



camshafts



CAMSHAFTS

Edward Lee writes:

The development the group CMU until the breakup of the original line-up in 1971 is detailed on this site at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/my-time-with-cmu.php>. However the present set of recordings are concerned with my own music in the period from 1966 until the Leeds concert (available on this site at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php>).

At that time I was moving from my strictly jazz background, and sought to explore the then rapidly opening world of meetings between cultures, fusions and interplay of ideas. The basic pattern was however still a theme leading to extended improvisation. When Terry Mortimer and I renewed our acquaintance musically, we sought to draw upon our mutual experiences. The result was fresh, often startling and audiences were grabbed by the sense of excitement both in the music itself and the exploration which was happening right in front of them. A sense of this can be gained from the Leeds tracks, which are the only record of this phase of the development of what became CMU.

I coined the name Camshafts for the first version of the group. Having been trained in English Literature, I was well aware of the resonances of the word. The Collins Dictionary defines it as: *a shaft having one or more cams attached to it, esp. one used to operate the valves of an internal-combustion engine. The cam itself is a projection on a rotating part in machinery, designed to make sliding contact with another part while*

rotating and impart reciprocal or variable motion to it. (Oxford English Dictionary). The notion of the transmission of power and energy was very suited to the rhythmic interests of the group.

But I was not unaware that the name [cam] has been extended to *any kind of eccentric...disc...that serves a similar purpose.* (Oxford English Dictionary). As James Gordon's novel *Rocky Foundations* (which is fairly closely based on the truth) shows, eccentricity was a key characteristic of the group's members (extract at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/rocky-foundations.php>).

There was a further element in the name in that it was an appropriate and bawdy word play suited to the basic desires interest of young men (which I still was then!) towards the young women of Cambridge (the city on the River Cam).

As the account of CMU shows , the aims and style of the group changed, and with it the name (which was thought to be too suggestive). Thus it was that no recordings were made of the original repertoire, except for *Slow and Lonesome Blues* (on the album *Open Spaces*, available in various formats). Existent amateur recordings are listed below, and can be downloaded free unless stated otherwise.

My aim in the current project is to realise this music in recorded form, mostly for the first time. Modern technology makes it possible to show what the music was like, or what I would have wished it to become. Because the original conception was , like most jazz, instrumental, there are no vocals.

One line of development which would I believe have become evident is that the original group used the classic rock format of lead, rhythm and bass guitars and drums. But in certain pieces, for example *Section 3 of Three Part Work* this was clearly pushed to its limit and I was beginning to feel that a third guitar was needed. Making these recordings has made clear that this was indeed so.

I have therefore added a third part when needed. I am not concerned with trying to create an absolutely authentic reproduction- which would be impossible anyway. I also feel that the original line-up could have followed this route, since James Gordon is a very able guitarist, and could certainly have filled such a role.

The recordings

Though it is now more useful to issue the pieces in mp3 format, they were conceived as a double CD, which is the order in which they are listed below. My aim was to create the effect of a live group, in a studio, i.e. without an audience, but live, in the manner of many jazz albums. The notes give technical comment and a few background anecdotes, but my real hope is simply that the emotional sections will move and the rhythmic ones excite.

CD 1

This CD contains the pieces which were most derivative of jazz, and also most of the more lyrical compositions.

Puzzle (James Sings Out)

The rhythm has a touch of the "Spanish strut" which I used first in *Bolero Blues*, but unlike the latter, the time is 4/4 and the theme is a long soaring one. We used it as one of the sections of the three section work created for James Gordon (see *Past Midnight*), hence the second title. We abandoned that project and with it this piece, but after I had moved to London felt that it could illustrate a process which has long interested me. This is where the elements of a composition appear in sequence, not concurrently, so that at first there is a puzzle – we think "Where is this all leading?" Then gradually the relationship between the parts emerges. At the same time, this creates a climactic effect, another musical process to which I have constantly returned. Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet *Gross Ideas* on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./music.php>

There was a Man

Originally simply called *Slow Blues*, it was another section of the James Gordon piece. I changed the name when it was used to framework a poem by Edwin Webb. (a live performance of this can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> – Track 6). The piece is still strongly in the jazz idiom but draws from across the styles – bebop, swing – even New Orleans jazz. There is also a touch of blues there. Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet *Gross Ideas* on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/music.php>

East Road Trot

East Road is in the centre of Cambridge, and was the easiest point of access to the Music Department of the then Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology, where I worked. Most of the pieces in the collection reflect my constant concern at that time with exploring ways of linking and making transitions between jazz and rock. Thus the first section is a bouncy and light with a strong jazz feel. It suggested to me the lightness of various early jazz dances which were called some form of “trot” – of which we now only see the Foxtrot, that favourite of Ballroom dancers – a very sedate dance by contrast. This explodes into a heavy rocking section.

