

Celebrating composer Kevin Charles Volans, b. 1949



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Composer Kevin Volans turns 60 on 26 July 2009. His profile overseas is unparalleled by that of any other South African-born composer, and here are a few reasons why. Volans has produced over 100 commissioned, published, performed works; his artistic collaborations have been with (*inter alia*) the Kronos Quartet, Bruce Chatwin, Jonathan Burrows, Siobhan Davies, William Kentridge and Shobana Jeyasingh; international performers who have premiered his music include Peter Donohoe, Marc-André Hamelin, Robyn Schulkowsky, the Duke and Smith Quartets, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Storioni Trio, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the San Francisco Philharmonic. He has written works with such performers in mind (something few South African composers have been able to do, and over an extended period of time). Volans has many works issued on a/v recordings: see for example May 1994, Roberts 1995, Burrows 1996, O’Kennedy 2006; and Volans 1985, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995a, 1996, 1998, 2000a, 2002, 2005). He has also achieved a sustained high profile in the international media, for almost thirty years.

Although there has been relatively little scholarly work on Volans, with the exception of writers such as Timothy Taylor (1993, 1995), Martin Scherzinger (2004, 2004/5, 2008), and Bob Gilmore (2006),¹ there has been a huge number of international media profiles, reviews of new work, and reviews of recordings. There has also been considerable commercial success for some works: the first two String



Quartets for example, both reached high on *Billboard Magazine*’s classical music charts in the late 1980s.² Volans has enjoyed sustained critique by leading music critics in London, New York, San Francisco, Berlin, Cologne, Darmstadt, Paris, Madrid, over a period of almost thirty years (see a selection of reviews on <http://www.kevinvolans.com>). The public to whom Volans is known overseas is the new music public, which is by no means enormous, but it is restricted only in the sense that new art music is not as large a market as popular music. Volans is known, in short, not only to a particular group of professional performers, or in a particular context. He is known and respected within the wider market-place of new art music globally, which (of course) is an extremely competitive market; and he is known, too, through his contribution to a wide range of genres – string quartets, percussion music, orchestral music, ballet scores, dramatic works, solo and duo piano music – and heard in prestigious venues such as the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Albert Hall (BBC Proms), Barbican Centre, Institute of Contemporary Arts (all in London), Museum of Modern Art Dublin, Lincoln Center New York, Contemporary Art Chicago, Pompidou Centre Paris, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Vienna State Opera, Berliner Festspiele, and Auditorium di Roma. He is also known as a teacher and adjudicator: see ‘Career Highlights’ on his website www.kevinvolans.com, the Irish Contemporary Composers’ website www.cmc.ie, and Chester Novello’s website www.chesternovello.com. What speaks most to his profile is the fact that he is published by Chester Music,³ which is owned by one of the largest music publishing companies in the world (Music Sales) and has 62 pages of composers’ names on its website, including Stravinsky, Poulenc, Prokofiev, John Tavener, and Michael Nyman.

When Volans is discussed in the broader world of music criticism, it not always as ‘coming from’ South Africa. He has long been accepted into an international arena and his music is compared (variously) to that of Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, or Steve Reich. ‘Volans stands outside any

Volans and percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky
looking at the manuscript of *Hunting: Gathering* in her
factory/studio in Munich, 1987
(Photographer Andrew Verster © 1987)

nation's mainstream', is how Kyle Gann put it, in the wake of the tremendous success of Volans's 2nd String Quartet *Hunting: Gathering* (Gann 1988).

Ten years later Gann still regarded him as 'one of the most refreshingly unfettered imaginations in new music' (Gann 1998). Gann is music critic on New York City's *Village Voice*, and along with Andrew Porter of the *Financial Times*, Andrew Clements (*Guardian*), Keith Potter (*Contact* and *The Independent*) and other major critics has generated a substantial body of media writing on Kevin Volans. Perhaps the single most impressive accolade in Volans's life so far has come from writer Bruce Chatwin, who devoted an article in the *Financial Times* to Volans, saying, among other things, 'Kevin is one of the more innovative composers since Stravinsky' (Chatwin 1990, 69).

Volans has lived overseas since the mid-1980s, is no longer a SAMRO member,⁴ is not affiliated with a Music Department in South Africa, has not written Unisa grade exam pieces or received commissions from national organisations recently.⁵ He has had few performances here, few people in South Africa promote his music or study his scores, few libraries hold them, and few recordings of his works have made it into our record stores. His profile in South Africa has therefore tended to be overshadowed by that of other South African composers, and is far different from his profile overseas. Volans's more recent work is however gradually becoming better known here, especially through the efforts of performers such as Jill Richards.⁶ Volans has for some years spent part of each year in South Africa, where he has a second home on the farm Kruisrivier, near Calitzdorp.

One hopes, therefore, that we will see more of him in the future. A foretaste of what this could mean for South African music lovers and young composers, and the impact that his music can still have on our musical life, especially the music of the last ten years, which is on the whole very different from what is currently being written in South Africa, was heard during the three Klein Karoo Kunstefees concerts in honour of his 60th birthday, on 4, 5, and 6 April 2009 (Volans won the Kanna Award for best premiere



in any medium during the KKNK). Two of the major overseas birthday concerts, by the Crash Ensemble, took place in Dublin on April 9, 2009 (<http://www.scena.org/blog/newswire/2009/02/crash-ensemble-to-celebrate-60th.html>, accessed 28.3.09). This includes *Nine Beginnings*, *Into Darkness*,⁷ and *Trumpet, Vibe, Cello, Piano* (2009). There is a birthday concert on 4 July – a 'big concert at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin' – and a 'Kevin Volans Day at the Wigmore Hall in London (31st October)' (Volans's e-mail to Wayne Muller of *Die Burger*, 3.4.09). There are also concerts in Pretoria (October) and Durban (November).

From South Africa to Ireland

Volans was born in Pietermaritzburg, Natal in 1949, the youngest son of Eunice and Jack Volans (Volans pers. comm.).⁸ His brothers were Graham and Nigel Volans, and his father ran the family business, Volans Dry Cleaners (now Volans Masters Cleaners).⁹ Volans attended Murchiston Primary School, which he loved, and then Maritzburg College.¹⁰ He started learning piano at the age of ten, but did not do music as a matriculation subject. He progressed so quickly on piano, however, that he was making his first composition attempts, pastiches of Rachmaninoff piano concertos, as a young teenager (Volans pers. comm.). Art classes at school inspired him to paint several huge black and white paintings in Abstract Expressionist style – portent of an abiding interest in art – and he also excelled at English, maths and science (Author's Interview 5-7.10.07).

Volans matriculated in 1966 and enrolled for an engineering degree at the University of Natal in 1967. He switched to architecture half-way through that year, realising that the design aspect of engineering attracted him more than anything else (Ibid). Music, however, was still his first love, and after an aptitude test ('Assessment on Kevin Volans', 30.11.67), Volans auditioned for the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, at the beginning of 1968. Volans majored in piano at Wits, performing the Beethoven C major and Ravel G major concertos with the Johannesburg Symphony Orchestra in 1970. According to the music critic, the latter performance showed 'great promise' in the 20-year-old's handling of an 'extremely difficult work' (Schneider 1970). Volans completed the BMus degree in 1971 and graduated in 1972 ('Wits Graduation Programme', April 1972). By this time, he had already auditioned at the SABC and been engaged as a recording artist.¹¹ He has remained a virtuoso pianist all his life.

