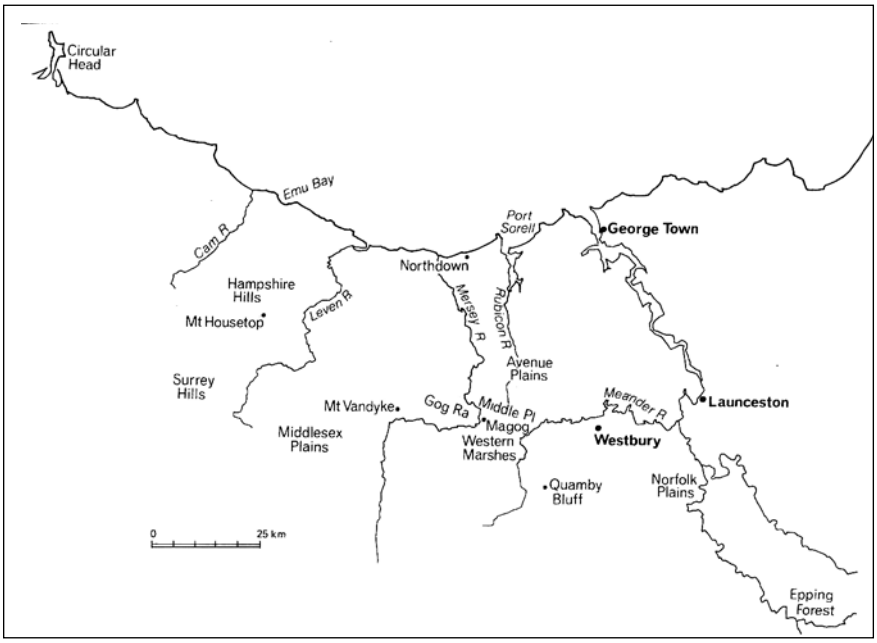
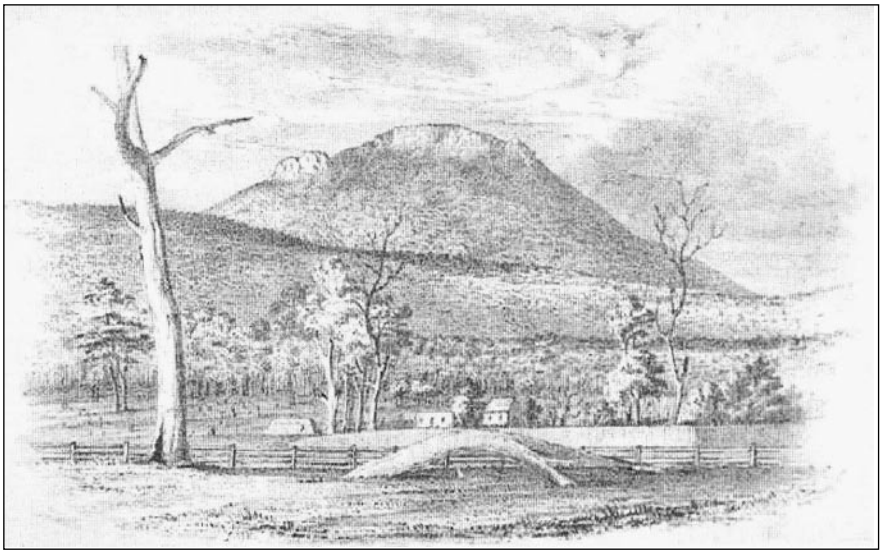


Figure 2: William Gore Elliston, *Quamby Bluff from Westbury* (1838), courtesy of the State Library of Tasmania



Lyndall Ryan, Henry Reynolds and Keith Windschuttle.[28] Through analysis of these sources, it is apparent that Sculthorpe's version of the Quamby Bluff incident may actually be a conflation of several similar events that took place in Northern Tasmania during colonial times. A massacre of thirty indigenous Tasmanians at Cape Grim, on the northwest tip of Tasmania (see Figure 3), by members of the Van Dieman's Land Company in 1828, has clear parallels to Sculthorpe's Quamby Bluff account. According to Robinson's journals, the party of native Tasmanians was shot and pushed over the precipice of Cape Grim, over which they themselves had driven a herd of over one hundred sheep several weeks earlier.[29]

