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Rhythmic Storytelling with Drums and Voice

Written Commentary

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Submission for the award of DMus in Composition

Guildhall School of Music & Drama

Department of Composition

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Stream supplemental audio and video files:

<https://seannoonanmusic.com/doctorateportfolio-supplementarymaterials>

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List of Portfolio Works

1. Contraptions (2021-23)

- Contraption Nr. 3 To Strip (10:07)
- Contraption Nr. 7 New Ways (12:15)
- Contraption Nr. 13 Am I Sane? (4:11)
- Contraption Nr. 14 Moments v.1 (3:05)
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2. Motets of the Otherworld¹ (2020-21)

- Chapter I: King Ludwig II (16:50)
 - Queen of Kings (0:00)
 - Banshee Dance (7:55)
 - Drop in a Cascade (10:22)
 - Magic Mist (12:26)
- Mystical Healing (6:30)
- Secret Valley (3:07)

3. Four Canons and a Love Meltdown (2021-22)

- Who is the man in the wall? (with drum kit 4:25)
- Chant of the Unknown (with drum kit 2:47)
- Real Deep Real Slow (with drum kit 10:18)
- Staring at Nothing (with drum kit 6:07)
- A Love Meltdown (with drum kit 1:41)

- Who is the man in the wall? (without drum kit 4:10)
- Chant of the Unknown (without drum kit 1:47)
- Real Deep Real Slow (without drum kit 9:32)
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¹ Owing to the Covid restrictions in 2020-2021, these portfolio works are performed by myself on the drum kit with midi files.

4. Excerpts from Concerto for Drum Kit (2021-22) (6:25)

Download Sean Noonan portfolio audio files and scores

<https://seannoonanmusic.com/files/1222560/sean-noonan-portfolio-audio-files-and-scores.zip>

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0 Abstract

This Practice-as-Research (PaR) submission comprises a portfolio of musical works for a 'speaking' drummer in four distinct configurations, with the primary objective of seamlessly integrating the voice with the drum kit to create a 'fifth limb' where the voice and limbs operate in equal partnership. An accompanying commentary reviews recent theories of musical narrativity, concretely exploring its intersection with improvisation and storytelling. The commentary delves into the role of the storyteller, storytelling as ritual, and rhythmic storytelling in transmitting culture.

The portfolio showcases various approaches to music-making that resist traditional developmental structures by exploring moment form and through-composed episodic models. This artistic choice differs from conventional models of musical narrative that originated from 19th and early 20th-century music. The works aim to unite rhythm and storytelling through the drummer's four limbs and voice, demonstrating the convergence of improvisational and compositional techniques in creating a musical narrative that transcends the limitations of text.

The research also expands the scope of the 'five-limbed' drummer to include vocal and instrumental ensembles, exploring composition methods derived from the drum kit. Since there is no widely recognized speaking drum kit tradition, this research provides a unique and valuable approach to music-making. It offers fresh insights into the intersections of music, improvisation, and storytelling for drum kit practitioners.

0.1 Acknowledgements

First, I am deeply grateful to Dr Richard Baker, Dr Steve Potter, and Professor Dominic Murcott for their invaluable contributions to my research. Dr Baker, in particular, opened my horizons to the topic of rhythmic storytelling at the beginning of my doctoral studies, and I thank him for his advocacy. He taught me that my artistic work is a form of research and helped me disseminate my findings to benefit others in the field. Professor Murcott has been incredibly generous with his time, visiting me in my studio and attending several of my concerts to hear my new pieces. Our countless discussions have had a profound impact on my work, and I am truly grateful for his support. His guidance and encouragement were essential in motivating me to pursue this research. I also want to express my appreciation to the faculty and staff of the Guildhall School Music Department, whose support and guidance were crucial to my success.

Additionally, I would like to thank my numerous friends and musical colleagues who generously shared their ideas and encouragement over the years. I am deeply grateful to each and every one of you for the unique ways we have collaborated, including Abdoulaye Diabaté, Alex Marcelo, Alex Ward, Aram Bajakian, Anne Aviles, Anne Beech, Aled Pedrick, Ava Mendoza, Bill Young, Cassius Ellis, Chris Buckler, Dan Magay, Diko Shoturma, Dirk Eusterbrock, Erna Franssens, Gary Officer, George Garzone, Giacomo Bruzzo, Günter Janovsky, Helen Earnshaw, Henry Burnett, Hubert Howe, Jack Sheen, James Weeks, Jason Lafarge, Jay Mistry, Jeff Dodge, Jamaaladeen Tacuma, John Lockwood, Johnny Richards, Julian Anderson, Kyle Gann, Ligeti Quartet, Linda Pedroso, London Symphony Orchestra, Lyndon Owen, Paul Bream, Malcolm Mooney, Manuel Cossu, Marc Ribot, Mario de Sa, Matthew Bourne, Matthew Whiteside, Matthias Gleixner, Michael Bardon, Michal Kupicz, Norbert Bürger, Peter Maris, Philip Blackburn, Roszkowski brothers, Russell Occomore, Sean Hargreaves, Shanir Blumenkranz, Silo studios, Steven De Bruyn, Susan McKeown, Thierno Camara, Tim Dahl, Tom Asma, Tony Reif, Vincent Macrina, Wesley Stephenson.

I am also grateful to the many artistic communities and promoters in North America and Europe who have supported me throughout the years. Your unwavering support has been a constant source of inspiration and motivation.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to my family for their unwavering love and encouragement throughout my years of research. I am especially grateful to my Mom, Dad, and Monika. This thesis is dedicated to all those who seek to discover and express their voice through the speaking drum kit, and it is also in memory of Milford Graves, Bob Gullotti, and J.T. Smith.

1 Introduction & Position

This doctoral research focuses on the compositional and performance potential of the 'speaking' drummer, with particular emphasis on integrating the voice into the drum kit in contemporary music performance. By examining the history and theories that inform this practice, the aim of this commentary is to contextualize the relationship between the voice and percussion in the portfolio, as well as examine the key attributes and challenges unique to the speaking drum practice.

As an interdisciplinary artist, my music has been in dialogue with drumming, composition, improvisation and storytelling.² By merging elements from different fields, disciplines, or traditions, artists frequently create hybrid forms that challenge conventional categories and open up new possibilities for expression, innovation, and experimentation.³ Throughout my 25-year professional music career, I have developed a unique approach for combining these disciplines, which I refer to as *rhythmic storytelling*. My intention was not to create a term that would be adopted by others, but rather to stimulate my own thinking and encourage thought-provoking discussions within practitioners interested in this topic.

As a creative researcher, I posit that the act of expressing oneself through improvisation on an instrument of one's choice is of utmost importance, particularly as it pertains to guiding the creative process. This perspective places emphasis on the role of improvisation as a tool for stimulating and nurturing creative expression, thereby allowing for the emergence of unique and innovative musical ideas. J. Pressing argues in *Improvisation: Methods and models* that improvisation is a fundamental aspect of the creative process in music, as it enables individuals to express themselves freely and generate novel musical ideas. He suggests that improvisation involves a complex interplay between perception, cognition, and motor skills, and that it allows for the exploration of alternative musical structures and sound

² Audio File 1 [Esspi from album Stories to Tell](#). Following the release of the 2007 album, I began incorporating storytelling and musical narrative into my creative practice..

³ John Corbett, "Christopher Wool: Into the Woods-Six Meditations on the Interdisciplinary," in *Microgroove: Forays Into Other Music*, ed. Derek Bailey (Duke University Press, 2015), 365-372.

worlds. Furthermore, improvisation can serve as a means of self-discovery, fostering personal growth and creative fulfillment.⁴

During my formative years as a musician, I was fortunate enough to immerse myself in a vibrant community of practice centered around *The Fringe*. This renowned free jazz trio, featuring George Garzone on tenor saxophone,⁵ Bob Gullotti on drums, and John Lockwood on bass, has been a fixture of the Boston jazz scene for over five decades. Starting at the age of 16 and until I moved to New York, I received weekly instruction from all members of *The Fringe*, as well as other exceptional jazz educators in the Boston area,⁶ including Hal Crook, a distinguished trombonist and author of several books on improvisation.⁷

A fundamental aspect of my musical training was a rigorous focus on improvisation, both through collaborative performance with esteemed instructors and peers, and through a twofold aim of cultivating a nuanced mastery of group performance dynamics and developing an acute sense of self-assessment. To achieve this, we recorded these sessions and engaged in post-performance discussions. Later, as a music education undergraduate at Berklee College of Music, I was able to build upon this foundation in a supportive pedagogical and research environment that was at the forefront of advancing the study of musical improvisation.⁸

In *Teaching Improvised Music: An Ethnographic Memoir*, George E. Lewis shares his experiences teaching improvised music and discusses the ways in which improvisation can be taught and learned in a structured environment. He argues that the process of teaching and learning improvisation involves much more than simply transmitting technical skills; rather, it requires a deep understanding of the cultural, social, and

⁴ Jeff Pressing, "Improvisation: Methods and models," in *Generative processes in music: The psychology of performance, improvisation and composition*, ed. John Sloboda (Oxford: OUP, 1988), 129-178.

⁵ Mark Gilbert, "Garzone, George (Sabato)" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, vol. 2 (2nd ed.), ed. Barry Kernfeld (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 2002), 19. [ISBN 1561592846](#).

⁶ [Audio File 2 Gypsee](#). Recorded with teacher and bassist John Lockwood from The Fringe in 1999, prior to living in New York. This is an example of collaborative performance with esteemed instructors and peers and developing an acute sense of self-assessment. We recorded these sessions and engaged in post-performance discussions.

⁷ Hal Crook, *How to improvise: An approach to practicing improvisation* (Mainz: Advance Music, 2000).

⁸ "About Berklee," Berklee College of Music, accessed May 1, 2023, <https://www.berklee.edu/about>

historical contexts in which improvisation arises.⁹ The principle of improvisation has been the genesis of some of the concepts in this practice.

In 1999, I moved to New York City where my community of practice expanded significantly contributing to the development of my experience as a New York-based jazz drummer from 1999-2017. Techniques developed from playing various styles of music embedded in urban culture have significantly contributed to my approach as an improvising drummer. This period of exploration led to the release of 30 albums¹⁰ that included collaborations and mentoring with Jamaaladeen Tacuma, the bassist from Ornette Coleman's *Primetime*.¹¹

In 2006, I was commissioned by the American Composers' Forum to develop a practice that I referred to at the time as the 'wandering folk theory.' Despite its name, this project involved practice-based research around the world to gather and adapt stories, legends, folklore, mythology, and poetry from various cultural traditions. This led to researching cultural influences from various regions, including America, Armenia, England, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Poland, Mali, Russia, Senegal, and South Africa, as creative research in preparation for developing new works.¹²

My strong interest in understanding the impact of cultural and social influences on storytelling through music led me to form the Afro-Celtic Jazz-Rock project *Brewed by Noon*¹³, where I produced five albums merging folklore from bardic and griot traditions with jazz improvisers, Irish folk singer Susan McKeown, and the Malian singer and guitarist Abdoulaye Diabaté.¹⁴ The diverse cultural experiences and collaborations while based in New York have greatly influenced the evolution of my

⁹ George E. Lewis, "Teaching Improvised Music: An Ethnographic Memoir," in *Arcana: Musicians on Music*, ed. John Zorn (New York: Granary Books, 2000), 305-322.

¹⁰ <https://seannoonanmusic.com/discography>
<https://seannoonanmusic.com/listen-purchase-physical-cd-vinyl-digital-here>

¹¹ In concert with [Jamaaladeen Tacuma](#)

¹² This creative research involved collecting narratives through direct observation and participant-observation, in the musical practices of a particular culture or community. This involves living and immersing oneself in the culture being studied, forming relationships with its members, and gathering information through various methods such as recording music, conversations, and observing musical performances and rituals.

¹³ Video File 1 [Being Brewed by Noon](#) is a live CD with DVD featuring a documentary of this practice.

¹⁴ Thomas A. Hale, *Griots and Griottes: Masters of Words and Music*, (Indiana University Press, 2007), 18.

practice, with a particular emphasis on the impact of West African music and griot traditions.

1.1 Abdoulaye Diabaté: Intersecting Traditions as a Malian *Griot*

Abdoulaye Diabaté, born in 1956 in Kela, Mali to a griot family, is a singer and guitarist who later immigrated to the United States. The role of griots in West African societies goes beyond that of mere musicians and storytellers. They are also the guardians and transmitters of the cultural heritage of their communities, with a tradition that dates back to the 13th century in the Mande empire of Mali.¹⁵ Griots are responsible for preserving and passing down oral history, cultural knowledge, and musical skills through the generations. In addition to their musical abilities, griots are often seen as leaders due to their position as advisers to royal figures. This multifaceted role has made griots an integral part of West African cultures for centuries.¹⁶

Though my practice does not aim to replicate the cultural functions of the griot, I was nevertheless drawn to the sonic properties and performative qualities that it possesses. In 2009, I embarked on a journey to Mali, accompanied by Abdoulaye, with the aim of gaining a deeper appreciation and understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the African traveling storytellers.¹⁷ This firsthand experience allowed me to delve into Malian rhythms, griot traditions and storytelling practices, and to engage in extensive research of local folklore, including the fascinating legend of Massana Cisse - the 13th-century Malian king said to have met an early demise owing to greed.¹⁸

Like many Western practitioners, I've explored music beyond my own culture, particularly drawing inspiration from Mali. This aspect of my practice underscores

¹⁵ Ibid, page 47

¹⁶ Ibid, page 65

¹⁷ Video File 2 in Mali with [Abdoulaye Diabate](#)

¹⁸ Video File 3 [Massana Cisse](#) was adapted into an original composition in Brewed by Noon. It was a rewarding experience to tour Europe with a griot, increasing awareness of these stories – which is essentially what a practicing griot does.

how cross-cultural exchange can transform artistic expression. Together with fellow musicians, I'm committed to embracing clear discussions on collaboration ethics, which will be further elaborated on in the next chapter.

1.2 Cultural Borrowing: the Pygmy Pop Case

In his seminal article *Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis*, Steven Feld navigates the intricate terrain of cultural representation and appropriation in music, prompting critical reflection on the implications of cross-cultural borrowing.¹⁹ Feld's analysis is enriched by real-world examples, including instances where musicians like Herbie Hancock have appropriated the distinctive music of the Ba-Benzélé Pygmies, sparking ethical debates within the Black community. Hancock's appropriation of Pygmy music highlights the complexities of cultural ownership and profit distribution, with record companies like Columbia/Sony reaping capitalist gains while disregarding requests for information from scholars like Feld.

Madonna's subsequent repurposing of Hancock's Pygmy music further illustrates the complexities of cultural appropriation in the music industry. Despite Warner Bros. licensing and paying for the sample, the ultimate beneficiaries were still the record companies rather than the Pygmy community. Feld challenges simplistic categorizations of musicians as appropriators or imitators of – or those inspired by – Pygmy music, emphasizing the fluidity of these roles in different contexts.²⁰

In response to Feld's article, informed by my experiences as a white middle-class American who has collaborated with musicians worldwide, including those from West Africa, I underscore the profound implications of these discussions for practitioners involved in cross-cultural musical exploration. I have been influenced by the world music and fusion movements of the past, which involved the appropriation of folklore and the imitation of rhythms.

¹⁹ Steven Feld, "Pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis," *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 26 (1994): 1-55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14

Feld further urges scrutiny of the copyright, ownership, and royalty relationships between musicians, ethnologists, and recording companies, highlighting the power dynamics at play. I place a strong emphasis on fostering clear communication and mutual understanding, particularly when collaborating with composers and performers from cultures different from my own. This involves crafting written and verbal agreements that outline monetary compensation, credit attribution, and discussions on publishing rights. I consistently encourage communal collaboration and value input throughout the creative process of my works. I always approach these interactions with a commitment to transparency and honesty, acknowledging that my musical style incorporates elements inspired by various cultures from around the world.

Feld's evidence from Hancock and Madonna suggests there are no clear ethical norms being undertaken in their appropriation of Pygmy music. Feld also observes that it is commonplace for consumers to actively renegotiate the cultural and intellectual property of sounds detached from their original sources. This raises critical questions about whether the initial split from the source or the subsequent proliferation of mutated copies is most significant. Through his thought-provoking examination, Feld invites us to confront the ethical and cultural complexities inherent in the mediation and circulation of music in contemporary society.

Feld's concept of 'schizophonic mimesis' resonates with my own practice, as my compositions and recordings can be best described as containing traces of borrowing from diverse musical traditions.²¹ Through the examination of Pygmy Pop and its implications for cultural representation and appropriation, I am prompted to constantly interrogate my own creative practice when confronting these obstacles in my current and future research and collaborations. This ongoing interrogation is essential for navigating the complexities of cross-cultural musical exploration with integrity and respect.

²¹ The term "schizophonic mimesis" was coined by Feld. It builds upon R. Murray Schafer's concept of "schizophonia" and adds the element of "mimesis." Schizophonic mimesis highlights the creative potential and challenges inherent in working with recorded sounds, as artists navigate the tension between fidelity to the original source and the desire to transform or reimagine soundscapes in new contexts.

1.3 Cultural Phenomenon of Storytellers

I was initially drawn to the idea of the storyteller, which I had encountered in my collaborations with the musicians I worked with in New York, for the project *Brewed by Noon*. At the time, our creative process involved developing a topic and crafting lyrics or spoken word poetry that could be set to music. As the composer, my main goal was to stay true to my collaborators' storytelling and work within their established context.

Another important part of my community was Malcolm Mooney, a visual artist, poet, and original vocalist from the German experimental rock band *CAN*, who is also part of our project *Pavees Dance* through a similar collaboration.²² Our relationship was based on the idea of setting music to text, which he presented to me. This was a basic partnership between a lyricist and composer, with Malcolm writing the lyrics and me creating the music and vocal arrangements. Despite being highly valuable, the professional and creative projects have left some unanswered questions that require further investigation within the 'rhythmic storytelling' practice.²³

²² Audio File 4 [No Strings Attached from Pavees Dance](#)

²³ Audio File 5 [Gravity and the Grave from Tan Man's Hat](#)

1.4 Research Aims & Objectives

The objective of this Practice-as-Research (PaR) project is to unite four disparate disciplines – drumming, composition, improvisation, and storytelling – into a single practice, with the aim of creating an original body of work, as well as providing a new and valuable resource for drum kit practitioners. By examining the various elements of rhythmic storytelling and demonstrating its applications in a range of musical contexts, it is hoped that this project will be of use to future researchers.

For the purposes of this project, rhythmic storytelling is defined as a compositional and performance practice in which various improvisational and compositional – especially rhythmic – techniques converge to develop a musical narrative that requires the drummer's four limbs and voice to unify rhythm and storytelling.

To summarize, the project engages with the following issues:

1. The Role of Storyteller
2. Storytelling as Ritual
3. Music and Narrative
4. Rhythmic Storytelling in Transmitting Culture
5. The 'Fifth Limb'
6. The Extension of the Drum Kit

What follows provides a concise overview of the research aims and objectives under these six broad headings.

1.4.1 Role of Storyteller

Julia Chaitin defines storytelling as:

"the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics, or embellishment. Every culture has its own stories or narratives, which are shared as a means of entertainment, education, cultural preservation, or instilling moral values. Crucial elements of stories and storytelling include plot, characters, and narrative point of view. The term 'storytelling' can refer specifically to oral storytelling, but it can also broadly refer to techniques used in other media to unfold or disclose the narrative of a story."²⁴

Julia Chaitin offers a thorough definition of storytelling as a cultural and social practice characterized by the sharing of narratives, often incorporating improvisation, theatrics, or embellishment.

In Chapter 2.3, I will delve into the unique challenges of solo rhythmic storytelling, particularly in relation to Chaitin's definition. I will explore how oral storytelling functions as a solo speaking performance, analyzing its application through three distinct forms of soliloquy. Through these examples, I hope to illuminate the intricate dynamics inherent in solo rhythmic storytelling. Given that I am the author of the performed texts, it is crucial to clarify my position regarding Roland Barthes's seminal work, 'The Death of the Author,' which examines the essence of narrative and its relationship with storytelling.

Chaitin's definition underscores storytelling's foundational elements of plot and characters. However, Barthes offers a nuanced perspective, questioning the conventional belief that storytelling is solely the author's creation. He argues that tying a narrative to an author confines its interpretation, stating, 'To give a text an Author is

²⁴ Julia Chaitin, "Narratives and Story-Telling," *The Journal of Conflict Transformation & Security*, 1(1), (2003): 68-85.

to impose a limit on that text,' suggesting narratives transcend the author's intent, inviting diverse readings.²⁵

Barthes further highlights narrative's inherent ambiguity by noting its capacity to conceal the speaker's identity. Removing the author's authority renders attempts to decipher a text futile, emphasizing narrative's autonomy from authorial intention. This underscores storytelling's inherent multiplicity of interpretations, urging readers to engage with narratives on a deeper level. His viewpoint underpins my understanding of rhythmic storytelling in the portfolio work, *Contraptions*.

The use of storytelling in music composition has been a popular practice for centuries. The combination of spoken words and rhythm can create a powerful and evocative performance that conveys emotion and meaning. While the spoken text in rhythmic storytelling may not always follow a traditional narrative structure, this does not mean that the term 'storytelling' is irrelevant. In fact, the term 'storytelling' can still be a valuable way to conceptualize and understand the practice.

