

# **Points for Departures**

Composing for Improvisers

A portfolio of original compositions and commentary

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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## **Abstract**

This portfolio of compositions searches for a dynamic approach in devising performing materials for improvising musicians. The role and application of improvisation is at the heart of this research, with the aspiration that each work encapsulate improvisation determined by the improviser, as opposed to works that include improvisation as a secondary element or action. This ethos is in contrast to past hierarchical precedents with the composer often the primary source of creativity and authority. Instead I hope to advance the proactive and pluralistic ideal of ‘creative music’ pioneered by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). This organisation, devoted to the African American avant-garde, encouraged and celebrated despite their varied aesthetic emphases... a belief in unfettered, individual self-expression (May, 2017), in which each member created “original music”—notated, improvised, or both—by striving beyond the set boundaries of jazz to explore a stylistic hybridity. (Baumgartner, 2012). I hope to produce and manifest extended points of improvisation through a myriad of strategies in my work, that channel the spirit of free improvisation, and bestow upon its participants the capacity to bare their musical sensibilities in the act of performance, unrestricted by tight and immovable borders. The examination of this endeavour will be assessed, developed and refined across the portfolio by means of three core considerations: The figurative (forms of notation and compositional control), the abstract (creativity and interpretive skills of the performer), and performance authenticity. Throughout this process, I will reflect on both the impact which the three have upon each other with regards to the creative contributions of the composer and performer, and also upon a general shift towards an aesthetic of simplicity. The power of technical and abstract limits in order to free the expressive experience will be advocated. In practice, the creation and refinement of a generous compositional system, termed as an ‘abstract language score’, will be charted — one that is dynamic in nature, and which serves, and amplifies participants’ intuition and intelligence in the act of performance.

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#### List of Scores (bound separately)

**The Wind Blows South** (2016) Flute, Tenor Saxophone, Trumpet, Violin, Double Bass

**Beneath the Horizon** (2017) Flute, Oboe, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone, Baritone Saxophone, Trumpet, Trombone, Violin, Cello, Electric Guitar, Double Bass, Piano, Percussion x2

**The Illuminated Man** (2017) Flute/Alto Flute, Baritone/Tenor Saxophone, Violin, Double Bass, Piano

**Herbig-Haro** (2017) Violin and Double Bass

**The Shaman** (2017) 12 Tenor Saxophones

**Panels** (2017) Alto Flute, Tenor Saxophone, Violin, Double Bass, Live Electronics, Drums

**Rituals** (2018) - Alto Flute, Bass Clarinet, Baritone Saxophone, Tenor Saxophone, Trombone, Violin, Viola, Double Bass, Electric Guitar, Drums

#### Audio Material (see enclosed USB Drive)

1. **The Wind Blows South** performed by Ensemble Entropy: Georgia Cooke (fl), Matt London (t.sax), Ben Zucker (tpt), Rebecca Raimondi (vln), Seth Bennett (d.bass). IKLECTIK, London, UK, 03/08/16.

2. **Beneath the Horizon** performed by New Music Collective directed by Damien Heron (Leeds College of Music). The Venue, Leeds, UK, 27/02/17.

**3. The Illuminated Man** performed by Ensemble Entropy: Georgia Cooke (fl/afl), Matt London (t.sax/b.sax), Rebecca Raimondi (vln), Seth Bennett (d.bass) featuring Matthew Bourne (piano). IKLECTIK, London, UK, 25/03/17.

**4. Herbie-Haro** performed by Rebecca Raimondi (violin) and Seth Bennett (double bass). Hundred Years Gallery, London, UK, 13/05/17.

**5. Herbig-Haro** performed by Oliver Baily (violin) and Paul Baxter (double bass). LEAF, Manchester, UK, 13/06/2018.

**6. The Shaman** performed by the Tenor Saxophone Collective: João Pedro Silva, Nathan Henshaw, Rodrigo Villa, Rob Buckland, Jenni Watson, Erin Royer, Andy Scott, Henrique Portovedo, Gilly Blair, Isabel Anjo, Matt London, Luis Riberio. Conservatório de Música do Porto, Portugal, 14/07/17.

**7. The Shaman** performed by the Tenor Saxophone Collective: João Pedro Silva, Nathan Henshaw, Alfonso Padilla, Pilar Montejano, Jenni Watson, Erin Royer, Kyle Hutchins, Nathan Mertens, Gilly Blair, Nicki Roman, Matt London, Michael Jameson. Theatre & TD Big Hall, University of Zagreb, Croatia, 14/07/18.

**8. Panels** performed by Ensemble Entropy: Georgia Cooke (fl/afl), Matt London (t.sax), Rebecca Raimondi (vln), Seth Bennett (d.bass) featuring Phil Maguire (live electronics) and Mark Sanders (drums) - IKLECTIK, London, UK, 01/10/17.

**9. Rituals** performed by Orchestra Entropy: Georgia Cooke (afl), Tom Ward (bcl), Seb Silas (b.sax), Matt London (t.sax), Sarah Gail Brand (trb), Rebecca Raimondi (vln), Benedict Taylor (vla), Seth Bennett (d.bass), Joel Bell (e.gtr), Mark Sanders (drums). IKLECTIK, London, UK 03/02/18.

**10. Rituals** performed by Orchestra Entropy: Georgia Cooke (afl), Tom Ward (bcl), Seb Silas (b.sax), Matt London (t.sax), Sarah Gail Brand (trb), Rebecca Raimondi (vln), Benedict Taylor (vla), Seth Bennett (d.bass), Moss Freed (e.gtr), Mark Sanders (drums). Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's, London, UK, 11/10/18

*For Dad*

## Personal preface

To my mind, it is the natural and inherently flexible ability to shift across those idioms associated with the saxophone - my primary instrument - that has helped shape the musical philosophy behind my creative practice today; a philosophy that is keenly focused upon improvisation and spontaneity.

My undergraduate degree at Leeds College of Music included a free improvisation module taught by bassist composer Dave Kane, who introduced me to the music of two creative visionaries in their respective fields: Paul Dunmall (saxophone, free improvisation) and Brian Irvine (composition, band leader). It was Irvine's *Montana Strange* for symphony orchestra, in which small ensemble and free improviser spectacularly collide, that really opened my eyes and ears to music without borders.

For me it was the varying degrees of creative freedom permitted to many of the players in *Montana Strange* that was so thrilling and engaging; the virtuosic and spellbinding Dunmall set loose alongside the chaotic and disruptive smaller ensemble, with both pitted against the orchestra (Irvine, 2004). From my point of view, it was the stripping away of barriers associated with idiom to purposely to engage and inspire each other that was so intriguing.

Further to this revelatory listening experience, Kane also gave me the opportunity to play in a number of his improvisatory groups outside of my course, including the premiere of his extended work *Anamorphosis VII* for large ensemble, that followed in the lineage of performer-composer Barry Guy through-composed strategies of structured improvisation. Little did I know that these experiences had planted a seed that over time would grow and eventually take charge of the way I create and perform music.

The primary motivation for undertaking a performance MMus at the Royal Northern College of Music was to refine and hone my technical faculties and performance craft to the highest degree as a classical saxophonist. Whilst this was an enjoyable test from brilliant teachers, finding saxophone repertoire that really interested me was at times challenging. However, there was one experience during this time that was to kickstart my interest in drawing together the written and improvised.

A good friend of mine decided to include a short piece of free improvisation - a duo with baritone saxophone - into his third-year percussion performance recital. In his feedback the examination panel requested that he not include free improvisation in future college recitals as "this music could not be marked". This seemed absolutely ludicrous. Did they feel the music was not intellectual enough? Or perhaps they felt they lacked the expertise and insight of free improvisation themselves? Whatever it was, they did not divulge. The general perception was that they needed a score to be able to judge upon a performance.

Whether meant intentionally or unintentionally, this in my view had constructed barriers between the practice of varying idioms. This was something reflected more generally in the college at this time as well, as there was never any mention of developing a more personal creative practice; at least on my course. The expectation was that you either composed, or performed, and the space in between was never seriously discussed or addressed. Thus in order to better reflect my friend's own diverse musical sensibility and to make some kind of stand against the aforementioned rather conservative feedback, he enlisted me to compose an extended piece that would draw idiom and practice together for his final fourth-year recital.

The result was a piece that required performing knowledge and experience of contemporary classical music, free improvisation and jazz, squeezed into a structured score of traditional notation, in the main for the adjudicating panel to follow. Being able to draw upon my experiences from Leeds was of enormous help in this regard and the piece itself was successful in portraying the varying disciplines authentically. It was from this point that I realised that it was musical inclusivity and creative freedom that truly interested me.

As a consequence of this positive experience, and in addition to further free improvisation listening, I sought out music that focused on varying strategies of creative autonomy towards structured improvisation to broaden my knowledge of this vast and fertile field. The continued exploration of Paul Dunmall groups and recordings were particularly fruitful in discovering other performer-composers of note to study, namely Barry Guy, Alexander von Schlippenbach and Anthony Braxton.

Lastly it was the experience of witnessing the Paul Dunmall Sextet perform *Life in Four Parts* at the Cheltenham Jazz Festival in 2014 that really focused my intention to pursue a practice-based PhD. With the suite lasting just over an hour, each part contained fragments of prepared material often used as starting points (and occasional recapitulations) for extensive group

improvisations. The use of the prepared is something Paul rarely uses as a bandleader. What I found so impressive was that the material was not overly explicit in its use as one might find in a jazz chart. Instead, the piece had a larger developmental arc to it, with each part a seemingly natural occurrence. The material was woven into the fabric of the piece, not merely superimposed. As a listener the experience was utterly transcendental.

Afterwards I had a conversation with Paul and asked why he had included prepared fragments this time. His response was that it helped him tell the story he wanted, and that in the right circumstance he was open to using prepared material, especially over longer structures. He added that it did not happen very often at all in his own music as a band leader - only when it was really required. And why would it, if your main band previously was Mujician — comprised of the equally iconoclastic Keith Tippett, Paul Rogers and Tony Levin!

Primarily it was this endorsement of the transformative effect that written material could have (in the right hands) upon free improvisation that gave me the confidence to embark on my research journey, and to start to redress my perceived misgivings of western classical music and its relation to improvisation, away from the pressure to define clearly where, if there is a fence at all to stand on (Toop, 2016).

**Thesis outline:** The first half focuses on my initial aim to find a system of inclusivity and synthesis of practice into a balanced whole. Predominantly the focus is on developing forms of notation to impart composer identity and narrative, guiding and informing complementary moments of free improvisation. The first three pieces chart this development and its implementation, which sees a gradual and modest mitigation of composer control and technical precision. The apex of this venture, *The Illuminated Man*, resulted in a meaningful expansion of the moments for improvisation, with the players becoming ever more self-reliant and independent from the composer.

At the halfway point of my research an important juncture is reached with regards to my original plan, moving towards finding a balanced system of practices. Built upon approaches using the development of semi-traditional notations, my general discernment is that this strategy is too composer orientated. Furthermore, it holds inherent limits for effective performer creative autonomy due to it being too regulated and determined in nature by the composer.

New Developments (chapter 7) charts a realignment of perspective and subsequent exploration of practice. This change of values places the core focus of my compositional strategies upon the performer to engage and empower improvisation as originally envisaged. As expressed in the chapter, direct study with Barry Guy and the examination of the Language Scores of Wadada Leo Smith and Anthony Braxton proved particularly informative and inspiring in this regard, and sent my creative practice in a new and more personal direction.

As such the principal development of my practice was a shift away from traditional forms of notations (delineated scoring) towards informative graphic representations (connotation) reliant on the creative interpretive skills of the performer. The required engagement and investment from others I hoped would allow access to untapped performer creativity as an important resource in my music. A true sharing of control and responsibility.

To advance upon the acquired Language Scores knowledge an exploration of abstract art was undertaken. Chapter 8 covers my attempts to obtain technical and poetic understanding of this art form from Wassily Kandinsky, William Hayter, Patrick Heron and Victor Pasmore to help inform my creative process. The main resulting insight of this endeavour was that I needed to make a meaningful release of control to better connect with, and give oneself up to the creative intuition of the performers. As such the remaining pieces of the portfolio chart this evolution in which I attempt to retain a broad control of the score/image, whilst leaving much of the exact detail of its content to the performer(s), shaping it with their own musical sensibility.

The principal vehicle for the undertaking of my research is Ensemble Entropy — my own group consisting of musicians with experience of both new music and free improvisation. Their breadth of practical experience is essential to the way the group functions as it allows for meaningful collaboration to occur.

The general *modus operandi* is to keep extensive rehearsals to a minimum. The primary concern especially with my own music is to understand the structural arrangement of a piece. Once these components are understood securely by the ensemble, the rehearsal ends. Much of the inner detail is purposefully left to the performers to decide upon and discover in performance. I am always particularly keen not to overwork pieces in rehearsal as I like the ensemble to be fresh and not have an already formed vision of the piece to then be replicated.

Across this research journey of assimilation and growth a key factor has been the steady de-compartmentalisation of my vision and perspective regarding idiomatic practice and its use within my own creative endeavours. The problem often encountered with formal categorisation is the appearance of perceived borders that in many circumstances restricts the performer pro-activism desired to operate outside and across lines. And in attempting to find a synthesis of practices into a single system, as sometimes demonstrated in the first half of the portfolio, I felt these would water down the powerful elements I hoped to encourage and showcase.

Thus, as advocated by the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), the roles of the performer and composer in my works are united and become more symbiotic as a result. The aim is to ensure the performer has the freedom to create their own interpretation, to think about what is really happening, and for my works to ultimately access the true soul of the artist/performer/composer. (Zorn, 2000).

The culmination of this can be seen in both *Panels* and *Rituals* in which I was comfortable enough to use and vary different approaches as and when the situation required; for example, including moments of delineated instruction to focus a certain moment (*antiphon - Rituals* sub-piece) alongside the heavy use of instructive graphics and free improvisation. This is in essence to create a premise or environment where a myriad of practices can coexist, so that the inherent qualities of those can create and communicate mine and the players' visions in the music.



## **1. Introduction**

Whether listening to or partaking in, it is the intensity of the unknown in free improvisation that brings me the most fulfilment and joy. To be so absorbed that tradition and convention seem superfluous allows one to make new and previously unattempted personal discoveries in the act of creativity. It is this multifaceted and at times paradoxical state of heightened awareness which forms the driving force behind my music as a performer-composer.

Each piece in the portfolio addresses and explores ways I might resolve and balance my ever-shifting internal conflict between the impromptu and need for the composed. Especially with regards to how these two practices affect performer-driven improvisation.

Unless stated, 'improvisation' is the term I will use for improvised music. In its purist form it is often referred to as 'free improvisation' and is a music without definable idiom. However it is a wider family of musics that can take the shape of many other perceptible approaches, free of the traditions and conventions of time and rhythm, tonality and structure that constitute many notated forms.

Through personal experience many improvisers use notational hybrid techniques, and move between notation and free improvisation — now often referred to as creative music (Corbett, 2016). It is this thread I wish to explore in constructing my own creative music system that embodies and celebrates the openness of free improvisation.

The expected modus operandi of free improvisation, one which has rightly existed for decades is that 'all interpretations are valid'. The broad variety of approaches this brings together allows for a community from any background to be accepted and thrive under the broad church that is improvisation.

Many practitioners however recognise that some improvisations are better than others, often judged on the basis of how performer intuition and intelligence is exploited and balanced. This of course is a highly personal reflection entirely dependent on the performer and listener, in which their own taste is formed through many idiosyncratic factors and experiences. Approaches may even be entirely divergent as outlined by Keith Rowe who maintains he takes no heed of anyone else's musical contributions in performances, compared to John Tilbury who asserts that his musical action is informed by listening to everything (Prévost, 2004).

With many different and contrasting approaches encompassing improvisation, this perpetual agreement and disagreement can be problematic at times in performance, and to the academic, bound to a canon of analysis and evaluation focused on the interpretation of the fully notated. In improvisation this polarity of ideas and approaches is a welcomed inevitability, and I am at great pains to judge an improvisation as good or bad. For an improvisation is a reflection of the performer's self, and whilst this might not be to personal taste one should endeavour to observe—and appreciate the resulting creation. Instead I am listening to whether the authenticity and integrity of the self is being upheld, and not something that is artificial.

Thus my opinion of improvisation is decided upon by the presence and implementation of a volition that bestows and maintains the focus of the individual and the greater collective in performance. This need for personal focus is of vital importance and is reflected in the construction (composition) and realisation (performance) of my work. Therefore the central thread throughout my research has been how to balance structure and spontaneity, discipline and freedom through devised materials for performers.

This perspective on improvisation is influenced by Wadada Leo Smith's ideal of 'creative music' outlined in his landmark treatise *notes (8 pieces) source a new world music: creative music*. Setting his technical and poetic viewpoint he challenges the improviser to take greater pride and responsibility for the art form, dedicated to developing a heightened awareness, appreciation and understanding of improvisation (Smith, 1973). And this outlining of the aesthetic differences between the improviser and composer has impacted greatly on the way I approach and bind both roles in my music.

“we as creative musicians must realise that it is not just one of us, but rather that all are responsible for an improvisation.... there are many forms of improvisation, and of the various forms, if there are elements that are structured by one individual, then that person has scored an improvisation - but it goes much further than that - if whoever is performing in an improvisation form contributes a solo or any substantial amount of in the piece, then he or she too should be given credit for the solo”. (Ibid.)

This collaborative principle in which the composer is not the sole creative voice but an instigator chimes significantly with my interest in the creativity of others and their powers of invention. My aim is to create music that contains the emotive freedom and intensity of free

improvisation and showcase its energy, focus and agility. This will be balanced by a broad narrative to avoid unconnected episodic moments — a characteristic often (but not always) found in free improvisation — to capture the intensity and colours indicative of this music through planned structures. In essence a form of structured improvisation.

The presented works chart an evolution in constructing strategies that search for a synergy between the composer and the creative improviser. In the main my approach and analysis will be split into two broad considerations that interconnect to manifest improvisation. A third consideration will reflect on my endeavour to preserve and utilise the genuine nature of improvisation.

## **1.1 Figurative considerations drawn from the composed**

**1.1.1 Forms of notation:** Traditionally from a modernist perspective scores in notated music tend to be viewed as prescriptive. They delineate; instruct the performer what to do. The core source of intention is from the composer.

“We tend to forget that the performance of fully composed works is an “extreme occasion” to use Edward Said’s phrase, whereas improvisation is not only everyday and ubiquitous, but moreover an utterly central phenomenon in our lives, fundamental to who we are”. (Iyer, 2009)

The analysis of unconventional notation systems has allowed me to devise my own in which a new attitude is required with regards to the function, content and presentation of a score. I have drawn inspiration from Earle Brown’s notational experiments towards ‘infinite ambiguity’ (Brown, 2006) through his *Folio and Four Systems* series, often cited as the birth of the conceptual graphic score. As such I developed hybrid systems centred around spatial placement and aimed towards the freeing up of time as demonstrated in *The Wind Blows South, Beneath the Horizon* and *The Illuminated Man*.

With a change of perspective and focus upon informative graphic representations in the second half of my research, the presentation of Wadada Leo Smith’s ‘Ankhrasmation’ musical language system was particularly influential aesthetically. This is seen in *Herbig-Haro, Panels* and *Rituals* in which the function and implementation of my visual structures are developed in new ways.

My final key source of notational inspiration is drawn from composer-performer Barry Guy; having studied numerous works of his, from small to large ensemble. His use of notation and its function often varies depending on the size of ensemble and the performing personalities involved, and ranges from traditionally through-composed pieces, to hybrid notations, as well as graphics containing musical characteristics akin to language scores. It is the musical intention behind such notations that is of vital importance; whether these are kept separate, or used to complement each other in a single work. This influence can be seen across the portfolio, and as my own understanding evolves, a new and personal perspective is discovered with regards to their content and function away from Guy's.

**1.1.2 Compositional control:** The demand and expectation of a composed element upon an improviser has always been a key consideration for me as someone who operates in both composed and improvised fields.

“A composed sound commands a different social priority. The musician is being requested to do something by another. Such an instruction may be considered restrictive and (if only in an abstract sense?) as oppressive. A collective improvisation is a freely interactive discourse. A composed work is — by contrast — an authoritarian one”. (Prévost, 2004)

Whilst Prévost's dissatisfaction on this subject is an extreme view, it does serve as an important reminder to uphold the improvisers' creative rights in performance, and not to produce convoluted systems that might stem improvisation.

Smith reinforces this belief in the dichotomy of praxis between the composer and performer emphasising the responsibility the composer should take in creating space for personal interpretation, and the licence for independence when devising performing materials.

“his music is not, like composition, one that is conceived as one idea at one instant, only to be funnelled at a later time through a standard system of notation onto paper as merely a related idea, and finally interpreted and performed sometime in the future as an idea removed at least three times from the original”. (Smith, 1973)

I have therefore always attempted to maintain a clarity of identity and space for creative interpretation. Thus the sharing of responsibility with the performer requires a new trust and

belief. Over time a distillation towards simplicity in which the prescriptive becomes suggestive is sought, so that the creative musical contributions of the performer may germinate from my seeds of ideas.

In most likelihood a consequence of my formal classical performance training, I find myself still bound to a handful of elemental rudiments from western classical art music with regards to the construction and direction of a composition. Thus narrative is a leading consideration; investigating how I might retain it within a score, but for it to outwardly appear to manifest in performance without confining the nature of improvisation.

In the context of my work, structured elements are produced to narratively connect musical events as part of an ever-expanding journey or arc, as opposed to the episodic. The challenge being to produce elements that possess sufficient identity to direct narrative and yet to leave space for performer expansion, development and departure.

As my understating and methods develop, the use of scripted narrative evolves and loosens. The apex being *Panels* in which an archipelago of starting identities or pronouncements on which to elaborate and depart from are used in comparison to the close narrative of the first three pieces. Additional considerations are made for the large ensemble circumstance as per *Beneath the Horizon*, *The Shaman* and *Rituals* in which a greater balance between technical and abstract narrative is sought.

Ultimately I use narrative to nurture change with the ultimate objective being transformation. Across the portfolio the volition behind this evolves from formal change (processional), to critical change (transformation) as my need to further embody the impromptu ever increases. As such I am attempting to unchain compositional narrative (preconceived) towards a self-generating form that takes place in performance akin to free improvisation.

## 1.2 Abstract performance considerations

### 1.2.1 Creativity of others:

“improvisation, unlike most western musical production in the last 200 years, can involve the simultaneous participation of several cocreators. Composition rarely involves more than one musician; and the various performers who contribute to the final process act later, and thus usually do not interact directly with the composer, and virtually never change the written form of the work. This interaction is one of the key attractions of improvisation, and one of the features which make it at least as valuable as composition”. (Dean, 1992)

No one musician is the same, whether composer or performer; to be so would be boring. We treasure the idiosyncratic interpretations of others with Glenn Gould’s Goldberg Variations and Mitsuko Uchida's Mozart performances often cited from the classical sphere. This openness to personal interpretation offers us a window into the musical sensibility of the performer; it draws us in, asks questions, and ultimately connects us.

“when efforts to preserve the autonomy of the composer’s vision are unbounded, the performer is turned into a kind of automaton”. (Subotnik, 1991)

The celebration of the personal and unique is a principle of creative music that draws together improvisers with diverse perspectives, strength and frailties. And it is this freer dynamic that brings fresh perspectives from outside my own, however problematic, that inspires me to enrich my creative approach (Prévost, 1995).

Therefore an adaptable approach is required to focus and uphold my personal need for narrative and transformation without diluting the spiritedness of the free. As the portfolio evolves so do these interpretive and improvisational aspects — as demonstrated in my early close prescriptive approach, and the later introduction of suggestive components (informative graphics) through to the utilisation of a self-supporting premise with regards to the function of a score.

**1.2.2 Performer interpretation:** The belief that free improvisation should be non-idiomatic as often prescribed by Derek Bailey (Bailey, 1980) is perhaps a blunt and exaggerated opinion — most probably due to him and his peers looking to create their own creative space and sever the hierarchical relationships of free jazz at the time (Fell, 2017). From my experience as demonstrated by my inspiring peers and their bands, including Cath Roberts, Johnny Hunter, Anton Hunter and Tom Ward to name a few, it is both fiercely original and idiomatically inclusive.

What the improviser manifests in performance is their own; guided by their experience and personal sensibility. It is this empowering freedom of the improviser to enact their own interpretation of a technical, or abstract instruction I wish to utilise. Again the wisdom of Smith chimes as a challenge to aspire to.

“although an improviser may create and notate certain types of symbols and forms in which to retain creative music, this process is not composition, for any elements of improvisation that are notated are but mere forms to be exploited by creative improvisors”. (Smith, 1973)

To fully utilise the creative powers of others in my developing notation system, an open approach to reading and understanding evolves. A departure from western art convention, which traditionally denotes information of literal and precise meaning, towards an approach of connotative awareness and interpretation, is seen. This connotative approach allows for the retention of composer influence and clarity upon the performer(s) in which primal musical ideas or characteristics are suggested that require the creative and expressive powers of the performer to project said qualities along with their own sensibility.

**1.2.3 Power of limits:** As connotative strategies become ever more important in my practice a particularly useful tool to utilise was the setting of technical or abstract limits often to create concentrated sonic states ripe for improvisatory exploitation.

If used positively, limits or parameters in improvisation can help strengthen reactions, guide form, and challenge our interpretive power of creativity to transcend perceived borders (Nachmanovitch, 1990). It forces one to focus and re-evaluate in the moment – a moment in which one must become ever more meticulous and inventive to better understand a state you

may have left behind. Thus maintaining the capacity for the creative self and the mercurial nature of improvisation to flourish within limits is a key challenge.

How one sets and defines these parameters so that the performer can prosper when they are applied was of great importance — chiefly with regards to the attitude of the improviser towards the material, with the intent that they are not perceived as limits but as points of engagement. To overcome and embrace this potentially troublesome state of duality, a strategy of simplicity through rendering information and inspiration down to primal references to be unpacked and developed was most effective. This was a lesson well learnt through the practical experience of exercises and pieces in John Stevens' brilliant *Search & Reflect* workshop handbook.

### **1.3 Performance authenticity**

**1.3.1 Aesthetics:** By tradition aesthetics implies a fixed system of prescribed conventions and implications to follow, adhere to, and judge upon. The almost constant state of duality with regards to the technical and expressive in free improvisation, to my mind, calls into question the effectiveness of such systems. If attempted to be rationalised, improvisation will always encounter a conflict of opinion and perspective due to its dynamic and capricious nature. The opposing approaches of 'hearing versus listening' from Rowe and Tilbury cited earlier (Prévost, 2004) is a fitting example of the difficulties in finding a single aesthetic model that fits all. As advocated by many, perhaps the easiest way is to just get on with it and dispense with success and failure altogether (Nachmanovitch, 1990).

The struggle is often in the balancing of perception and discernment between the technical and the free, with one frequently taking precedence – such as a focus on the perfection of the composed that improvisation could never attain despite moments of rare beauty (Gioia, 1987). Even when advanced through the recognition and value of the humanistic performance (Aesthetics of imperfection), the habitual trope in the sanctity of the composer and work is maintained: Aesthetics of perfection (Hamilton, 2007).

Personally I find these two concepts problematic as they are bound to the composition as their operating paradigm for evaluation. The consequence of this separation and rendering upon the composition unfortunately returns us to the tropes of right and wrong, finished and unfinished — a misrepresentation of improvisation as a frivolous and unfocused activity.



The broader rationale behind George Lewis' 'Afrological' and 'Eurological' forms of improvisation places a greater focus upon personal experience often characterised by the determination of volition commonly based upon cultural and historical grounds; such as the African-American experience and the post-war European avant-garde. This advocates that Afrological improvisation should be an all-encompassing personal experience of interconnected memory, culture, and lineage, in comparison to the Eurological with its actions detached from personal narrative (Lewis, 1996).

In agreement with this broad outline, I too wish not to exclude or undermine the personal sensibility and experience of others in my music. This becomes a key aspect as my practice evolves — especially in the latter half of the portfolio with a refocus on unfettered improvisation so as not to bypass its true nature away from the hazards of the prescribed (Braxton, 1985). I hope to engage with present-day musicians from many different cultures and practices who have chosen to place improvisation at the centre of their musical discourse and transcend exclusivity (Lewis, 1996).

