
THE COLOURFUL SOUNDS OF MIRIAM HYDE: INSPIRATIONS AND INFLUENCES

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Miriam Hyde is considered to be one of Australia's best performers, composers and pedagogues. Presenting her own thoughts on each major and minor tonality which she notated during the Second World War provides insight to how Hyde perceived and used colour to create such expressive and Impressionistic music. Discussion of other specific influences that Hyde described in her autobiography will also be presented and supported in the selection of specific compositions that best exemplify these influences and inspirations.

As a burgeoning piano student, I was introduced to the piano works by Miriam Hyde as part of my practical exams. I was entranced by the manipulation of melody and harmony that Hyde used. As an advanced musician, and having experienced the various highs and lows of life, which Hyde also encountered, I have developed an empathy and understanding of the emotional complexity of Hyde's music. One thing that needs to be stated from the outset is that subjectivity, in many forms, is inherent in musical discourse. It encourages healthy debate and thought-provoking stimulation. My research explores the various influences and inspirations of Hyde's music, presenting a selection of four works that demonstrate the maturation of Hyde as a composer, from a 13-year-old adolescent, through to an absolute veteran of Australian music.

Miriam Beatrice Hyde was an Australian composer, performer and pedagogue. Argument could be put forward that Hyde is considered to be one of the most prominent Australians in the fields of composition, performance and music education within the 20th Century. In her autobiography, *Complete Accord* (Signature Press, 1991), Hyde describes the upbringing she had and the artistic milieu, which nurtured her passion for music, literature and poetry. Hyde delves into her genealogy that further describes the artistic nature passed down through previous generations. One thing Hyde does not do, is give credence to one particular familial link to her talents and abilities, but simply acknowledges their influence as a collective throughout these generations. In reading any literature or poetry by Hyde, or any of the detailed and descriptive narrations she provides with her compositions, one glimpses a person of eloquence, intellect and profound fervour for her craft. Hyde makes it clear that her story is '...of a woman who, like many others, has gone through life trying to keep a balance between the harmony of the home and the fullest possible development of talents that were recognised at a very early age.' (Hyde. p. 9)

Born 15 January 1913, Hyde grew up in extremely artistic environs with a mother who was a concert pianist; her father worked for the Adelaide Steamship Company and created needlework designs for Miller Anderson's (Adelaide department store) and, in his

spare time, dabbled in philately (stamp collection), as well as having a sister who played the violin. Learning piano from her mother at a very early age, Hyde's first formal composition *Evening Primrose* was created when she was 4, but it was never formally scored. Successfully winning a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music in London saw Hyde leave her native Australia at the age of 19 to travel halfway around the world to study composition under Gordon Jacobs. Only 3 years after arriving in London, Hyde performed the 4th Beethoven Piano Concerto with Sir Malcolm Sargeant in 1935.

Over the years since studying in England and returning to Australia, Hyde forged a career performing regularly for the ABC, examining, teaching, lecturing, composing and raising a family; the outcome of such a diverse career saw her receive an OBE in 1980 for such immeasurable contributions to the field of music. Hyde was still performing and undertaking part-time teaching well into her eighties. 2005 saw Hyde pass away at the age of 92, leaving behind an enduring legacy of music to be explored for many years to come. Hyde's music, subjectively speaking, is an idiosyncratic constitution of inspirational sources. Virtue is awarded to each individual composition from its propagation as a melodic concept through to completion:

My sources of inspiration (although this always sounds too pretentious a word) fall roughly into the following categories: 1. Nature; 2. Words or a poem; 3. A painting or a picture; 4. Some musical motif; 5. Some profound emotional experience; 6. Some small incident; 7. Some accident or misfortune; 8. A direct approach from a performer, or a performing group, for a work for some specific purpose. (Hyde, p. 150 – 152)

The uncovering of a list of elucidations by Hyde for each of the 12 major and minor tonalities, provides quite a unique insight into how she perceived each tonality and the application of those thoughts to her compositions.¹

C Major	Unsentimental, dry, humorous
C Minor	Forceful, direct, grand, noble
C#/Db Major	Most romantic, 'juicy' of all; highly emotional, warm
C#/Db Minor	Tragic with a meaner edge than the other most tragic key (Eb Minor)

¹ This table was discovered by Christine Edwards (Hyde's daughter to Marcus Edwards) in 2014 when she was going through some of her mother's scrap books and personal notebooks and is reproduced with permission.