Gulf Stream

This has always been one of my most well received pieces. I think of it as the point at which my music developed from being jazz into something else. It draws on jazz, light rock, Brazilian music and even classical music. (The breaks are not meant to have a swing effect but to be straight and *marcato* as they might be played by symphony musicians). I always thought the piece was very simple, but I have been surprised by how much able musicians have been challenged to get its interpretation right. The title reflects its aim and mood – the Gulf Stream is a current which begins in the warm subtropical seas of the Gulf of Mexico and makes its way to Europe, warming and changing our climate. My mother-in-law (an Ayrshire woman) said that the current made it possible (at least for the hardy!) to swim in the sea during the spring – which would be quite dangerous in the colder waters further north. Other versions of this can be heard at: <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php>; <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/cmu-at-the-tech.php> and <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> (Track 4)

Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet *Gulf Stream* on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/music.php>

Past Midnight

This was another section (together with *There was a Man* and *Puzzle*) of the piece created for James Gordon when he joined the group. Again there is fusion. This is basically a slow shuffle blues, but the harmonies are more folk inspired and the tremolo effect is from good old 50s pop /rock and roll. It is an example of my belief that all sound sources are potentially valuable to a composer. When I came to make this recording , I saw that there was scope for an interplay between two guitars, reflecting my longstanding linear interests. There is even include a little "imitation" in the Classical sense. At times, following a technique sometimes used in free jazz, the two guitars briefly perform the same phrase.

Bolero Blues

This was originally written when I was doing my Music degree at the beginning of the 60s, but at the end of the decade I still found it had plenty to offer as a vehicle. In fact, I still find it has mileage and still play it as a solo piano piece. The title indicates the inspiration, which is the Spanish dance so well-known through Ravel's orchestral piece. I was (and remain) fascinated by the interplay between the insistent, almost strutting triplets of the Spanish original and the underlying swing patterns of jazz. Another version can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> (Track 4). Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet *Gulf Stream* and le in the booklet *Gross Ideas* both on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/music.php>

A Straight Case of a Gas

The title comes from James Gordon, who has always liked the piece. It was his comment on his first hearing. Like *East Road Trot* it contrasts lighter and heavy sections. But in this case the inspiration of the first section is a rather jazzy form of country music. A version can also be heard at: <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/cmu-at-the-tech.php>

Please Stay

This was theme written for my wife, Frances, when we first knew each other. At that time she was studying in Reading, so that partings were frequent. Lorraine Odell later added words to the theme and sang it in early performances. The piece is in 6/8 time. I have always been interested in the various metres which divide the basic beat into three (technically known as *compound time*), and at the time was very attracted to Scottish and Irish folk music which uses them frequently. Again I was also interested in the links and contrasts with the 12/8 which underlies jazz. The use of threes is also a major feature of traditional (West) African music, which I was (and remain) excited by. We did not get as far as going down the latter route at the time, but in this realisation I have tried to use some African elements in the backing.

Mountain Girl

This was originally a guitar piece written for my students, which aimed to demonstrate the open G tuning. I had written in imitation of the banjo style, and in this realisation the banjo is given its proper place. We did not persevere with it in the group, which I always regretted because I find that the piece has a character and effectiveness despite its simplicity. I like to imagine a story in this piece: the mountain girl appears, lovely in youth, and a little playful, and then breaks into a dance – finally, as everyone disperses she gives a little wink. The piece links aspects of traditional Appalachian music with rock. The instrumentation of the folk sections is intended to be reminiscent of what was available to poor people in those mountains. There is an *accelerando* (a quickening of tempo) at one point, a technique common in Classical music, but little exploited Afro-American genres. A version can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> (Track 13) Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet Gulf Stream on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/music.php>

Babysitar

The title is a pun by my then guitarist, Lee Barnes, made when we first rehearsed it while I was babysitting my daughter Sarah and my son David. The theme and treatment was inspired by Indian music, which I

have always lived since hearing Ravi Shankar in the 50s (yes, 50s!). But is not meant to be parody sitar, or truly Indian in style. It is an exploration of various modes and was originally a reflective guitar piece written for students. But when Roger Odell heard it, he led us towards a contrasting section which does develop the first ideas, but also uses a 7 beat time, something which was interesting both us and the wider rock world at the time. A version can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php> Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet Gulf Stream on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./music.php>

Slow Land

The title is that of a poem by Douglas Oliver, a Cambridge poet with whom I collaborated in the mid-sixties. The poem is deeply sensual (speaking of “the slow land of your body”) and the theme tries to mirror the beauty of that sensuality. A recording of me playing this with Felix Cross, as a version for two guitars, will be available on this site early in 2014.

CD 2

This CD contains the longer pieces, and reflects my development during that period. My music became more intense and more exploratory of longer forms.