**1.3.2 The experience:** Life is a continuous improvisational interaction with the world (Iyer, 2009). As such improvisation should be approached with equal gravity and appreciation to bestow personal expression and collective discourse of the self in the now — a free flowing expression of the mind. In mature and skilled hands, a myriad of transient musical outpourings may arise and transform through a multitude of interactive dynamics that continuously shift and change. I would therefore advocate that the act of improvisation be recognised and appreciated as an experience. Not as an action or activity.

As far as I am concerned improvisation is the act of creative critical examination (creative problem solving), but is not reliant on definite, expository, or repeatable solutions. As participants or keen observers, we appreciate our own participation, however big or small, and assess how we might approach the question in this often paradoxical balancing act of variation and subversion.

“Improvisation as I see and practice it, as an inevitably existential experience rather than a reified production, seems to bypass aesthetics. [...] But if a definition comes to mind when I think about aesthetics — aesthetics is a recognition of places in experience that have been explored”. (Ninh, 2014)

This continual act or process of questioning, response and negotiation reliant on the self as a core resource of inspiration and reflection in my opinion makes improvisation experience-dependent. Therefore the responsibility required demands continuous focus, engagement and drive. If one truly gives oneself up to the conscious and unconscious thought process in the moment an experience of authenticity and truth is delivered. This allows anything and everything. Nothing is disallowed, and defined outcomes are not needed or expected.

It is my wish to grasp and channel this attitude of engagement and responsibility into my music. To produce scores or performing materials that enable and allow this process of experiential improvisation to manifest without quelling the motivating force and social discourse. Allowing this process of exchange and the resulting authenticity to occur unimpeded is of great importance as this is what I identify with and appreciate in improvisation.

**1.3.3 Reflection:** Having establishing improvisation as an experience of creative critical examination, an assessment with regards to this attainment will be made for each piece. I feel it is important to state that this process is one of reflection, not comprehensive analytical analysis due to the practice being based upon the authentic, but fallible and ever-changing human experience ill-suited for rational analysis.

“A painter hangs his canvas on the wall — a finished work. Anyone with eyes can see it. A score is only a blueprint, and cannot be said to be finished until it is played. It is at the mercy of performers and risks the distortion of their ‘interpretations’”. (Varèse & Alcopley, 1968)

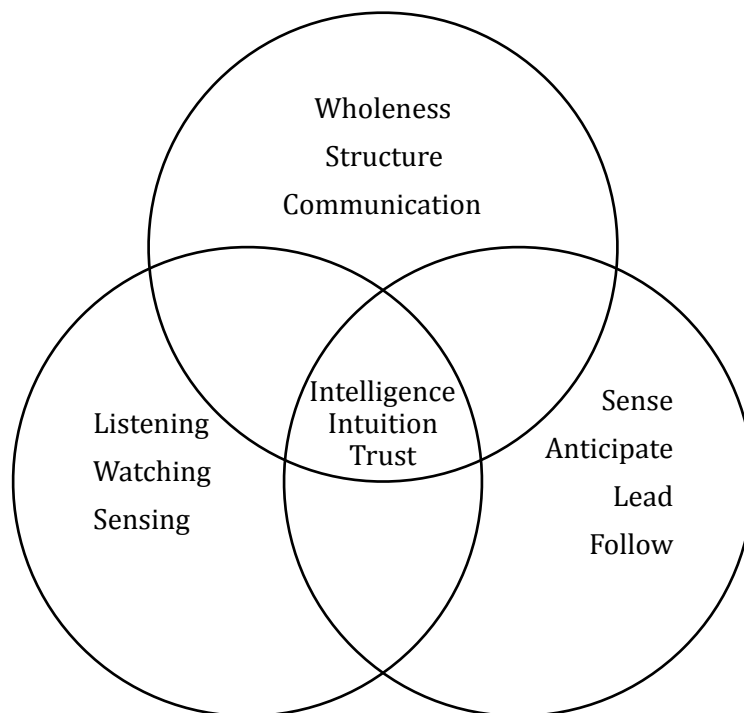
The salient point implied by Varèse is the significant contribution and responsibility the performer has in bringing any piece of music to life. Thus I must remember that trust in others is an essential virtue to help unleash creative potential within my developing approach, so that important personal aspects such as emotion, memory, and lineage may be accessed.

If it is to flourish, the improvisatory experience can be pared down to three fundamental actions: planning, execution and evaluation. The temporal nature of these continuously and simultaneously changing actions make close examination difficult. However it is this perpetual

state of divergence combined with the duality of personal creative sensibility which makes the improvisatory experience such a beautiful and engaging form of expression.

Therefore to exploit said fundamentals it is essential that improvisers are able to access and utilise their creative intelligence and intuition so that they are clear to engage with and negotiate the discourse of the all-encompassing experience. Access to these faculties enables the improviser to draw upon and apply their accumulated knowledge and skill of expression. This means the ability and space to embody and immerse oneself deeply into the process is crucial for the authenticity and integrity of its participants' creative voices to shine through.

The diagram below compiles the key faculties that in my view are critical to the prosperity of an authentic improvisation highlighting that the experience be one of inclusivity. This state of wholeness makes deeper with every tone and gesture the resonance of information and feeling (Nachmanovitch, 2019).



**Figure 1.1: combining elements for the improvisatory experience**

If and when this state is achieved, time is abundant. A multiplicity of tempos may coexist waiting to be exploited. Guided by intuition and intelligence the improviser is free to experiment along a multitude of creative paths in consensus and dispute with other participants — all meanwhile offering their own feelings and solutions to the posed musical question.

"I want to move people and remove them from chronological time... That's what I strive for — magic — it's not enough just to be good". (Tippett, 2016)

The reflection of my work will therefore consider the levels of attainment the performing materials have been able to achieve in enabling the improviser to immerse themselves into improvisatory experience in accordance with the original concept for each piece.

As the portfolio evolves so will the application of my figurative and abstract considerations charting a gradual and expanding transferal of creative input and responsibly from the composer to performer. The performing materials will evolve from precise denoting instruction to informative connotation as the importance of performer/improviser authenticity and integrity becomes ever more important to me. Therefore the quality of intention and the way it is imparted in my materials will serve as a good marker of assessment.

My task and responsibility is therefore to create an open and receptive space to allow this interconnected process of instinct and trust to occur so that everyone is invested, and ownership shared. Through the collaborative workings of Ensemble Entropy everything we create is loved before it even exists, not after it has been constructed (Chesterton, 1911). Thus from my seeds of ideas the music should grow and develop forged by its participants' creative intelligence and intuition — to transform and discover new ground.

## **2. Improvisational Influences**

The creative strategies I use are influenced by a number of varying approaches from a number of improvisers and composers. This chapter will briefly outline those basic considerations from the improvisational world that I draw from in constructing my own approach.

**2.1 Listening versus hearing:** I very much identify with the ‘listening’ improviser who is informed and influenced by everything and everyone around them (Prévost, 2004). From my own subjective perspective I find the approach of the ‘hearing’ improviser who takes no heed of anyone else in performance too impersonal and negates my need for collaboration.

From experience, the impact of this view was reinforced in 2017 whilst listening to a continuous forty-five minute set of free improvisation in which the trio’s operating paradigm was one of total independence.<sup>1</sup> This singular and expansive use of the ‘independent simultaneous action’ interaction dynamic conveyed an experience in which each musician did their own thing with the result being a sonic collage of separate activities (Corbett, 2016).

From my own perspective as a listener, I found the set difficult to engage with, due to the lack of communicative considerations. As a bystander looking on from afar I did not feel involved in any way. This experience reinforced my personal appreciation of and need for this social aspect of improvisational discourse. As my practice evolves, I find that encouraging and maintaining said aspect becomes ever more important.

**2.2 Instrumental role:** In creating hybrid compositional strategies, instrumental role is an important consideration – and wishing to move beyond the predetermined conventions of western classical music and traditional jazz forms I found great inspiration in the music of Albert Ayler.

His revolutionary idea was to make the emotive self the starting point of an improvisation, so as to elevate it above all other considerations, and empower the improviser to solely focus on the discourse of improvisation. This significant and notable change of perspective from jazz (and in part free jazz) forms an important thread in the Afrological tradition, and in the wider heritage of free improvisation, helping to shape the way it is practiced today.

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<sup>1</sup> *Into the Maelstrom: Talk and Performance* by David Toop, Yumi Hara and Guy Harries. University of East London Experimental and Improvised Music Practice as Research Series 24/02/17.

As such this allowed for an awakening and repurposing of instrumental role, away from the conventional and prescribed dispositions of the past to provoke a new consciousness of freedom in exploring new plains of rhythm, harmony and sonorism irrespective of instrument or medium. Ayler's seminal recording *Spiritual Unity* (1965) with Gary Peacock (bass) and Sunny Murray (drums) exemplifies this new found freedom;

“The absolute rhythmic freedom frequently leads to action on three independent rhythmic planes: Ayler improvises in long drawn-out sound-spans; Peacock hints at chains of impulses, irregular and yet swinging in a remote sense; Murray plays on cymbals with a very live resonance, creating colour rather than accentuation.... This is remarkable when one recalls that drummers of this time usually seemed to be under a non-stop compulsion to drum. By sitting out, Murray proves that the emancipation of jazz percussion is not necessarily achieved by more action, but can just as well be attained by less”. (Jost, 1974)

This reinvention and equality of instrumental role can be heard across many improvised musics nowadays and indeed has had a great impact on my music. The result is a sound world where the bass may soar melodically, or weave contrapuntally; where drums construct palpable and tactile textures that may move with or against the group, and where the traditional ‘melody’ instrument may play only in flourishes or deep abstract pedal points. What is important is the group dynamic.

“Most people would have thought this impossible but it actually happened. The most important thing is to stay in tune with each other but it takes spiritual people to do this.... We weren't playing, we were listening to each other”. (Ayler quoted in Wilmer, 2018)

The importance of musical equality and wholeness is the predominant message I draw from Ayler. This attribute can be found in copious amounts in two of my other key improvisational influences: Paul Dunmall (outpouring of expression) and especially John Butcher (exploration of sonority) in which the musicians are guided by their own sensibilities and idiosyncrasies, and not by instrumental role.

**2.3 Fellow improvisers:** With the social dynamic in improvisation fundamental to the music I enjoy and practice, the sharing of musical sentiment is a key factor of impact to consider. When it comes to shared sentimentality, possessing faculties of openness and versatility which support, nurture and enrich the collective experience is vital. Equally important with regards to this flexibility is the maintaining of individual will and integrity in the interest of the collective. As such a dynamic balance is vital — too much flexibility can destroy the music, but too little will destroy the improvisation (Butcher, 2011).

As an example, Henry Grimes' effect on a Sonny Rollins led group in my opinion is transformational in regards to the playfulness of feel and improvisations. Consisting of two recording sessions, *On the Outside* (1991) accentuates the striking change of character bassist Grimes makes in place of Bob Cranshaw in the second session. There is a freer collective spirit akin to Ayler, with each member feeding and somersaulting across each-other as they start to explore aspects of timbre and gesture beyond traditional instrumental role.

Thus the preservation of identity and character in conjunction with flexibility were notable considerations when forming Ensemble Entropy — the main performing vehicle for my research portfolio of works. As outlined earlier the group is founded upon a collaborative work ethic and delegation of creative responsibility to give the music the best opportunity to transform beyond the score. This strength from the improvisational sphere also enabled us to invite guest performers with different histories to work with the group to deepen our own perspective as individuals and as a collective (ibid).

As with many composers, having musical personalities already in mind helped me attune the material for optimal assimilation and realisation, continuing to develop core procedures as the group matured and built a shared musical understanding. The intention was not to write music in the style of their playing but to try and gain a real sense and insight into the players' artistic identities to create materials they would proactively engage with, and in which they would not feel too displaced from their own musical sensibility.

As such I hoped to tap into my fellow improvisers and their opinions as a key resource in my music so as to focus on the content of the score and the different perceptions of it, not simply on its execution (Gottschalk, 2016). Together I hoped these would transform my music in ways I could not foresee, as a retreating composer planting connotative seeds of ideas and intention.

**2.4 Conduction:** Today the world of improvising conductors has grown into an established medium of in the moment creativity led by key exponents such as Lawrence D. “Butch” Morris, Peter Wiegold and Walter Thompson.

Through stylised vocabularies of hand and body gestures found in ‘Conduction’ and ‘Soundpainting’ the conductor shapes and moulds the music — composing in real time (Thompson, 2012). As such the music is a reflection of the conductor’s sensibility, often looped and herded with their perspective and preferences. The conductor is the editor, and the ensemble is bound to their vision, knowledge and experience, more often through a retention of musical fundamentals and instrumental role found in orchestral music (Morris, 2017).

Many would argue the fielding of a conductor as a conduit through which to channel the music enables the less experienced to participate. I would agree with this sentiment, however from direct experience of conduction through Wiegold’s *notes inegales* and observations of Morris, I question how straightforward this method is with regards to performer creative risk taking, as well as how spontaneous the music via this editorial process actually is. As such I intended to create work where possible that did not rely on a conductor to hold the music together.

**2.5 Game:** For John Zorn, one of the leading architects of experimental improvisational approaches, his development of ‘game’ pieces was an important consideration when deciding upon my own path of development. As recognised by many, the inbuilt duality and challenges of composing for improvisers is in the balancing of composer control and engagement of the improviser.

The broad principle behind Zorn’s ‘game’ pieces was to create a world where anything could happen at any moment, and everybody had equal control. As such, scores do not refer to sound or time. In place of traditional content, a myriad of ‘ideas’ (instructions) concerned with different areas of improvisation were developed to be used and cued by performers (Zorn, 2015). Therefore the beauty of these pieces and in particular *Cobra* (1984) is in the interaction between performers that allows both anarchic (total freedom) and democratic ideals (freedom within constraints) to exist. However the inclusion of a conductor-like prompter to initiate radical change seems to contradict these ideals as a purposeful and direct source of energy and inspiration for the entire group (Brackett, 2010).



More generally, 'game' is an activity defined by a set of rules for its participants to adhere to (and occasionally break). Play is a free-spirited attitude of exploration (Nachmanovitch, 1990). In this regard Zorn is able to include both in varying degrees and perspectives. The 'game' is the form, shaped and controlled by instructions and the prompter with the content left to the musicians — 'play'. Thus the core focus is on the creation and breaking of relationships between musicians to harness the personal language of each improviser (McCutchan, 1999). Unlike traditional composers he is not concerned with narrative or linear time.

From a personal perspective I find the vast number of instructions contained in *Cobra* a little problematic as I would want to fully understand each one first to be comfortable and not feel inhibited. But perhaps this is the point — to make discoveries in the moment and to ensure the performer is challenged — just like the experience of free improvisation, but from a different social perspective. Ultimately this reminds me that when it comes to composing for improvisers there will always be a friction of duality with regards to control and freedom; that one should embrace it and find a personal balance between the two that fits one's own musical values. And in my case, I wish to find ways to impart broad narratives that are not too restrictive into my music.

### **3. Notational Influences**

Having outlined some of the broad considerations I draw upon within improvisation, developing a notational approach to complement and encourage these aspects was vital. As alluded to in the preface and introduction, maintaining compositional control was an overriding consideration at the start of my research, often reflected in the prescribed and fixed structures in my works. This chapter outlines these key considerations and influences.

In assessing the following approaches, Dean's 'gradient of precision' consideration of notation helped me to appraise their impact on improvisation, with regards to process and procedure, in a simple and intuitive way (Dean, 1992).

**3.1 Open Notation:** The radical change of perspective with regards to creative decision making by performers in the 1950s enabled new and innovative forms of notation to be developed by a number of likeminded composers including Earle Brown, Christian Wolff, John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Cornelius Cardew, amongst others.

These 'open' works gave enormous freedom for performer interpretation in comparison to the little offered in conventional scores, with many including elements of indeterminacy in various forms. These were often broadly categorised as a determinate performance comprised of the indeterminate with respect to composition – exemplified by Cage's *Music of Changes* (1951) – or an indeterminate performance of the determinate with respects to its composition, often seen in the work of Cardew and Brown (Cox & Warner, 2017). Within this broad collective of composers, no single style identifies them except their rejection of past traditions (Nicholls, 2011), as demonstrated in the myriad of approaches presented in Cage's anthology *Notations* (1969).

Yet despite this required input from the performer to make creative decisions akin to improvisation, the word or even the concept itself is rarely, if ever, mentioned, perhaps down to their wish to clearly separate themselves from tradition; much like Bailey's early description of non-idiomatic improvisation. Either that, or in order to negate the terrifying prospect that those unacquainted with and inexperienced in improvisation might find themselves in, being left free to play whatever comes to mind (Lewis, 1996).

Of course this is a personal choice as demonstrated by Cage's development of indeterminacy, to produce music not descriptive of the performer, but descriptive of what happens, and which is characterised by an absence of intention (Kostelanetz, 1988). This in comparison to the notational experiments of Brown's *FOLIO and 4 Systems* (1952/53) in which all of the characteristics of sound and their relationships to each other are subject to continual transformation and modification (Brown, 1952/53); which sounds much like improvisation. Perhaps a consequence of time and self-acceptance, practitioners of the Open work today warmly embrace the term as demonstrated in Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen's *From the Danish Seasons* (1999) performance note that reminds: "Don't forget also to make free improvisations without arranging anything in advance sometimes. Music is supposed to be an eminent team-working art - let's elaborate on that in the millennium to come!" (Bergstrøm-Nielsen, 1999).

**3.1.1 Performer perspective:** To better understand this broad approach, an examination of the three pieces that comprise Brown's *FOLIO* was undertaken to gain insight from a performer's perspective, through the dissection of a number of recorded performances.

In my opinion, performers of a strong disposition and determined approach often produced the most satisfying performances as they were able to immerse themselves into the piece and place their own artistic identity upon it. As a consequence of this total investment, they used every faculty at their disposal to breathe life into the piece and ultimately look beyond the score, as witnessed in Merzbow's performance of *November 1952*<sup>2</sup> and notably Joan La Barbara's *December 1952*<sup>3</sup>. In comparison David Arden's performance of *November 1952*<sup>4</sup> and the Ne(x)works performance of *December 1952*<sup>5</sup> appear bound by tradition producing rather literal and unvaried 'polite' interpretations that lack resonant depth, seemingly unable to tap into their own creative imagination.

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<sup>2</sup> *Folio and Four Systems* (2006) — Merzbow makes full use of the timbral opportunity available to him to create a unique electronic sound world inspired by the textual density of the notes in the score as a starting points creative departures.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* — La Barbara takes full advantage of the creative possibilities available filling each notational event with her own material of wide timbral variation, dynamic range and elastic tempi. She is even able to infer a loose sense of structure through self-referential moments of her opening material.

<sup>4</sup> EARLE BROWN: *MUSIC FOR PIANO(S) 1951 - 1995* (1996) — The performance of *November 1952* is striking due to it's close interpretation of the score. It is short and concise with a uniform approach towards pitch and tempo. Thus any sense of spontaneity is lost.

<sup>5</sup> *earle brown: tracer* (2007) — A somewhat literal and procedural ensemble performance with each scored graphic treated as a single note by each performer. The performance would have greatly benefited from a wider and extreme range of dynamics and articulations to intensify and portray a real sense of individuality and unpredictability.

The recordings and study of such pieces as Cage's *Aria* (1958) and Cardew's *Treatise* (1963-67) from my perspective reveal the importance in outlining the premise of the score and volition behind it so to engage the creative intelligence and intuition of the performer to reach beyond it. The aim is that the performer is always engaged, not peripheral, and will give their own response to the score in creating the music (Cardew, 1971), so that together we can hear the character or personality of the musicians in performance (Lateef, 1985).

**3.2 Hybrid notations:** Developments upon conventional notational forms, especially spatial placement, have provided particularly useful tools for many composers. The opening up of this parameter helps bypass the implications of strict rhythm and pulse, plus that of equal temperament and specific tonal keys (Dean, 1992).

Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima* (1960) and in particular Toru Takemitsu's *Rain Spell* (1983) present developed systems of hybrid notation containing succinct clarity in which purposeful and proportional placement require a greater level of performer engagement and investment. Yet despite this loosening of figurative representations the composer retains narrative control of the music.

The notational approach used in Christopher Fox's *Generic Composition #7* (2000) was particularly insightful in this regard. The premise and notational system provided by the composer is precise, with the overall structure (and rhythmic patterns) fixed through a rhythm key of erudite simplicity. In performance the control of these delineations is broadly alleviated from the composer and instead regulated by the performer.

3 different note-lengths, whose relative length may vary throughout the piece, are used:

- ↑ = a short note
- = a longer note
- = a long note

Notations enclosed by a bracket should be repeated between 2 and 4 times. The number of repeats should vary in successive measures.

Each of the work's 27 measures occupies approximately the same amount of time but the proportions of sound and silence within a measure are at the player's discretion. Notated material within each measure should, however, always be performed on a single breath.

Figure 3.1: Fox: *Generic Composition #7* performance note excerpt

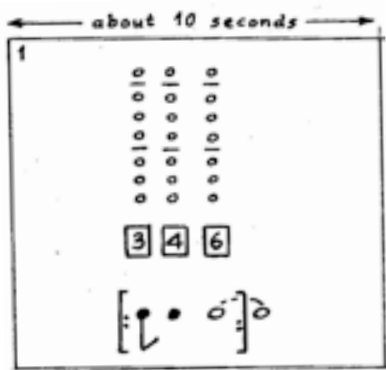


Figure 3.2: Fox: *Generic Composition #7* score excerpt (measure 1)

From a performer's perspective this premise of simplicity allows for quick and thorough assimilation. As such the intuition of the performer is able to shine through and it is this prevailing theme of shared responsibility and creative awareness that, from personal experience, makes the piece so effective in performance<sup>6</sup>. The hidden beauty of this approach is that despite these performer-driven aspects, the identity and compositional intention of the composer remains.

**3.3 Barry Guy:** From the perspective of the performer-composer, Barry Guy's considerable output in composing for improvisers makes him a significant figure to study. Through innovative scores and conducted direction he carefully and intrinsically balances control and freedom between the composer and improviser, taking it through the rigours of European music and the temperament of black American music; citing Charles Mingus' ability to shift time and space for his musicians as particularly inspirational (Corbett, 1994).

Much of this work has been developed through The London Jazz Composers Orchestra and Barry Guy New Orchestra to harness and guide the powerful creativity of the improviser into new contemporary fields (Guy quoted in Heining, 2016). It primarily uses strategies of through-composed points and structures of developed and stylised hybrid notations to inform and contrast sections of free improvisation. As such these developments, combined with a preference to work with improvisers not tied to 'old forms' such as jazz (ibid.) enabled Guy to negate issues not just of engagement and authenticity, but also and especially issues of continuity, moving away from the episodic elements that might occur in such an approach<sup>7</sup> (Fell, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Having performed the piece on numerous occasions I greatly appreciated the fluidity of time and pulse afforded to better reflect my feelings at that moment and reflect factors such as room acoustics.

<sup>7</sup> the insertion of blocks of freedom within the notated material or predetermined material.

Therefore the close analysis of various scores including *Oort-Entropy* (2003), *Mr Baggage Is Coming To Dinner!* (2014) and in particular *Double Trouble Two* (1995) was undertaken to gain detailed understanding into the workings of these type of scores. As reflected in the first half of the portfolio this insight was particularly influential on my own approach, specifically with regards to structure and narrative, and the handling of performer engagement and freedom, which I will outline later.

**Double Trouble Two (1995):** Having obtained the score from the composer, one can see that the level of precision in notation and control of the narrative is high, mostly seen through conventional compositional devices of crystalline identity. As outlined in appendix 1.2 the piece has a clear structure divided into five distinct sections in which a number of key devices are referenced and recapitulated across and within sections, to take the ensemble and listener along an intricate and intense journey.

The key devices deployed take the form of distinctive composed gestures of elemental nature. It is important that every idea is primal for maximum impact. The core material is based upon a short swirling tone row which immediately sets the energetic and manic tone of the piece (Figure 3.3). A reiterating chorale (or chorus) of developing paired chords helps anchor the ensemble together at key moments (Figures 3.4 and 3.5), and a powerful accelerating gesture of repetitions built upon the opening harmony serves as an important recurring device of cadential resting points or pauses (Figure 3.6). The composer's ingenious strategy is one of simplicity on a big scale to maintain clarity throughout his work, built upon the wisdom and shared trust between composer and ensemble.

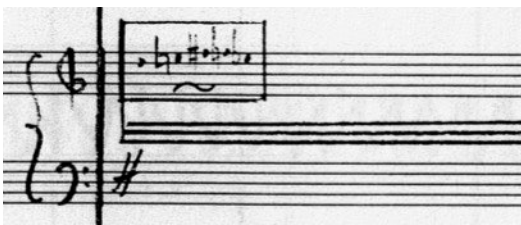


Figure 3.3: Guy: core material tone row (piano) b.1

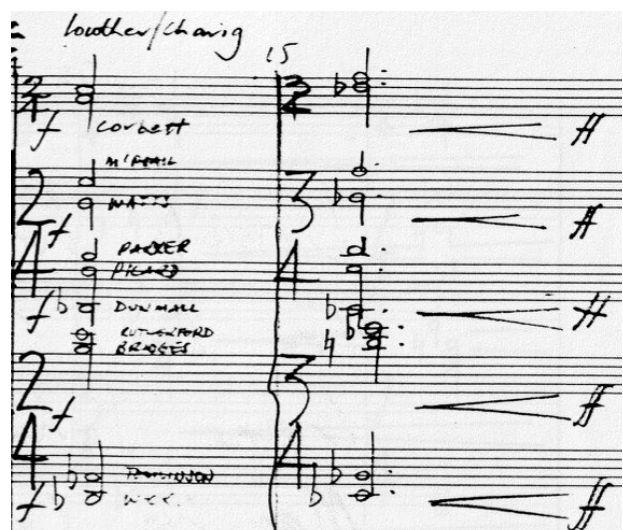


Figure 3.4: Guy: chorale (chorus) b.14-15



Figure 3.5: Guy: developed chorale (chorus) b.24-26

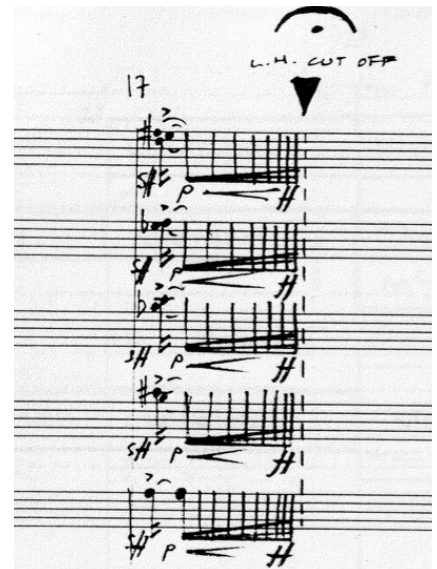


Figure 3.6: Guy: cadential device b.17

When it comes to implementation the written and improvisatory are consistently kept separate, often with segments or sections of improvisation (of no notation) bookended by the written (Figure 3.7). The use of hybrid notations helps the composer to maintain clarity for quick performer assimilation and interpretation as well as the opening up of parameters of time and fluidity in performance. Importantly the alleviation of full notation gives space to the performers to use their own initiative to collectively hold and build key moments via a couple of signals, compared to scores reliant on a traditional conductor (Corbett, 1994).

Figure 3.7: Guy: score excerpt b.110 - 114

Essentially the composer employs a traditional system of through-composed control based on developments and recapitulations of core material with planned and specified places for improvisation along a taut narrative. This separation allows him to place and interject crucial devices and points of crystalline identity — for example the *cante jondo* (in part II), which is used as an important plaintive refrain within the work.

Guy rarely — if at all — blurs the written with the improvised, sometimes opting to interpolate the latter on top of the former. Fundamentally the written is consistently and firmly in the foreground and this purposeful clarity helps inform the improvisation's contextual place. As such in performance one practice is dominant to ensure focus and direction.

A cunning tactic of the composer in the handling of improvisation is to often break the ensemble up into smaller groups (duets to quartets) to reduce the number of voices that might muddy the waters. Notably he is never intrusive, to allow these moments of great importance the space required for the improvisers to focus, develop and follow their unique and shared sensibilities in the moment — there are never strict instructions (Figure 3.7).

This approach of simplicity on a big scale is reliant on his unflinching belief in the creativity of others that understands their crucial role in transcending the score. In essence Guy is composing music to inspire the player to create something new and previously unheard. He never guesses or assumes, for that would construct a confining ceiling. Instead he is composing opportunities to strengthen and advance his musical designs. He trusts in his musicians. He accommodates and champions their unique skills. Everyone is involved and invested.