Geoffrey Chew and June Schneider were Volans's most important mentors at Wits (Author's Interview, Ibid). He had occasional composition sessions with Peter Klatzow, who premiered Volans's first graphic score, *Compositions for a Composer*, on 26 August 1971 (Sackse 1971).¹² Retitled *Grafik*, this piece was realised as an instrumental

Volans (left) and Stockhausen in Cologne c1973

(Photographer unknown; photo by kind permission of Kevin Volans)

noise piece (chamber ensemble) in 1974 at the Cologne Electronic Music Studio (Volans pers. comm.). June Schneider supervised Volans's 4th-year BMus dissertation, 'The *Klavierstücke*: Stockhausen's Microcosm' (Volans 1971),¹³ and advised him to study composition in London with Vladimir Rodzianko (Author's Interview, Ibid). He went to London in July 1972, stopping off en route at the Darmstadt Summer Course, where he attended lessons with Stockhausen.

This was a seminal moment in Volans's career. The two had already met in Johannesburg in 1970 when Stockhausen visited South Africa to give a series of talks at the SABC at the invitation of the Johannesburg Music Society, then chaired by Hans Adler (see Peter Klatzow 'Encounters and Reflections' on <http://www.klatzow.uct.ac.za/reflections.html>, accessed 29.3.09). The lectures were 'phenomenal', says Volans:

He had such powers, almost like mass hypnosis ... Certainly the other students, other members of my class who were really anti-Stockhausen, came out of that [first] lecture and ran up Eloff Street jumping over the parking metres, and were so excited they were saying, 'we're going to go back, we haven't got tickets but we're going to go to every lecture'. We all did, and they were something, they were just phenomenal. That's when I decided I'd like to study with Stockhausen (Author's Interview 5-7.10.07).

Volans enrolled for a Masters degree at Aberdeen University (1972-3) but was then invited by Stockhausen to audition for the Cologne Hochschule (a gruelling interview of piano playing and aural tests). At Aberdeen he wrote the graphic score *Module* (1973)¹⁴ and a short but prescient commentary on it that drew on information theory in a way that reassessed Stockhausen ('Some Notes on *Module*', 1972). At Cologne, Volans was one of only five students accepted into Stockhausen's composition class (Author's Interview 5-7.10.07).¹⁵ The friends he made in Cologne included composers Moya Henderson, Claude Vivier, Gillian Bibby, Robert Platz, Clarence Barlow, Chris Newman, Walter Zimmermann, and Gerald Barry.

Cologne in the early 1970s was *the* European centre for new music, especially electronica, just as it was for experimental theatre, film, art, and architecture. Volans took seminars on composition and new music with Stockhausen and Richard Toop, music theatre studies with Mauricio Kagel, piano lessons with Aloys Kontarsky, and later improvisation with Johannes Fritsch, and electronic music studies with Hans-Ulrich Humpert (Ibid). 'We had one 6-hour seminar a week with Stockhausen out at his house in Kürten, and two 4-hour seminars a week, something like Mondays and Fridays, with Richard Toop ... which were fantastic. Richard was really a great teacher and very knowledgeable' (Ibid). In Stockhausen's classes works such as *Inori* and *Hebstmusik* were analysed. In 1975 Volans became Stockhausen's teaching assistant. On return visits to South Africa in 1975/6 Volans gave

lectures at the University of Cape Town Summer School on *Mantra*, *Stimmung* and other Stockhausen works (Ibid; these lectures, entitled 'Introduction to the music of Karheinz Stockhausen', 'Some aspects of Stockhausen's serial techniques', 'Kontakte: A 20th Century Mephisto Waltz', 'Plus/Minus', and 'Telemusik', are in Volans's personal collection).

Volans studied every aspect of serial and electronic techniques, and performed many new piano and chamber works including his own piano work *Nine Beginnings* (1979, with Gerald Barry). When Stockhausen was working on *Inori*, Volans spent hours with him in his Kürten home outside Cologne. Extracts from Volans's diary of this period speak to the closeness of their rapport:

After he has been composing for a while he seems more relaxed & we talk & behave as equals. He tells me how far he is, & how far he has to go ... I asked him if he wrote each structure as he goes along [and] remarked on how difficult it was to know just how much to determine in advance. What were his ideas? ... '[Y]ou should decide for yourself – you will feel much more proud, much happier if you do' ... I couldn't help feeling happy that he has sufficient respect for me not to tell me, for there is no doubt he could rattle off a dozen techniques (Volans diary 1974 [n.p.]).

A monopoly on serialism by the 'Establishment' in Germany, however, with its strictures about highly developed complex structure and atonality, was for Volans increasingly limiting, aesthetically (Author's Interview 5-7.10.07). Even octaves were seen in those days as problematic because 'they created an unwanted emphasis on one pitch over another and thereby gave the impression of a tonal centre' (Volans in Gilmore 2006, 23). Volans was increasingly drawn towards simpler textures, unplanned and tonal structures, and folk music from various countries of the world – in which, indeed, Stockhausen himself was also very interested. A new post-serial aesthetic developed in Volans's work that saw him turn more and more towards his home continent, Africa, for inspiration. Hearing historically informed performances on hand crafted instruments by the group *Musica Antiqua Köln* (Cologne), which had formed in 1973, also helped Volans to appreciate much later the possibilities inherent in African instruments such as the mbira and panpipes, and in the sonic effectiveness of non-equal-tempered tuning.

The term 'New Simplicity' was in currency for the Zen-like aesthetic that emerged among some younger European composers at this time, motivated strongly by the influence of American experimentalists such as Cage, Feldman, Reich, and La Monte Young (see Beal 2006, especially chapter 6). Prominent among this group of younger composers in Germany was Walter Zimmermann, whose piano piece *Beginner's Mind* (Zimmermann 1975) dates from the same period as Volans's own *Nine Beginnings* (Volans 1976). Zimmermann's book *Desert Plants: Conversations With 23 American Musicians* (Zimmermann 1976) inspired Volans's



Group of musicians in Walter Zimmermann's 'Beginner Studio', Cologne, c1980.

From the left: Deborah James, Robert Hill, Volans, Peter Vereb, Margriet Tindemans, Alain Barker
(Photographer probably Zimmermann, photo used by kind permission of Kevin Volans)

book *Summer Gardeners* (Volans 1985), which comprises eleven interviews with composers such as Morton Feldman, John McGuire, Peter Garland, Howard Skempton, Tom Johnson, and Zimmermann. It is misleading, however, to use 'New Simplicity' as an umbrella term for all of Volans's music from the late '70s and early '80s, because this music is far from homogenous in style, some of it retains affinities with serialism, and some of Volans's later works such as *Untitled* (Chester 1996) also deploy a 'simple', pared-down language.

Together with Zimmermann, Barlow, and Henderson, Volans took part in a project that began in 1977 and probably consolidated a more concrete break with the establishment than they might have realised at the time. Zimmermann's term for his part of the project was *Lokale Musik* (see <http://www.analogartsensemble.net/2008/12/walter-zimmermann-phran.html>, accessed 31.3.09). The idea behind it was that the four composers would record 'soundscapes' in their home countries and investigate the relationship between 'folk' music and its natural sound environments. 'Soundscape' was a notion much promoted at this time through the work of Canadian music educationist-composer Raymond Murray Schafer (see Schafer 1977 and <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html>, accessed 28.3.09). This notion inspired the four composers to study their own region of the world, and compare results. They later incorporated what they learnt into their work in various ways – although this was not part of the original plan (Volans pers. comm.).