The concept of storytelling is not limited to traditional stories that have a clear beginning, middle, and end. In the context of music composition, storytelling can be understood more broadly as a means of communicating ideas, emotions, and experiences through the use of spoken words and rhythm. The spoken text in rhythmic storytelling can convey a sense of drama, emotion, and meaning that is similar to what one might find in a traditional story. For example, in a performance of a West African griot, the spoken text may not tell a traditional story, but rather convey historical events, moral lessons, or societal commentary. This type of performance can be seen as a form of storytelling because it communicates important ideas and emotions through spoken word and rhythm.

As a teenager, I had the opportunity to witness a performance by Mickey Hart, the drummer of the *Grateful Dead*, during his tour for the book and project called *Planet*

²⁵ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, Trans. S. Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 147.

Drum. Hart shared a fascinating story about Morgon-Kara, the first shaman of the Buriat of Irkutsk in Siberia, who possessed remarkable abilities to bring souls back from the dead. However, the lord of the dead was unhappy with his actions and complained to the high god of heaven. To test the shaman's skills, the god took the soul of a man and concealed it in a bottle by sealing the opening with his thumb. The man fell sick, and his family reached out to the shaman for help. Despite searching the forest, waters, mountain forges, and the land of the dead, the shaman could not locate the missing soul. It was only when he sat down to play his drums that he was able to use rhythm and music to find the lost soul. Witnessing that concert left a lasting impression on me, shaping both my professional path as a drummer and my current research project. It is stories like this that inspire us to explore the deeper connections between music, culture, and spirituality, and they remind us of the profound impact that music can have on our lives.

1.4.2 Storytelling as Ritual

In this research project, I endeavored to identify avenues for advancing the practice of ‘storytelling as ritual.’ In *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner identifies eleven themes where rituals and performance studies intersect, including the use of ritual in theater, the transformative power of rituals, and the relationship between entertainment and efficacy in ritual performances.²⁶ Schechner's framework offers a valuable tool for understanding musical expression and can be applied to the evolving practice of rhythmic storytelling, which has developed from narrating text behind a drum kit to a performance practice that can encompass a wide spectrum of rituals.

One key insight from Schechner's framework is the distinction between efficacy/ritual and entertainment/aesthetic approaches to musical performance. The efficacy/ritual approach places great emphasis on the attainment of a transcendent experience through a shared, traditional ritual. Performers in this approach embody the music through possession or trance, with virtuosity taking a backseat. The goal is

²⁶ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2002), 57.

self-transformation and collective creativity, while criticism is discouraged.²⁷ This approach is often associated with traditional musical practices and has a relationship to Henry Cowell's discussion of neo-primitivism (See Ch. 3).

In contrast, the entertainment/performing arts approach prioritizes enjoyment of the music in the present moment and is typically associated with popular music. Performers in this approach value virtuosity and often employ both new and traditional scripts/behaviors to encourage individual creativity. However, the transformation of the self is unlikely to occur, and the audience engages with the performance primarily as observers.

Through the progression of this research, it has been determined that the efficacy/ritual approach had not been fully investigated in this practice. A role model of a composer who utilizes rituals to create new 'aesthetic performances' is Philip Glass in his *Symphony No. 5*. In this work, Glass blends Australian Aboriginal and African music with his own unique style to create a comprehensive 'spiritual human history' that spans from 'Creation' to the future, similar to the grand Masses of Bach or Mozart.

Schechner's efficacy/ritual-entertainment/aesthetic performance framework provides a valuable lens for conceptualizing and experiencing musical expression. Each approach offers distinct goals and values that can be leveraged to shape a particular work.

Understanding and applying this framework led me to explore shamanism, where it serves as a medium for transmitting spiritual and cultural knowledge and promoting healing. Shamanic stories can be based on personal experiences or on traditional myths and legends that have been passed down through generations.

Shamans use storytelling to connect with their community and share their experiences of spiritual awakening and transformation. It is an effective way to directly engage with audiences, especially in solo performances. Through stories, they transmit cultural values and beliefs, and help individuals make sense of their own experiences.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 52.

Furthermore, storytelling is used in shamanic rituals and ceremonies to create a sense of community and shared experience. Gathering around a fire or in a sacred space, individuals listen to stories and connect with each other on a deeper level.²⁸

In *Percussion and Transition*, Rodney Needham considers the use of percussion in the social rituals of many of the world's cultures, and his words are worth quoting in their entirety.

“Wilken (1887) has pointed out that drums are used not only to establish contact with spirits, but also to repel them, but this is still a form of communication with the other world. What other situations and institutionalised forms of behaviour are marked by percussion? Once the question is put in this way, it is seen that percussive devices are used in a very large number of situations other than that of contacting spirits. Dworakowska has indeed indicated the importance of bells and drums in the normal course of social life, in healing, prophylaxis, hunting, warfare, funerals, etc.; and one has only to review ethnographical literature to appreciate that percussion is typical of a remarkably wide range of other situations such as birth, initiation, marriage, accession to office, sacrifice, lunar rites, calendrical feasts, declaration of war, the return of head-hunters, the reception of strangers, the inauguration of a house or a communal building, market days, sowing, harvest, fishing expeditions, epidemics, eclipses, and so on. Often the instruments are identified with the events, and are themselves the material symbols of them; their players may be not just normal participants but indispensable officiants at the rites and ceremonies which are distinguished by the sounds.

What is it that these events have in common? Obviously they are *rites de passage*. In other words, the class of noise-makers is associated with the formal passage from one status or condition to another. Once again, though, I am not saying that such rites cannot be accomplished without percussive noise-makers, or that only such devices are used to mark them, but simply that there is a constant and immediately recognisable association between the type of sound and the type of rite. What I am proposing, namely, is that there is a significant connexion between percussion and transition.”²⁹

Rituals that involve percussion will be further discussed in the role of rhythmic storytelling in transmitting culture (See Ch. 1.4.4).

²⁸ Andrew Strathern, Pamela Stewart, “Shamanic Performances: Issues of Performativity and Comparison,” *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 22(1), (2008): 53-65.

²⁹ Rodney Needham, “Percussion and Transition,” *Man*, New Series 2, no. 4 (Dec 1967): 611, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2799343>.

1.4.3 Music and Narrative

Rhythmic storytelling behind the drum kit allows the drummer's four limbs and voice to stretch the responsibilities of both drummer and narrator, merging them into one. Rhythm and tempo drive the narrative, and the narrative shapes the musical form.

Narrative does not always rely on language as a means of communication. Instead, it can be expressed through non-verbal modes such as still images, shadow-puppets, silent movies or drumming.³⁰ Narrative is not confined to language, and its effectiveness can be heightened through enactment or the emotional emphasis that music provides.³¹

In many cultures, drumming has been used as a form of communication and storytelling, and it can be a powerful way to convey narrative without relying on language. The dundun, a type of talking drum in Burkina Faso, holds a significant place in African music culture.³² Mickey Hart further adds:

“a player can alter the pitch of the tone he is making, thus enabling the dundun to ‘talk,’ or produce tones that sound like words. A master drummer can maintain a regular monologue on a talking drum, saying hi to different people, cracking jokes, telling proverbs.”³³

The damaru is a small two-headed drum used in Tibetan Buddhist rituals, with a famous story of its use in the ritual of the god Mahakala. Legend has it that the sound of the damaru represents the primordial sound of creation, and its rhythm is the heartbeat of the universe. In the story, Mahakala became so absorbed in meditation that he failed to perform his duties, but was awakened by the sound of the damaru, which he declared the most beautiful and powerful sound in the world. The damaru is not only used in ritual practices but also as a tool for teaching and storytelling. The lama, or teacher, uses it to punctuate his speech and create a rhythm that engages and focuses the listeners. The damaru is also used for meditation and visualization, with its

³⁰ Michael Klein, Nicholas Reyland, (Eds.). *Music and Narrative Since 1900* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019), 166.

³¹ Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 159.

³² John F. Carrington, *Talking Drums of Africa* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 32.

³³ Mickey Hart, *Planet Drum: A Celebration of Percussion and Rhythm* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), 53.

rhythmic beat helping to focus the mind and create tranquility. The tradition of the damaru in Tibetan Buddhism is a unique example of how drumming can be used for teaching, storytelling, and spiritual practice.³⁴

However, exploring the relationship between narrative and musical structure is crucial for understanding how music, with or without text, might convey stories. Matthew Kaner's recent doctoral thesis states:

“The application of theories of narrative to musical contexts has a significant history going back to the 1980s, during the rise of the so-called ‘new musicology’ where an emphasis on hermeneutic, as opposed to purely analytical, activity came to the fore in the academy, as part of a wider backlash against positivism and formalism, and a desire to locate music more within its social and cultural contexts.”³⁵

Since then, narrative in music has been a disputed field in musicology. What follows is a summary of key figures writing on narrative in music from Kaner's thesis:

Jean Jacques Nattiez

Nattiez concluded that music cannot be described as having narrativity despite the provocative title of his influential article *Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?*. However, he did acknowledge that there are some similarities between music and written text, such as their shared use of sound objects and linear discourse structure. Nattiez also suggested that music is capable of “imitating the intonation contour of a narrative.”³⁶

Lawrence Kramer

“The very premise of musical narratology is the recognition that music cannot tell stories.” (...) Yet for Kramer, music “adds itself to the closed circle—apparently all

³⁴ *ibid.*, p. 128

³⁵ Matthew Kaner, *Composing narratives: Reimagining musical storytelling in new vocal and instrumental works* (Unpublished doctoral thesis., Guildhall School of Music and Drama, 2022) <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/29592/>

³⁶ Jean-Jacques Nattiez, “Can One Speak of Narrativity in Music?” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115 (2) (1990): 240–57.

self-sufficiency and self-evidence of—an acknowledged story,” acting, therefore, as a “supplement of narrative”.³⁷

My past rhythmic storytelling performances have had this position. Further research of Kramer's highlights the significance of adopting a diverse perspective while examining contemporary music. This approach allows us to discern how narrative has evolved and taken new shapes in modern art music. By connecting contemporary music with recent literary models, we can better comprehend how narrative has been reimagined and continues to be pertinent in our comprehension of modern musical compositions. In *Negation and Negotiation: Plotting Narrative through Literature and Music from Modernism to Postmodernism*, Nicholas Reyland examines the various techniques employed by modernist and postmodern authors to subvert and progress narrative. These techniques, such as ‘disnarration,’ ‘bifurcated narrative,’ and ‘subjunctive narrative,’ fall along a spectrum of ‘negations’ that challenge conventional narrative structures. Reyland's analysis illuminates how these writers are interested in exploring the complexities of consciousness, challenging the notion of a stable and unified mind.³⁸

To summarize, musical narrative shares a close kinship with literary narrative, as it possesses similar emotional qualities despite lacking any semantic content. Both forms of narrative achieve similar goals, but employ different means to do so.

The creative approach utilized in this practice departs from models of musical narrative that emerged during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and that have been the object of analysis for most theorists of narrative. Instead, moment form and through-composed episodic structures are employed to explore novel avenues for musical expression.³⁹

³⁷ Lawrence Kramer, “Musical Narratology: A Theoretical Outline,” *Indiana Theory Review* 12 (1991): 141–62. <https://doi.org/10.1109/ICCI-CC.2012.6311153>.

³⁸ Michael Klein, Nicholas Reyland, (Eds.) *Music and Narrative Since 1900* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019), 30-38.

³⁹ Don Michael Randel, *The Harvard Concise Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 670. ISBN 0-674-00084-6.

Stockhausen defines moment form as "every unit of form in a particular composition recognizable by a personal and distinctive characteristic"⁴⁰ "A moment can - formally - be a shape (individual), a structure (individual), or a mixture of both; and in terms of time, it can be a state (static) or a process (dynamic) or a combination of both." "Thus, moments can be arbitrarily long or short, depending on their characteristics."

John Dack further contributes,

"Moment *forming*" is a compositional approach in which a narrative overall line is deliberately avoided. The component moments in such a form are related by a nonlinear principle of proportions. If this system of proportions exhausts a set of possibilities, the form is said to be "closed"; if not, or if the series of proportions is not finite, then the form is "open". Moment form does not necessarily avoid perceptible goal-directed processes. "They simply refuse to participate in a globally directed narrative curve, which is, naturally, not their purpose".⁴¹

Further continued in Stockhausen's words,

"neither aim at *the* climax, nor at prepared (and consequently expected) multiple climaxes, and the usual introductory, rising, transitional and fading-away stages are not delineated in a development curve encompassing the entire duration of the work. On the contrary, these forms are *immediately* intense and seek to maintain the level of continued "main points", which are constantly equally present, right up until they stop. In these forms a minimum or a maximum may be expected in every moment, and no developmental direction can be predicted with certainty from the present one; *they have always already commenced, and could continue forever*; in them either everything present counts, or nothing at all; and each and every Now is not unremittingly regarded as the mere consequence of the one which preceded it and as the upbeat to the coming one—in which one puts one's hope—but rather as something personal, independent and centred, capable of existing on its own. They are forms in which an instant does not have to be just a bit of a temporal line, nor a moment just a particle of a measured duration, but rather in which concentration on the Now—on every Now—makes vertical slices, as it were, that cut through a horizontal temporal conception to a timelessness I call eternity: an eternity that does not begin at the end of time but is attainable

⁴⁰ Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Moment form: New relationships between performance duration, work duration and moment," in *Texts on Music*, Vol. 1 (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1963), 189-210, [OCLC 715815242](#).

⁴¹ John Dack, "Kontakte and Narrativity," [eContact!](#) 2, no. 2. (1999)

in every moment. I am speaking of musical forms in which apparently nothing less is being attempted than to explode (even to overthrow) the temporal concept—or, put more accurately: the concept of duration. ... *In works of this kind the start and stop are open* and yet they cease after a certain duration.⁴²

This approach to form appeals to me because allows for numerous avenues for exploration and expression in this practice.

1.4.4 Rhythmic Storytelling in Transmitting Culture

The evolution of music's role within contemporary Western society has been a subject of ongoing debate. The function of expressing individual thoughts and emotions, common in Western art music, is not necessarily the same as the function of passing stories down from one generation to the next, which I have discussed in relation to Malian griots.

Edward Said's book, *Culture and Imperialism*, challenges conventional understandings of cultural dynamics, particularly within the context of 'Western society.'⁴³ Said's insights compel us to reevaluate the notion of a cohesive 'Western' identity and to consider the intricate interplay of cultures in shaping musical expressions. Nonetheless, oral storytelling in Western art music typically relies on the works of named individual authors. My practice has been no exception to this: it highlights oral storytelling within an art music setting. I do not use rhythmic storytelling functionally, as in ceremonies such as weddings or funerals.

Arguably, advancements in technology have influenced modes of cultural transmission, although it is debatable whether they have extinguished the vitality of oral traditions.⁴⁴ Rather, the evolution of storytelling practices reflects a dynamic

⁴² Karlheinz Stockhausen, "Erfindung und Entdeckung," in *Texte zur Musik*, Vol. 1, (Cologne: DuMont Schauberg, 1963), 222–258.

⁴³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, England: Penguin Classics, 2003).

⁴⁴ Karl Kroeber, *Retelling/Rereading: The Fate of Storytelling in Modern Times*. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

continuum, wherein traditional methods coexist alongside recent innovations, in social media forms such as YouTube and TikTok.

Western societies confront a complex tapestry of heritage and innovation, grappling with the tension between preserving tradition and embracing progress. In the 4th century BCE, Plato viewed writing as a novel tool that threatened to degrade people's memory and attention span, much as modern individuals perceive computers.⁴⁵ Our extensive incorporation of writing into our daily lives contrasts with Plato's era, where it was not as deeply ingrained. Consequently, it's challenging for us to recognize writing as a technology, unlike printing and computers, which we readily identify as such.⁴⁶

The critical roles of oral storytelling and music in fostering communal cohesion remain pertinent, serving as anchors amidst the currents of societal change. By recognizing the enduring relevance of oral traditions and their intrinsic connection to music, Western societies can cultivate a more holistic understanding of cultural transmission that honors both tradition and innovation.

The purpose of this research is to investigate innovative methods for creating culturally relevant works intended for use in ritualistic performances. *Chapter 6 Reflections On Findings/Directions for Future Research* will discuss these approaches in greater detail and present future research directions. Next, I will introduce the 'fifth limb' technique, which will be used to explore musical narratives through rhythmic and vocal elements.

1.4.5 The 'Fifth Limb'

Various rhythmic storytelling techniques utilize the voice as part of the drum kit practice, providing a 'fifth limb' and establishing an additional extension to the fully-coordinated four-limbed practice of the drum kit as it exists today.

⁴⁵ Deborah Maxwell, *Traditional storytelling in a digital world: the transformative power of storytelling across media* (PhD diss., University of Dundee, 2010), 28.

⁴⁶ Walter Ong, *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017), 80.

This research inquiry is to generate techniques that seamlessly integrate the voice with the four-limbed drum kit, becoming an extra layer or 'fifth limb' where no hierarchy exists between the voice and the four limbs. The opposite situation can also exist, where spoken or vocalized text can be accompanied and purely supported by the drum kit within a particular rhythmic scheme.

Through this commentary, the aim is to examine the theoretical models and considerations that accompany the integration of the voice as 'a fifth limb' in drumming. This includes exploring the role of the voice in rhythmic storytelling, the challenges and limitations of using the voice while playing the drums, and the potential contributions and innovations.

The incorporation of the voice as the fifth limb within the drum kit has been largely unexplored in contemporary music performance. One potential reason for the limited development of the practice of incorporating the voice as part of the drum kit in modern music performance may be the difficulty of hearing the voice without vocal amplification. Until the 1930s, amplification of the voice was not commonly used in performance venues, which may have made it difficult to effectively integrate the voice into percussion. This commentary devises remedies for the unique challenges faced by amplified speaking drummers and provides insight into techniques for overcoming them (See Ch. 2.3).

During the development of this performance practice, I explored the potential contributions of the voice as a fifth limb and how it might enhance the drum kit as a polyrhythmic instrument. The concept of the vocal resonance of the body being thought of as the resonance of the drum has also been experimented with. Although my skills as a vocalist are not as advanced as my proficiency on the drum kit, it is hoped that future speaking and singing drummers will be able to broaden the potential of the voice within the fifth limb practice.

Furthermore, this theoretical engagement with the fifth limb has inspired the continuation of experimental practice. Through dedicated practice on the drum kit and voice, an ever-expanding array of ‘fifth limb rudiments’ has been developed to incorporate the voice in the solo drum kit practice (See Ch. 2.5).

1.4.6 Extensions of the Drum Kit

The practice of incorporating composition methods derived from the drum kit explores how different ensembles can extend the abilities of a four-limbed drummer. This technique goes beyond drumming to treat ensembles as extensions of the drummer's limbs, using rhythmic language derived from the drum kit. The evolution of the relationship between the drums and the ensemble grew from my experiences of hearing and playing music from the drum position, incorporating these additional instruments as natural extensions of the drummer's limbs.

The genesis of this concept began with the album *A Gambler's Hand*, which marked my first experience recording and touring with classical musicians in an amplified string quartet configuration.⁴⁷ The quartet's arrangement sparked the idea of considering it as an extension of a drummer's four limbs, with each instrument contributing a unique element to the ensemble's overall sound. Of particular interest was the spatial effect of the strings, which prompted experimentation during the album mix. By panning the string quartet around the drum kit, I aimed to create a soundscape where the inherent qualities of the strings existed in relation to, but independent of, the drum kit's projection. This led to the concept of extensions between the drum kit and quartet, resulting in a novel and innovative approach to music-making.

The notion of extending the scope of the ‘five-limbed’ drummer to also include a vocal ensemble, string quartet, and chamber orchestra is an exciting opportunity for these two forces to merge, as the ultimate extension of the drum kit. This paper will further discuss various composition methods derived from the drum kit in the analysis of the portfolio pieces. Assessment of the various portfolio works has led to the identification of several diverse techniques that assist in establishing the voice as a

⁴⁷ Video File 4 [Lying under the Sea](#) live on A38 Budapest

'fifth limb' and treating ensembles as an extension of the four limbed drum kit.

1.5 Collaborative Practice in Music

Before embarking on this PaR doctoral research, the study of other practitioners and involvement in collaboration were essential to the development of the creative practice.

Collaborative musical creativity is an essential aspect of this practice bringing together musicians from diverse backgrounds who are willing to be challenged about improvisation and composition, and view it as a creative process. Collaborators are sought out who bring their unique approach to the creative process while also recognizing and respecting my role as producer.⁴⁸ Successful collaborations require a high degree of interpersonal communication and coordination, as well as a willingness to take risks and be open to new ideas. I have experience working with a diverse range of collaborators, including vocalists, instrumentalists, composers, recording engineers, lyricists, and poets from various backgrounds and locations.

This commentary highlights the key composition and performance practices, musical experiences, and previous collaborations that have shaped the current research topic. It is worth noting that there is limited literature available specifically on this research topic.

⁴⁸ Louise Bishop, "Collaborative Musical Creativity: How Ensembles Coordinate Spontaneity," *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 29, no. 5: (2012): 495-507, doi:10.1525/mp.2012.29.5.495.

1.6 Research Context

This practice acknowledges that drumming, composition, improvisation, and storytelling are fundamental elements of rhythmic storytelling. In this commentary, a methodology is proposed that moves away from systematized knowledge and transforms the role of the drummer from a simple timekeeper to a multifaceted position that involves serving as a bandleader, conductor, and vocalist while often improvising or providing rhythmic accompaniment on the drum kit.