What I find fascinating about this approach is his ability to facilitate and bury traditional devices into the fabric of the work. This paradoxically results in music that intrinsically portrays the spirit and practices of free improvisation set within established and prescribed structures rather than merely trying to get classical music and jazz to meet (Corbett, 1994).

Like the best improvisers, who are able to access and channel their musical intelligence and intuition, his compositional practice is predominantly about discipline and controlled flexibility. Taut narrative, strong identity and the power of limits help contextualise and provoke authentic improvisational reactions. Unlike conventional western classical music that



is captured and fixed into a blueprint, this music only really exists when it is being performed. The composer and the players need each other. It is a collective experience.

**3.4 Reflection:** My observations from the studied scores demonstrated that in essence traditional compositional strategies usually prevailed. The important development which made them so effective was that they were framed and designed for the performer and their perspective. The devices are positive, not antagonistic, challenging the performer to be assertive with their creative offerings guided through the filter (or vision) of the composer. Through these tactics each composer is able to imprint their identity whilst leaving space for the creative performer or improviser.

As such these lessons will be reflected on and developed upon in the first half of the portfolio, broadly consisting of composed points of hybridity to influence and create points for improvisation. At this early phase of my practice and creative perspective, my need to retain narrative of formal change will take precedence, which I will begin to question as the portfolio develops.

## 4. The Wind Blows South

### 4.1 Beginnings

Inspired by the poem of the same name (see appendix 2), Jo Surzyn's portrayal of the personal and immediate combined with greater natural forces motivated me to find a subtle and yet powerful thread of material for the work.

Creating illustrative representations of characteristics I wish to establish and explore is a method I often use to find the core material of a piece. This process helps me to pare ideas down to elemental notions ripe for exploration at this vital starting point away from the overly delineated that might impede future development. As such I identified three core characteristics I hoped to utilise and develop: atmospheric sonic states, spirited movement and cadential points (Figure 4.1).

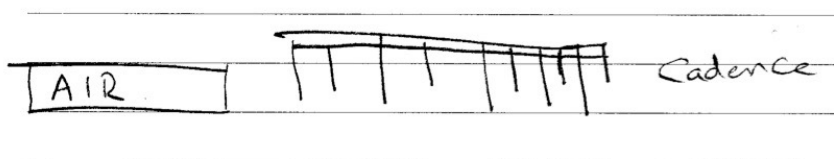


Figure 4.1: *The Wind Blows South* core material sketch

### 4.2 Macro form

The piece can be divided into three sections (Figure 4.2) informed by the illustration of the core characteristics I hoped to invoke. An arch structure was implemented to establish and develop thematic material as threads of narrative to be channelled towards points for free improvisation. This combined with the various hybrid notations would hopefully inform or provoke these points and enable the performer to make their own imprint on the music.

| Section        | 1 atmospheric sonic states  | 2 spirited movement  | 3 cadential points  |
|----------------|---|--|---|
| Rehearsal mark | Start   | A - C  | D - End   |
| Features       | <p>A delicate atmospheric sonic state is conjured by the violin and later supplemented and supported through subtle harmonic pedal notes by members of the ensemble.</p> <p>The core motif is presented by the flute, briefly passed to the tenor saxophone and then developed further by the violin.</p> <p>The section is mediative almost plaintive with simple fluctuating harmony void of cadential resolutions.</p> | <p>(A) Sudden shift from the delicate to the spirited and powerful through a rigorous pulsating drive from the double bass. The trumpet is introduced with a solo line developed and embellished from the core motif with supporting gestures from the ensemble.</p> <p>(DUO) A free improvisation duo (trumpet and double bass) follows freeing itself from the repetitive double bass driving pulse. The duo is supported by selected and cued backings.</p> <p>(B) Tranquil refrain akin to the opening in atmosphere to contrast and reset builds towards next mark.</p> <p>(C) Short solos taken in turns guided by box events containing graphic representations vs tutti stabs. Extended violin solo shifts into duo with flute ensues free of graphic suggestions.</p> | <p>(D) New mediative refrain with an almost leitmotif developed from core motif. A free solo from the double bass follows that shifts into a duo with tenor saxophone.</p> <p>This sequence of collective mediative refrain and improvised duo continues.</p> <p>With each repetition the refrain is simplified towards major dyads (2nd, 3rd, 7th) in anticipation of the next mark.</p> <p>(E) Cadential points - core motif is recapitulated in different forms across the ensemble with accompanying shifting harmonies from derived from the mediative refrain culminating in a repeating and dissipating version of a D major 9 chord to end.</p> |

Figure 4.2: Macro form

At the heart of the piece lies a core thematic motif which develops through evolving reiterations that hopefully encapsulate the broad sentiments of the poem. The motif is simple and intervallic in nature through the repetition of a diminished fifth (B to F), followed by an adjusting third (diminished and minor) from a D# (Figure 4.3). As such a tonal centre is partially implied but is never fully revealed or resolved.

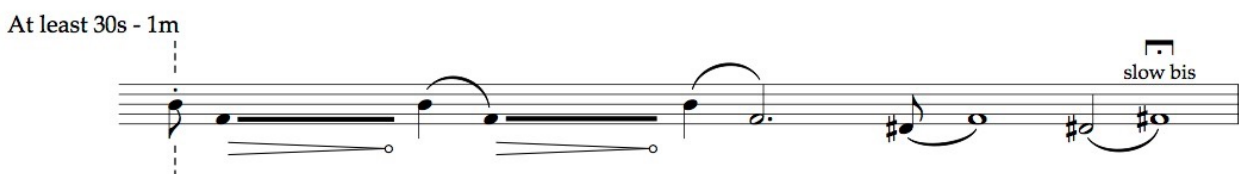


Figure 4.3: core motif (flute)

The cells of motivic gesture found in the solo saxophone music of John Butcher were particularly influential in the construction of this motif. As observed in *Fixations (14): solo saxophone improvisations 1997 - 2000* Butcher is fastidious in his exploration of gesture through slowly evolving reiteration. With each reiteration of a motif or gesture, small, almost microscopic aspects of rhythm and impetus, sonority and dynamics, or the articulation of attack and decay are inspected, understood and developed. Through this intricate and delicate scrutiny we delve deep into the fabric of the music gaining insight into its character and nature, learning how impactful the smallest of changes can be. In essence he deeply contemplates the effect of every sound at all times in his music (Butcher, 2011).

As such with regards to my core motif there are never any exact repeats. Instead there are subtle changes of rhythm (short note vs long) supplemented by spatial placement to ensure an elasticity of time as it subtly reshapes and evolves in a lyrical fashion. The resulting shape from these harmonic choices of a falling interval and slight rise forms the identity of this thematic material and is used as a referential point of focus across the piece, and in a developed form as a final recapitulation (Figure 4.4) (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.4: core motif shape reiteration (tenor saxophone) section D



Figure 4.5: core motif recapitulation (tenor saxophone) final page

### 4.3 Forms of notation and compositional control

Following in Guy's LJCO approach, a separation of practices was implemented predominantly using hybrid notations of strong identity to deliver and retain narrative. For example a interpolated quintuplet gesture in the flute, violin and double bass is used as a device to push the piece forward and energise the free improvising saxophone and trumpet duo (Figure 4.6).



Figure 4.6: energising gesture (flute) page 8

The use of box events was a particularly useful tool to introduce elements of controlled ambiguity. The clear outline inherent in these representations allowed for succinct placement and defined duration within the score enabling for the clear mapping of material and key events along my planned narrative. For the most part I chose to use clear instructional text of connotative qualities to aid and stimulate their assimilation and interpretation (Figure 4.7).

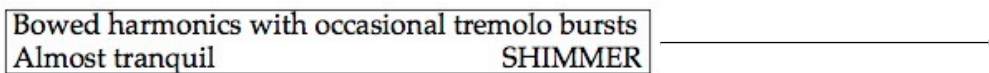


Figure 4.7: opening box (violin)

I also found these box events very useful in applying simple harmonic and rhythmic cells to guide the narrative and introduce new sonic and rhythmic textures as demonstrated in section A that require a new rhythmic urgency indicated through a selection of motivic backings to help invigorate the trumpet and supplement the driving double bass (Figure 4.8). This flexibility of content contained within, and their implementation, was especially useful throughout. Having observed the notational devices used by others (chapter 3), I was mindful to keep this material simple and concise for the purposes of clarity — strong identifying gestures that could be understood quickly and expanded.

Figure 4.8: motivic gestures (section A)

At section C an element of graphic notation was introduced within a couple of box events. These representations were kept simple to hopefully encourage moderate and playful degrees of ambiguity and maintain a forward-looking trajectory (Figure 4.9 and 4.10) Through these differing approaches I hoped to encourage greater degrees of performer creativity and an elasticity of time and feel across the whole piece. Nevertheless, the gradient of precision of my notation was generally high to ensure a general retainment of composer intention. As such the written was of primary importance in constructing and retaining identity and narrative, being kept firmly in the foreground from which the points for improvisation would hopefully flourish.



Figure 4.9: graphic representations (section C)

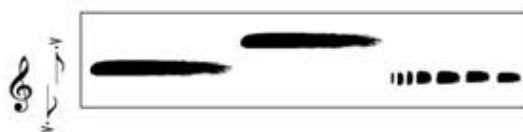



Figure 4.10: graphic representations (section C)

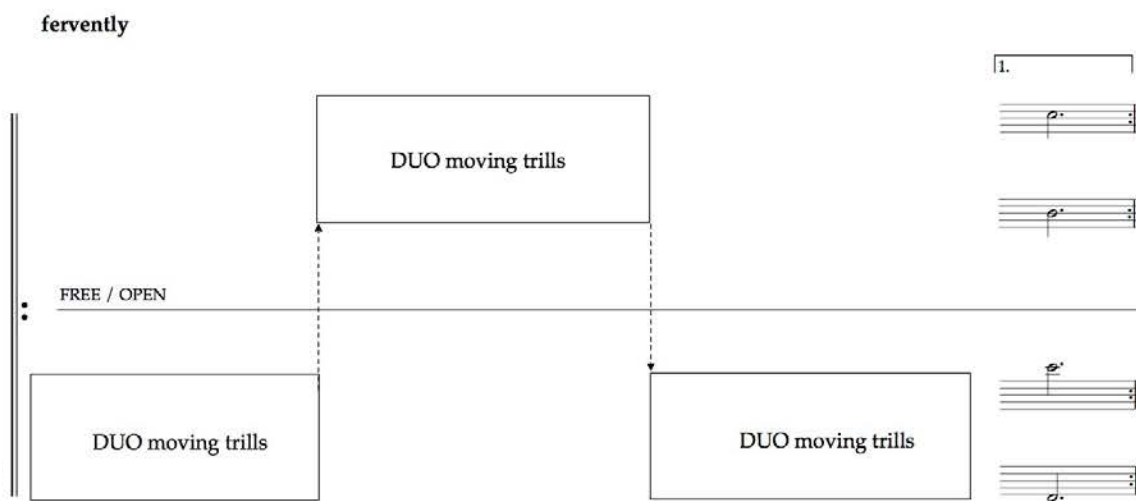
#### 4.4 The role of improvisation

Having previously attempted to blend the improvisatory with the written unsuccessfully which often stemmed the engagement and freedom to the improviser I decided to implement improvisation as free-standing events. By placing these points between the written figures, I hoped to inform and contextualise them without directly influencing them through absolute instruction. At this early point of my research, I felt this general separation was required to help me understand the impact of improvisation in my music so to develop new approaches and procedures for future pieces.

As such this separation would allow me, I hoped, to respect improvisation (and the improviser) and not treat it as a secondary element; preserving its inherent nature, and hopefully not impeding it through overarching composer intent. In the main I decided to not place musical stipulation on these important points (Figure 4.11), but did occasionally provide simple points of reference that could be easily eclipsed (Figure 4.12).

  
**DUO**  
**Trumpet / Double bass**  
**(open / free)**

**Figure 4.11: free improvisation (in-between section A and B)**



**Figure 4.12: free improvisation events (page 9)**

On top of this general separation of practices I also decided to try and utilise the two together at certain points to ascertain methods and procedures that could be later developed. This was actioned through the interpolation of practices, not through blending that might dilute their application in performance, ensuring clarity of role with one firmly in the foreground for the other to coalesce around.

This was first implemented in the free improvisation duo section in-between section A and B with the improvisation placed in the foreground at its start (Figure 4.11) with cued gestures of distinct identity to support it, and mark its ending (Figure 4.13). I also used this technique of interpolation in the second half of section C through simple motivic gestures to supplement the improvisatory and help maintain a forward trajectory in the music (Figure 4.14).

Backings for Duo

1

2  
1st as written  
2nd free note choice

3  
Open repeat (ideally more than 3)  
1st three times as written... then free note choice

4  
x3

5  
coda

Figure 4.13: interpolated backing gestures (in-between section A and B)

8 serene

Fl. med length notes decorate with a grace note flick

Ten. Sax. still

Tpt. really squeeze  
long notes shifting in and out of perception  
*pp*

Vln.

Db. *p* continue

shift of energy (impulsive)

expand / develop

DUO

expand / develop

expand / develop

Fl. occasionally add... doesn't have to be in line with vln.  
previous material / texture

DUO + Bass

Vln. occasionally add... doesn't have to be in line with fl.  
previous material / texture

Join duo

Figure 4.14: interpolated motivic gestures (section A)



## 4.5 Performance and reflections

As the first piece for Ensemble Entropy (for our debut concert) the rehearsal process was fairly detailed to enable us to get to grips with my system of scoring, and to start forging our musical relationships as a newly formed group. As such we ran through each section just once, followed by a short reflection centred around the reading of the score and the creative options available. The provided recording is from our debut performance in which the piece closed the concert.

In performance the piece went as expected, with the ensemble able to follow the mapped out narrative and place varying degrees of personality upon the notations. For example section E to the end was played with more dynamic force in contrast to the rehearsal which was subtle and quiet — a reflection of the moment encouraged through a general and purposeful lack of dynamic markings.

From my initial perspective the improvisatory points generally achieved my aspiration for personal creativity. However I felt at times their execution was lacking in the expansive qualities required to elevate these points above secondary status. In my view this was predominantly down to composed material that was overly delineated and controlling that perhaps suffocated the improvisatory and personal interpretation of notations. I also felt some of the more ambiguous notations lacked the descriptive intention required for the performers to connect with, resulting in the weakening of volition and direction.

For example I could have offered more descriptive intention or character for the players in the second part of section B to add motivation towards the section's ending crescendo instead of the technical text provided (Figure 4.15). Likewise I felt the lack of descriptive intention at some of the improvisatory points and accompanying material affected commitment, and inhibited some of the inherent social qualities of improvisation such as interplay (Figure 4.16).

Ultimately this inexactness quelled the expressive potential for performers to interpret and react to, resulting in a lack of impact, intensity and interplay. As such this absence of emotional intention meant these points were sometimes caught between practices weakened by this uncertainty. Therefore providing stronger points of determined identity to better provoke performer reactions and effectively utilise devices such as the power of limits would be of great benefit for future pieces.

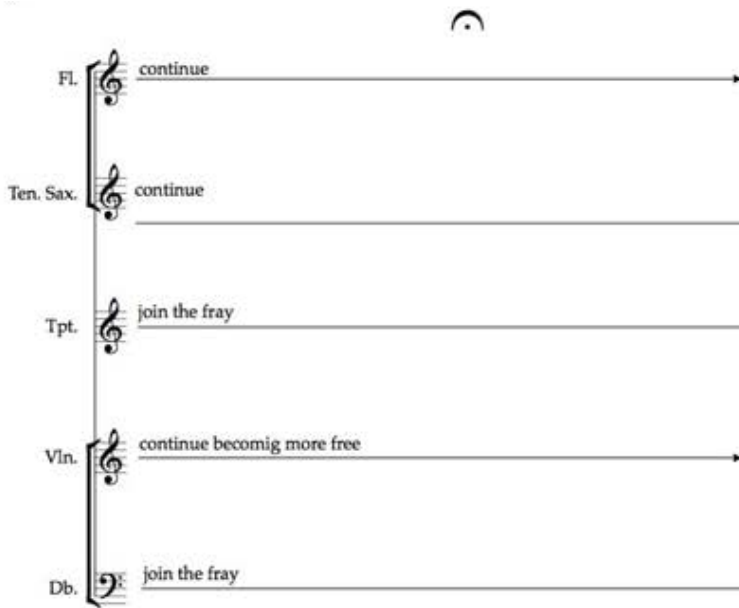


Figure 4.15: lack of descriptive intention (page 6)

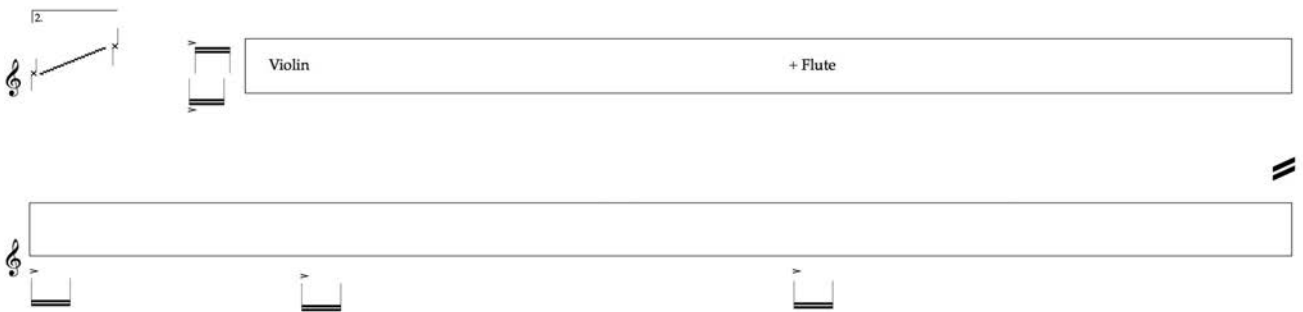


Figure 4.16: lack of descriptive intention (page 7)

In general I felt the various hybrid notations applied were fairly effective towards freer performer interpretation. However from a technical standpoint my system of organisation in section C, consisting of graphic notations in box events for solos, and ensemble stabs outside, was not clear for fluent execution, thus incurring slight and unnecessary hesitations in performance (Figure 4.17). In hindsight this introduction of a method removed from the general system was an unnecessary complication for the performers to contend with.

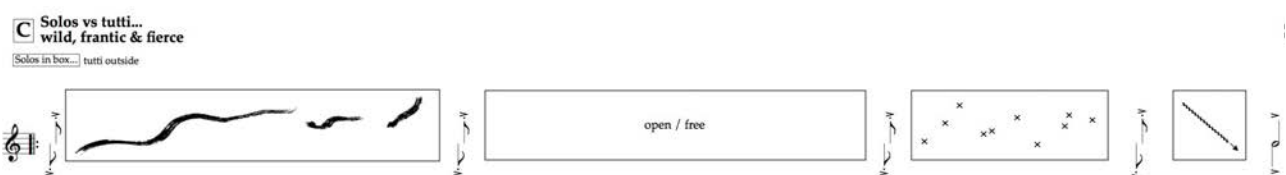


Figure 4.17: reading complications

Whilst partly successful in my aspiration to effectively utilise improvisation authentically in performance, I felt at times personal creativity was at times impeded. As such I was not able to consistently embody the spirit of improvisation across the piece as I would have liked, due to the weighting between the written and improvised points, that did not offer the required space for creative departures. Unintentionally I had marginalised these points through compositional devices that were too figurative and controlling.

As such I needed to develop procedures to better encourage and utilise the creative faculties of the improviser to provoke more authentic responses and interplay, and be prepared to relinquish more control as a composer. I needed to encourage further departures from my ideas, in order to better encapsulate the dynamic relationships intended in works centred around the impromptu.

## **5. Beneath the Horizon**

### **5.1 Beginnings**

My goal was to develop a more integrated system of composition and performance away from the previous approach of separation and interpolation. I hoped to raise a greater consistency of focus and intensity in performance, and heighten the opportunity for creative interplay.

The opportunity to compose for Leeds College of Music's New Music Ensemble – consisting of fourteen players – meant new practical implications of writing for large ensemble would have to be carefully considered and balanced with regards to the impromptu. The leading obstacle to address was how one maintains the space and clarity for meaningful interaction whilst maintaining a forward trajectory to the music that is not incoherent due to the number of creative voices involved.

Misha (Mengelberg) decided when ten people are talking to each-other you hear nothing. You say, shut your mouth! So there came compositions and that's where we are now with this band (Instant Composers' Pool). (Bennink, 2018)

With the aim to produce scores that demand performer development, the handling of narrative was of vital importance. As such my planned tactic was to maintain and manage it through scripted paths to ensure focus and direction in the wider story telling through processional formal change. I therefore decided to base the piece on simple characteristics for the players to channel. Another important aspect to consider was that I was writing for musicians I did not know — who might come from differing practices and experience from my own.

The following outlines the core characteristics I hoped to develop (Figure 5.1).

- Non metric pedals
- An undercurrent of energy
- A state that is constantly in flux
- Melodic line to indicate open harmonic states for players / soloists to depart

**Figure 5.1: *Beneath the Horizon* core characteristics**

## 5.2 Structure and Form

I decided to use an arch structure to clearly outline the narrative control required for the large ensemble situation. Within this broad architecture the piece is divided into eight structural blocks that carefully handle and develop the thematic material through formal change of controlled repetitions with inner content that is pliable for performer interpretation.

| Rehearsal mark / blocks | Opening  | 1 - 2  | 3 - 4  | 5 - 7  |
|-------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Features</b>         | <p>Opening: <i>mysterious and mystical</i></p> <p>The two core characteristics of the piece are introduced: A none-metric pedal (double bass) and a quiet undercurrent of energy (drum kit) together forming a delicate state of fluctuation.</p> <p>The delicate is countered and contrasted by an insistent, active and spirited apex tutti event in which a graphic is interpreted.</p> | <p>Block 1: <i>An intense energetic wave bubbles beneath...</i></p> <p>A quiet intensity is re-established through delicate and soft instrumental sonic techniques. Small and succinct gestures interject to focus and direct the piece forward.</p> <p>Block 2: A crescendo event featuring the drum kit ( <i>brisk frenetic statement</i> ) to serve as an contrasting apex point of relief.</p> | <p>Block 3: A return to a subtle texture developed from block 1 of expanded sonority and quiet intensity with added melodic line of direction.</p> <p>Block 4: Contrasting tension through single reed multiphonic dissonances, heightened string rhythmic movement and quiet yet punchy brass statements.</p> | <p>Block 5: Expansion and development of block 3 with added performer driven interpretation of material.</p> <p>Block 6: Small development of pedal into a rhythmic gesture to drive the trajectory towards the an apex in the next box.</p> <p>Block 7: <i>Open repeat building a pulsating abstract texture in constant flux</i> - an apex event akin to the opening tutti event in energy and drive.</p> <p>Dissipation and controlled crescendo towards a tutti stab to end.</p> |

**Figure 5.2: Macro form**

A simple non-metric pedal forms the core device of the piece which develops and grows in force and importance, predominantly as an anchor of composure for others to ricochet off. This contrast between the double bass and drum kit of measured control versus an undercurrent of frenetic activity helps form the technical approach of application between practices (Figure 5.3). And it is this idea of subtle conflict that is at the heart of the piece's identity.

Not in metric time so vary the length of the repeat space  
**x3 - Let the note resonate...**

Double Bass

pizz.  
*p*

Percussion 1

Open / Free

An undercurrent of frenetic energy bubbling beneath the ensemble...  
 with zeal rasp, glance, skim and brush.

*pp*

Play what you see!  
 free time (at least 10s)

a little louder but controlled (*mp*)

Figure 5.3: opening material

The contrasting apex tutti event at the end of the opening also influences the general approach of inner form — measured followed by points of volatility. When extrapolated out, this pattern or relationship can be seen in the wider form of the piece through the pairing (and grouping) of blocks as outlined in Figure 5.2 . With regards to the overall structure of the piece this event of unbridled energy at the end of the opening (graphic notation) is the piece’s point of apogee with regards to spontaneity. What follows is a gradual and controlled crescendo that attempts to recapture this point of vitality.

### 5.3 Forms of notation and compositional control

For the large ensemble situation I decided to concentrate the core notation around developed hybrid forms of clear figurative qualities. This tactic, whilst diminishing some of the inherent qualities of improvisation (e.g. spontaneity) was chosen to manage the handling of narrative (of formal change), aid performer interpretation, and to maintain focus and intensity in performance — aspects from in *The Wind Blows South* that if not addressed could further obfuscate the music in this circumstance. As such I also decided to minimise the opportunity for free and unchecked improvisation to carefully placed junctures with descriptive intention infused with clear character to interpret.

Whilst the choice of figurative hybrid notations could be seen as restraining in comparison to the freedom of improvisation, their ability to impart considerable degrees of identity and volition were key facets to ensure a forward moving trajectory to each block and the piece as a whole. The simplicity of character and identity of this inner content in which certain parameters were opened up such as pitch choice of a held note (Figure 5.4), or the creative interpretation of a gesture (Figure 5.5) would hopefully ensure quick and efficient assimilation and interpretation.

An intense energetic wave bubbles beneath...  
**x3 - don't rush the held note & the space afterwards**  
 air sound only  
 Free pitch choice each time vary length (lead tbn. off)  
 Perc.2 statement length will vary

Tpt. *mp softly vary dynamic*

Tbn. Free pitch choice each time off with tpt.  
 Perc.2 statement length will vary

Figure 5.4: simple hybrid notations (brass - block 1)

tongued air tone  
 play occasionally / fragmented  
 vary the air tone each time  
*mp varying dynamic*

Figure 5.5: simple hybrid notations (baritone saxophone / bass clarinet - block 3)

The simple and direct formations (and character) of the general notation and descriptive language used were influenced by the music of Heiner Goebbels. In works such as *Surrogate Cities* (1993-1994), *Black on White* (1996) and *Walden* (1998) he is able to gather together and retain the authenticity of an eclectic array of idiom including song, rock, jazz and contemporary classical. This is achieved through a clarity and simplicity of the composed and written instruction that in my opinion leaves the performer time and space to find a personal and authentic feel to the music. By way of example in *The Concert* (from *Black on White*) the Zither part which anchors much of the rhythmic drive for the piece, and is highly percussive and pulsating in nature akin to funk music is provided with a notated two bar beat pattern with instruction: 'occasionally, not continuously ad libitum' (Goebbels, 1996). This opportunity of liberty in my opinion allows the space for the beat pattern to settle, find itself and its groove. This is highlighted to even greater effect in *Brass in 5/4* of the same work through just a written instruction in the drum part: 'Drumset supports the 5/4 pulse in an improvisational manner and accents the phrases of the brass players' (ibid). Essentially 'find a groove' is the message.

To further thwart the seemingly firm nature of this notational approach, greater degrees of interpretive liberty were granted via unfurling repetitions (not exact repeats) within some blocks. In these instances the first playing of a block sets out its character with the subsequent repetition offering and encouraging opportunity to further loosen and advance these aspects.

For example in block 5 the oboe is encouraged to replace a written pause (first playing) with a small improvisation, and the orchestral bass drum invited to interact with the piano on the repetition. Through this process I hoped the musicians would look deeper into the character of the music and examine their role within it to enhance and expand it beyond the inscribed.

Having enjoyed the flexibility afforded in the box events of the first piece I decided to place greater identity on these devices to avoid moments of indecisiveness that were at times exhibited. This was achieved by including both descriptive and technical detail away from nondescript ambiguity essentially remodelling them as notations that required creative engagement and interpretation (Figure 5.6) away from the previous separation of approaches.

The image shows a musical score for Electric Guitar (E. Gtr.) and Piano (Pno.). The E. Gtr. part has a notation box that reads: "Tapping & scratching the strings ... a crackling and sputtering texture" and "a quiet varying dynamic (background)". The Pno. part has a larger notation box that reads: "INSIDE PIANO! with fingers (no nails) rub across / between strings creating an almost tremolo... change speed and pitch trying to always keep your fingers on the strings." and "Sustain pedal down (open) throughout." The notation includes staves for both instruments and an arrow pointing to the right.

