

Visions of the Stars and Earth: The *Images* of Jean Coulthard

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Résumé de l'article

Image Astrale (1981) et son pendant *Image Terrestre* (1990) peuvent être considérées comme les œuvres déterminantes du style pianistique de maturité de Jean Coulthard. Les deux pièces comportent une écriture idiomatique et, parfois, virtuose pour le piano, une mise en application des principes de la forme sonate, un style mélodique qui oscille entre une intensité dramatique et un lyrisme serein, et l'évocation néo-impressionniste d'images et d'humeurs contrastantes grâce aux couleurs harmoniques riches et variées. Cet article examine les *Images* de Coulthard d'un double point de vue, analytique et historique, en évaluant les attributs stylistiques pertinents et en démontrant l'importance de la série dans l'œuvre de Coulthard, la musique canadienne et le répertoire pour piano du XX^e siècle.

VISIONS OF THE STARS AND EARTH: THE IMAGES OF JEAN COULTHARD

Glenn Colton

Jean Coulthard (1908–2000) will long be remembered as a great composer in Canadian music history.¹ Her compositions are among the most widely performed and recorded works of any Canadian composer, and she received numerous national and international honours for her music during a long and distinguished career.² Coulthard helped pave the way for women composers on the Canadian music scene through her early involvement with the Canadian League of Composers and is widely regarded as the first composer from Canada's West Coast to garner international recognition for her music.³ Her pedagogical legacy lives on in a new generation of composers, many of whom have achieved national and international attention.⁴ Stylistically as well as geographically, Coulthard lived much of her life outside of the "mainstream" of Canadian music.⁵ She discovered in herself a personal voice through an expressive, tonally-based idiom that was infinitely more compatible with her own musical values than the austere textures and serial writing of many of her Canadian contemporaries.⁶ Coulthard, in a recorded biographical monologue (1982), summarized her philosophy of composition with the following self-described "coda":

I have written many kinds of musical compositions and in them all my aim is simply to write music that is good. In this great age of scientific development, I feel that human values remain the same and that unless music is able to reach

¹A version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the Canadian University Music Society, Bishop's University and Université de Sherbrooke, June 1999.

²To cite just a few examples, Coulthard received awards from the London and Helsinki Olympiads (for the Sonata for oboe and piano [1947], and *Night Wind* [1951], respectively); the Australian Broadcasting Commission (for Symphony No. 1 [1950]); and the British Women Musicians' Society (the Capriani Prize for *Music for Midsummer* [1971]). In Canada, honours bestowed upon Coulthard include Freeman of the City of Vancouver (1978), the Performing Rights Organization of Canada Composer of the Year (1984), Officer of the Order of Canada (1988), and the Order of British Columbia (1995).

³Of the twenty-one member composers listed in the Canadian League of Composers 1952 directory, Coulthard was the lone female member and the only representative to reside west of Winnipeg.

⁴Coulthard lectured in theory and composition at the University of British Columbia from 1947 to 1973. Among her eminent pupils are the composers Michael Conway Baker, Chan Ka-Nin, David Gordon Duke, Jean Ethridge, Joan Hansen, Sylvia Rickard, and Ernst Schneider.

⁵A major biographical study of Coulthard is currently being prepared by William Bruneau.

⁶As Coulthard once observed, "In the 1950s there was a strong group of influential composers who were inspired by the serial music of the 1920s and for a time, you simply weren't up to date at all if you didn't write in this style. I seemed to live through a period where I felt I was out of favour and this may have been because the serial school was so in evidence in the music departments of all universities in Canada at this time." Coulthard, "Music Is My Whole Life" (recorded monologue), *Radio Canada International Anthology of Canadian Music*, 1 (1982).

the heart in some way, it loses its compelling power to minister to human welfare. I also think that a composer's musical language should be instinctive, personal, and natural to him, and not to be forced in any way as to the specific style or technique of the moment. For if one becomes overly involved in the mechanics of one's musical thought, inspiration is easily lost.⁷