Zimmermann studied folk music and dance from his native Franconia, Barlow studied the street music of Calcutta, Henderson Australian indigenous music, and Volans the music of rural Natal and Lesotho. With the help of funding from *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (WDR), the four went their separate ways, conducting intensive field recordings and interviews. This project continued until 1981, and the composers' findings were disseminated quite diversely and not in a co-ordinated way, through a number of journal articles, conference papers, and radio broadcasts (see Volans 1978a-c, 1979a-b, 1980a-h, 1981a-b).¹⁶ Its impact was also felt in compositions by the four composers: see for example Zimmermann's *Lokale Musik* (Local Music) 1977-78 (*Neue Musik in Köln* [programme: n.d.c1980]); and Barlow's *Relationships* for melody instruments (Barlow in *Feedback Papers Reprint 1-16, 1971-1978*, 391-400). Fiona Richards has written about Moya Henderson's relationship to Australian landscape and Aboriginal music from an Australian perspective (Richards 2006).

Volans made four field trips between 1976 and 1979. Major events that he documented were King Zwelithini's marriage to the Swazi King's daughter in June 1977 ('Invitation' from the KwaZulu Chief Minister, 25.6.77), and Princess Magogo's repertoire of *ugubhu* (bow) songs at Ulundi in Dec '76, Feb and June '77.¹⁷ One of the groups he met on his travels was Ladysmith Black Mambazo, then probably relatively unknown outside Zulu society, and he arranged for them to perform at the Zulu Festival in Cologne in 1980 (see Volans 1980c).¹⁸



Gerald Barry (left) and Kevin Volans c2000

(Photographer unknown; photo by kind permission of Kevin Volans)

Volans made programmes about African music and musicians for West German Radio, Voice of Germany, and Belgian radio during 1980-81. He wrote on African and European aesthetics in essays in the Cologne-based new music journal *Feedback Papers* (Volans [n.d.(1978)]; Volans and Fritsch [n.d.(1978)]). He located transcriptions of traditional music in academic journals, learnt the mbira a little, and attended a workshop on Nyanga panpipes (Volans e-mail to the author 7.11.08). At the same time, he continued to play in concerts in South Africa, London, Dublin, Berlin, Cologne, and Brussels as a concert pianist. A performance of Gerald Barry's *Things That Gain by Being Painted* in Dublin on 7 January 1978 ([programme:] *7th Dublin Festival of 20th-century Music, 6-13 January 1978*) reinforced the attractions of Ireland, which he was later to make his home. He also became a champion of the music of Barry and other Irish composers (see for example Volans and Bracefield 1987).

Early works

KwaZulu Summer Landscape (1979) is the first piece Volans made that was directly based on soundscape recordings made in Kwazulu-Natal: a 70-minute tape of 'six natural sound environments' distilled from hours of field recordings near KwaNongoma ([Volans programme note for ICA programme:] *Kevin Volans: African Paraphrases: Installation* [n.d., 1982]). It was premiered in New York (Volans 1977-79a). An electronic realisation of the tape made in Cologne, called *Studies in Zulu History* (Volans 1977-79b), was premiered at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) London in 1982. Volans describes it as "artificial" complement to the natural sound study ... art presented as nature. I found I could depict more concisely my experience of these sound environments by electronic means than by using natural sound recordings, which tend to sound electronic' ([Volans programme note for] *African Paraphrases: Installation*, Ibid.). In its low dynamic, minimal change of density, and indeterminacy, *Zulu History* is almost indistinguishable from *Summer Landscape*. Another tape piece, called *Cover Him with Grass* (1979), initially called *Lesotho Mountain Village*, was based on recordings made on one of his trips to Lesotho, and was premiered at the same ICA installation in 1982 (Ibid). *Studies in Zulu History* was also performed in South Africa the following year, during the 1983 SABC Contemporary

Music Festival in Johannesburg (*1st SABC Contemporary Music Festival Broadcast Centre Johannesburg 2-9 July, Souvenir Programme, 23*).

In the natural tape pieces, environmental sounds present themselves to the listener almost unchanged as compositional material, except for some cutting and equalising. This can be compared to the way mid 20th century composers used *musique concrète*, except that here the whole piece is 'concrete'. It is not, on the other hand, electronic. In the absence of a framing ('composed') context or electronic manipulation, the natural sounds seem constructed rather than natural: the simulacrum of an electronic piece, as Volans notes above. In the electronic piece, the abstract context then becomes the electronic music studio, and the piece a composed 'natural' piece. Volans combined 'found sounds' with composed ones more conventionally in *Delay in Glass* (1979) and the much later *String Quartet No. 5: Dancers on a Plane* (1995). The cicadas, woodland kingfisher, squeaky gate, and other environmental sounds heard in the Quartet were, however, recorded on a 'completely separate trip, with a professional sound engineer ... in Venda and the Kruger Park' (Volans e-mail to the Author 7.11.08).

Volans's early style in *Incidental Music to Pirandello's Die Riesen vom Berge* (a Munich theatre production of 1980), the two-piano *Nine Beginnings* (1979) and the solo piano *Monkey Music* (1976, revsd. 1981) is sometimes atonal, drawing (perhaps unconsciously) on pitch serialism and (more consciously) on Liszt paraphrase gestures in *Monkey Music*, and reimagining the relationships of chords in functional harmony in *Nine Beginnings*. On the other hand, *Newer Music for Piano* (1981), a set of eight pieces of which the *Intermezzo* from Schumann's *Faschingswank aus Wien* is played as piece No. VII, is quite tonal, emphasising octaves as well as sometimes using the interlocking technique found in some of the African music that Volans had by this time heard.

When it comes to *Matepe* (1980) written for two retuned harpsichords and percussion and premiered at the *Ostasiatische Museum* Cologne, a new picture emerges. This draws on the Zimbabwean *matepe* song *Aroyiwa Mwana*, traditionally played on an instrument similar to the *mbira* called the *matepe*, and comprises several interlocking 'broken chord' patterns based on the 8-chord harmonic progression which Volans distilled from the basic tune. 'Of the patterns given, Nos. IIA (player 1) and IIIA (player 2) are traditional. The rest are my own composition ... A performance of this piece should involve improvised variation based on the chord progression' (UND 1985, [n.p.]). Volans here extends and embellishes the basic tune in something like the same way that Zimmermann transformed and extended Franconian folk music: timbrally

(in Volans) through the sound-world of harpsichords retuned to modified Shona *mbira* tuning and African hand-rattles; and structurally by means of paraphrasing, adding new non-traditional variations, and introducing an element of improvisation – again, techniques not unlike those found in Liszt’s operatic paraphrases. What Volans was clear he was not doing, however, was ‘westernising African music - the popular music industry had already done that [but rather] introducing some strictly non-Western aspects of African music into the European concert repertoire’ (‘White Man Sleeps: Composer’s Statement’ [www.kevinvolans.com, accessed 1.2.08]).