Figure 3: Cape Grim, on the north-west tip of the Tasmanian coastline

There is also a discrepancy between Sculthorpe's account and those of historians concerning the naming of Quamby Bluff. According to an article that appeared in an early Tasmanian newspaper, the *Hobart Town Courier*, Quamby Bluff obtained its name from the circumstance of an indigenous Tasmanian begging for mercy from a party of European settlers who threatened to kill him.[30] Many such cases were also reported by Robinson in his journals. Other scholars, including Ryan, claim the Bluff was named after the leader of the local tribe, Quamby, who was shot and killed by European settlers following a dispute over territory in 1830.[31] Given the similarities inherent in these accounts, it is likely that the version of events known to Sculthorpe is a fusion of various narratives, compounded over time by the romanticised notion of the meaning of the word *quamby* being 'save me'.[32]

Despite the lack of authority of Sculthorpe's version of the events at Quamby Bluff, there were undoubtedly many similar incidents of injustice that occurred in colonial Tasmania.[33]

[28] Lyndall Ryan, *The Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 2nd ed. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996); Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002).

[29] Plomley, *Friendly Mission*, 175, 181–3, 231–2.

[30] Windschuttle, *Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, 280–81.

[31] Ryan, *Aboriginal Tasmanians*, 141.

[32] Ball, 'Pastoral and Gothic,' 115.

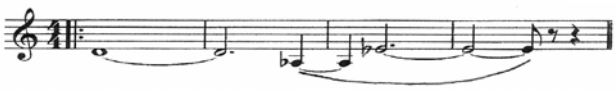
[33] Ryan notes that between June 1827 and September 1830 the indigenous population of northern Tasmania fell in number from two hundred to just sixty.

According to Sculthorpe, 'whether or not [his version is] true, it certainly represents the attitude of the time.'[34] While there were no doubt some 'philanthropic individuals' who deeply disagreed with the European settlers' treatment of the indigenous population, according to Reynolds, they were 'often lonely figures, attracting derision as they stood out against the great weight of colonial opinion,' which held the diametrically opposite opinion that the indigenous Tasmanians were 'not entitled to be looked upon as fellow creatures' and adopted the 'harshest and most severe measures towards them.'[35] Reynolds' views are supported by an entry in the journal of Rosalie Hare, a witness to the massacre at Cape Grim, who noted that many early settlers considered the 'massacre of [the indigenous Tasmanians] an honour' and wished to 'extirpate them entirely if possible.'[36]

Sculthorpe's String Quartet no. 14 does not depict the events at Quamby Bluff in a programmatic sense, but should be viewed rather as a musical response to the composer's personal feelings about the incident, and a reflection of his incessant questioning, through childhood and adulthood, of why such an injustice took place. Sculthorpe acknowledges that the story of Quamby Bluff has retained a prominent place in his memory since childhood: 'It was perhaps inevitable that my thoughts about this incident and this place would find their way into a piece of music.'[37] It was also appropriate that when composing a work in response to this incident and place that Sculthorpe would reflect on his childhood in Tasmania and the sentimental melodies he composed there. Soon after completing String Quartet no. 14, Sculthorpe described it as 'the string quartet that I would have written in Tasmania as a Tasmanian before I was really exposed to Asian music and Aboriginal music … In other words, a Tasmanian string quartet.'[38] The influence of Sculthorpe's Tasmanian upbringing is evident in each of the work's four movements: Prelude, 'In the Valley,' 'On High Hills' and 'At Quamby Bluff.'