Yet the label of "conservative," a criticism frequently leveled at Coulthard's music, is largely misplaced.⁸ As Helmut Kallmann rightly noted in 1969, "Terms like conservatism and avant-garde . . . may no longer be identified with tonal and atonal music respectively. . . It has become more difficult to see the two extremes as an antithesis between modernism and conservatism, since both have existed before the majority of our composers were born."⁹ Coulthard's later works, moreover (c. late 1960s–1990s), show a willingness to embrace some of the more experimental paths in twentieth-century music, as illustrated vividly through forays into electronic music, indeterminacy, tone clusters, and twelve-tone writing. *Image Astrale* (1981), for solo piano, and its companion piece *Image Terrestre* (1990), epitomize the merger of new compositional strategies with Coulthard's deeply held musical values, and may be regarded as the defining works of her mature pianistic style.¹⁰ Stylistically, this comingling of old and new manifests itself through the juxtaposition of tonally-based lyricism and neo-impressionistic textures (traits long associated with Coulthard's music) with alternative strategies such as the selective use of twelve-tone writing and tone clusters.¹¹ The extra-musical impulse behind the *Images* is likewise an eclectic mixture of old and new. In *Image Astrale*, the musical evocation of imagery associated with the stars represents a development of ideas first expressed in the *Sonata for Two Pianos* ("Of the Universe") (1979), with its three movements, "Constellations," "The Vast Night," and "Cosmic."¹² *Image Terrestre*, conversely, was inspired by the dichotomy between urban civilization (a new creative stimulus for Coulthard) and nature (a persistent inspirational source throughout the composer's entire oeuvre).¹³ Collec-

⁷Ibid.

⁸David Gordon Duke, following a conversation with Coulthard, has documented one instance of this type of criticism (c. 1950): "Accidentally overhearing a disparaging assessment of her music from an Eastern colleague was Coulthard's first indication that her work was to fall increasingly out of favour with the central Canadian musical establishment of that era." David Gordon Duke, "The Orchestral Music of Jean Coulthard," Ph.D. dissertation (University of Victoria, 1993), 45.

⁹Helmut Kallmann, "Musical Composition in Canada from 1867," *MusicCanada* 20 (August 1969): 15.

¹⁰Editions of both works have been published by the Avondale Press, Vancouver. In the case of *Image Astrale*, the published edition corrects a number of notational errors which existed in the manuscript version.

¹¹The latter trait reflects the influence of recent contemporaries such as Crumb, Penderecki, and Xenakis.

¹²In a number of instances, the types of textures and figuration employed in the *Sonata for Two Pianos* invite direct comparison to *Image Astrale*, such as the superimposition of extended trill figuration upon pointillistic melodic passages and the selective use of tone clusters. The persistence of this type of writing in both works suggests that the composer viewed such gestures as quasi-programmatic symbols of celestial imagery.

¹³Among the many nature-inspired works in Coulthard's catalogue are the choral work *Québec May* (1948); the *Aegean Sketches*; the *Ballade of the North* (1966), for violin and piano; the *Sketches from the Western Woods*; *Kalamalka "Lake of Many Colours"* (1973–74), for orchestra; *Schizzen: Three*

tively, the two *Images* form a convincing set of contrasting pieces which are at once virtuosic, evocative, emotionally expressive, and skillfully crafted—all compelling reasons why they deserve to be accorded their rightful place as standard twentieth-century piano repertoire.

From her earliest years, the piano was a central force in Coulthard's musical life. Her childhood in Vancouver was spent in a stimulating musical environment owing mainly to the presence of her mother Jean Blake Coulthard (née Robinson) (1882–1933),¹⁴ an accomplished singer and pianist who is credited with introducing the music of Debussy to West Coast Canadian audiences.¹⁵ Not coincidentally, Coulthard would later identify Debussy as one of the “hero-gods” of her formative years.¹⁶ As a piano student of her mother during her early childhood, Coulthard quickly developed a fondness for the instrument that inspired some of her very first ventures into composition—a series of early piano pieces based on musical events in the Coulthard household.¹⁷ As she developed and matured as a pianist, Coulthard studied with Jan Cherniavsky in Vancouver and later with Kathleen Long during her years at the Royal College of Music in London (1928–30).¹⁸ A decidedly pianistic approach to composition remained with Coulthard throughout her adult life. Composer and former Coulthard pupil Sylvia Rickard, for example, has observed that even in her orchestral works, Coulthard typically worked out her compositional ideas at the keyboard.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, works utilizing the piano occupy a substantial portion of Coulthard's catalogue. She employed the instrument in a multiplicity of chamber and orchestral works, including a Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1963) and the Sonata for Two Pianos (1979), and produced a body of solo piano literature that includes numerous teaching pieces and over 20 concert works.²⁰ These works have attracted the attention of many eminent pianists, among them John Ogdon, Antonin Kubalek, Robert Silverman, Jane Coop, Charles Foreman, and many others (see Appendix).