In *White Man Sleeps* (Volans 1982) for 2 harpsichords, viola da gamba, and percussion, premiered at the ICA, London in 1982, the original music is sometimes very present and sometimes left far behind. There are five ‘Dances’ (they are not called movements), each based on a different southern African regional practice: Tswana (panpipe), San (bow), Nyanga (panpipe), San (bow) and Sotho (*lesiba* bow) and Sotho (concertina) (see Clarkson-Fletcher 1998). Volans makes striking use of diatonic tonal centres, rhythmic patterning, and interplay between instruments; there are lively and sudden shifts in tempo, register, and dynamics, including the famous ‘white man sleeps’ hush in the ‘Third Dance’. The next pieces that Volans wrote were *Journal*



Kevin Volans c1984

(Photographer unknown; photo by kind permission of Kevin Volans)

(*Walking Song*) (Durban 1983), the first versions of *Walking Song* and *Kneeling Dance* (Volans 1984; derived from the ‘Third Dance’ of *White Man Sleeps*), and *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* (Volans 1985). In the latter, African material is implied by the title but not present. It has fused into the sound of Volans just as Lisztian paraphrase,

Stockhausen serialism, Stravinsky, American minimalism, and other ‘influences’ have.¹⁹ With *She Who Sleeps with a Small Blanket* (a virtuoso solo for drums and marimba that encapsulates the energy and poly-rhythmic complexity of African drumming without avert quotation from any African source), Volans had completed what he considered his African Paraphrase period and was moving into a more experimental style. Symbolically, it was written in Paris, en route for his new life in Europe.

Most of the pieces written between 1982 and 1985 belong to the time that Volans was Lecturer in Composition at the University of Natal, Durban (1982-1984), and they were included in a portfolio Volans submitted for the degree of Doctor of Music (DMus) there in 1985. The photograph below belongs to this period.

In the doctoral citation, Volans was hailed as ‘a young South African composer of classical music [who] for the very first time in the history of classical composition in this country, has made a serious and sustained attempt to discard the shackles of a colonial heritage and produce classical music that is authentically South African’ (‘Eulogy’, UND [n.d. 1985]). The African Paraphrases were well received overseas. Adrian Jack, who directed concerts at the ICA (‘MusICA’) from 1977 to 1995 and was a keen and tireless promoter of new music, explained recently in answer to my questions about the early Volans performances, how his work was presented and why it was important:

The African paraphrases were something entirely new, and therefore attractive, to me. I was struck by the gentle warmth of the music and the charm of Kevin’s arrangements, for harpsichord, light percussion, and viola da gamba. Our intention, in 1982, was to set the music in the context of eye-witness photographs of South, or Southern, Africa. ... So we had two short concerts (up to an hour each?) each day of a weekend, in the upper gallery rooms of the ICA, where we displayed [Desmond Cremer’s] colour photos of African landscapes. The tapes of Kevin’s field research were played before and between the short concerts as an installation (Adrian Jack, pers. comm. 29.9.08).

They were also heard by audiences in Durban at the time as something new and radical – promoting African sources, flaunting African musical procedures, tuning, rhythms, dance-language – all at a time when it was unusual to do so (see for example my own review, ‘Master of African Sounds’ [Lucia, *Daily News* 5.6.83]). One of Volans’s students at the University of Natal in 1982-84 was Matteo Fargion.²⁰ Fargion remembers the novel impression Volans’s work made on him as an undergraduate, raising his awareness of African music for the first time:

It didn’t even occur to me to question [it]; it seemed to me so obvious that Kevin would use the stuff that he was [collecting]; in a sense it was like Stravinsky [did]. This was the music he loved, and

so he was going to use it. It was fantastic. Really, the impression I had was that this is from another planet. That's the only way to describe it. I'd never heard African music. I'd been there [all my life] (Author's Interview 30.9.07).

Volans's music 1982-86 coincided with two revolutions sweeping through European and American contemporary music in the mid-'80s: the invention of the compact disc, and the growth of 'world music'. The term 'world music' was (re)invented as a marketing strategy in 1987 (<http://www.rootsmag.com/content/features/world%5Fmusic%5Fhistory/>, accessed 31.3.09), but the notion was in circulation already. The San Francisco-based Kronos Quartet were among the first 'classical' musicians to catch the crest of the new wave, in which recordings of popular and folk musics of the world were exposed to undreamed-of commercialism alongside new forms of art music. When Kronos's leader David Harrington requested a quartet version of *White Man Sleeps* for an ICA concert in 1986 (Jack Ibid), then, it became a turning point in Volans's career.

It is hard to imagine, now, with the benefit of a hindsight fraught with the ethics of appropriation in Volans's early work (see for example Taylor 1993, 1995, 1997, 2007; Brauning 1998; Olwage 1999/2000; Walton 2003/4; Scherzinger 2001, 2004, 2004/5, 2008; far too big a debate to take on and add to here), how exhilarating and also how innocently daring it felt *then*, to use 'Black' music in a classical composition in apartheid South Africa, including its harmonic progressions, tuning system, patterns, and

timbral qualities; and especially to do this as a young white, middle-class, essentially 'anti-establishment' composer. As the UND Eulogy infers, *White Man Sleeps* was regarded at that time as a 'serious and sustained attempt' to be 'authentically South African' ('Eulogy', Ibid).

The sense of doing something radical showed itself in other ways, too: including the fact that both Volans and Zimmermann tried to undermine the founding of what they perceived as the conservative Cologne Society for New Music on 25 June 1981 by founding a Society for Newer Music (SNerM) and a Cologne Society for Experimental Music, respectively, on the same day (Volans e-mail to Author 23.2.07). In their manifesto for SNerM, Volans, Gerald Barry and Chris Newman vowed 'to promote work and activity possessing an understanding and knowledge of artistic freedom ... Such work would necessitate a direct view of the world, stripped of sophistication, & rooted in a sense of wonder' (*Gesellschaft für Neue Musik*, Wallraf-Richartz Museum [Cologne] 25.6.81). SNerM was never a society in the sense of having a Constitution and members; it was merely a statement, but an important one to make at the time, and in Cologne.

Volans's *Newer Music for Piano* (1981) and *White Man Sleeps: String Quartet No. 1* (1986), encapsulate this 'newer' sense of freedom, directness, and wonder. The Quartet created a furore in Darmstadt, not because of the 'politics of appropriation' (which, as I have shown above, came much later), but because it was considered 'inappropriate' in the way in which it flaunted German quartet tradition (Volans pers. comm.). It was however acclaimed in London,



Some of the Faculty of the Darmstadt Summer Course 1986

from left to right: Peter-Michael Hamer, Barbara Monk Feldman, Morton Feldman, Volans, Bunita Marcus, Wolfgang Rihm (Photographer Steven Sloman © 1986)

where it was heard at least in part as minimalist: ‘Steve Reich entangled in the African bush’ (Potter 1982). Most important, it was taken up not only by Kronos (*White Man Sleeps*, Nonesuch 1987; *Pieces of Africa*, Nonesuch 1989), but by choreographer Siobhan Davies, who in 1986 turned *White Man Sleeps* into one of the most popular international dance pieces of the late twentieth century. ‘[T]he piece sang with a freedom that was reflected in Volans’s score, revealing the ‘existential’ quality that Davies is so at home with’, wrote one critic in the *Cv Journal of the Arts* (James, 1993, 30). It effectively launched Davies’s career (see the list of works since 1988 on <http://www.siobhandavies.com/>, accessed 2.4.09). When *Cover Him With Grass* (Landor 1990) also appeared, including both versions of *WMS* and other African paraphrases, Volans was inevitably seen as ‘from Africa’ regardless of where he lived, or how he developed aesthetically.