Figure 5.6: developed box notations

Lastly I attempted to develop the impact of graphic notations beyond their previous tentative use. These representations had been too simplistic to encourage the spirited response I was hoping for, impacting upon their interpretation in performance. To this end I decided to employ imagery of greater character and identity to hopefully provoke more powerful and personal responses. Thus following in the development of box events, descriptive and technical direction was often included to help contextualise the imagery as to how it might be translated into sound (Figure 5.7).

The image shows graphic notations for Piano (Pno.). On the left, there is a musical staff with the text: "Strike strings with open hand (palm) vary placement (pitch area)" and "sustain pedal down (open) throughout". In the center, there is a black ink blot with the text: "inside the piano using your hands & fingers (any part of instrument... strings/frame etc)". On the right, there is a cluster of small circles with the text: "inside the piano using your hands & fingers (any part of instrument... strings/frame etc)".

Figure 5.7: graphic notations (block 5)



## 5.4 The role of improvisation

To maintain a taut narrative and focus for the large ensemble circumstance I decided to tighten the parameters for free improvisation. As such the points for free improvisation used in *The Wind Blows South* were replaced with a more unified compositional system that required creative interpretation to channel and capture the vitality of improvisation.

Not wishing to diminish the importance of improvisation, the two points of apex in the piece centre around creative spontaneous expression. The first is realised through the interpretation of a graphic by the entire ensemble to round off the opening. This graphic contains both abstract and illustrative qualities to ensure its impact when interpreted and does not include descriptive instruction or direction from the composer. Thus its interpretation is left in the hands of each musician (Figure 5.8).

The second point of apex is an attempt to emulate the first in an extended form through an open repeated cell at the start of block 7. Various box notations of open but descriptive qualities and direction are utilised to encourage the musicians' outpourings to ensure a forward moving trajectory. Through this method of flexible and pliable parameters I hoped to encourage creative personal interpretation, plus interplay between musicians to capture and match the raw intensity of improvisation (Figure 5.9).

Therefore instead of having a direct role in the piece, I was using improvisation as a primary source of inspiration to emulate. As such I hoped to elevate and diversify the prescribed and delineated beyond the written page to the experience and creative intuition of the performers.

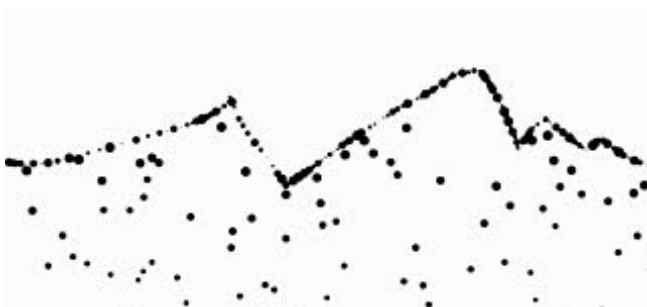


Figure 5.8: improvisatory graphic point (page 2)

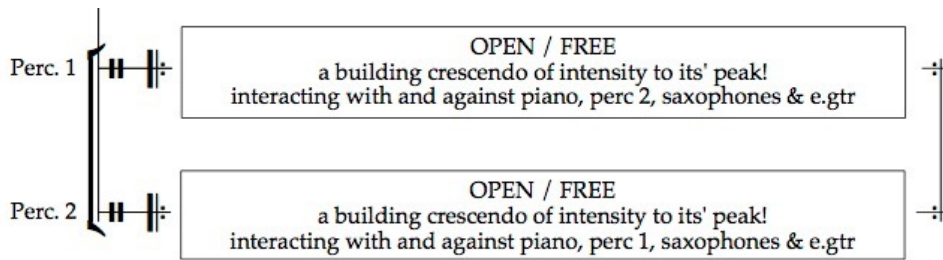


Figure 5.9: second apex point notation example (block 7)

## 5.5 Performance and reflections

The comparably formal nature of the work combined with the expert and generous experience of the ensemble's Musical Director and Conductor Damien Heron meant the piece could be understood and rehearsed with relative ease. Being able to attend the final rehearsal my main task was to help the students understand that they could generally take more time with the interpretation of their parts and the piece overall outside of metronomic time; that the time and space afforded in the piece was key in the building of tension, and the focus required in these quiet and subtle moments was essential to unveil the piece's character and temperament in performance.

As a piece designed to emulate the expressive qualities of improvisation, I felt it was successful in this regard and in the unshackling of time and feel in performance. Through feedback from members of the ensemble I was able to gain further insight from their perspective (see appendix 3).

The opening up of creative input was widely appreciated with the graphic notations most popular for their apparent freedom within clear structures. As such having strong points of reference were also well received in enabling those less comfortable with the impromptu to develop and expand their input which was particularly pleasing. With regards to the overall notational approach many felt one of traditional notation would have been constraining and creatively limiting.

The only technical point of concern was with regards to keeping one's place within the repetitions. Perhaps an inevitable concern due to the pliable nature of each part and gesture, but this was mitigated through the use of a conductor, and the clear points of reference (cues) included in each part.

Intriguingly many felt the piece was successful in projecting a sense of spontaneity and unpredictability despite the clear structures and narrative constructed, noting the slight sonic differences of each performance, and the contrasting effectiveness of the techniques used in the pairing of measured and volatile blocks. This highlighted the empowering effect the power of limits has on performers if used carefully, and not too heavy-handedly, through the opening up of inner content against the prescribed, for personal interpretation to encourage greater investment and creativity.

From my own perspective as an improviser, I felt the general approach was perhaps a bit conservative in producing true moments of spontaneity, but perhaps this was an inevitability due to the accommodations I made for the large ensemble situation. Thus having produced successful forms of notation that emulated the improvisatory, I now needed to start the process of developing their application further from an approach of denotative instruction to suggestive connotation, to actually embody the improvisatory experience rather than borrowed actions.

Therefore, the aim for future pieces (including large ensemble) would be to grant further creative opportunities through greater quantities of notational freedom and improvisatory points for the performers to enrich and elevate beyond my concepts and vision. This I felt was demonstrated particularly well in the performance of the drum kit player who energised the piece through their own creative vitality and commitment. Had I attempted to commit this to paper it would have surely diminished the feel and intensity of the music and nullified their inventiveness. Thus, empowering and guiding performers to reach beyond the page would require a new willingness to take greater risks, as well as new levels of trust from me in the creative capabilities of others. I needed to remind myself that improvisation is the creative force behind my music.

## 6. The Illuminated Man

The experience and knowledge gained from the previous two pieces emboldened me to advance my approach to impart greater creative freedoms to others that would better utilise improvisation in my music. As such I intended to use composed figures of strong identity to inform and engage the musicians to then transcend in the points for improvisation. Plus, the growing musical relationships within Ensemble Entropy meant I felt far more comfortable in delegating these creative responsibilities as a composer.

### 6.1 Beginnings

*The Illuminated Man* is a homage to the music of British pianist and improviser Matthew Bourne whose work I have connected with over many years, having listened to him in concert numerous times. I love the ferocity and fresh creativity in his playing as demonstrated in records such as; *The Molde Concert* (2007), and *The Money Notes* (2010) through to the sensitive, economical and delicate found in the *Montauk Variations* (2012). These provided a powerful source of inspiration in constructing a work for my ensemble, with Bourne as a featured guest.

The creation of an illustrative representation proved critical in helping me fashion a core motive for the work. This process helped me to determine and extrapolate inner characteristics to express, of a spirited nature (Figure 6.1).

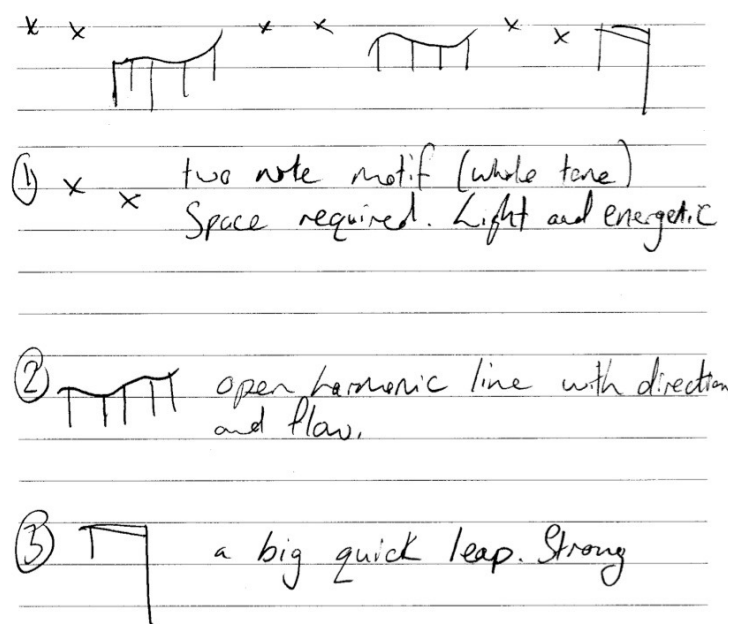


Figure 6.1: core motive illustration and characteristics: i) whole tone motif ii) flowing line iii) a descending leap

## 6.2 Structure and Form

The work is divided into 8 sections that draw influence from a core motive of determined hybrid notations partnered with points for improvisation. As such I decided to implement a free form arch structure to best exhibit, develop and reinvent my thematic material along a wider planned narrative.

| Rehearsal mark        | Opening   | 1  | 2  | 3  |
|-----------------------|---|--|--|--|
| <b>Features</b>       | Immediate introduction of core motif (piano) followed by an improvisatory continuation and expansion. Double bass joins as a duo. Ensemble later supports the duo through accompanying gestures and cadential points. | <i>Wistful</i> - contrasting and calming section built upon and developing the intervallic character of the core material (two note whole tone motif) into lines of lyricism.          | Piano feature - notated tone rows for the piano to freely harmonise.<br><br>Building section of free improvisation - solo (piano) - duo (with flute) - trio (flute and double bass)                        | <i>Tutti vs Break</i> - free improvisatory solo breaks framed by a two note tutti motive.<br><br>Small refrain of calming lyrical material (rehearsal mark 1). |
|                       |   |  |  |  |
| <b>Rehearsal mark</b> | <b>4</b>  | <b>5</b>   | <b>6</b>   | <b>7</b>   |
| <b>Features</b>       | <i>Meditational</i> - Free improvisation piano feature using four a paired chords as an initial point of reference to develop and expand.   | <i>Rhapsodic (bel canto)</i> - improvisatory trio. An evolution from previous figure through the introduction of lyrical material to develop (tenor saxophone, double bass and piano). | <i>building upon ripples to a surge</i> - building crescendo of energy and rhythmic velocity to a point of apogee built upon the development and expansion of a two note motif shared across the ensemble. | Dissipating recapitulation of apex point towards an open cadential point to end.   |

Figure 6.2: Macro form

At the heart of the piece lies a core motive in which all other thematic material is drawn and developed upon (Figure 6.3). Drawing upon my experience from previous pieces I decided to include and incorporate three defining characteristics to the motive instead of the one as seen in *The Wind Blows South* to provide greater developmental opportunity for my figurative material in each section.



**Figure 6.3: core motif**

As such the crystalline identity and core characteristics of the motive would help enlighten the piece's form much like the development and extrapolation of a small gesture or cell in each of Arnold Schoenberg's *6 Little Piano Pieces, Op.19*. Thus the inner form of sections would predominantly take the shape of figurative material almost akin to a prelude, to empower an improvisatory continuation and reaction.

### **6.3 Forms of notation and compositional control**

From experience I was able to refine my compositional approach to better promote the impromptu in an almost contradictory way, through utilising the potency of the power of limits, devising hybrid notations of strong identity and intention. This was achieved through reducing elements of vague ambiguity towards more traditional hybrid representations, to establish powerful points of reference for partnering points of improvisation to react to and exploit. As Steven Nachmanovitch (1990) puts it; "They may simply present a definite situation that can provoke a definite, if unpredictable, reaction from the artist".

As such I produced hybrid notations with a high gradient of precision that were purposefully efficient and succinct with regards to their content for optimal performer assimilation and interpretation. Thus the notated material was predominantly prescribed in nature to yield intensity through containment and subsequently help provoke and contextualise the improvisatory. This approach of determined intention and detail also ensured I was able to maintain a forward trajectory to the music through inner rhythmic velocities, and include valuable anchoring cadential points as demonstrated in an interlude that helped move the narrative forward and connect sections (Figure 6.4). This is also demonstrated in the occasional energising gestural backings through interpolation to support the free piano and double bass duo half way through the opening section (Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.4: notated interlude (page 6)

Figures can be played as whole and or split & played in any order  
*(instruments are independant not together)*

Figure 6.5: energising gestural backings (flute, bari sax and violin page 2)

At certain points I was also able to alleviate some of the tight control of my hybrid notations with regards to their application that might not be helpful to the performers. At section 5 (page 7) the notated material is reduced to gestures deployed in a loose spatial manner to serve as a kind of barometer for the trio (tenor saxophone, double bass and piano) to cite and engage with before being set free to expand and depart from the material.

Graphic notations were seldom used on this occasion, predominantly due to the piece's unbroken inner form, in contrast to the repetitive blocks of *Beneath the Horizon*. Here I wanted to create a more expansive premise that bestowed the space for greater and more instinctive creativity to occur and develop. As such the use of graphics did not seem appropriate in this endeavour, compared to the previous ones in which a graphic would often denote a single gesture exclusive to that block, to be presented and developed.

The music of Paul Dunmall was particularly influential on the construction of my composed elements to help propel the narrative forward. In particular through his duo recordings *Spiritual Empathy* and *Essential Expressions* with Tony Levin (drums) I was able to gain insight

into his use of melodic and linear line; qualities which in my opinion forms an important part of his oeuvre. These lines are free flowing with a strong sense of purposeful direction. They appear to be free of key but are not atonal in construction. Instead they arise and spread across harmony akin to that used in free jazz, released of the binding harmonic structures, implications and resolutions of jazz. In place of these constraints they are self-referential through intervallic construction, often bestowing a sense of modality, but one that is in eternal flux and expansion. Just as a mode might begin to be implied he often skips whimsically into new harmonic plains that despite being unrelated to conventional harmonic structures still convey a seemingly natural evolution.

As such I attempted to incorporate these qualities of dynamic line into the construction of my composed material through flowing linear intervallic contours that would also hopefully influence the rhythmic vitality of the piece: a characteristic observed in 'Deep Whole Trio'<sup>8</sup> — Paul Dunmall (saxophone), Paul Rogers (double bass) and Mark Sanders (drums) — in which musical emanations construct sonic states that drift like the wind across melodic and rhythmic landscapes.

#### **6.4 The role of improvisation**

Strengthening the figurative nature, control and intention of my written content to serve as powerful points of reference meant I was finally able to leave the improvisatory in the hands of the performers, to utilise their creative intelligence and intuition and produce music that reflected their sensibilities. In essence I wanted to get away from emulation and aim for something more authentic.

To best implement this, I refined the general separation-of-practices approach used in *The Wind Blows South* and utilised it in a more defined way, reducing the moments of interpolation to ensure a greater clarity to the piece. This separation meant the focus of attention would be on one practice at a time to ensure the moments' inherent natures could be observed, channelled and enhanced.

Significantly with regards to improvisation this meant the 'interaction dynamics' that form the improvisatory experience, such as interplay, dialogue and independent simultaneous actions

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<sup>8</sup> Attendance of live performances and through recordings such as *That Deep Calling* and *Paradise Walk*.



etc, could take place with more freedom — not checked by stifling parameters — to produce creative moments of authenticity. As such this required the performers to further invest themselves in the music to transcend the mapped-out narrative via their individual and collective sensibilities.

This clarity between practices also meant that interpolation when used (sparingly) was done so in a more connected way, as demonstrated at section 7, which was far more successful in performance in comparison to the first piece – thus adding certain degrees of communicative interaction to occur in these moments, to inform and enrich each other, and help further contextualise their role in the music.

## **6.5 Performance and reflections**

With the gained experience from the Ensemble Entropy debut that included a collection of pieces from differing perspectives — fully notated, hybrid scores and free improvisation — I felt far more comfortable in loosening the rehearsal process with regards to my piece. The rehearsal took place on performance day and was purposefully kept short in which understanding the piece's wider structure was the key task. Only the opening (to establish the character of the piece), plus sections 6 and 7 were played through fully so to experience the cued points of importance in the score. The remaining sections were talked through with the score so as to understand the general narrative and creative opportunities available.

The provided recording is from the evening concert that included a solo set from Matthew Bourne, a text score by Lola de la Mata, and more traditionally scored pieces by James B Wilson and Carol Jones, with *The Illuminated Man* closing the night.

In performance I felt the piece was successful in achieving my aspiration to promote the importance of improvisation over that of the written. By bestowing the performers with greater autonomy to unveil their own creative responses when improvising in my opinion elevated the music to new levels of creativity and intensity beyond the page. Thus the improvisations belonged to the performers, not me, and could go where they pleased in the moment.

Consequently the main discovery and realisation with regards to this relationship between the written and impromptu was the creative productivity and potency the former could instil in

the latter despite their seemingly different poetics. Essentially the strength of identity and volition empowered the free to develop and ultimately depart along personal paths. As reflected in feedback from Matthew Bourne:

“Having the stimulus of the score is crucial: It allows a reference point, or, functions as a kind of 'raw material' resource that can be drawn on/reflected upon - no matter if in a literal or oblique way. In many ways, I felt as if this piece, from a musicians/players perspective, achieved a high level of spontaneity and unpredictability”. (appendix 4)

This newfound strength and efficiency to the notated meant I was able to streamline its quantity to succinct portions away from the oversubscribed to find a new working balance between the two practices and avoid a disconnect, placing improvisation at the heart of the work. This meant a loosening of narrative control was possible away from a tightly planned route to follow towards the discovery of new places through self-navigation (improvisation) between landmarks (notated) as points of reference. Whilst this method might not be the quickest or most efficient route from A to B, it is certainly more involved and engaging as an experience (creative intelligence and intuition).

“I remember thinking that the scored elements were just enough, and left plenty of room to interpret their suggestions in the improvisations. Moreover, the scored elements were not mere asides, but complete in their own right. They felt integral and stimulating when delving into them”. — Matthew Bourne (ibid)

This continued development of simplicity with regards to notations and their application helped to further reduce a disconnect between practices. I felt this was particularly effective at section 4 with the notated setting up a premise through four paired chords for the improvisation to transcend beyond anything I could have notated. Had I attempted this, the feel, the intensity and ultimately the authenticity of the music would have been displaced and lost. As such I discovered an approach of simplicity and clarity in the composed were strikingly effective to provoke improvisations of complexity and depth.

With regards to the technical aspects of my notations and their implementation in performance, no problems were encountered, most probably down to the high gradient of precision and streamlining of ambiguity in their interpretation to unleash the improvisatory. This was perhaps best demonstrated in the ‘Tutti vs Break’ device in section 3 that was refined

through simplicity — a consideration built upon the reading and performance difficulties encountered in the ‘Solos vs tutti’ device of *The Wind Blows South* [Figure 4.17].

From my perspective I was very happy with the results of the piece as a composer and improviser. I was able to weave threads of narrative into the notated, projecting a wider storytelling of experiences, to conjure rather than merely chronicling ideas to be reanimated. Thus the introduction and modest transition to connotative identity and volition rather than the fully delineated (and its application) was key to this evolution towards greater creative liberty.

As such I felt the piece embodied the improvisatory experience far more greatly than my previous pieces, enabling me to present the sound of the participants in which they could reach beyond my vision, instead of providing a single authoritarian voice. Thus the piece depended on the performers and the improvised to exist.

As successful as this approach of open scoring was in finding a better equality between the fixed and the impromptu, informing and enriching each other, I felt it was still too removed from the improvisatory experience with regards to utilising spontaneity and the unpredictable in a profound manner. In essence I wanted to add the opportunity for spontaneity to my handling of narrative to further invoke the inherent nature of improvisation and pass even more responsibility and power to the performers. As such I needed to find a better way to express connotative suggestion over delineated instruction to set up a more forgiving premise for the spontaneous to occur, a shared sentiment in a less radical manner and form to Morton Feldman’s (2000) desire not to “compose” but to project sounds into time, free from a compositional rhetoric that had no place here.

Perhaps my notations of hybridity had reached their limits? And perhaps a move towards more allusive forms to be deciphered by personal impulse was required to further elevate the music and embody the improvisatory experience.

## **7. New developments**

At this crucial juncture of my developing practice I felt I was yet to utilise improvisation as authentically as I would have liked, in a way that embodied the nature of this music to include moments of true spontaneity. In the main this was down to my technical handling of notation and tight control of narrative. As such I needed to encourage the performers / improvisers to invest themselves more deeply in the music by granting greater creative responsibility and autonomy. I hoped this would encourage a new willingness to take greater creative risks as on occasion I felt the music lacked the grit, dissonance and tension to be maximally effective due to my over-elaboration in the composed sections. Thus my aim was to change the premise of my notation towards one that called upon others to generate more of its content. I hoped this would produce new levels of authenticity I could not reach through my previous notational strategies.

### **7.1 Study with Barry Guy**

Through direct study with Barry Guy at Festival Mixtur (Barcelona 2017) I was able to gain new and valuable insight into his compositional practice. As a festival participant I was also able to gain first-hand experience of performing a large ensemble work, under his direction; *Meditations and Hallucinations* (2017).

During this time Guy introduced me to scores of his that wove significant graphic elements into their fabric. In particular his *Witch Gong Game* series (1993-1995) and *Un Coup de dés* (1994) were especially inspiring in uncovering alternative ways to further performer input and interpretation. His brilliance was to not handle these graphics as abstract imagery for equally abstract interpretation, but as instructive imagery with contextualising reference for interpretation, somewhere between hybridity and the abstract – as demonstrated in the coda of *Schweben – Ay, but can ye?* (2009), in which controlled and measured sustained notes across the ensemble transform into a forceful and wild cacophony of sound (Figure 7.1). Thus in effect he was recasting his graphics towards an approach more akin to the language scores of Anthony Braxton, as seen in a fragment of *Nasca Lines* (2001) in which Guy constructs sixteen different sonic textures (depicted on cards) through illustrative description, to be played within a substructure (Figure 7.2).

What I particularly admire about these cards are the directness of information they exhibit to create clearly identifiable sonic textures and articulations. The exact detail of pitch and rhythm meanwhile is left in the hands of the performer to realise via their own sensibility. For example, what “angular” (card 6) might sound like will be different for each person. In essence Guy had deftly developed ways to loosen and free the interpretation of inner content within certain cordoned substructures. Guy (2012) has said of this alternative approach to that often used with the London Jazz Composers Orchestra and Barry Guy New Orchestra — “I was searching for a solution that would bring together two quite specific and often opposing musical disciplines (free improvisation and delineated notation) that would complement each other and even enhance the various characteristics that define their differences”.

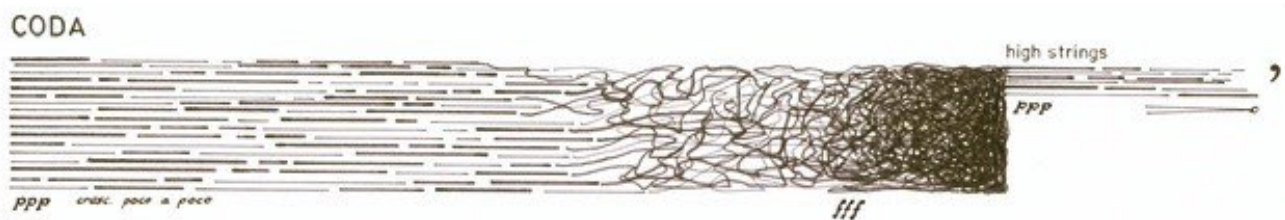


Figure 7.1: Guy: *Schweben - Ay, but can ye?* (2009)

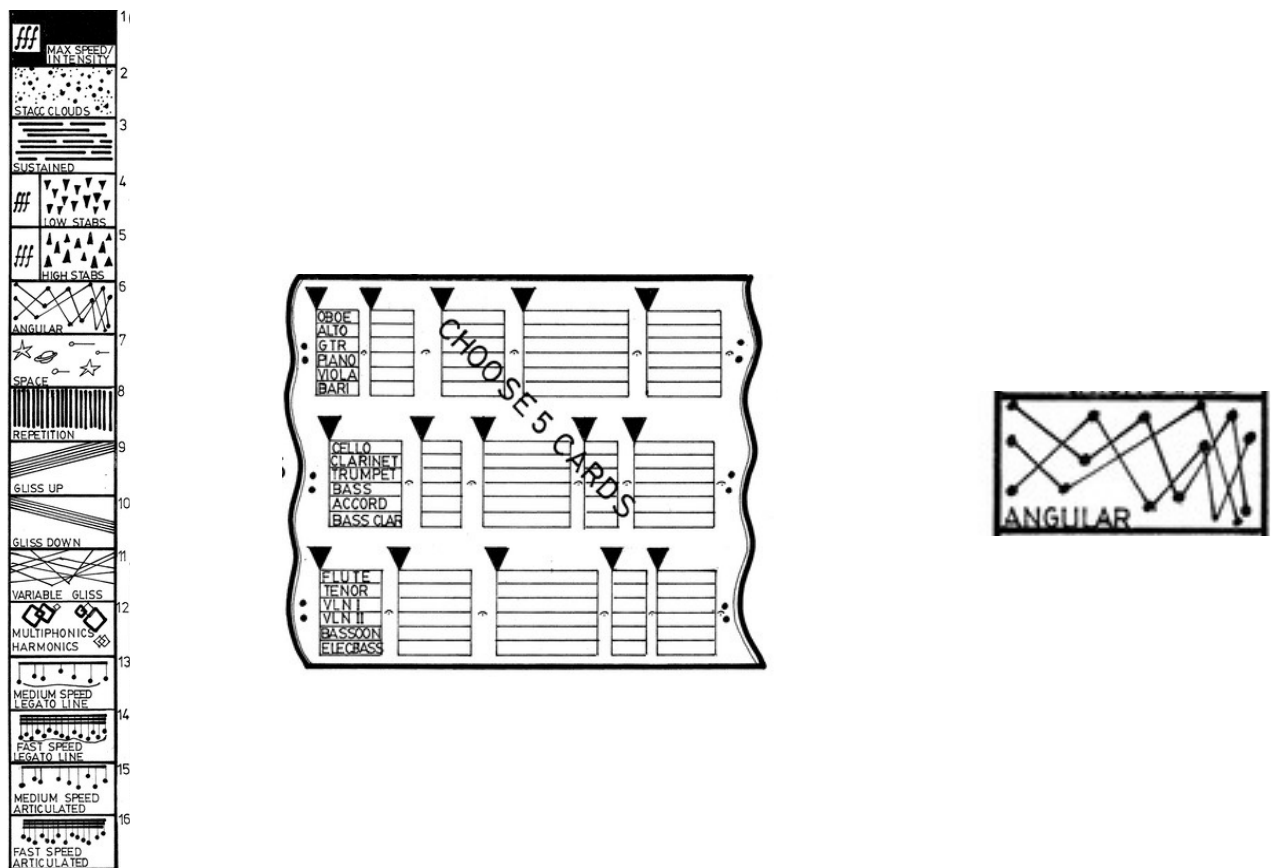


Figure 7.2: Guy: fragment from part three of *Nasca Lines* (2001); plus magnification of card 6 “ANGULAR”

In effect Guy has cleverly continued his broad compositional approach of improvisation within control (or chance within parameters) in a more playful manner as demonstrated in the evolved interpolative charting of a flute and oboe substructure within *Bird Gong Game* (1992). Comprised of formal and hybrid notations plus graphics this structure maintains a high gradient of wider character but requires a more creative and personal interpretation of its content (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3: Guy: *Bird Gong Game* flute and oboe substructure

Furthermore, a number of his other substructures across these graphic scores contain fully notated material of crystalline identity to realign and focus a work at important junctures (Figure 7.4) — pointing towards an evolution of his foreground and background handling of practices in which one may coalesce around another. By including notated (or precise) elements within these varying ambiguous substructures Guy is able to retain wider control of a piece. Sometimes choosing to include a notated opening and ending as seen in *Witch Gong Game II/10* (1994).