Nature Sketches from Japan (1979), for oboe and piano; the *Ballade of the West* (1983), for piano and orchestra; and the *Symphonic Image of the North* (1989), for strings.

¹⁴Her father Walter Coulthard (1872–1937), was a physician.

¹⁵See Janice Butler and Bryan N.S. Gooch, “Jean (Blake)(b. Robinson) Coulthard,” *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada*, second ed., ed. Helmut Kallmann, Gilles Potvin, and Kenneth Winters (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 319.

¹⁶Coulthard, “Music Is My Whole Life.”

¹⁷As Coulthard later recalled, “I’ve always been asked how I became a composer. Well, I never consciously decided to become one. I think I always was. You see, at the age of seven or eight I used to compose little pieces at the piano all about family events... I remember we acted out all our favourite stories, and in the winter nights we constructed a theatre in our attic. I composed music for these little plays at the piano...” Coulthard, “Music Is My Whole Life.”

¹⁸During her years in London, Coulthard also studied composition with Ralph Vaughan Williams and theory with R. O. Morris. Subsequent composition studies in North America were undertaken with Aaron Copland (1939), Arnold Schoenberg (1942), Darius Milhaud (1942), Bela Bartók (1944), and Bernard Wagenaar (1944–1945).

¹⁹Sylvia Rickard, interview with the author, March 1993.

²⁰Coulthard's concert works for solo piano include the Four Etudes (1945), Sonata No. 1 (1947), Variations on BACH (1951), Preludes 1–10 (1954–60), *Aegean Sketches* (1961), *Requiem Piece* (1968), *Sketches from the Western Woods* (1970), *Image Astrale* (1981), Sonata No. 2 (1986), Preludes 11–13 (1986), and *Image Terrestre* (1990).

Image Astrale was composed on a Canada Council commission for the Philippine pianist Christine Cyiuto, who premiered the work in a 1982 CBC recital. Since that time, it has received considerable exposure internationally, most notably through performances by Jane Coop and Charles Foreman.²¹ The celestial impulse behind the work was once described by the composer as follows:

Image Astrale is a dramatic work, written about my thoughts and feelings when I contemplate the stars. The title describes how the heavenly bodies provoke our imagination. There is such an interest in the universe today that I feel we should try to project ourselves into it, one way or another.²²

In translating these ideas into musical terms, Coulthard juxtaposes several disparate stylistic elements. The work features quartal harmony, extended chord forms, flexible rhythms, rich textures, and the evocation of contrasting images and moods, traits which characterize the piece as neo-impressionistic. In several instances, the stratification of the music into three distinct textural layers (reminiscent of Debussy) supports this assessment. Within this framework, however, Coulthard incorporates twelve-tone themes, tone clusters and chance elements into her musical vocabulary, resulting in a synthesis of styles and means of pitch organization. The Ottawa Citizen critic Jacob Siskind, commenting on the eclecticism of the piece, once remarked that it is “an evocation of a myriad of musical styles, all set down with consummate skill.”²³

Loosely cast in sonata form, *Image Astrale* is reflective of a traditional, yet flexible approach to form evident in the piano sonatas and other sonata form works in Coulthard’s catalogue, such as the symphonies, string quartets, and sonatas for other instruments. In the case of *Image Astrale*, application of sonata form principles is deftly concealed by an episodic array of evocative, quasi-programmatic elements. The first theme group comprises two contrasting elements: a series of widely-spaced quartal chords, described by the composer as a representation of the “ultimate serenity of the universe,” and a pointillistic twelve-tone passage, used to evoke what Coulthard referred to as “star points”²⁴ (example 1). While highly disparate in terms of texture, pitch organization, and melodic contour, both thematic elements may be viewed as metaphors of space, a perception well suited to the descriptive subject matter. The opening chords utilize the upper and lower extremes of the keyboard to evoke a perception of tonal space, while the indeterminate duration of the “star

²¹Coop played the piece in a 1987 broadcast on CBC’s “Arts National” and subsequently in a 1988 European tour, including concerts in London, New York, Paris, and the Chopin Conservatory of Warsaw. Foreman’s performances of *Image Astrale* include a concert at Lincoln Centre, New York (1984) and a CBC television broadcast in an interview program with the composer (1987). The piece is also included on Foreman’s recording *Ballade* (Canadian Music Centre CMC-CD 1684, 1991). Other performances of *Image Astrale* include those by Christina Petrowska (in a concert sponsored by *Espace Musique*, Ottawa’s contemporary music society, October 1988), and Glenn Colton (with *Image Terrestre*, Lakeland College, Alberta, February 1996).

