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**COMPOSITION: INTERACTION & COLLABORATION**

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## **DECLARATION**

I grant the powers of discretion to the University Librarian to allow the written text of this thesis to be copied in whole or in part without further reference to me. This permission covers only single copies made for study purposes, subject to normal conditions of acknowledgement. The scores and tapes containing recordings of the music presented are subject to normal copyright restrictions.

## ABSTRACT

For more than two hundred years it has been assumed by those engaged in the production of conservatoire-based music that a composition is best written by a single individual. It has been assumed that the most effective way to communicate a composition is through the exclusive means of the notated score. It has been assumed that the processes of performance and composition should be separate disciplines and that in general, the role of performers should be restricted merely to that of the interpretation of notated music.

This thesis presents a challenge to these assumptions through the presentation of a folio of compositions that have each been written through processes based not only on notation, but also in improvisation and various other collaborative aural and oral means. This folio is accompanied by a written discussion of the reasons for wishing to compose music in such a way.

In Part One of the written discussion I argue that the tradition of Western art music has reached a point of crisis. This is a crisis that is the result of a growing imbalance between literate and oral modes of thought and expression. I argue that the technology of notation is only partially useful as a tool for composition and communication. Conversely, I discuss what can and has been achieved by musicians when they allow non-notation based processes to form a significant part of the processes of the composition and performance of music.

In Part Two I consider the nature of the skills of improvisation. I argue that the practice of improvisation holds part of the key to the regeneration of the conservatoire music tradition and that it is a skill that should serve to underpin all elements of a player's musicianship.

In Part Three I discuss some of the more practical considerations of the techniques used in the composition of the music presented in Part Four of the thesis. I attempt to show that through effecting a balance within the composition process between notated elements scored by a single composer, and improvised/realised elements written within the context of an ensemble, a practice can be developed that has implications not only for traditional assumptions of composition, but which serves to question the whole way in which our culture traditionally organises and structures its institutions of education and performance.

Part Four takes the form of a recorded folio of works that have been composed as the result of collaborations between the ensembles that perform them and myself as a director.

## **COMPOSITION: INTERACTION & COLLABORATION**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **RESPONSE TO CHANGE**

The world is changing. Developing communication and access to an ever increasing body of information is resulting in a smaller and more contained planet in which cultural and social boundaries can appear to be blurred and hard to locate. The forces promoting these changes have begun to have a significant effect on the way in which we produce and project our arts. Recent upheavals in the world of music have been far from insignificant. Almost all the major orchestras and opera companies in this country have effected significant changes in their organisation and relationship to society through the development of education and community-orientated programmes. Many of these programmes do not merely consist of token school assembly performances by 'B-team' orchestras or ensembles paid at half rate. They are programmes which believe in, and promote the necessary integration of 'top' players and composers into community contexts in which they take an active role, through projects that are as much a challenge to them as they are to the other participants. Orchestras such as the London Sinfonietta, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra have now developed their education work to an extent to which it is considered as important, as crucial, and as necessary as their standard concert work. And indeed, the rates of pay for the work reflect this.

Orchestras such as these do not consider education work merely as a means by which they can ensure their funding, nor even as a way to simply help audiences understand their music. The work is considered as the inevitable means through which the entire musical process is enriched - the means by which music, as a socialising art, fulfills its true potential as a communication and celebration of existence, and as a mediator between religious, social and economic boundaries.

The initiative of the G.C.S.E.<sup>1</sup> in music and the possible future developments of the national curriculum has begun to spark a new fervour and excitement in schools. Increasing numbers of children and young people are being encouraged to learn and develop the necessary skills through which they can both compose and perform their own music. Many of these students are now benefiting from the experience of performing their music with professionals of the highest status. And they are collaborating on their compositions with some of the country's most experienced composers<sup>2</sup>. Such collaborations have proven that there is a vitality about work involving the integration of artists into the community. The energy of this work not only feeds the members of the community at large but which also feeds back to the artists in a way that enriches and invigorates their own work.

The implications of such changes are huge. Not least are the implications that these changes have for our universities, colleges and conservatoires which, for the

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1. The G.C.S.E. (general certificate of secondary education) was established in Britain during the 1980's. G.C.S.E. examinations were designed to be sat by children of school leaving age. It replaced the old two-tier examination system as it was designed to cater for children of all abilities. It brought with it a number of radical changes. In music, the most important of these was that it meant that pupils were required to study amongst others, the practical skills of composition and appraisal alongside those of performance.

2. Regulars taking part in the Sinfonietta programmes include the clarinettist, Anthony Pay and the saxophonist, John Harle, and composers Nigel Osborne and Robert Saxton.

time being, appear to be largely ignoring the developments. But these institutions must respond to change. Professional musicians are increasingly being expected to perform, not just with technical and interpretive skills, but also with the creative skills of improvisation and composition, skills of creative leadership, and skills of collaboration. Such skills are those that equip the players for a wide range of creative and educational contexts, whether it be simply a basic improvisatory role within a composition, or a directorial role within a vast multi-cultural music theatre project. Only through a response to these challenges by the institutions of the conservatoire tradition, and a development of programmes through which our future professionals can receive adequate and necessary training, can our musical culture flourish and meet the changes taking place in society.

Research and development in this area is of the most urgent and vital nature. This thesis thus constitutes a contribution to that research as an investigation into one of the main challenges facing our conservatoire tradition;<sup>3</sup> that is, the problem of effecting genuine and creative interaction and collaboration in the composition of music.

To this end the thesis is divided into four parts:

Part One - The roles of Literacy and Orality in Conservatoire-based music.

Part Two - Improvisation.

Part Three - Collaborative processes of composition through techniques of the 'backbone' score.

Part Four - Folio of 'backbone' scores and recorded realisations.

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3. Throughout this thesis the term conservatoire is used to refer to the body of institutions and traditions that form the essence of Western art music culture.

## **PART ONE**

### **THE ROLES OF LITERACY AND ORALITY IN THE CONSERVATOIRE**



## CHAPTER ONE

### QUARTET FOR FOUR FLUTES

#### Introduction

During recent years there have been many attacks on the traditions and conventions of the conservatoire. In *Music.Society.Education* (Small 1977), Christopher Small argued vigorously against the institutions of the conservatoire asserting that they had betrayed the needs of society and undermined the culture through a constant rejection of the processes and achievements of non-western musics. He rigorously analysed the assumptions of the conservatoire tradition and then, through comparison with the contradictory value systems of other cultures, argued that those assumptions had foundation in nothing but the artificial and transient constructs of contemporary Western ideology. In 1977 the arguments were radical, controversial and urgent, and adequately summed up the feelings of a generation that had grown up to detest many of the traditions of the conservatoire.

Further texts, such as those by Cornelius Cardew and his associates, and the writings of various commentators who sounded their voices through the now defunct *Musics* magazine, contributed to the rebellion through an almost anarchistic philosophy of music. Together they produced a movement which espoused many views that collectively expressed a general desire for change. Many of these views not only consisted of a rejection of the fundamental tenets of the institutions, but appeared to actually advocate the destruction of any memory of them.

Numerous further texts could be cited, each of which takes some radical anti-institutional stance, be it religious or ideological, spiritual or ecological, and much of this work is both convincing and valuable. But in the long term (it is now twenty years since Cardew's *Stockhausen serves Imperialism*, and fifteen since *Music.Society.Education*), it seems to have had little effect on either the practices or conventions of the conservatoire tradition which, more than ever, seems to be exclusively promoting the traditional values and processes of Western art music.

The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, the majority of these texts projected an idealistic attitude which consisted of the rejection of almost all aspects of the tradition. Such rejection engulfed not only the broadly based assumptions of the tradition, ie. those concerning the autonomous nature of the work of art and artist, and all the associated processes and values; but also all the elements of its language and aesthetic, and all concepts of product-orientated practice. It did this in favour of an exclusively process-orientated practice. And despite the fact that the majority of the artists who led the rebellions were in fact highly trained and skilled practitioners<sup>4</sup>, they seemed to be reluctant to acknowledge the essential uniqueness and value of individual skill and the part that it can play within the practices of composition and performance. Secondly, the majority of these attacks on the tradition failed to be supported by significant practice, other than the occasional performance or event which was generally attended only by the dedicated and devoted supporters of the work. The failure of the movement thus lay in its inability to produce music or art of any kind which had sufficient depth and richness to convincingly challenge the work of the conservatoire tradition.

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4.Frederic Rzewski and David Tudor to name but two such virtuosos.

However, there is still much to be learnt from this tendency. Its achievement was to expose the fact that the conservatoire tradition was not the heaven-sent bastion of taste and perfection that it was generally considered to be. Indeed, it demonstrated that the tradition contained and promoted a vast range of values and processes that could be profoundly criticised in terms of their ideology, aesthetics, and practicalities. The conservatoire had become so inextricably bound up with the conventions and relations of literacy that it could no longer cope with those qualities of music and musicking<sup>5</sup> that are essentially oral in their origin - qualities of communality, integration and collaboration. In short, it had reached such a point that it could no longer acknowledge or contend with the vast majority of the world's music and musical practice. It is this that must change if conservatoires are to survive and flourish.

### *Quartet for Four Flutes*

Before discussing some of these issues in more detail I would like to present a composition whose basic nature represents a challenge to the assumptions of the conservatoire tradition. It is a piece of music that is fully composed, and yet which is not fully notated. And although it is carefully and formally structured, it was not formulated by a single composer.

*Quartet for Four Flutes* is a composition that is the result of a creative collaboration between myself and four flautists who have been trained exclusively within

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5. In *Music of the Common Tongue* (Small 1987), Christopher Small makes the point that 'music' is not primarily a thing or a collection of things, but an activity in which we engage. He suggests then, that the word 'music' is not properly a noun, but a verb. Small therefore uses the verb, 'to music' (as 'to dance') and especially the present participle 'musicking' to express the act of taking part in a musical performance. The term is thus a more accurate one than 'playing music', as that latter term fails to acknowledge the array of activities that form a part of taking part in a musical performance; those activities that directly relate to the nature of performance as a socialising art.

the conservatoire tradition and who generally work exclusively with notated music.

Stylistically, the music is clearly part of the conservatoire tradition and it is not difficult to conceive of a composition sounding similar to this that could have been written in a conventional manner and with traditional notation. However, such a composition would differ in a number of important ways. For *Quartet for Four Flutes* exhibits many qualities that in fact come directly from the idiosyncracies of the players themselves, characteristics that are partly formed due to the specific ways in which each musician plays their flute, to the idiosyncracies of their creative personalities, and to the ways in which those personalities interact. Had one of the players been different, then the music would have been different. And had the musical or social relationships been different, the music would have been different. The sound of the composition and the quality of the music is inherently tied up with both the social and the musical conditions of its production. Of course, this is true for most music, but within the conservatoire tradition such factors, as I shall show later, rarely contribute to the extent that they do here. In this case, the music is the product of an organic and seamless, social and musical process. And it is this that makes it different from the music of the tradition.

*Quartet for Four Flutes* was composed and recorded through a collaboration between myself and the four performers during May 1991. The recording is presented on Dat One accompanying this thesis. The notated part of the music is in Score No.12.(S1) (Cassette One)

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THE ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF LITERACY IN THE PRODUCTION OF MUSIC**

The history of music can be considered as a struggle between the forces of literacy and notated musical practice, and the forces of orality. Typically, the institutions of the conservatoire tradition, which are so wholeheartedly part of a literate tradition, fail to recognise many of the consequences of this struggle and, as such, continue to train and examine our young musicians almost exclusively in the art of notated music. The result of this is that our conservatoire-based music continues to be almost exclusively mediated by notation, and is therefore largely dominated by the particular characteristics of notation. Many of these characteristics are part of a valuable and perhaps almost indispensable literate technology that has aided the intense development and refinement of many qualities of composition and performance during the last three centuries. However, the price that has been paid for this has been huge. Firstly, an extreme bias towards the exclusive use of notation in the composition of music has resulted in modes of composition that are, to a large extent, determined by the technical capabilities of notation and the various degrees of suppressive and restrictive control that notation can impose. Secondly, it has resulted in the impoverishment of qualities in music that derive from more orally based musical processes.

Almost all of the problems of post-war conservatoire-based music stem from this condition: on the one hand, musicians have a natural urge to create music that functions as a basic human expression. On the other hand, notation has a tenden-

cy to isolate that music, and to locate it in a world of abstraction and objectivity.

In order to understand this fully it is necessary to consider some of the effects that the development of notation has had on the ways in which our culture writes, plays and listens to its music.

### **Ideological Functions of Notation**

Notation is the means by which we, as musicians working in the tradition of western art music, write down our music. It is the means through which we order it, copy it, store it, and communicate it. Without notation, we would not, and indeed could not, relate to aural phenomena in the way that we now do. As such, notation plays a crucial role in the development and conditioning of our creative personalities.

Notation brings with it the power of literacy which is the power of a social institution. As such, it can and has been exploited for its liberative and constructive qualities - those that have allowed for the intense development and refinement of structural and formal qualities of composition and the consequent production of a canon of thoroughly composed works throughout the years of its development. But it has also been exploited for its restrictive and destructive qualities - those that have led to the impoverishment of oral process and which have alienated the vast majority of our society from the creative processes of music practice. The result within the culture of Western art music has been two-fold: on the one hand the use of notation has resulted in order, patterns of development and history, and on the other its use has resulted in the impoverishment of the qualities of freedom, interaction and collaboration - the characteristic qualities of orality.

In recent years, there has been a revolution in the understanding of the processes

of literacy and the contrasts between the oral and literate modes of thought and expression. The work of writers such as Marshall McLuhan spearheaded a renewed interest in the technology of writing during the 1960s that paved the way to a radical reworking of literary and cultural theory.<sup>1</sup> Musicologists, however, have been less than eager to take on board the implications of such understanding and, consequently, progress in these terms has largely been limited to ethnomusicology in which the literacy/orality issue has always been central.

But the beginning of writing about writing can be located well before McLuhan. Walter Ong (Ong 1982) cites Plato, ironically one of the first 'great' writers as the source of the study. He summarises text from *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh Letter*<sup>2</sup>, in which Plato has Socrates make a series of outlandish assertions concerning writing:

Writing is inhuman, pretending to establish outside what in reality can only be in the mind. It is a thing, a manufactured product...Writing destroys memory. Those who use writing will become forgetful, relying on external resource for what they lack in internal resources. Writing weakens the mind...a written text is basically unresponsive. If you ask person to explain his or her statement you can get an explanation: if you ask a text, you get nothing back except the same; often stupid words...real speech and thought always exist essentially in a context of give and take between real persons. Writing is passive, out of it, in an unreal, unnatural world.(Ong 1982 p.79)

Socrates' comments concerning literacy reveal much about the functions of writing. But they also apply equally well to the functions of musical notation. For example:

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1.McLuhan 1962, 1964. Havelock 1976. Ong 1982.

2.Plato (1973), *Phaedrus* and *Letter's VII & VIII* trans. with introduction by Walter Hamilton, Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books.

1. *Notation* is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind, (*or the ear*), what in reality can only be in the mind...It is a thing, a manufactured product... *it* destroys memory...Those who use *notation* will become forgetful, relying on external resource for what they lack in internal resource.

Notation has indeed replaced a certain quality of human memory. Musicians no longer have much need for memory, so they do not train their memory. As a result, they tend not to be able to use their memory in a functional way in any but the very simplest situations, or as the result of basic parrot-fashion modes of learning. This may well not be a problem for those musicians who work exclusively within a traditional environment. However, consider the problems that arise when a musician is obliged to take part in some kind of improvisation. One of the most common complaints of inexperienced improvisers (that is, most of the notation-based musicians) is that they can not remember details of an improvisation, either whilst they are playing nor after it has taken place. And bearing in mind the fact that improvisation often relies upon the ability of participants to have a clear understanding of the materials they are using, which involves an accurate and active memory, such a lack of ability is liable to be disastrous for the music. Without a development of their memories, such musicians may not be able to develop their improvising to any great extent.

It is not insignificant that at the time of its evolution notation was intended and regarded simply as a device to assist the memory - an *aide memoire*. At first this consisted simply of a system of signs placed above a text that served to remind a singer whether a melody was ascending, descending, or combining these two movements. At this stage it was simply an aide to complement the oral memory of a huge body of plainchant during the early years of the millennium. But with time, the notational symbols developed, grew in complexity, and began to 'remind' the singers of ever increasing details of the musical line. Ultimately, this



led to the contemporary system in which oral memory plays no part in the process of the communication of composition.