Works from the later 1980s-1990s

Morton Feldman nurtured the new direction Volans took from the mid-‘80s. They had met in Cologne, then in Johannesburg (July 1983 when Feldman visited the SABC Contemporary Music Festival), and again in Darmstadt in 1984 and ‘86. Unlike Stockhausen, Feldman was not Volans’s teacher, nor perhaps did Feldman’s language haunt him as much as 1970s serialism did (Volans was much older when he met Feldman). He redirected Volans to useful aspects of modernism – Stravinsky, Debussy, Cage and other American experimentalists – both in music and in fine art. One can begin to hear this in works such as *She Who Sleeps With a Small Blanket*, written for percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky in Paris in 1985 when he was en route for Ireland. This is a virtuoso solo for drums and marimba that encapsulates the energy and polyrhythmic complexity of African drumming, but without overt reference quotation from any African source.

In April 1986 Volans ‘was short-listed for the Head of Department for University College Cork. Despite not getting the job, his love of the country made him decide to settle in Ireland, and he took up a post as Composer-in-Residence in Belfast [Queen’s University (‘86-‘90)]’ (http://www.chesternovello.com/default.aspx?TabId=2431&State_2905=2&composerId_2905=1651, accessed 2.4.09). In July 1986 he taught at the Darmstadt Summer Course, alongside a distinguished faculty that included Morton Feldman, his wife Barbara Monk-Feldman and fellow American Bunita Marcus, and German composer Wolfgang Rihm. This group represented some of the most important figures in what was thought of then as anti-modern experimentalism in music (see Nyman 1999). As British composer-scholar Christopher Fox shows, however, the Darmstadt ethos was nuanced and complex: in some ways anti-modernist, yet also espousing some of the values of modernism (Fox 2007).

In 1989 Volans moved to Donegal and applied for Irish citizenship. In 1994 his citizenship was granted, and he settled in Dublin. (In the middle of all this, in 1992 he

spent several months at Princeton University as Composer-in-Residence.) While living in Belfast, Volans wrote a series of works that radically explored surface and non-developmental structure. This new ‘style’ represented something of a break with his earlier work, and it begins with *Into Darkness* (1987, revised 1989).²¹ This is a fairly austere two-movement chamber ensemble work, turning back towards an older European modernism (Stockhausen/Boulez) and not related to Africa. It was a work written under great personal stress: Volans’s mother had died at the beginning of 1987 (his father had died in 1984). Material from *Notes d’un Peintre* (Notes from a Painter) (1987), later re-titled *String Quartet No. 3* and ultimately ‘*Movement*’ for String Quartet, was used when Volans rewrote the second movement of *Into Darkness*.

One of the most interesting, and exquisite of Volans shorter works, *Movement* was originally composed as a free-standing quartet Satz. It was premiered by the Jürgen Schwietering Quartet in the Durban Art Gallery on 8 April 1987, and dedicated to Durban artist Andrew Verster. Volans’s relationship with Verster at this time was highly significant on a number of levels: not least, it reaffirmed what Feldman had already rekindled in Volans’s work, which was an interest in the relationship of music to graphic art and modernism.²² Volans painted several canvasses at this time and Verster painted several portraits of Volans, two of which were on display in the retrospective exhibition ‘Verster: Past/Present’ (curated by Carol Brown and first shown at the National Festival of the Arts in Grahamstown in July 2008 (see http://cuepix.ru.ac.za/main.php?g2_itemId=29648, accessed 2 April 2009). The exhibition was also shown at the South African National Gallery in Cape Town in January 2009).

A short unitary work in one movement, *Movement* is exquisite in its Webernesque texture and transparent melodic lines. Volans has shown great affinity with the medium of the string quartet from the start, and as of now (2009) there are ten. *No. 2, Hunting: Gathering* (1987) and *No. 3, The Songlines* (1988, revsd. 1993) were commissioned and premiered by Kronos. *No. 2* draws on *kora* music from Mali, *lesiba* music from Lesotho, and an Ethiopian folk tune, creating ‘a musical pastiche that passes like a journey or a dream’ (Scherzinger 2004, 609). Structurally however it is very unusual: it is a journey; neither cyclic nor minimalist, but a chain of twenty-three sections of material.

Late in 1987 two other significant events in Volans’s personal life occurred: one was the untimely death of Feldman on 3 September, and the other was that Volans received a copy of Bruce Chatwin’s novel *The Songlines*, in October.²³ Chatwin himself has written of the way he and Volans met (see *What Am I Doing Here?* (1990)). The meeting was another crossroad, and a bittersweet one, for Chatwin was to die within just over a year, on 18 January 1989. *The Songlines* provided the idea for a long-term project, however: an opera, which Chatwin persuaded Volans and librettist Roger Clarke to base on the nomadic life of Arthur Rimbaud rather than on his novel *per se*. The

3-act opera, commissioned by Dancelines Productions and the English National Opera, took four years to complete: the libretto was constantly rewritten and extracts of music were workshopped long before the premiere, which took place on 5 July 1993 at the Almeida Theatre, London. It has not been performed since.

For a public used to innovative work from a ‘thoroughbred post-modernist’, as Andrew Clements described Volans in the *Financial Times* in 1991 (Clements 1991), the opera was puzzling, a work in which ‘nothing happens’ and which director Peter Mumford seemed not to understand. For Volans the production was a crashing disappointment, although as it turned out, the criticisms of the work were almost entirely positive. It is a chamber opera, lightly scored for string quartet, solo winds and percussion, and postmodern in its treatment of voices and narrative: it begins with what in traditional opera is the end, a death scene. The opera reveals the tension in Volans’s work, generally, between grand gesture and intimate, often minimal (not necessarily minimalist) writing, and between graphic play of surface and restless desire for movement; for artistic and spiritual journeys of the kind that indeed, Rimbaud (and Chatwin) embodied.

The opera had spin-offs, including the 3rd String Quartet, pianist Yvar Mikhashoff’s brilliant transcription of *Striding Dance* (premiered in 1992), and Volans’s wind ensemble piece *This is How It Is* (1995). Chatwin was a kindred spirit, who introduced Volans to a different class of society. Through him, indirectly, Volans found his current home, which is a rented flat on the Guinness Estate outside Dublin. Chatwin’s widow, Elizabeth Chatwin, remains one of Volans’s closest friends, and the journey to India they took together in October 1994 was a spiritual highlight in the composer’s life (Volans diary, 1994).²⁴

Other works were written during the genesis of the opera, several of them for choreographers Jonathan Burrows, Siobhan Davies, and Shobana Jeyasingh. Dance was an inspiring collaboration for Volans, ensuring wider exposure

and more than one performance; and within the new intimate aesthetic of contemporary dance emerging in London from the late 1980s it allowed for the ‘play of surface’ in which Volans excels. These are not full-blown orchestral ballets but are scored for quartet, or piano, or ensemble – often on stage with the dancers – sometimes including tape. *Chevron* (1990) was the first, and is a chamber orchestra piece written for the Rambert Company (the dance was called *Signature*), its harmonies slightly Stravinskian in their patterning and pitch combinations. *Correspondences* (October 1990) was a quartet and Baritone score written for the Shobana Jeyasingh Dance Company and the Smith Quartet, and became *String Quartet No. 4, The Ramanujan Notebooks* (December 1990). This *Bharatha Natyam* dance opera is an analogy to the life of Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan (1887-1920): both dance movements and music are number-based, also drawing on the *talam* rhythmic system of Indian classical music.