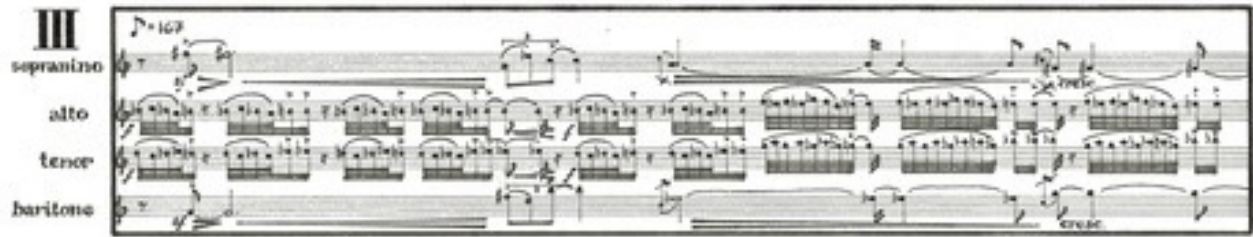


Figure 7.4: Guy: *Witch Gong Game* (1993) notated substructure

This general relaxation from tight control is also often reflected in his handling of macro structure and narrative through the placement of his comprising substructures as mobiles to be cued by a designated leader. As such he is able to form a three-way conversation between improvising soloist(s), director and ensemble in a flexible scenario of give and take (Guy, 2012). In the case of *Un Coup de dés* (1994) a winding path of semi-open parameter events and transitions are drafted for the performers to navigate, which I found particularly inspiring. In essence he is able to create and manage a basic linear narrative in a creative and pliable way for his developed improvisatory actions to be placed within. In effect this is a playful continuation of his LJCO approach — improvisation within control.

I found these hand-drawn graphic based scores particularly inspiring in their iridescent qualities, that captured the energy and spirit of the composer's creative intention on the page, in comparison to formatted notation software. This simple presentational insight in my opinion helps fire the imagination of the performer to swiftly and creatively interpret such notations effectively, adding further resonance and authenticity all round, as seen in the transformation of sound and energy in the coda of *Schweben – Ay, but can ye?* (2009) (Figure 7.1).

This qualified opening up of close control demonstrated by Guy was seismic in helping me to evolve my own practice along similar paths. Having witnessed and experienced this first hand at Festival Mixtur, I sought to further extrapolate these approaches in the second half of the portfolio towards something more expansive and encompassing to further embody and utilise the impromptu in my own creative practice.



## 7.2 Language Scores

Having been introduced to elements of language score through Barry Guy's graphic scores I decided to revisit and delve deeper into the work of Anthony Braxton and Wadada Leo Smith, and their respective creative music approaches, to better understand and extrapolate such approaches to loosen my own grip on notation and narrative.

**7.2.1 Anthony Braxton:** The creative music system that is Braxton's Tri-Centric (Axium) approach demonstrates just how intricate and detailed a language system can be. As an ever-evolving approach, Braxton has, and continues to develop, a multitude of differing superstructures (paradigms) for specific ensembles that draw together notation and graphics for inventive improvisatory interpretation.

"The first answer was 'to section off various components, formings', and use these as the basis for new vocabularies which could then be fed into 'a modular system'. Now I was interested in improvisation only for its ability to generate structural dynamics and vibrational dynamics.' Generating this material became 'the science' of this music".  
(Braxton quoted in Lock, 2018)

As indicated, each superstructure, such as *Ghost Trance Music*, *ZIM Music*, *Trillium* etc handles musical rudiments (line, rhythmic velocities, dynamics etc) in differing ways. By way of example, as expertly described by Violinist Erica Dicker (2016) in her detailed breakdown of *Ghost Trance Music*, it contains three species of 'primary melody' with a fourth 'pure melody' to translate, and within this there are also three logics of displacement to accommodate. If a 'Correspondence Logic' for example is encountered then the performer is invited to deviate from the melody to play another notated composition.

However at the base of these differing superstructures lies a common developed system of 'Language Music' rudiments or sound classifications for the performers to realise. As Nate Wooley (2016) puts it: "Language Music consists of a list of 12 "types" or descriptions of broad musical parameters, which the performer uses to limit their improvisation. I say limit with a grain of salt. It may be more accurate to call them starting points or springboards to musical activity".



As one can see, each language type is clearly expressed to ensure performer comprehension and realisation (Figure 7.5), and it is this basic system of simplicity that interests me. In particular it was their universality that I found most striking in that each type could be played by anyone, on any instrument. As such the resulting music or sonic response would reflect the personal perspective and sensibility of the player placed upon the composer's basic technical directive.

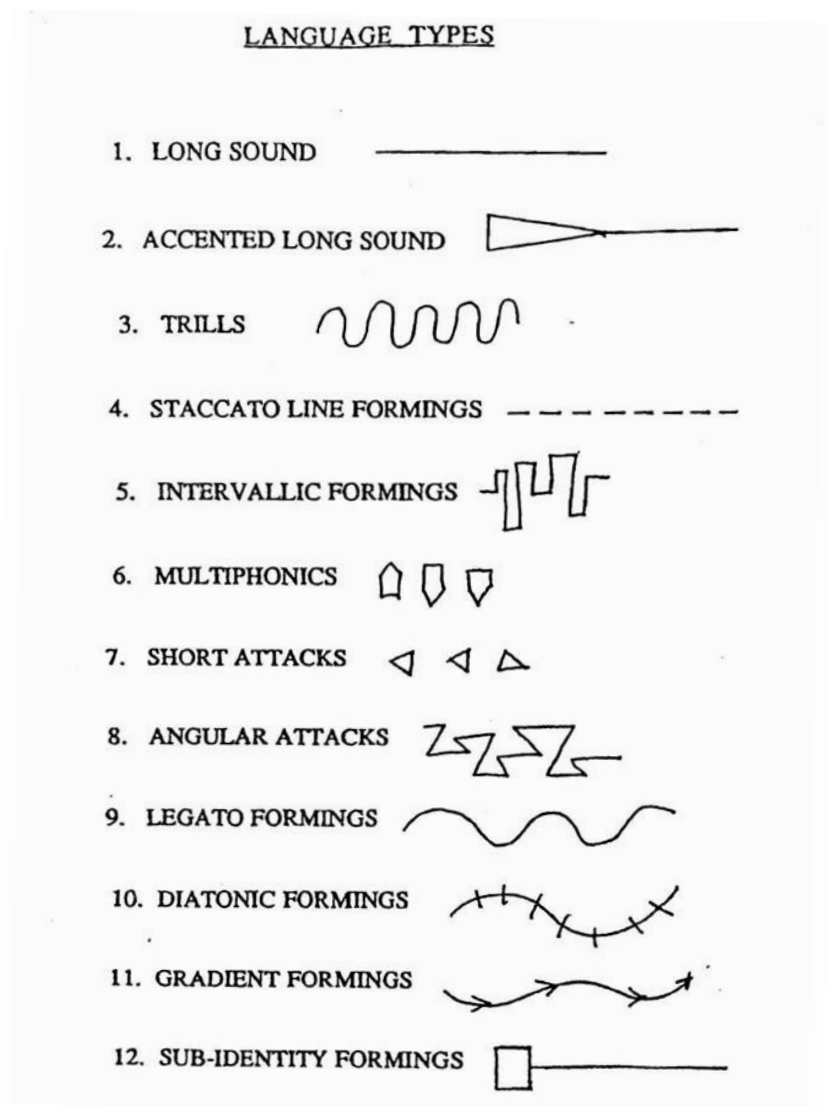


Figure 7.5: Anthony Braxton Language Types

As Dicker's analysis of the *Ghost Trance Music* system demonstrates, Braxton has invented and developed a whole new lexicon and paradigm that contains almost perpetual interlinking strands of both new and old material within his construct. He even provides recorded examples of his 12 Language Types. In essence this is improvisation within a constructed paradigm containing various and differing states of control and detail.

As such, the vastness of this ever-expanding system means a vocation of study is really required to wholly understand it and bring it to life. Yet despite all this complexity I found the simplicity of Braxton's 12 Language Types particularly inspiring from a technical standpoint, to create and develop my own basic common notation to provoke creative interpretation as suggested by Wooley — creative starting points for others.

By observing Braxton in a live context with his *Zim Music Sextet*<sup>9</sup>, one could hear that in this *Zim Music* paradigm he had set up 4 to 5 preconceived and clearly defined musical states through his developed lexicon. In performance these carefully constructed states did not develop or transform in a linear fashion. Instead each one was thoroughly examined by the performers and left to shimmer and oscillate away when cued (and later re-cued) in an unpredictable sequence by the composer. With each reiteration, the overall character would be retained but with fluctuating detail, never repeating itself exactly.

“The biggest difference between me and the total improvisation schools that have developed is — how can I say it? — it seems to me that structure gives one the possibility of defining the space in a way where it can be evolutionary. So, I was interested in developing a music and a music system and then, from that point, extending it”. (Braxton quoted in Lock, 2018)

As hinted, this perhaps did not match up with my own personal taste that yearned for the music to develop and transform into the unknown — in comparison to the open looped cycle (that lacked these phased transitions). However, the reimagining of each detailed and fluctuating state was intriguing — I listened out for the slight and intricate differences with each reiteration, as the music bubbled away under its own steam.

The beauty of this seventy-five minute set was in witnessing and experiencing the performers' deep examination of the material; the focus it required, and the radiating intensity of the moment. My realisation was that this whole experience was built around and lived within Braxton's construct. The performers were playing his music, and the sound was that of Anthony Braxton. Whilst I deeply admired and enjoyed the experience, particularly the intrigue of the intricate and controlled discourse between performers, it reiterated to me that

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<sup>9</sup> attendance of Anthony Braxton Zim Music Residency, Cafe OTO 30.05.18

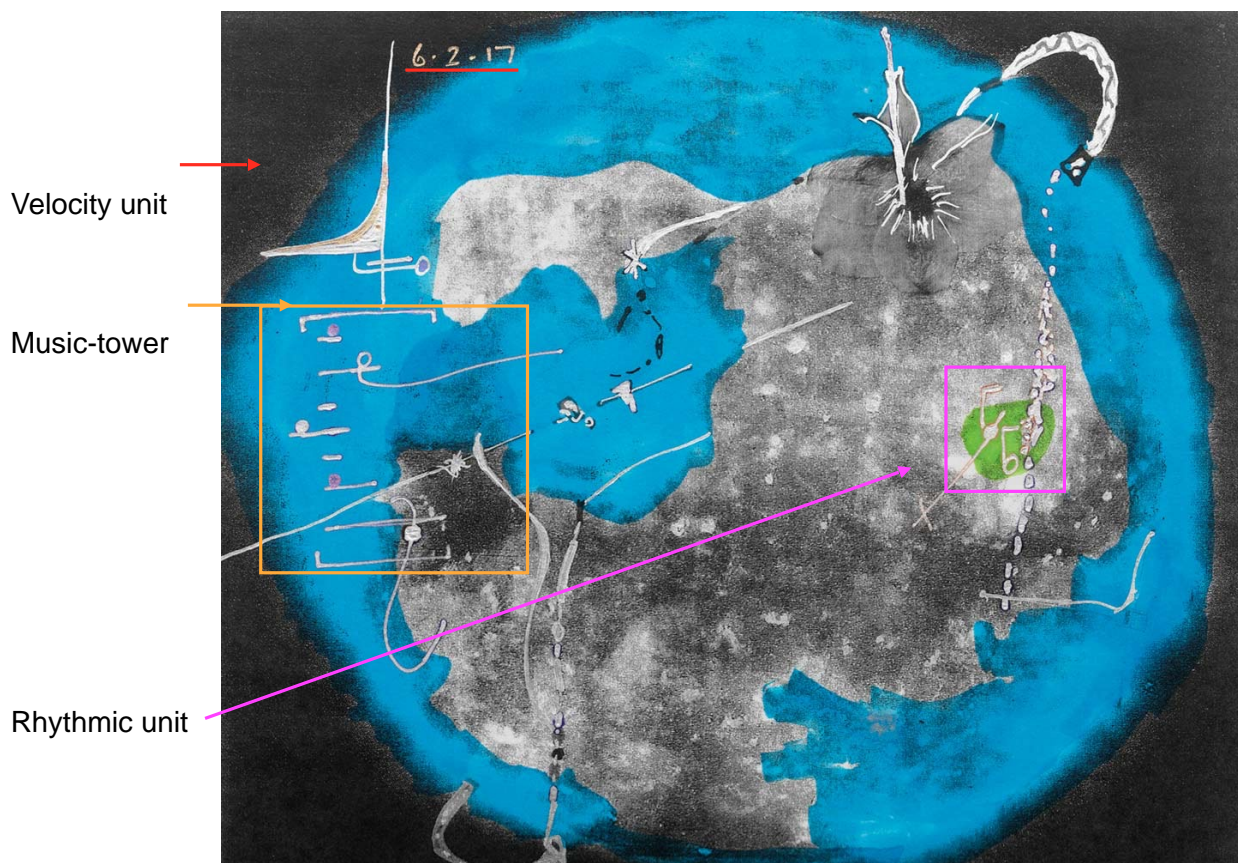
I wanted to hear a greater level of individual creative freedom from the players in my own music.

**7.2.2 Wadada Leo Smith:** Developed over the past 50 years Ankhrastration is the musical language system developed by Wadada Leo Smith to champion improvisation as an art form of equal depth, and intellectual scope to western classical music (Smith, 1973). Unlike Braxton, in the main Smith's scores refrain from traditional notations and their affiliated hybrids. Instead he utilises image, form (line and shape), and colour to devise scores full of symbolism – both ancient and new – for performers to decipher. Whilst these scores contain and provide direction through guidelines, they conversely require far greater input and personal involvement from the performer due to the obscure, and in part abstract, nature of the imagery, and broad sentiment contained within.

“Ankhrastration is a musical language as opposed to a musical notation system. In the early years of it, we talked about it as being a notation system. But since 1967, it has moved into a language, meaning it's a musical language as opposed to being a graphic language. There's a difference between the two. In my Ankhrastration, there are lots of commands. There's a rule of thumb for success or failure for any portion of it. There are elements that have to be referenced, like when there's color involved. The colors have to be referenced on various levels. For example, it could be referenced scientifically, according to nature or biology, or it can be referenced according to fantasy, imagination. So when all these components are connected, that guarantees the possibility of success; you can definitely, in a critical way, decide what's not making it”.  
(Smith quoted in Oteri, 2012)

The exact workings of Ankhrastration is shrouded in an intended mysticism by the composer, with Smith never committing precise or detailed guidelines to paper for public consumption. Instead hints are given in various talks by him and others, but detail is never divulged in order to ensure the metamorphosis of the music through performer determination. Thus Smith does not include intricate figurative detail (fixed notations) like Braxton that require faithful interpretation through mapped intention. Instead it is more about finding, and creating a core character and sensitivity for each piece. It is this challenge of utilising and encouraging performers to invest themselves and bestow their own ideas onto the music that I find particularly impactful.

“This is not to say that some do not express frustration at not understanding the material, because he will not give straightforward instructions on how to enact Ankhramation. He instead supports auto-didacticism. He wants you to reach out, and do your own research because he doesn't want you to believe in everything you've been taught”. (Doraiswang, 2017)



**Figure 7.6: Smith: *Symphony No. 4: Spring***

When delving deeper into the workings of Ankhramation one can see that the design of the scores is of great importance for navigation, and this guides how the performer should structure their improvisation. This is achieved through the placing of demonstrative structures within the symbolic and abstract. As briefly outlined (Smith, 2017) in a general overview of *Symphony No. 4: Spring* there are two key structures employed to create and drive the performers core content — ‘velocity unit’ and ‘music-tower’.

The velocity unit is the object that represents the performer’s core content or musical action. In some instances, a numeric sequence is provided above to denote how many musical elements or phrases should be included (Figure 7.6). The music-tower is an object to help the

performer construct a melodic line consisting of short, medium and sustained tones (ibid). How one exactly navigates through this is not divulged; perhaps one can choose the order and orientation through it? Other supplementary elements include ‘rhythmic units’ and ‘melodic units’ to help focus and move the music on.

In *Unity And Diversity In The Secret Garden of Life* (2001) for solo trumpet these various units are utilised without an abstract underlay and the piece proves insightful in better understanding their technical workings alongside Smith’s *Red Sulphur Sky* recording of the work.

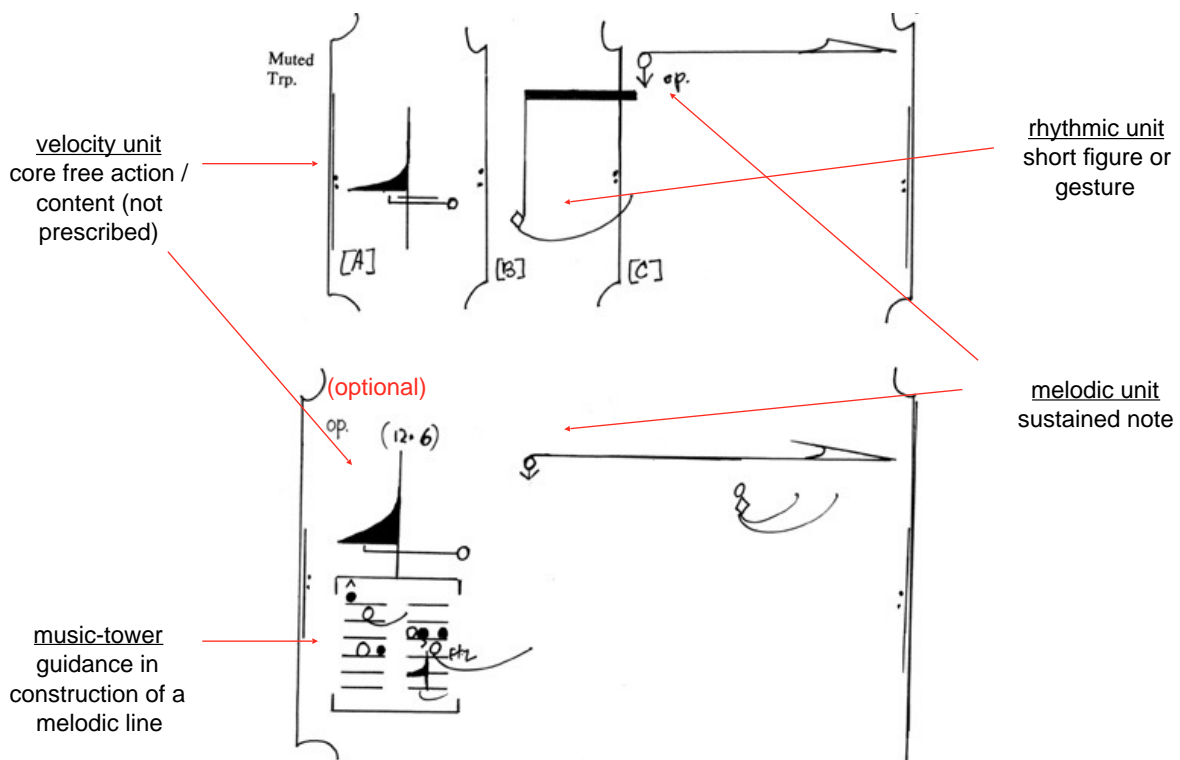


Figure 7.7: Smith: *Unity And Diversity In The Secret Garden Of Life*

Through this process of deduction in understanding Ankhramation I would surmise that it is fundamentally based on the experience of improvisation. The aim is to generate and achieve a state or place of being in which a free and open dialogue may occur between participants. And whilst these things might be intangible to define in academic terms, they are certainly felt and determined by the intuition and intelligence of the improviser in the moment.

“...I use the specific language that I have to experiment with instruments and people, sometime extracted from their history, sometime using their history as well. Most

things that artists do will find this course. Art is here for a specific reason. It wants to engage us to think deeper about ourselves and our connection to our environment”.

(Smith quoted in Oteri, 2012)

Therefore the input from others is different compared to that of Braxton. It is more active and involved requiring the performer to create and conceptualise the broad and overarching sentiment or theme of the piece set out by Smith. As such the music is eternally improvising and in a constant state of phase transition in which the performers are left in a situation of discovery — discovery based upon the supplied information, and of the new in the moment.

From my personal perspective, this paradigm is a shared experience between composer and performer in which the score and performer(s) coalesce to spontaneously create the music. As such everyone relies on each other much like in free improvisation. So perhaps this music is not for the uninitiated or faint hearted, for it requires and relies on both a musical and social sympathy and discord to really take off and be effective; both strength of character and creativity. But this is what I truly admire about Smith’s approach — the importance of involvement and investment, to inform, spar with, and strengthen the collective. Whilst he might instigate the situation, the experience belongs to everyone.

**Reflection:** Having gained a deeper insight into the technical and practical workings of language scores I decided I wanted to embrace and develop some of these elements into my own work to draw out and encourage greater performer input and investment.

As demonstrated in these varying approaches each composer showed a fresh willingness to bestow creative responsibility upon the performers, and still place their broad imprint on the music. As such the music was shared and not dominated by a sole voice. Of course, the levels of this transferal of creative responsibility varied between each composer depending on their own sensibility and developed practice, and each were inspiring in their own way.

I found Braxton’s creation of a common system to elevate the creative musicianship of the performer, unbound from specific instrumental technique, particularly impactful. In this regard Guy’s similar cards of sonic textures approach which is more playful in its presentation perhaps adds an extra layer of reference and camouflaged volition for interpretation, and as such conviction, all round?

#### 4. STACCATO LINE FORMINGS - - - - -

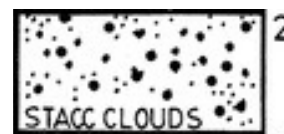


Figure 7.8: language score representations of staccato - Braxton vs Guy

Although Smith's approach is more oblique compared to the others, and not too geared towards creating preconceived textures at designated points, he is still concerned with assuring the music is focused and has a forward trajectory through the placement and implementation of his elemental rhythmic and melodic units. Whilst he might not have direct control of the music's inner content, his velocity units and music-towers help shape and drive the form and structure of the piece along his very broad intention.

Through these differing and unique approaches, each composer demonstrated that I could construct a practice with the creative force of improvisation at its heart, and that the power of simplicity across the technical and abstract (a recurring thread in all their systems) was deeply effective in both focusing and freeing the performers in each paradigm. At its height the music is removed from the constraints of time, and is left to thoroughly explore itself in a way comparable to free improvisation. This is something I hoped to achieve in my music — an experience, not actions from within.

## **8. Abstract art: Kandinsky and reflections from British abstract artists**

With the intention to gravitate towards more graphic representations in my work, the fine arts, and in particular abstraction have become a valued extra-musical resource helping me to integrate and contextualise shared principles from an external and internal perspective into my own compositional practice. Having been inspired by the graphic elements of language scores I wanted to gain insight into how I might create my own graphics and imagery.

Whilst I may be no skilled or trained practitioner of drawing or painting, the actions and decisions involved in the creation of abstract art were of particular interest to me. In particular I am enamoured with the work of Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miro, Paul Klee and Jan Tarasin who conjure work of arresting luminosity and kinetic energy through interior configurations (inner forms), displacement, colour and macro form.

Kandinsky's *On White II* (1923) is a particular source of insight in the perception and application of objects with seemingly independent inner volitions, contributing towards a broader image/vision. Set upon a white background, an energy and vision of harmony and discord impress through clusters of primal and irregular shapes (interior configurations). Each possess identity of great strength and dynamism; from resplendent intersecting and pointed geometric shapes devoid of curvature, cells of tessellating squares juxtaposing small flocks of simple cellular organisms, through to an unaccompanied triad of straight lines on the outer-rim, off to explore the cosmos. Yet despite this variation and seeming imbalance, a coalescence is found emanating from the centre, to form an entity in which a greater structure arises opening out in all directions, fluctuating and buzzing with life.

Another source of inspiration from Kandinsky is *Small Dream in Red* (1925) which continues along the theme of visual variance, but with a greater focus upon objects of natural and irregular curvature. The key difference in comparison to the former work is a seemingly greater freedom of the internal objects in forming a greater structure through spatial placement, unbound from a central point. These suspended elements are rendered upon a background of colour, texture and broad sweeping shape which to my mind impacts upon their bearings and course. This perhaps implies an allowance of a greater force over the work with regards to trajectory and time, compared to the indefinite possibilities of silence, space and time the white background of the former implies. Both are intriguing, and impact upon how I apply narrative in my latter works.



I deeply connect with the constant tension and duality of such works. Their inner forms are independent, and are often the antithesis of each other. This continual tension of harmony and discord in the pertaining of individualistic expressive identity and direction empowers the work to self-generate and react to itself, so much so that the consonant and dissonant are almost entwined and dependent upon each other. In the macro they appear to have a freedom to float alongside the other in continuous motion, colliding with and feeding off each other, with the viewer left to decipher and interpret these ever-changing composites in which time is both transient and perpetual. Akin to improvisation, the inner sentiment creates and informs the greater whole. What I find striking is Kandinsky's ability to express his inner emotion for our consideration, but also challenges us to discover our own.

A contemplation of the inner sentiments behind the dot, line, and more broadly form in his second treatise *Point and Line to Plane* (1926) outlines and advocates a deeper consideration; a 'living force within the element' (Kandinsky, 1979) of the spirit and intent behind every mark, indent and form — beyond the figurative delineation of portrayal, and form.

“The geometric line is an invisible thing. It is the track made by the moving point; that is, its product. It is created by movement — specifically through the destruction of the intense self-contained repose of the point. Here, the leap out of the static into the dynamic occurs... straight line represents the most concise form of the potentiality for endless movement” (ibid).

This conceptualisation of rendering to basic planes, in which a shared or common ground of expression is found, considerably resonates with me, as it highlights the importance of the inner sensibility in forming the whole — a collective pillar of improvisation. This insight on the volition behind creativity has keenly impacted upon my compositional and performance considerations.

From an abstract position, creating an aesthetic nucleus is of vital importance for natural and potential development. Understanding the spirit and essence of core material is crucial in unleashing both its anticipated and unforeseen possibilities. In turn this feeds into the figurative, with regards to the appearance and construction of the notation, finding representations that invoke the aesthetic values of the core material for the performers to interpret. In finding a clarity and lucidity for these representations, a return towards the

abstract is found, in which the performer may speculate and imbue their interpretation upon the core material with intuitive freedom. To me, Kandinsky's concept of allowing the intrinsically natured inner elements to develop and follow their own paths, in turn contributing to the greater structure, enables a living art to arise; a quality I would like my scores to embody, with total freedom granted to the performer. A living, creative music.

Although greatly insightful, such treatises as *From the Point and the Line to Plane* and Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* (1925/53) offer largely technical perspectives of detail for initiated practitioners of the fine arts to enrich and refine their already developed experience and knowledge. Consequently, there are limits to my comprehension and application of the technical schoolings in such documents into my own work. As such the perspectives of a more reflective nature, from British abstract practitioners Patrick Heron, William Hayter and Victor Pasmore were particularly impactful.

Away from the formality of written treatise and conventional interviews, the BBC series *Artists on Film: Scenes from Working Lives* enables the aforementioned artists to unpack philosophical perspectives of great sincerity regarding acts of creativity. From these outpourings a real appreciation and demand for detail and craft are discovered; borne of discipline, intelligence and intuition. Crucially to me these are shared fundamentals with improvisation; a view seldom recognised by the uninitiated.

To my mind, discipline, intelligence and intuition are all closely entwined and required in the production of works of resonance. Each feeds, guides and informs the others on many different levels; from the nature and volition of an idea, and the act of collaboration or discourse, through to the perception of space and time. All of these aspects are dependent on our own decision making. The following quotes from *Scenes from Working Lives* are of significant impact in helping me to understand and develop these principles within my own creative practice.

William Hayter (1988):

“To take off by itself — it can hardly be said to be uncontrolled, because there's quite clearly something controlling it, though one isn't entirely conscious of that”.

“And there are other moments, of which one becomes conscious in a curious sort of way, in which absolute certainty is necessary. Which doesn’t mean they must be done painfully and meticulously. Even they have to be done very spontaneously and very freely, but they must be right, they must be right to the thickness of a hair, or the whole thing will fall apart”.

Patrick Heron (1988):

“You know, roughly speaking, the sort of image you’re going to project and your arm has to do it for you”.

“Paintings are all about space, and that space is the product of colours operating upon each other. That really has been the subject of painting of all time”.

Victor Pasmore (1988):

“Everything man makes will either look like something in nature or work like it, because man himself is a part of the natural process. The circle was there long before the wheel and the bird long before the aeroplane. This is an important point. The artist is both master and slave of his work. The process is reciprocal. If the ingredients are right, the picture will, to some extent, paint itself. For this reason, I like to paint only when I feel relaxed, so as to allow the picture to speak for itself”.

“The artist must have some idea of what he’s going to do in a purely physical sense. There are so many possibilities. He can make a dot, draw a line, dab with a brush, pour on the paint, or outline a formalised shape. Each of these factors will form a particular image relative to its material and process”.