**2. *Notation* weakens the mind...a *notated score* is basically unresponsive.**

As notation became ever more accurate and succinct during the 13th and 14th centuries, so too did its power to prescribe rather than to simply describe music. The technology of notation developed from its basic *aide memoire* functions to those of a prescriptive tool. As such, it had the effect of dramatically distorting the relationship between the notated parameters of music and the context or circumstances in which that music was performed. A work which was notated could no longer adapt to changes in contexts and conditions of performance and thus acquired a temporally static quality. It became a fixed entity and a product of a particular context as many of the parameters that were worked out within such a context were now merely reproduced within new and different contexts rather than being reworked.

This is the notation that is the inheritance of our present culture. It is a notation that removes from music an essential quality of responsiveness. It is a notation that is constant and unchanging in its content. It is a notation, which despite allowing for a small degree of creative manipulation by a performer, prescribes its music in such a way that it cannot be questioned to any great extent and, therefore cannot really be challenged.

It was a discovery of this power that led to the use of notation as a hegemonic tool by the leaders of the church during the 11th and 12th centuries. By wielding notation in such a way that concentrated on its characteristics of formal order,

unity, and transcribability, it was possible to set sacred texts in such a way that they became wholeheartedly the province of literate musicians, and therefore of the church. And unification of the chants throughout the church led to the potential for a more unified, and therefore more closely controlled culture.

As the church had sole access to, and control over the powers of musical literacy, notation thus became a further means by which the church removed liturgical music (that which developed into Western art music) further still from the common people. This is illustrated well by a 9th century legend which describes how St. Gregory the Great (c.540-604) collected sacred plainchant that were dictated to him by a dove. St Gregory sang the chants to a scribe who, working behind a screen, recorded them in notation. The notated versions thus came to describe the eternal truths of the divine (the dove being allegorical for divine inspiration), and became the definitive and spiritually perfect realisations of the chants.

The parallel between the St. Gregory and the archetypal post-renaissance composer is startling. Our culture continues to trust in the composer who, by and large, works in secret behind a cultural screen, and who notates the 'perfect' and definitive form of music drawn from his or her divine or quasi-divine inspiration. And, as though the notes were sacred, they can rarely be altered in any way by anyone but that composer.<sup>3</sup>

3. Performers are now rarely in a position in which they can even question the

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3. As Donald Grout points out (Grout & Palisca 1988, 51-52), the legend is, in practical detail, actually implausible as there was (ironically) no adequate notation in St. Gregory's time that the scribe could have employed. However, the point remains the same. During the late 8th and 9th centuries, liturgical-musical 'missionaries' used the legend as a form of propaganda to reinforce the idea of the divinely inspired chant.

contents of the score:

If you ask a person to explain his or her statements you can get an explanation: if you ask a *score*, you get nothing back except the same; often stupid *notes*...

Today, performers often find themselves in a situation in which they are forced to struggle through vast complexes of notated material, much of which they neither like nor understand. Such performers have no power with which to make suggestions or adjustments to the substance of the music that might make that music more appropriate to them, their audience, or their context. Instead they are asked to have absolute faith in both the technical and creative expertise of an often absent composer, who may well have rushed the completion of his or her score in order to meet a commission deadline. Throughout history, even in the cases of composers of the stature of Beethoven or Boulez, dedicated and faithful performers have spent hours carrying out the dictates of the composers with complete trust in those composers' aesthetic and technical credentials. But they have often been rewarded by the composer withdrawing the score after a first performance, either in order to make extensive alterations or to throw it in the bin. This process, which is insulting both to performers and audiences alike is wholly the fault of those composers who have the arrogance to believe that the composition process is complete at the moment at which they finish putting pen to paper. All too often, the composer's first aural experience of the music is when rehearsals are well underway and there is no time to alter mistakes or 'creative miscalculations'. If changes or alterations could be effected through oral processes, and without a laboured recourse to notation, the situation might be different.

## **Cultural Imbalance & the Significance of the Scientific Revolution**

If the activities of the church and the advent of notation mark the beginning of the process of change from an oral to a literate music culture, then the transformations brought about by the scientific revolution mark the end of it. The period 1500 - 1700 marks the beginning of the modern era. To a large extent the way we think, our social structures and our personalities are determined and conditioned by the cultural response to the changes that took place during that period.

Fritjof Capra's dramatic analysis of this period describes such a transformation as a change in consciousness from the notion of an "organic living spiritual universe, to the notion of the world as a machine"(Capra 1982, 38). Central to this change was the transformation of science. It was during this period that it acquired its character as a literate, and thus, quantifiable pursuit based on an exclusively mathematical description of nature and on analytical methods of reasoning. In the philosophy of Descartes, science was described simply as the pursuit of "certain, evident knowledge" (Ibid, 42). Knowledge that was merely probable was rejected and belief was placed, only in those things which were "perfectly known and about which there... *could* ...be no doubts". This certainty of scientific knowledge lay at the heart of Cartesian philosophy and became a central part of the philosophical foundation of the modern age.

Capra describes Descartes' method as one which lies in "radical doubt". Descartes doubts all he can - traditional knowledge, impressions of the senses, his body - until he reaches the only stable thing, which is his existence as a thinker. Thus he arrives at the principal statement of existence: "I think, therefore I am". From the Cartesian viewpoint, this forms a starting point which leads, apparently quite logically, to the idea that the essence of human nature lies in thought (the only

thing of which we can be certain) and that the things that we conceive of clearly and distinctly are therefore true. From such a foundation has evolved the analytical processes of reasoning that are now characteristic of western culture as a whole. Such processes that involve the breaking up of thoughts and problems into pieces, and arranging them in reasonable and logical orders.

The philosophy of scientific certainty served well to reinforce the dominant and quantifiable tendencies of music in notation. At the beginning of the new era, the score could function well as proof of the absolute controlled and strictly quantified nature and existence of a piece (or object) of music. In Descartes' terms, a score could present: "evident knowledge" in terms of the fact that it was clearly and concisely presented in an unchanging and unchangeable format.

Thus, the seal was put on the fate of orality in music. Qualities of human memory, improvisation, and collaboration, which were once central to the fundamental processes of musicking, began to be experienced by the rising culture as uncontrolled, unknown factors, as they were subjected to ever growing restriction and control. And despite continued widespread and popular practices of improvisation during the 18th century, all such oral practices had been killed off within the rising tradition of the conservatoire by the mid 19th century.

The condition of music in today's conservatoires continues to reflect the basic principles of Cartesian certainty. In the conservatoire tradition, the quantifiable substance of the score has become the almost exclusive means through which we relate to and understand our music. It represents what is thought of as a composition and states through a clear and logical format what are understood as the essential characteristics of a musical composition. On one hand, this has led to

the development of a clearly and logically evolving tradition of quantified 'composed' works, all of which we have access to through the lasting technology of notation. But on the other hand, this has had a devastating effect upon the way in which the conservatoire understands and appraises music that is not based on those principles of notation and of the score.

This is made clear by the way in which the conservatoire attempts to cope with such non-notated music. That music which is not, or cannot be notated tends either to be subjected to a laborious and futile process of transcription, or it becomes simply the subject of doubt and suspicion. For instance, it is not insignificant that almost all attempts by the conservatoire tradition to understand or justify the achievements of non-notated musics have necessarily resulted in the transcription of those musics, or analyses of them in strictly notated terms. For instance, consider the discussion of the music of The Beatles by the eminent musicologist, Wilfred Mellers (Mellers 1976).

In the introduction to *Twilight of the Gods*, Mellers states that "there is no valid way of talking about the experiential effects of music except by starting from an account of what actually happens in musical technique, the terminology of which has been evolved by professional musicians over some centuries".(p15) This is followed by an extensive description and discussion of the music in precisely those "valid terms". For example, Meller's describes the first verse of the track "She's Leaving Home" from the L.P. *Sargent Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* as:

(five bars) rounded off by an instrumental ritornello of three bars with an emotive solo cello apparently modulating to the dominant. But the next phrase of the tune reasserts the tonic; and what looks like a repeat of a four bar phrase is extended to nine bars, with a postlude of another three bars solo cello again modulating to the dominant. Once more the modulation is frustrated; and the verse section is completed with a four-bar phrase in the tonic, repeated.(p92)

*Twilight of the Gods* is filled with similarly inappropriate descriptions that mean nothing to readers who are unfamiliar with the jargon and make tediously pointless reading for those who are. The act of describing music in this way is indicative of an obsessive desire by the conservatoire tradition to isolate and dissect its subject with scientific precision in order to explain meanings that are in fact culturally determined.

Further evidence of the conservatoire's inability to cope with the genuine demands of oral musical processes is provided by the nature and status of those conservatoire courses that have been set up in order to deal with music from those oral traditions. For example, the Guildhall School of Music & Drama runs a course designed to train students in the art of rock and jazz music. On one hand, the introduction of such courses into the conservatoire is a progressive and necessary development that cannot help but raise the status and awareness of the qualities of non- and part-notated music. Such initiatives should be encouraged. However on the other hand it is no coincidence that in order to be accepted for this particular course and to take full part in it, students need to be both fluent in the literate processes of music, and technically excellent in its performance. Considering this, it is ironic that the majority of both rock and jazz performers who throughout history have been considered to be 'great' as youngsters would not have been accepted for this course.

It is in the discipline of improvisation, however, that the conservatoire must be found to be most lacking. Improvised music, which more often than not tends to defy the possibility of effective transcription altogether but which was central to the practice of composers such as Bach and Mozart, seems now to be the subject of intense doubt and suspicion by the majority of the members of the Bach-

Mozart tradition. Consider the attitude of the English composer Jonathan Harvey:

*Group improvisation can produce only either boringly obvious climaxes and lulls, or a veneer of complexity the sounds all too obviously the work of chance (Harvey 1975, 123; cit. Dean 1990, 115 and Small 1977, 305)*

Such an attitude seems often to be typical of the conservatoire tradition. And it is reflected in its reluctance to embrace the art at either the level of education or that of performance. During the post-war period the general lack of judgment and understanding by composers and performers alike has resulted in a shambolic series of half-hearted attempts at integration by composers both unwilling to let go their notated scores or to accept the responsibilities of the oral processes that improvisation brings with it.

The continuing failure of the conservatoire tradition to cope with non-notated musics and music traditions in any but its own exclusive terms, is indicative of its status and success as a function of the Cartesian tradition, and is a clear indication of a cultural imbalance that forms the essence of that tradition.

Capra identifies this imbalance as one between rational thinking (being analytical, focussed and belonging to the realm of the intellect) and intuitive knowledge (being synthesising, holistic, non-linear, and coming from a direct and non-intellectual experience of the world). In our culture, he argues, these imbalances, which pervade our "thoughts and feelings, our values and attitudes, and our social and political structures", have become manifest in the domination of "rational knowledge over intuitive wisdom, science over religion, competition over cooperation, natural resources over conservation" (ibid, 22).

In order to explain the nature of such an imbalance, Capra uses the concepts of Yin and Yang drawn from traditional Chinese philosophy. This system, which is often misinterpreted in the west as representing merely a moralistic good-bad



polarity, is primarily concerned with the dynamics of balance - balance between characteristics which are considered to be Yang, and those which are considered to be Yin. It is this idea of balance that has implications for western culture.

In the Chinese system, balance between Yin and Yang is considered to be good, imbalance is considered to be bad. So effectively a good condition arises only when any characteristic is complemented by a sufficient degree of its opposite. Such a notion is alien to traditional western philosophy, and it is due to a failure by our culture to recognise this essential duality of existence and experience that has, according to Capra, led to the intensity of the current cultural crisis.

Consider the following characteristics that are outlined by Capra (p21):

YIN	YANG
Feminine	Masculine
Contractive	Demanding
Responsive	Aggressive
Cooperative	Competitive
Intuitive	Rational
Synthesising	Analytical

By focussing on these it is easy to see, as Capra points out, that our society has constantly favoured the qualities of Yang, over those of Yin. And this represents the fundamental imbalance that underlies our culture and which is also responsible for a growing crisis in our conservatoires.

The conservatoire as an institution, although not exclusively orientated towards Yang characteristics certainly exhibits a bias towards them. Although it partly trains musicians within the relatively responsive, cooperative, and dynamic context of the one to one lesson it does so within the larger structures of an environment that is essentially competitive in its goal-orientated processes and which tends to focus more upon external standards and technical requirements than on

individual personal and creative idiosyncracies. This tends to force students along preestablished and normal paths of development rather than allowing them to develop their own specific and idiosyncratic paths.

Further evidence of the conservatoire's Yang-biased nature is provided by its rational and analytical characteristics. The conservatoire, which as I have argued, uses notation as the sole mediator of all its music, on the one hand encourages its students to understand such notation as merely a means by which the music itself can be reached. But on the other hand it encourages its history and theory students to analyse music almost exclusively in notated and therefore rational and intellectual ways, and to understand it as the sum of a number of constituent notated parts. As such, it discourages the role of intuitive processes and more holistic approaches.

This argument can be reinforced by a consideration of the impoverishment within the conservatoire of those characteristics of musical process that are essentially Yin in nature. Many of the defining characteristics of collective improvisation, for instance, have little to do with the aggression and rationalism of Yang. Improvisation is at once essentially an experiential and intuitive activity, the beauty of which lies in cooperation and responsiveness. In these respects, it embodies the essence of an activity that is Yin - it is collective, being the product of a dynamic exchange of ideas within a group, and it is essentially free, fluid, and in a dynamic relationship to its context of production. Improvisation, is solely based in the ear.<sup>4</sup>

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4. It is perhaps ironic that despite such qualities of improvisation, the tradition of free improvisation that developed in Britain and the U.S.A. through the 1960's tended to exude qualities that may well be experienced as yang. The tradition was certainly male dominated and the nature of much of the improvisation was almost anti-responsive, anti-sensitive, and only synthesising by default! Ample evidence of this lies in the recordings and written accounts of the improvisations by the dominant improvising ensembles of the day. The beauty, if it can be called that, of such improvisation can not be said to lie in responsiveness!

I do not wish to argue that orality is good and that literacy is bad or that collaborative and aural-based music processes are good and that notated music processes are bad for that would be akin to saying that Yin is good and Yang is bad. The literacy-orality issue is not about a good-bad polarity but about balance. Notation is a technology that boasts many qualities and is clearly an indispensable tool for many musicians. However, I do suggest that the over-use of this tool and the impoverishment of non-literate music processes has resulted in a situation that is to a large extent unhealthy. For fully notated composition has few of the qualities of orality outlined above. It is the product of a single person telling others what to do; it is restrained, static and largely ignorant of its contexts of production; and it is based in the eye. And although none of these things are necessarily bad in themselves, their over-domination has led to a situation that is in many ways inadequate.

### **The Naturalising Conservatoire**

The inadequacy of our musical notation has made itself felt and is widely admitted. (Schoenberg 1975, 354)

The conservatoire tradition is one partly founded upon conflict, contradiction and cultural imbalance. And yet it still manages to sustain itself and our society continues, by and large, to trust it, to support it, and to work with it.

During the 1920s Schoenberg felt so unhappy with the notation system that he spent a great deal of time attempting to develop and perfect a new system that would represent, more clearly, his 12-tone based music (Ibid, 354-362). But soon after presenting his new notation, he rejected it and spent the following 25 years working out his new music through the limits and preferences of the traditional system.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Karlheinz Stockhausen explored and experimented with countless alternative notational systems. He produced a plethora of works, each drawing from the idiosyncracies of the notation, and exploiting the characteristic manner in which they tended to represent sound. However, for the past 15 years, he has written almost exclusively with conventional traditional notation.

Countless other composers have followed similar paths involving a rejection or dissatisfaction of the established traditions of notation followed by an acceptance of the limits and a return to the traditional working methods. Even John Cage, master of the unnotated and unnotatable, is now producing increasing numbers of conventionally notated scores<sup>5</sup>.

This continual apparent acceptance of, and conformity to, the formal traditions of the conservatoire is a function of the conservatoire as a naturalising institution. It performs the ideological function of making appear natural those characteristics of music and musicking that are, in fact, merely the constructs of its own system. Thus form, structure, finite harmonies and definable pitches and rhythms are represented as parameters of music that both can and should be subject to analysis, change, and development. They are represented as the essential stuff of music. But, by way of contrast, those qualities such as responsiveness, gesture, timbre and loose structures are represented as being peripheral to the central core of musical practice. They are experienced as less significant or less important natural ingredients of sonic art.

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5. Recent examples include the Freeman Etudes.

Naturalisation pervades all areas of our musical culture. For instance, it appears natural that a composition is best written by a single person, rather than by a group. It appears natural that a composition should be represented and communicated through a notated score. It appears natural that the role of the performer should be limited solely to the job of interpreting and performing the written score. It appears natural that improvisation cannot possibly produce as effectively or coherently structured music as traditional composition. Such processes, which are in fact, merely the product of social, historical, cultural and economic forces (and hence subject to change), are culturally experienced as natural - that is, as inevitable, timeless, universal, and hence, inarguable. And although problems and inconsistencies might occur, the naturalising process is so overwhelming that, as cultural consumers, we are held in to what we hold as our fundamental beliefs. These serve to sustain the basic structures of the conservatoire tradition and which, to an essential degree, restrain the more radical experiments and developments that take place within it.