One Hundred Frames (1991) for orchestra also dates from this period. Its title refers to Hokusai’s *One Hundred Views of Mount Fuji* and it is delicate and non-conceptual in the same way as Japanese art, a succession of 100 ‘views’ of the same chord that explores surface and light without development. ‘The moment counts for everything’, as Michael Dervan put it in the *Irish Times* (10.12.91). Listening to it is like looking at painting, hearing a constant shifting of limited material, a technique Volans subsequently used a great deal.

Works for dance, string quartet, and percussion dominate Volans’s output in the early Dublin years. Music for the BBC art film *Plane-Song* broadcast (11 April 1995, BBC2) continued a separate existence as *String Quartet No. 5: Dancers on a Plane*. As mentioned earlier, it juxtaposes taped sounds with string quartet music; the natural sounds drift in like memories. The most outstanding work from this period is *Cicada* (1994). This 26-minute piece for two pianos is based almost entirely on one chord rocked gently but quickly between the two players, hardly ever exceeding a *mezzo piano*. It was commissioned for the American piano duo Double Edge and premiered in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on 25 April 1994.

Cicada

Cicada exemplifies Volans’s tendency towards the exploration of textured surface, inspired by images such as those achieved in the balanced asymmetry of Congolese raffia textiles, or Euro-American abstract or minimalist art. Jasper Johns’s three paintings *Dancers on a Plane* (1979) are visual parallels to *Cicada*, even more so than the same artist’s *Cicada* (from which Volans took his title). Johns’s *Dancers* are structured in two halves, mirror images of each other, like Tantric images of Siva, creating a ‘sense of balance between left and right connected with the symmetry of the human body’ (Francis 1990, 7).

Elizabeth Chatwin on her farm in Oxfordshire c2000
(Photo by Kevin Volans; used with his kind permission²⁵)



Figure 1 *Cicada* (1994) bars 1-2. Music by Kevin Volans © 1996 Chester Music Limited. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Reprinted by Permission.

They are predominantly white, offset by acerbic pale red, yellow and blue stripes (like the acerbic E and C-sharp in the predominantly B-flat major chord of *Cicada*), and are constructed with an engraving technique called cross-hatching, where patterns of short parallel lines constantly cut across the angles of other patterns.

The idea of a constantly moving image in Johns's paintings is perfectly matched in Volans's music, which is why he called it his 'first genuinely minimalist piece' (Volans 2000). Not minimalist so much in the way it processes material as in the way it approaches it. The inspiration for the piece was something Feldmanesque and ethereal: American artist James Turrell's sky-pieces; installations where a square of sky seen through an opening in the ceiling subtly changes colour over time. After seeing a Turrell exhibition one evening Volans stayed at the minimalist home of a friend, and then awoke next morning 'to a glittering square of sunlight reflected off the sea' and decided, 'no composition; don't change anything except the tone' (Ibid). This is as much a sign of having arrived at the aesthetic he was looking for, as it is a sign of confidence in the material.

At first glance *Cicada* seems to confirm the 'minimalist' tag, on account of its repetitions (see Fig 1).

The two bars shown in the example are representative of the whole work, which is all 'surface', non-developmental, and non-hierarchical in its use of material, especially pitch; and thus the very opposite of serialism. The pitch material comprises triads A-C-sharp-E and B-flat-D-F – plus a seventh note, G (which enters shortly after the example shown). The chords are perfectly chosen for – or perhaps by – the shape of the hand, and acoustically they have a particularly resonant quality on the piano. Christopher Ballantine discerns a 'distinct family resemblance to Stockhausen's *Klavierstück IX*' with its obsessively repeated chord (2001/2, 8), but a more felicitous parallel is Stockhausen's *Stimmung*, which although not a piano piece is also based on a B flat (9th) chord, and is more imbued with the meditative qualities of *Cicada*. The interlocking

technique of sharing material between pianos contributes to the delicate lushness of texture; indeed the resonances would not be possible without such interlocking. Volans's basic unit of material comprises a bar of notes followed by a very short bar's rest (see bars 1-2), and the units are repeated from 2 to 12 times and in a number of ways: for example, by changes of tempo, register, density and voicing of chords, length of bars and number of repetitions, and by stabilizing the tempo in certain places in contrast to the frequent changes of tempo elsewhere.

Like many African and minimalist music the piece has no coda: it just starts and eventually it just stops. (This is unusual in Volans, who has a weakness for codas.) About two-thirds of the way through there is a sudden change of texture: a four-note ascending melodic phrase (C-sharp-D-E-F), also shared between pianos. This short rising motif is almost an *ur*-motif in Volans, found in many other works and in various guises – soft or loud, slow or fast, sometimes with notes widely spaced; as far back as *Monkey Music* and strikingly at the beginning of the *Concerto for Piano and Winds* written the year after *Cicada*. *Cicada* contains hints of Volans's later texture, too: its rapid rising-falling blocks of sound are found throughout the *Trio Concerto* and the *2nd Piano Concerto*, for example (and in many ways, too, the new chamber works *Violin and Piano*, *Cello and Piano*, *Viola and Piano* written in 2009). The interlocking, too, goes way back. *Nine Beginnings* (1976 rev. 1985) is a play of atonal fragments between two pianos; and *Matepe*, *Leaping Dance*, *Kneeling Dance*, and parts of *White Man Sleeps* all use it.

Recent work

Cicada is thus to a certain extent pivotal in Volans's output: one can see many pieces written before as leading up to it in the way that they use interlocking, patterning, texturing, short motifs, small units and juxtaposed blocks of sounds within a language that is neither wholly tonal nor wholly atonal. Later works often continue these techniques in a much starker realm, however, with stronger contrasts of dynamics. The *6th String Quartet* (2001) and *Concerto for*

Double Orchestra (2002) are uncompromisingly wedded to the idea of extremely frugal material tossed (or maybe ‘torn’ is a better word) between two equal instrumental forces: in the *Concerto* it is two orchestras, so the result is somewhat in the style of a baroque concerto grosso; in the *Quartet* it is a live quartet and a tape (or a second quartet). In *Trumpet and String Quartet 2* (2001) single notes in the quartet are constantly at the heels of those in the trumpet. On the one hand it is radical new music which ‘some of us are going to need time to assimilate’ (Gilmore 2006, 27), although critics at the premiere of the *Concerto* heard echoes of La Monte Young, or Stravinsky, or Schoenberg’s *Klangfarbenmelodie*, even Stockhausen’s *Inori* (Driver 2002). *Cicada* is like that moment in the 1960s when visual art broke from abstract expressionism to minimalism, when complexity gave way to surface with a resulting emphasis on ‘arrangement’, or design, rather than composition. Volans was clearly thinking in terms of visual art, when he wrote *Cicada* and pieces like it.