²²Jean Coulthard, notes to *Image Astrale*, in *Ballade*, Charles Foreman, piano (Toronto: CMC-CD 1684, 1991).

²³Jacob Siskind, “Society presents interesting offerings by B.C. composers,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 18 October 1988, D15.

²⁴Coulthard, notes to *Image Astrale*.

Poco lento. Misterioso

Floating

3

p

Sostenuto. Tenuto

Allegro a piacere
quasi cadenza

mp

gva *Accel. e dim.*

gva

Example 1: *Image Astrale*, bars 1–3. Copyright © 1988 by The Avondale Press. Used by permission.

points” passage evokes a perception of temporal space.²⁵ Both thematic elements are underpinned by a sustained, partial tone cluster on A-flat, which serves as a unifying link, a reinforcement of the spatial metaphor on both tonal and temporal levels, and an underlying tonal reference.²⁶

²⁵The end of this passage is marked “Repeat ad lib.” This type of spatial metaphor invites comparison with the use of aleatory passages in the chamber work *The Pines of Emily Carr* (1969). In the “Dream Music” section of that work, aleatory passages evoke a perception of “timelessness” associated with dreaming.

²⁶This sonority foreshadows the final cadence chord to which the work ultimately resolves. The allusion to important tonal centres via bass pedals and cadential points is a strategy frequently employed by Coulthard.

Coulthard's twelve-tone writing comprises a melodic unit utilizing the ordering of the tone row shown in Table 1.²⁷ Subsequent entrances of the row are manipulated through transposition (bar 63), retrograde treatment (bar 124) and by maintaining certain subsets of the row in either prime or retrograde form, while varying the order in which the remaining pitches are presented. In bar 63, the cadenza-like climax of the development section, the first nine notes of P₅, P₆, and P₇ are presented as invariant subsets with the ordering of the remaining notes varied. In the recapitulation (bar 124), conversely, the row is partitioned into two symmetrical hexachords based upon repetition of the initial statement of the row with retrograde treatment and variable ordering.²⁸ Coulthard's twelve-tone writing is significant in that it illustrates the expanded tonal vocabulary which characterized her music from the late 1960s to the 1990s. Conceived for sonorous effect rather than as a governing compositional technique, Coulthard's use of twelve-tone writing in *Image Astrale* is highly selective and superimposed against tonal references.²⁹ Indeed, the combination of tonal and twelve-tone elements is just one aspect of Coulthard's decidedly synthesist approach in this piece, to which one could add dichotomies of texture (pointillism versus richly textured quartal and extended chord forms), and melodic style (disjunct, motivic writing versus a neo-romantic tendency toward lyrical melodies in long, flowing phrases), all governed by a neo-classical sense of form.

Following a tension-building transition section characterized by accentuation, extended trill figuration, and metrical shifts, the contrasting second theme group opens with a series of richly textured C⁹ chords. The effect is one of a majestic fanfare, announcing both the emphatic arrival of the second theme group, as well as a new tonal centre [C]. A thinned version of this chord (C/G/D) is maintained as a pedal point against the opening measures of the lyrical *cantabile* theme, thereby reinforcing the mood of tranquillity with an underlying sense of tonal stability (example 2). The respite is short-lived, however, as the music quickly progresses through a series of extended chord forms which descend progressively by the interval of a second. The music grows in intensity once more, culminating with a lengthy cadenza at bars 37–46. Throughout the second theme group, a sense of rhythmic ambiguity derives from the presence of duplet and triplet subdivisions, syncopation, and metrical shifts between compound triple and compound duple meter. In a manner analogous to the “spatial” metaphors of the opening theme, these rhythmic gestures evoke a temporal quality of “timelessness,” a perception reinforced by the composer's expressive markings: *tranquillo* and *celestial*. A

²⁷Boldface numerals denote statements (or partial statements) of the row in prime form; italicized numerals denote statements (or partial statements) of the row in retrograde form.