1.6.1 The Speaking Drummer

It will be essential next to discuss the pioneering contributions of figures such as Milford Graves, Kurt Schwitters, Conlon Nancarrow, Henry Cowell, Frederic Rzewski, Robert Erickson and Samuel Beckett, all of whom have explored the use of rhythmic techniques and novel approaches to facilitate innovative composition and performance practice. Conlon Nancarrow and Henry Cowell will be discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Before delving into the nuances of the speaking drummer's practice, it is crucial to address the distinct attributes and challenges that set it apart. Notably, there is a lack of comprehensive discourse on the 'fifth' limb of the speaking drummer's practice, necessitating further investigation. In 2010 the speaking drummer concept arose out of necessity when the vocalist in one of my projects did not appear for a concert. This eventually led to the exploration of combining the voice with the drum kit, to the debut of the speaking drummer album *Set the Hammer Free*, and to the eventual inquiry into this research.⁴⁹

The connection between the human voice and percussion instruments is an ancient and interwoven one in the world of music. The earliest instances of music likely involved the use of the voice, with the development of percussion instruments soon following. Drums, in particular, have a long history of serving as a means of communication and

⁴⁹ Audio File [Drunkard Landlady from Set the Hammer Free](#) This album in part paved the way for the development of the speaking drummer practice

playing a role in various cultural activities, such as defense, hunting, and rituals.⁵⁰ As Gary Tomlinson points out, "The presence of bone flutes dating back to approximately 40,000 years ago suggests that music was being made by Homo sapiens at that time."⁵¹ Indigenous cultures around the globe have a rich tradition of incorporating both the human voice and percussion instruments into music and performance. For example, in Native American cultures, the voice and drums coexist in harmony in musical celebrations and rituals.⁵²

These following subheadings will be discussed in further detail in the commentary on individual pieces.

Vocal Percussion

The term 'vocal percussion' refers to the use of the voice to create sounds that mimic those produced by percussion instruments. This involves using the voice in a percussive manner in order to enhance the musical soundscape. This can be done as part of a group of singers, in an instrumental ensemble, or as a solo performer. Vocal percussion can be used to imitate specific instruments or to add rhythmic elements to music in a way that is similar to traditional percussion instruments. An example of mouth drumming, also known as beatboxing, is a vocal technique that involves using the voice to imitate the sounds of a drum kit. It is often used in a cappella music, but can also be found in rock and jazz. This technique is used to create drumbeats and rhythms using only the voice, allowing the vocalist to serve the same role as a drummer in a musical setting. Mouth drumming requires a high level of skill and precision, and those who specialize in this technique are referred to as vocal percussionists.⁵³

⁵⁰ Gary Tomlinson, *A Million Years of Music: The Emergence of Human Modernity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁵¹ Tim Hyland, "Where It All Began," *News, Ideas and Conversations from the University of Pennsylvania* <https://web.archive.org/web/20100221031728/http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/current/interviews/011008-1.html>

⁵² Victoria Lindsay Levine, "Native American music," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Native-American-music>, accessed December 27, 2022.

⁵³ Evan Feist, "[A Cappella Origins: An Interview With Wes Carroll](#)". *CASA*. The Contemporary A Cappella Society, accessed September 24, 2017.

The voice in drum kit performance

The incorporation of vocalizations such as singing, chanting, or spoken word into drum set performance is a unique and expressive form of music. This practice is less common than traditional drumming techniques, but some percussionists have found ways to add an additional layer of expression and creativity by incorporating the voice. An improvising and speaking drummer combines drumming and vocalizations to create a narrative or sound poetry through music, combining elements of rhythm, melody, and language to enhance the storytelling aspect. ‘Vocal percussion’ differs from other techniques like scat singing, beatboxing, or spoken word poetry in its ability to convey narrative and create distinctive characters or personalities. There are various techniques that can be used to incorporate the voice into drum set performance, which were discovered in this research such as sound poetry innovations (See Ch. 2.4).

To grasp the development and current state of the speaking drummer practice, it's important to next discuss the impact of three key drummers from various cultural backgrounds. They each have unique contributions to the practice, showcasing the diverse influences and techniques that have shaped the development of this art form.

1.6.2 Levon Helm

Levon Helm was a crucial figure in the development of Americana and roots rock music. As a member of *The Band*, Helm played a central role in shaping the group's sound through his powerful vocals and skilled drumming. Helm was unusual in his ability to sing lyrical melodies from behind the drum kit, which requires developing a technique where breath support and the four limbed coordination can co-exist. His drumming style was rooted in blues, rock, and country music, and he was known for his driving and propulsive beat. In addition to his skills as a drummer, Helm was also a talented songwriter, and he sang some of *The Band's* most memorable songs, including *The Weight* and *Up on Cripple Creek*.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Example [Levon Helm](#) discusses singing while drumming in an instructional video from 1992

1.6.3 Tatsuya Yoshida

Tatsuya Yoshida is a Japanese drummer and vocalist who is widely recognized for his contributions to the experimental rock scene. His work with the bands Ruins and Koenji Hyakkei has garnered particular attention, as has his solo career. Yoshida's drumming style is notable for its virtuosity and its fusion of progressive rock, heavy metal, and traditional Japanese elements. He is also known for his distinctive high-pitched singing style, which has been compared to yodeling. In addition to his work with these bands, Yoshida has also collaborated with a number of other musicians and groups, including John Zorn, Fred Frith, and the Boredoms. Yoshida's physically and technically demanding approach to vocalizing while playing the drums has had a lasting impact on the speaking drummer practice and remains one of the most influential contributions to this particular style of drumming.

1.6.4 Milford Graves

Milford Graves (1941-2021) was an African-American jazz drummer and artist known for his contributions to the avant-garde jazz movement in the 1960s. He worked with notable musicians like Paul Bley and Albert Ayler, and was a founding member of the New York Art Quartet. Graves is considered to be a pioneer of free jazz and is credited with liberating percussion from its traditional role as a timekeeper, greatly influencing my drum kit practice. In addition to his musical pursuits, Graves was also a professor, researcher, visual artist, gardener, herbalist, and martial artist. The composer John Zorn referred to Graves as a '20th-century shaman.'

In the mid-1970s, Graves became fascinated by the notion of 'the heartbeat as a primary source of rhythm' when he stumbled on a recording of heart rhythms.⁵⁵ In addition to the basic pulse of the heartbeat, he perceived complex rhythms with varying intervals between beats and a range of frequencies. This further convinced him that true rhythm is not strictly metronomic and that the timbre of the beat is just

⁵⁵ Alan Licht, "[Listen to your Heart](#)" (PDF). *The Wire*. (March 2018) p. 38, accessed May 28, 2020.

as significant as its duration.⁵⁶ Milford devoted himself to studying the rhythms of the heart and in his later years was creating a technique to treat himself.

Graves stated that, “regular rhythms are not natural. You have to go against all the rules of nature to use a metronome, which inhibits your true ability to sense the rhythms and vibrations of nature. In a pure metric sense, that means that your inhalation and exhalation would always be the same, because when you inhale your beats per minute increases. If you exhale, it decreases. No one breathes that way. Breath varies, so cardiac rhythm never has that tempo. It's always changing.”⁵⁷ He also states, "The drum is the heart".

The expressive power of Graves's drumming became evident upon analyzing his solo album, *Stories*, which served as a model for exploring various ways of incorporating the voice into the drum kit. It is worth noting that Graves's approach to drumming and vocalization was not just a product of personal creativity, but also a result of his extensive research and experimentation in various fields. Graves's interdisciplinary approach, which combined music with fields like medicine and martial arts, adds depth and complexity to his work and highlights the importance of maintaining an open mind in one's practice.

The incorporation of vocalizations into his drumming in albums such as *Stories* was not just a superficial element, but rather an integral part of his musical expression. His use of the voice on the track *Speaking to the Spoken* was not simply a matter of adding lyrics or singing melodies, but rather a way of incorporating the full range of human expression, including spoken word, shouts, whispers, and other vocalizations, into his percussion playing.⁵⁸ These quasi-lingual vocalizations added an additional layer of improvisation to his ever-shifting polyrhythms and were the result of his extensive investigation into different cultures' speech patterns, in particular those of Yoruba and

⁵⁶ Christoph Cox, ["Matters of the Heart: Christoph Cox on Milford Graves"](#). *ArtForum.edu*. Retrieved May 28, 2020.

⁵⁷ John Corbett, *Microgroove: Forays Into Other Music*. (Durham: Duke University Press). (2015) p. 77

⁵⁸ *Stories* (2000) - This album is a solo recording by Graves featuring a mix of drumming and spoken word, and is a good example of his approach to rhythmic storytelling.

Bantu languages.⁵⁹ Graves was particularly interested in the tonal shifting and dynamics of these languages and how they affected the entire nervous and cranial system when singing. His vocalizations, which can be heard on many of his records, were not necessarily meant to convey a specific meaning, but rather to evoke emotion and feeling through the manipulation of the body and voice.⁶⁰

1.6.5 Kurt Schwitters's *Ursonate*

The aesthetic proximity of Graves's use of vocalizations and Kurt Schwitters's work has influenced me artistically, in the latter artist's case especially the work *Ursonate*, a groundbreaking sound poem that revolutionized the use of vocalizations in art.⁶¹

Composed entirely of phonemes and sounds rather than traditional language, *Ursonate* is a four-part piece that demonstrates the experimental and improvisational potential of the voice. The piece is a prime example of the use of vocalizations as a means of artistic expression beyond conveying meaning, focusing on the emotional and physical effects of the sounds on the body.⁶²

Both Graves and Schwitters utilize vocalizations as a means of artistic expression and experimentation, incorporating sounds and phonemes from various languages and sources to create a unique and expressive style. While Schwitters's work *Ursonate* is a sound poem that demonstrates the expressive and improvisational potential of the voice, Graves's use of vocalizations is also focused on the emotional and physical effects on the body and the audience, creating a sense of rhythm and structure within his works. These innovators demonstrate the potential of the voice to create rhythmic patterns. The application of sound poetry will be further explored in Chapter 2.⁶³

⁵⁹ The Bantu languages are a group of languages spoken by the Bantu peoples in Africa. These languages are divided into the Southern Bantoid languages and are spoken in Central, Southern, Eastern Africa, and Southeast Africa. McWhorter, J. 2001. *The Power of Babel* (pp. 81-82). New York: Freeman-Times-Henry Holt.

⁶⁰ Milford Graves interview *Wire Magazine*, Issue 409, March 2018

⁶¹ Kurt Schwitters was a German artist who was born in Hanover in 1887. He was a multi-talented artist who worked in a variety of genres and media, including dadaism, constructivism, surrealism, poetry, sound, painting, sculpture, graphic design, typography, and installation art.

⁶² Example of [Ursonate](#)

⁶³ Sound poetry is a type of "wordless poetry" that emphasizes the sounds and rhythms of language, blending elements of literature and music. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "sound poetry," accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/182346?rskey=3xqyXa&result=1#eid>

1.6.6 Frederic Rzewski and *De Profundis*

In *De Profundis*, Rzewski masterfully intertwines the voice and piano, blurring the lines between the two instruments to create a cohesive narrative. Through the use of spoken word passages interspersed with pianistic gestures, Rzewski constructs a sonic landscape that transcends traditional musical boundaries. The piano serves as more than just an accompaniment; it becomes a vehicle for vocal expression, echoing and enhancing the emotional depth conveyed through the spoken word.

This integration of voice and piano echoes the ethos of the 'fifth limb' concept explored in this thesis, where the voice and limbs collaborate to weave intricate rhythmic narratives. By incorporating elements of spoken word alongside instrumental performance, Rzewski expands the expressive possibilities of the piano, transforming it into a dynamic medium for storytelling. The seamless fusion of voice and instrument in *De Profundis* exemplifies the transformative power of rhythmic storytelling as a means of communication and expression.

Moreover, Rzewski's other works such as *Coming Together/Attica* offer valuable insights into the artistic process of integrating voice with instrumental performance. His emphasis on the emotional and philosophical dimensions of music resonates with the objectives of this thesis, highlighting the transformative potential of rhythmic storytelling as a means of communication and expression.

Similarly to my research as a speaking drummer, Rzewski's work in *De Profundis* illuminates the shared challenges and creative possibilities inherent in merging voice and instrument which will be further discussed in Chapter 3.3. Unique Challenges of Solo Rhythmic Storytelling. Both endeavors seek to redefine conventional music notation and notions of musical performance, embracing the voice as an integral component of rhythmic expression.

1.6.7 Robert Erickson

The American composer Robert Erickson has ventured into the realm of speaking instruments in several of his pieces which has also influenced the development of this practice. Among these, *General Speech* stands out as a compelling instrumental theater composition. Collaborating with Stuart Dempster and Lenore Erik-Alt, Erickson employs the text attributed to General Douglas MacArthur, incorporating even a pause for a drink from a glass of water, as material to be transformed through the medium of the trombone. The result is a distinctive amalgamation of satire and extended instrumental virtuosity, delicately straddling the line between musicality and theatricality.

Crafted in 1969 at the request of Stuart Dempster, *General Speech* draws inspiration not only from MacArthur's words but also from the essence of his persona, reflecting the myth he consciously cultivated. Similar to my approach as a speaking drummer his compositions serve as a fusion of music and theater, with speech acting as a conduit. The trombonist is tasked with seamlessly integrating meticulously notated musical segments, often intricate in complexity, with the spoken rendition of a phoneticized version of MacArthur's farewell speech at West Point.

Erickson's instructions guide the performer to faithfully reproduce the vowels and consonants as depicted in the abstracted words, necessitating various manipulations of the mouth, tongue, and throat to achieve the desired effect. The concept of the instrument as a speech resonator extends to other compositions, such as *High Flyer*. Here, a lighter and more whimsical text is paired with a stronger tonal influence exerted by the trombone itself. In this piece, the trombone interacts and alternates with the speech sounds, further showcasing Erickson's innovative approach to merging speech and music.⁶⁴ These compositions have significantly influenced the development of vocal expression in this practice, particularly through vocalizations and sound poetry. Chapter 2.5, titled "Fifth Limb Rudiments," will delve into the

⁶⁴ John MacKay. "On the Music of Robert Erickson: A Survey and Some Selected Analyses." *Perspectives of New Music* 26, no. 2 (Summer, 1988): 56-85. Accessed April 5, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/833186>.

innovative integration of the voice as a fifth limb, enhancing rhythmic expression alongside drums.

1.6.8 Beckett, Repetition and the Absurd

Certainly, repetition has played a significant role in the relationship between music and words throughout history. It serves as a structural element and creative force in a wide range of musical styles, and it has been explored and used in various ways in literature and other art forms. Samuel Beckett, a leading figure in the Theatre of the Absurd, was known for his innovative use of repetition. This use of repetition creates a sense of absurdity and disorientation, which contributes to the development of a non-traditional approach to storytelling. The repetitive nature of rhythm in the speaking drummer makes the exploration of Beckett's work relevant to the practice of rhythmic storytelling. The term absurd originally referred to something that was out of harmony in a musical context, but more generally it refers to something that is out of sync with reason or propriety, and is illogical or incongruous.⁶⁵ These types of absurd or ridiculous situations will be explored in Contraptions (See Ch. 2.1).

In his book *Samuel Beckett, Repetition and Modern Music*, John McGrath explores the role of repetition in Beckett's work and its relationship to music. He argues that Beckett used repetition to create a sense of semantic fluidity in his texts, resulting in a more music-like quality. This allowed Beckett to dissociate his language from traditional narrative structure and draw attention to the materiality and physical properties of the language. Additionally, the persistent repetitions in Beckett's later writing can be seen as emphasizing a more musical and expressive form of expression, adding depth and complexity to the work.

In many of his plays, Samuel Beckett's use of repetitive speech patterns exhibits musical qualities. A particularly striking example of this can be seen in *Not I*, in which a single mouth delivers the entire monologue. The concept of this piece alone falls

⁶⁵ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, 3rd edition (N. Yorkshire: Methuen Drama, 2001), 47.

within the definition of rhythmic storytelling, as the one mouth could represent a drum. This iconic work has been creatively useful in this evolving practice.

Beckett actively encouraged the incorporation of musical elements into his work during rehearsals, stressing the importance of sound and emphasizing that it was his responsibility to guide the actors towards a musical approach. In fact, he was known to bring a metronome to rehearsals and to use it to set the rhythms and pitches of the actors' speech, sometimes even playing the piano to prompt them. Beckett's approach to directing resembled that of a conductor more than a traditional theatre director, according to Knowlson. Thus, it is clear that Beckett valued and deliberately incorporated musical elements into his plays, using repetition and other techniques to create a unique and distinct sound. He was very sensitive to the musical and rhythmic properties of speech in the making of his texts for the stage.⁶⁶

Samuel Beckett's use of musicality in his work differs from that of James Joyce in that it does not rely on the linguistic imitation of musical effects. Instead, Beckett's musicality is derived from the way in which linguistic sounds are organized into structures that do not prioritize meaning. Overall, Beckett's use of repetition contributes to the exploration of rhythmic storytelling in the portfolio works to be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.6.9 The Practice of Improvisation

I start with something I know, then I go to something I don't know.

—Miles Davis⁶⁷

Drummer and composer Tyshawn Sorey describes improvisation as 'spontaneous composition', involving a compositional mindset that focuses on the improvisation itself, as well as the overall structure and organization of the music.⁶⁸ This includes considering fundamentals such as performance, form, harmony, directionality, and

⁶⁶ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1997), 668.

⁶⁷ Kenny Werner, *Effortless Mastery* (New Albany, IN: Jamey Aebersold Jazz, 1996), 23.

⁶⁸ Tyshawn Sorey, "Perle Noire: Meditations for Josephine," *Aesthetics, Discussion, and Reception* (2015) <https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D86W9PJQ>

non-directionality, while also taking into account unpredictable elements such as sound production, timing, and balancing intention and non-intention. The aim is to create an evolving and transformative experience that connects with the self and listeners through unbiased engagement with the music.

This practice approaches various forms of improvisation, which require responding to either known contexts or unknown possibilities in real-time during performances. Techniques can take many forms depending on the particular scenario that includes utilizing memory, incorporating composed elements, promoting creativity, intuition, and counter-intuition, and establishing a ritual to guide the improvisation process. Additionally, there is the potential to tap into abstract ideas from the subconscious to translate them into musical expression. Together, these improvisation techniques offer endless opportunities to create unique and innovative musical experiences for performers and audiences alike.

During my improvisational sessions with Jamaaladeen Tacuma, a highly skilled bassist and mentor, we adhered to an unspoken rule of refraining from verbal or written discussions before or after playing. This approach allowed us to take a more immediate and hands-on approach, letting the music speak through our instruments and avoiding the pitfalls of excessive analysis. As a result, our improvisations felt more authentic and free-flowing, unencumbered by preconceived notions or overthinking.

This was instrumental in developing my understanding of the harmolodic theory, created by jazz saxophonist and composer Ornette Coleman. Although the manifesto was never fully articulated, Coleman's work as an improviser has been widely recognized as a pioneering force that helped to establish free jazz as a distinct genre.⁶⁹

Harmolodics represents a groundbreaking approach to improvisation that has had a significant impact on the development of free jazz. This approach aims to remove the

⁶⁹ Josh Jones, "How Ornette Coleman Freed Jazz with His Theory of Harmolodics," *Open Culture* (2020) <https://pitchfork.com/thepitch/how-ornette-coleman-freed-jazz-with-his-theory-of-harmolodics/>

structural and harmonic constraints of traditional jazz, prioritizing a collective approach to improvisation that empowers all performers to contribute equally to the music. As such, harmolodics encourages a spontaneous and intuitive approach to improvisation that emphasizes creativity and innovation over predetermined structures.⁷⁰

In the article *The Complex Dynamics of Improvisation* by David Borgo, the author delves into the intricate nature of improvisation in music. Borgo first establishes the broad definition of improvisation as the creation of music in real-time, without prior preparation or planning. He then goes on to discuss the various approaches to improvisation, including both individual and collective improvisation.⁷¹

One of the main points made by Borgo is the idea that improvisation is a complex process that involves both structure and freedom. He argues that while improvisation may seem like a purely spontaneous and unstructured activity, it is actually a balance between the two. Improvisation requires the establishment of certain rules or parameters within which the musicians can operate, while also allowing for flexibility and creativity. Borgo also touches on the concept of ‘flow’, a state of optimal experience in which the performer is fully immersed in the act of creating music.

Bob Moses, a Boston-based drummer and former private teacher, authored *Drum Wisdom*, which serves as a guiding principle for the drum kit improvisation practices that are discussed below. Moses' free jazz style has led him to play with a wide array of legends such as Pat Metheny to Roland Kirk.

It is essential to have a clear musical concept or idea in mind before performing. This concept should guide all aspects of the performance, from melody to rhythm to dynamics. It is argued that playing ‘from something’ (compositional structure) rather than ‘from nothing’ is essential in this process. Additionally, Moses states that many musicians fail to make sufficient use of the specific elements of a song in their

⁷⁰ Stephen Rush, *Free Jazz, Harmolodics, and Ornette Coleman* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2016).

⁷¹ David Borgo, “The Complex Dynamics of Improvisation,” in *Springer Handbook of Systematic Musicology*, edited by Rolf Bader, (Berlin: Springer, 2018), 1017-1027.

improvisations. In particular, it is suggested that melodic improvisations should be based on the original melody, and that even drum solos should relate back to the original melody. This is why drum kit notation is not used in this practice.