D Major	Bright, rather green, joyful, chiefly in contrast to its minor – not very appealing
D Minor	Very minor; serious and of strong purpose rather than tragic
D#/Eb Major	Pompous, suggests flag-flying and patriotism; rather red
D#/Eb Minor	Deeply tragic; more sonorous than C# Minor; less bleak
E Major	Very bright; greenish-yellow, not given to richness
E Minor	Cold, bleak, unsympathetic, thin; the most 'wintry' of keys
F Major	Rather smug, not easily ruffled, complacent, can be insipid
F Minor	Strong character and high aspiration, dignified, determined
F#/Gb Major	Sentimental, easily becomes sickly and monotonous, though can sparkle brilliantly
F#/Gb Minor	Rather unsympathetic and cold but stronger than E Minor
G Major	Lends itself to delicacy rather than massive effects. Clear and bright
G Minor	Straightforward, downright, rather square and teutonic
G#/Ab Major	Romantic, Autumnal in colour, rich, yearning, often serene
G#/Ab Minor	Sombreness unrelieved
A Major	Spring-like, youthful, clear, dewy
A Minor	Dusty, colourless, can suggest grotesque or super-natural when used chromatically; not very effective unless used rhythmically

Bb Major	Confident, bombastic, resonant, easily sounds commonplace
Bb Minor	Dark and rich, thick, has pathos
B Major	Not a very definite personality; not as distinguished as F# with one sharp more or E with one sharp less
B Minor	Allows no nonsense; firm, portrays human affairs rather than ideal realms

Figure 1. Table notated by Hyde between 1940-43.

What is interesting to note in Hyde's elucidations for each major and minor key, is that they are of an emotive, almost psychoanalytical viewpoint. Admittedly these elucidations were penned during World War II, an emotionally draining time when her husband was a POW in Europe. Whether her perceptions had changed over time is unfortunately a question that will not be easy to answer, as there is no other evidence that Hyde revisited her thoughts on each major and minor tonality. Again, it must be stated that subjectivity will always be at the core of any response provided in relation to creativity.

The selected works I will feature in this lecture recital are: *Reverie*, *Concert Study #3*, *Valley of Rocks* and *Evening in Cordoba*. These works span a period of some sixty years of composition by Hyde and enable detailed exploration of the correlation of the tonalities of each of these works and the construction and manipulation of those tonalities Hyde created. The selected works also demonstrate, interestingly enough, the introvert (*Reverie*), the technician (*Concert Study #3*), the lover of people (*Evening in Cordoba*) and the lover of nature (*Valley of Rocks*).² One advantage of discourse on Hyde's compositions, as mentioned earlier, is the detailed program notes she provides. This has assisted greatly in analysing the inspiration behind each of the selected works.

Reverie was composed in 1926, when Hyde was 13-years old. This work has a tonality of D Major (bright, rather green, joyful) with suggested modulations through D Minor (Very minor; serious and of strong purpose rather than tragic); A Minor (Dusty, colourless); E Minor (Cold, bleak, unsympathetic, thin; the most 'wintry' of keys) and a return to D Major for the ending. When asked about this work later in her life, Hyde associates this

² There are possibly other works of similar character and skill that could have been selected for the purpose of analysis, but I feel these provide more than adequate differentiation for the purpose of discourse.

work with an '...idyllic garden in the home of Wimbledon friends...as I relaxed in a hammock on a sultry afternoon, the scent of flowers came to me, as did the nips of a few midges (the whimsical cadenza-like passages...).' ³

Composed in 1935 whilst studying in London, *Concert Study #3* was written when Hyde was 22. Having played it to Arthur Benjamin, then Hubert Howells, Hyde was encouraged to write it down but found it too daunting a task. This work is highly chromatic in nature and is the most technically difficult and virtuosic of the 3 *Concert Studies*. Hyde is strongly influenced by Arthur Benjamin's style of technique, with deft alternation of the hands required throughout most of this work. This work was recorded by Hyde herself in 1991, when she was 78. *Concert Study #3* begins in C# Minor (tragic with a meaner edge than the other most tragic key [Eb Minor] with some suggested modulations through keys such as B Major [not a very definite personality]); G Major (Lends itself to delicacy rather than massive effects. Clear and bright); G Minor (Straightforward, downright, rather square and teutonic); G#/Ab Major enharmonic modulation in key signature (Romantic, Autumnal in colour, rich, yearning, serene); D Major (bright, rather green, joyful); leading back to C# Minor. The end of this work has a slight twist with the creation by Hyde of a *Tierce de Picardie*, as the piece finishes in Db Major (Most romantic, 'juicy' of all; highly emotional, warm). The contrasting sections throughout are far more lyrical in nature and contrast heavily with the main concept of this study. ⁴