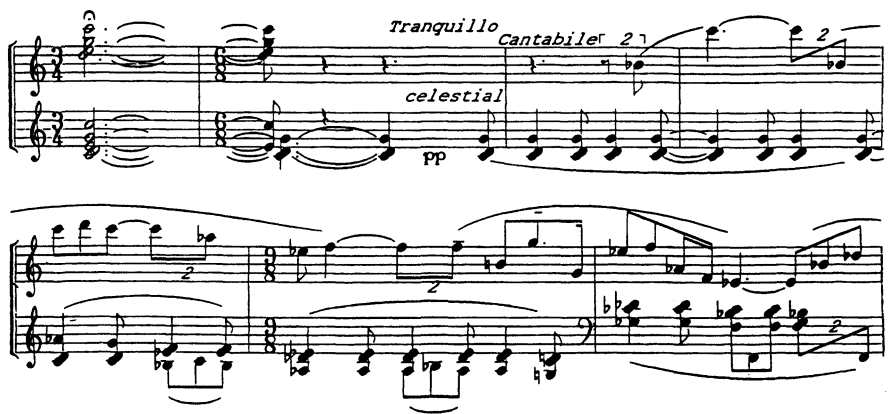
²⁸The first hexachord states the first six pitches of the row in retrograde form, while the second hexachord freely varies the ordering of the remaining six pitches.

²⁹In this respect, Coulthard's approach to twelve-tone writing in *Image Astrale* is consistent with that found in other works of this period, such as the *Octet, 12 Essays on a Cantabile Theme* (1972), and reflective of her composition studies with Arnold Schoenberg in 1942: “He was a very ‘traditional’ teacher and told me that he was surprised that musicians were using his system to create such a revolution.” Jean Coulthard, Biographical Sketch No. 6 (from six unpublished autobiographical essays, 1970–71).

majestic, full-textured codetta brings the exposition to a close, punctuated by the first full tone cluster of the piece in the extreme lower register.

Table 1: *Image Astrale*, “star points” passage (twelve-tone matrix)

	B	D	B ^b	A ^b	F	C [#]	A	E ^b	G	C	E	F [#]	
						I							
	0	3	11	9	6	2	10	4	8	1	5	7	
	9	0	8	6	3	11	7	1	5	10	2	4	
	1	4	0	10	7	3	11	6	9	2	6	8	
	3	6	2	0	9	5	1	7	11	4	8	10	
	6	9	5	3	0	8	4	10	2	7	11	1	
P	10	1	9	7	4	0	8	2	6	11	3	5	R
	2	5	1	11	8	4	0	6	10	3	7	9	
	8	11	7	5	2	10	6	0	4	9	1	3	
	4	7	3	1	10	6	2	8	0	5	9	11	
	1	2	10	8	5	1	9	3	7	0	4	6	
	7	10	6	4	1	9	5	11	3	8	0	2	
	5	8	4	2	11	7	3	9	1	6	10	6	
						RI							



Example 2: *Image Astrale*, bars 23–29. Copyright © 1988 by The Avondale Press. Used by permission.

In the development section, Coulthard's synthesisism takes on an added dimension. In addition to the textural dichotomy between pointillistic twelve-tone writing and neo-impressionistic harmonic colour, another technique which makes its presence felt from the outset of the development is neo-baroque counterpoint. Based on previously stated transitional material, Coulthard's use of contrapuntal imitation harkens back to two of her earliest large-scale piano works, the Piano Sonata No. 1 (1947) and the well known *Variations on BACH* (1951).³⁰ The development culminates with a dramatic transformation of both elements of the first theme group. The opening chordal passage is transformed from its initial context as a representation of "infinite serenity" to articulate the climactic moment of the entire work, described by Coulthard as the "tremendous explosion of the stars"³¹ (example 3). Several factors conspire to effect this transformation, including changes in articulation, dynamics, rhythmic pulse, metre, expressive markings, and registral placement. The structural function of the passage is likewise reversed from its initial entrance, since it no longer acts as the impetus for further expansion but rather as a dramatic point of arrival, a perception heightened by extending the partial tone cluster of the opening of the piece into a full cluster. This passage is preceded by a transposed, intensified version of the twelve-tone passage in the shape of a virtuosic cadenza, thus reversing the order in which these thematic

The image displays two systems of musical notation for Example 3. The first system shows a piano introduction with a 'gva' (glissando) marking and a dotted line above the staff. The second system is marked 'Molto Maestoso' and features a 'sf' (sforzando) dynamic. It includes a 'sost. Ped.' (sostenuto pedal) marking and a 'gva' marking at the end. The music is characterized by complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes, and a dense, pointillistic texture.