The first movement, Prelude, presents most of the thematic material upon which the work is based. The opening three-note motive, which appears in the second violin part, is particularly significant, and reappears in the final movement, 'At Quamby Bluff' (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Opening motive of String Quartet no. 14, second violin, bb. 1–4



While composing the work, Sculthorpe continually questioned, 'did this [injustice] have to be, did it really have to be?'[39] Following completion of the work, he realised that the musical motive he had composed was suggestive of a theme from Beethoven's final string quartet,

[34] Peter Sculthorpe, email to the author, 11 April 2005. Sculthorpe states the Quamby Bluff incident 'could be regarded as a Tasmanian parable.'

[35] Reynolds, *Frontier,* 83.

[36] Rosalie Hare quoted in Robert Manne, ed., *White Wash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003) 285.

[37] Peter Sculthorpe, email to the author, 11 April 2005; Gordon Kalton Williams, Natalie Shea and Peter Sculthorpe, liner notes for *Quamby* (Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, ABC Classics 4767627, 2005) 5.

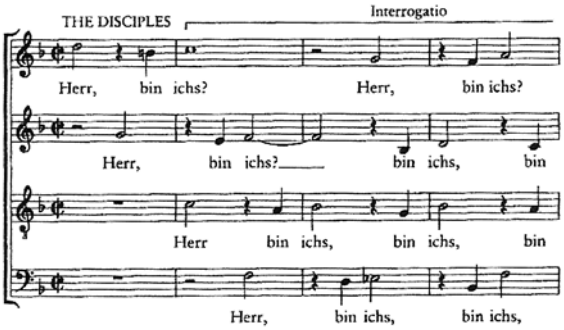
[38] Williams, Shea and Sculthorpe, liner notes for *Quamby,* 5.

[39] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music,* 162.

opus 135, composed in 1826.[40] The final movement of opus 135 carries the title *Der schwer gefasste Entschluss* [The hard-made Decision], and begins with a dramatic 'Grave' in F minor, in which a three-note motive is presented that dominates the remainder of the movement's thematic material. In his sketches for the quartet, Beethoven scrawled the question *Muss es sein?* (Must it be?) under this three-note motive, to which the first notes of the main body of the movement (Allegro in F) give the answer *Es muss sein!* (It must be!).

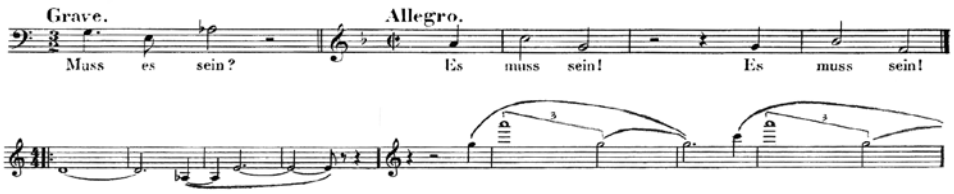
The use of specific musical figures to represent particular rhetorical concepts (in this case a question and answer) has been the topic of several treatises dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Among the most frequently cited musical examples is the following excerpt from the *St Matthew Passion* by Heinrich Schütz (see Figure 5), which is recognised as the musical equivalent of a rhetorical question.[41]

Figure 5: Musical *interrogatio* in Schütz's *St Matthew Passion*



Musical *interrogatio* (interrogation or questioning) may be defined as 'a melodic ending or entire harmonic passage ending a second or some other interval higher than the previous note or notes.'[42] There are clear parallels between this 'musical question' motive and the *Muss es sein?* motives of Beethoven and Sculthorpe. While the intervallic relationships between the motives differ, they employ similar shapes (see Figure 6).[43]

Figure 6: Beethoven String Quartet, op. 135, motives from the fourth movt contrasted with Sculthorpe String Quartet no. 14, motives from the first movt



[40] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 162.

[41] See Blake Wilson, George Buelow and Peter Hoyt, 'Rhetoric and Music,' *New Grove*, vol.21, 263.