The narrative also has a place in his work, however, and a compositional device he frequently uses is the ‘walking motif’, found in the 2nd, 4th and 5th String Quartets, *Walking Song*, the opera, the 8th String Quartet: *Black Woman Rising*, and other works. These include the percussion pieces, which are unique in Volans’s oeuvre because as works inherently rhythmic rather than melodic or harmonic they are unrelated to each other or to other works. We have seen how many threads connect quartets to dances or even stage works – such as those done in collaboration with William Kentridge and Jane Taylor (*Zeno at 4am* (2000) which uses the 8th Quartet, and *Confession of Zeno* (2002) which refers to *White Man Sleeps* and *Hunting: Gathering*). Similarly, the seven piano *Etudes* written in 2003-5 paraphrase or quote from earlier works, such as *Monkey Music* (in *Etude V*). The percussion pieces are original, and rooted in the earth: the solo *She Who Sleeps* in Africa, and the solos *Asanga* (1998) and *Akrodha* (1999) and trio *Chakra* (2003), in India. They are virtuoso, energetic pieces. *Asanga* means ‘freedom from attachment’ (and is also the name of a Buddhist saint who founded the Yogacara school); *akrodha* is a Sanskrit word meaning ‘freedom from anger’; and *chakra* means ‘wheel’, and is also the name given to the seven energy centres in the body. Thus they also relate to Volans’s spiritual journey.

Volans’s *Piano Concerto No. 2 (Atlantic Crossing)* (2006) is more voluptuous, even romantic. Scored for a huge orchestra of 4 flutes, triple winds, quadruple brass, tuba, 2 percussionists (2 bongos, 2 congas, 3 tom toms, 1 bass drum) and concomitant strings (16, 14, 12, 10, 8), it deploys these forces so frenziedly that only the most virtuosic piano writing penetrates the texture. ‘But if *Atlantic Crossing* is a killer for the performers, it’s a wonderfully accessible feast for the audience. Melding the emotional transparency of the Romantic concerto tradition with the varied repetitions of post-minimalism, Volans writes with the listener uppermost in mind, and the results are thrilling’ (Kosman 2006). The work was written for Marc-André Hamelin, who gave the premiere on 15 November 2006,

followed immediately by three more performances with the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas. It is music that harks back to the 19th- and early 20th-century concerto: the world of Liszt and Ravel that nurtured Volans as he was growing up. Something of this narrative style is foreshadowed in the ‘1st’ piano concerto (1996), which likewise refers back to the lushness and teleological momentum of romantic concertos. *Atlantic Crossing* blows away the cobwebs of Volans’s own immediate past (a recording of the performance, on 17.11.06 can be seen on http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=E8513413FED4387D, accessed 2.4.09); and yet, it may be that it will be seen in future as that same painterly world magnified and projected onto a much larger canvass. The *Trio Concerto* (2005) for violin, cello, and piano soloists and large orchestra, is less romantic in language than in spirit, and is one of his best large-scale works to date. In 2008 he collaborated with German artist Jürgen Partenheimer on *The Partenheimer Project*, a retrospective exhibition entitled ‘Discontinuity, Paradox & Precision’, which was displayed in several interconnected galleries of Ikon Gallery Birmingham from 2 April to 18 May and thereafter moved to *Kunstmuseum Bonn* for several months (August to November).

Invited by the artist to create a new composition in response to his work, the music [is] elaborated physically by speakers integrated into linear wooden sculptures made by Partenheimer. As the artist’s work relates to the condition of music in an abstract sense of perception, so Volans attempts to embody musically formal and emotive qualities and images possible in painting, sculpture and work on paper as seen in Partenheimer’s practice (‘Press Release’ (Ikon Gallery), http://www.jurgenpartenheimer.com/PDF/JP_PR-Ikon.doc.pdf, accessed 30.3.08).

For the premiere at Ikon, the Birmingham Contemporary Music Group performed Volans’s 70 minutes of music live. ‘Three ensembles of musicians mirroring Partenheimer’s approach and that of the interconnected galleries [create] physical displacement providing exciting and surprising opportunities within the overall musical structure’ (Ibid). Art has always played a significant, symbolic role in Volans’s work; his relationship to art and artists has been not merely a point of reference, but he has not created music that is overtly referential. On the contrary, in terms of the connotations such words have in the art world his music is abstract rather than figurative. However, the images that art offers have provided in some cases a ‘template’ for Volans’s musical ideas. There is no space to explore the image in Volans’s work, to which a separate article could be dedicated. I end with an extract from his essay in the exhibition catalogue, in which Volans espouses many of the most central tenets of his musical thought and compositional process.

The exhibition was to be spread over a number of spaces, so I decided to do the same with the music – 3 ensembles playing in 3 different spaces, but

each able to be overheard by the others ... I also decided that they should play without a conductor and at independent speeds ... Also I decided to write quite different material for each ensemble, only allowing one or two moments when they would come together. To begin with, I wrote the music of one ensemble from beginning to end, then cut it up and stretched it out to 150% of its length. Then I composed the music of the other two ensembles around this, with long gaps where they didn't play. In this way I tried not only to avoid filling up the space with sound, but also to draw the listeners from one space to another – to entice them to move around the galleries ... I decided to create as many different images as possible, and to use very little repetition. This proved to be a challenge in itself, firstly as it precludes working with any musical system whatsoever. Musical systems are defined by concepts, and we are reminded by Henri Bergson that we can think in images *or* concepts. Secondly, trying to find roughly 60 images per ensemble proved exhausting. It is rather like trying to write 60 small pieces of music, or 60 drawings, while keeping an eye on the flow of one idea to another. (Fortunately, I only had to open a book of reproductions of Partenheimer's work to start a new musical image forming in my mind.) (Volans 2008)

Awards and honours

Since 1984, when Volans was elected onto the board of professors for the Darmstadt Summer School (Cage, Ferneyhough, Rihm, and Lachenmann were his colleagues that year), he has been much in demand as a visiting teacher. In 1986-89 he was Composer-in Residence at Queen's University, Belfast and in 1992-93 at Princeton. In 1998 he was guest composer at 'June in Buffalo', New York State; in 2000 composer-in-residence at the Grahamstown Festival; and in 2003 visiting lecturer at his alma mater, Wits, for three months. He has been featured composer at the Ultima Festival, Oslo (2003) and the Huddersfield Festival (2004), where his 9th String Quartet was broadcast live on BBC Radio 3. Volans was keynote speaker at the Princess Constance Magogo Conference in Chicago in 2004, Juror for the Schloss Solitude Young Composers awards, Stuttgart in 2005/6, and Juror for the Gaudeamus Composition Competition, Amsterdam in 2007. In 2008 he sat on the final jury of the ISCM World Music Days. In 1999 his 50th birthday was celebrated at a concert in the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, and in 2004 he was awarded one of the highest honours for an artist in Ireland: the Martin Toonder Award of €10,000 from the Arts Council of Ireland.