Example 3: *Image Astrale*, bars 63–64. Copyright © 1988 by The Avondale Press. Used by permission.

³⁰Both works suggest the influence of the piano sonatas and *Ludus tonalis* of Paul Hindemith.

³¹Coulthard, notes to *Image Astrale*.

elements were initially stated. The recapitulation presents modified versions of both theme groups in reverse order, followed by a coda which returns to the thematic material, tranquil mood, and spatial metaphors of the opening measures.³² Interestingly, the final cadence chord re-harmonizes the opening A-flat¹³ bass pedal by superimposing an A-natural, as if injecting the close of the work with an added degree of harmonic tension to underscore the infinite mystery of the universe.

Image Terrestre (1990), the companion piece to *Image Astrale* and Coulthard's final concert work for solo piano, was dedicated to the pianist Margaret Bruce and premiered by Bernard Doerkson in a 1991 Vancouver Art Gallery recital.³³ While *Image Astrale* conveys the composer's vision of the stars, *Image Terrestre* evokes images of planet earth, with contrasting *dramatico* and *cantabile* themes representative of the duality between the frantic pace of modern civilization and the quiet tranquillity of nature.³⁴ In comparison with *Image Astrale*—a primarily meditative, albeit technically challenging work—*Image Terrestre* is a virtuosic *tour de force*, featuring frequent crossing of hands, rapid octave passagework, and disjunct melodic motion. Like its companion piece, *Image Terrestre* follows Coulthard's flexible approach to sonata form. The piece opens with a first theme group comprising two contrasting elements—a series of extended chord forms (marked *Attaca. Allegro Dramatico*), followed by an arpeggiated theme of alternately rising and falling sixteenth notes. The richly textured *dramatico* chords, marked *f* and characterized by incisive accents, are suggestive of the commotion and turmoil of modern civilization (example 4). Coulthard, in an interview, indicated that the piece is intended to suggest images of a busy city, with episodes such as the *dramatico*

Attaca
Allegro Dramatico

f

sost.

f

Example 4: *Image Terrestre*, bars 1–2. Copyright © 1991 by The Avondale Press. Used by permission.

³²The tone row of the “star points” passage recurs in modified retrograde form in the recapitulation.

³³Subsequent performances include those by Connie Shi (Vancouver Playhouse, March 1995) and Glenn Colton (University of Victoria, October 1993; Lakeland College, Alberta, February 1996 [with *Image Astrale*]; Memorial University of Newfoundland, May 1997) (recorded by CBC Radio).

³⁴Jean Coulthard, in conversation with the author, 1994.

introduction evocative of certain aspects of the urban soundscape (the sound of traffic, for example).³⁵

While the opening chordal section is suggestive of urban *sounds*, the arpeggiated passage which follows creates a vivid impression of the *pace* of modern civilization. The entire passage (bars 9–23) may, in fact, be viewed as a metaphor for motion resulting from a combination of rhythmic and melodic elements (example 5). Thus while the metrical irregularity and rhythmic flexibility of *Image Astrale* convey a perception of “musical space,” precisely the opposite temporal effect is realized in *Image Terrestre* through rhythmic uniformity and regular metrical groupings (based upon phrasing, pitch direction, pitch repetition, and accentuation). By structuring and emphasizing the direction of time, these elements evoke a sense of forward-directed motion, a perception well suited to the descriptive nature of the music. The restless quality evoked through the opening *dramatico* section is heightened by shifting bass pedals (F-sharp in bar 1, G-sharp in bar 5), creating ambiguous tonal references. Octave C-sharps underpinning the beginning of the arpeggiated section create a momentary perception of tonal resolution, as if the entire opening section functioned as a composed-out cadence (IV-V-I) in C-sharp.³⁶ The sense of repose is short-lived, however, as the music progresses to an F-sharp major triad in bars 11–12, thus returning to the germinal tonal material of the piece and foreshadowing the final cadence chord to which the work ultimately resolves.³⁷ Considered in another light, the F-sharp major triad clarifies the tonal ambiguity of the opening section and retrospectively implies a composed-out cadence in F-sharp (I-II-V-I).³⁸ Following this momentary release of tonal tension and rhythmic energy, bars 12–23 return to the perpetual motion, urgency, and shifting harmonizations found in bars 9–10.