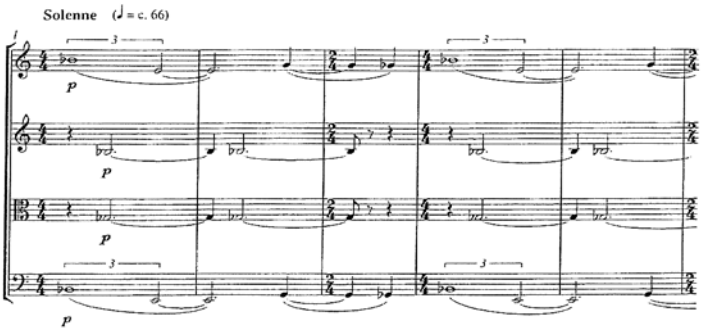
[42] Wilson, Buelow and Hoyt, 'Rhetoric and Music,' 267.

[43] Beethoven's 'Must it be?' theme features a falling minor third, followed by an ascending diminished fourth, while Sculthorpe's motive consists of a falling tritone, followed by a rising fifth). Likewise, the intervallic relationships between the responding 'It must be!' motives differ. Beethoven's motive consists of a rising minor third, followed by a falling perfect fourth, while Sculthorpe's figure varies at each statement, and is constructed of leaps as large as a major ninth.

It is apparent that Sculthorpe's unintentional borrowing of Beethoven's theme, as he claims, is in actual fact a borrowing of a musical gesture recognised for centuries as a musical question. Sculthorpe's use of this pre-existing musical figure is significant for a number of reasons. While Sculthorpe claims that he was unaware of borrowing from Beethoven when writing, he nevertheless maintains that, like the story of Quamby Bluff, the theme must have stayed in his mind from his 'first acquaintance with it, forty or fifty years earlier.'[44] It is both significant and appropriate that Sculthorpe uses a figure heard in his youth to respond to a story encountered in his youth. This suggests a type of regression to the composer's childhood in Tasmania. The extra-musical association the borrowing carries is also of importance, as Sculthorpe states, 'clearly such a question was on my mind at the time.'[45] While he may not have realised the connection between the pre-existing figure and his theme until he completed String Quartet no. 14, the extra-musical meaning that the original source divulges was intended by Sculthorpe and this is mediated to the listener through his theme. This rhetorical figure is supported by a static atmosphere created by a lack of harmonic movement in the other string parts. Here, broad arpeggios are underpinned by a C pedal throughout, suggesting a sense of timelessness.

In the preface to the score, Sculthorpe states that the falling tritone presented in the opening motive is especially significant to the movement's construction. The recurrence of this falling tritone and the presence of a falling ninth interval in the *Es muss sein!* answer motive suggest an oblique pictorial reference to the indigenous Tasmanians falling from the bluff's edge. The falling tritone also dominates the sombre second movement, 'In the Valley' (see Figure 7).[46]

Figure 7: String Quartet no. 14, second movt, bb. 1–5



Although it is not acknowledged in the preface to the score, the second movement is essentially an arrangement for string quartet of Sculthorpe's solo piano work, *Mountains* (1980), which was composed in response to Tasmania's mountainous terrain.[47] This borrowing

[44] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music,* 162.

[45] Peter Sculthorpe, *String Quartet no.14, Score and Parts* (London: Faber Music, 1998).

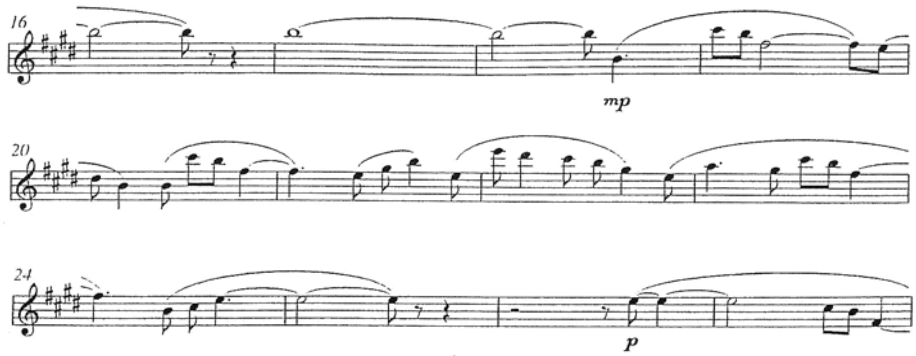
[46] While it may be coincidental that both the first and second movements feature the falling tritone, it is likely that Sculthorpe composed the first movement with the knowledge that he would include an arrangement of *Mountains* in the work.