Within the conservatoire, such naturalisation has developed in particularly interesting and complex ways. What we experience as natural is reinforced by a contained degree of subversive activity. Such processes allow us to profoundly question certain qualities of the culture and to effect change of a sort within those areas, whilst continuing to maintain the basic natural conditions of the culture as a whole. So that although, during the post-war period, changes have indeed occurred in musicking that have to a great extent, upset what previously had been considered natural - such as attitudes to tonality, or concepts of form - other more fundamental attitudes, such as those regarding the fabric of the conservatoire and the basic processes of production have remained more or less constant. Thus there has been no change in the standard composer-performer relationship, or in the role of the score in the production process, or in the prime objectives of the cul-

ture being to promote aesthetic and cultural development based exclusively on the parameters of the already extant tradition.

Because of this, the culture accommodates artists who are considered to be radical. However, these radicals often merely function to reinforce the naturalising process. At one level (the one that is most evident) such artists are experienced as members of progressive radical movements. But at another level (that is hidden), they must be considered as conservative and conformist artists due to the fact that they tend to work, consciously or not, for the maintenance of the conditions of the culture as a whole. In terms of the overall dynamic they have the function of making the culture appear to be radically responsive to social or political change, thereby creating the illusion that it in fact serves some important social function. Thus, we experience that culture as both healthy and vital and therefore tend to resist any forces for change that undermine the basic structures.

However, the genuine cultural radicals (those who seek to change or develop the very fabric of the culture) thus have to contend with two major forces. Firstly, the naturalised discourse of the conservatoire tradition, with its tendency to encourage us to understand its social and musical relations in ways that merely reproduce its own imbalance and inequalities; and secondly, the difficulty of establishing as natural (or as John Fiske points out - "as not unnatural" (O'Sullivan 1984, 152)) their alternative modes of discourse and relation. This is the dilemma facing those who wish to promote change.

## **The Practical Functions of Notation**

I have argued that the history of music can be considered as a struggle between the forces of literacy and the forces of orality. That this is not the popular view can now be seen as a result of the fact that our culture represents notation as the natural means through which to develop, construct, and communicate music. However, the struggle continues to be maintained by composers due to an ever increasing desire by them to compose music that embodies many of the characteristics that we might associate with musics of an oral tradition, but which is still within the deterministic limitations of the conventions of the notation tradition. This struggle manifests itself in the move, by many composers, away from simple compositions based on quantified pitches, bipartite rhythms and clear metrical structures, towards compositions based on either overtly complex structures of such parameters or less quantifiable parameters of musicking such as gesture, articulation and feel.

Notation is very useful for the communication of certain parameters of music in certain contexts. As I have already mentioned, discrete pitches, bipartite rhythms, and simple metrical structures can be notated reasonably economically and effectively within a large number of compositional contexts. Needless to say, many composers continually find such notation to be an effective tool with which to prescribe and to communicate certain quantifiable details of their compositions. But throughout the present century there have been increasing numbers of composers for whom that notation did not and does not work well, and this has resulted in what may be considered as the most significant crisis in the history of Western art music.

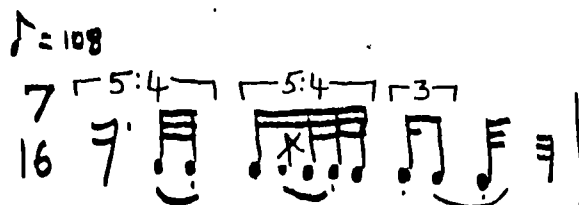
Although the practical problems of notation were already being noted by critics

during the 19th century, the situation did not begin to approach a crisis point until the development of total serialism during the 1950s. Two causes can be cited which jointly led to this crisis: firstly, the increasing desire of composers such as Boulez and Stockhausen to notate and prescribe their music more accurately and in evermore exacting detail. Secondly, the desire of composers such as Carter and Ligeti, to adapt notation in subtle ways in order to cope with the new demands of the ever increasing complexity of the music that they were attempting to develop.

The problems have been most widely experienced with reference to the adequate and accurate notation of rhythm and metre. For example, one of the fundamental problems with rhythmic notation is that it always presupposes a pulse. As Kurt Stone points out "it knows only regularities and irregularities of the pulse" (Stone 1963, 16). Thus when the music to be notated is of a free and flexible nature, as is the case with much contemporary music, the composer is faced with the problem of locating regular reference points within the notation, and is forced to resort to increasing numbers of modifying signs and symbols of which dots, ties, brackets, numerals, fermatas, and tenutos number but a few.

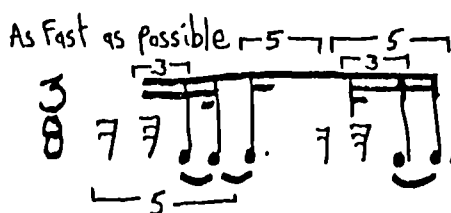
In his exhaustive study of rhythmic notation, Gardner Read (Read 1980, 5) cites the following two examples:

a. Henri Pousseur: Symphony for 15 Soloists





b. Karlheinz Stockhausen: Klavierstück IV



Looking at these examples and considering the intensity of the complex and intricate rhythms, one cannot help but wonder, as Read himself says, if it is possible for even the most advanced musical technician to easily feel and reproduce them with mathematical precision, and if whether such a rendition is even necessary in terms of the purely aural requirements of the compositions as a whole.

Such rhythms stretch the capacity of notation to such a limit as to render that notation effectively meaningless. For in practice, these two examples merely communicate the fact that the rhythms are extremely irregular. And this is one of the major problems with rhythmic notation: it can only efficiently communicate a limited degree of detail. As Read says, rhythmic notation requires not only precision, but also simplicity if it is to satisfactorily fulfill its function within the compositional matrix. And quite rightly he states that the notator "must strike a delicate balance between conceptual extremes in rhythm and their lucid notational realisations" (p6).

In the case of the Stockhausen and Pousseur examples, such a balance is far from evident as the intellectual effort that is required even to decipher the notation is so great that the performer is forced into a deeply rational and analytical mode that cannot help but interfere with a lucid and fluid performance of the music itself.

The notation of polymetric music has been the subject of much discussion in recent years, the problems of which are even more apparent and acute than those

of rhythm. The example given by Stone (Stone 1974, 523) of the notation of a polymetric texture in Elliot Carter's 2nd String Quartet, highlights one such problem:

Presto scherzando  
(♩ = 175) (with rhythmic expression)

II

Solo-sempre to [241] leggiero sempre

pizz

♩ = 140 *p* (ma ben marc.)

(pp) leggiero sempre

(pp) leggiero sempre

pp

\*Alternate rhythmic notation for violin II indicating how its part should sound, within itself. This alternate notation also indicates the correct length of resonance of each note, regardless of the note-values which appear in the actual performance part.

In this case, Carter has attempted to notate two different, but simultaneous sounding metres. And his solution to the problem is deceptively complex. For the sake of convenience and apparent visual simplicity, he notates the entire passage using a 5/4 time signature and with a metric pulse, crotchet=175. However, the actual pulse of the second violin part is crotchet=140 and thus, the simple quavers of the part are forced, into "grotesquely complex durational values", in order that they can fit into the metric structure of the other three instruments. In addition to this, Carter inserts an extra rhythmic cue-line for the second violin in order to show the

actual 'true' rhythms of the part.

What is particularly astonishing about the somewhat confusing nature of this score is, that the musical device itself, that of two metres sounding together, is in fact a rather simple one, and one that is second nature to the musicians of most oral music traditions. But for Carter, within the constraints of the over rationalised and intellectual traditions of notation, the simple device is transformed into a conceptual nightmare. Such is the folly of notation.

The canon of notated composition is filled with cases of similarly confounding notational problems (Kurt Stone and Charles Wuorinen go as far as to find serious problems in the notation of the music of J.S.Bach, Wuorinen 1964; Stone 1963). Such problems have contributed to the ever increasing intellectualisation of musical production and have served to increase both the artistic and the practical separation between the composer and the performer, in many cases to an unreasonably impractical degree. What notation can do is to produce a series of intellectual stages between the performer and the composer which perform, firstly, a deterministic function through the ways in which they distort, restrict and condition the music, and secondly, a rationalising function through the ways in which music is taken further from the realms of oral exchange and expression and into the objective world of the intellect. The process maybe represented by the following series of relationships:

- 1       Composer's Intention - What the composer wants.
- 2       Notational realisation of intention - What the composer feels is possible to notate.
- 3       Notation 1 - What in practice the composer is able to notate.
- 4       Notation 2 - The way in which the notation is read and interpreted by the performer
- 5       Realisation - What is actually played.

Although for many composers such stages are blurred or conceptual, and all are simply elements of an unconscious unified process of composition through notation, in practice, stages 2, 3 and 4, can and often do serve simply as a lengthy and laborious process of communication. In many cases, this communication could be far more economically effected through the incorporation of at least a degree of oral exchange. For the composer, such poor situations would characteristically be those in which he or she has either struggled to find adequate notational means with which to express the music, or those in which the composer has been the victim of the more deterministic forces of notation. For the performer such situations would characteristically be those in which he or she has either struggled to read and interpret that notation to detriment of the quality of the performance, or those in which the music, in its notated form, has been of such a nature that it is aesthetically impossible to comprehend. In any of these cases, a simple dialogue could clearly dispense with such poor practice. This dialogue can release the composer from the restraints and determinisms of the conventions of notated practice within the conservatoire, and it is a dialogue that can both complement and compensate for the limitations of that notation.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter I have outlined some of the principal dangers and limitations of notation-based musical processes. I have discussed such processes not only in terms of the cultural and ideological functions but also in terms of practical functions and the implications they have for the production of music.

By stressing some of the inadequacies of notational processes, whilst acknowledging some of the benefits, I have argued that those processes could be comple-

mented by the development of oral processes in order to redress the cultural balance of our conservatoire music traditions. Such a balance is one that acknowledges that both oral *and* literate processes have an important role to play in musical practice.

## **Summary**

The over-domination of notation, and therefore processes of literacy over oral processes, in Western art music and musicking manifests itself in a cultural imbalance resulting in a number of significant practical and ideological problems. These can be identified in three distinct but interrelated areas:

- (1) In the standardisation and formalisation of the various parameters of music (production problems).
- (2) In the rationalisation and objectivisation of the relations between the various participants in the process of production of a work of music (communication problems).
- (3) In the nature of the work of music as an autonomous work of art and its consequent role within society as that of a rarefied object.

- (1) i. Notation of pitches is ordered according to seven diatonic pitches. The effect of this is that the score increases in complexity with increase in non-white-note pitches, and further still with non-chromatic pitches. Notation of passages containing diatonic, chromatic, and quarter-tones is invariably clumsy and cumbersome.

ii. Rhythms other than those that relate to a regular pulse or deviations from a regular pulse, often require extremely complex and cumbersome notation which can, to all intents and purposes, be almost impossible to accurately and fluidly interpret and perform.

iii. Notation of details of articulation is often both confusing and unspecific. The lack of a standard has resulted in the use of identical symbols to indicate different articulations for different instruments. Partly due to this, details of articulation are generally accorded only a very minor role in the process of composition.

iv. As with articulation, notational details concerning details of timbral characteristics are both unspecific and confusing, similarly limiting their potential functions as central parameters of composition.

v. Composers wishing to extend the range and specificity of the notation of dynamics have had to cope with merely a few, crude and relative, (although generally effective), indications. The result has been, in extreme cases, for composers to produce intense degrees of dynamics (ppppp to fffff, and various complex combinations of indications (see Ferneyhough *Quartet No.2* for example)) within which changes become almost insignificant. As with complex rhythms and pitches, the result has been simply to clutter and to complicate the score.

vi. Notation has an effect of determining and circumscribing the creativity of the composer, firstly due to the way in which it affects the composers' relationship to the music, tending to encourage an overly rational and analytical creative mode. Secondly, because of the way in which it allows for certain qualities of music to be notated efficiently and accurately, and for others not

to be notated at all. This had led to the formation of a notationally determined hierarchy of the compositional value and function of the various different parameters of sound.

vii. Notational systems have reached a stage in their evolution in which they are no longer able to cope with the demands made by many composers.

(2) i. Notation is subject to visual systems of representation. It is, as Chris Cutler says "a medium of the eye, not the ear" (Cutler 1985, 95). And yet it has become the medium through which players communicate - an aural art communicated through a visual symbology.

ii. Musicians within the conservatoire tradition are trained almost exclusively with reference to notation and notated music. As a result, they tend not to develop their oral powers of communication. They cease to be able to communicate with other players in a compositionally creative sense through any processes other than those involving a reference to the concepts of notation.

iii. The relationship between composers and performers is not a dynamic one. It is generally a reasonably static mono-directional flow of information from composer to performer.

iv. The notated score often tends to function as both a visual and aesthetic obstacle between players, and between players and their audience.

v. The exclusive use of notational processes tends to inhibit the role of intuition and intuitive response during creative processes.

(3) i. Notation tends to force all players to acquire musically literate skills if they

are to participate in the conservatoire tradition.

ii. Notation is a technology that grants its user the power to allow and encourage "excessive self-assertion". As such, the technology functions to produce control, mass-production and standardisation of musical process.

iii. Notation promotes a misleading degree of competitive behaviour by encouraging excessive objective analysis of musical symbols. Such analyses tend to be over-rational, abstract and devoid of social content.

iv. The exclusive use of notation seems to encourage social and cultural attitudes which have a tendency to reject, or to be suspicious of music or music-making that is either not notated, or which does not rely on notation.

v. Notation promotes and makes possible the ideal of the autonomous work of art.

vi. Notation provides the means through which the composer can work completely independently from the performer, thereby reinforcing those labour divisions.

vii. Notation is "wholly conscious of itself as an aesthetic exchange" (Cutler 1985, 22). The level of discourse is alienated, conscious, intellectual, and non-participatory.

vii. Notation exhibits a bias towards the characteristics of Yang. It is demanding, aggressive, competitive, rational and analytic. It dominates our conservatoire music and thus results in the impoverishment of those characteristics of Yin: the contractive, responsive, cooperative and synthesising.



## CHAPTER THREE

### THE ROLES OF ORALITY

...although human creativity may appear to be the result of individual effort, it is in fact a collective effort expressed in the behaviour of individuals... (Blacking 1973, 106)

Even if it is not impossible, it is extremely unlikely that any composer could successfully score a composition such as 'Frownland', by the 1960's rock group Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band.<sup>1</sup> To begin with, the notator would be presented with a number of almost insurmountable problems, simply with reference to the movement of the music through time. There is, for instance, no common metre. Each instrumental part simply works its way through the composition in a manner which seems to have little reference to the movement of the other parts. And although at the beginning of the piece there might appear to be some kind assimilable relationship between the various metres, by the time that 30 seconds or so have elapsed any such relationship has vanished and the musical fabric has been reduced to that of a barrage of constantly changing relationships as the individual parts continually adjust their own metre with, seemingly, scant regard for the movements of the others. In addition to this, and in an apparent

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1. Frownland is taken from the *Trout Mask Replica* album. Disc 1969 (reissued 1975). WEA K64026. An extract from this track is included on Dat One accompanying this thesis.

world of its own, there is the outlandish vocal line, which simply 'rides' over the apparent complexities of this texture, but with a randomness that would defy the technical and practical capabilities of even the most dedicated and compulsive notator.

Combined with these rather basic problems, is the challenge to the notator to find adequate symbols with which to indicate the multiplicity of timbral effects and everchanging articulations. These include the wild eccentricities of Beefheart's vocal, the array of guitar effects and nuances, and the resultant ambient noise that seems to 'fill out' and 'energise' the track.

'Frownland' is a dynamic and vitalising piece of music. And that dynamism and energy is derived both from the nature and character of each individual instrumental and vocal part of the music, and from the way in which these retain their own space and identity within a constant process of collision and elision with the other elements of the piece. The result is an organic whole, although it consists of many individual parts.

'Frownland', along with many of the tracks on the album *Trout Mask Replica*, is the result of performances articulating, not simply the notated signs of a composer but of the creative contributions of a number of individual musicians. These musicians bring to the music, not merely their respective abilities to play what they are asked, in the way in which they are asked, but they also bring a degree of their own inventiveness and creative persona that results in the uniqueness of their individual parts. So that in listening to the drum parts, for instance, what we hear primarily are the idiosyncracies of the drummer John 'Drumbo' French. Such idiosyncracies are those that contribute to the specific nature of the music, and which bring to it a special uniqueness that forms the characteristics of the sound world of the Magic Band.