In order to effectively convey musical ideas through performance, it is essential to make a conscious decision about the concept or idea that will serve as the foundation for the improvisation. Without this initial decision-making process, a musician may struggle to fully commit to and execute their playing with energy and conviction. Moses emphasizes that one effective strategy for improvisation is to take a single idea and expand upon it, rather than constantly shifting between multiple ideas. This approach allows for a deeper exploration and development of the chosen concept, and is often employed by the most successful musicians.

1.7.0 The New Discipline

My practice shares similarities with several of the tendencies Irish composer Jennifer Walshe identifies in her essay, *The New Discipline*, which offers a fresh perspective on contemporary music that challenges traditional disciplinary boundaries. Walshe contends that contemporary music can no longer be constrained by composition, performance, or improvisation alone, but instead should adopt a new mode of practice that blends all of these elements in innovative ways. The result is a new type of artist who can fluidly move between different disciplines and practices to create unique and groundbreaking music.

My own practice is similarly interdisciplinary, drawing on diverse fields, disciplines, and traditions. I share Walshe's belief that improvisation is crucial for fostering creative expression and generating innovative musical ideas. While our practices stem from different traditions, I find Walshe's concept of the 'New Discipline' helpful for discussing my artistic approach because it allows me to draw connections between compositions that differ in degree rather than kind. It is important to note that the New Discipline is not an aesthetic but a methodology for creating music, and it is not a

school or movement but a way of working that can be applied to pieces of varying kinds.

Composers working within the New Discipline function as directors or choreographers, using physical, theatrical, and visual elements alongside sound to solve compositional and performative problems. The discipline involves a rigorous process of discovering, learning, and developing new tools for composition and performance. While it draws on the legacies of movements such as Dada and Fluxus, it is not limited to them and is not merely music theater. Instead, it regards music as inherently theatrical and embodied, with performers and audiences' bodies playing a central role in the music experience. The New Discipline values composers' willingness to perform, 'get their hands dirty,' and work quickly, without the luxury of extended development and rehearsal periods.

Although my roots are in the North American jazz/improv community and differ slightly from the tendencies Walshe has identified within European experimental music, there are nevertheless common interests. British composer Laura Bowler – whose DIY approach conforms to the New Discipline aesthetic – has incorporated boxing into her performances by training with a female boxing champion, and performing wearing a boxing outfit.⁷² Boxing has also been incorporated into my practice, and this led to modeling physical movement and patterns on the drum kit, adding a theatrical and rhythmic effect to performances.

Like Walshe, my area of expertise involves the meticulous process of discovering, acquiring, and refining new tools for composition and performance. I relish discovering new ways of playing, such as combining a spasmodic blast beat with a subdued monologue, using special effects makeup to transform into a coyote, or training my four limbs to be thought of as if each has its own independent personality.⁷³

⁷² <https://laurabowler.co.uk/work> Women Box - Arcola Theatre

⁷³ Example [Man No Longer Me](#) use of special effects makeup to transform into Pecos Bill

1.7.1 Research Questions

This Practice-as-Research concretely explores various approaches for incorporating the voice as a fifth limb within the drum kit practice. There are limited resources for drummers looking to integrate vocalization into their practice; this commentary aims to fill this gap by focusing on its use in improvised drum kit contexts. Drummers, percussionists, and other musicians may adapt these concepts to their own practice, as the goal of this research is to explore the integration of the voice in fully coordinated drum kit practice.

The primary questions guiding this are:

1. What can the speaking drummer achieve in a composition or performance which a speaker and a drummer cannot achieve on their own?
2. How can rhythmic material derived from the drum kit be expanded into compositions for various ensembles as an extension of the drum kit?

The purpose of this research is to explore different approaches to music-making that are 'ritualistic' in nature. As a result, the pieces in this portfolio are predominantly episodic and do not follow a traditional developmental structure. In addition to the primary questions, our research also considers the following supplementary question:

3. In what other ways can 'through-composed' music and 'moment form' allow for the further advancement of this practice?

1.8 Methodology

In what follows, we will consider the unique manner in which PaR contributes to new knowledge. Kristina Niedderer defines 'practice' as encompassing “many potential activities from artistic to analytical, where the creative output is the basis of the contribution to knowledge.” This definition emphasizes the importance of using autoethnography⁷⁴ as the primary methodology in this PaR as it encompasses both the creation and reflection processes.⁷⁵

Autoethnography is a social research approach that connects personal experiences to broader cultural, political, and social contexts. It involves creating performance texts and ethnographies that highlight the relationship between the researcher, the audience, and the subject matter. This method enacts the research subject, resulting in performative outcomes that create realities. Autoethnographers scrutinize their own experiences and apply methodological tools and research literature to dissect those experiences, while taking into account how others may encounter similar moments of insight.⁷⁶ This research will draw data from contemporaneous notes, audio and video recordings, voice-notes, blog posts⁷⁷, manuscripts, emails, and text messages, which will then be further analyzed and reflected upon.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Carolyn Ellis, Arthur Bochner, and Tony Adams.. “Autoethnography: an Overview”, *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12 <<http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095#gcit>> [accessed 2 June 2017] p. 273

⁷⁵ Kristina Niedderer, Seymour Roworth-Stokes. ‘The Role and Use of Creative Practice in Research and Its Contribution to Knowledge.’ In *IASDR07: International Association of Societies of Design Research*. Hong Kong. (2007) <http://www.sd.polyu.edu.hk/iasdr/proceeding/papers/THE>

⁷⁶ Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An Overview. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-12.1.1589>

⁷⁷ [Blog post](#) on exploring ways in which sculpture and stonecarving can influence drumming and the compositional process.

⁷⁸ Access entire Research Data Folder [HERE](#)

1.8.1 Feedback Loop

This research also utilizes the ‘feedback loop’ methodology, which involves the conception and investigation of an idea, the creation of a preliminary draft, reflection and revision, and finally, the premiere or recording of the final version. This process is then reflected upon and used to inform future iterations of the process. The journal, practice room, and performance stage serve as key sites for the collection, construction, and finalization of works. This approach allows for the integration of creative practice and reflection, and the ongoing development of knowledge through the iterative process of Practice as Research.

The Journal

The practice of carrying a composition journal, as advocated by Wayne Shorter and practiced by Gustav Mahler, has been instrumental in my creative process as a jazz drummer.⁷⁹ Throughout this doctorate I am maintaining four journals which are daily updated, revised and reflected upon in the creative process and presented in the commentary.⁸⁰ For example some lyric and musical texts have been gathered and refined through the art of observation, such as taking note of captivating experiences while traveling or jotting down conversations with anonymous individuals on the street. Additionally, inspiration can be found in unexpected places, such as inaccurate English translations found on Polish restaurant menus.⁸¹

The Practice Room

The importance of regular practice in the development and advancement of a musician's skills cannot be overstated, particularly in the field of rhythmic storytelling, which demands proficiency in drumming, composition, and vocal training. To effectively understand and progress in this practice, it is necessary to break it down into individual practice sessions, focusing on specific tasks. Keeping a record of these

⁷⁹ 1999 Berklee College of Music baccalaureate ceremony featuring honorary degree recipients David Bowie and Wayne Shorter

<https://archives.berklee.edu/browse/beo/1999-berklee-college-music-baccalaureate-ceremony>

⁸⁰ Example [Preliminary list of previous compositions for the solo speaking drum kit practice](#)

⁸¹ Example - [Motets of the Otherworld journal sketches](#)

sessions through journaling can assist in identifying and addressing any challenges in technique and ability.⁸²

The Recording Studio

The recording studio is essential in my research process, allowing me to document and refine musical ideas, and produce finished works that can be shared with others. I collaborate with engineers and producers to capture and I directly edit my works as part of the composition process using Pro-Tools, and guide the final stereo mix with feedback and instructions.⁸³

The Performance Stage

The stage is crucial for performing and presenting completed works and for gaining feedback from the audience. It also allows for personal growth and development as an artist by sharing work with a wider audience.⁸⁴

⁸² Example - [Practice Room journal](#)

⁸³ Example - [Recording Studio editing mixing notes](#)

⁸⁴ Example - [MS Stubnitz](#) for 20 years has presented and archived my various projects

1.9 Research Outputs

The portfolio discussed in Parts 1-4 aims to explore different methods of combining vocal and drum-kit based rhythmic storytelling within a musical composition. It includes written works in four different configurations, along with critical analyses, personal reflections, and final recordings. These works aim to identify key attributes that support rhythmic storytelling and address any challenges encountered during the research process. The critical analysis will focus on relevant compositional practices that pertain to the main research inquiries and questions.

The portfolio will include videos and audio recordings of me as a composer, drummer, improviser and storyteller, showcasing diverse techniques developed throughout the research. The analysis aims to contribute to the understanding of the potential for voice and drum-kit based rhythmic storytelling in musical compositions. Reflections on Findings will be presented in Chapter 6.

2 Part One: Contraptions

The solo drum kit project was developed as a response to a situation that arose when a programmer booked me for a 25-minute performance in the lobby of a cinema after the premiere of the film *Whiplash* at the American Festival in Poland.⁸⁵ It was through this experience that the importance and usefulness of integrating the voice with the drum kit was recognized, a practice that would later evolve into these works.

The first portfolio piece, *Contraptions*: episodes for solo speaking drummer (2021-23), employs soliloquies, often freely improvised over various internalized rhythmic, melodic and harmonic forms. *Contraptions* refers to the complexity and intricacy of the drum kit as a musical device and the act of creating musical ideas and expressions with it. The speaking drummer becomes a ‘musical inventor’. The term ‘episodes’ used to describe *Contraptions* highlights its modular and self-contained structure. However, it also implies a sense of narrative coherence and progression, which paradoxically resulted in an almost anti-narrative and anti-progressive work.⁸⁶

Referring back to Chapter 1.3.3, Byron Almén acknowledges the importance of rhythm in musical narrative, noting that it can create tension, build momentum, and establish a sense of directionality in the music. Almén suggests that narrative in music is not necessarily linear, but can be circular or non-linear, and that the form of a musical narrative can be shaped by various factors, such as repetition, variation, and contrast.⁸⁷ Moreover, rhythm can convey extra-musical associations, such as movement or physical activity, and also contributes to the narrative content of the music.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ *Whiplash* is a 2014 American independent psychological drama film [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiplash_\(2014_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiplash_(2014_film))

⁸⁶ Audio File [bout 3 from Bruised by Noon](#), an instrumental solo drum album released in 2012, consisted of 12 "Improv Bouts," which served as a framework for *Contraptions*.

⁸⁷ Byron Almén and Robert S. Hatten, "Narrative Engagement with Twentieth Century Music: Possibilities and Limits," in *Music and Narrative Since 1900*, eds. Michael Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013), 59-85.

⁸⁸ Byron Almén, *A Theory of Musical Narrative. Musical Meaning and Interpretation*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 77.

While *Contraptions* may be seen as falling short of the traditional monodrama, it offers a fresh perspective on the role of the drummer in contemporary music, eschewing the boundaries of traditional musical form and inviting a sense of whimsy, absurdness, and experimentation.⁸⁹

To fully grasp the context of this practice, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the drum kit.

2.1 Customization of the Drum Kit

The drum kit has evolved since its New Orleans origins in the 1840s, giving rise to new genres like jazz, blues, and rock.⁹⁰ Its ability to create complex music with diverse sounds makes it great for keeping time, meter, and rhythm.⁹¹ By the late 1930s, the standard drum kit consisted of a snare, bass drum, high-hat, toms, and cymbals. Since then, drummers have customized their kits to suit their specific musical needs, forever changing the role of percussionists in music.⁹² Refer to Appendix 8.1 for an overview of my customized drum kit.

⁸⁹ A monodrama is a dramatic work or opera featuring a single actor or performer. The term can also refer to a solo performance representing the thoughts or actions of a single character. Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., 2021. <https://www.britannica.com/art/monodrama>

⁹⁰ Samuel Solomon, *How to Write for Percussion: A Comprehensive Guide to Percussion Composition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 142.

⁹¹ Thomas Kernan, *Drum set*. In *Grove Music Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/display/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-1002240738>

⁹² R.B. Breithaupt, "The Drum Set: a History," *Encyclopedia of Percussion*, ed. J.H. Beck (New York, 1995), 173-77.

2.2 Making Narrative Work During the Covid-19 Pandemic

This chapter explores the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on the theme and development of the narrative in *Contraptions*. The isolation and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic presented unique challenges in the creation and direction of this piece, which ultimately became an intimate performance expressing the experiences of isolation and entrapment.

The Covid-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for the development of a solo project, as it allowed for a focus on working in isolation. This experience of isolation became a central theme in the narrative of *Contraptions*, which examines the psychological stresses caused by solitary confinement and the temporal perceptual shifts that result from it. The work is a durational piece in which the speaker assumes the role of the protagonist, the ‘Unknown,’ who is trapped within the drum kit, gradually succumbing to the effects of isolation and solitary confinement as expressed through a cycle of soliloquies, solo improvised drumming, and composed material. Musical narrative can be found in non-developmental works such as *Contraptions*, in which the stresses of isolation produce a state of madness that is explored in what becomes a sequence of abstract episodic pieces.

In *Contraptions*, soliloquies serve as a powerful tool for expressing these abstract narratives as the speaking drummer navigates the psychological effects of isolation and confinement. The use of soliloquies in *Contraptions* is inspired by the works of Beckett, who was known for his use of this literary device to convey the thoughts and emotions of his characters, provide background information and context, and create tension and resolution within his plays.

Each of these types of soliloquies allows for a different perspective on the *Unknown*’s thoughts and emotions, and can be used to create a sense of intimacy and connection with the audience.

- Soliloquy to oneself: *Unknown* expresses inner thoughts and emotions while alone, exploring effects of isolation and confinement.⁹³
- Soliloquy to a surrogate: *Unknown* addresses the ‘cell’ that confines him to express thoughts and emotions as a way of coping with isolation and confinement.
- Soliloquy to the audience: *Unknown* questions the audience directly, creating intimacy and connection sharing thoughts and feelings about isolation and confinement.⁹⁴

The use of soliloquies in *Contraptions* allows for a deeper exploration of the theme of isolation and solitary confinement.

⁹³ Video 6 *To Strip* <https://youtu.be/e-EJEKP6e5w>

⁹⁴ Video 7 *Am I Sane?*

2.3 Unique Challenges of Solo Rhythmic Storytelling

This work delves into my personal approach to the solo speaking drummer. Through a critical analysis of *Contraptions*, this chapter explores the challenges, techniques, and artistic possibilities of this dynamic and expressive form of drumming. By examining the developmental process, performance history, and final recording of *Contraptions*, this chapter aims to provide insight into the art of the solo speaking drummer and highlight the innovative and creative potential of this practice. A case study approach is used to offer a detailed and in-depth examination of the solo speaking drumming practice and contribute to the broader conversation on contemporary music performance and creation.

In solo speaking drumming, the performer must not only be proficient on the drum kit but also skilled in using their voice as a musical instrument. This requires a high level of coordination and control, as the performer must seamlessly integrate the two elements of their performance. Since there isn't an established speaking drummer catalog to reference in this discourse, one common challenge in this practice is finding the balance between the rhythmic, melodic, or lyrical elements of my performance. It can be tempting to prioritize one element over the other, leading to an unbalanced or uneven performance. One difficulty in this challenge is developing a strong sense of rhythmic and melodic awareness and being able to effectively integrate the two elements in a cohesive and expressive manner.

Another challenge is coordinating the voice as an extension of the fully coordinated drum kit performance, particularly when attempting to execute the fifth limb techniques. This requires the drummer to develop the ability to speak or sing while simultaneously playing the drums in any conceivable way, which can be difficult for those with little or no vocal training. To overcome this challenge, it is important to begin by developing a strong foundation in coordinating a strong bond between drumming and vocalizing. From there, the drummer can focus on developing the vocal skills necessary to effectively coordinate the voice with the drum kit.

Another challenge that solo speaking drummers may face is the need to convey narrative and emotion through their performance. While the drum kit and voice offer a wide range of expressive possibilities, it can be difficult to effectively convey complex emotions and ideas through these instruments. To overcome this challenge, solo speaking drummers may need to develop a strong understanding of musical storytelling and the use of musical motifs and themes to convey meaning. They may also need to experiment with different vocal techniques to create a more expressive and engaging performance. To keep audiences engaged, solo drummers may use strong stage presence, varied performance style, and adapting to audience interests.⁹⁵

Having no prior vocal training before this doctorate, I received 25 vocal and acting coaching sessions with actor and director Aled Pedrick between June 2021 and April 2022 (See Phase 2).

⁹⁵ Video file 8 [*Wrinkles of Time*](#)

2.4 Contraptions Feedback Loop

As previously discussed in Chapter 1.8, this methodology is a process of conceiving, creating, and refining a work of music through repeated cycles of practicing, drafting, reflection, and revision. By utilizing this method, this piece was able to evolve into a unique and provocative work that resists traditional musical form and offers a fresh perspective on the role of the speaking drummer in contemporary music. This methodology was utilized over the course of three developmental phases between November 2020 and December 2022.

Phase 1

Phase 1 focused on the initial conception and investigation including the conception and progression of the concept of a solo speaking drummer project. The practice room served as a key site for this phase, as various musical and narrative ideas were explored and tested. This Phase 1 involved the assembly and survey of my current catalog of over 125 works, spanning 30 albums which were categorized into broad terms for my personal use such as swing, rock, Latin, funk or Malian drum grooves.⁹⁶ The compositions were chosen based on their potential to be restructured and developed into solo speaking drummer pieces, utilizing fifth limb techniques and exploring a range of themes including tempo, meter, rhythmic style, drum kit approach, dynamics, form, narrative style, and use of text and voice. This resulted in 49 pieces which I further investigated in the practice room and in crucial new developments of forms, rhythms, melodies and narratives, which I notated in my journal and/or recorded using the voice memo app on an iPhone, indicating which would be sung or played on the drums.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Example [list of initial work list](#)

⁹⁷ example of developing drum groove for [Accabadora](#)

Phase 2

The proto-performances, held between June 2021 and April 2022, focused on developing the composition and organization of *Contraptions* forms, rhythms, melodies, and narratives.⁹⁸ Phase 2 utilized various techniques, such as practice, recording, reflection, and journal writing, to create a preliminary list of 12 episodes that were categorized and structured based on specific musical and narrative concepts. This phase allowed for the identification of areas for improvement, such as what to eliminate or retain.⁹⁹

A crucial aspect of Phase 2 was developing a clear and focused concept for each episode. This involved experimenting with tempo, melody, rhythm, forms, harmony, and devising effective improvisation concepts for the solo speaking drummer practice. The 'inner ear' technique was used to refine the rhythms and tempi of each episode, aided by the use of a metronome and midi files.¹⁰⁰

Guided coaching sessions were used to develop techniques for singing while playing drums, evaluate performance, and bring the artistic vision to life. To supplement self-reflection and practice, audio and video recordings, voice memos, and journal writing were utilized to track progress. The coaching sessions covered foundational vocal training, including freeing the body and throat, support and anchoring, creating character through vocal conditions, articulation, and speech range. See appendix 8.2 for vocal coaching outline.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ The 'proto-performance' refers to the precursor or origin of a performance. It serves as a foundation or a collection of foundations from which performances emerge. Most performances do not originate from a single source or impulse. Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2002), 238.

⁹⁹ Example [Contraptions Phase 2](#)

¹⁰⁰ Bob Moses defines this as the ability to hear music internally and to distinguish between what is being played and what serves as the inspiration for the performance. Bob Moses, *Drum Wisdom* (San Francisco, CA: Backbeat Books, 2003), 6.

¹⁰¹ Examples of [Vocal Coaching Sessions Audio and Journal](#)

Phase 3

Phase 3 of the development process aimed to refine the work for a video performance on September 22nd. This phase took place from April 2022 until September and involved internalizing and memorizing the personalized reference lead sheets through multiple dress rehearsals of the 12 episodes.¹⁰²

Leading up to the September 22nd video performance, there was an opportunity for intense reflection and revision of the project. Between March and September 2022, these efforts led to exciting new discoveries and outcomes, including improved techniques and a deeper understanding of the artistic vision.

The goal of the performance was to test the limitations and strengths of the practice and pave the way for future works.

The 37-minute performance had several satisfactory moments such as in the *King is Dancing*¹⁰³ where many positive aspects were retained.¹⁰⁴ However, I criticized the overall piece for its lack of linear narrative and strong thematic material. The text was too often abstract and did not clearly convey a story, resulting in a series of disconnected episodes that could be rearranged without altering the overall experience. Furthermore, some episodes were not of sufficient length to create a mesmerizing effect.

The final decision was to develop and present in the portfolio three episodes: 'To Strip', 'New Ways' and 'Am I Sane?'

¹⁰² Example [Contraptions Proto-performance versions](#)

¹⁰³ Example [The King is Dancing](#)

¹⁰⁴ Video file 5 [Contraptions proto-performance full video](#)

2.5 Fifth Limb Rudiments

The aim of integrating the voice as a fifth limb is to investigate the potential of incorporating the voice into the rhythmic expression of the drums. This approach can be applied to any musical context and be achieved through vocal percussion, vocalizations (singing, chanting, or spoken word), or sound poetry techniques. While vocal percussion creates percussive sounds with the voice, vocalizations encompass any use of the voice in music, and sound poetry emphasizes the sonic qualities of language to create abstract compositions.