[47] Peter Sculthorpe, *Mountains for Solo Piano* (London: Faber, 1982). *Mountains* was dedicated to Sculthorpe's friend, Rex Hobcroft, who held the first chair in music at the University of Tasmania, and who was particularly inspired by the State's rugged landscape. The work was written as a test-piece for the inaugural Sydney International Piano Competition, of which Hobcroft was founder.

is particularly significant because, in addition to identifying a specific place, it encourages associations with the mountainous landscape against which Quamby Bluff is set. The re-working of pre-existing musical sources is a technique Sculthorpe has used in several of his compositions to carry associations from one work to the next.[48] An example of this intertextuality can be seen in the un-metered movements of *Tabuh Tabuhan* (1968) for wind quintet and percussion, which quote bird calls from *Irkanda I*. Through this transplantation of ideas, Sculthorpe 'intended to affirm the Australian viewpoint from which *Tabuh Tabuhan* was composed.'[49] The re-working of *Mountains* in String Quartet no. 14 illustrates to the listener Sculthorpe's intention to establish a Tasmanian context for the work, and simultaneously transforms landscape into place, the generic into the specific. Sculthorpe describes this slow and solemn movement as like 'the shadow of the valley of death,' and this impression is conveyed to the listener through the employment of widely-spaced intervals and suspensions which conjure a tense and static atmosphere.[50]

In contrast, the third movement, 'On High Hills,' is calm and serene, its melody conceived in the composer's schooldays in Tasmania.[51] The inclusion of this melody further supports the theory that the work is a symbolic regression to Sculthorpe's childhood and his point of encounter with the Quamby Bluff story. Like many of Sculthorpe's early compositions, this melody is lyrical and sentimental (see Figure 8), its inclusion in the string quartet perhaps motivated as much by personal nostalgia as by a desire to reaffirm the Tasmanian context of the work. It is perhaps also symbolic of the innocence of the land and indigenous people prior to white settlement and incidents such as that which occurred at Quamby Bluff. This melody is also coloured with imitations of bird calls (see Figure 9), which are present in other works by Sculthorpe, including *Irkanda I for Violin Alone* (1955), *Sun Music I* (1965), String Quartet no. 8 (1968), *Tabuh Tabuhan* (1968) and *Landscape II* (1977).

Figure 8: String Quartet no. 14, third movt, main melody, first violin, bb. 16–27



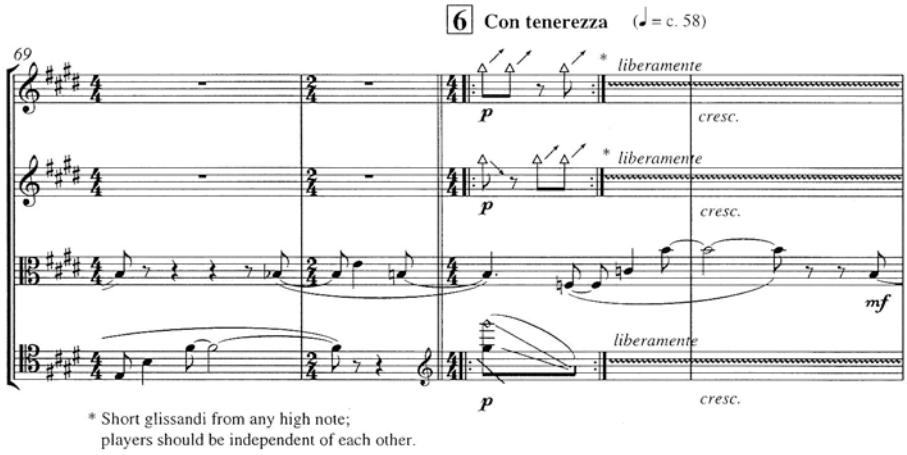
[48] Repetition of material is evident in the works of the Sun Music series, the *Irkanda* series and those inspired by Kakadu National Park. It is a technique that is echoed in the work of Sculthorpe's close friend, the Australian painter Russell Drysdale, who was known for re-using ideas from one canvas to the next.