“The style is dependant on what you start with. If you start with a blob, that will dictate a certain style. If I start with a line, it will dictate another line”.

“I start with the physical painting, and the process will determine the style and the form of it, to some extent - not to the whole extent, but to some extent and so it depends what I choose to start with”.

“Behind that splodge of paint there’s a lot of knowledge about painting”.

“The kind of painting which I do, you can look at the picture from different angles. You can walk past it or look underneath it and get a different aspect without destroying it. I mean, if you look at a Rembrandt sideways on, you can’t see the picture, you’ve got to look at it dead on. In which case it therefore belongs to the old static position. But you don’t have to look at modern painting only by standing bang in front of it. You can move, you get a completely new and sometimes more dynamic experience if you move on either side”.

“Once you start working on the thing, the thing, the picture, tends to paint itself and go on automatically, on its own laws”.

What makes improvisation so beguiling is individuality, and how the improviser maintains and surrenders it in performance. As with the abstract artist who allows interior configurations to grow and manifest in a manner true to their disposition, so too does the improviser who plays with a pallet of interaction dynamics, each with their own differing nature and perspective.

To best utilise these powerful elements, choice becomes paramount. Behind this decision making there must lie an intelligence and intuition within which a dynamic relationship is essential to guide one’s actions as alluded to by Hayter, Heron and Pasmore. Whatever you do has an effect on the overall picture. Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990) appropriates the term *Intellecto* from Michelangelo in which an intelligence not of the merely rational kind, but visionary intelligence, is required to reveal a statue that had been buried in the stone since the beginning of time — as such highlighting the importance of a combined intelligence and intuition. For the statue is not really there waiting in the stone; it is in the artist, composer, or improviser, yet to be revealed.

For me the beauty of this relationship between intelligence and intuition is that it is constantly shifting, living in the past, present and future. For improvised music is a dynamic entity, always changing. You might be playing something completely different, the antithesis to your fellow improviser; the decision is whether you stick or twist. Your intuition may be to twist and join your partner, but your intelligence is aware that this discourse through interpolation is new, distinctive and energising. So you stick, but for how long? Your intelligence says wait;

build the tension, take it to the nth degree. Unexpectedly your partner changes but your intuition fed by your intelligence knows to stick as there is more to come. For your partner has in fact added something new and is shifting between the two. Together this grows and transforms into a whole new composite that feels natural, but at the start was never envisaged.

These shared traits of conviction from abstract artists have firmly reinforced my belief that craft and technique enable spontaneity to thrive. For spontaneity embraces free impulse which is not entirely random, but guided by our own unencumbered *intellecto* which encompasses independence and collaboration, both as an individual and part of a greater whole. Having the capacity to participate and immerse oneself into this experience in which everything is dynamic is the key to creativity, whatever the discipline.

From these abstract artists I learnt that there is a craft and technique; perhaps better described as a discipline behind spontaneity. I wished to channel and release these fundamentals myself across a stratum of perspectives into my music as a creator and improviser.

As such I needed to embrace and trust in unfettered intuition in the construction of my scores, following the natural volition of inner components that may surpass my initial notions. In other words, retain an intelligence to produce points and representations of intense identity and clarity, and without impeding or obstructing these inner constituents, nurture a greater intelligence to construct a viable whole, waiting to be deciphered.

For the performer, it is equally important to recognise and appreciate their own creative role in making this happen. As such their role is indisputably active, and finding ways to encourage and compel creative interpretation and improvisation is vital for productivity, as well as the wider enrichment of the music and experience.

As demonstrated through the shared thread of simplicity across the examined language scores, and advocated by the aforementioned abstract artists the rendering of an approach to basic planes allowed the performers a greater freedom to develop and transcend the material along the lines of their own musical sensibilities. Integrating this wider perspective into my creative practice would hopefully allow an alleviation of function and interpretation from the

delineated towards connotation across all parameters, so that my material may be positively engaged with and developed.

This aspect was strengthened through artist Francis Bacon's description of 'non-illustrational' form (Bacon quoted in Sylvester, 2016) that "works first upon sensation and then slowly leaks back into the fact", helping me to further contextualise the concept of connotation. Furthermore his acceptance of embracing and utilising the transformational effect of 'accidents' into his practice strengthened my belief in the impromptu and the rewards it has to offer to those who wish to immerse themselves into the experience, and trust in their own instinct and intellect.

"...suddenly the lines that I'd drawn suggested something totally different, and out of this suggestion arose this picture. I had no intention to do this picture; I never thought of it in that way. It was like one continuous accident mounting on top of another. [...] there is a possibility that you get through this accidental thing something much more profound than what you really wanted. [...] And that's what I'm hoping accidents or chance or whatever you like to call it will bring about for me. So that it's a continuous thing between what may be called luck or hazard, intuition and critical sense". (ibid)

This focus on unbridled expression and emotion across applications of the figurative, to the surreal and the abstract in his work was inspirational, as he balances images and techniques of fragility, detail and obscurity into a singular vision of deep truth. The juxtaposition of spontaneity versus control is particularly interesting as it chimes with my need to impose some kind of narrative upon my work. His words on the utilisation and development of these extemporised events were especially impactful.

"I want a very ordered image but I want it to come about by chance." [...] Perhaps one could say it's not an accident, because it becomes a selective process which is part of this accident one chooses to persevere. One is attempting, of course, to keep that vitality of the accident and yet preserve a continuity." (ibid)

Finally, the ethos of trusting in the intuition of individuals, plus the shared responsibility and ownership of the music between composer and player is a key aspect to embrace and consider from my perspective. As such the contributions from others are vital for my music to flourish. As previously stated, I am interested in the sound of others. Thus being prepared for the

duality and interdependence of the performer as opposed to my own initial intention and vision is of the utmost necessity.

When combined, these new perspectives would hopefully allow me to construct a practice in which an experience of wholeness may exist, so that the creative intuition and intelligence of the performers may thrive and contribute to the music; hopefully challenging them to question and discover, not just follow. In many ways I am seeking to create powerful and compelling sonic collages of broad shape and colour, as well as intricate and elaborate detail akin to Kandinsky and Bacon, through a practice that is able to channel, and subtly shape the emotive outpourings of improvisers – but from a distance so as to not impede their own idiosyncratic creative voices.

## 9. Herbig-Haro

### 9.1 Beginnings

*Herbig-Haro* is the first piece in the portfolio in which I attempted to utilise graphics as my primary form of notation, following the study of language scores and abstract art. The intention was to thread a line of light formal narrative, and wherever possible provide notations of connotative qualities, to give the piece a broad but distinctive identity for the performers to invoke and channel.

I decided the piece would be for the two string players in Ensemble Entropy – Rebecca and Seth (violin and double bass) – to explore the sonic possibilities these closely related but very different instruments might conjure. I hoped a focus on certain sonic textures and broad instrumental techniques might help inform the construction of the piece's wider structure.

Instead of an illustrative representation of core ideas, I decided to construct a test piece with the aim to ascertain if I could successfully utilise an approach of both informative imagery (graphics) for personal and creative interpretation, plus an element of precise notation as seen in the violin part to pull the piece back into focus (Figure 9.1).

FOR V.L. AND S.B.  
**ELYSIAN PLAINS**  
VIOLIN AND DOUBLE BASS

3 pizzicato harmonics to be played in any order.  
Between the Staves navigate through the Circles. These Circles do not envelop the Star so Moments of Silence is an option.

Staccato Alternative Sounds

BASS-----DUO  
Star Star  
Rubato Rubato

Rubato (2-60)

Vln. Vln.

Figure 9.1: test piece — *Elysian Plains*



## 9.2 Structure and Form

The work is divided into 5 distinct sections of instructive imagery for musical interpretation and open (yet purposeful) notation. I hoped each section would represent a musical island or composite structure of material to be worked through before moving on to the next, with some joined by a bridge of supplementary narrative to maintain a forward trajectory and focus to the piece.

| Section / Rehearsal Mark        | 1  | 2  | 3  |
|---------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <b>Features</b>                 | <p>Double bass star (solo) — a structure in which the player attempts to join 3 notated pizzicatos at the points of the star by moving through instructive graphics (staccato clouds and alternative sounds). Time is open.</p> <p>To end the figure the violin plays their notated material interpolated on top of the double bass.</p> <p>A tiny bridge of notated dovetailed tremolos are used to realign the duo together before embarking on the next figure.</p> | <p>Paths of instructed imagery (duo) — each player embarks on a path of varied instructive graphics for personal interpretation.</p> <p>Whilst their paths are broadly mapped in parallel the players are encouraged to move through them in their own time.</p> <p>At the end these respective paths they join forces to coalesce around an unison E enveloped within a red circle to reflect a building (looped) intensity as the two players explore nuances of tuning.</p> | <p>At the heart of figure 3 lies a free double bass solo. This solo is entirely free with no descriptive instructions or indications made.</p> <p>Before and proceeding the solo are notations (plus some instructive graphics) of a precise nature to develop previous musical elements (tremolo) and introduce new gestures (rising quavers) to drive and focus the duo forward in a linear fashion.</p> |
| <b>Section / Rehearsal Mark</b> | <b>4</b>   | <b>5</b>   |  |
| <b>Features</b>                 | <p>A composite of 3 semi ambiguous lines of material in which rhythm is determined and pitch is relative are interpolated upon each other by the performers to create a texture of busy movement.</p> <p>An interruption in the form of a veto is thrown in as a form of jeopardy to contrast and reinvigorate the players above the fluctuating but non developing texture.</p>   | <p>Driving violin — a section of precise material (notated) is provided for the violin to clearly establish character and a forward intensity (drive) towards towards the ending material.</p> <p>To end the players coalesce around the black circle of full intensity before rising together along the line of grouped quavers to finish.</p>  |  |

Figure 9.2: Macro form

### 9.3 Forms of notation and compositional control

With a new found drive to channel the impromptu into the fabric of my work, a move away from the delineated with regards to notation and narrative was required. As seen in the work of Braxton, Smith and Guy (covered in chapter 7) — descriptive and instructive information from the composer could still be imparted within a freer paradigm through an approach of connotation to construct and maintain composer identity and volition.

I quickly decided to do everything by hand so that I might capture the energy and character of my creative will within the score. As advocated by the abstract painters, this process would help me understand the inner volition of my material during creation so that I might develop them to better transmit the spirit and nature of the piece for the performers to manifest with their own sensibilities.

As such I looked to build an approach upon instructive imagery so to shape the music with a sense of mapped narrative. Whilst on the whole I intended to use formal narrative to ensure a linear storytelling of the piece, I hoped the general connotative qualities of my notations would release the music from the constraints of metric time so that it might unfurl under its own steam through the musicians' explorations. As such the numbering of sections ensured I could chart a broad but clear structure to the work through paths of light formal narrative for the musicians to chart and explore.

As mentioned, I decided to approach each section as a musical island or composite. However unlike Smith's 'velocity units' of solely structural information for performers to superimpose their own creativity upon, I decided to give each section its own unique character and different approach of translation so to guide them along my broad intention in a varied and non-uniform way. In a way I suppose I was looking to formalise Larry Ochs' (2000) approach of the 'simultaneous solo' in which players use written material to start with and then expand upon it in a soloistic fashion, finding ways to fit with the other players.

With regards to my imagery, I looked to extrapolate Braxton and Guy's language types of instructive simplicity to create graphic notations for creative interpretation with my own added intention of mapped paths as opposed to singular events, as demonstrated in Figure 9.3. Importantly these new levels of connotation would hopefully aid the creative interpretation of the material, leaving the performers responsible for note and rhythm

selection guided by their own intuition and intelligence felt in the moment of performance. As such, maintaining a clarity through the simplicity of these notations was a key consideration to ensure efficient assimilation for interpretation along the lines of my broad intention. This included the more ambiguous elements of purely suggestive imagery in which little information is provided (Figure 9.4) — a simple depiction insinuating interweaving lines and points of convergence.

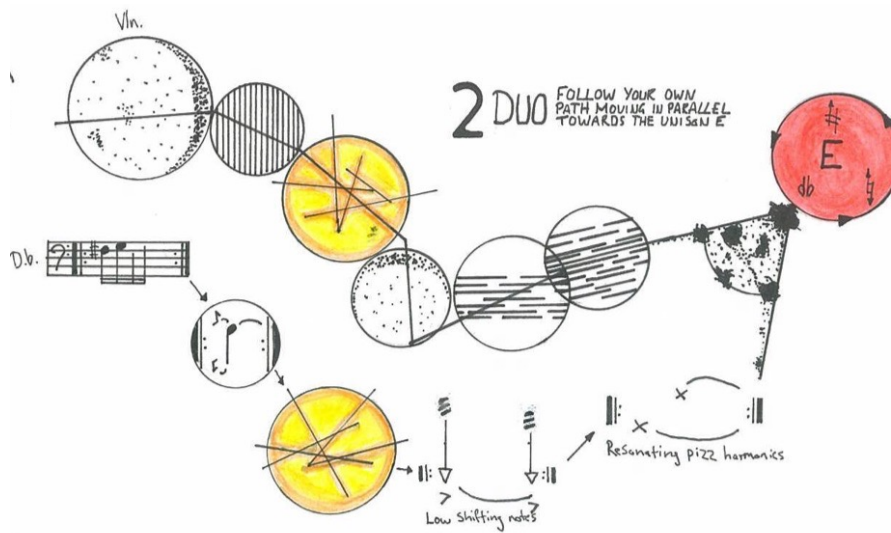


Figure 9.3: instructive graphic notations at section 2

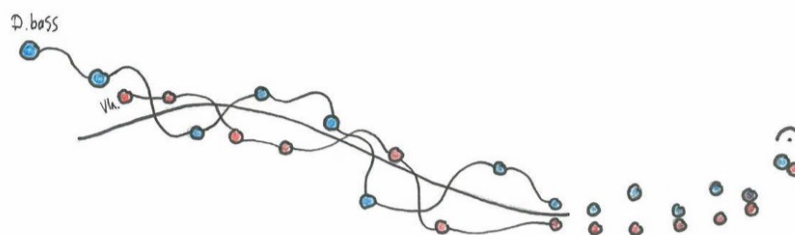
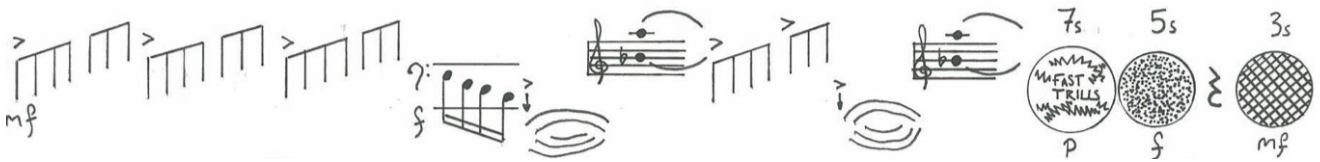


Figure 9.4: graphic notation following double bass solo at figure 3

To help maintain a forward trajectory in the music, I decided to utilise hybrid notations of traditional qualities at certain points, as seen in the bridge sections around the double bass solo at section 3. However where possible I tried to reduce a total delineation of these notations by leaving pitch choice in the hands of the performers, and to only include such information scantily to help give closure to the end of a phrase, or as a cadential point in one part for the other to bounce off, as seen in Figure 9.5.



**Figure 9.5: hybrid notations**

Section 4 of the work takes a similar route, but wanting to create a variance of approaches within the piece to assess their effectiveness I chose to construct a composite structure for the performers to navigate as opposed to a linear narrative to follow. As such I decided to explore the use of chance operations through the performer's choice of hybrid lines, to build a sonic texture of quick and fragmented movement. This in a sense was a development of my previous approach of interpolation but in a more playful manner that would hopefully engage the performers to contrast the displacement of the veto actions effectively.

Perhaps the largest change of approach with regards to *Herbig-Haro* was the willingness to promote a multifaceted approach of notations and practices instead of attempting to find a one-size-fits-all approach. This allowed me to loosen and tighten the reins of composer control and instruction at particular points, as and when required, to help supplement and strengthen these differing notations and practices. Thus in effect the piece could be best described as a 'hybrid graphic score' that sits somewhere between, and borrows elements from, the graphic score (abstract), and hybrid open score.

In summation, inspired by the functionality of Wadada Leo Smith's *Unity And Diversity In The Secret Garden of Life* (2001) I was able to construct a broad framework for the piece to be filled with varying forms of notations and their inner volitions, influenced by Braxton language types and Guy's sonic cards for creative interpretation. As such I weaved my own thread of narrative to help guide the performers through the piece, and in part influence the improvisations without being too direct.

#### **9.4 The role of Improvisation**

The core aim of the piece was to find new ways to elevate and liberate my instructive notations away from tight and controlling delineations towards that of personal choice and creativity as found in improvisation. As such the move towards connotation was used to preserve broad composer intention and identity that required performer investment. As

demonstrated in my notations of instructive imagery, a broad sense of character or identity was imparted, but the actual realisation and choice of inner detail was left to the performer to decide upon and enact. As such I was looking to utilise the power of limits to produce strong and personal responses that relied on, and would encourage, the creative intuition and intelligence of the musicians to act.

I hoped this new multifaceted approach – centred around connotation, and in part influenced by Ochs’ ‘simultaneous solo’ strategies – would allow me to include moments where critical change (transformation) might occur, as opposed to that of just formal change, to help allay the issues of continuity and interfacing one might encounter when utilising different forms of notation and practice (Fell, 2017). Finding ways to encourage these points of critical change to occur was of great importance in order to release more creative control to the musicians for them to enrich the music and ultimately transcend the score.

## **9.5 Performance and reflections**

In performance I felt the new levels of connotation embedded in the score were successful in encouraging creative interpretation. In both rehearsal and performance, I felt I was able to remove myself from the situation and leave the piece entirely in the hands of the performers to explore the score and put their own stamp on it. Again, the rehearsal process for both performances was purposefully kept short and succinct, and explaining the structure of the piece, the creative opportunities available and input required from the performers took precedence.

I felt the two performances very much reflected these aspects of personal creativity I hoped to invoke, with the double bass improvised solos a particular highlight. As such in my opinion one could hear the musicians’ differing and individual musical lineages and tastes that formed their creative voices. Seth Bennett produced a bold solo of muscular and percussive qualities full of floating motivic gestures and transitions unbound from traditional harmonic implications of changes and cadences (recording No.4 ~ 05:22). In contrast Paul Baxter’s solo (recording No.5 ~ 07:05) is more melodious and lyrical, developing gestures that hint a harmonic and rhythmic sense akin to jazz and blues. Pleasingly, both effectively utilised and created space to subtly build tension over time. Therefore, everything in these moments belonged to them, and most importantly to me, the narrative was one of transformational critical change.

As such I was able to transfer moderate to large portions of ownership and investment to the performers and start moving towards my aspiration for even greater creative freedoms. When further developed I hoped such strategies might be used as starting points for even greater departures.

This new approach to my construction of a score showed me that a multifaceted approach of notation and practice was deeply effective in opening up the space of performer-driven creativity, and in retaining moments of clarity and control when needed. Being able to identify and apply the appropriate notation for each proposed situation within a piece was key, as demonstrated with a fully notated violin part at section 5 (Figure 9.6). This structure immediately focuses the piece and drives it forward to escalate the music towards the improvisatory high intensity black circle. Without this immediate clarity I doubt the impulse to catapult the piece forward could have been achieved in such an effective manner.

In keeping with the idea of flexibility as a composer, taking a step back in rehearsal and encouraging the performers to be adaptive with the score was key to invoking meaningful investment and collaboration between performers. Again section 5 is a good example of this meaningful act with the violinists in both performances choosing to be generally more playful with the written notations by adding repeats to certain lines that were not in the score, as well as adding a general elasticity to their pace.

5 SOLO - DUO \*OPEN REPEAT - GETTING FASTER & OUT OF SYNC

VIOLIN

Vln

Vln

Vln

D.b.7:

MAXIMUM SPEED & INTENSITY

TUTTI UPWARD LINE TO END!

The image shows a handwritten musical score for three violins. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff is labeled 'Vln' and has a tempo marking '♩ ~ 110'. The second staff is also labeled 'Vln'. The third staff is labeled 'Vln' and has a key signature change to 'D.b.7:'. Below the third staff, there are four hand-drawn wavy lines representing a tremolo or vibrato effect. To the right of the music, there is a large black circle and a hand-drawn sawtooth pattern. The text 'TUTTI UPWARD LINE TO END!' is written next to the sawtooth pattern. The overall style is that of a composer's working draft.

Figure 9.6: figure 5 to end

As the first step towards a new approach that included the meaningful utilisation of imagery as notation, I felt the piece was successful in conjuring an experience more reflective of the impromptu with the performers able to creatively interpret the score and place their own identities on it. Being allowed to make these decisions and changes in my view was essential to the experience and hopefully elevated the music to follow the feelings and experiences of the performers. As such I intended to further develop these notations of connotative quality, and explore a loosening of my narrative towards one of greater critical change.

## 10. The Shaman

### 10.1 Beginnings

Inspired by the evocative playing of British improvising saxophonist Paul Dunmall, I hoped to create a piece that reflected his spellbinding ability to meld wildly differing characteristics and techniques together coherently. In particular I wanted to channel and embody Dunmall's deeply expressive, melodious and lyrical lines, plus his ability to summon animated textures of vitality and spiritedness (rhythmic velocities) through nimble and rapid twisting contours.

Written for the Tenor Saxophone Collective of which I was a member (12 players), I looked to develop the large ensemble approach implemented in *Beneath the Horizon* to further embrace creative interpretation and interplay between performers associated with the impromptu. As such I hoped to utilise the open hybrid notations seen in *The Illuminated Man* in combination with my new and developing approach of connotative graphic notations. The varying experience of free and experimental improvisation in this broadly classical saxophone ensemble was another important consideration in the construction of the piece.

### 10.2 Structure and Form

For the large ensemble situation, I decided a narrative of formal change was required to help develop my thematic material. To counter this potentially over-controlling schema I intended to predominantly use connotative notation (hybrid and graphics) whereby their open and flexible character might bleed into aspects of the piece's form. Thus I sought to create a clear framework to be creatively filled.

The majority of the thematic material is derived from a tone row of the twisting contours (Figure 10.1). Whilst the music might suddenly change akin to Dunmall's musical agility and dexterity, I hoped the close intervallic relationships extracted from the tone row into the piece would help add a thread of coherence away from block form and unrelated material.



Figure 10.1: chromatic tone row



| <b>Section / Rehearsal Mark</b> | <b>Beginning</b>  | <b>1 - 2</b>  | <b>3</b>   |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|
| <b>Features</b>                 | <p>Presentation of core note set (5 tones) to create an intense sonic texture of swirling and twisting lines.</p> <p>Texture is pinned by cadential points before moving. The swirling texture is reaffirmed in a new but close variance before being concluded with cadence.</p> | <p>1. A new sonic texture is introduced that is quiet and fluctuating that utilises unstable sound production techniques of the saxophone. The section is concluded with a solo line.</p> <p>2. A shift of energy and pace occurs through somewhat of a reimagining of the opening music but with aggression and fire (trills and short cadential gestures).</p>  | <p>A developing recapitulation of the opening swirling texture occurs with counter material placed alongside to feed the texture.</p> <p>A duo line is introduced to add direction. The duo becomes a quartet which includes moments of close tension building harmony.</p>  |
| <b>Section / Rehearsal Mark</b> | <b>4</b>  | <b>5</b>  | <b>6</b>   |
| <b>Features</b>                 | <p>Graphic language notations bring the ensemble together through powerful elemental gestures plus moments of interpolation break and juxtapose this apparent unity.</p>  | <p>Notated lines of lyricism inspired by the music of Paul Dunmall dovetail between three players. This break from everything before cleanses the musical canvas and bestows space for the following free improvised solo.</p> <p>The solo is free with no musical instruction or description provided. The solo morphs into a duo before 10 building accompanying chords from the ensemble supports and provokes the now trio of soloists.</p> | <p>A final reimagining of the opening material occurs through the elemental notational techniques and gestures of figure 4. To counter this a final moment of clarity occurs with the layering of staggered held notes (paired) across the whole ensemble.</p> <p>To end the piece departs from where it started - twisting and swirling lines off in to the atmosphere.</p> |

**Figure 10.2: Macro form**

### **10.3 Forms of notation and compositional control**

As previously mentioned, one of my core aims for the piece was to further develop the connotative qualities of my notations (hybrid and instructive graphic). As such I decided to continue to refine them through an approach of simplicity as observed in the work of Barry Guy.

This approach of simplicity was applied to my hybrid notations to enable the performers to place their own musical sensibilities on them as demonstrated in the tone rows of material that encouraged small developments and departures (Figure 10.3).

The handling of melodic line at specific points ensured the clarity and determined trajectory required for the parts to coalesce (Figure 10.4). The rhythms of such the lines were clearly indicated but without barlines to encourage a greater fluidity of time. I felt this lucidity was important so to invoke the lyrical and melodious lines of Dunmall as demonstrated in the dovetailing of a written line across three players at section 5.

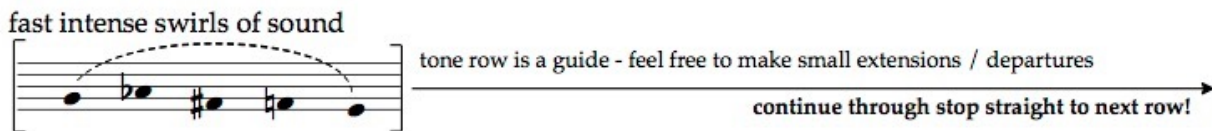


Figure 10.3: hybrid notation tone row - opening (Tenor Saxophone 12)

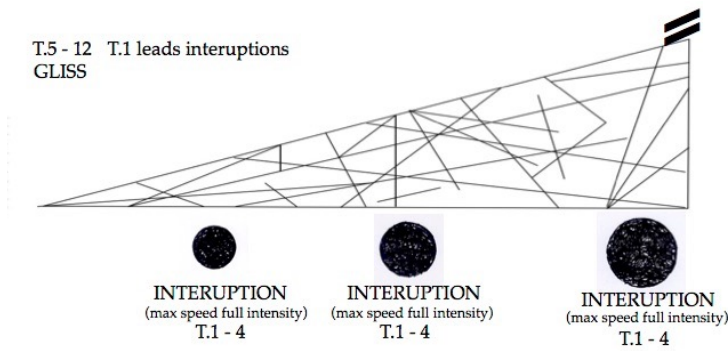


Figure 10.4: hybrid line - section 3 (Tenor Saxophone 12)

With regards to my instructive graphic notations this approach of connotation and simplicity was particularly important. As such I decided these graphics would contain elemental gestures or actions of a descriptive nature (inner volition) so that they might be emboldened with the strength and clarity to provoke a powerful creative response.

To maintain the required clarity I decided to implement these graphics in two ways. At section 1 I used a simple method of interpolation to create a bubbling and fluctuating sonic texture by placing the graphics into box events so to map out their direction to the performer. At section 4 this process of interpolation is replaced for one of broad unity in which the entire ensemble deciphers the same set of graphics which I hoped would invoke moments of great intensity and collective focus.

From a technical standpoint, by refining these graphics to 8 simple representations I hoped to aid their creative interpretation. This is demonstrated in the development of my glissando graphic which was placed within a horizontal long triangle to depict the intended collective crescendo (Figure 10.5). Finding ways for quick and efficient assimilation was the priority for all my instructive graphic notations to grant greater opportunity for creative interpretation.



**Figure 10.5: glissando graphic notation**

With regards to narrative I decided to implement a more formal handling of compositional control so to maintain the clarity required when so many musicians are involved. Therefore a path of formal change was mapped and regulated by the liberty bestowed on the performers through the connotative notations. This refinement and clarity of the piece's framework meant a conductor was not needed, as such removing the chance of added interpretive displacement that might occur with a conductor inexperienced in experimental music and improvisation.

Influenced by Guy's handling of instrumental forces I sought to divide the ensemble into smaller collective working groups to help maintain a clarity and directness to the music. As such this tactic enabled me to strengthen the impact of the gestures in the recapitulation at section 6 in which the ensemble is divided in half and pitted against each other.

#### **10.4 The role of improvisation**

For the large ensemble situation I decided the capacity for free improvisation had to be reduced to ensure a general clarity to the piece could be maintained. Through the connotative notations I hoped the required performer creativity would conjure an evocative intensity akin to improvisation.