These are the fifth limb rudiments developed in this research which will be further analyzed in *Contraptions*. The creation of this list is motivated by the need to provide speaking drummers with a set of initial rudiments, which can be further subdivided into distinct categories based on specific musical contexts.

1. The voice and limbs are equal in establishing a rhythmic pattern or groove.¹⁰⁵
2. The limbs can provide accompanying textures to the 'lead' voice through techniques such as vocal percussion, singing, chanting, spoken word, or sound poetry.¹⁰⁶
3. The limbs create the rhythm while the 'lead' voice either improvises or narrates.
4. The voice can replace the rhythm of any limb while that limb either rests or improvises.
5. The voice and limbs achieve equal rhythmic harmony, allowing for the possibility of switching between the voice or any limb as the 'lead'.
6. The limbs, in combination with the voice, can mimic natural speech.¹⁰⁷
7. Creating rhythmic unison between the voice and limbs while vocalizing a text.

¹⁰⁵ Example [Fifth limb rudiment 1](#)

¹⁰⁶ Example [Fifth Limb rudiment 2](#)

¹⁰⁷ Example [Pepe Silvia with drums](#)

Analysis of *Contraptions*

The forthcoming analysis is founded upon the audio recording and personal reference lead sheets, which serve as references for future performances. These personalized notations aid my memorization process and assist me in developing my style as a rhythmic storyteller. The application and examination of the seven 'fifth limb' techniques demonstrated in these performances represents a fundamental aim of this study.

'To Strip'

'*To Strip*' is intended to evoke the feeling of the 'Unknown' being trapped in a maze, which experiments with presenting non-narrative content through five unrelated sub-episodes.¹⁰⁸

This non-linear approach challenges traditional storytelling conventions. To create an element of surprise and disorientation the episode begins with a false introduction, incorporating composed elements such as a marching band-style count-off, which abruptly cuts off, segueing into an unexpected, comical style and neurotic monologue.¹⁰⁹

The Unknown suggests a sense of anonymity and detachment from the outside world. The repetition of the phrase 'Sometimes I'm just Known just as the Unknown' further emphasizes this sense of detachment and lack of connection to the outside world. The episode portrays the themes of isolation and confinement, but introduces a sense of determination and a desire to break free. The Unknown contemplates stripping away thoughts and 'rip[ping] these knots away' as a means to shed the negative effects of isolation and find freedom.

¹⁰⁸ The term non-narrative refers to something that does not have a clear or structured storyline or plot and explores ideas, emotions, or sensations through imagery, sound, or movement.

¹⁰⁹ A false introduction is started but abruptly cut off, creating a sense of surprise or tension before the main theme or melody begins. It is often used to add a dramatic or comedic effect. Rikky Rooksby, *The Songwriting Sourcebook* (Chicago, IL: Chicago Review Press, 2003).

The phrase ‘my needless body is stripped away’ suggests a sense of vulnerability and loss of identity, as if the physical body is stripped away, perhaps symbolizing the psychological stripping away of the sense of self that can occur as a result of prolonged isolation. At the phrase ‘will this be the way?’, I stand up behind the kit and drop a stick vertically onto the snare drum, catching it mid-air before launching into a frenetic drumming at forte. Chance is an integral part of this performance practice, which utilizes the ‘juggling’ drum stick drop technique to allow for on-the-fly alterations to the direction of the piece.¹¹⁰ The aim of this approach is to push the traditional boundaries of drumming and create a unique experience for both the performer and the audience.

The drumming throughout much of the performance can be characterized as ‘organic’, where rhythms are played in a way that doesn’t conform to traditional note values.¹¹¹ Such rhythms may appear random and freeform, but they maintain a sense of swing or groove within a particular style. To achieve this style of drumming without sacrificing the role of timekeeper, one must develop the ability to internalize a basic framework while allowing for organic movements. This can be accomplished by honing one’s internal hearing and focusing on a simple underlying structure, even as the body and hands move intuitively and naturally.

At 1:16, the voice joins the performance, complementing the four-limbed drumming in a quasi-waltz feel and providing a consistent pattern on the first beat, as the drums respond with attacks on the second and third beats. Certain vocal concepts are to shift between narrator and using the voice as an instrument such as the drums. At 2:02, trying to separate language from the limitations of definite meaning, the vocal performance shifts registers in expression with the text ‘to strip,’ introducing variety and progression in an absurd style inspired by vocal inflections heard in Schwitters’s *Ursonate*. At 2:10, the vocals introduce elements of sound poetry and spoken word,

¹¹⁰ This example was developed through the ‘New Discipline’ methodology

¹¹¹ Bob Moses, *Drum Wisdom* (London: Backbeat Books, 2003), 44.

which climax and eventually break down into a similar interplay between voice and drums as previously heard at 1:16.

At 2:53, this interplay expands and leads to an abrupt composed vocal phrase 'boldly going' at 3:13.

Figure 2.1 *To Strip* section B transition



In the B section, there is an abrupt change in the improvisation style, accompanied by the drums which frequently reflect the vocal phrasing. This allows for the exploration of various fifth limb techniques such as at 4:12 where rudiment #7 is employed - vocalizing a text in rhythmic unison with the limbs. This creates an intense and aggressive unison phrase, 'whither nowhere the light can reach,' which effectively draws the listener deeper into the concept of the Unknown.

At 4:26, the drums engage in a dialogue with the voice, mirroring natural speech patterns through the use of rudiment #5. This technique involves coordinating the voice and limbs in rhythmic harmony, allowing for a seamless transition between the two as the leader in the musical conversation.

The spoken text "no debt, to these thoughts" at 5:00 employs rudiment #4, which involves using the voice to replace the rhythm of a limb while it rests or improvises. In this instance, the text "no debt" is used, leaving the word "debt" to be spoken by the voice. This creates an interplay between the voice and the drums, resulting in a unique and dynamic musical expression.

At 6:40, we encounter the next composed transition, leading us out of the B section with the help of an internalized memory of pitch and tempo. The abrupt transition into section C features the voice chanting "boldly go," with the drums remaining silent. The section commences with solo vocals, and as it progresses, the drums join in with an ostinato pattern, establishing a cohesive and dynamic interplay between the voice and drums. Singing without the drumming support can be a challenging feat, and it is the constant rhythm of the drums that plays a crucial role in attempting to create a hypnotic atmosphere that can lead to a sense of fanatical ecstasy.

Figure 2.2 *To Strip* section C transition

21 **(C)** AT WILL VOCALIZE OUT OF OPEN IMPROV SECTION - OPEN REPEAT 3

BOLD - LY GO BOLD - LY GO BOLD - LY GO BOLD - LY

25 2X's

BOLD - LY GO BOLD - LY GO BOLD - LY GO BOLD - LY

The remainder of this piece, along with 'New Ways' and 'Am I Sane?' to varying degrees, centers around the idea of 'internal' hearing, which involves playing off a vamp or harmonic progression. To cultivate the ability to hear music internally, it is essential to distinguish between what is being played and what serves as the inspiration for the performance.¹¹² The external aspect refers to the physical act of playing, while the internal aspect refers to the mental image or idea. Bob Moses claims that to achieve internal hearing, it is important to have a clear foundation in the form of a simple idea, and to build upon it with additional details and ornamentation. However, it is also important to maintain structure throughout the process to ensure cohesiveness in the performance. As the music becomes more complex, it can be challenging to maintain this connection, and active effort is required to develop and

¹¹²ibid, page 6

strengthen the ability to hear music internally.

At 7:13, the voice attempts to sing the text up a perfect fifth, followed by an attempt to sing the text up an octave from the original pitch at 7:23. The voice also begins to act as an improviser, interacting and playing in unison with the drums at specific moments. This gradually morphs into the limbs improvising freely, then providing rhythmic support for sound poetry at around 7:30.

At 8:55, there is an abrupt transition into section D, marked by a slight increase in tempo and a change in rhythmic field. Expressing storytelling through the use of lyrical vocals is the most powerful form of storytelling that involves the incorporation of vocalization within the drum kit, over a groove. This section features a driving syncopated paradiddle based groove, providing a contrast to the previous section which was predominantly played on the toms. The drums in this section are played with a dry, tight cross stick and a hi-hat based texture, supporting the voice and allowing for a more open sound.

Figure 2.3 *To Strip* section D transition

(D) ♩ = 174 OPEN REPEAT AD LIB. ROCK GROOVE - VOCALIZE OFF CHANGES

33 C/E G D/A E/B

ff

The episode reaches its climax with the voice singing off a four bar harmonic progression in a style reminiscent of a rock band, as eighth notes on the floor tom further drive the groove with a more open sound that eventually switches to the ride. At 9:30, the voice attempts to sing part of the internalized background harmonies notated in the lead sheet. The climax concludes with a cadenza where the text 'Of mindlessness' recaps elements from the B section, ending the piece on an absurd and comical note.

‘New Ways’

In ‘*New Ways*’, feelings of frustration and hopelessness are conveyed through the portrayal of confinement and an inability to escape. Unknown’s effort to find new paths to freedom in the ‘maze’ of isolation ultimately proves futile, leading to a resigned acceptance of an uncertain fate. This episode emphasizes the use of two internalized ostinato sections developed from my experience collaborating with the Malian griot, Abdoulaye Diabate. The structure of the piece follows a freely improvised ternary A-B-A form, with the A section featuring an ostinato in cut time. The use of mallets on the drums adds a melodic resonance that complements the accompanying vocals.

In developing the script and vocal style for this episode, vocal coach Aled Pedrick suggested I go against the mood of the music. When the music is really lyrical, he suggested, it's good to put some extra energy into the voice. It's like when a cake is already sweet; you don't need to add more sugar, because it's already there. Sometimes, we should do the opposite of what the music suggests.

The use of soliloquies in *New Ways* effectively portrays the psychological struggles of isolation and confinement through the text ‘This cell is my maze’ and ‘never found the way out’, which convey a sense of entrapment and longing for escape. The repetition of the phrase ‘new ways every day’ emphasizes the monotony and repetition of isolation, while the final lines ‘In the end we turn to stone, into ash and sand’ suggest a universal vulnerability and mortality. The contrasting use of optimistic drum patterns further emphasizes the theme of entrapment and isolation adding depth and complexity to the rhythmic storytelling.

Figure 2.4 *New Ways* section A drum kit groove

Section A starts with a gradual introduction of a drum groove that builds upon the melody of internalized ostinato with a focus on establishing a dynamic and straightforward rhythm. The use of mallets allow for a subtle fade-in, creating a sense of gradual development in the groove which was originally based on this sticking pattern:

RLRL RRLR LRLR LLRL

At 1:08, the voice enters as an opening statement establishing rudiment #3, utilizing the limbs to provide rhythm while the voice as leader ad libs singing, speaking or chanting.

At 1:45, the voice ascends to a higher register, with the text 'every day,' reminiscent of the sound of a gong or large cymbal being struck. At 1:56, there is a drop in dynamics, contributing to the overall impression of being lost within a maze. The concept of the drumming and voice is to create a hypnotic and minimalistic effect through the repetition of text and drum patterns.

At 2:19, the voice begins to incorporate a vocal fry technique unintentionally. At 2:55, the voice repeats the phrase 'all about all about,' which serves as the foundation for the drums to improvise over. At 4:08, the voice's repetition of 'to, to' serves as a substitute for the hi-hat in a typical groove. These techniques provide a rich tapestry of sound and meaning, contributing to the listener's experience of being lost inside a maze.

The use of windchimes serves as a symbol of ash being blown in the air, as the voice narrates ‘into ash.’ This is followed by a transition to the use of the toms as the voice states ‘into sand.’ The call and response between the voice and drums creates a sense of interplay and experimentation, with the voice attempting to utilize different ranges, timbre and expressions, drawing inspiration from the works of Kurt Schwitters. At 5:30, the voice and drums collaborate effortlessly, without one overshadowing the other. This is achieved through a rudiment #1 where the voice is integrated as an equal component in the rhythmic pattern or groove, along with the drumming limbs. The piece then begins, around 6:00, to gradually morph into the B section that will eventually change the tempo and meter.

Figure 2.5 *New Ways* section B drum kit groove



The rhythmic feel here incorporates organic rhythms that may appear random and freeform, but which maintain a sense of swing or groove within a particular style. The drums play on the rims at 6:45, creating a sense of static energy and a pause before a heavily improvised drum section. The change to the drumsticks and the addition of snare drum in this section serves to contrast with the previous section and explore different parts of the maze through various drum expressions. At 7:30, a polyrhythmic drum groove finally emerges with the simultaneous altering of two, three and four independent rhythms to create layered patterns.

At 8:35, the voice speaks in non-language influenced by Milford Graves, and the episode transitions back to the A section and gradually fades out on the open theme.

‘Am I Sane?’

The final episode is a climactic culmination of intense drumming, improvisation, and minimalistic use of narrative. The *Unknown* questions his own sanity and reality with the repetition of the phrase ‘Am I sane?’ highlighting a growing sense of doubt and insecurity. The final lines suggest a sense of detachment from reality and disconnection from the outside world, emphasizing the detrimental psychological effects of prolonged isolation.

This episode attempts to explore various fifth limb techniques as it was created with the intention of incorporating new techniques and addressing criticisms and challenges from the Sept 22nd performance. The objective was to improve upon past strengths and explore new ideas to push the boundaries of improvisational drumming, leading to the development of technique #5.

The 14-bar open form is often broken into six- and eight-bar phrases (see double bar line at b.7). These are some of the ways in which the structure of this form can be played.

- Without any voice, the limbs can phrase the melody based on the contour of the melody with specific sound sources such as only drums, choked or sustaining cymbals.
- The limbs and voice can state the melody in unison.
- The voice can state the melody while the limbs rest or freely improvise.¹¹³
- The four note motif can be split between the limbs and voice: e.g., the limbs play the first three notes and the voice carries the last note.

The drum kit plays a four-note motif that is repeated with variations in the melody spoken by the voice and drums in various combinations. The open repeated form is an important foundation of the episode though it is not always strictly adhered to,

¹¹³ The voice does not have to sing these exact intervals and it is common to sing intervals based on the tuning of the drums.

allowing for the limbs to spontaneously superimpose organic rhythms over the voice and over the internalized structure. Emphasis on notated rests in measures 8, 9, and 10, through the use of silence and muffled or sustained drum/cymbal sounds, contributes to the sharp and angular lines of tone and rhythm that give this episode its ‘neo-primitive’ character (See Ch. 3.1).

The episode begins with the voice and limbs in rhythmic unison, while at 1:14, the motif is split between voice and drums, with an improvised variation of rudiment #4 which utilizes the voice to replace the rhythm of any limb, while that limb either rests or improvises.

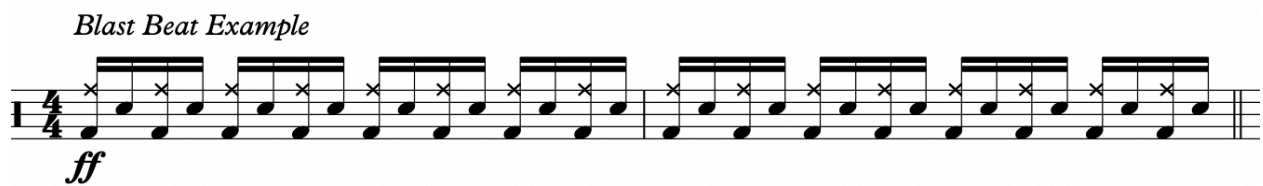
Figure 2.6 *Am I Sane?* section A

The musical score for 'Am I Sane?' section A consists of two staves: Voice and Drum Kit. The Voice staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The Drum Kit staff is in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The score begins with a circled 'A' and the tempo marking '♩=138 OPEN REPEAT FORM FREELY'. The lyrics for the Voice part are: 'AM I SANE YEAH SAME I SANE YEAH AM I SANE YEAH WHERE'S MY BRAIN YEAH'. The Drum Kit part features a 'mf' (mezzo-forte) dynamic marking and includes various rhythmic patterns, including rests and sixteenth-note figures.

At 1:33, the form continues with vocalizing the form while the limbs superimpose blast-beats¹¹⁴ for the first time, an important characteristic of this episode that represents rage or anxiety. At 1:50, the aggressive improvisation causes the structure to collapse further, accelerating into an even more intense disarray in the drumming and voice recitation of ‘am I chained?’. At 2:03, the form returns briefly with the voice stating the main theme, followed by the use of more blast-beats that build the transition into a punk-rock interlude at 2:18.

¹¹⁴ The blast-beat is a repeated, sixteenth-note figure played at a very fast tempo, and divided uniformly among the bass drum, snare, and ride, crash, or hi-hat cymbal. MacGregor, A. (2006). *Agoraphobic Nosebleed: PCP Torpedo*. Dusted. <https://dustedmagazine.tumblr.com/post/60118797/agoraphobic-nosebleed-pcp-torpedo>

Figure 2.7 Blast-beat



Composed elements are incorporated at 2:35: here there is vocalization within the punk groove, which consists of the voice attempting to sing off the harmonic progression notated in the bass part of the lead sheet. The voice eventually improvises using vocal percussion to imitate the right-hand ride patterns that had been played on the kit, and to expand the primitive nature of the work.

Figure 2.8 *Am I Sane?* section B

(B)

15 **168** PLAY OUT OF IMPROV OPEN REPEAT AD LIB PUNK ROCK GROOVE **3**

In section C, at 3:30, composed elements are incorporated again: the voice repeats the words ‘Am I Sane?’ in unison with the limbs. The full use of four limbs and voice as one musical instrument gradually accelerates into a dramatic, powerful, rough, and untamed ending (rudiment #7). This approach has a direct correlation with the discussion on neo-primitivism in Chapter 3.2.

Figure 2.9 *Am I Sane?* section C

21 **(C)** ♩=140

Am I SANE Am I SANE

♩=45 AD. LIB REPEAT TO FINE

24 **ACCEL.**

SANE SANE SANE SANE SANE SANE SANE SANE SIMILE

3 Part Two: Motets of the Otherworld

Motets of the Otherworld (2020-21) hereafter *Otherworld*, is a 90-minute composition for vocal ensemble and drum kit that uses folkloric and mythological themes to convey a narrative, while expanding the sound world through this unique combination.

In 2016, I was fortunate enough to compose for a vocal quartet as part of a commission for the *Sant'Anna Arresi Jazz Festival* in Sardinia. The result of this commission was the premiere of *Zappanation*, a rock opera that utilized a 13-piece ensemble and paid tribute to the works of Frank Zappa and Edgard Varèse.¹¹⁵ After a 2018 performance of *Zappanation* in Germany,¹¹⁶ I began conceptualizing *Drumavox*, a new project blending a Sardinian a cappella quartet and drum kit. This experimentation laid the foundation for *Otherworld*, in which the speaking drummer is absent.

3.1 Development of Subject Matter of *Otherworld*

Otherworld explores the theme of death through the tragic ends of four legendary figures: Kings Ludwig II, Casey Jones, Robert Johnson, and 'Malanga' Jose Rosario Oviedo (See Appendix 8.3).

The formal design of each chapter in *Otherworld* was influenced by Dáithí Ó hÓgáin's *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland*. The narrative of each chapter is presented within its own 'circle of life,' a prevalent concept in Irish mythology that signifies the continuity of life after death. Druids believe in the indestructibility of both the human soul and the universe through fire or water, which

¹¹⁵ Audio file [9 Zappanation](#)

¹¹⁶ Video file [9 Zappanation German premiere](#)

is associated with Tech Duinn, a small island off the coast of Ireland where the souls of the dead gather.¹¹⁷

During a recording session with *Drumavox* in Cagliari, Italy, local folk legends, including the Accabadora, or ‘woman of death,’ were shared with me, which in part inspired *Otherworld*, and thus led to a collection of 15 motets divided into four chapters that are linked together to create a continuous work depicting each character's journey into the afterlife. The commonality of their tragic deaths unites the distinct historical contexts of the characters, and the mystery of death serves as the starting point for each chapter to contemplate various aspects of the afterlife.

My discussion of music and narrative in Chapter 1.4.3 is relevant here. Further to that discussion, Michael L. Klein identified four categories that illustrate how music with or without text can tell stories: narrative, neo-narrative, anti-narrative, and non-narrative.¹¹⁸ These categories include spoken or vocalized poetry as well as traditional storytelling, which can incorporate narrative elements such as characters, settings, and plot, and use language, rhythm, and imagery exploring themes like identity and experience.¹¹⁹ Musical text or song lyrics, too, can be considered a narrative form, with their ability to describe characters, settings, and actions that unfold over time, and with clear beginnings, middles, and ends.

3.2 Towards Neo-Primitivism

In the article *Towards Neo-Primitivism*,¹²⁰ American composer and theorist Henry Cowell advocates for the integration of non-Western musical elements into Western classical music, expanding its range of expression and exploring new sounds and techniques. Although Cowell refers to these musical cultures as ‘primitive,’ a more

¹¹⁷ Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1999), 18.

¹¹⁸ Michael L. Klein, in *Music and Narrative Since 1900*, eds. Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2019), 166.

¹¹⁹ Audio file 8 [Lost in Guenter's Wald](#)

¹²⁰ Primitivism is defined by The Oxford English Dictionary as ‘a belief in the value of what is simple and unsophisticated, expressed as a philosophy of life or through art or literature.’

accurate term could be 'traditional' or 'ritualistic' music. This practice aims to pursue similar aesthetics found in non-Western music, which boasts a rich variety of intricate rhythms, such as polyrhythms and isorhythms, not commonly found in Western classical music.