The point is that even if it had been possible for a composer to notate those idiosyncratic parameters of the music, he or she could never have brought to the music the characteristics and idiosyncracies of the individual musicians that form such a basic and fundamental part of its make up. These are not simply performer characteristics that come into play during the interpretation of notated instructions; rather they are characteristics that serve to create and form the music during the composition process. These characteristics are as fundamental to the composition of the music as they are to its performance. For instance, they make the drum lines unmistakably those of French and these would have been different had a different drummer been playing. Indeed, during 1970, when French was no longer playing with the band, the replacement drummer, Artie Tripp, reportedly found it impossible either to reproduce French's previous parts, or to recreate the characteristic sound of those parts in new material. Eventually it led to French being asked to rejoin the group.<sup>2</sup>

'Frownland' exhibits many essential qualities that come directly from the creative personalities of the Magic Band. A single composer, prescribing music through notation, will rarely be able to bring such a multi-layered depth of character and personality to music. The nature of fully notated music, as was shown in the previous chapter, is such that it forces the performer to function merely at an interpretative level, and to bring only the characters of their interpretive selves to the music. Fully notated music thus deprives musicians of a degree of the scope of their creative persona, with the result that music will never be unique to them in quite the same way that 'Frownland' is to the Magic Band.

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2. In an interview with Michael Davis (*Option*, Jan/Feb 1990 #30) French explains that the Magic Band had to work in a variety of ways in order to arrange the music. By the time of recording, all of the parts had been extensively rehearsed with the exception of the vocal.

Despite the fact that the Magic Band was in many ways a somewhat eccentric rock group, they none-the-less exhibited many characteristics that might be considered to be typical of rock groups in general. For instance, the band was essentially collaborative. Each member had a degree of responsibility for their own creative involvement within the band. And players were required to participate in the invention of the music.

What those players would bring to the music, besides their purely technical instrumental skill, was their ability to function creatively as individuals within an ensemble that was, in turn, forged out of the interaction and collaboration of all the participants. So each player was partly responsible for both the creation of their own part and its relationships to, the music created by the rest of the band. And although this may well have been under the guiding influence of a director or producer - in this case John French and Don Van Vliet - the onus was still on the individual player to contribute in real terms to the composition of the music. That 'Frownland', and rock music in general, is like it is precisely because it is the result of this essential degree of collaboration and creative involvement that is, to a great extent, removed from the rigours and formalities of fully notated music. It is dynamic and it is changing, and in these terms it is a music which is built primarily through processes of orality.

Rock music is essentially collaborative. Traditionally, a rock band will develop (i.e. compose) their music collectively and will expect the music to change through time as, together, they gradually develop its feel and its form. Within this process, the various elements of the music will be structured with varying degrees of determination. Certain elements, for instance, may deliberately be left free - free for improvisation during performance or recording; others maybe accorded

certain prescriptive limitations - such as stylistic or structural limitations, whilst still allowing for a degree of improvisation; others still, might develop into strictly and meticulously controlled elements.

Such a composition process generally involves a number of techniques that are quite alien to the conservatoire tradition. A starting point for a track might be a riff, a simple chord sequence, lyric, melody, rhythm or even, simply a sound. This will often function as the basis for a group improvisation from which ideas are drawn that form the basis of the track.

An alternative common practice is that in which the starting point for collaborative work takes the form of a completed song structure consisting of a lyric and vocal line. The job of the group in this case is to 'flesh' it out and to realise it within the context of their own idiosyncratic sound.

Were such a process, which is considered basic and of second nature to the rock musician, to be incorporated within the composition of a work within the conservatoire tradition, it would doubtless be considered both outlandish and suspicious. For example, an equivalent would be for Schubert to have composed only the vocal lines of his songs and to have expected a pianist or ensemble to work out their own accompaniments. And each time a performance took place, that accompaniment would be slightly different due to the natural development of the music, the improvised elements within it, and the conditions and contexts of the performance.<sup>3</sup>

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3. It is important to note that a process such as this is not the same as realising an accompaniment from a figured bass. For with figured bass, the accompanist is required to realise his or her accompaniment within the context of a clearly notated harmonic structure. And although in itself it represents a good balance between what it presents in notated form, and what it requires to be improvised/realised by the performer it still consists of a significant degree of prescriptive notation in a form that is rarely present within the rock idiom.

A practice of this sort would, of course, be considered unthinkable by the majority of the members of the conservatoire establishment. However it is not really any less acceptable or challenging than it is in the rock idiom. In practice, the only significant difference is that the rock musician is trained and skilled in those techniques and processes, whereas the conservatoire musician is not.

### **Improvisation and Collaboration**

Such a way of working is typical of many non-notated musics. In our culture, besides rock music, such collaborative processes are typically the domain of jazz and folk musics, all musics which have historically struggled for recognition beneath the determining and naturalising forces of the institutions of notation. Before discussing the role that such processes might have in the new music of the conservatoire tradition, I will outline some of the more specific qualities of those processes and the effects they have had on the music and musicking of the performers that work with them.

Derek Bailey's compelling compendium of interviews with musicians from a vast range of traditions (Bailey 1980) must surely be evidence enough to convince even the most cynical skeptic of the universality of the celebratory and enriching qualities of the practice of improvisation. He quotes Tony Oxley, the percussionist. "I have no reservations about the value of improvisation. To me it has been the single most liberating factor of my life, socially, politically and musically."(p151) Peter Riley, poet, describes improvisation as "the matching of music with place and occasion"(p123) and Stephane Mallarme as "a poem freed from the apparatus of the scribe."(p152) Bailey himself says of improvisation that it,

has no need of argument and justification. It exists because it meets the creative appetite... and because it involves (the musi-

cian) completely, as nothing else can, in the act of music-making.(p153)

But it has not only been in recent years that such excitement has been generated.

Roland Byrnsid quotes an 18th century critic who described the sensation of experiencing an improvisation by Mozart:

It was to me like the gift of new senses of sight and hearing. The bold flights of his imagination into the highest regions, and again, down into the very depths of the abyss, caused the greatest masters of music to be lost in amazement and delight. (Byrnsid 1975, 285; cit. Small 1977, 285)

And even before the advent of notation, improvisation was still the subject of such comment. St Augustine regarded improvisation as "a free pouring forth on the spur of the moment, of the feeling of a limitless joy" (cit.Ferand 1961, 6), and Amalarius (760-852) simply as, the means through which, "one soul can communicate to another, without reflection, what he feels". (cit. Ferand ibid, 6).

It is no coincidence that improvisation has entered our artistic culture at almost every level. The 1970s and 80s saw the rise of a multiplicity of community orientated radical arts groups such as Community Music, who use improvised contexts as a means through which all members of the community could be involved in the creative process. The Community Music handbook-cum-manifesto, *Search and Reflect*<sup>4</sup>, describes how the emphasis of their musical processes depended "on collaboration" and "on listening to one another, rather than on individual performing skills". Such projects "invite each participant to trust, in a communal and convivial spirit in the musicality which is born in us all". (Small, Forward to *Search and Reflect*).

It is significant that improvisation has also become central to music therapy prac-

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4. Search and Reflect is an unpublished document written edited and compiled by John Stevens, Julia Doyle and Ollie Crook. It contains a Forward by Christopher Small.

tice, and is now regarded as the general musical process through which groups of all ages, abilities and experiences can be brought together in community contexts ranging from schools and hospitals to prisons and youth clubs.

Improvisation, as I have argued, is also central to the practice of rock and jazz musics, to folk music, and to almost every non-Western musical tradition. And it is only during the last 200 years of the formal notated western art-music tradition that the practice of improvisation has been rendered obsolete. So we cannot help but wonder with astonishment then, when one of the most highly regarded musicians of our culture, Pierre Boulez announces that:

With improvisation, because they are purely affective phenomena, there is not the slightest scope for anyone to join in. Improvisation is a personal psychodrama, and is regarded as such. We cannot graft our own affective, intellectual or personal structure on a base of that source. (Boulez 1975; cit.Small 1987, 112 & Dean 1989, 301)

For in that brief statement, Boulez condemns virtually all the music that is either being produced, or that has ever been produced.

### **The Collaborative Mode.**

Group improvisation necessarily implies creative collaboration, and in recent years commentators have tended to move away from accounts of improvisation based simply in terms of the spontaneous creation and performance of music, towards descriptions of it in which that collaborative element is considered as a fundamental and determining characteristic. For instance, in an illuminating discussion, Eric Clarke (Clarke 1992) makes the point that in order to understand the results of improvising it is necessary to understand it as a social as well as a



musical process.<sup>5</sup>

Such an attitude is certainly necessary in order to discuss the results of the Beef-heart example. The sources of such dynamic and surprising music are not merely the individual actions of the improvisers, but rather the social processes of collaboration or involvement in the composition process. Through these processes musicians can make genuine creative decisions that are both appropriate and conducive to the conditions of performance. As Cutler articulates, music produced as part of a genuinely whole collective activity "expresses in a material and reflexive way the unity and identity of its participants" (Cutler 1985, 95). And it is precisely this quality that the listener experiences in 'Frownland' - individual identity and unified whole in dynamic expression, firstly through the degree of the creative interactions of musicians during the process of composition, and secondly, through the various practices of improvisation during performance. Such characteristics of collaborative music will always be necessarily alien to musics produced exclusively through conventional notated means.

These characteristics are outlined by Cutler as those of music belonging to what he calls The Folk Mode:

First: The medium of its musical generation and perpetuation is tradition and is based in human...memory. This mode centres around the EAR and can exist in only two forms: as sound, and as memory of sound.

Second: The practice of music is in all cases an expressive attribute of a whole community, which adapts and changes as the

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5. It might of course be argued that this is true of all music. But the point is that when we refer to improvisation we are referring to a process. And that process is as much a social one as it is a musical one. However, in the case of the performance of conservatoire music, the role of such social processes has been reduced to a minimum. And they certainly have little, if any, bearing on the practice of composition.

concerns and realities it expresses - or as the vocabulary of the collective aesthetic - adapt and change.

Third: There can be no such thing as a fixed or definitive piece of music...consequently there is also no element of personal property, though there is, of course, individual contribution.

Fourth: There is no productive distinction between the roles of composer and performer. The generation and performance of music is a socially seamless and single process and one in which improvisation plays, or has played, a central part. (Cutler 1985, 133)

Now the key concept within this Folk Mode is that of changeability. Because music is in human memory, rather than in notation, it can and will be subject to change - either change that is intentional, such as the result of a collective or individual urge to alter or adapt music for aesthetic, social or practical reasons, or change that is unintentional, such as the natural changes that take place as the social or geographical context of the music changes. But in either case, change operates as a function of the nature of the music as a living and dynamic expression of an artist, collection of artists, or of an entire community. Individuals, groups and communities change, as do the "concerns and realities" of their expressions. As such, if their music is to retain the power of its meanings, it must adapt and change with it.

Consider, for instance, what happens when a music's potential for change is removed. Fred Woods recounts the infamous story from 1903 in which the English Collector, Cecil Sharp reputedly heard his first folk song, *The Seeds of Love*. Sharp took down the words and the music, harmonised the song, and sang it that evening at a choir supper with him playing the piano. One of the gathering is given to have said that it was "the first time the song had been put into evening dress"(cit.Woods 1981, 19).

At the moment that Sharp transcribed that song he took away its ability to be

subject to growth or development. When it was transcribed, it acquired the nature of quantified and specific fact, and in that way it lost its characteristics of dynamism in terms of its relationship to its culture. So that although musicians may continue to produce various new arrangements, or even include improvised elements within a performance, genuine change no longer takes place. These small alterations have a character only of local and transient inflections. The song is no longer a part of the changing traditions of an oral culture. Rather, it is a static historical set piece.

Any collaborative, non-notated music is subject to the same forces. Few rock bands have any desire to perform the same track consistently in the same way throughout their careers. Tracks tend to develop as the group develops. And groups that do not change or develop their material tend to lose any sense of vibrancy they may once have had, and transform into mere empty cliché-ridden show bands, content with replica performances of their previous successes. An example of this is The Troggs. In 1968 they produced the track 'Wild Thing' which has been accorded the status of a 'classic' of pop history. At the time it seemed to be a genuine expression of sexual excitement. However, the group were still extant during the late 1980's, making intermittent appearances on afternoon gossip shows performing 'Wild Thing' in its original form and with original looking instruments. The group looked anything but sincere. They seemed out of touch with the original tensions of the music and the performances are consequently both derisible and embarrassing.

This example is in stark contrast to that of The Everly Brothers. Despite their somewhat unprecedented success as teenybop stars at the start of the 1960s, The Everlys have managed to remain much closer to the dynamic traditions of the American country music tradition than to mass produced pop. And they have

consistently changed and updated their music as a part of a natural process of organic growth. But despite this, The Everlys are constantly expected to perform their 'classics' from those golden years of pop. Such was the case recently when they were reportedly contracted to perform on a popular BBC chat show hosted by the British media celebrity, Terry Wogan. When the producers insisted that they play a medley of their old 'hits', the Everlys simply refused to appear.

That art needs to change and adapt in contemporary Western culture is not, however really in dispute. What is unclear, though, is what our culture considers to be in need of change, and in what ways such change may take place.

Consider, for instance, the way in which works drawn from the canon of music literature are continually subject to occasionally radical reinterpretation. That this continues to occur is at least partly due to the fact that in order for such music to retain its communicative and expressive power it must respond to change both in audience's perception of that music and also to developments in performers' understanding and experience of those historical works. And if this were not to occur, audiences and performers alike would surely begin to tire of such works. But for all its import and initiative, innovation still tends to focus only on certain parameters of those works. *Such parameters are those whose notation, or lack of notation easily allows for change to occur.*

It is here that a contradiction or cultural imbalance becomes apparent. Western art culture understands the need for change, and indeed promotes that change through its tendency to reinterpret old works. Through this, the acknowledgement is made that what might suit the aesthetic climate of one time, may not necessarily suit the climate of another. But the conservatoire continues to be obsessed with

the nature of the notated score as a sacred and rarefied object, the details of which should not be altered in any way. I have already discussed many of the reasons why the notated score is accorded such privilege, but when the quality of change in non-notated music is considered, that is, change that is a function of all parameters of the work, the question must be asked as to why, within the notated tradition, change continues to be limited only to certain non- or loosely-notated parameters. As it is, creative changes in or reinterpretations of notated music take the form of mere inflections of the originals in much the same localised and transient ways as the interpretations of a Sharp song.

Creative artists of oral traditions expect to be able to change their music. This is a necessary process of the art and one which was once a necessary part of the conservatoire art. Consider, for instance, those elements of present conservatoire music that were subject to processes of improvisation during the pre-conservatoire years of the 17th and 18th centuries. The practice of composers such as Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and their contemporaries was to leave a space near the end of a concerto first movement in which a soloist was expected, as Small explains, to "show his or her inventiveness, ingenuity and technical brilliance by improvising an extended passage...based on the musical material of the movement that was nearing its conclusion" (Small 1987, 282).

Today such a practice rarely takes place and realisations generally consist merely of the reiterated performance of previously worked out cadenzas, (which often take the form of transcriptions of 200 year-old improvisations). However, in Mozart's time, improvisation was both expected and considered a necessary part of the creative process, thus allowing performers to engage themselves and the conditions of their performances more fully in the expression of the music.

Even more exasperating than these changes are the examples of contemporary performances of orchestral music and operas of the early 17th century. For such operas, singers were commonly presented with a score outlining simply a melody, an accompanying bass line and a figured bass. And even such scant information was intended to function merely as a base for extemporisation through which, as Small points out, singers and musicians should "invent" their own parts "with due regard for what colleagues were doing as well as for the overall effect" (ibid, 286).

Today's performances exhibit none of these processes, and they take as their foundation merely the notated memories of the expressions of performers long since dead.

### **The Qualities of Oral Processes**

In the previous chapter I outlined the practical and ideological problems associated with the predominance of the processes of notated music over those of non-notated music. I would now like to complement this by outlining some of the specific qualities of oral processes in music in order to clarify the nature and potential of the techniques of improvisation and collaborative composition.

The characteristics of orality in music can be categorised thus:

- (1) In terms of the practical realities of production and performance.
- (2) In terms of the processes of communication and collective

expression.

(3) In terms of the nature of musicking as a dynamic social process.

(1) i. Improvisation allows for the performance of music that could not have been notated.

ii. The use of processes that do not constantly and exclusively refer to notation tends to discourage the dominating influence of the notated parameters of music.

iii. Oral processes offer a relatively simple means through which certain musical events may be communicated and produced - events that would be difficult to communicate through notated means.

iv. Oral processes allow for the characteristics of gesture, articulation, timbre and dynamic to become central parameters of a composition.

v. Oral processes tend to encourage exploration, change and development.