[49] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 69.

[50] Peter Sculthorpe, email to the author, 11 April 2005.

[51] Sculthorpe, preface to *String Quartet no. 14*.

Figure 9: String Quartet no. 14, third movt, bird calls



Sculthorpe's use of bird song stems from suggestions in the writings of the early Australian music theorist and composer Henry Tate, who advocated the establishment of a national identity in music through characteristically Australian natural sounds, in particular, the distinctive calls of birds.[52] It was during his time as a student in Melbourne in the late 1940s that Sculthorpe encountered Henry Tate's collection of essays, *Australian Musical Possibilities*:

> I first came to know about Henry Tate when I was a student in Melbourne. In particular, I was impressed that he exhorted composers to look to Australia for inspiration, to listen to the bush, to bird-song and to indigenous music. I myself had begun to follow this path and Tate's writings made the journey feel much less lonely.[53]

Like Tate, Sculthorpe recognised a distinctly Australian sound in the employment of bird song, and it has since become somewhat of a trademark of his personal, Australian style. Sculthorpe employs bird song in his works to encourage Australian associations, to punctuate and frame the melodic or rhythmic momentum of emotionally charged passages and, in his own words, to 'populate the lonely landscape.'[54] In 'On High Hills,' Sculthorpe employs string harmonics to imitate the cries of a suddenly roused flock of seagulls. The inclusion of these bird calls further encourages associations with the landscape and reconfirms an Australian context for the work, making the specific general.

The final movement of the quartet, 'At Quamby Bluff,' is marked *Inquieto.* It reiterates the restless themes of the Prelude, and conjures a similarly tense atmosphere, reflective of Sculthorpe's feelings towards this place and its associations. The 'It must be!' answer motive is explored and developed more in this movement than in the first, suggesting a progression from the questioning of why such a horrific act took place, to a resignation to man's inhumanity to fellow man.

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[52] Peter Sculthorpe, email to the author, 18 May 2004. Tate's theories can be found in his *Australian Musical Resources: Some Suggestions* (1917) and *Australian Musical Possibilities* (1924).

[53] Peter Sculthorpe, email to the author, 18 May 2004.

[54] Hannan, *Peter Sculthorpe*, 76.

This reinstatement of the answer theme is followed by a section Sculthorpe describes in the preface to the score as 'a short hymn-like section' (see Figure 10). While Sculthorpe does not identify a specific hymn in his description, on close examination it is evident that this 'hymn-like' melody is derived from the opening motive of the tune 'St Anne' (see Figure 11), which Sculthorpe undoubtedly would have heard as a student at Launceston Church of England Grammar School.

Figure 10: String Quartet no. 14, fourth movt, bb. 53–61

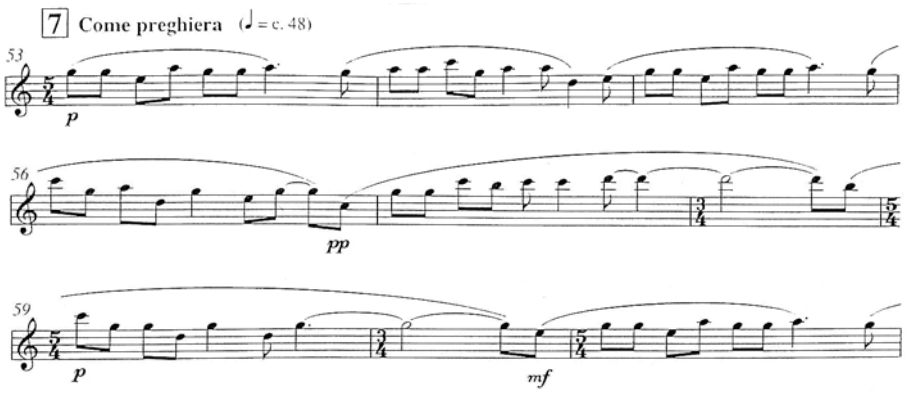
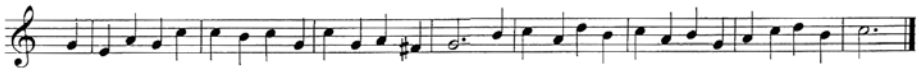