Black Dog Blues

This is a composition which again links different aspects of music. To a heavy shuffle rhythm and a bluesy theme is added a repeating riff – but the harmony line which is added constantly changes. The guitar solo explores the various modes which are implied by this changing progression of thirds. The “Black Dog” is not an animal but an 18th Century phrase meaning “depression”. Other versions can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php> and at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> (Track 15)

Osiris

This is another piece which is quite simple in conception, but which has always been well received. An evocative out-of-tempo first section leads into a repeating guitar riff, which using different notes from the typical rock riff. The backing is meant to suggest Africa, as Osiris was the ancient Egyptian God Of Light. Edwin Webb found this piece inspiring and wrote a poem of the same name. For him, and in the versions which use his

words, the listener first overhears one of those who are waiting, in the moment before dawn, when the entire civilisation of ancient Egypt was poised on the edge of survival. When Osiris -- the god of the dead and of the living re-born -- gives the sign (the flooding of the Nile), there follows a celebration in music which traces back to the African source of the river. One realisation can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> (Track 5) and there is also an exciting version (possibly the best) on the Gargoyle album (soon to be on sale in the Shop). The original conception can be heard in the Leeds concert (<http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php>)

Little Miss Julie

This was originally conceived of as a rave-up to end our set, but became both a summary of our approach and a pointer to possible future developments. Like *Straight Case* it has a country touch, but uses the jazz technique of the break as well as a rhythm and blues type of riff. There are then different sections which develop the mood. First there are swing and rock improvisations, before the rhythm dies away to leave the solo guitar playing an out-of-tempo section inspired by the country blues. This then leads to what was the highlight of live performances. I had bought a Watkins Copicat echo unit (running on constantly looping tape !) I felt this had great possibilities, notably that the guitarist could set up a phrase and then play against that. Terry Mortimer took greatly to this, and created some highly imaginative solos. In this version, I have tried to go for a

shorter and more unified section, which develops the original themes. At a certain point the guitar goes into conversation with the drums, which then lead into the reprise of the opening riff. Live versions can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php> and <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/cmu-at-the-dog-and-pheasant.php> (Track 6)

Slow and Lonesome Blues

A rock blues but with a folk like touch, at least to begin with. It is said that if you put a frog into cold water, and then boil the water, the creature does not jump out, because its system, unlike ours, does not recognise what is happening until too late. Whether this is so or not, I have long found it an analogy to many of our experiences in life. This piece sets out to create a gradual increase of tension, so that you do not realise that you are in Hell until you find yourself there. My other aim was to express the tension of modern life, and especially city life. Thus the piece leads to an impression of an ambulance siren hurrying to an accident. A third concern at the time was that I felt that as a composer I needed to explore darker emotions – my pieces had typically been very lyrical up to that point. The piece is part of my original CD conception but is not available on the website for copyright reasons. Versions can be heard on the CMU album *Open Spaces* but I feel that the Leeds version (<http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php>) better expressed my original conception. Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet *Gross Ideas* on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk./music.php>

Three Part Work

I referred to this work by the above title, because I set out to create a longer composition, inspired by classical forms such as the sonata and suite. (I had gone down this route before – as can be heard on links). The piece never got a real title, especially as it was left behind as the aims and direction of CMU changed.

1: White Heather

This piece began as a teaching medium for finger style guitar students in Cambridge. Again it links idioms – in this case contemporary folk music and a Latin feel. It is meant to be warm and lyrical. Its title was dedicated to my wife, who I had just got to know. Both her parents were Scots, and the plant was traditionally felt to bring good luck. Version can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php> and <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> (Track 1) Notation and mp3 files of a MIDI version are available in the booklet *Gulf Stream* on sale at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/music.php>

2: Jeannie's Reel

Frances (my wife) also features in this piece. It is again meant to have a slightly Scottish dimension. – hence "Reel". Jeannie (Frances second name is Jean) was also the lover of Rabbie Burns. All very romantic!. It is another piece with two sections – an out-of-time lyrical section with

harmonies derived from folk music and the 20th century composers such as Vaughan Williams, followed by a lively piece in 7 beat time, the latter picking up from ideas in the rock of the period, with jazzy solos. Versions can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php> and <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/sounds-like-at-garnett-college.php> Track 8)

3: Section 3

The third and climactic section also never got a proper title. My aim was to bring together the various elements of my music into one coherent structure. I also wanted to take on the challenge of seeing whether a jazz/rock piece could successfully be given a more developed form than the traditional theme and variations. The issue was (is?) how to create a logical development but also not to lose the excitement which comes from using a repetitive and cyclic form.

The basic shape is: Theme (form ABA) – first episode (given shape by a changing chord sequence but with improvised lead) – building to a strongly jazz influenced section (again with chord sequence and improvisation. This leads to a riff which underlies Theme 2. This takes the initial figure but develops it in a different way: it is first presented in the form of jazz “breaks” – there is then an improvised rock solo to build excitement – the theme returns in “imitation” (i.e. the two guitars chase each other), and having reached a climax, dies down to end quietly, as it began. The original version can be heard at <http://www.elmvillagearts.co.uk/free-downloads/the-leeds-concert.php>