Demonstrating the profound influence nature had on Hyde, *Valley of Rocks* was composed in 1974. Hyde was 61. Whilst on holiday in England Hyde visited the Valley of Rocks near Lynton, North Devon. After returning from this holiday, Hyde was approached to compose a 'quick-study' item for an overseas scholarship. This work is centred on the key of Bb Minor (dark, rich, has pathos) and the opening '...invokes the atmosphere of the coastal scene as night is falling'. F Major (rather smug, not easily ruffled, complacent, can be insipid) leads the next section of music, which is very lyrical in nature and '...depicts a flowing stream winding its way through the Valley'. Hyde uses a rhythmic feature of a dotted quaver-semiquaver pattern that '...expands forcefully with jagged leaps depicting the primeval eruption that created the rock formations, followed by an impassioned statement in C# Minor (tragic, with a meaner edge) of the flowing river theme'. After this impassioned statement, the next section portrays '...a stirring

³ The specific comments related to the various sections within this work are sourced from the notes provided at the back of the *Signature Series* sheet music published by Allans Publishing in 1995.

⁴ The tonalities mentioned are simply an example of what modulatory movement occurred throughout this work. The specific comments related to the various sections within this work are sourced from the inside cover of the sheet music published by The Keys Press in 2001.

wind stirs the leaves and lightening from a distant storm lead to a chromatic cadenza' leading to a final return of the original key of Bb Minor with a '...reinforced version of the opening harmonies bring the piece to a close – the Valley is folded into night'.⁵

The final composition selected delves into Hyde's Spanish heritage. Like *Valley of Rocks*, this work was composed by Hyde in 1987 after she had been on holiday in Cordoba. Even at the age of 74, it is clearly evident that Hyde's skills as a composer had not diminished in any way over time. This work is a superb example of the capturing of human nature and portrays an imagery of '...lavish lighting of all the streets and lanes....groups of young people moved in an ever-flowing stream singing...sometimes someone would be strumming a guitar in their midst...near the mosque, the narrow streets surged with humanity, reaching a sort of midnight crescendo.' *Evening in Cordoba* begins in A Minor (Dusty, colourless) with suggested modulations through D Major (bright, rather green, joyful); C Major (Unsentimental, dry, humorous); Ab Major (Romantic, Autumnal in colour, rich, yearning, serene); back through D Major then F Major (Rather smug, not easily ruffled, complacent, can be insipid); F Minor (Strong character and high aspiration, dignified, determined); then an alternation between A Minor and A Major (Spring-like, youthful, clear, dewy). The composition finishes on Hyde's version of a *Tierce de Picardie* with the reinforcement of the tonality of A Major (Spring-like, youthful, clear, dewy).⁶

As stated in the opening paragraph of this paper, subjectivity has a tendency to be inherent in any discourse on artistic creativity and can bias any underlying concepts or ideals. The other side to this is that the reader or writer of text for any academic research (including this individual endeavour) has, in a sense, prior knowledge that ought to potentially enhance the inquisitiveness of new investigative inquiry. Due to the fact that Hyde was so articulate in openly disclosing influences and inspirations on her work, discussion on her music is facile and enables, with limited subjective interpretation, the best understanding of the compositional complexity and skill for which she was, and still is, renowned.

⁵ The specific comments related to the various sections within this work are sourced from the inside cover of the sheet music published by Albert & Son Pty. Ltd in 1976. This work also demonstrates the impressionistic nature and skill of Hyde's compositional techniques, along with the influence of Debussy in capturing the "essence" of nature in music.

⁶ The specific comments related to the various sections within this work are sourced from the inside cover of the sheet music published by The Keys Press in 2000.

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Jo-Anne Kemp is undertaking a PhD (performance research) through the University of Tasmania examining the influences and inspirations within the solo piano music of Miriam Hyde (1913-2005), including the possibility that Hyde composed her music with synesthetic effect. A Master of Music degree (performance research) was completed through the Queensland Conservatorium of Music (Griffith University); along with receiving her L.Mus.A. Jo-Anne completed her Bachelor of Creative Arts (Music) in 1991, from the University of Southern Queensland and Postgraduate Diploma in Education in 1992 from University of Queensland. She has been a Musical Director, Conductor, Adjudicator and an Accompanist for several organisations.