Figure 11: The 'St Anne' hymn tune by William Croft



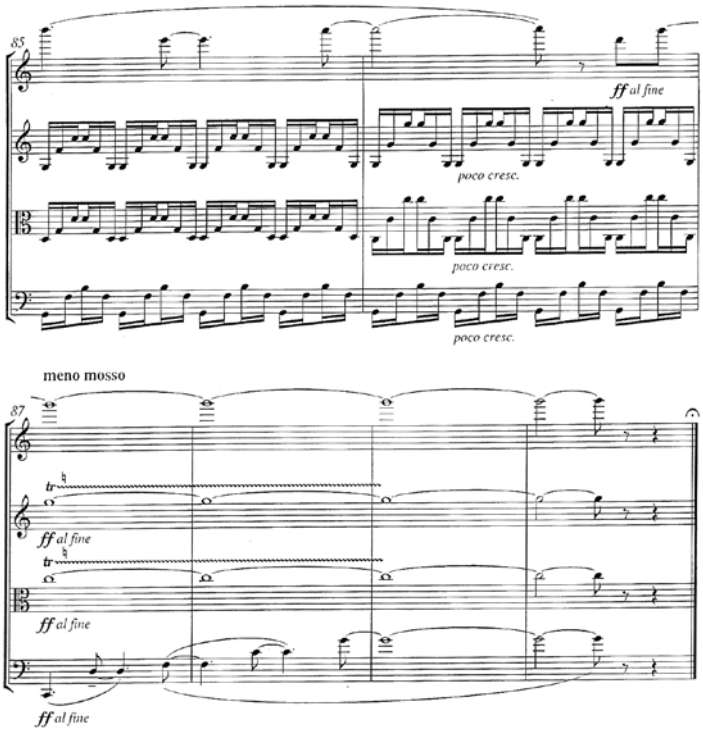
While not a direct borrowing, the inclusion of the opening melody from the hymn tune is significant and appropriate for a number of reasons. 'St Anne' appears with the words 'Our God, our help in ages past' in the original edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* (1861) and its association with Isaac Watts's text, based on Psalm 90, has since been firm. Its use internationally for commemorative ceremonies has further cemented its association with Watts's text in the public consciousness. In the context of Sculthorpe's String Quartet no. 14, the hymn tune is perhaps symbolic of the composer's personal reflections on the story of Quamby Bluff. The text 'Our God, our help in ages past' is a plea for help, and could, thus, be viewed as the Christian parallel of the Aboriginal *quamby* (save me). Despite appearing in the string quartet without its text, the original hymn melody carries its text's associations and maintains a strong presence by virtue of being out of context in this otherwise non-religious work. Once the original hymn tune is identified by the listener, its cultural discourses are transported into the string quartet and its extra-musical meaning conveyed to the listener. Through the inclusion of this hymn melody, Sculthorpe creates an intertextual link with the events at Quamby Bluff.[55] This is another medium through which the composer tells the story of Quamby Bluff to the listener.

[55] There are numerous sources available that address borrowing and intertextuality in music, including David Metzer, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), and, more recently, Michael Klein's *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2005).