(2)i. Collaborative techniques allow for both individuals and ensembles to express themselves through both the creation and the performance of their music.

ii. Improvisation allows for a group to spontaneously create and project a music that is both transient and unique.

iii. Non-notated music is wholly the subject of the ear, rather than of the eye, thus allowing players to communicate through music, rather than through notation and a composer.

iv. Performers learn to develop and project their own individual creative personalities. Their creativity is not circumscribed by an all-encompassing imposition of composer's directions. Musicians thus develop qualities of uniqueness that make them irreplaceable members of an ensemble - change a player, and you will change both the ensemble and the music it makes.

v. Oral processes develop and promote qualities of intuition.

(3) i. Techniques of improvisation and collaboration carry with them the characteristic qualities of orality.

ii. Through genuine creative collaboration, a composition acquires a sense of celebration of the unity and identity of the ensemble.

iii. Non-literate musicians can take full part in the composition process.

iv. Divisive labour divisions can be broken down - the roles of composer/conductor/performer/copyist etc. all tend to merge during collaborative processes.

v. Non- and part-notated music is free from the temporal restraints of notation. It can respond to changes in circumstance.

vi. Oral processes reduce the role of objectivity and tend to discourage forces of standardisation and mass production.



vii. Through collaborative processes, players learn to more fully understand the music they play.

During the post-war period, there has been an increasing desire by a growing stream of musicians to bring the concepts and processes of orality into the arena of notated music. This has entailed the desire to revitalise the processes of composition, and to relocate the relationships between music as an artistic expression and music as a social process. The tendencies that produced this movement are clear and stem from a renewed interest in oral music cultures which, in turn, has served to emphasise the imbalance of our own notated one. Four fundamental tendencies can be identified:

(1) Growing interest and awareness of non-Western musics, particularly those of Africa and the East and the consequent growth of ethnomusicological study which contributed to a renewed interest, not only in the specific qualities of non-notated music (microtones, complex rhythms etc.), but also in the processes of improvisation and collaborative composition.

(2) Non-western philosophies have fuelled the natural urge of many composers to let go of many, or all of the creative decisions concerning their music, thereby resulting in less autonomous or ego-centered processes.

(3) Growing urge by composers and musicians to bring to music, social and occasionally political expression.

(4) Growing awareness and intensification of the nature and role of the notated score in musical processes, and the consequent, growing separa-

tion between performers, composers and audiences.

Such broad tendencies, as I have argued, prompted a radical challenge to the naturalised processes of the conservatoire tradition. It was, in effect, a challenge to the very fundamental principles and premises of the processes of notated music. In these terms, the reintroduction of improvisation and creative collaboration can be considered, more than anything else, the single most important and monumental trend in 20th century music. No change in a musician's perspective is likely to be greater than one which involves the realisation that music need not be written by a single person, but may be the result of a collaboration, and which need not be scored note for note, but which may be open to improvisation and change. This is the most important lesson to be learnt from the experiments of the post-war period, and from non-Western and non-notated music. So it is to a discussion of the various techniques and processes of such collaborative work that I now turn my attention.

### **The Role of Improvisation and Collaborative Processes in the music of the Post-war Period**

Composers have attempted to use many techniques in order to incorporate oral processes into notated music and this has involved the development of a variety of new types of scores.

#### **(1) Scores that 'point' to music**

More often than not, notation merely outlines a degree of the quality and detail of the music that is to be performed. But despite this, it still exhibits a largely deterministic nature that often leaves little room for compositionally creative manipulation by the performer.

So one of the basic techniques developed in scores throughout the post-war period, was that which involved a dramatic 'loosening' of the determining precision of notation. The notation of such scores is that which, rather than describing in detail the vital characteristics of an event or sound, merely indicates certain limits within which a performer is free to make creative decisions. For instance, a typical device is for a score to ask for the kind of thing that is to be played, without actually notating it in detail. So, if a complex, fast-moving texture is required, as in Theo Loevendie's *Aulos*, the score simply asks the ensemble to play fast changing short-note improvisations. In such a way, the score could be said to 'point' to the detail, without actually stating it.

David Behrman discusses Morton Feldman's *Durations 1*, which incorporates this 'pointing' characteristic. In this case, the pitches to be played are notated with the precision of a traditional score. But the musicians are allowed, or rather, required to play through the material at their own rate. Such a form which Behrman calls race-course form ("start together, move independently, stop when you reach the finish line") allows players to listen to one another, and, as Behrman states, "reach a broad understanding concerning their overall rate of movement...*resulting in...*a sense of ensemble which has to do in part with the musical background common to composer and players, in part with the nature of what they are playing." (Behrman 1965, 76/77)

A similar, though more complex, process is effected through the score of Terry Riley's *In C*. In this case the score consists of 53 conventionally notated riffs that are played by all members of an ensemble of any instrumental combination. Each player works systematically through the 53 riffs repeating each one as many or as few times as s/he wishes before moving on to the next. The performance ends when all players have reached the final riff.

So in this piece, the score 'points' to the relationships between the players and to the overall length and structure of the realised composition. This is achieved by leaving these elements open to improvisation and interaction within the limits of general guidelines and direction. As the players play through the material, they naturally make decisions whether to continue repeating a riff or to move on to the next riff, depending on the sound and the progress of the entire ensemble. Through such a process, a music is built up which consists of an ever changing complex of overlapping metres and, as Behrman articulates "a teaming world of groups and sub-groups forming, dissolving, and reforming" (Behrman, Sleeve note to disc *IN C*, Columbia MS 7178).

Despite the fact that, technically, the music is relatively simple, musically it is extremely demanding and its quality during performance is largely reliant upon the qualities of interaction within the group. So, in this way, it focuses upon qualities of musicality, rather than on technicality, and more upon collaboration and communion than on separation and autonomy. The score is masterful both in this respect, and in the way through which it communicates a music of such a complex and dynamic nature, simply through relying upon the qualities of human, oral exchange. By way of contrast, for instance, consider how inappropriate, impractical and cumbersome the score would have been had it been entirely written out.

## (2) Scores which function in a descriptive or discursive manner.

During the post-war period, composers were constantly attempting to find the means through which they could more adequately describe their music. And many composers devised scores in order to do this. They developed scores through which they attempted to 'talk' to musicians, or to have a dialogue with them through explaining

the musical processes, anticipating performers' questions, answering those questions and thus attempting to illicit a particular type of performance.

*Ante-axis* (1975) by the New Verbal Workshop (published in Johnson 1981) is typical of such a score. The score simply consists of written instructions outlining the sorts of sounds that maybe played (sound elements), a rough idea of form, and the way in which the sounds should progress throughout the piece.

This work necessarily involves a great deal of improvisation, but improvisation that is based on and that is with reference to a preplanned scheme. In this way the score also embodies that characteristic of pointing. As with *In C*, the details of the score outline, with as much detail as is required, the sort of music that should be produced. And what are left 'open', are the precise details of the second-by-second processes of the music and the nuances of the interactions between the players.

The beauty of *Ante-axis*, besides the fact that the score succinctly 'points' to textures that would be almost impossible to traditionally notate, is that it allows for non-notation reading musicians to take a full part in a performance; the music is as performable by a group of non-reading children, as it is by the L.S.O. All that is required is an 'open ear' and a willingness to take part. However, despite such openness and performability, the score still manages to present a degree of form and substance that will offer genuine musical challenges to even the most experienced performer, and the success of the performance is still reliant upon the collective ability and skill of the ensemble.

### (3) 'Inspirational' Text and Graphic Scores

It is with 'inspirational' text scores, such as Stockhausen's *Aus den seiben Tagen* in

which the performer is simply presented with a series of short 'inspiring' texts, that the relations between the composer, the score, and performer/improviser are least clear. This is due to the often confused status of determinism with reference both to the score itself - how literally is the given material to be interpreted - and to the actual improvised material of the performer - what is actually improvised as a response to the score. And the issue is further confused by the added dimension of the indeterminate production of sound. Thus there are a multitude of purely philosophical problems concerning such issues as the status of the 'composer' as 'creator' of the scores versus the performer as the 'creator' of the music.

However, despite these problems, such scores are clear in that they place the responsibility for creativity firmly in the hands of the performer and away from the composer. And in this way, they represent a clear rejection of the premises and practicalities of the traditions of notation. However, in practice, the almost limitless range of possibilities set up by these scores means that performers tend to be overwhelmed with the demands of decision making which suffers from the lack of a clear musical focus.

#### (iv) Scores which prescribe non-musical processes

Many of the scores produced by the experimentalists tended to be more overtly concerned with the idea of removing any and all kinds of musical constraints from the processes of performance. These scores thus solve all the problems of notation by simply avoiding the issue altogether. With the premise that any sound is as good and as valid as any other ("once you make a value judgment, that is all you have" - John Cage), processes were set up that created situations in which sounds were allowed to occur "naturally" and without premeditated intention.

These scores are rarely concerned with the specific nature of the sound of the impro-

vised music and tend to be more concerned with the conditions in which the sounds were produced. The control of the music is, by and large, removed from the hands of all the performers involved in the process, and simply left to chance or the result of arbitrary decision.

The above notational practices all clearly led to a changing relationship between those elements which were determined by the composer, and those which were determined by the performer. It is the nature and quality of this relationship, and the way in which the relationship is indicated or implied through the score, which is most significant in terms of the success of compositionally collaborative processes. The success of these relationships, both in terms of musical and practical characteristics, largely dictates the success of the music. As I will show through the following examples, much of the music produced using those notational processes outlined above, although often successful in their own terms and within certain contexts, in practice ultimately failed to convince the mainstream traditions of the liberating potential of collaborative and improvisatory processes due to an imbalance in those relationships.

#### **Earle Brown: *Event-Synergy 2*(UE 5302)**

*Event-Synergy 2* is typical of a composition that attempts to forge a dynamic, collaborative relationship between the composer, the conductors, and the performers. To this effect Brown states in the score:

that each 'final form', which each performance necessarily produces, (should) be a collaborative adventure, and that the work and its conditions of human involvement remain a 'living' potential of engagement.

The score thus consists of many elements, written and notated, which have, at

first, the appearance of coordinating a composition which will indeed be a dynamic "collaborative adventure".

*Event Synergy 2* is for 19 instrumentalists (strings and wind), divided into two groups, each with its own conductor. The score consists of eight sections of material (4 for wind, 4 for strings) that are notated through both graphic and proportional means. Each section consists of a number of events that maybe played independently.

The process through which the music maybe put together is described in thorough detail in the written part of the score. The conductors are given control over many parameters of the music - they are free to decide, during performance, when, where, and by whom, certain events are to be played; they can start and stop the performance of events at any time; and they have control over the speed and dynamic intensity of the music and may introduce a fermata at any time.

The conductors have the freedom to respond to each other, and to the conditions and mood of the performance. They have control over the form and structure of the music and over its rate of passage through time and relative loudness.

Surprisingly however, the performers find themselves to be rather more restricted than this. Obviously they are obliged to obey the directions of the score and also of the conductor. But those directions are extensive and leave almost no room for creative involvement by the performers. In practice, such involvement is reduced to just three instances:

1. In sections 1, 2, and 4, the notation is time proportional and thus the performers may be 'flexible' in their interpretation of the



rhythms. But even so, the score dictates that they must "act without hesitation on the basis of their perceptions", thus forbidding the performer to make any but spontaneous decisions.

2. In sections 2 and 4, the performers are given various degrees of freedom regarding pitch, although the actual gestural qualities are graphically notated and the articulations, especially those for the strings, are precisely notated.

3. In section 4a, the performers may move freely about the page "playing sensitively in relation to others", and with a degree of freedom in dynamics and instrumental techniques. However, they may only do this when cued by the conductor.

Besides these three instances, there is no freedom for the performers to interact or to collaborate in any way whatsoever. They must simply follow the dictates of the score and of the conductors.

So it is really only the conductors who have any compositionally creative control over the music during rehearsal and performance. And it is only the two conductors who are really able to collaborate. And even that element of collaboration and decision making is really rather artificial and pointless. The sort of decisions that the conductors are 'allowed' to make are those concerning form, in the rather crude manner of deciding in what order the events should be played, and how much of the events should be played.

We might wonder why it is that this element is left free. Brown has written that he

sees form as "a function of people acting directly in response to a prescribed environment" (cit. Nyman 1974, 48). But this score does not really allow for that process to take place with any degree of creative depth. All it allows for is the simple ordering of pre-described events in time. And although this can often be a genuinely useful and creative process, in this case it is not one that contributes in any significant way to the creative scope of the performance. Indeed, in this case, such real time decisions, especially when used with relation to complex material, tend merely to subject the players to a degree of unnecessary performance stress. They are required to learn and respond to a vast array of complex conductor signals that are outlined in the score, and which refer merely to a process that boasts no genuine musical or social advantages at all. And that process simply detracts from the players' concentration on the more creative aspects of the music - aspects such as the interpretation of the proportional notation.

Music such as *Event Synergy 2* tends to be confusing and irritating to conduct and perform. Whilst it is clearly intended as a collaborative work, in practice it is nothing of the sort. It performs none of the collaborative functions that Brown seems to be aiming at, but simply places intensely complex demands on the performers, none of which contribute in any practical way to the creativity of either the ensemble, or the composition process.

A fundamental problem with *Event synergy 2*, and many other scores of this type, is that it maintains an uneasy balance between its 'traditional' nature, as a score as a document of prescription that can easily leave the hands of the composer and be interpreted by an ensemble, and as a score which functions as a basis for collaborative group work that involves, not so much the carrying out of instructions, but the collaborative forming of a music about the ideas of the score. In effect, the

result is a score that functions in a more or less conventional manner, with the exception that in this case, instructions are extended from indicating simply what should be played, to how creative decisions should be made.

**Cornelius Cardew: *Autumn '60* (UE 15444)**

Cornelius Cardew's work throughout the 1960s was almost entirely motivated towards performer involvement in the creative process. *Autumn '60* displays typical techniques through which he attempted to break down the barriers between composer and performer.

The composition may be performed by any number and by any kinds of instruments. These are then 'controlled' by the conductor through a variety of means. For instance, the conductor is allotted control over many of the parameters of the music. He or she indicates the beat, where and when the performers should start and stop their playing, and the manner in which each section should be interpreted. This allows, for example, that the conductor may introduce a section in which the instruction is that all players should play through their material as fast, or as slow as possible, but each at their own rate. Thus in many ways the conductor serves a somewhat traditional role, as one who coordinates the decisions affecting the progress of the entire group.

The players, however, have a slightly more unusual role. Each bar contains between 1 and 7 indications concerning various parameters of the music. The musicians are advised to ignore two indications and then to work out what they are to play, taking into account those indications that remain. In effect, this gives enormous freedom for them to literally 'compose' their music within reasonably

minimal guidelines. For example, one bar may ask simply for a staccato articulation, another for a long sound with a sharp cut off, another, simply for a crescendo. Once they have devised their parts, the players can then write it on a clean stave which is conveniently situated beneath the notated part of the score.

What is particularly liberating about this score is that it acknowledges the uniquenesses of individual musicians. It acknowledges the fact that they are all characterised by the particular idiosyncracies of their technique and musicality, and that by bringing such idiosyncracies into play in a composition, a music can be created that is, in itself, unique and partly determined as a function of the personalities of those musicians. It allows for novice technicians to play with those who are perhaps more technically experienced, and yet still to find their own voice. It encourages them to explore the sonic possibilities of their instrument, to consider the structure of the sounds they produce, and, of course, allows for a music to be produced that may incorporate complex rhythmic and pitch structures, and a variety of sonic detail whose intricacies in themselves could not possibly have been notated. Simply the instruction to play material at your own rate, for example, can result in a texture with as many simultaneous metres as there are players - a texture which, as Carter shows us, does not easily lend itself to formal notation.

But for all its qualities, *Autumn '60* is unsatisfactory as a score for a dynamic, collaborative music. Despite the fact that the performers have a great deal of freedom, and that the overall structure of the music is open to experimentation and discussion, there exists no basis for genuine creative collaboration between the musicians themselves. This is due to the fact that the actual sound of the music at any one point is fairly arbitrary. The structural limits are such that they allow for almost any element of the music to sound with any other, at any time. And that structure fails to allow for experimentation and decision making with

reference to those consequent textural parameters of the music. So despite the careful and specific nature of the work carried out during the early stages of the working process, this has the effect of producing a music which, in practice, exhibits very few characteristics that sound either composed, or the result of a collaboration. And the aural effect of the music tends to be more akin to that of a rapidly changing improvisation, simply ordered through a few, crude structural points.

It seems a shame that, after having worked out their parts so precisely, the musicians and conductor shouldn't have more control over how they should fit together, rather than it being largely a function of an arbitrary process. For it is precisely in the area of texture that group collaborative processes come into their own. And a simple guideline or direction in this area could enhance the composition enormously.

This is typical of a composition which incorporates a great deal of prepared and specific material, of which the details become largely unimportant due to the imposition of arbitrary processes at a late stage in the process. As with so many scores of that ilk, those processes tend to overwhelm the effect of all the work that has already been done. Certainly, it is due to those processes that Cardew's 12-page score fails to result in anything that could not have been easily created through a simply directed improvisation outlined on the back of an envelope.