The neo-primitivist approach to music composition aligns with the concept of exploring other cultures and traditions in the realm of new music, as indigenous music often features more complex rhythms than classical music. This approach challenges and subverts traditional Western musical forms and notions of 'proper' musical performance by incorporating unconventional musical elements and techniques, which is an integral aspect of this practice.¹²¹ Cowell notes that 'nearly all primitive music' is sung with percussion accompaniment, with melody and rhythm being the main elements. The voices in primitive music are either in unison or heterophonic, creating a new polyphony where each part is independent but must end together. Additionally, primitive music often features rapid rhythmic changes, syncopations, polyrhythms, and cross-rhythms.¹²²

Neo-primitivism integrates the 'wild [and] confused...with raucous cries and noisy instruments all bound together by powerful rhythm'. This is an apt description of my *Queen of Kings* b.82. Yet, neo-primitivism also incorporates the 'soft, melodious, and soothing', which is descriptive of my *Queen of Kings* b. 32. The use of unconventional vocal techniques, such as extended vocal range, microtonality, and overtone singing, expands the expressive potential as previously explored in *Drumavox*.¹²³ Incorporating these diverse musical traditions will continue to make neo-primitivism a part of this practice.

¹²¹ Henry Cowell, "Towards Neo-Primitivism," *Modern Music* X/3, (1933): 149-153.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ Audio file 11 [Bia from Drumavox](#)

3.3 Evaluating Chapter I: King Ludwig II

Chapter I: King Ludwig II, consists of four connected motets: *Queen of Kings*, *Banshee Dance*, *Drop in a Cascade*, and *Magic Mist*. Chapter 1 in *Otherworld* serves as a continuous movement with abrupt changes between motets. The goal is to showcase the non-developmental aesthetic and the ‘circle of life’ formal design previously discussed in Chapter 3.1.

The overarching aim is to challenge conventional development structures by creating a through-composed work, despite using motets that function as circular passages into the Otherworld. Although each chapter's completion brings the circle full circle, the individual motets may seem non-developmental at first glance. However, their through-composed linkage serves as a link in the ‘circle of life.’

As episodic works, the motets pose compositional challenges, resisting musical development and affecting the listener's perception of time. This avant-garde work embraces the aesthetic nature of the episodic style, which opens up new avenues for the work. An analysis of the techniques used to create these outcomes will be explained in detail.

The introduction starts with floating arpeggios symbolizing flight. The repeating motif ‘fly,’ which is intended to depict swans in flight, is a reference to King Ludwig's favorite animal. The crescendo at b. 7 followed by a beat of silence is intended to provide the vocal quartet with a sufficient pickup breath to facilitate a smooth transition into the *pp subito mesto misterioso* at b. 9. The dark mood and static harmonies underscore the sudden shift in mood and subject matter, as the listener embarks on a journey through King Ludwig's Neuschwanstein, a castle renowned for its romanticism and iconic status.

Figure 3.1 *Queen of Kings* b. 4

The musical score for Figure 3.1 shows four vocal soloists (S. Solo, A. Solo, T. Solo, B. Solo) and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Grazioso'. The lyrics are 'fly won - der - ful sight'. The score includes triplets and dynamic markings (p, f). The Soprano and Alto parts have triplets on 'fly' and 'won - der - ful'. The Tenor part has triplets on 'fly' and 'won - der - ful'. The Bass part has triplets on 'fly' and 'won - der - ful'. The piano accompaniment has triplets on 'fly' and 'won - der - ful'. The score is in 4/4 time and features a 'Grazioso' tempo marking. The lyrics are 'fly won - der - ful sight'. The score includes triplets and dynamic markings (p, f).

At b. 32, the snare drums played with brushes, create a versatile rhythmic feel that can complement a jazz piano trio setting.¹²⁴ The combination of the drums and vocal quartet generates a unique rhythmic tension. At *grandioso*, the vocal quartet begins an E minor pedal triplet passage with the soprano and alto singing ‘bow as your king’.¹²⁵

Queen of Kings investigates the mysterious death of King Ludwig II through various perspectives, beginning with the belief of the Guglmänner, a clandestine Bavarian society¹²⁶, that he was assassinated.¹²⁷ At b. 78, the bass vocalist in the motet proposes an alternative absurd theory that Ludwig may have died from tickling, while also implying that he could have been the true composer of Wagner’s ‘silly plays’; the accompanying drum improvisation enhances the narrative by incorporating various rolls around the kit, including tickling-like sounds created by playing the ride cymbal below two hi-hat cymbals.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Example bar 32 in [Queen of Kings](#)

¹²⁵ The jazz swing feel often involves playing polyrhythmic patterns, where each limb plays independent rhythms.

¹²⁶ The Guglmänner were a group of men who were known for wearing distinctive hoods, or ‘gugl’, which covered their faces and identities. They were known to be involved in various secret rituals and ceremonies, which were rumored to involve pagan and mystical elements. <http://www.guglmann.de/deutsch/index.htm>

¹²⁷ Hans Nöhbauer, *Ludwig II. : Ludwig II of Bavaria = Louis II de Bavière*. Taschen (1998). ISBN 9783822874301.

¹²⁸ Example [Queen of Kings drum kit accompaniment](#)

Timing and pacing of the following musical events attempt to create tension, release, progression, and change that contribute to the overall emotional narrative. At b. 82, the drums switch to drum sticks and launch into an ‘organic’ pattern, leading to a quasi Afro-Jazz beat played on the rim of the floor tom at b. 104.¹²⁹ The pattern evolves into a quasi half-time rock groove, before breaking down into an improvised drumming accompaniment featuring blast beats that coincide with isorhythmic patterns from the vocal quartet at b. 120. The vocal quartet's parlando repetition of ‘honk, honk, black, swan’ recalls the swan theme from the introduction.

Figure 3.2 *Queen of Kings* b. 118

The image shows a musical score for measure 118 of the piece 'Queen of Kings'. It features four vocal soloists: Soprano (S. Solo), Alto (A. Solo), Tenor (T. Solo), and Bass (B. Solo). The lyrics are written below the notes, and the musical notation includes various symbols such as treble and bass clefs, key signatures, and dynamic markings like *p* (piano) and *parlando*. The lyrics for each soloist are as follows:

- S. Solo:** black swan honk honk honk black swan
- A. Solo:** honk black swan honk honk black swan
- T. Solo:** dead honk honk black
- B. Solo:** dead honk honk black

The next movement, *Banshee Dance*, employs polyrhythm starting from b. 139, which represents the timeless state of King Ludwig's transport to the Otherworld.

Throughout the motet, polyrhythms serve as a compositional tool to advance the narrative and convey the changing perception of time in different realms. The fortissimo opening of the statement gradually transitions to piano at b. 150, accompanied by shivering shakers as the vocal quartet sings 'cry.' The drums and cymbals add subtle textures with brushes. At b. 163, the use of varied tuplet patterns and layers represents the existence of multiple clocks with differing perceptions of time.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Example [Queen of Kings example at bar 104](#)

¹³⁰ Example [Banshee Dance](#)

Figure 3.3 *Banshee Dance* b. 163

In One-Facilimente

163

S. Solo through win-dow through win-dow through win-dow to o-ther to o-ther world to o-ther world

A. Solo to o-ther world

T. Solo through win-dow o-ther

B. Solo through win-dow to o-ther world

The final motet of the Chapter, *Magic Mist*, draws inspiration from the Féth fiada, a magical mist that envelops individuals in the Otherworld, including Tuatha De Danann, rendering them invisible to human sight. The mist serves as an interface between the two realms. Druids are believed to have the ability to create a supernatural mist known as a device to open portals to the Otherworld.¹³¹

A collection of scales and harmonies was developed with the keyboard to find the most suitable textural harmonies to complement the text in *Magic Mist*. At b. 273, close-voiced harmonies are introduced on the vowel in ‘mist’ and sustained on the unpitched consonant ‘ss,’ creating a static effect reminiscent of a snake's hiss or air escaping from a balloon. The piece concludes with a faint, dark, and mysterious final statement that symbolizes a cessation of time. Pitch intervals can also convey a range of emotions and moods. David Schiff offers a valuable overview of the emotional meanings that certain intervals convey in the music of Elliott Carter, which helped guide the choice of these clusters.¹³²

As the final motet of Chapter I, *Magic Mist* acts as a transitional portal to Chapter II,

¹³¹ Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *The Sacred Isle: Belief and Religion in Pre-Christian Ireland*. (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1999), 116.

¹³² David Schiff, *The Music of Elliott Carter* (London and New York: Eulenburg Books, 1983).

Casey Jones, which opens with a drum feature that provides a period of vocal rest. Upon reflection after completing Chapter I, I chose to include pauses between motets in the remaining Chapters.

Figure 3.4 *Magic Mist* b. 270

The musical score for Figure 3.4, *Magic Mist* b. 270, is written for four solo voices: S. Solo, A. Solo, T. Solo, and B. Solo. The score is in 4/4 time and consists of two measures. The first measure begins with a rest for the Soprano and Alto parts, followed by a half note for the Tenor and Bass parts. The second measure has a half note for the Soprano and Alto parts, followed by a half note for the Tenor and Bass parts. The lyrics "mist (ss) t mist (ss)" are written below the notes. Above the notes, the word "(unpitched)" is written in parentheses. The score is in 4/4 time and features a variety of note values and rests.

3.4 Evaluating *Mystical Healing*

This practice draws inspiration from the American composer-theorist Henry Cowell, who proposed a technique for creating polytemporality using divisive rhythm in his treatise *New Musical Resources*.¹³³ The technique aims to structure rhythmic duration in a similar way to harmony, with pitch intervals and polyrhythms being manifestations of the same phenomenon.¹³⁴ This inspired Conlon Nancarrow's *50 Studies for Player Piano*, which combined divisive and additive approaches to rhythm, written specifically to be played by a machine. These compositions include ostinato studies, rhythmic canons of fixed proportions, and specific rates of acceleration and deceleration.

¹³³ Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources* (Cambridge University Press, 1930).

¹³⁴ Peter Garland, "Conlon Nancarrow: Chronicle of a Friendship" in *Americas: Essays on American Music and Culture (1973–80)* (Santa Fe: Soundings Press, 1982).

In the 20th century, Conlon Nancarrow made significant innovations to the canon, which has had a major influence on the compositional practice of the motet *Mystical Healing*, which features isorhythm.¹³⁵ What sets *Study 20* apart is its polyphonic use of isorhythm, in which the pitch row and rhythmic talea are paired differently in each contrapuntal line. This study is a study of durations and reflects Nancarrow's brief exploration of minimalism.¹³⁶

The unconventional notation of *Study 20* presents challenges for analysis, requiring the use of a ruler to measure the actual durations expressed in units of $\frac{1}{3}$ cm.

Nancarrow avoids traditional notation in this study, opting instead for a proportional type of notation that he would adopt in later works. It is worth noting that Nancarrow would initially sketch his compositions on a punching score before transferring them to a piano scroll. A complimentary score would then be written out after the punching process. An excerpt from *Study 20* is provided below.

Figure 3.5 Nancarrow *Study 20*



¹³⁵ Isorhythm is a term introduced early in the twentieth century for a structural device found in motets of the thirteenth through mid fifteenth centuries. Meaning simply "same rhythm", it refers to the practice of using the same rhythmic pattern (called the 'talea') over and over in one or more parts as the structural base for a motet. The repetitive series of pitches in which the talea was sometimes manifested is called the color. Kyle Gann, *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

According to Kyle Gann's analysis, Study 20 by Nancarrow features two rhythmic series, each lasting 180 units, corresponding to the first and second hexachords of the pitch row.¹³⁷ The study is divided into five sections, and this analysis will focus on Section 2, in which each pitch onset is expressed as a semiquaver:

Section 2: 8 20 17 10 14 21 7 21 15 16 14 17 = 180

Section 2: 19 15 12 14 19 12 11 16 12 19 13 18 = 180 plus a final note at the end

Distances between entries of each pitch and series diminish by multiples of six as follows: 42 - 36 - 30 - 24 - 18

These intervals remain consistent throughout the section, leading to the eventual inaudibility of the canon. Instead, what is heard is the transformation from one hexachord to another. This irregular duration series is what inspired my further investigation of this study.

There are some key differences between *Study 20* and *Mystical Healing*. In *Mystical Healing*, the two Nancarrow isorhythm series do not unfold simultaneously but are instead directly connected, including the repeated final note, resulting in a 378 unit durational cycle. Figure 3.6 illustrates the entrance of the first three voices and the effect on the sequence when multiple lines enter. As I was unable to accurately determine the length of each sustained note in the score, a duration series in semiquavers was created, which is referred to as Section A, the durational distance between the onset of one sound and the next.

Section A Duration: 8 20 17 10 14 21 7 21 15 16 14 17 19 15 12 14 19 12 11 16
12 19 13 18 18

Section A Sustains: 3 11 8 3 9 16 6 16 12 6 10 10 12 10 4 10 8 10 10 12
10 4 4 12 12

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

Figure 3.6 Mystical Healing b. 1

Figure 3.6 shows the beginning of a musical piece with five staves. The time signature changes frequently: 4/4, 3/4, 7/8, 2/4, 5/16, 7/8, 4/4, 3/4, 4/4. The lyrics are: "Leech - es - Cree - py - Lov -". The first staff has a *pp* dynamic marking. The second staff has a *pp* dynamic marking. The third staff has a *pp* dynamic marking. The fourth staff has a *pp* dynamic marking. The fifth staff has a *pp* dynamic marking.

The second series starts at b. 15 in the bass on note E with the text “you take I...”

Figure 3.7 Mystical Healing b. 15

Figure 3.7 shows a musical score starting at measure 15. The time signature changes frequently: 3/4, 5/16, 3/4, 7/16, 3/8, 9/16, 3/4, 7/8. The lyrics are: "Creep - Leech - Lov - ers - es - Creep - Lov - Lov - er - Soul - Suck - Soul - Soul - er - Leech - Soul - Lee - Love - er - You - Take - I". The first staff has a *grad cresc.* dynamic marking. The second staff has a *grad cresc.* dynamic marking. The third staff has a *grad cresc.* dynamic marking. The fourth staff has a *grad cresc.* dynamic marking. The fifth staff has a *grad cresc.* dynamic marking.

In contrast to *Study 20*, *Mystical Healing* does not adhere to a strict duration canon. Instead, after the series is completed, it repeats in retrograde, creating a palindrome effect at Section B.

There are several factors that differentiate *Mystical Healing* from Study 20:

- Nancarrow employs nearly every pitch on the player piano in *Study 20*, while *Mystical Healing* is not written for the player piano.
- It is impractical to increase the number of voices beyond eight due to the number of overdubs needed to record the work in the studio or perform it live.
- The timbre of the mechanical piano is dissimilar to the human voice.
- Minor modifications to the rhythmic duration series are made due to the technical difficulty of the voice in articulating syncopated rhythms accurately.

The primary goal of the musical composition is to support the text. The slow, gradual unfolding of repeated pitches and isorhythmic patterns enable the text to transform and expand gradually.

Figure 3.8 Nancarrow *Study 20* section B



The goal of researching Nancarrow's *Studies for Player Piano* was to analyze and deconstruct techniques that could be applied to the creation of a musical narrative in a work. Both the handwritten score of *Study 20* and the audio recording, with its morse

code-like durations, visually influenced the theme and musical text of the work. The continually expanding single note durations in *Mystical Healing* represent leeches, wine, and blood, which are all lyrical themes expressed in the text.

As Richard Schechner has stated, rituals can be viewed through four perspectives: structures (appearance, performance, space, and performers), functions (purpose for individuals, groups, and cultures), processes (driving dynamics that enact change), and experiences (what it's like to participate).¹³⁸

There are intended ritualistic elements in the performance of *Mystical Healing* that was inspired by the Irish god of healing, Dian Cécht. In Druidism, leeches were thought to possess magical healing powers, and Dian Cécht, meaning 'swift power,' was regarded as the patron of leechcraft in ancient Irish mythology.¹³⁹ The motif of leeches healing the sick by sucking their blood is depicted in the vocal octets of the motet, which gradually expand and contract throughout the piece.

Mystical Healing combines the inclusion of a 'high-affect juxtaposition,' of improvised drumming which involves combining unrelated or opposing moods against a pre-composed vocal octet canon in an isorhythm duration. The drum kit part of the piece features an erratic 'organic' swing feel, with the exception of section D, which is played with a relatively consistent, straight sixteenth note feel. The drum kit is intended to be the focus of the piece, with the voices serving as accompaniment, though the voices eventually become more dominant towards the end. Sticks are used at the beginning and end of the piece and brushes are used at section B, before gradually transitioning back to sticks before section D.¹⁴⁰

The compositional concept is for the drum set to symbolize a 'sick and anguished human body' undergoing the process of healing. The vocal octet represents the leeches

¹³⁸ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2002), 56.

¹³⁹ James Mackillop, "[Dian Cécht](#)", *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 138, [ISBN 0-19-280120-1](#).

¹⁴⁰ Example [Mystical Healing](#)

that attach themselves, suck the blood, and heal the body. The durations align with the repetitive text, which aligns with minimalism.

Mystical Healing combines elements from an abstract player piano piece with no timbral differentiation and a piece with text and human voices. The slowly unfolding array of tone rows creates unexpected harmonies that may resolve into consonant or dissonant sonorities at any given moment.

3.5 Evaluating *Secret Valley*

To conclude *Otherworlds*, in March 2023, the Exaudi Vocal Ensemble workshopped the motet *Secret Valley*, providing a perspective with live vocalists.¹⁴¹ *Secret Valley* is modeled after Johannes Ciconia's motet (c. 1370 - 1412) *Le Ray Au Soley*, a proportion canon for three voices. This distinct motet is an irregular prolation from the French Ars Subtilior.¹⁴² Utilizing a 4:3:1 proportion, this motet is a true form of polytemporal music, creating an irregular phasing effect between the soprano, alto and bass. When the same text is sung in each voice a delay effect is created, as if it reverberates through a mountain valley. This became a central composition technique in developing the narrative to *Secret Valley*. This is the only polytemporal motet in *Otherworld* and will be further explored in Chapter 4.

¹⁴¹ Due to the nature of the vocal workshop there was an overdubbed percussion version recorded

¹⁴² Johannes Ciconia - Prolation Canon, "*Le ray au soleyl*" (Mancini Codex/Lucca Codex, I-PEc MS 3065 no. 9 fol. LXXXIIIr)

Figure 3.9 *Secret Valley* b. 38

38 *mp*

se-cret va-lley__ o-pen gate wel-come the__ king with a__ beau-ti ful day__

mp 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

se - cret va - lley o - pen gate__ wel - come the king__ with a beau-ti ful

mp

se - cret va - - - - lley o -

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle staff is in treble clef with an octave 8 below the staff, and the bottom staff is in bass clef. All staves are marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic. The top staff contains the lyrics 'se-cret va-lley__ o-pen gate wel-come the__ king with a__ beau-ti ful day__'. The middle staff contains the lyrics 'se - cret va - lley o - pen gate__ wel - come the king__ with a beau-ti ful' and features several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' and a bracket) over groups of three notes. The bottom staff contains the lyrics 'se - cret va - - - - lley o -' and has a few notes, including a dotted half note.

4 Part Three: Four Canons and A Love Meltdown

The five pieces in this chapter (2021-2022), represent a departure from traditional string quartet writing by adapting my notion of a fifth limb extension from the drum kit, which I applied previously to my own voice, to the string quartet.

While these works were initially structured as tempo canons, they ultimately evolved into what could be described as 'free' canonic forms. These forms share similarities with moment form and through-composition, as imitative voices are used to create variations achieved through adding, subtracting, or retrograding notes and rhythms.

This innovative approach to incorporating rhythmic elements through canonic guided forms allowed for manipulation throughout the compositional process. The inspiration for this integration of the drum kit and string quartet was drawn from the unique sonic blending that occurs when playing the drums, including the sharp attack of the drums and cymbals and the various overtones and resonances that are not commonly heard together. The album *A Gambler's Hand* originated the concept of treating the quartet as an extension of a drummer's four limbs, and its potential was realized during this research.¹⁴³

By viewing the string quartet as an extension of the drum kit, I was able to use the rhythmic language developed on the drums as a starting point for creating new material for the quartet, opening up new possibilities for the integration of the string quartet in modern music and departing from traditional approaches such as composing from the piano.

The drum kit, with its ability to produce a wide range of percussive sounds, offers a plethora of creative possibilities for composers and performers. The unpitched rhythmic quality of the drums also provides a vast source of material for composing and arranging for the string quartet, such as analyzing and transcribing specific rhythmic patterns or grooves played on the drum kit and using them as the basis for composing new material for the string quartet. Additionally, recording solo drum

¹⁴³ Audio file 12 [Thank You from A Gambler's Hand](#)

improvisations and transcribing them for future use, also allows for the eventual application of the rhythmic language to the quartet in numerous ways, such as the cello representing the bass drum, the viola the hi-hat, violin 1 the ride cymbal, and violin 2 the snare.

4.1 Rhythmic Language from the Kit

There are various methods of deriving rhythmic language from the drum kit and incorporating it into new compositions for the string quartet. The foundation of this research is the 26 drum rudiments, a set of basic patterns and techniques that serve as building blocks for more complex rhythms. The 26 drum rudiments are the standard set of rudiments that are widely recognized and taught in drumming education.