Because he settled in Dublin rather than remaining in South Africa his influence has been strong in Europe and especially Ireland, with Donnacha Dennehy, Jennifer Walshe, Deirdre Gribben and Jürgen Simpson among the generation of composers who owe a debt to him. Yet young South Africans have also sought his advice, and he has influenced composers as different as Bongani Ndodana,

Martin Scherzinger, and Cobie van Tonder. It is not only as a composition teacher but also as a writer and analyst that he has had an impact, and a selected list of his writings is given below. Five essays that reflect on various stages of his aesthetic as a composer ('Paraphrase', 'Of White African and White Elephants', 'White Man Sleeps', 'Dancing in the Dark', and 'One Hundred Frames'), can be viewed on www.kevinvolans.com.

Notes

1. It is however anticipated that Volume 29 of *SAMUS: South African Music Studies* will partly be a special issue in honour of Volans (*SAMUS* 28, 198).
2. See for example *Billboard* 'Top Classical Albums' for the week ending 21 November 1987, where the Kronos/Nonesuch *White Man Sleeps* album was in position 3 and had already been on the charts for 18 weeks. (Ratings here are based on sales, not critical opinion.) It was not until 1992, however, when Kronos released *Pieces of Africa* with music by Volans and other composers from Africa, that *WMS* hit big time, so to speak. It was *Billboard's* best selling classical and world music album in the USA, for 26 weeks. Volans's work has now become synonymous with Kronos to the extent that (for example) when Jay Pather used an extract from *String Quartet No. 1: White Man Sleeps* in the University of Cape Town Drama Department's production 'Qaphela Caesar' on 27-March-3 April 2009, it was listed under the 'Music' credits in the programme, as 'Kronos Quartet' rather than 'Volans' ('Qaphela Caesar' programme, [2]).
3. Except for a brief period when he left Chester and was published under his own imprint, Black Sheep Edition.
4. He left in 1987 because '[o]ver the past few years [i.e. before 1987] the number of my performances in South Africa has totalled some 2 hours, as compared with over 200 hours in Europe and America' ('Letter to The Directors', 20.9.87).
5. An exception is the commission he received from the New Music Indaba in 1999 for the choral work *One Day Fine*, with funding from the Eastern Cape Department of Arts and Culture.
6. The Sontonga Quartet (until they disbanded in 2006) also promoted his music, and there have been several performances at New Music Indabas at the Grahamstown National Arts festival between 1999 and 2005.
7. Originally commissioned by Michael Blake in 1987 for the ensemble London New Music ('Programme', London New Music, 28 January 1987).
8. Some of the information in this article is known to the author from personal contact with Volans over many years (sometimes referenced simply as 'pers. comm.')., some of it is available on his website www.kevinvolans.com.

com, and some of the personal reminiscences about his early life come from an author's interview conducted with Volans over three days (5-7 October 2007). The unpublished documents also referred to are from Kevin Volans's personal collection and used here with kind permission of the composer.

9. The original shop is in Theatre Lane.
10. Volans hated and feared Maritzburg College's paramilitary ethos although he remembers most of his teachers with affection. The punishment of 'extra parade' was what he particularly tried to avoid, since it involved 'running up and down the banks of the playing fields with a rifle above your head until you vomited from exhaustion' (Author's Interview 5-7.10.07).
11. To put this in the financial perspective of the time: on one occasion he was paid R35.70 (SABC payslip 3.7.72).
12. Peter Klatzow kindly gave me the original copy of the score in August 2005, and it is now in Kevin Volans's personal collection. A word on the dating of Volans's works in this article: they are usually dated according to when they were premiered rather than when they were written/completed.
13. This is a remarkably detailed and sophisticated undergraduate analytical essay.
14. There are too many works to list them all in the Sources at the end of this article. Volans's worklist can be seen on various website including his own, his publishers, and the website of the Irish Information Centre – references all given elsewhere in this article.
15. In a testimonial written for Volans in 1975, Stockhausen speaks of his protégé as a 'highly talented musician, both as a composer and a performer ... I anticipate an outstanding career for him, and can recommend him without reserve as one of my finest students' ('To Whom It May Concern', 21.2.75).
16. I am indebted to Theo Herbst for the bibliographic details of these radio transcripts.
17. He later deposited copies of these tapes at the Ulundi Museum and the West German Radio archives, and donated the originals to the British Library Sound Archive (Volans pers. comm.).
18. In light of this, it is interesting to note that in 1979 Volans was contacted by ethnomusicologist Veit Erlmann, then occasionally presenting programmes on the radio station *Deutsche Welle* (Voice of Germany) and already 'strongly interested in South African music', about the possibility 'that we might introduce some of your compositions [in] a programme' (postcard from Erlmann to Volans 28.3.79). Erlmann's work on LBM and the whole *isicathamiya* genre later became seminal ethnomusicological research (see for example Erlmann 1991, 1996, and 1999); and he also later became Volans's colleague at the University of Natal.
19. Volans is prickly on the topic of 'influences', which is almost certainly related to his dislike of stylistic categories (see footnote below). In a recent e-mail interview with Music Critic of *Die Burger*, Wayne Muller, Volans writes the following in answer to Muller's question 'What other influences have there been on your compositions?':

I've passed through a gamut. Chronologically: Kandinsky, Stravinsky, Franz Kline (at school); Corbusier (I studied architecture for a year); Xenakis, Stockhausen ([while I was a] student in Germany); African textiles (principally Shoowa weavings from Zaire) late 70's; African Music (Shona Mbira music, in particular - late 70's [and] early 80's); Morton Feldman (mid 80's); Merce Cunningham (90's); Gerhard Richter (90's). All of them, however, could be described as abstract, moving from architectural to non-conceptual (Volans e-mail 3.4.09).
20. Fargion is now a successful composer in London, whose work has included a long-standing collaboration with choreographer Jonathan Burrows.
21. The word 'style' has to be used with great caution around Volans, but explaining why would go far beyond the scope of this article. It is a word he has repeatedly rejected in interviews (see for example an extremely useful interview with Jonathan Grimes on <http://www.cmc.ie/articles/article1120.html>, accessed 11.8.08, where he says of his work in Germany in the 1970s: 'we didn't wilfully get rid of modernism, but we did try to get rid of the idea of the *style police* [i.e.] that the only way to be modern is to write your next style of serialism'). Another reason for eschewing style is because of the way labels such as minimal, atonal, tonal, serial, expressionist, modernist, postmodernist, or conceptual have been used by critics to attempt to interpret for themselves and their readers the bewildering plurality of twentieth-century music. The word style here, carries with it a sense of evolutionary history, influence, and repeatability; ideas that Volans rejects because they make listeners put on certain kinds of 'listening glasses' (my term) when they hear new music, rather than simply listening afresh to the surface and sound of the music. See his 5 essays on www.kevinvolans.com for more insight into how Volans thinks about aesthetics, compositional process, and what he himself is doing in his own compositions.
22. 'In the sense that modernism is not a style, but a tenet - nothing is given and there is no received language - I consider myself a committed modernist' (Volans quote on <http://www.cmc.ie/composers/pdfs/113.pdf>, accessed 2.4.09).
23. His friend the violist Margriet Tindemans sent it to him (Volans pers. comm.).
24. On the close friendship between Volans and Elizabeth Chatwin see Sue Gaisford's interview with them in the London *Independent* ('How We Met'; <http://www>.

independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/how-we-met-elizabeth-chatwin---kevin-volans-1104323.html).

25. The sheep probably gave rise to the name of the self-publishing imprint Volans had during a short period in which he left Chester; it was called 'Black Sheep Edition'.

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