Both *Event Synergy 2* and *Autumn '60* exhibit the same fundamental problem. This is one which stems from a lack of understanding or awareness of the practical and necessary relationships of collaboration. In these scores, details for performer interaction and collaboration are thrust upon the members of the ensemble.

bles. Performers are told explicitly how and when they are to interact. But if an ensemble is to be a creative and dynamic organism, it must organise its own relations and modes of relations so that they are free to change and to adapt to its specific needs and conditions. And the job of the score should be to acknowledge this and to promote the development of those relationships.

### **Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Aus den sieben Tagen***

Whelan Cardew might be criticised for providing an excess of notated material with respect to the aleatoric nature of the resultant music, Karlheinz Stockhausen, with his '*Aus den sieben Tagen*', might be criticised for providing too little. As I have argued, these compositions consist simply of a series of short texts written by Stockhausen that are intended to serve as cues for intuitive improvisation. But it is, unfortunately, as true today as it was in 1968, when they were composed, that the majority of conservatoire-based musicians do not have the necessary skills with which to cope with the demands of a composition involving so much, albeit intuitive, improvisation. There is absolutely no doubt that inexperienced improvisers will produce merely lack-lustre, cliché-ridden performances thereby sending their audiences to sleep and inciting critics such as Boulez and Harvey to produce damning inditements of the creative potential of improvisation. One would not expect a 3-chord guitarist to perform Mozart without a good deal of practice. Similarly, it is foolish to expect the standard orchestral musician, accustomed solely to the practices of notated music, to perform an inspirational text piece without a similarly good deal of practice.

So we might wonder who such pieces should be performed by. As with all Stockhausen's works, the first performances were by his own, closely-knit entourage of

'expert' musicians. But outside of that group, there are few musicians who are experienced and skilled enough to undertake the performance and who are likely to do so. For a text such as "play in the rhythm of the universe" can, for all intents and purposes, be replaced by any quasi-mystical starting point. And once a player has all the skills and experience with which to create and produce their own music entirely through improvisation, it is unlikely that they are going to draw anything from a composer unless it will result in a genuine enhancement of their processes of creativity. And Stockhausen's texts do not really offer this. They in fact offer no more than a personal statement about Stockhausen's own musical preferences, and, as Maconie says, his "composing philosophy"(Maconie 1976, 254)<sup>6</sup>.

## Conclusion

The three compositions, outlined above, all attempt to involve performers in creative processes in radically differing ways. And they each form part of a movement that acknowledged both the contradictions and inadequacies of the notated, conservatoire tradition, and which attempted to provide genuine practical solutions to some of those problems. Now I do not want to suggest that the work of composers such as Brown, Cardew, and Stockhausen has no value. For the efforts and initiatives of such musicians contributed enormously to an understanding of the limitations of full notation and the possibilities of non-notation based

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6. Stockhausen quite deliberately uses the term Intuitive Music to apply the text pieces. "Joint concentration on a written text of mine", he says, "provokes the intuitive faculty in a clearly defined manner" (Texte III, pp123-4, Quoted in Maconie 1976 p.252). He attests, therefore, that the pieces in fact have nothing to do with improvisation. For him, improvisation conjures up images of "underlying structure, formulae, and peculiarities of style". However, his argument not only displays a degree of circularity but also fails to provide any reason why a performer's intuitive faculty should be particularly provoked by a text of his over and above that by anyone else.

process. And many of the scores produced by such composers boast many qualities and characteristics that can result in joyful, creative and invigorating performances. And despite the varying problems of such scores, some of which I have outlined here, they still provide a good deal of scope for musicians of varying abilities to become at least partly involved in the creative processes of music. But ultimately they are all lacking in terms of the relationships between the various members of the artistic process. For in each of these pieces, and in many others produced during the years of the experimental tradition, there exists an uneasy and inappropriate balance between those elements that are notated, and those that are not. And as I have argued throughout this thesis, problems tend to occur within a system not due to ideas, processes, or forces being bad in themselves, but due to imbalances between complementary ideas, processes and forces.

It is such an imbalance which permeates so much post-war music and that lies at the root of so many of the problems of the composer-performer-audience relationship. For once music breaks free from the standard notational system (which it is in the process of doing and inevitably must continue to do), the important question concerns not how we notate music, but what we notate of the music. For instance, there is no point in expertly notating vast quantities of it if that notated music is not going to be heard due to the effect of chance processes. And there is no point in asking performers to make decisions if those decisions are not of the sort that benefit by being made in real time during performance. What performers need are scores that allow them to bring into the compositional arena those qualities that will both enhance and contribute to the composers' basic ideas. Such qualities are those that technically could not or need not be notated and those that, creatively, belong to or come from the players themselves.



Composers and musicians alike need to develop an awareness of, and respect for, each others essential uniquenesses, both in terms of what they can, and what they cannot, do. And whilst there is rarely a good substitute for a single guide or director within a creative project, there is likewise no substitute for dialogue and experimentation within that project. Situations in which a composer might bring his or her knowledge of structure and form, of material and direction, are well complemented by a performer's knowledge of their own instrument and instrumental preferences, as well as the idiosyncracies of their technique. And this is further enhanced by the benefits of the real time dynamic relationships of two or more musicians working together.

The common complaint of composers to interactive composition tends to be based on a reluctance to allow creative control to slip from their own hands and into those of the compositionally untrained performer. This is understandable if we consider the many disastrous results of the collaborative experiments of the past. But if we consider the reasons for the failure of much of that work then the picture looks a little different. For the problems of such works were not inherent in the nature of collaborative work per se, but were due to the specific nature of many of the compositions and the ways in which those compositions were communicated through the notated scores. And if we take into account the many successes of collaborative work, such as for example Terry Riley's *In C* or Stockhausen's *Stimmung* in which the performers are drawn into immensely rich and creative modes of performance through clear economical and succinct scores, then we cannot help but wonder about the reticence of such composers to 'let go' of some of the specifics of their notational practice. Working with performers, and producing scores in which those performers have a genuine collaborative and creative role, does not necessarily result in anarchic or chaotic results. Nor does it necessarily result in the composer losing sight of an aesthetic overview. Once the

conditions have been correctly set up, and performers have been well prepared, composers are able to enter a whole new world of dynamic creativity that benefits not only themselves, but also the performers, and their audiences.

The task of perfecting the balance in any composition between constraint and freedom can now be considered to be one of the major factors governing the production of any score. It is a question of identifying, on the one hand, what is necessary and essential, as well as practicable to notate, and on the other, what should advisedly be left to a performer or an ensemble to realise. This thesis is concerned with an examination of such relationships in those situations in which such a balance is achieved and in those in which it is not.

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## **PART TWO**

### **IMPROVISATION, EXPERIENCE AND RELATIONSHIP**

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **IMPROVISATION, EXPERIENCE AND RELATIONSHIP**

**If I were to dare to pray to the almighty to grant me one more earthly joy, it would be that I might again hear Mozart improvise.(a contemporary of Mozart, cit. Small 1987, 285)**

#### **Introduction**

Before discussing the more overtly practical considerations of balance between the relationships involved in composition (presented in Parts 3 and 4 of this thesis), I will consider some of the fundamental experiential and interactional aspects of those relationships as they occur in the practice of improvisation. For it is through improvisation that musicians acquire and develop those essential skills that form the basis of any creative collaborative venture. As a practice, improvisation embodies not only intuitive and instinctual processes, but also distinctly formal and traditional processes. And these processes function both with reference to a basic experiential understanding of music as well as to more conventional, learnt or objectified understanding of music. The skills and qualities required and acquired by the improviser are those that serve to underpin all aspects of his/her creative group work; intuition, experience and freedom through interaction, relationship and restraint.

By way of introduction to such qualities of improvisation I suggest that you, the reader, take a little time out to listen to the first improvisation on *Dat One*, (cas-

sette one)<sup>1</sup>. This is the track that follows 'Frownland'. For a moment put down this text, push it to one side and turn the music up. Follow the advice that Italo Calvino gives to his readers (Calvino 1982, 9). "Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade". For a while simply allow yourself to become immersed within the music. Wherever you are sitting, be it an office, lounge, study or library, just turn off your reading mind, put your feet up, and listen. Do not attempt to analyse the music. Do not try to compare it to other improvised music. Do not try to assess it in your personal terms of the evaluation of music.

## **Experience**

Improvisation, as I have already said, is about experience. It is first and foremost an activity, a practice and a sharing, a sharing between intuition and technique, between individual and collective, between performers and audience. It is an immensely personal activity. To improvise is to release, to express, to feel and to form, to create space, to fill and explore space, to find paths of uniqueness, paths of change, paths of exchange. The improviser is at the centre, the improvisation flows out, interacts, weaves its way through the ears of others, changes, transforms and moves. It is unique, the expression is unique, the act is unique.

It is partly due to the nature of improvisation as a basically experiential, and therefore personal activity, that there is such a wide range of viewpoints concerning its practice. And I have yet to find two improvisers who are in absolute agreement about its functions, roles, meanings, qualities and characteristics.

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1. The recorded examples of improvisations, I1, I2, I3 etc. are on Dat One. Appendix One includes a brief summary of all the taped examples.

There are those who insist upon absolute freedom, those who reject reference to tonality or steady metric rhythm, those who insist upon various formal modes of improvisation, upon the inclusion of various traditional or extended techniques, those who insist upon defined limits, or those who insist that those limits can only hinder expressive processes. The list is endless. And it is reasonable to assume that for every improviser there is likely to be a unique viewpoint, a deeply personal reason for wishing to improvise and an idiosyncratic view of their relationship to others within a collective improvisation. This is what Derek Bailey's (Bailey 1980) book acknowledges. And it is such an acknowledgement that must lie at the root of an understanding of the nature of improvisation. For improvisation is essentially a thing of which there can be no complete understanding, of which any definition will be ultimately lacking, and which, by its very nature, must constantly elude formal or rigorous all encompassing theories or models for analysis.

Improvisation No.11 is typical of an improvisation by the London-based Clarinet Quartet, No Strings Attached. It was played as a warm-up for a recording session that took place at the end of a collaborative composition project (see Ch.9, p191), and therefore served many functions.

Firstly, as a means through which individual players could warm-up both themselves, their instruments, and their creative skills.

Secondly, as a means to play into the relationships between the members of the ensemble and to open up the paths of musical communication.

Thirdly, as a means by which the players could express themselves and relax within the formal and unfamiliar terrain of the recording studio.

Fourthly, to enable the recording engineer (myself) to adjust the recording balance of the ensemble.

Once having improvised this music, the ensemble passed a few short comments concerning their feelings about it. And these summed up to a general feeling that the improvisation had been reasonably good and that, certainly, they had enjoyed playing it. The following five hours were spent recording other music.

The events surrounding this improvisation were simple. The members of the ensemble arrived. They were in reasonably good moods. They naturally decided to begin this session with a short improvisation. They improvised. They felt good. The event was essentially an experiential one - the experience of improvisation. I was present at this session, but I was not improvising. My mind was focussed upon the knobs and buttons in the recording console. And I was listening to the improvisation with an engineer's ear. My critical awareness of the improvisation came later through listening to the recording, which is a fundamentally different experience. For you, the reader, the experience is different still. You have encountered the music within the context of a written text. You have been instructed to listen to it. And you have been given little information concerning it. The functions are different still.

You may have enjoyed listening to this piece. You may have resented being instructed to listen to it. You may have wondered why you were being asked to listen to it. You may have constructed many reasons for yourself as to why you were being asked to listen to it. You may have flicked through the pages of the thesis in order to try to find out whether it would be worthwhile spending ten minutes of your valuable time listening to a mere recording of an improvisation. You may have hated the music. You may have become angry that expensive tape

should have been wasted on it. You may have heard similar improvisations many times before and thought, "oh no, not another one like this!" And of course, being in a reading mode, you may have decided to skip the listening, to read on and to do all the listening when you had finished reading the written part of the thesis. But if this was the case I urge you either to return to page 79 and to put your headphones on, or to stop reading this chapter and to return to it only when your attitude is a little more responsive.

The point about any response that you may have had to the improvisation, is that it will have been both personal and unique. This is a response that was based on the experience of both encountering and listening to the improvisation within a particular context - the experience of hearing the music, or of listening to the music, or of being involved in a reading process through which you were instructed to listen to the music. The contexts of those experiences and the consequent ways in which you have reacted to those experiences has inevitably affected your appreciation and understanding of the improvisation. Experience is dependent upon context. Improvisation is concerned with experience. And as contexts change, so to does experience. And this is one of the major problems that underlies any discussion of improvised music. The experience of the conditions and of the context always contribute to the nature of the improvisation.

Improvisation is a functional art. It does things to the people who take part in it. It takes account of, and it changes, human relationships. And it is therefore inevitable that any discussion of it (other than a merely shallow discussion of its purely aural characteristics) must inevitably involve a degree of 'you had to be there'-ness about it. This is certainly the case with many of the discussions within Bailey's book. Improvisation is defined by its context. If you are there, if you experience the conditions, if you are part of the relationships then you will understand.



The improvisation and writing about improvisation that is presented within this chapter is therefore offered with a number of simple, practical and clear intentions:

Firstly, to demonstrate the types and kinds of improvisations that are typical of those that have supported the composition projects that are outlined in Part Three of this thesis.

Secondly, to demonstrate that the skills involved in the practice of improvisation are those that underpin any kind of creative group work.

Thirdly, to outline the nature of some of those skills. In particular to outline those skills that contribute to the ability of musicians to communicate, to exchange ideas and to effect both individual and collective expression through non-verbal and non-notated means.

Fourthly, to demonstrate that improvisation is an activity that relies upon a particular quality of relationship and experience. It is an activity that is dependent upon the balance between the qualities of the intellect and the qualities of intuition.

### **Expression, Response and Technique**

Through improvisation musicians can learn to create, to express inner thoughts feelings and emotions and to interact with others in intensely personal and immediate terms.

Improvisation can function as therapy, as an essential outpouring of tension and

feeling. It can be a dangerous and revealing practice. Anyone who has performed a sincere and intense solo improvisation before an audience knows only too well that it draws not only upon technical resources, but also upon personal emotional resources. And although it has the power to uplift and to invigorate the improviser, it likewise has the power to drain him or her of those resources. Such is the immediate and heartfelt intensity of the practice.

Such characteristics are those of improvisation as an intuitive, responsive and unrestrained activity. But this is only half of the picture. For if improvisation was a practice that relied solely upon these qualities, then in order to develop as an improviser musicians would need to develop only in terms of the quality of their intuitive and responsive selves. And for most musicians this is clearly not the case. The other half of the picture is concerned with the more overtly technical musical characteristics of improvisation: those that concern the ability of the improviser to articulate sound through formal, conventional or traditional modes. Such technical skills draw upon the improviser's experience and knowledge of the resources and practices of the world's musics. These are resources that feed and inform the intuitive and expressive sense of the improviser. And they enable him/her to articulate their music more carefully, confidently, and assuredly in relation to others.

Such considerations relate to that old adage which is often forwarded by the unconfident, undisciplined improviser: "I don't know what I'm doing; I don't know how to improvise". On the one hand, this can be answered by saying, "there is nothing to know; let your intuition be your guide". But on the other hand it must be answered with reference to an acknowledgement that a knowledge of certain formal modes of improvisation can enable such a musician to more easily reach richer areas of intuitive expression. For example, a player within an ensemble who is unsure of his/her contribution to the whole might, on the one hand, be

able to develop if they simply were to stop worrying about what they were doing and just got on with the job. But on the other hand, they might perhaps be able to develop more effectively if they began to acquire certain formal considerations of improvisation such as a greater understanding of the appropriateness and resources of role playing skills in ensemble work. For if that player learns to experience an ensemble as a unit constituting many roles, and develops a knowledge of such roles, then they have at least a formal understanding of the ways in which they might relate to the other members of the ensemble and thus contribute to the whole.

Similarly a somewhat objective understanding of a vast melange of other techniques and characteristics can further the capabilities of an improviser. This might include an understanding of the role that silences can play in improvised music; that it may be useful to restrict certain parameters of one's own playing, that a simple structural role is as important as a glowing soloistic role, that the use of a motivic element may lead to a development in an organically evolving way, in a repetitive way, or through a process of block shifts; and most importantly, that an improvisation need not actually involve reference to any formal techniques.

Such considerations can and often do contribute to the quality of a player's improvising. And although a knowledge of them will not necessarily result in a good improviser, or in good improvisation, they certainly can provide clues as to how a player's improvising may develop and to how an ensemble might explore and develop its group relations. Further, a consideration of such characteristics can also serve well to offset, often in a refreshingly therapeutic way, the equally important intuitive characteristics.