Much like *Herbig-Haro* I wanted to include explicit moments of free improvisation to transcend the composer. Therefore in the latter half of section 5 a designated space for free improvisation was placed. In keeping with my approach of simplicity this moment was paired down to a solo that developed into a duo to help concentrate the space and allow meaningful interplay to occur.

Whilst improvisation in its purer form might not have been the predominant practice in the piece, the intention with regards to my notation was to empower the players wherever possible with a freedom for personal interpretation. Through this general approach of shared creativity every performance would be different and reflective of the performers involved; guided, but not strictly bound by a single voice.

### **10.5 Performance and reflections**

The limited number of rehearsals available to the ensemble meant only short amounts of time could be spent on each piece in the groups programme. I was prepared for this situation and the piece was partly constructed with this aspect in mind. As such, in the time allotted my key task was explaining the pieces structure so to release and embolden the creative interpretation of its notation.

In performance (Porto 2017 and Zagreb 2018) I was very pleased with the elasticity and fluidity of time presented, and the perception of spontaneity this invoked. As such I felt the mapped structure provided the safety net required for the performers to push their interpretation of the notations to take greater creative risks in performance. Through feedback from completed questionnaires following both performances I was able to gain valuable insight from a performer's perspective (see appendix 5).

With regards to my notations the general consensus was that the instructive graphics were the most effective upon the performers as they bestowed a greater opportunity for creative interpretation signalled by their inner energy. As such the common opinion was that the creative nature of these notations also greatly contributed to the piece's general feel and spirit of the impromptu, by freeing the performers of the expectations and rules associated with traditional notation, thereby to take creative risks that would not have been attainable through traditional notation This contributed to a general sense of creative involvement and ownership, a key aspect I hoped to achieve.

The main difficulty encountered within the piece for all was realising the hocketed material at section 2. For the performers it was keeping track of their place within this section, as accented trills were passed from player to player. As such I felt this slight uncertainty affected the general fluidity of the section. On reflection I think the layout of this box notation was the cause and that a more traditional or precise form would display the clarity required.

Concerning the implementation of differing practices (written and improvisatory) I felt I was able to integrate them together successfully within a paradigm of clear connotative instruction for the large ensemble situation. The main development in this regard was that I was able to find an approach of greater equality between practices as opposed to a method of foreground and background separation as seen in *Beneath the Horizon*. By refining my notations and structure to one of simplicity I felt their succinct representations and elemental natures enabled efficient assimilation to create the space required for a more personal form of creative interpretation and storytelling.

Perhaps the most striking aspect from my perspective was the importance in conveying to the performers the piece's reliance on their input and investment in order to vividly realise it. Therefore the process of rehearsal was of great importance in helping them understand the broader identity of the piece, the inner natures of the various and different notational methods used, and express the importance of their role in realising all these aspects to bring the piece to life. As such the key aspect I needed to raise in this creative learning experience to the performers was the general removal of traditional relative time from many of the notations, especially with regards to the instructive graphics. Understanding that time was flexible and not strict meant the notations could be explored and contemplated upon, as opposed to rushing through them with a need to get from one point to the next in an ultra-efficient manner.

“At first, I have to admit, I was a little bit apprehensive about the piece. Not seeing "typical" notation was a bit jarring, but once I deciphered all of the graphics, the piece was really quite easy to read/understand. Rehearsing a piece like this was also much easier than I originally thought. Rehearsals were all about logistics, timing, and cues. In performance, I felt more relaxed than with the other pieces. I did not feel the pressure to perform perfectly and feel like I was given the opportunity to create”. — Nathan Mertens (appendix 5)

Finally with regards the improvisatory experience I felt the piece was able to convey the intrinsic nature and intensity of this highly evocative music through the relative liberty of the notation. As such the inner detail and intricacies of the music were created by the performers, not the composer. Having seen the effectiveness of the instructive graphics, I planned to predominantly rely on them in future pieces to further reduce the layers of composer control and hopefully move towards a narrative of critical change associated with the impromptu.

## **11. Panels**

Having explored and developed notations of open and connotative qualities away from the delineated, I decided I must loosen my handling of narrative away from fixed frameworks and move towards a more performer-driven form of critical change (transformation) to really invoke the spirit and self-determination of the impromptu.

This looser handling of the wider narrative it was hoped would further elevate the intrinsic natures of the notation to inform the piece's structure and narrative in performance as points of suggestion, away from the prepared and prescribed. To strengthen this aspect, I intended to further embolden the notation with the poetics of volition and natural development learnt from the British abstract artists with regards to their construction, function and application. As such, I hoped to create a living music that relied on the creative intelligence and intuition of the performers.

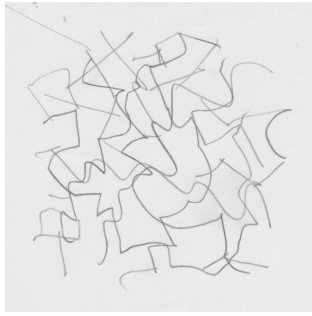
### **11.1 Beginnings**

The continued development and understanding between Ensemble Entropy and myself provided me with the platform and experience to explore this new aspect of performer-driven narrative in which trust between everyone is a prerequisite to invoke meaningful dialogue and interplay.

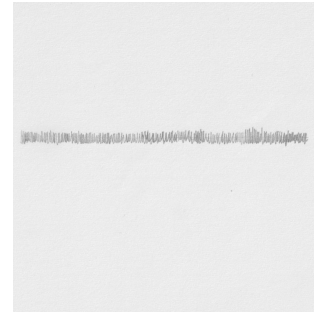
A key part of the group's development was to invite guests to join the core group (flute, saxophone, violin and double bass) so as to bring new perspectives and approaches that would add to our wider experience. For this piece I was able to invite two guests; Phil Maguire on live electronics, and Mark Sanders on drums / percussion.

With electronics a totally new medium to me, understanding the sonic capabilities of Maguire's set up was key in helping me find an identity for the piece. Through a demonstration of the instrument, I was able to divide it's sounds into five broad textual categories, alongside an oscillator for simple tone production.

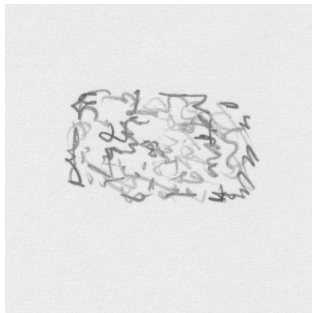
From this demonstration I was able to sketch out 4 graphic representations of these sounds to serve as starting points of development for the piece's core material (Figure 11.1).



1. Filtered Noise (crackle)



2. Light Rumble



3/4. White Noise (selected/filtered)



5. Pop(s)

Figure 11.1: electronics core sounds graphic representations

## 11.2 Structure and compositional control

To apply a narrative of self-determination akin to the critical change of free improvisation, I decided to construct a set of five graphic based panels to serve as starting points for the performers to interpret, expand on and depart from, predominantly through improvisation. Influenced by the indeterminacy often applied by Braxton, these panels could be performed in any order decided upon in performance by a designated leader. As such the piece would rely on the creative interpretation of the material to inform its structure.

For the purposes of this commentary, the following is the order in which the panels were performed in the provided recording.

| Recording timings | start                                       | ~ 3:00                                    | ~ 6:49                                       |
|-------------------|---|---|--|
| Panel             | Flute & drum feature: fragmented notations. | Muted vs Spiky, plus triangle of harmony. | Sustained tone with composite of departures. |

| Recording timings | ~ 10:19            | ~ 12:39   | ~ 19:14                     |
|-------------------|--------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Panel             | Free improvisation | String feature with background of recurring paired notes. | Layered meditative motives. |

Figure 11.2: order of panels in performance

### 11.3 Forms of notation

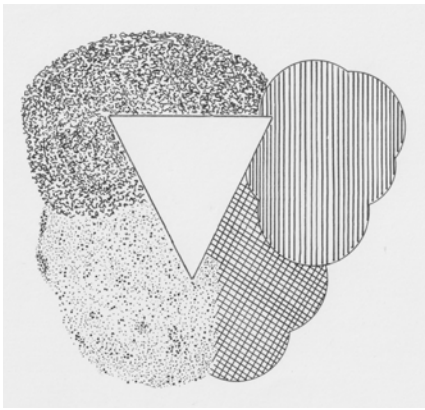
In the previous two pieces I looked to develop and refine my graphic representations into forms of notations extrapolated from the language score approaches of Guy, Smith and Braxton. I therefore added elements of character through connotation instead of treating them as separate contained events or actions as seen in Guy's cards of sonic textures (Figure 7.2).

Whilst happy with the results of this approach I wanted to add an element of abstraction to my notations and their inner natures to help manifest an even more personal and creative interpretation. Therefore, I have tried to devise these five panels around the players, paying particular attention to the sonic qualities of drums and live electronics to provide informed and suggestive points for departure.

Each panel is distilled down to the bare rudiments required to set up a broad character, with much of the inner content left to the performer(s) to create in performance. Wherever possible, I tried not to provide exact pitches or rhythms to follow, with the flute and drum feature panel, and panel of layered motives the exception so to set up a clear identity as an initial point of reference to help inform the departures. And it is this inbuilt opportunity for departure that is really at the centre of these panels.

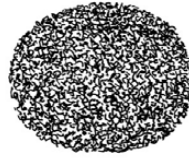
Much of the developmental process was to refine the notation through further simplicity; finding an identity for each panel to be embodied by the performer as opposed to a passing action. I found reducing the initial options available meant I was able to produce material of clear concentrated character for the performers to coalesce around and creatively interpret, as demonstrated in the developed functionality of the Muted versus Spiky panel (Figure 11.3).



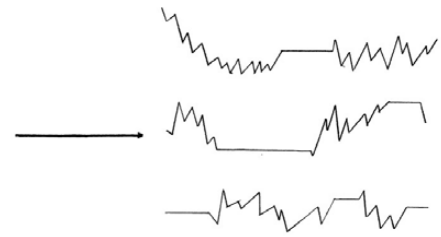


Original

MUTED INTENSE INTRICATE  
HUSHED AIRY



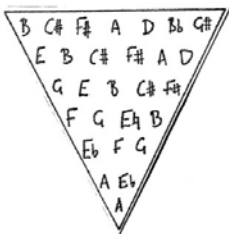
SPIKY JAGGED AND HELD



Developed

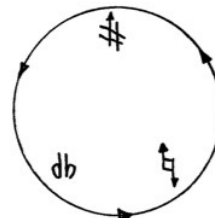
**Figure 11.3: development through simplicity**

I also decided to include points of convergence in certain panels to aid focus, as demonstrated in the triangle of harmony of the same panel (Figure 11.4). Plus, an ending procedure of strong coalescence was developed as demonstrated in the collective ending action of the flute and drum feature panel (Figure 11.5). However, I was careful to ensure these notations or procedures of coalescence were not overly delineated, instead calling for an act of collective convergence.



**Figure 11.4: triangle of harmony**

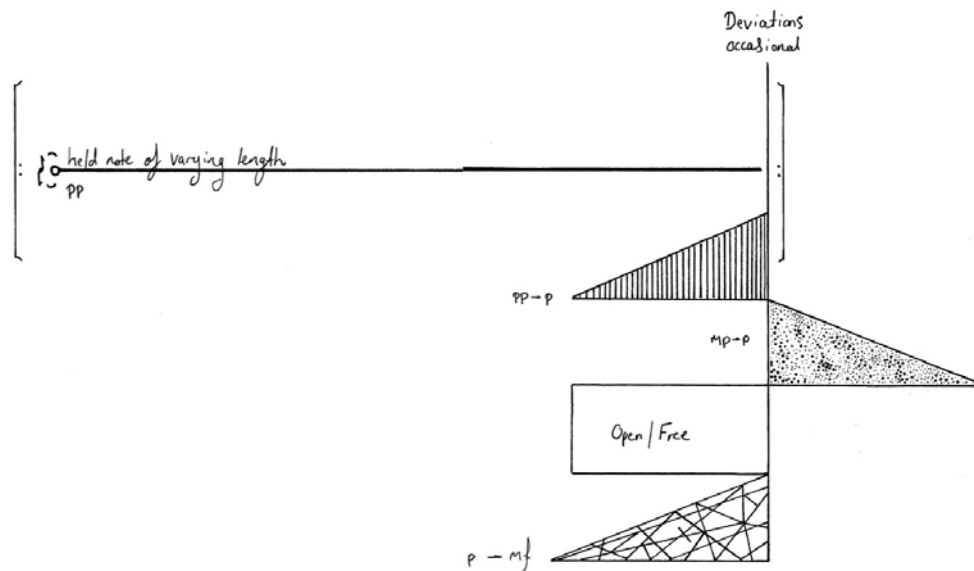
★ Towards and Settle on a unison note



**Figure 11.5: unison note to end panel**

Through this approach of simplicity with regards to my notations, I was able to focus on their inner volition in construction as advocated by the British abstract artists. As with *Herbig-Haro* I found working by hand in the production of each panel meant I could develop and channel this inner energy into my notations.

Finding a balance between the abstract and functionality of my panels was a key consideration as demonstrated in the sustained tone combined with a composite of deviations panel influenced by Smith's velocity unit substructures – developing it into a structure of character and kinetic energy (Figure 11.6).



**Figure 11.6: sustained tone with composite of deviations**

Whilst not able to add too much abstract character to my notations, as I would have originally liked —probably due to my personal need for some form of volition and clarity — I felt by loosening the wider narrative I was able to produce highly suggestive notations instead of prescribed. As such the piece required the creative investment of others as individuals, and as a collective, with the composer in the role of an instigator.

### **11.4 The role of improvisation**

Through the reduction of a broad formal narrative in which each panel of notations would serve as suggested points of character, the onus would therefore be placed on the performers to creatively engage with, and bring each panel to life. It is this requirement of the performer to take ownership of the music that I wanted to maximise in my creative music practice.

As such, I hoped to engage the creative intuition and intelligence (and their associated internal faculties of perception, decision making, technique and expression etc) of the ensemble to produce the inner content of the panels and the wider narrative of the piece through a process of creative discourse. In essence I hoped the intrinsic nature and faculties of the improvisatory experience would shine through.

By constructing material of strong and open connotative qualities, the performers are compelled to imprint their own musical sensibility upon the material (functioning as

suggestive starting points), then taking them forward through new interpretations to manifest music beyond the page.

In essence I had reduced delineated points for interpretation to a minimum, with the act of creative interpretation and improvisation the driving force of this paradigm, to ensure the voice of others was the life-blood of the music. In many ways I was trying to apply the wise words of Mingus (1962) into the application of my score/performing materials; “As long as they start where I start, and end where I end, the musicians can change the composition if they feel like it. They add themselves. They add how they feel, while we’re playing”.

### **11.5 Performance and reflections**

In keeping with my strategy of short succinct rehearsals, the main task was to explain the premise of the piece and panels to the ensemble. Once one panel was collectively understood from a technical viewpoint, we would promptly move on to another until all were consumed.

In performance I was very happy with the results of the notation and reduction of broad formal narrative to produce evocative music of intensity and fragility. This in my opinion was a consequence of the newly inbuilt opportunity and requirement in which transformative moments of critical change could occur. Importantly this was achieved collectively; performers could creatively contribute and ride the waves of others’ ideas simultaneously, as opposed to being determined by an overriding voice.

As such, the score by itself was as a set of suggestive points that could never be adequately imagined by an onlooker. It relied on the performers for it to exist, as the notations needed to be embodied, developed and ultimately departed from for the piece to find any real meaning. To find this deeper meaning it had to be produced as part of a collective experience that relied on each other to push, lead, follow, find consensus and dispute.

From my perspective this was proved, in that a moment of collective free improvisation was able to occur in between panel 3 and 4 in performance. This in my opinion felt like a natural manifestation that was never planned, but was able (and encouraged) to transpire through the inbuilt openness and intrinsic nature of the panels to develop into something new.

One of my main concerns with this approach of independent panels was that it might result in a performance of disjointedness akin to the sometimes jarring juxtapositions found in block form. But through the collective realisation of material, refined and empowered through simplicity, I felt this fear was allayed, as the material when performed went beyond representations on the page. As such the collective was able to construct and find a musical collage of wholeness.

*Panels* represents the culmination of my research in developing a personal creative practice to invoke the inherent nature of improvisation into constructed broad structures for traditional sized ensembles (4 - 6 players). As such, the core development of this process was the change in application and function of my notation towards one of open connotation to be embodied and surpassed, beyond its initial character. To enhance and magnify this new motivation of creative drive placed upon the performer, the opening up of narrative from formal change towards providing opportunity for transformational change was key to allowing others to manifest music along the lines of their creative intuition and intelligence.

The implementation of this multifaceted notational approach enabled to me to gauge the effectiveness of these varying approaches in performance. As such this would inform the wider approach for my final large ensemble work, in which creating the space for meaningful acts of improvisational discourse to occur was my primary objective.

## **12. Rituals**

### **12.1 Beginnings**

Written for Orchestra Entropy — the extended edition of my group — *Rituals* is the culmination of my research with regards to implementing a myriad of compositional approaches that aim to conjure and invoke the intrinsic nature of the impromptu in a large ensemble setting.

The core aspiration in this regard was to grant as much freedom as possible to the performers to creatively interpret material along their own musical sensibilities and utilise their creative intuition and intelligence within situations of varying regulation. As such, this builds upon the experiences of my previous works for large ensemble — *Beneath the Horizon* (14 players) and *The Shaman* (12 tenor saxophones) in developing notations of connotative natures, and especially in the reduction of formal narrative.

By opening these parameters of control I hoped to encourage the performers to elevate the performing materials beyond the page by placing their own creative voice into the music, to transform into a shared experience of creativity and resonance.

Before composing the work, I made sure to listen to a number of the improvising musicians that would make up the large ensemble live to gain insight into their musical personalities, and to help them understand that I was interested in their musical essence, and wanted to respect this aspect in the work.

I was also able to attend concerts led by my peers; Alex Ward, Cath Roberts and Anton Hunter to gain further insight into their personal approaches in composing for large improvising ensembles <sup>10</sup> — in particular I found Roberts' strategies requiring the ensemble to independently and playfully interpret her material inspiring to witness and experience.

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<sup>10</sup> Cath Robert (2017) *Favourite Animals*, Anton Hunter (2017) *Article XI*, Alex Ward (2017) *Item 10*

## 12.2 Structure and Form

Presented on two hand drawn panels, a broad framework is constructed for the purposes of a wider storytelling with the content of the piece predominately created by the performers. Whilst this form of narrative might be construed as one of formal change, its actual nature and application is reduced from one that typically controls the inner content along every parameter, to one that merely guides the performers to explore and create a musical landscape.

I felt this semi regulation of the broad narrative was needed for the large ensemble setting so to ensure the creative voices of the performers could be heard, had the required space for meaningful discourse to occur; with perceived boundaries to work off and hopefully break (power of limits).

For the purposes of this commentary I have divided the work in to nine parts to outline its wider structure — but in reality it was formulated as two halves of flowing music.

| Part | 1  | 2   | 3   |
|------|--|---|---|
|      | Staggered repetition actions layer across the ensemble. This wider action occurs four times with a different closing actions each time.<br><br>A trombone solo leads out along an instructive graphic.   | <i>Skelf</i> a trio sub piece for electric guitar, double bass and drums. In the form of a simple text score, the trio are instructed to perform a short moment of high intensity followed by a stop and natural ring/resonance to nothing. This happens three time. The trio is then free. | Points of free improvisation:<br><br>Solo - viola<br><br>Duo - viola and drums<br><br>A quiet tutti chord   |
|      |  |   |   |
| Part | 4  | 5   | 6   |
|      | Instructive graphic composite inspired by the artwork of Jan Tarasin - each member of the ensemble charts their own journey through the graphic (tutti interpolation). Graphics in colour are to be brought to the foreground. Graphics in black and white are to be played in the background.<br><br>Two tutti chords to end. | <i>antiphon</i> a sub piece for violin, viola and double bass. A notated (hybrid notation) violin feature in which a line of melody and semi regulated rhythm is developed. Within this there are two designated points of improvisation for the trio.                                      | Bass clarinet and trombone feature - the duo starts with hybrid material that develops into a free trio with the drums. To support and supplement the free trio two backings for the remainder of the ensemble are cued by the leader (4 tutti chords or a repetition action). To usher out the trio 6 chords are cued. |
|      |  |   |   |

| Part | 7   | 8   | 9   |
|------|---|---|---|
|      | <p>Extend language notation section. The ensemble collectively moves through a path of instructive graphic notations and structures.</p> <p>This includes a triangle of harmony for the ensemble with baritone saxophone solo placed on top. The section ends with a refrain of the opening material (staggered repetitions) plus a repeated tutti chord.</p> | <p>Point of free improvisation:</p> <p>Trio - tenor saxophone, double bass and drums.</p> | <p>A tutti melodic line is played by the ensemble on top of a pedal note in the lower instruments (concert D).</p> <p>Collective free improvisation.</p> <p>Loose tutti chord to end.</p> |

Figure 12.1: Marco structure

### 12.3 Forms of notation and compositional control

With *Rituals* the culmination of my research, a multifaceted and flexible approach was implemented with regards to both notation and the handling of narrative so to invoke the intrinsic nature of free improvisation. The key development of this process was in the refinement through simplicity of both these two core aspects so that they might inform each other in performance. Through this approach the performers were required to invest themselves into the interpretation of the material in different ways depending on the form of notation, and its associated process of realisation. Importantly, this multifaceted approach enabled me to vary the levels of wider control with performer creativity and liberty the prime consideration.

The three core procedures developed through previous pieces that form this abstract language score approach were; scored points of hybrid notations, instructive graphic notations, and points for free improvisation.

I was therefore able to utilise a variety of notational approaches used and developed through the portfolio as seen in the inclusion of the triangle of harmony and sustained tone composite from *Panels*, the latter was further developed through a process of simplicity influenced by the deep focus found John Stevens' *Sustain Piece*. I also included developed paths of instructive graphics as seen in *Herbig-Haro* and *The Shaman* taking Ochs' 'simultaneous solos' strategies into further consideration. As such, I hoped to imbue my general notational approach with

varying degrees of performer impulse and creativity for them to invest themselves in the music, and elevate the material beyond the page.

As mentioned, a broad framework was constructed to ensure a wider storytelling of the work could take place in the form of a collective thread to follow. The formal nature of this thread was reduced to one of simple guidance, not tight control. As such, the performers were encouraged and required to interpret and realise the performing material through their creativity and self-determination.

One small but important development with regards to the technical handling of my hybrid notations was the removal of assigned pitches, with only rhythmic impetus implied or outlined. This was even applied to the large tutti chords found across the entire piece in which only pictorial outlines void of any clefs were supplied. And I was reminded of a chat with Paul Dunmall when developing this device about his experiences of playing in Barry Guy's London Jazz Composers Orchestra.

Paul told me a short story about the saxophone section — when warming up for a rehearsal the section; Trevor Watts, Evan Parker, Simon Picard, Peter McPhail and Dunmall decided to play some short staccato tutti stabs to get their timing and articulation together; pitch was of no concern. After a couple of stabs, Guy heard them and came tearing over asking them to freeze so he could write down their notes!

What struck me from this story was that the harmony was entirely generated by chance or accident, as such I thought, why not embed this aspect of indeterminacy into my approach with regards to harmony and embrace the 'accident' as suggested by Francis Bacon (2016), that might result in something far more profound than I could have imagined or planned.

Perhaps the most important aspect with regards to my three core procedures was one of parity, and not hierarchical importance. Thus accordingly *Rituals* illustrates how through experience I could construct, and handle narrative and varying forms of notation in different ways within one piece. Being adaptable and willing to embrace a duality of seemingly opposing practices was key to this paradigm.

“It is possible to play traditional compositions by capturing their feel, using them as springboards for improvisation, rather than being forced to play them in a traditional



manner (although knowledge of the traditional interpretations and manners of playing can only enrich the new interpretation); in fact, they can be used as concepts to imitate or contradict". (Crispell, 2000)

This is perhaps best demonstrated in the inclusion of the sub-piece *antiphon* that consists of a notated and characterful solo line for the violin. Whilst its poetics might seem at odds with a creative practice intended to invoke the impromptu, I felt that this point of crystalline identity and precise intention was needed to serve as a cleansing focal point, and to better provoke the ensuing string group improvisation. Similarly the tutti melodic line in part 9 served as an important point of focus for the ensemble to coalesce around, and drive the piece towards its upcoming finale (Figure 12.2).

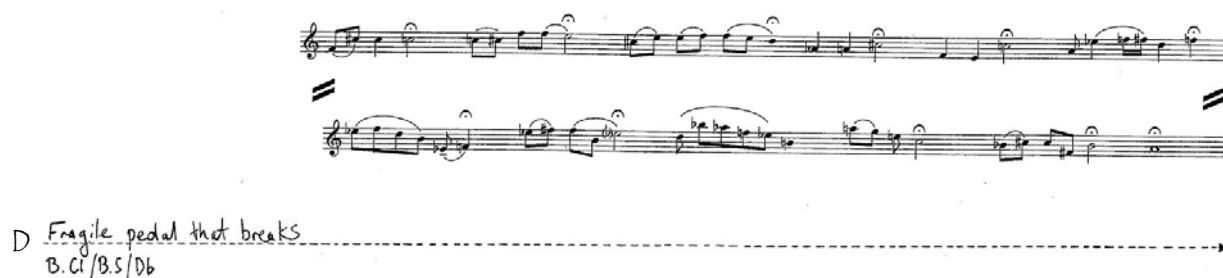


Figure 12.2: melodic line

Lastly a new development in the application of my instructive graphic notations can be seen in the central graphic of the first panel. Instead of placing these instructive notations along a path to be followed, I decided to add a layer of chance and required self-determination by constructing an artistic composite (inspired by the artwork of Polish artist Jan Tarasin) for the performers to navigate themselves through — in a sense this was a form of controlled ambiguity (Figure 12.3). By placing responsibility on the performers to construct their own path through the composite, I hoped would add a degree of abstraction to this point of creative ambiguity. As such a theme of duality lies within this condition and more broadly the piece as a whole. For despite its seeming degrees of freedom and self-determination, the composite is essentially a medium of wider control, through the power of limits.

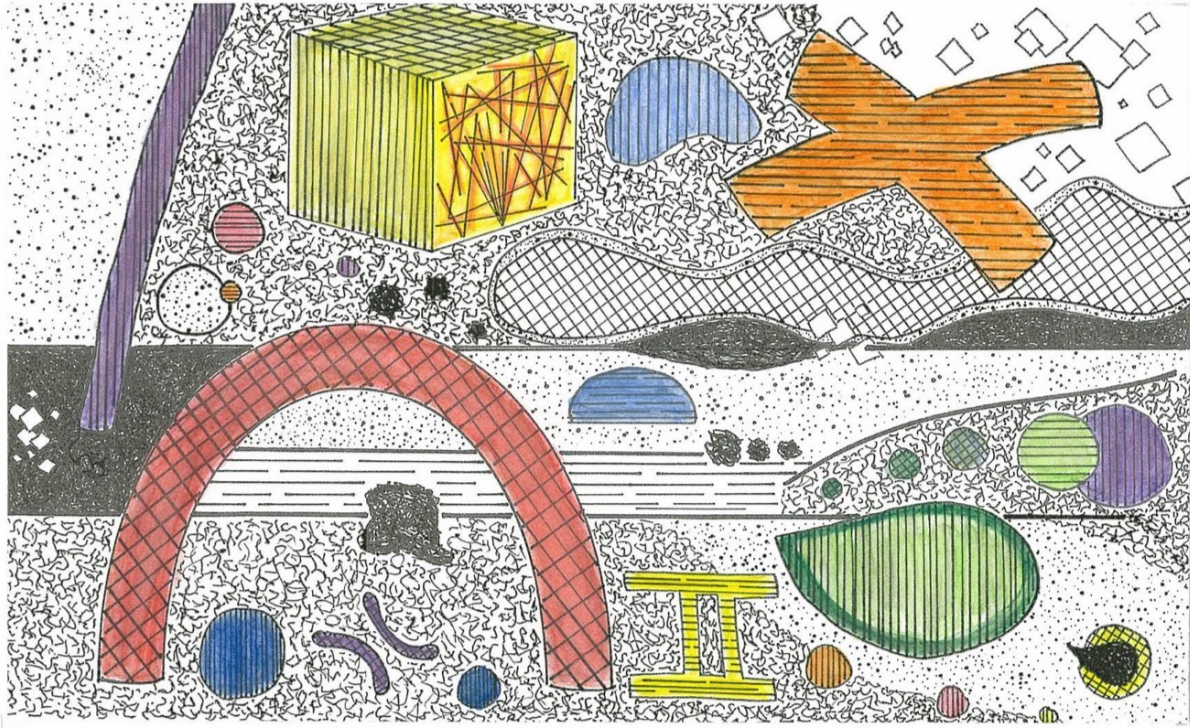


Figure 12.3: instructive graphic composite

## 12.4 The role improvisation

Through this process of evolution across the portfolio I was able to weave a conviction of connotation into the fabric of my creative music practice in the way I bestowed my composer's intention and identity, away from delineated forms. This connotative nature refined and enhanced through simplicity as such would demand performers to make instinctive departures based upon the notations primal character. I therefore hoped through this approach to engage with, and require the shared faculties of creative intuition and intelligence inherent in improvisation to be placed into my devised materials.