Example 5: *Image Terrestre*, bars 9–10. Copyright © 1991 by The Avondale Press. Used by permission.

³⁵ Jean Coulthard, in conversation with the author, 1993–1995.

³⁶ The pitch C-sharp is further emphasized quantitatively via repetition in bars 9–10, and qualitatively via metrical stress and accentuation.

³⁷ The work closes on a repeated F-sharp⁷ chord (F-sharp/C-sharp/E-sharp, with grace note A).

³⁸ The structural importance of this chord is affirmed by a cadential gesture frequently found in Coulthard's music to denote important structural divisions—the combined use of *dim.* and *ritard.* markings on the cadence chord, followed immediately by a comma and rest.

A short bridge passage leads directly to the second theme group, a contrasting *cantabile* theme which grows progressively in intensity (example 6). Accompanied by an arpeggiated sixteenth-note pattern, this theme is appropriately marked *Calmato*. This type of accompaniment, suggestive of nature imagery, is identical to the type of figuration found in many of Coulthard's songs as a representation of the gentle, rhythmic flow of a stream or brook. One such example is her musical setting of the word "stream" in the song "Dream Love," the second of the four *Christina Songs* (1983) (based on poetry by Christina Rossetti). It is this type of figuration, moreover, which reveals most explicitly the self-described "rippling, lyrical" paradigm of Coulthard's dualistic style. The composer's description of this stylistic duality speaks volumes about the inspiration of nature in her creative process:

To develop this imagery, first is the rippling lyrical nature of sunlight glinting on the watered stone of a small brook. The other is more brooding—the depth of one's being reflected in the deep fiords of our west coast. Many works have, of course, elements from both styles. Certain signposts do keep recurring in all my music, though I am unconscious of this at the time of writing.³⁹

Poco meno mosso. Cantabile

Calmato
mp

Example 6: *Image Terrestre*, bars 26–27. Copyright © 1991 by The Avondale Press. Used by permission.

The fact that the *cantabile* theme functions as a momentary repose from the urgency of the first theme group suggests a quasi-programmatic interpretation whereby nature is portrayed as a site of refuge, a source of spiritual renewal from the rigours of modern existence.

In a manner analogous to the thematic process of *Image Astrale*, the development section begins with contrapuntal treatment of material from the exposition (in this case bar 6 of the first theme group, which is subsequently expanded and intensified). Also analogous is the contextual transformation of one of the thematic elements, the *cantabile* theme, to articulate the climactic moment of the entire work (example 7). The harmonic texture is enriched, the dynamic and expressive contexts reversed, and the "flowing" accompanimental figuration is supplanted by *fortissimo* chords in the extreme lower register (invoking direct comparison with the climactic "explosion of the stars" in *Image Astrale*). By extending this programmatic analogy to *Image Terrestre*, the transformation of the *cantabile* theme might be viewed as a representation

³⁹Coulthard, "Music Is My Whole Life."

of the primal force of nature. The dynamics (*ff*), expressive markings (*maestoso*), and accentuation further heighten the drama and support a possible programmatic interpretation. Coulthard's thematic development also comprises a process of integration whereby melodic fragments from both theme groups are juxtaposed in succession (bars 62–63), or superimposed upon one another (bars 76, 80–81). The recapitulation presents transposed, abbreviated versions of both theme groups, followed by a virtuosic coda.

Example 7: *Image Terrestre*, bars 85–88. Copyright © 1991 by The Avondale Press. Used by permission.