Of course, balance is the key. And improvisation often encourages such balance. On the one hand there exists the personal, intuitive, emotional, and expressive

qualities of presentation and performance. But on the other, there are externally learnt or developed processes and modes of playing that combine to form the technical resources through which the intuitive can function. Attaining a creative balance between such apparently opposing characteristics is one of the major challenges facing the improviser. It is a question of being able to improvise with reference both to those internal/expressive qualities and to those external/formal qualities. The improviser needs to constantly challenge him/herself through a development with reference to both those qualities and in terms of the relationships between them. It is only through constant growth and development of this kind that one's improvisation can flourish and retain its liberating, expressive therapeutical and communicative power.

Improvisation No.12 (Dat One) is in someways a product of such a balance. This was improvised by the clarinettist, Neyire Ashworth, from the clarinet quartet 'No Strings Attached'.

As an improviser, Neyire has a tendency towards more intuitive playing. She is an improviser who believes in playing from the heart - in releasing tension, feeling and sense through a continuous intuitive flow or gesture. But she has also acquired certain characteristic techniques and patterns of improvising that function to provide an assured technical and structural framework through which she can channel her expression - a kind of formal safety net serving to provide intensifying limits.

The example exhibits many qualities that are the result of such an intensely focussed mode of improvising, and the degree of structural coherence is, in many ways, quite astonishing.

Neyire exclusively uses a small cluster of pitches in the bottom two octaves of the clarinet register. These pitches seem to function as a focussing epicentre. Throughout the improvisation Neyire seems to focus all her energy upon the Bflat/Bnatural dyad as though toying with the relationship through shifting the emphasis from one to the other and back, stretching it from rapidly repeating staccato figures to sustained drawn out figures. Undoubtedly, it is the formal limitation of these pitches, combined with natural responsiveness of Neyire's playing, that contributes to the vibrancy of the music.

Looking more closely at the improvisation, and especially the transcription (Score I2, p90), it is possible to identify a plethora of further formal characteristics which have contributed to the intensity of the improvising. For example, consider the improvisation in terms of motivic development. The opening motif can be divided into two parts, 'a' and 'b'. Between these two there seems to be a natural tension. At first 'a' appears to be merely an upbeat to 'b'. But it also exhibits an urge to break free from this role and to develop in its own right. At one level the improvisation evolves through a play on the tension between these two roles.

Throughout the first three lines of music we hear a development of both 'a' and 'b' as they attempt to gain independence from each other. At (i), 'a' makes a bid for independence. By this stage it has moved up the octave to the register of 'b'. Such a move can be thought of as one of increased confidence. This is confidence that 'a' can hold its own ground in the registral territory that has so far been dominated by 'b'. When 'a' finally resolves onto 'b' again at (ii), we realise for the first time the significance of the relationship between the two ideas. Whilst 'a' has moved to the register of 'b', 'b' has developed a quality that derives from 'a'. This is the semi-quaver descent B to B-flat evolving out of the microtone deviations of the 'b' figure that occurred earlier in the improvisation. Suddenly 'b' is

heard not as a separate entity, but as a developed form of 'a'.

This is a significant point in the improvisation. Out of this event a new figure emerges - 'c'. If the figure at (ii) can be thought of as a prolongation of 'a', then the figure at (iii) is a contraction of 'a'. It is as though the tension created through the move, (i) through (ii), releases in the flourish at (iii). The improvisation subsequently develops this new figure and its relationship to the original motivic ideas. At (iv), 'c' is played in the context in which might have expected 'b'. Thus, we recognise an element of 'b' within 'c'. At (v) the scope is widened even further through the introduction of a new pitch, c, and a return to an emphasis on 'b'.

During (vi) through (vii), the original 'a'+ 'b' motif becomes reversed. 'a' is now played as a resolution of 'b'. It is out of this gesture, with the weight of 'b' falling onto 'a', that section (viii) evolves. At this point, 'c' comes into its own as all the tension and weight of the music is unleashed through an extended cadenzial flourish. In a sense, the entire improvisation could be considered as merely been an upbeat to *this point*.

The closing section of the improvisation works in terms of the synthesis of all elements of the 'a'+ 'b' motif. It combines the registral tension of the opening , the micro-tone deviations, and the various gestural functions of both 'a' and 'b' . During this section 'a' functions both as an upbeat to, as well as a resolution of 'b'.

The final figure of the improvisation is a clever mutation of the original 'a' motif. Here the rhythmic pattern is identical but the pitches are reversed and transposed up the octave.

The image displays a handwritten musical score for solo clarinet improvisation, consisting of six staves. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. A red line with a 'b' symbol is present on the first staff. The second staff includes the instruction 'microtone deviations' with a wavy line. The third staff has a red '(i)' above a measure. The fourth staff has red '(ii)' and '(iii)' above measures. The fifth staff has a red '(iv)' above a measure. The sixth staff has a red '(v)' above a measure. Dynamics include *pp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, and *pp*. The score is written on a yellowed piece of paper.

**Score I2 - Solo clarinet improvisation**



The image displays a handwritten musical score for solo clarinet improvisation, consisting of ten staves. The notation is written in treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The score includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, slurs, and dynamic markings.

- Staff 1:** Features a melodic line starting with a slur over a series of notes, followed by a rest and then a series of notes. A red "(vi)" is written above the first note of the second group. A dynamic marking "f" is present below the staff.
- Staff 2:** Continues the melodic line with slurs and notes. A dynamic marking "f" is present below the staff.
- Staff 3:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes. A red "(vii)" is written above the first note of the second group.
- Staff 4:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes. A red "(viii)" is written above the first note of the first group.
- Staff 5:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes.
- Staff 6:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes.
- Staff 7:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes. A dynamic marking "ff" is present below the staff.
- Staff 8:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes. A dynamic marking "ff" is present below the staff.
- Staff 9:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes. A dynamic marking "mf" is present below the staff.
- Staff 10:** Features a melodic line with slurs and notes. A dynamic marking "mf" is present below the staff.

Score I2 - Solo clarinet improvisation



The processes involved in the improvisation of this music are clearly related to a background knowledge and understanding of the possibilities of formal processes. And although those processes may not have been foremost in Neyire's mind during the act of improvising, they still manage to find their way into the music. And they are characteristic of a degree of formal skill and understanding that both enhances and focusses the scope of her expression and which results in a certain quality of music that can sometimes be lacking in purely intuitive improvisation.

Improvisation No.13 (Dat One) works as an equally effective and focussed expression. This is a duet improvisation by the violinists Barley Norton and Christina Taylor.

In this case, the initial figure, which was picked up instantly by the second violinist, becomes the base for the entire improvisation. This serves as an assured formal basis through which the players articulate varying different degrees of intensity, articulation and relationship in both a responsive and a dynamic way. The security of the structure allows the players to immerse themselves in their exchange and to perform with a dynamic fluidity and naturalness that characterises the entire piece. The two players, who at the time were fairly inexperienced improvisers, remarked that the formality of this improvisation enabled them to improvise with vibrancy that they had previously found hard to focus. The use of a simple formal technical device served to intensify their expression.

What many novice and non-improvisers often fail to appreciate is that an improvisation, even when loosely termed free, can in fact easily locate itself within distinct formal processes. And within a free context, the conscious employment of formal learnt or acquired modes of playing can actually enhance the qualities of

intuition, responsiveness and expression. The success of the two examples above - that is, the success for all those involved - lay in the fact that the players experienced a freedom of expression through a focussed reference to formal intensifying modes. And those modes, whilst serving to enhance that expression, did not objectify it nor become a technical obstacle to it. Processes of technique and processes of intuitive response found themselves in dynamic creative balance, each serving to enrich and enhance the quality of the whole.

### **Interaction and Exchange**

Communicate

- 1.To impart, pass along
- 2.To give or exchange information, thoughts, symbols or messages
- 3.To be connected

(Keating 1988)

The significance of formal and technical modes of improvisation within a basically expressive/responsive/intuitive sense of performance is similarly evident in terms of the modes of relationships between the improvisers of a collective. For when a collective improvises, either within free or within structured contexts, both processes tend to be functioning. On the one hand, an ensemble works together in a basically intuitive way with individuals responding naturally and instinctively to each other. In this sense, the music evolves through the result of the combined intuitive responses of the ensemble, and the expression is a collective one. However, on the other hand, those responses are invariably articulated through formal and conventional patterns of exchange and relationship that maybe either conscious, unconscious or motor-orientated.

Both processes combine and contribute to an improvisation that is at once a responsive collective expression, as well as a formal mannered and developing

art.

Improvisation No.I4 (Dat One) (score I4, p95) demonstrates some typical formal processes through which improvisers relate or 'talk' to each other. At one level, there is a characteristic canonic exchange. This takes place initially between the flute and the clarinet, and later between the guitar and clarinet. The relationship can be thought of as a shadowing one: the second player loosely copies or 'shadows' the first, thereby affecting the further progression of that part (fig a to a16).

At another level of the improvisation, there exists a kind of dialogue between the flute/violin material A that opens the section, and the developing/shadowing material B. At this level, material A functions as a kind of structural safety point - a reference from which the B figure grows, and to which it inevitably returns. At a third level, there is a developing relationship between the B sections themselves. So at this level, the whole of B is improvised as a development of, or answer to B. And B'' is improvised as an answer to B' and so on. This relationship could perhaps be thought of as a question and answer one.

In this improvisation, then, the performers seem to be structuring the music through reasonably conventional modes. And, it seems likely that the musicians are familiar with those conventional modes and that it is this that contributes to their understanding of the ways that the music is developing and the ways in which they are interacting. They are experienced by the players as conventional and traditional modes of interaction and exchange, and the means by which the players can collectively make decisions, attain a formal group expression, and articulate structure.

fl. A B A+B

cl. q' base canon echo q'

bk. echo q'

vi. A B A+B

fl. A B A+B

cl. q' base canon echo q'

bk. echo q'

vi. A B A+B

fl. A B A+B

cl. q' base canon echo q'

bk. echo q'

vi. A B A+B

Score I4 - Shadowing and Question and Answer improvisation.

Fig.1 is an abstract representation of the three levels:

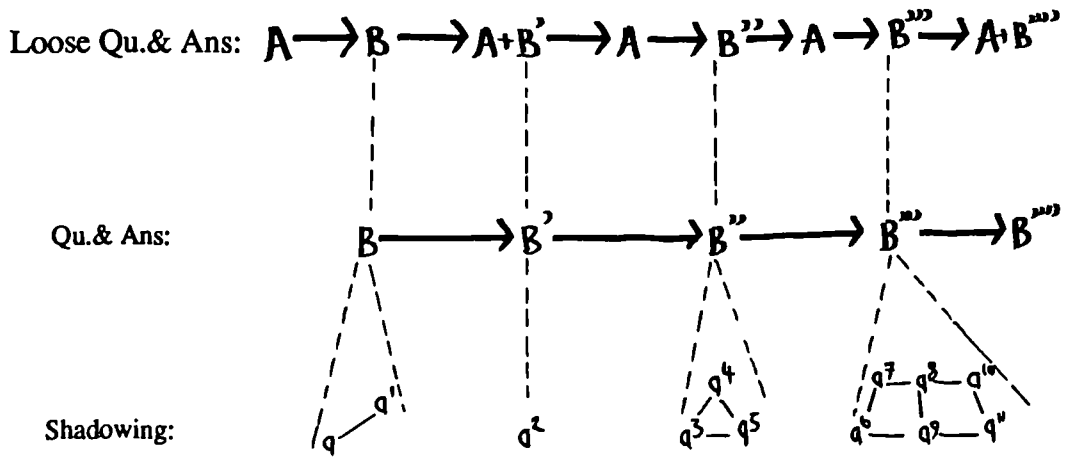


Fig One - Diagram outlining exchanges in Improvisation I1

A number of these conventional interactional modes can be identified in much improvised music. Of these, the question and answer mode is the most commonly recognised, its use being central to many improvised musics. It is a basic mode through which improvisers effect a communication. In its pure form it consists of a simple dialogue between two musicians. One player plays a phrase that acquires the nature of a question or offer. This is a phrase that has a quality of openendedness and which encourages some kind of response. That response then traditionally acquires the nature of an answer to that question, but also with a quality that tends to encourage a further response. Such a process continues and the exchange develops as a continual musical dialogue between the two musicians.

In the blues idiom, in which this kind of exchange forms a basic element of the style, players often even consider question and answer to be essentially akin to spoken dialogue. And this contributes to the idea of blues musicians making their instruments 'talk'.

In such forms, 'question and answer' is a conventional structure and one of which most players are familiar. As such it provides the means through which players in an ensemble can improvise with a collectively understood group focus. At the point at which the mode is operating, the players are inevitably drawn together in a particularly strong way. There is little ambiguity. The relations between the players are clear.

In Improvisation No.14 the question and answer is less clear cut. Although it can still be considered as a dialogue, it is a dialogue between the players articulating different motivic areas, rather than between two specific players themselves. Each of the motivic areas both functions to respond to the previous area and opens up the way for the next.

*Of course, such an exchange may equally well be interpreted in terms of a different mode. Whereas in a Blues, in which question and answer is invariably clearly the result of two players responding to each other, in this case the most that can be said is that it is a possible scenario for the interactions that were actually occurring during the improvisation.*

For instance, a different way to interpret the improvisation would be in terms of the simultaneous articulation of two layers or textures of music: the layer of A, and the layer of B, and a series of block shifts between them. So in this scenario, the musicians may be conscious of articulating the two textures simultaneously.

They have established a communication through which A is recognised as a basic underpinning texture - the effect of which is everpresent although it is in fact not always heard - and B is a more soloistic developmental figure - progressing through its own characteristic processes and which bears little relation to A.

As listeners it is perhaps not important how the players are interacting. But for the improvisers it could be significant. The degree to which conventions or traditional modes become apparent and form the bases for communication within improvisations can have a significant effect upon the way in which an ensemble articulates its improvisations. So at one extreme, as in the blues example, the players are clear about the conventions of the communication and this allows for a specific and controlled exchange. And in Improvisation No.14, there certainly are some kinds of conventional and formal exchanges taking place, but they are far less formal and clear cut, open to wildly differing interpretations, and therefore tend to allow for greater degrees of divergence. Although it is not possible to say that they form the bases for the exchange between players and the articulation of the improvisation, their presence and the conscious/unconscious knowledge of their conventions must, to an extent, allow the musicians to develop the music in a way that would be less likely were such structures not present.

Spacing is a further common interactional mode that often serves as a basis for exchange during improvisation. The mode is based upon the gradual adjustment of material improvised by two or more players as each responds to slight variations or changes in the material of the other.

Further conventional interactional modes can be identified as those involved in the role playing considerations of improvisation. So at any point within an improvisation, players may have an understanding or confidence of a particular interactional structure due to familiarity of conventional or traditional roles

played by each of the improvisers. For example, if one player improvises a soloistic line, then the relationship between that line and other parts can be established as a collectively understood structure. So a second player, for instance, may clearly be improvising an accompaniment to that solo, a third player improvising commenting figures in relation to that solo, a fourth player improvising a counterpart to that solo, a fifth player improvising an interruptive, destructive figure with relation to that solo, a sixth player entirely ignoring the other parts and so on. Each player within the ensemble will have an extent of understanding and knowledge of their relationship to the others due to the familiarity of those roles. And it is through such familiarity that players can exchange information concerning the structure and the progress of the music. And they relate to each other in specific ways without recourse to verbal or notated information.

The common familiar roles that are acquired or stressed by improvisers are listed below. Any structures or modes of exchange can be considered as the results of the combinations of these roles:

1. Solo (individual line).
2. Accompaniment to Solo.
3. Commenting or observatory part in relation to any other roles.
4. Duet with other part.
5. Counterpart.
6. Provocative, interruptive part (blocking role).
7. Ignorant role. Part in its own world paying no attention to the roles of others.

In terms of such roles, it can be easy for an improviser to make sense of the various modes of interaction that tend to occur within improvisation. Those



modes can be understood simply as the combination of various roles. Examples would include solo and accompaniment, solo and comments, solo and countersolo, duet and third interruptive part, solo and ignorant part, or even four parts mutually accompanying each other. In these terms, a *môde* such as the spacing mode, for example, could be considered simply as a kind of evenhanded and responsive contrapuntal exchange. This is an exchange that results in a texture that, in turn, could have a further role such as that of an accompaniment to some other part, or even that of a solo.

At the other extreme of course, an improvisation may simply consist of an ensemble of ignorant roles as is the case with much traditional free improvisation.