As a consequence, I felt I could include multiple points for free improvisation within the work through different notational approaches that would not appear forced, but as natural and essential happening. As such, through this approach of equality and parity between differing practices I was able to sculpt the music not as a totalitarian figure of authority, but as a guide for the performers to explore and discover who they were within it. This I hoped would be a shared experience that would transcend the material beyond my vision to express and reflect the intensity and fragility of the musical personalities involved.

## 12.5 Performance and reflections

In keeping with previous tactics, I purposely kept the rehearsal for *Rituals* short and succinct. The main task was to explain the technical workings of the various notation found in the score (graphic composite, triangle of harmony etc), and talk the ensemble through the piece's structure. Once each landmark or signpost was understood, we would move on to the next. Only the opening was played in full so that the ensemble could understand the staggered layering of the material in action, and get acquainted with my general style of direction.

The provided live and unedited recordings are of the piece's two performances at IKLECTIK and LSO St Luke's. The latter was the result of being given the fantastic opportunity to professionally record the work through LSO Soundhub. Again the rehearsal for this was short as the time allotted for the session would only allow for one take of the entire piece, much like a live performance. As such, this is how we approached it.

In performance I felt the work successfully exhibited the parity of approaches and creative wholeness I hoped to achieve. Whilst a broad thread of formal narrative was used in comparison to *Panels*, I felt the work was still able to invoke the intrinsic qualities and interrelationships of improvisation, plus points of critical change I aspired to embed into the fabric of the music.

As such, the performers were able to channel their creative musical identities in performance within the framework through the connotative instruction and suggestive points of inspiration, for them to take forward expand and depart in their own personal. This was well demonstrated in Moss Freed's (electric guitar) interpretation of the opening material of rapid qualities, in which he placed his own rhythm and pace upon it displaced from the other member's interpretation resulting in an interesting, and stirring cross rhythm effect (recording 10. St Luke's performance).

This was also revealed in the designated points for free improvisation in parts three, six and eight that were very different in nature and manner in each performance — a reflection of their feelings with no imposing or instructive direction from the composer. This aspiration to create music that is always different was also well reflected in the realisation of the instructive graphic composite.

As part of this wider approach I found embracing an adaptability was essential to perform the music beyond my initial vision. This was perhaps best demonstrated in making small but important changes in both sub-pieces.

In *Skelf*, I had originally intended to bring back the short concentrated figure (text instruction) of high intensity to bookend the free improvisation as an ending refrain. However, when marking up the score in rehearsal it became abundantly clear that this refrain was not needed, and was therefore removed.

In *antiphon*, I decided to add the drums/percussion to play freely half way through this sub-piece as I felt it required another sonic texture to add an extra dimension of tactile energy for the trio to bounce off in their second point of free improvisation, to produce a point of greater apogee. In both situations, being flexible and willing to make changes enabled the musicians to enrich and amplify the levels of intensity inherent in free improvisation.

To perhaps to best sum up this approach for the large ensemble situation and creative practice as a whole, an analogy about travel comes to mind. Please bear with me:

I intend to make a journey from one point to another. I want to enjoy, and experience this journey. As such, I am not interested in following exact directions in which every single turn is laid out and described in great detail along the most efficient route like a Satellite Navigation System. For I would be fully concentrated, and bound to its every instruction. I would miss out on discovering, and studying interesting landmarks of both natural and manmade beauty, and intrigue. From my perspective, I would prefer to be given a set of landmarks, or coordinates to navigate by, and make my own way across unknown terrain to stumble upon, and discover places I never knew existed. And whilst I might take a wrong turn, and need to ask for directions, or even not enjoy a particular part of this journey, I have certainly experienced it, and contemplated upon it, and ultimately learnt something from it.

As a personal example of this perspective, I particularly enjoyed a very small, perhaps inconsequential moment in the St Luke's performance. This was the repeated tutti chord at the end of part 7. By using a very simple form of open hybrid notation in which no pitches were provided, the resulting harmony was left in the hands of the musical gods as a point of chance. Knowing that the result would be one of chance, the fact that it felt right in that moment when played (from my perspective and taste at least) was particularly thrilling. As

such it helped invigorate my role in the free improvisation trio (saxophone, double bass and drums) that followed. Had I set the pitches, this tiny, personal moment of impact might never have happened.

### **13. Conclusion**

This portfolio documents the construction of a personal creative music practice using my understanding of the figurative and abstract considerations outlined in the introduction, and their effect on my aspiration to channel the spirit and social discourse of free improvisation. Through the process of developing my notational approach and handling of narrative I hoped to create an approach that would grant this freedom to the performers in my compositions. On reflection however it was clear that the overriding considerations in my earlier works were overly centred around the issue of control; to maintain my compositional identity predominantly through formal narrative – in turn affecting the general nature of my notational approach. Therefore the key point at this early stage was understanding the actual nature and attributes of improvisation that I hoped to conjure and insert into my creative practice. As such I was obligated to re-evaluate the levels of compositional control and identity required to successfully channel the intrinsic qualities and relationships of the impromptu.

In realising that I wanted improvisation to truly be the creative force behind my music I set about understanding how to alleviate the levels of compositional control, and transfer far greater creative responsibilities to the performers, relying on their creative intuition and intelligence. As outlined in chapter 7 the study of language scores was essential and enlightening in changing my outlook with regards to the sharing of responsibility between composer and performer(s). As such the key development was in creating a notational approach of connotation so to grant the performer with the power and liberty to interpret them along the lines of their own musical sensibility. This can be predominantly seen in the crafting, development and refinement of my instructive graphic and hybrid notations through a process of simplicity, as reflected in *Herbig-Haro* and *The Shaman*. In finding shared commonalities in the creation of abstract art as outlined in chapter 8 I was able to better understand the inner volition behind every mark and line within an image to further inform and influence how to construct my own instructive graphic notations of connotative qualities.

Through this developmental process of simplicity regarding my notational approach I was finally able to evolve my handling of narrative. In the first half of the portfolio, I used a narrative of formal processional change to maintain compositional control (and identity) of the pieces throughout, as demonstrated in *The Wind Blows South* and *Beneath the Horizon*, which I felt often impeded the creative intensity of the performers, thus affecting the pieces' overall feel. However I was able to relieve some of this control as demonstrated in *The*

*Illuminated Man* through the reduction of devised material to small portions, to act as detailed points of instruction to move between. Through the introduction of connotative notations, as seen in *Herbig-Haro* and *The Shaman* I was able to reduce the concentration of formal change even further in my handling of narrative to one that served as a path of guidance that did not impose too much composer intention and fixed detail. This allowed the performers to further imprint their identity upon the work in a far greater way in comparison to the first three works, adding an element of risk to encourage new levels of investment and ownership, and thus intensify the collaborative experience.

The final evolution of my creative music practice was in the further refinement of both my notational approach and handling of narrative through greater simplicity and connotation. As such I was able to distil these aspects down to primal forms that in practice would inform each other in performance through performer sensibility. The culmination of this process was *Panels* — by constructing separate entities of material whose broad identity was outlined through a thread of guidance containing simple and elemental notations, each panel relied on the performers individually, and collectively to interpret the material beyond the page, along the lines of their own sensibility and creativity, that resulted in points of critical change. As such the material required the performer to fully engage with their creative intuition in order to have any substance. Akin to improvisation they had to share their creative voice and take ownership of the music in these departures from the suggestive points of my material.

Through this experience I was able to devise an approach for *Rituals* that incorporated many of these creative practices into a framework of shifting regulation for the often-problematic large ensemble situation. And as such I was able to include points of formal change and points of critical change within a single paradigm of wholeness and equality to produce a work that was able to tell a collective story, instead of attempting to recreate a removed vision from a single perspective.

Through this journey of evolution and development, my discovery was that I had to embrace a multifaceted approach of practices that allowed for a state of duality to exist. My oversight at the start of this process was that I was looking to create a single systemic paradigm for all situations when in reality I needed to create one that was flexible, and adaptable, that could contain techniques from differing practices together and separately in order to be truly effective.

Essentially the core aspect in enabling me to discover and develop my open and flexible creative paradigm was in the changing of my mindset, originally built upon the conventions and traditions of western classical art music. I was too bound to the importance of preserving compositional identity through control, inner detail and development in the recreation of a single vision. Equally from the opposing perspective of the improviser I needed to set aside the view that fixed elements and instruction would necessarily limit and curtail personal creativity, intensity and authenticity of the self. Instead I had to develop a mindset of democratisation between practices so as to unleash the authentic power of the impromptu into my music that could be further empowered, and magnified through informative points of devised material (utilising the power of limits) and carefully handled narrative for creative departures. As such I needed to learn how to control and embrace the happy accident.

Therefore my creative paradigm is one that is independently spirited, that can indiscriminately borrow elements from differing and opposing practices for each piece or situation on an individual basis, and celebrate their intrinsic characteristics and the contributions of others in creating a shared experience, rather than adhering to the prescribed judgement of a single perspective. It is this equality and parity between practices and approaches, and the trust in other musicians that ultimately brings my music to life. It is a shared experience that belongs to those involved but not to any one individual.

As such my creative music practice is always changing and evolving and is therefore even hard for me to define. Is it structured improvisation or improvisation with structured points? Most likely it is a bit of both depending on the context. Perhaps the point is that it does not matter whether one can identify what is improvised, and what is not improvised in my music. Instead I think it is perhaps best appreciated as a living music created by a collective of musicians willing to bare their voices and vulnerabilities within a shared experience.

In many ways my creative practice fits Paul Dunmall's (2006) description of free improvisation: "I think what's actually happened in free improvisation... is there's nothing that's barred. We want to use it all. We want everything. We want melody, we want time, we want abstraction, we want no time, we want the whole package so that you are truly free to play what you want."



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## **Appendix 1: Double Trouble Two (1995) by Barry Guy**

The genesis of this substantial piece originates through its predecessor *Double Trouble* a double concerto styled work composed in 1989 for pianists Howard Riley and Alexander von Schlippenbach and their associated ensembles; The London Jazz Composers Orchestra and Globe Unity Orchestra performed in that year in Cologne. After its premiere the work was subsequently performed again and recorded within a year (1990) by Guy's LJCO minus the Globe Unity Orchestra and their soloist (Alexander von Schlippenbach).

*Double Trouble Two* written and recorded in 1995 retains the same number of soloists (two pianos) from its predecessor accompanied by the LCJO plus an extra drum set. With the large ensemble consisting of two double bassists and a drummer this allows for two piano trios (piano, bass and drums) which the composer uses to great effect and this general concept of pitting guest soloists (including soloists from within the ensemble) and groups against each other becomes a recurring theme within the work harking back to aim for the original 1989 work as a double piano concerto.

Whilst much of the core material contained in *Double Trouble Two* is clearly captured from its predecessor the work itself should not be viewed as an arrangement. It is in fact an evolution birthed by a greater understanding of the original and the intricate relationships between members of the LJCO a result of experience and the percolation of time. Between the two works in question; five original works for the ensemble were written and recorded by Guy and his orchestra (1989 - 1995).

### **Appendix 1.2: Double Trouble Two basic overview**

#### **Part I: Bar 1 - 55 Duration: 8m8s**

|  |   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| A series of fast, manic and furiously rapid passages between pianists in free / open time. | Written ensemble paired chords counter, support and help direct open / free elements. | Controlled semi open collective ensemble reflection and reciprocation including soloists from within. | Greater controlled rhythmic motif-like elements introduced and established by the ensemble through repetition between semi open tutti passages. | A strong differential between open and controlled elements are represented throughout. |
|--|---|---|---|--|



**Part II: Bar (55 pickup) 56 - 90 Duration: 8m38s**

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Calmer energy and dynamic.</p> <p>Free soloist (trumpet) in an almost rhapsodic vein accompanied by written ensemble including rubato lines within. A collective tonal centre is established.</p> | <p>Written accompaniment reminiscent of a <i>cante hondo</i> (plaintive) becomes more controlled later developing into annotated military type march with continued soloist (trumpet) above.</p> | <p>Reference of calmer section with new soloist (soprano saxophone) developing into an almost recapitulation of Part I through repeated ensemble statements (strong chord verses repeated rhythmic motif).</p> |
|--|--|--|

**Part III: Bar 91 - 104 Duration: 10m10s**

|   |   |   |  |
|---|---|---|--|
| <p>Restful almost serene written rubato piano solo.</p> <p>End of solo is presented by bell tone-like stacked chord re-enforced and reciprocated by ensemble.</p> | <p>Free piano trio initially references written piano solo as requested by composer before transforming into something highly energetic and driven referential of the work's opening.</p> | <p>Piano trio joined by soprano saxophone continues. Added ensemble backings of short rhythmic statements developed from primal motifs elements in Part I are repeated. Growth of energy from all result in brief open tutti moment (free bar).</p> | <p>Free quartet with new pianist emanates. Backings again reminiscent of Part I later interjected. Very brief recap of controlled rapid passages from Part I by ensemble to end.</p> |
|---|---|---|--|

**Part IV: Bar 105 - 136 Duration: 16m52s**

|   |  |  |  |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Small verses big.</p> <p>Duo improv (trumpet and drums) with interjected short ensemble statements (rapid passages reference). Duo change (trombone &amp; drums). Change to trio (trombone, tuba &amp; drums) with quiet stacked bell tone chord to end.</p> | <p>Extended free quintet (2 saxophones, piano, double bass and drums). Later added ensemble backings of short rhythmic statements again developed from primal motifs elements in Part I.</p> | <p>Duo (alto sax and piano) with tapered string background accompaniment. Duo continues. Background accompaniment returns becoming more prominent through added numbers from the ensemble. Tutti chord to end.</p> | <p>Exact repeat of the plaintive refrain and march (bars 63 - 77) but with trombone soloist.</p> |
|---|--|--|--|

**Part V: Bar 137 - End (174) Duration: 3m35s**

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <p>March distilled down to a simple held chord with moving homophonic chords statements (written). A soprano saxophone soloist is added.</p> | <p>The statements are repeated but with incremental developments to pitch range resulting in a growth of intensity.</p> | <p>A refrain from intensity is made with the statements reduced with regards to density into the background as the soprano saxophone solo continues with the two pianists returning in the same spirit of the opening (rapid).</p> | <p>The background chords begin rise to the foreground becoming more free eventually culminating in a final open and free tutti moment that is fast and manic referential of the opening.</p> <p>This moment of energy is held and crescendos to an abrupt end.</p> |
|--|---|--|--|

## Appendix 2: The wind blows south by Jo Surzyn

The wind blows south

to blow all concept of my own appearance south  
towards the flats behind the avenue thousands  
will die today and the wind will blow through  
the cotton polyester blend that lines my body  
and the trees that run east along the avenue  
taking their form from them with little rhythm  
just leaves migrating south across  
the paths of speeding cars on the avenue  
and it won't stop because you don't  
like it or because the cat mistakes it  
for a stranger grabbing at her tail  
and it won't stop because the forecaster  
never warned us it was coming because a voice  
that turns me on is singing *keep your body still*  
as the wind pushes south across the avenue

Jo Surzyn (undated)

### **Appendix 3: Beneath the Horizon: collated questionnaire answers**

From four responders.

**Question 1. Which form of alternative notation was most effective (graphic, box, text, hybrid notation etc) and why?**

- Graphic - gives you freedom alongside clear direction.
- Graphic - it gave good structure to play freely in.
- Hybrid notation, most clear to understand.
- I found the text helpful, as an extra guide having the cues written under was useful too.

**Question 2. Did you encounter any problems navigating through the piece? If so, any suggestions as to how this could have been improved?**

- Damien (conductor) gave cues for each section and within each section, maybe these could be added in the score?
- No.
- Struggled to know when repeats were happening.
- Just making sure I kept track of all the repeats.

**Question 3. Did you feel more creativity involved with the piece? How comfortable are you with this aspect and did this change with time?**

- I love this kind of music and play it regularly so felt comfortable and enjoyed it.
- Yes as the improvisatory sections allowed more creative input from all players, and I was comfortable doing this from the start.
- Yes, I'm not usually up for improvising but I felt like I could experiment around the written and had lots of confidence by the end of rehearsals.
- To being with I was a bit timid in the graphic score notation improv but I feel completely comfortable with this now.

**Question 4. One of the core aims for the piece was to give it a sense of spontaneity and unpredictability. In your opinion how successful was the piece in achieving this goal?**

- Very successful; each time it's slightly different and i like how it switches main parts across the instrumentation.
- I think it succeeded in these areas, as improv sections came at unexpected times after notated sections.
- Very successful, each section gave something different and unusual.
- Yes with the contrast in mood between sections.

**Question 5. Do you think the music created was unique to the notation system and could have been achieved through traditional notation?**

- I don't think the spontaneity and creativity could have been achieved by standard notation.
- I haven't seen this style of writing before (graphics) and it was the best way of achieving the desired effect; notations would have sounded constrained and complicated to play.
- Yes, definitely, it would have been hard to notate some of it normally, especially when the performer has choice over notes.
- Possibly, but it would've limited creativity and would not have been easy.

#### **Appendix 4: The Illuminated Man: questionnaire completed by Matthew Bourne**

**One of the core aims for the piece was to give it a sense of spontaneity and unpredictability. In your opinion how successful was the the piece in achieving this goal? Did you feel creatively involved with the piece?**

I felt very involved, creatively - yes. I love engaging with written material, and learning new (scored) music. So, this piece allowed me to indulge in both improvisation, and building musical bridges between the written and improvised components, respectively. Having the stimulus of the score is crucial: It allows a reference point, or, functions as a kind of 'raw material' resource that can be drawn on/reflected upon - no matter if in a literal or oblique way. In many ways, I felt as if this piece, from a musicians/players perspective, achieved a high level of spontaneity and unpredictability.

**Do you think the music created was unique to the notation system, could it have been achieved through traditional notation? Would this have affected it's musical performance impression / feel?**

I don't think that your current compositional intentions could have been achieved through a traditional, fully-scored approach; but is/was achieved by the combination of scored/improvised elements. Part of the unseen score is, of course, the community of musicians that participate in the performance of the piece. I know this isn't looking good as a potential answer to the question(!) but, I think that, had your piece been 100% written notes and 0% improvisation, played by musicians who are used to reading complex scores, it would have been a very different intent / energy / realisation, altogether...

**With the desire to serve as musical sustenance and identity to the work (including it's improvisations) through the composed components there is also the hope that they act as sign-posts, to establish direction and structure. As a performer did you find freedom in the scoring for you to initiate and implement your own ideas?**

Absolutely. I remember thinking that the scored elements were just enough, and left plenty of room to interpret their suggestions in the improvisations. Moreover, the scored elements were not mere asides, but complete in their own right. They felt integral and stimulating when delving into them.

**Please described in your own words your experiences rehearsing and performing 'The Illuminated Man' with some of these aspects in mind. If possible try to cover your thoughts on the practical workings of the piece (scoring) and the impact this had on the music and your performance.**

I like to study scores, generally. And I loved looking at /rehearsing/performing 'The Illuminated Man'! My own predisposition is to firstly, 'learn the notes'. Perhaps this comes from the implied weight of Western classical music and its conventions, rigmarole, and the adherence and admission into a certain class, or clique. Playing the notes, or, getting the notes right is still something that haunts me - and all of this is of my own making. I guess I choose improvisation as a safe place, free of such internal judgement and assumption upon myself. SO, playing your piece presented the perfect forum in which to dance with the safe, unfamiliar, the conventions of scored material... I really enjoyed performing it - knowing full well that all of us in the ensemble were working towards the same end. I think this had something to do with the other pieces performed that evening. Whether improvised or fully composed, there's just music, right? I think it is only us in the West that are obsessed with that strange, existential question: "But, can you hear where the written material stops and the improvisation starts?" "Could you hear the join?". I think that your approach is definitely one that furthers sound practice of bringing written material, readers, improvisers, together in achieving a network of overlapping musical sensibilities and shared aesthetics.

## **Appendix 5: The Shaman: collated questionnaire answers**

The first three responses were made post Porto performance (2017). The last three were made post Zagreb performance (2018).

**One of the core aims for the piece was to give it a sense of spontaneity and unpredictability. In your opinion how successful was the piece in achieving this goal?**

Andy Scott - I think that this works well, and if the ensemble performed the piece regularly, knew it better, I think that the elements of spontaneity and unpredictability would be greater.

Rob Buckland - Very successful.

João Pedro Silva - definitely achieved the goals.

Kyle Hutchins - I think it was successful, both in regards of texture and density - especially given the challenge of having 12 of the same instrument.

Nathan Mertens - I would say the piece is successful. It is as spontaneous and unpredictable as a notated "free" piece can be, I think.

Nicki Roman - Very successful. Each rehearsal/run through was slightly different due to the individual and group freedom that was expressed in the writing.

**Which form of alternative notation was most effective or least effective (graphic, box, text, hybrid notation etc) and why?**

Andy Scott - I guess it's down to each individual player and what they are used to reading or not, in terms of notation? Also, how used to and comfortable each player is improvising.

Rob Buckland - All notation worked, and a variety of graphics gives a really good sense of different energy levels etc



João Pedro Silva - On the beginning, the co-existing of different notation seemed to be a little confuse, but, after some time playing, this concept got a very easy, free, organic and effective result.

Kyle Hutchins - Prefer the graphic and text stuff myself. Allows more flexibility in the interpretation and rehearsal.

Nathan Mertens - I thought all of the graphics were effective. With proper explanation, any notation is acceptable here.

Nicki Roman - The box notation was most effective for my interpretation of the piece. Perhaps this was because I am most used to this type of writing. However, the graphic notation was very easy to read and after the first rehearsal, it was very clear what the composer was aiming for in this type of notation.

**Did you encounter any difficulties moving through the piece? If so, any suggestions as to how this could have been improved?**

Andy Scott - Brilliantly laid out Matt, simply a case of being able to absorb the information in real time!

Rob Buckland - Once it was rehearsed, movement through the piece is straightforward. The detailed nature of the graphic score does mean that some very short gestures have very long graphics, and some very long gestures have very short graphics, which take some getting used to.

João Pedro Silva - No, the music map was very well designed, very easy to follow.

Kyle Hutchins - The cues at the end, T1, T2, etc could have been more clear. At square 2 with the boxed hoquet trills was not very satisfying to me, but perhaps that was more rehearsal stuff than notation. Not sure how to improv that other than notate more traditionally.

Nathan Mertens - My only concern moving through the piece was getting to involved in the improvisatory quality that I would lose my place or miss an important cue. No suggestion as to how to improve this as this is the nature of a quasi-improvisatory work.

Nicki Roman - Everything seemed extremely clear. It helped that the composer was a performer on the piece. This gave me a more clear idea of how to interpret the notation.

**Do you think the music created was unique to the notation system, could it have been achieved through traditional notation? Would this have affected it's musical performance impression / feel?**

Andy Scott - Could someone transcribe the performance of your piece at EurSax. Yes I think so! However, the spirit and danger of performance will be missing, and the conceptual heartbeat missing, so a pointless exercise.

Rob Buckland - Having played similar works, this all worked really well.

João Pedro Silva - I believe that the contemporary music composers must give some liberty and "composition tools" to the players, to bring on the life and the organic to the music, what normally don't happen with some of the modern erudite music. For me, this kind of music brings a clear advantage to the success of the performance that will be always different, alive and organic. So, my answer is no and yes: No, it couldn't been achieved through traditional notation. Yes, the traditional notation would have affected the musical performance impression / feel.

Kyle Hutchins - Some of it definitely could have been created through traditional notation, for example square 4, I like the look of the triangle thing, but certainly could have been a low Bb whole note as well. However, the following line before square 5 is very interesting, and that effect could not have been achieved another way, I feel.

Nathan Mertens - I think something like this...maybe...could have been achieved through traditional notation. However, I believe the way it was notated was good. Using traditional notation has some kind of expectation of rules, etc - this notation frees the performers of that.

Nicki Roman - In some ways, yes! The box notation is something I see often, but the entire page of graphic notation was new to me. I think it made for a highly effective musical performance. In addition, I felt as though it gave me freedom in the performance. This is something that wouldn't have been possible with traditional notation.

**Did you feel more creatively involved with the piece?**

Andy Scott - There is a sense of ownership, which I like, and for me the key is to give multiple performances to really understand the writing and approach, and develop a sense of confidence performing your piece.

Rob Buckland - To a degree - actually, no improvisation is ever truly free, there is always context, and in a large ensemble, everything is affected by everything that has gone before, and is happening concurrently, so there is actually only limited scope for individual creativity.

João Pedro Silva - Absolutely

Kyle Hutchins - Yes, it was great!

Nathan Mertens - Yes, most definitely!

Nicki Roman - Absolutely

**Was there a certain part of your own performance practice that you felt needed to be explored / developed to perform the work to your own satisfaction?**

Andy Scott - The same point seems to be recurring (from me), it's purely more performances, and as a result really being able to get inside the music.

Rob Buckland - Already familiar with this type of work, so on this occasion, no.

João Pedro Silva - Maybe to have more multiphonics available

Kyle Hutchins - Not necessarily. I live in this world, always fun!

Nathan Mertens - Nope! I thought the work explored / developed different sections more each time in rehearsals and performance. It was unexpected and that is what made it exciting!

Nicki Roman - No

**Please described in your own words your experiences rehearsing and performing 'The Shaman' with some of these aspects in mind. If possible try to cover your thoughts on the practical workings of the piece (scoring) and the impact this had on the music and your performance.**

Andy Scott - The presentation of the score was exceptional! Everything was clear. The difficulty and challenge with this project with the Tenor Saxophone Collective was the nature of the project, an international group only able to meet for a very limited amount of rehearsal time, prior to a one-off performance. Your communication and direction in rehearsal was good, there's an art to it! The variety and array of musical colours was impressive, with the shape and varying intensity levels all feeling natural.

Rob Buckland - The initially unfamiliar notation was quickly explained in rehearsal, one once a set of rules had been established, and an order of cueing, and explanation of durations of effects, general direction and energy, the piece came together really quickly. Ironically, in order to it to really work architecturally, we would need to run the piece several times in order to understand the shape and energy, so that a seemingly 'spontaneous' improvisatory version could exist.

João Pedro Silva - Has I mentioned before, I believe in a open, free, alive and organic approach to the music and this experience was absolutely amazing, where I could feel the diversity of the different players approach/interpretation getting together by the musical text/map.

This is a kind of experience that I normally have with other project where I play in, L.U.M.E. Lisbon Underground Music Ensemble, the difference is the aesthetic and the way that the composer use to get this open score.

Kyle Hutchins - It was great! I got the impression from the sessions last summer that not everyone in the ensemble works in this avenue often, so I feel the piece definitely helped bridge a gap between those that are more/less fluent in improvisation and free music. Depending on the part assignment, one would have more/less to do as well.

Nathan Mertens - At first, I have to admit, I was a little bit apprehensive about the piece. Not seeing "typical" notation was a bit jarring, but once I deciphered all of the graphics the piece was really quite easy to read/understand. Rehearsing a piece like this was also much easier

than I originally thought. Rehearsals were all about logistics, timing, and cues. In performance, I felt more relaxed than with the other pieces. I did not feel the pressure to perform perfectly and feel like I was given the opportunity to create.

Nicki Roman - I had an extremely positive and musically enriching experience performing and working on this piece. I really appreciated that the composer was a member of this ensemble. This allowed for a more hands on experience, and is a process I really value as a new music performer. The interaction between composer and performer is very important to me. Seeing the composer speak about his composition and notation made the rehearsal process much easier. Reading off of the score also allowed the experience to feel more like a proper chamber ensemble experience.