On many levels, *Image Astrale* and *Image Terrestre* represent important contributions to twentieth-century piano music. To be certain, the piano writing is largely traditional in terms of its notational practices, neo-classical sense of form, and allegiance to the fundamental principles of tonality. Yet her music is no more traditional (arguably less so) than that of others of her generation, among them Samuel Barber, Benjamin Britten, Elliott Carter, Aaron Copland, Alberto Ginastera, and Dmitri Shostakovich, composers for whom the composition of tonally-based piano music remained a valid mode of expression. Within its traditional architecture, there is remarkable ingenuity exhibited in Coulthard's tonal, formal and thematic process, as well as the manner in which diverse stylistic elements are synthesized into her own distinctive idiom. Her handling of thematic material is subtle and ingeniously tied to the descriptive content of the music, her selective combination of tonal and twelve-tone elements is evocative and highly original, and her formal treatment is indicative of a personalized, carefully crafted approach to sonata form. Characteristic of Coulthard's piano music, the *Images* demonstrate an easy command of the instrument through a pianistic style that is at once idiomatic, technically and interpretively challenging, and in several instances, virtuosic. In this respect, the piano works may be viewed as distinctive from other facets of her compositional output, most notably the orchestral works, in which her ability to write effectively and idiomatically for various instruments developed gradually and relatively late in the composer's career.⁴⁰ Finally, the *Images* remain an

⁴⁰As David Gordon Duke explains, Coulthard's mature orchestral style did not emerge until after her orchestration lessons with Gordon Jacob in the mid-1960s. Duke, "The Orchestral Music of Jean

inherently accessible set of contrasting, emotionally expressive pieces, a factor which has no doubt contributed to their popular appeal with audiences world-wide. As such, they are prime examples of a compositional aesthetic which remained constant throughout Coulthard's creative life, one based on the principle of music as a communicative and emotionally expressive medium. This ideal, which I will leave you with as a postlude to this paper, is perhaps best summarized in the words of the composer:

I feel that music is my whole life. If one can interpret it, one can understand my personal philosophy. When I write music, I am releasing my inner self.⁴¹

Appendix: Selected Discography of the Solo Piano Music of Jean Coulthard

Aegean Sketches, Antonin Kubalek, piano (*Canadian Piano Music*), Melbourne, 1976.

Four Etudes for Piano, Ross Pratt and John Newmark, piano, *Radio Canada International Anthology of Canadian Music*, vol. 1, 1982.

Image Astrale, Charles Foreman, piano (*Ballade*), Canadian Music Centre CMC-CD 1684, 1991.

Piano Sonata No. 1, Elaine Keillor, piano (*Views of the Piano Sonata*), Carleton Sound CSCD-1002, 1997.

Piano Sonata No. 1, John Ogdon, piano, *Radio Canada International Anthology of Canadian Music*, vol. 1, 1982.

Sketches from the Western Woods, John Ogdon, piano, *Radio Canada International Anthology of Canadian Music*, vol. 1, 1982.

Sketches from the Western Woods, Margaret Bruce, piano (*Bach to Berkeley... and Beyond*), Independent recording, undated.

Variations On BACH, John Ogdon, piano, *Radio Canada International Anthology of Canadian Music*, vol. 1, 1982.

Abstract

Image Astrale (1981) and the companion piece *Image Terrestre* (1990) may be regarded as the defining works of Jean Coulthard's mature pianistic style. Both works feature idiomatic and, at times, virtuosic piano writing, a personal application of sonata form principles, a melodic style which vacillates between dramatic intensity and serene lyricism, and the neo-impressionistic evocation of contrasting images and moods through rich and varied harmonic colours. This article explores Coulthard's *Images* from both analytical and historical perspectives, assessing relevant style features and demonstrating the significance of the

Coulthard," 226.

⁴¹Coulthard, "Music Is My Whole Life."

set within Coulthard's œuvre, Canadian music, and twentieth-century piano repertoire.

Résumé

Image Astrale (1981) et son pendant *Image Terrestre* (1990) peuvent être considérées comme les œuvres déterminantes du style pianistique de maturité de Jean Coulthard. Les deux pièces comportent une écriture idiomatique et, parfois, virtuose pour le piano, une mise en application des principes de la forme sonate, un style mélodique qui oscille entre une intensité dramatique et un lyrisme serein, et l'évocation néo-impressionniste d'images et d'humeurs contrastantes grâce aux couleurs harmoniques riches et variées. Cet article examine les *Images* de Coulthard d'un double point de vue, analytique et historique, en évaluant les attributs stylistiques pertinents et en démontrant l'importance de la série dans l'œuvre de Coulthard, la musique canadienne et le répertoire pour piano du XX^e siècle.