Following the 'hymn-like' melody, a concluding section marked *Calmato* is presented. This section closes the string quartet with a sense of resolution, created through the employment of more consonant intervals in the main melody, which passes through a circle of perfect fifth intervals. The juxtaposition of opposing ideas presented in this movement, the *Inquieto* and the *Calmato*, can be interpreted as a form of dualism, a feature common to many of Sculthorpe's works, including *The Loneliness of Bunjil* (1954), the Piano Sonatina (1954), *Irkanda I* (1955), the String Quartet no. 4 (1947–50) and *Rites of Passage* (1972–73).[56] Sculthorpe defines dualism as 'a clashing of opposites until a synthesis is discovered' and uses it in his works to create tension.[57] He states, 'I'd like to think that dualism gives my music its tension, and helps to give it whatever personal qualities it may possess. Certainly it appears in my work in many guises.'[58]

In the first movement of String Quartet no. 14, Sculthorpe creates tension by presenting the opposing ideas of question and answer, while the tense, dramatic nature of the second movement is contrasted with the lyrically sentimental third movement. In the final movement, these opposing ideas are resolved: the 'clashing of opposites' dissolves as the *Inquieto* merges with the *Calmato* and a synthesis is discovered in the consonant intervals that conclude the work (see Figure 12). The resolution of these themes at the conclusion of the work further suggests that the composer's feelings towards the act have been resolved.

Figure 12: String Quartet no. 14, fourth movt, bb. 85–90



[56] In the Piano Sonatina, for example, the dual natures of body and spirit and reality and unreality are presented.

[57] 'Peter Sculthorpe,' National Library of Australia [online source], http://www.nla.gov.au/epubs/sculthorpe/music.html, accessed 24 April 2004.

[58] Sculthorpe, *Sun Music*, 32.

To further evoke a sense of place in the work, Sculthorpe employs a technique he used previously in his *Irkanda I* (1955) and his String Quartet no. 7 (1966). Shortly before composing *Irkanda I*, Sculthorpe visited Canberra and was inspired to trace a 360 degree graph of the hills around the city and write music that followed the contour of the landscape.[59] Sculthorpe used a similar technique to depict the oblique planes of the Toltec pyramids of ancient Mexico in his String Quartet no. 7, later renamed *Red Landscape* after a painting by Russell Drysdale. In these two works, at least, Sculthorpe's clear intention was to create a link between his music and a specific place by means of the graphic depiction of characteristic physical forms, be they landscape forms or buildings. Such a translation of visual stimuli into sound, in this case again from the Australian landscape, is also arguably evident in String Quartet no. 14. If, following the example of *Irkanda I*, one were to trace on a graph the intervallic contours of the main themes of the work, they can easily be seen to depict landscape forms characteristic of the Tasmanian mountain skyline (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: String Quartet no. 14, fourth movt, melodic contour, second violin, bb. 24–30

In the year 2000, Sculthorpe arranged the String Quartet no. 14 for chamber orchestra, under the title *Quamby*. The work was composed for the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and recorded by them in 2005, significantly strengthening the work's Tasmanian connections. Sculthorpe recently stated that the second movement of *Quamby*, which also reworks material from the solo piano work *Mountains*, had become even more menacing in character than its quartet counterpart.[60]

Irrespective of whether or not Sculthorpe's version of the events at Quamby Bluff is historically accurate, he was obviously deeply affected by the story when it was related to him as a child. It was one of the composer's first encounters with institutional injustice, and the disruption it caused to his childhood innocence was only exacerbated by the geographical proximity of the Bluff to his home town. When seeking a musical response to this memory decades later, Sculthorpe reflected on his early years in Tasmania and his point of encounter with the Quamby Bluff story. By encouraging associations with the Tasmanian landscape and through the employment of materials collected in his childhood, Sculthorpe contextualises the String Quartet and responds to his personal thoughts about this symbolic event of social injustice. It is through such works as the String Quartet no. 14 that Sculthorpe raises public awareness of social justice issues pertaining to the indigenous population and simultaneously strengthens the nexus between his music and a sense of Australia.

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[59] Peter Sculthorpe in *Australian Biography: Peter Sculthorpe*, produced and directed by Robin Hughes, VHS videocassette, 26 mins (Sydney: Film Australia, 1999).

[60] Peter Sculthorpe to Graeme Skinner, personal conversation, 23 March 2006.