Through the development of new sticking patterns, drum permutations, syncopation, and four-limbed grooves, the goal is to create new rhythmic experiences for string players and add drive and propulsion to compositions for the string quartet.

One method of incorporating drum rhythms into string quartet compositions is by adapting drum rudiments and their variations for the string instruments. This can involve rearranging basic drumming patterns and assigning them to specific string instruments.

For example, these sticking patterns from the *Contraption* episode *Cruel & Usual* were developed into a string quartet work that has the violins alternate between right and left hand drum sticking patterns at bar 1069, while the viola and cello play the foot pattern.

Figure 4.1 *Cruel & Usual* example

Another method is applying drum permutations by rearranging and manipulating existing string quartet patterns to create new rhythms. This can involve swapping notes or repeating sections of a pattern. Drum syncopation can also be incorporated by emphasizing weak beats in string quartet rhythms to create a sense of tension and release.¹⁴⁴

Figure 4.2 *Caught in the Act* example

The four-limbed drum grooves from *Moonwalk* from *Pavees Dance* can be adapted by adding all four strings to create rhythmic patterns that balance against aggressive drumming.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Example [Caught in the Act](#)

¹⁴⁵ Video file 10 [Moonwalk](#)

Figure 4.3 *Moonwalk* example

This chapter emphasizes the importance of building a comprehensive archive of rhythmic language derived from the drum kit. By collecting and cataloging a variety of rhythmic techniques, composers have a vast array of options to use as the foundation for their compositions.

4.2 Compositional Strategies for 12-Tone Pitch Systems

The next phase is structuring the selected rhythmic language within specific pitch systems. This section presents methods for developing pitch content in five string quartet compositions in this portfolio, all of which underwent the same development process. A comprehensive examination of the techniques used in the development of these works is provided to demonstrate the consistent and cohesive approach employed throughout.

In each of these five works, the tone row serves as the starting point. The most commonly used tone row is the 12-tone row, which comprises one of each of the twelve distinct pitch classes without repetition. Within this technique, segments and partitions can be further categorized by dyads, trichords, tetrachords, and hexachords. These techniques also provide a framework for developing different types of chords and harmonies (see Ch. 5.4).

To organize and select pitch content for compositions, a process of creating an archive of tone rows has been implemented. The tone rows of various composers, such as

Berg, Schoenberg, Webern, and Wuorinen, were examined, and those that aligned with my compositional goals were chosen. Currently, a collection of over 40 distinct tone rows has been organized into eight different groups for easy reference and use in future compositions.¹⁴⁶

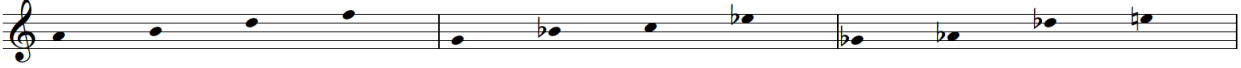
1. Tonal Series
2. Atonal Series
3. Symmetrical Series
4. All Interval Series
5. Symmetrical All-Interval Series
6. Short Series
7. Long Series
8. Melodic Series

¹⁴⁶ Reginald Brindle, *Serial Composition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

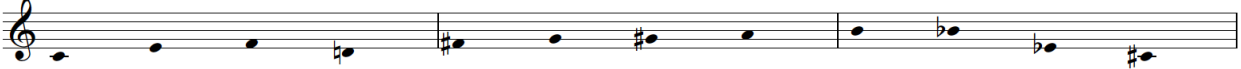
The tone rows that have been selected for these pieces are:

Figure 4.4 Four Canons and A Love Meltdown tone rows

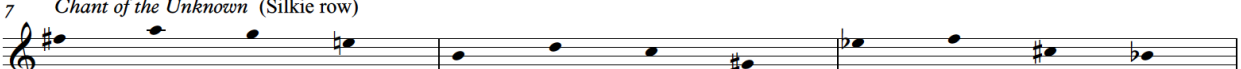
Who is the Man in the Wall?/Staring at Nothing (Dallapiccola Liberty - Melodic Series)




4 *Real Deep Real Slow Row* (Berg Lyric Suite - Melodic Series)



7 *Chant of the Unknown* (Silkie row)



10 *A Love Meltdown* (Schoenberg Variation for Orchestra Op 31)



The concept of the 'Melodic Series' is championed by Arnold Schoenberg, who posits that the initial idea for a series often starts as a thematic character. However, Schoenberg acknowledged that this idea may need to be altered for compositional considerations. The melodic nature of a series is evident in the works of composers such as Alban Berg and Dallapiccola, who often prioritize melody in their compositions.

Dallapiccola's opera *Il Prigioniero* also utilizes the concept of melodic series, specifically the *Series of Liberty*. The properties of this row were found to be most effective in the compositions *Who is the Man in the Wall?* and *Staring at Nothing*.

In his compositional process, Alban Berg often prioritized the melodic potential of a series, as demonstrated by his use of the same series in both the song *Schliesse mir die Augen beide* and the *Lyric Suite for string quartet*, despite the distinct rhythmic configurations employed in each piece. Similarly, when composing, I carefully select the tone row that best fits the intended narrative, experimenting with different rows or modifications before making a final decision, as exemplified in *Real Deep Real Slow*.

Chant of the Unknown utilizes an original tone row, referred to as the ‘*Silkie*’ row, created from a melody I composed in the vocal quartet song *Silkie from the Sea*.¹⁴⁷ This process highlights the flexibility in creating tone rows, as it can be done by adding unused notes to a pre-existing melody.

Figure 4.5 *Silkie from the Sea* melody

excerpt of melody

Soprano Solo

I'm Man On Land Sil - kie From Sea Take

6

S. Solo

Hold Me Bo - ttom From Sea

10

S. Solo

Man On Land Sil - kie From Sea

The row is symbolic of Scottish mythological beings that can change forms, representing the theme of tragedy in the piece. This narrative theme justified using this row to represent the character 'Unknown' in these works, which also continue to treat the theme of isolation and entrapment that was explored in *Contraptions*.

¹⁴⁷ Audio file 13 [Silkie from the Sea](#)

4.3 Application Full Rows and Numeric Rows to Canonic Structures

In the initial sketching process, the tone rows are applied to each voice of the entire canon in the four basic forms of prime, inversion, retrograde and retrograde inversion. Transposition and further development of pitch is determined in later phases.

One method utilized in these works is ‘full row’ notation where the entire twelve-pitch row in each of the four basic forms is continuously notated from the beginning to the end of the canon in each voice in the canon. This method serves as a reminder that we are dealing with fundamental relational networks rather than specific notes or tunes, and allows for precise measurement of intervals using quantitative expressions, eliminating the need for terms such as dissonance.

Figure 4.6 Four Canons and A Love Meltdown full row notations



The rules of 12-tone music are not abided by in the development process of these works; they are just used in the initial sketching phase. In the initial phase the first tone of each row is always accented so that during the development phase that follows, it is easier to find places at which to shift to a different row.

Numerical notation allows for the precise and objective definition of basic operations and transformations within the four basic rows of the 12-tone system. This allows for greater flexibility in the use of these concepts. The system of numerical notation can be summarized by the following principles:

1. The twelve pitch classes are designated by integers 0 through 11 in ascending order.
2. The pitch class assigned as 0 is variable and can be any of the twelve. The choice of which pitch class to use as 0 is usually determined by criteria of order, with the first pitch class of a 12-tone set being the most common choice.

In the musical illustration below, the letters P, I, R & RI displace numbers for the first pitches.

Figure 4.7 *Chant of the Unknown* numerical rows

9 *Chant of the Unknown*

Row	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
P	P	3	1	10	5	8	6	2	9	11	7	4
I	I	9	11	2	7	4	6	10	3	1	5	8
R	R	7	11	9	2	6	8	5	10	1	3	0
RI	RI	5	1	3	10	6	4	7	2	11	9	0

Additionally, each canon goes through the process of having a numerical value assigned to each note, creating a ‘numerical’ row version. This technique was developed out of a process of applying numerical values to each note in the canon, and by applying these values to all of the four basic rows. It allows for the possibility to present a melodic contour and break away from the continual sequence of pitches that exist in the ‘full row’.

Figure 4.8 *A Love Meltdown* numeric row notations

Pnum 6 8 5 0 7 3 8 0 7 5 6 11 3 7 4 0 7

lnum 6 4 7 0 5 9 4 0 5 7 6 1 9 5 8 0 5

Developmental process

After completing the process of applying the 'full' and 'numerical' rows to each voice of the canon in the four basic forms, the next step is to select the appropriate pitch systems. See example of RI and I full row applications at b. 408 of *A Love Meltdown*.

Figure 4.9 *A Love Meltdown* b. 408

407

RI full

I full

The next phase is an intense period of development mostly through experimentation that can include any one of these techniques:

- omitting rhythms or certain tones from the row
- pitch or note repetition
- changing the row or intervals and/or notes but holding the rhythms
- changing the rhythm and holding notes and/or intervals
- the simultaneous combination of these two exercises
- rhythmic augmentation, diminution, or retrograde
- elision and interpolation
- transposition and register changes

The analysis of the material led to a comprehensive decision-making process in order to choose the most suitable versions for further development and revisions.

Figure 4.10 *A Love Meltdown* b. 390



My collaboration with the Ligeti Quartet since 2015 has been a source of ongoing enrichment. The cellist's comprehensive knowledge of extended techniques,¹⁴⁸ as evidenced by her PhD dissertation on the subject,¹⁴⁹ has been invaluable to my growth in composing for this configuration. The quartet's extensive experience and mastery of their instruments has enabled a range of opportunities for exploration and experimentation in the revision processes. Through workshopping, collaboration, and dialogue, we are able to explore the full range of musical possibilities, determining for

¹⁴⁸ Audio file 15 [Knott Tones](#) The need for string extended techniques was not required for these works, however our previous album *Knott Tones* utilized them throughout the album.

¹⁴⁹ Valerie Welbanks, [Foundations of Modern Cello Technique](#) (2017)

example the optimal registers for each section and refining the compositions to our highest potential.

Figure 4.11 Who is the man in the wall? b. 1

Con Dolore legato

$\text{♩} = 75$

The musical score is written for a piano and features a single melodic line in the right hand. The piece is in 3/4 time, marked with a tempo of 75 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo and mood are indicated as 'Con Dolore legato'. The score begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a legato articulation. The melody is characterized by frequent triplet patterns, which are marked with a '3' over the notes. The piece consists of 11 measures. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. Measures 2 through 5 continue with various triplet patterns. Measure 6 features a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. Measure 7 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 8 contains a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 9 has a triplet of eighth notes. Measure 10 features a triplet of eighth notes. The final measure, measure 11, concludes with a triplet of eighth notes. The score is written on a single staff with a treble clef. The notes are primarily in the middle register, with some higher notes in the final measures. The overall texture is simple, focusing on the melodic line and its rhythmic patterns.

I Full Row

p legato

I Full Row

p legato

4.4 Canon and Tempo: Examining the Interplay of Ratios

The modern tempo canon, pioneered by composer Conlon Nancarrow, involves layering two or more voices in canon at different tempos to create a layered polyphony that shifts over time. This technique was adapted to the string quartet by manipulating tempi to create a dynamic layering of rhythms, adding a new dimension to the string quartet and treating it as an extension of the drum kit.

Kyle Gann has identified 26 such experiments in Nancarrow's canons, many of which were attempted only once.¹⁵⁰ This is likely due to the labor-intensive process of punching player piano scrolls, which reportedly took Nancarrow an average of six months to complete. With technology, each of the tempo canons, including *Studies #1*, *2a*, *3c*, *4*, *5*, *6*, *7*, *9*, *10*, *14*, *15*, *16*, *17*, *18*, *19*, *Tango?*, and *String Quartet 3*, were transcribed, analyzed, and re-notated with the aim of determining which could be performed live without a click track.

The final result was a set of five string quartet works based on the tempo canon ratios from *Studies for Player Piano* and *String Quartet #3*, beginning with the transcription of several of Nancarrow's works. The analysis during 2020-2021 allowed for the listening and isolation of the tempo canons at slower tempos, as they are often too fast to be clearly perceived.

Who is the Man in the Wall?

Who is the Man in the Wall? takes inspiration from Nancarrow's *String Quartet #3 Movement 1*. The piece opens with the voice asking 'Who is the Man in the Wall?' and the cello playing in the highest register of the instrument in a 3:4:5:6 tempo ratio, utilizing the full inversion row. The rest of the quartet enters in their respective upper registers, with the viola in 4, the second violin in 5, and the first violin in 6. By b. 19, the cello descends to the lower register before jumping back to the upper register with pizzicato in b. 20, playing a rapid line based on the retrograde full row.

¹⁵⁰ Kyle Gann, *The Music of Conlon Nancarrow* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

The drums in this performance do not serve as a ‘conventional’ rhythmic accompaniment for the string quartet that has existed in past recordings. The overall strategy is to minimize and control the rhythmic activity that is being improvised, allowing for the drums to emphasize subtle accents in conjunction with specific phrases initiated by any one of the four voices. For example, the build up into the cadence on beat three at b.31 is a crucial release point. The drums also often improvise using an expansion of five-limb techniques, playing rhythms derived from speech patterns on the drum, cymbal surfaces, and in the air with brushes, however with no speaking involved. This approach adds a ‘drum kit contrapuntal layer’ of textural and rhythmic activity to the overall performance.

Chant of the Unknown

Chant of the Unknown draws inspiration from Nancarrow’s *Study #6*, featuring a complex bass line that evokes the feel of an ostinato rather than being one. The piece has a tempo ratio of 4:5, with a short pizzicato statement by violin 1 at b. 80 in a 3:1 ratio. The prime numeric row melody in violin 1 stands out in contrast to the rest of the quartet, with prominent melodic references to the Silkie tone row.

The *con dolore* rhythm of the ostinato is split between two tempos, creating a rocking pattern reminiscent of being afloat at sea. The cello theme is based on the retrograde numeric row, with the viola harmonized a tenth higher, establishing a chant-like atmosphere. The dynamics build to a climax at b. 84, with the violins predominantly playing in thirds until the end of the piece.

The repetition in the Unknown theme also brings a narrative aspect, exploring new possibilities by reworking motifs and ideas from *Contraptions* in collaboration with the string quartet. The use of call-and-response elements among the cello, viola, and two violins creates a ritualistic mood and enhances the quartet as an extension of the Unknown’s subconscious mind. The drums attempt to reflect this throughout, striving to infuse each stroke with vitality while avoiding dominance and playing more like a conductor than a driving force.

Figure 4.12 Chant of the Unknown b. 1

Subito con dolore chant very calm legato

67 ♩=80

R Num

6 5 1 6 8 4 6 1 *p*

6 5 1 6 1 *V* *5*

p

R Num

p

75 *P Num*

p *mp*

3 3 3

Real Deep Real Slow

Real Deep Real Slow is situated in the center of the set and re-introduces the narrative of isolation. In addition to what was discussed in Chapter 1.4.3, according to Michael L. Klein, while some musical narratives are explicit in telling a particular story or depicting a scene, others use abstract musical structures and techniques to convey an emotional or expressive arc.¹⁵¹ These musical narratives with minimal text or without text can tell stories in a variety of ways. Timing and pacing of musical events can create tension, release, progression, and change that contribute to the overall emotional narrative.

¹⁵¹ Michael L. Klein, in *Music and Narrative since 1900*, eds. Michael L. Klein and Nicholas Reyland (Indiana University Press, 2013), 5.

The piece begins with a gentle, lullaby-style melody in thirds, leading into b. 4 where the string quartet amplifies the rhythmic patterns of the voice and brush strokes. The quartet's role in this composition is to fully support the narrative.

The text of *Real Deep Real Slow* is a contemplation of the relationship between time, self, and nature, embodied in the form of a small black stone. The repeated rhythmic pattern and phrase 'Real deep real deep real deep real slow' attempts to create a hypnotic effect, emphasizing the slow and introspective journey of the Unknown from the perspective of an isolated stone.

The idea that 'all the world is inside of me' highlights the subjectivity of perception and the interconnectedness of the self and the environment. At b. 136, I pick up a sand shaker and look down to the ground, stating 'don't pick me up, don't wake me up, let me be, let me be free,' indicating a search for inner peace and freedom that initiates the instrumental development section that features the string quartet in a canon ratio 3:4:5, beginning with the prime numeric row in the first violin and the prime full row in the second violin and viola. The developmental section seamlessly moves between three different voice combinations. At b. 147, I transferred the viola part to the cello, marking the first time the cello takes the lead in the development section. At b. 167 the cello plays in the upper register with the retrograde full row sequencing the phrase when the viola enters as the lower voice in b. 171. At b. 224, the cello and viola have a pizzicato duet that gets passed to the violins set against each other in a ratio of 5:7 climaxing in a held dyad followed by a bar of rest.

The drums cue the recapitulation of the hypnotic introduction theme, now in octaves, at b. 243, a dramatic contrast in sonority to what came before. The collaboration between the string quartet and speaking drummer returns, creating a musical landscape that mirrors the text's mood and themes. The simple harmonic progression of the strings evoke stillness and introspection, while the delicate rhythms of the swirling brushes impart a sense of forward momentum that concludes with the violin lullaby melody.

Figure 4.13 *Real Deep Real Slow* b. 165

Staring at Nothing

Staring at Nothing is inspired by Nancarrow's *String Quartet #3 Movement 2*. The composition uses the tempo ratio of 3:4:5:6, inverted from *Who is the Man in the Wall?*, with the cello and the viola taking the lead in 6 and 5 respectively. This minimalistic piece is the softest of the set, with the quartet beginning the piece with practice mutes.

The first violin is predominantly based on the inversion numeric row, which shifts to a descending inversion full row with the pizzicato at b. 287. At b. 294, it utilizes an ascending retrograde row that crescendos into a more full sound due to the removal of the mutes.

The drums in this performance offer a departure from conventional accompaniments, with a muffled drum variation from the fifth limb technique #6. The notion of a sub-technique of playing speech patterns with brushes in the air was developed from a solo version in *Contraptions*.¹⁵² The rhythms are derived from speech patterns, with mallets and brushes creating a static effect that is heightened by the eerie muted textures and subtle rhythmic activity to the strings. Without any voice the arms move throughout the air with specific brush stroke patterns which are derived from the speech patterns of the text:

¹⁵² Example [Staring at Nothing](#) example of 'air' brush

Staring at nothing but pitch darkness

Look in the opposite direction

Fine equality of pitch darkness surrounding me in all directions

I wait for the unknown

I welcome the unknown

I stand before the throne

Figure 4.14 Staring at Nothing b. 281

The musical score for 'Staring at Nothing' begins at measure 281. It is written for a piano with four staves. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, quintuplets, and slurs. Performance instructions include 'senza sord' (without sordano), 'pizz' (pizzicato), and 'arco' (arco). Dynamics are marked with 'p' (piano) and 'I full' (full intensity). The score continues through measure 288, showing a progression of complex rhythmic and melodic lines.

A Love Meltdown

A Love Meltdown is a playful composition that draws directly from *Study #15* and showcases the use of a distinctive tempo ratio of 3:4. The use of tempo canon in the piece presents a significant challenge for the quartet, requiring impeccable precision and coordination for a successful performance.

The cello melody is based on the inversion tone row and the viola plays the retro inversion row in its uppermost register, where it was determined at the workshop to be playable. At b. 11, the viola melody is based on the inversion numeric row transposed up by seven semitones. When the viola falls silent at b. 22, the melody is passed over to the second violin, which plays the inversion full row; at b. 408, the violins briefly play together.

The string quartet arrangement attempts to create call-and-response elements between various string duets throughout the piece, culminating in a unified performance by the entire quartet at b. 420 (1:24). The high density of musical events within a short period of time and the use of syncopated accents on unexpected beats contribute to the sense of forward momentum and tension. The quartet must maintain unity and work together, despite each player's determined adherence to their own tempo.

The improvisatory nature of the drum kit serves as an extension of the string quartet composition, with the drum kit counterpoint providing an additional layer of textural and rhythmic activity, though initially at the beginning of the piece it plays at the same tempo as the viola.

Figure 4.15 *A Love Meltdown* b. 411

In conclusion, the fully composed nature of the string quartet material allows for the possibility of standalone performances without the speaking drummer, as demonstrated by the Ligeti Quartet's performance of *Staring at Nothing* on BBC Radio 3.¹⁵³ In addition the Ligeti Quartet recorded versions of these works to demonstrate how these pieces have evolved into works that exist without the speaking drummer; these versions will be released as an album in 2024.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵³ BBC Radio 3 New Music Show Jan. 7, 2023 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001gtp>

¹⁵⁴ *Four Canons and A Love Meltdown* December 12, 2022 recording without speaking drummer at All Saints Church, London

5 Part Four: Excerpts from Concerto for Drum Kit

The final portfolio piece, *Excerpts from Concerto for Drum Kit* (2021-2022) was presented in a workshop setting at the LSO/Orchestral Artistry Chamber Orchestra Project in April 2022. This piece reconfigures the orchestra as the ultimate extension of the drum kit within this practice.

This composition represented a departure from traditional orchestral music by placing the drum kit at the forefront of the composition and setting it up at the front of the stage, as well as by highlighting its capabilities within an orchestral context.

Participation in the workshop and recording session of the composition represented a seminal moment in this research, as within my work it marked the first time the drum kit was both performed with an orchestra and featured prominently in an orchestral piece.

Due to the limited rehearsal time in the workshop, the opportunity was taken to experiment with different orchestration possibilities and ways to arrange the diverse range of instruments as an extension of an ‘orchestrated drum kit.’ The score presented during the workshop highlighted relevant excerpts for what will later become a 30-minute work that will be recorded with the LSO after the completion of this doctorate in January 2024.

5.1 Orchestral Innovations: The Significance of the Drum Kit

Although concerti are a regular feature in classical music programming, to date, no composer has written a concerto specifically for the speaking drummer.¹⁵⁵ While the use of the drum kit in orchestral music has become more prevalent, it is noteworthy that composers such as Harrison Birtwistle, Thomas Adès, Louis Andriessen, and Luciano Berio have typically employed the instrument in a supporting role rather than as a featured solo instrument.

A landmark piece that merges jazz and orchestral music is Ornette Coleman's *Skies of America* from 1972, where the drum kit plays a crucial role in propelling the rhythm and momentum of the music. Despite this, some perceive the drum kit as a limited instrument in terms of virtuosity, partially due to its association with popular music genres like rock and jazz, and historically as an accompanying instrument rather than a solo one.

However, this view overlooks the drum kit's full expressive potential, which has been broadened by technological advancements and evolving drumming techniques. Therefore, the aim of this research is to showcase the drum kit's range of virtuosic capabilities by featuring it in a solo role in a concerto.

¹⁵⁵ In 2016, Hristo Yotsov and the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra claimed to be the first to premiere a concerto for drum set and symphony orchestra. This performance suggests that the inclusion of the drum kit as a featured instrument in classical repertoire is still an area that is relatively unexplored.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m0ZKdV-_kfQ

5.2 The Drum Kit in the Orchestra: The Ultimate Extension of Possibilities

There are a number of unique, original, and innovative ways to compose a drum kit concerto, as the drum kit is a relatively under-explored instrument in the orchestral context. One potential approach is to draw inspiration from the rich tradition of jazz drumming, incorporating elements of improvisation and syncopation into the composition. Another approach is a continuation of the concept of ‘extension’ of the drum kit, and to incorporate elements of jazz, folk, world music, and storytelling in order to create a cross-genre work that pushes the boundaries of traditional orchestral music. Additionally, considering the four limbs of the drummer and how these can be assigned onto different sections of the orchestra could provide an interesting starting point for composition.

5.3 Analyzing Excerpts from Concerto for Drum Kit

One of the central elements of this piece is the incorporation of the figure of John Henry, an American folk hero known for his prowess as a ‘steel-driving man’ in the construction of railroad tunnels. The concerto seeks to depict the legendary contest between John Henry and a steam-powered drilling machine, in which he ultimately triumphs but dies of exhaustion. The speaking drummer, and the rhythmic ‘hammering’ in this piece, acts as the protagonist, John Henry, and the orchestra serves as the representation of the machine. The work draws inspiration from the folk tale and its themes of man versus machine, as well as the struggle and sacrifice of the working class.

The workshop performance consists of a very brief excerpt of the first movement. The Concerto opens with the shouting text ‘I’d rather die, I’d rather die, with his hammer in my hand, I’ll jar this mountain till it falls.’ The drum pick up initiates an abrasive fortissimo opening chord derived from a 12-tone row, using eleven tones of the row which have been reordered for voicing and orchestration purposes.

Figure 5.1 *Excerpt from Concerto for Drum Kit* opening chord derived tone row



The remarkable aspect of music is its ability to blend simultaneous and successive pitches in harmony. Even though each line of music may have its own unique articulation and contour, they can be combined in a way that the notes being played together complement the ones that follow, and vice versa.¹⁵⁶

Figure 5.2 *Excerpt from Concerto for Drum Kit* opening chord



The open statement attempts to project the complete forces of the orchestra simultaneously, in order to create a diverse and varied sound. The chord voicing here is intended to represent the overtones and rumblings commonly emitted by industrial machines, and is used to explore the limits of what the orchestra can handle against loud drumming, as well as how the balance and acoustics change when the kit is placed at the front of the stage. In order to reflect the full effect of the hammering and the machine, the intention is for these chords to be expanded for several minutes with even more intense drumming than what was expressed in the workshop.

This version of the composition was created to experiment in the workshop with different techniques for composing for an orchestra in combination with a drum kit and is not meant to be a cohesive work, but rather an exploration of the potential of the orchestra in relation to the drum kit. The final intended version of this concept will

¹⁵⁶ Charles Wuorinen, *Simple Composition* (New York: Alfred Music, 1979), 55.

expand on an even more dense harmonic juxtaposition against aggressive drumming using several solo drum kit features.

At b. 12 portrays the exhaustion and death of John Henry. Essentially this is the beginning of what would be the second movement of the *Concerto for Drum Kit*. It begins with a spoken narration, 'I lay down the hammer and I die,' which serves as a poignant transition aided by *con sord-non vibrato* markings in the strings. This section is characterized by a sharply decreased use of dynamics and orchestration compared to the previous movement. The triple meter is inspired by jazz brush patterns: the cello takes on the role of the bass drum, while the violins and viola mimic the high hat, creating a subtle yet effective imitation of the jazz brush pattern. At bar 13, the flutes enter with a lyrical phrasing reminiscent of a typical jazz ballad cymbal brush phrasing. These melodies were originally conceived while singing and playing drums and were later transcribed allowing for further development in the orchestration process.

Figure 5.3 Excerpt from Concerto for Drum Kit b. 13

The musical score excerpt shows four staves for woodwinds: Flute 1.2., Oboe 1.2., Clarinet in B \flat 1.2., and Bassoon 1.2. The music is in 3/4 time. The Flute 1.2. staff begins with a *p³* marking and features a triplet of eighth notes. The Oboe 1.2. staff has a *mp* marking and a triplet of eighth notes. The Clarinet in B \flat 1.2. staff has a *p* marking and a triplet of eighth notes. The Bassoon 1.2. staff has a *mp* marking and a triplet of eighth notes. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

The expansion of the brush pattern imitations is evident in b. 21, and at b. 28, the harmony changes as the double bass enters with a pizzicato, intensifying the passage. A majestic horn transition at b. 40 leads into a chromatic, contrary movement passage in the woodwind section, which symbolizes the moment when John Henry rises from the dead, with the spoken text 'I pick up the hammers come to life.' Unfortunately, due to technical issues, the voice for this part was not recorded.

At the *con fuoco* at b. 50, the drum groove is marked by a change in tempo and rhythm, inspired by my love of Malian rhythms, similar to those in the piece *New Ways*. The ideal opportunity to highlight the drum kit as a solo instrument was lost in the workshop due to time restrictions. However, the drum kit still sets the tempo and rhythm, while the cello and viola provide a composite two-bar ostinato pattern, similar to what a guitar would play in traditional Malian music. The drum kit creates a strong rhythmic foundation, with a unique pattern on the hi-hat and consistent quarter-note beat on the bass drum.

The strings grow with subtlety and in intensity along with the exploration of arrangement configurations within the woodwind and brass sections. Techniques such as the trombone's glissandos at b. 66 and the string section unison at b. 64 are employed to heighten the intensity. The aim was to examine the orchestra's ability to accurately articulate the rhythms, echoing the style of a Malian guitar riff inspired by Ali Farka Touré.¹⁵⁷ Upon review, I decided it would be beneficial in future to speak with a violinist to improve some of the string articulations.

At b. 79, the brass section joins the ostinato pattern and is soon joined by the woodwinds, intensifying the music and leading into b. 85. Here, the drum kit changes its rhythm to a rock groove, following a harmonic progression influenced by rock guitar power chords¹⁵⁸, creating a three-against-two polyrhythmic feel. The music builds as the drumming pushes the orchestra's dynamic limits, leading to an improvisational array of drum fills at b. 96, which are described as *poco a poco ferocious*. The *suddenly grandioso* tempo change at b. 100 is intended to be an abruptly slower statement, but it could have been further developed before the final cadence at b. 102.

At b. 118, a homophonic passage played by the strings section serves as foreshadowing for the final statement in b. 134. The agitated and dissonant dyads in b.

¹⁵⁷ Audio Example of Ali Farka Touré <https://youtu.be/PGjbMUD8HQ0>

¹⁵⁸ Power chords are a type of chord on a guitar that consists of just two notes - the root note and its fifth

130 symbolizes the malfunction of the machine and the triumph of John Henry. The structure of this closing statement is a quasi-palindrome, with the top and bottom cross rhythms orchestrated not by instrument families, but by register, in a 20-bar sequence (see fig. 5.4). The rhythm predominates over melody, with cross rhythm sonorities mainly consisting of arpeggios and chord tones. These progressions were inspired by research into Henry Cowell's theory of cross rhythms (see Ch. 4.5) and further experimentation on the drum kit.

Fig. 5.4 20-bar sequence

Top	2	2	3	4	6	5	6	7	8	8	9	9	9	7	6	5	6	4	3	2	2
Btm	9	8	7	6	5	3	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	5	6	7	8	9

6 Reflections on Findings/Directions for Future Research

The primary focus of this research was to investigate the unique capabilities of a speaking drummer in composition and performance, particularly in comparison to the abilities of separate speakers and drummers. Neither a speaker nor a drummer improvising separately can execute the exact same musical synergy or anticipate and react to each other spontaneously in real time as a speaking drummer can achieve alone.

At its core, this practice embodies a unique performance tradition. It merges storytelling with accompanying percussion, allowing for a versatile utilization of all four limbs. It is a live spectacle, best experienced in person or through video, as it encompasses an intensity and particularity that cannot be fully captured through audio alone.

The virtuosity displayed by the speaking drummer is remarkable, involving the simultaneous execution of speech and percussion in a coherent and effective manner. However, this integration poses significant challenges, requiring a level of coordination beyond that of performing each task separately. The resulting spectacle, characterized by its seamless fusion of voice and drumming, offers rich rewards to both performer and audience alike.

Moreover, this practice is dynamic and evolving, incorporating elements of performance ritual. It introduces novel forms of quasi-ritualistic actions, wherein speech is intricately interwoven with rhythmic expression on the drum kit. As Richard Schechner aptly articulates, "rituals may also be invented – both by official culture and by individuals." Indeed, rituals serve as stabilizing forces while facilitating transformative change in individuals' lives. However, it is crucial to recognize that as social circumstances evolve, so too do rituals, as practitioners adapt their performances to suit new contexts.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2002), 81.

Through this investigation, it becomes apparent that when the role of the speaking drummer is divided between two individuals, the essential ritualistic element is diluted, underscoring the imperative of maintaining the solo performance format to preserve authenticity and impact.

The practice of the speaking drummer assumes the mantle of a quasi-shaman, embodying a performative ritual akin to that of a priest or elder. This ritualistic dimension is deeply interwoven with the performance itself, drawing upon a rich tapestry of literature in performance studies that elucidates the significance of ritual in cultural expression. The portfolio demonstrates the unparalleled synergy achieved by the speaking drummer, which surpasses the capabilities of individual speakers and drummers.

Table 6.1 Reflections on Findings

Portfolio Works	Contraption Nr. 3	Contraption Nr. 7	Contraption Nr. 13	Contraption Nr. 14	Mystical Healing	Chapter I: King Ludwig II	Secret Valley	Who is the man in the wall?	Chant of the Unknown	Real Deep Real Slow	Staring at Nothing	A Love Meltdown	Excerpts from Concerto for Drum Kit
Role as Storyteller	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Storytelling as Ritual	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Music and Narrative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rhythmic Storytelling in Transmitting Culture					✓	✓	✓						✓
The Fifth Limb	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓			✓
The Extension of the Drum Kit					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

After the research was conducted, certain issues that require addressing in future works were identified, and two ‘Looking Forward’ pieces were created to explore the areas of interest highlighted by the findings of this research.

Chapter 1.4.4 Rhythmic Storytelling in Transmitting Culture discussed the exploration of new approaches to composing cultural works specifically designed for ritualistic performance. One such illustration is the *Mari Lwyd*, a Welsh wassailing custom celebrated around the Christmas and New Year season, which is brought to life through music and performance. In this tradition, a person carries a large horse's skull, adorned with ribbons and sometimes baubles or lights, from one house to another while being concealed under a cloak and controlling the jaw with a pole. The skull-carrier is accompanied by traditional characters like 'Punch and Judy', and upon arrival at each house, the group sings to request entry while the occupants engage in an improvised battle of rhyme and verse, known as '*pwnco*.'

In the upcoming winter, I have been invited to collaborate with local musicians in South Wales. I have developed a preliminary ritualistic version that employs only a snare drum and vocals, which allows for ease of mobility while performing from house to house. To imbue this collaborative project with ritualistic aspects, it is crucial to involve the local community in its development. Additionally, the simplicity of the composition presents an inclusive opportunity for musicians from diverse backgrounds to partake in the further development of this piece.¹⁶⁰

In conclusion, these portfolio works are characterized by an episodic structure with varying degrees of contrast between each episode, rather than a traditional sense of linear development. This distinctive feature warrants further exploration, as many composers tend to focus on the temporal progression of their works in a specific manner. The current research intentionally seeks to explore the experience of multiple episodes over time as part of a personal aesthetic that has emerged from this research. The final work *Contraption nr. 14 'Moments'* reverts to a solo speaking drummer configuration and presents a challenge to perform consecutively eight short, disconnected musical episodes. The aim is to examine how these episodes can still create a satisfying listening experience, with the potential to develop a unique and compelling musical style.

¹⁶⁰ Audio file 16 [Mari Lwyd](#)

‘Moments’ involves the composition and structuring of eight ‘micro’ episodes, each containing one or two rhythmic motifs, a specific texture/mood, or a minimal accompanying text. By intentionally creating unconnected musical episodes, the study seeks to explore at what point the listener shifts focus from individual episodes to the overall arc of the composition.

The experimental conclusion considers two approaches. The first approach focuses on the interplay between voice and drumming, allowing limited material to develop in a minimalistic manner. The second approach explores the possibility of making episodes smaller and smaller until they become connected, providing an interesting contrast to the first approach. There have been three recorded versions through the ‘feedback loop’ where the duration between each ‘micro’ episode becomes shorter.¹⁶¹ Overall, the research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how episodic structures can be utilized to create compelling musical experiences.

In summary, the speaking drummer in this practice serves as a ritual leader, demonstrated through actions, attire, and the episodic nature of the music. The role is similar to that of a ringmaster in a circus: guiding the ritual and captivating the audience through rhythmic storytelling. Although the speaking drummer does not deliver stories in a conventional manner, the conduct and demeanor are crucial in unifying the ensemble and producing a cohesive performance. This practice prioritizes generating ritualistic expressions over narrative development to contribute to the overall coherence and unification of the performance. It is the unique combination of speaking and drumming that allows the speaking drummer to achieve this, producing an outcome that is unfamiliar in its combination of elements.

Undertaking the first post-doctoral work presents a unique opportunity to advance the findings of the research. The focus will be on exploring and developing the outcomes of this work, as directions for future research will include the January 18, 2024 recording of *Beats of the Biosphere: A Concerto for Planet Drum*, a ca. 30-minute

¹⁶¹ Audio file 17 Contraptions nr. 14 [Moments v.1](#)

concerto for drum kit and the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Jack Sheen and featuring myself as speaking drummer and composer.

The Concerto will highlight our current climate emergency and will be a conversation between a narrator (the spoken part) and nature (the orchestra). Throughout the work, the four drum limbs will sonify climate data. The project collaborates with a passionate Environmental Investigation Agency climate scientist, to identify appropriate data to sonify and base the spoken sections on. The work will be in three movements:

Movement 1 reflects where we have come from to where we are today.

Movement 2 portrays where we will end up if we don't change (acceleration towards failure).

Movement 3 imagines where we could be if we do change (acceleration stabilizes before failure).

The solo and orchestral parts will be recorded separately, allowing for a 'solo+tape' tour, while reducing the environmental and budgetary impact of moving an orchestra. The goal is to make the project accessible to any orchestra that wishes to present this work with drum kit players of their choice. The project will include workshops and YouTube videos to teach drummers how to play the solo part by ear and with notation as it will encourage drummers from all backgrounds to participate and develop the speaking drum kit tradition.

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8 Appendix

Appendix 8.1

My customized drum kit has undergone several transformations since it was built by Eames drum maker Joe MacSweeney in 1995 in Saugus Massachusetts. Initially, it was a custom-built Eames five-piece kit, featuring an 18-inch bass drum, 14-inch floor tom, 8-inch hi-tom, and 10-inch middle tom. In 2011 Troyan drums in Munich, Germany provided an endorsement where Alex Zachow designed a 14-inch *Sean Noonan signature custom snare drum* which is made of three types of wood (maple, bubinga, birch). The kit is also equipped with a double bass drum pedal, two hi-hats, 2-3 ride cymbals, 1-2 crash cymbals, wind chimes, and various auxiliary percussion instruments such as shakers and woodblocks.

During touring, however, limitations on the amount of drum equipment that could be carried were encountered. To address this issue, modifications were made to the hi-hat, including adding a ride cymbal below it, which created a new range of sonic possibilities, increasing the versatility and creative potential of the instrument. Such modifications demonstrate the flexibility of the drum kit and how it continues to adapt to the needs of musicians in diverse musical contexts.



Appendix 8.2 Vocal coaching outline

Aled Pedrick

COURSE SUMMARY

A thorough exploration of all elements of foundational vocal training. We will cover: freeing the body and throat; support and anchoring; creating character through the subtle amendments of vocal conditions; articulation and range of speech.

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Breath meditation
- Relaxation techniques- neck, jaw, tongue, ribs and torso
- Support and anchoring part 1 - Torso anchoring
- Head and neck anchoring
- Application of technique

EXERCISES:

Mindfulness and breath awareness
Sternocleidomastoid Stretch
Tongue boot-camp
Jaw release
Rib stretches

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Body scan meditation
- Recap and grow on previous work
- Jaw conditions
- Lip conditions
- Tongue conditions
- Application of techniques

EXERCISES:

Mindfulness and body awareness
Jaw release and application of conditions to set text
Tongue release and application of conditions to set text
Application of lip conditions to set text

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Breath meditation
- Recap and grow on previous work
- Laryngeal conditions
- Resonance
- Intonation

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

- Breath meditation
- Articulation
- Consonants vs vowels
- Range
- Pace vs Speed
- Text vs Thoughts

LESSON OBJECTIVES:

Revision and feedback on:

- Support
- Anchoring
- Lip, tongue, jaw conditions
- Laryngeal conditions
- Resonance and range
- Articulation

Appendix 8.3

Motets of the Otherworld Table of Contents

Chapter I: King Ludwig II

Queen of Kings (motet 1)

Banshee Dance (motet 2)

Drop in a Cascade (motet 3)

Magic Mist (motet 4)

Chapter II: Casey Jones¹⁶²

Skippin' Tracks (motet 5)

Story of Jones (motet 6)

Let's Walk Below (motet 7)

Rite of the Unknown (motet 8)

We're Younger Now (motet 9)

Chapter III: Robert Johnson

Crossroads (motet 10)

Mystical Healing (motet 11)

The Accabadora (motet 12)

Chapter IV: 'Malanga' José Rosario Oviedo

The Aqua Diva (motet 13)

Secret Valley (motet 14)

Moonwalk (motet 15)

¹⁶² Casey Jones, a heroic American locomotive engineer, tried to save passengers on his train from a catastrophic accident on April 30, 1900, after receiving a warning of a stalled freight train ahead. Although he successfully slowed down the train, he couldn't avoid the collision and died in the crash, minimizing the number of casualties among passengers. Jones became a legendary folk hero, and his story has been celebrated in numerous songs, poems, and artworks, including *The Ballad of Casey Jones*. Lee, Fred J. (2008). [*Casey Jones: Epic of the American Railroad*](#). Lee Press. ISBN 9781443728928.

King Ludwig II of Bavaria (1845-1886) commissioned the construction of extravagant castles, including Neuschwanstein Castle. He was also a patron of the arts and sponsored the works of notable composers such as Richard Wagner. Despite his achievements, he was known for his eccentric behavior and reclusive lifestyle. He was deposed from the throne in 1886 due to concerns over his mental health and financial mismanagement. The following day, he was found dead in Lake Starnberg under mysterious circumstances, officially ruled a suicide by drowning, but surrounded by many conspiracy theories.¹⁶³

Casey Jones (1863-1900), a heroic American locomotive engineer, tried to save passengers on his train from a catastrophic accident on April 30, 1900, after receiving a warning of a stalled freight train ahead. Although he successfully slowed down the train, he couldn't avoid the collision and died in the crash, minimizing the number of casualties among passengers. Jones became a legendary folk hero, and his story has been celebrated in numerous songs, poems, and artworks, including *The Ballad of Casey Jones*.¹⁶⁴

Robert Johnson (1911-1938) was an innovative American blues musician whose songs and guitar playing have had a lasting impact on popular music. The legend of his life and death involves a supposed deal with the devil at a Mississippi crossroads, where he gained his musical talent after disappearing for several months. Johnson's death at age 27 remains tragic and mysterious.¹⁶⁵

Malanga, whose real name was José Rosario Oviedo (1885 – 1927), was a renowned Cuban rumba dancer known for his skills in the columbia style. His death is still shrouded in mystery and has been the inspiration for several literary and musical works, including the famous song "Malanga murió".¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Britannica. (2021). King Ludwig II of Bavaria. In Britannica. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ludwig-II-king-of-Bavaria>

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¹⁶⁵ Elijah Wald. (2004). *Escaping the Delta: Robert Johnson and the Invention of the Blues*. New York: Amistad Press.

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