A knowledge of such considerations of interaction and exchange serves as a technical resource for the improviser. It is a means to focus and intensify the parameters of non-notated, non-verbal communication. But in order to use such a resource in an effective and creative manner the improviser requires a great deal of skill. And in many ways, to attempt to approach improvisation in terms of reference to the techniques of such a resource, offers to the improviser, as I have argued, one of the fundamental challenges to the act of expressive and creative musical performance: that is, to find effective means through which a formal technical process, or conventional interactional or structural modes may be articulated within the scope of a basically intuitive, expressive utterance. This entails the development of the processes of communication in a way that is at once personal and unique, but which bears significant relation to others. It is the nature of this skill that lies at the heart of creative group work. And it is in the nature of this skill that we can find a part of the solution to the problems facing the contemporary conservatoire.

## **Process, Practice and Relationship**

The first sonic utterances and experiments of humans are improvised. When a child first encounters a piano, drum or any sound producing object s/he will improvise. S/he will find out what sounds that object can make, what is pleasing to the ear, and what is not. This is the first experience of exploring music. And it is this kind of activity that should be encouraged and nurtured. It is the starting point, the basis, the fundamental expressive communication between that individual and the surrounding world.

For any musician, such a personal practice is one that could well serve to underpin conventional and learnt practices. For each time we improvise, we carry out a kind of technical, emotional and expressive research based on an ever developing experience and knowledge, a synthesis between the new and the old, the present and the past. This entails an acknowledgement not only of what we have been, but of what we are, and how we are changing.

The processes that were involved in the composition of the music presented in Part Four of this thesis largely relied upon such a practice of improvisation. For each of those compositions is, in part, the result of the relationships between the performers' intuitive improvising characteristics and qualities and their more traditional and formal improvising and performing characteristics. Those compositions relied upon improvisation as a basic underpinning activity that tended to affect the various projects at all stages of their development.

For instance, many of the ensembles working on those compositions consisted of musicians who had previously not worked closely together. The members of the

flute quartet who produced *Quartet for Four Flutes* (See Ch1), for example, consisted of two flautists drawn from one quartet, one from another, and one from a third. Similarly, a string quartet was formed drawing on the members of three different quartets, and a small chamber ensemble was formed, comprising of musicians drawn from a variety of differing contexts. These groups each began to explore their group identity and their group relations through improvisation. So, when meeting for the first time, the various musicians used improvisation as a means through which they could introduce themselves to each other. And in turn, they could respond to each other both intuitively, and through more conventional and traditional modes. So from the first instant, the musicians were already concerned with creative relationships, those between themselves and the ensemble, and those within the ensemble as a whole. And through continuing reference and recourse to improvisation, the ensembles would strengthen and develop those relationships at a basic and natural level.

Relationships of this kind, those that are dynamic creative and everchanging, became those through which the various ensembles found their way into the compositional work that followed. For each of those compositions was based upon a creative collaboration. To an extent, they were forged out of the idiosyncracies of the relationships within the ensemble. And the manner in which the musicians improvised together determined more than any other factor the ways in which the musicians formed and understood those relationships. Therefore improvisation served to underpin all of the collaborative work that took place. And the relationships of the ensemble were the dominant determining factor in terms of the development of the compositions.

Perhaps more than anything else, it is the quality of relationship that is lacking in the contemporary conservatoire. These are the relationships between performers,

between performers and composers, between performers and notation and between artists and audiences. It is such quality that can be developed through an increased reference to processes of improvisation. Improvisation allows for both the intuitive and the learnt. It can embody relationship both based upon emotive intuitive response and within distinctly formal and traditional stylistic and structural modes. Through improvisation, musicians learn not only about themselves, but about their relationship to others, about their past, about the present, and about change.

### **Improvisation and Notation**

I have examined some of the functions of formal technical processes within improvisation. At one extreme, improvisation may be almost entirely free, in so far that it is an unpremeditated intuitive outpouring. However, as demonstrated by improvisations I2, I3 and I4, musicians tend to complement intuitive processes with formal technical processes that serve to allow for various degrees of definition and determination in terms of detail. Such details would include those of structure, interaction and processes of development. These technical processes allow for the development of the music in ways that would not be likely in a genuinely free idiom. They help to focus and often also to challenge improvising musicians.

It could be argued that notation performs a similar function. Notation performs the function of limiting and thereby focussing certain parameters of music performance. And in a sense it is possible to conceive of all music, even fully notated music, as merely improvised with reference to certain formal constraints. Indeed as Clarke points out (Clarke 1992), "every performance art contains an element of improvisation since a degree of indeterminacy at some level of the performance,

requiring 'invention' by the performer must always exist."

Bearing this in mind, it is possible to argue for a function of notation with respect to improvisation. For if we take a definition of composition as "improvisation focussed by any degree of external reference", be it simply a vague impression of role playing or a traditional full score, then we can see that a function of notation can be to increase the possibility of certain kinds of events taking place within an improvisation. For example, a score consisting of a few basic instructions or indications, such as *Ante-axis* (see p64), can function as a formalising basis for an improvisation. Following this, the use of a more detailed notated score, such as *In C* (see p64), might allow for more tightly focussed improvisation. And of course, at the notated extreme, a fully notated score might allow for music in which improvisation of an intensely focussed nature is limited to just a few parameters, such as is the case of an authentic performance of a Mozart Concerto. And in all these cases there is a degree to which these scores could be considered to be performing a similar function to those performed by the simple formal improvising techniques outlined earlier in this chapter. The only significant difference is that in the case of the scores, the formalising limitations are prescribed as opposed to being developed during the process of improvisation.

In these terms there is little doubt that notation can serve a liberating and creative role with respect to improvisation. I have shown some of the ways in which musicians limit and focus their own improvisation through the use of formal conventional techniques. And indeed most of the world's improvised musics function with reference to specific conventional and traditional processes. Such musics thrive on the balance between formal external and intuitive internal references and processes. And it is in terms of the development of those formal external references and processes that the use of notation can be considered to be

important. For through recourse to specific formalising processes, which may well be those of notation, conditions can be set up in which musical events may occur that would be unlikely within a purely free process.

Within this context, notation has a quality of a servant of the music. It can be used as a partial aid to the development of a piece. It can be incorporated into a musical process as a part of that process. This is a part that enhances the process rather than prescribes it.

It is towards such a function of notation that I will turn my attention in Part Three. This function has respect for the qualities and characteristics of improvisation and which serves to enhance the possibilities of music created with reference to processes of improvisation. This notation is a complement to improvisation rather than a replacement.

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## **PART THREE**

## **BACKBONES**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### INTRODUCTION TO BACKBONES

#### Introduction

Perfecting the balance between the processes of literacy and the processes of orality can be considered to be one of the major factors governing the production of a composition. It is a question of identifying, on the one hand, what is necessary, essential and practicable to notate and, on the other, what should advisedly be left for a performer or an ensemble to realise through improvisation and collaboration.

*Quartet for Four Flutes*, which was presented in Part One of this thesis, was composed and produced through a process which both explores and relies upon an exacting balance between notated and non-notated elements. The recorded version of this quartet represents, for all intents and purposes, a thoroughly and precisely composed work. In this sense, it is much the same as any flute quartet. However, it was realised through processes that have as much in common with those used by Captain Beefheart's Magic Band (Ch.3) as they do with the conventional composer/performer processes of the conservatoire. And although the music exhibits many qualities that are, perhaps, more overtly characteristic of the conservatoire tradition than of the rock tradition, unlike most conservatoire compositions, it is essentially the product of a collective effort. It is the result of a creative collaboration between the four flautists and myself.



It is significant that each of the flautists has contributed to the process of composition. Had I been working with a different quartet, as I shall show later, the composition would have been different. The present quartet uniquely reflects the personalities and idiosyncracies of the individual players, the relationships between the players, the relationships between the players and myself (as an overall director), and of the conditions and contexts of production.

Score No.12, *Backbone Suite for Flute*, contains the notated part of the composition. This was composed exclusively by myself following a preliminary meeting and improvisation session with the flautists. Written as a response and reaction to that session, these notated parts came to form the focus for a process of collaborative work that took place during a series of sessions in the following months. It was during these sessions that the non-notated elements of the composition (that which can be heard in the recording that is not in the score) were realised.

The composition of the music thus clearly takes place through two fundamentally different processes. Both of these are essential to the character of the music. There is a traditional and conventional composition process during which certain essential identifiable and quantifiable elements of the music are formulated through notation. And there is a rather less conventional (or rather less conservative-based) process during which those notated elements become 'fleshed out', as they form the basis of an oral and collaborative process of composition. The actual process of composition per se, is not ended until the completion of that collaborative work.

Such collaborative work is not entirely free. It is focussed by the constraints of the notated element. This serves to enhance the collaborative work in both a dynamic and an enriching manner which, in some ways is similar to those focussing effects of formal techniques within freely improvised contexts as was dis-

cussed in Part Two. Thus a balance is formed between the constraints of the notation and the freedom of the collaboration.

In the case of the *Quartet for Four Flutes*, such constraints consist of a fully notated part that is played as written by one of the four flautists. And that part carries with it a reasonable degree of detail concerning content and form. However, the freedom lies primarily in the music that is created by the other three flautists through the ways in which they respond and react to the music of the notated part. Through a collaborative process of experimentation and exploration, they must 'invent' a whole quartet that is focussed in some appropriate way by that notated part and which must also include it. And within the final realised composition that part may play any role ranging from a simple background structuring role to a foreground soloistic role.

In Part One of this thesis I discussed many of the problems of both notated work, and of collaborative work within the conservatoire tradition. The processes used for the composition of *Quartet for Four Flutes* attempt, in part, to avoid such problems. In particular, they attempt to avoid the specific pitfalls that can arise from work which involves the performer in the creative process of composition. To this end, the use of a notated part, containing essential focussing information and thereby performing a focussing role within the collaborative process, is central. The technique starts firstly from an acknowledgement of the fact that there are skills and characteristics that are generally unique to either composers or performers, and secondly, an acknowledgement that the skills of both must come into play in the composition of music. Therefore, a fundamental premise of such a technique is that firstly, there are certain qualities and characteristics of music that can be most efficiently effected and formulated by a 'composer' working with notation (someone who has a clear understanding of, or experience of the nature

of structure and the relationships between form and content); secondly, that there are certain characteristics and qualities that are most effectively and efficiently formulated and realised by a collection of musicians working aurally and collaboratively; and thirdly that all qualities and characteristics can benefit from a degree of exchange between both processes.

For example, as I discussed in chapter 3, notation is simply inadequate when it comes to the scoring of elements such as complex rhythms and metres, and various details of articulation and timbre. It is not a particularly useful tool for the description of microtonality, and it is largely incapable of describing qualities of feel, gesture and responsiveness. Similarly, a composer working exclusively with notation tends to suffer from the limits of the technology of that notation, and from the creative and social isolation that that notation tends to impose.

However, on the other hand, being trained and skilled in the use of that technology, the 'composer' is in a good position to outline or even to prescribe certain salient features of a work of music that would, otherwise, be difficult to formulate. Features might include characteristics such as the linear development of basic motivic detail, and the relationship of that development to the structure as a whole. Furthermore, the composer is in a good position to view such structure from an objective distance, and to consider the pace of the music in terms of the rate of change, or of repetition of basic ideas. And the composer can acquire a good overview of the music in an objective way that a group, working in real time, can often find difficult.

But an ensemble of performers is uniquely well placed to bring qualities such as individual and group characteristics and idiosyncracies to a composition. Each member of an ensemble has a unique knowledge of their own instrument and their own technique and can bring the idiosyncracies of that knowledge into the

compositional arena. This is something that a composer can rarely achieve.

Similarly, a group working aurally is well placed to devise or realise complex metric or rhythmic structures. And they can easily explore qualities of timbre and articulation in ways that are uniquely appropriate to them. This is possible due to the fact that they do not get hampered by the limits and determinations of notation.

However, despite this, groups working compositionally through exclusively oral processes rely solely upon the qualities of interaction, communication and memory, and these can often become unfocussed due to the problems of effecting both discipline and direction within the freedom that collaborative compositional work often encourages. If there are no limits, no signs, and no goalposts, and if, theoretically, anything might happen, a group can waste hours simply finding a starting point, a direction, or simply even a focus for the work they do and the composition they produce.

Returning to the *Quartet for Four Flutes*, as I have argued, such a focus was provided by the notated score; a focus that allowed for and encouraged collaborative and improvisatory work in the areas of the composition in which it was appropriate. So from the beginning of the collaborative process, the performers were working on both relevant and creative elements of the composition. But they were not forced to work through lengthy conceptual or overtly objective processes (as they would be in compositions such as Cardew's *Autumn '60*). They were not faced with an effectively blank page (as they would with Stockhausen's *Aus Den Sieben Tagen*). Conversely, they were not faced with a complex and bewildering barrage of symbols and signs (as they would be if they were to work with the intensely notated and minutely detailed scores of composers such as Brian Ferneyhough, Richard Barratt or others of the New Complexity).

The starting point for the quartet group work was aural. The first activity, after some preliminary warm-ups and improvisation, was to listen to one participant play the notated part. This was followed by a short sharing of responses and a repeat performance during which the other members of the quartet improvised other parts. Thus, at an early stage the group was submerged in the sound and the feel of the music, but they still had a focus, and a clear direction and a goal. These two stages of the process can be heard on Dat One Ex T1.1, T1.2.(cassette two)

It is important to understand the basic difference between use of this type of score and simple formulaic scores in terms of their potentials as bases for collaborative work. For formulaic scores such as those which present merely a form, structure, or a process through which music might be produced (examples of scores presenting this type of material include, Cage's *Variations iv* and Cardew's *Solo and Accompaniment*) present information that is conceptual, whereas the former presents information that is experiential. So that although formulaic scores such as *Variations iv* and *Solo and accompaniment* may well be stimulating at an intellectual and conceptual level, they often fail to fire practically creative inspiration.

Experiential scores, however, carry with them human emotions and feelings as well as purely aural details, and these serve to inspire both the individual and the ensemble. For instance, in the case of the flute example outlined above, one of the most stimulating factors during the working sessions was the spontaneous response of the group to the first performances of the written part (the enthusiasm of which can easily be heard on the tape example). This sense of joy and celebration is central to work about experiential information. It rarely comes in such an enriching way with the conceptual.

The performer/composer Peter Wiegold has called this type of score a 'back-

bone'. This name is more appropriate than one might at first imagine for, like an animal backbone, a musical backbone serves to form an indispensable central axis and focus to which all other parts of the music (or skeleton, organs and flesh), must relate. And like the animal backbone, it is complete in itself, but still requires the rest of the body in order to bring it to life. And although vertebrates differ hugely - from the mouse to the diplodocus, and from the trout to the emu - the basic principle is always the same: each is held together, characterised and focussed by its backbone.

The backbone offers to a collaborative music project an essential experiential focus. In the quartet it served absolutely as the basis and foundation of the oral collaborative work. But it also served to challenge the ensemble in both an aesthetic and technical way. They were forced to confront and to accommodate the varying stylistic qualities of the bones, ranging from the simple modality of *Flutebone No.1* (Score no. S12.1) to the abstraction of *Flutebone No.4* (S12.4). In these cases, the quartet had to learn to realise the music, both with respect for the nature of these bones, and also within the characteristic musical identity of the ensemble itself. It is this element of challenge that is important. Through challenge, the interest must be sustained throughout a composition project, and the ensemble forced or coerced into new creative and technical areas that, in turn, serve to enrich and invigorate the entire process. As will be shown later, this is sometimes a very simple thing to achieve. But at other times it can be extremely complex.

Much of the work of this sort can thus be considered as collaborative problem-solving or resolving. It involves working through the tensions between freedom and constraint, between improvised and composed elements, between degrees of easiness and difficulty, and between what is fixed by performers, and what they

choose to leave free. It is the job of the backbone to set up the conditions in which this can take place. Such condition should allow for appropriate degrees of tension and confrontation, as well as relaxation and mediation. Again it is a question of the dynamics of balance between elements, processes and techniques. In essence, conditions through backbone techniques need to be such that an ensemble can be appropriately challenged to produce something new, unique, and dynamic.

### **Practical Considerations of the Backbone**

It is not enough to describe a backbone simply as a single musical part to be played by a single player. The backbone is not, for instance, quite the same as either a solo composition, nor the same as a part that might have been extracted from an ensemble composition. Although individual backbones may vary considerably, all tend to share certain essential characteristics.

A composer writing a backbone is aware that it is going to form the basis of oral and collaborative processes. As such, the backbone tends to be composed within the limits of what may usefully and effectively be notated with reference to those processes. Thus, backbones are necessarily incomplete in terms of many of the parameters of composition. These are parameters that are more easily, efficiently or satisfactorily, created, communicated or mediated through oral means. Within this, the notated backbone functions as a servant to the continuing process of backbone composition.

The function of backbones is not, for example, to express qualities of music that are notationally problematic. But it might be to present qualities of music that could allow for a musician or an ensemble to create music, much of which may well be difficult, to notate for one reason or another. In this instance, a backbone will set up the conditions in which music which may even be impossible to no-

tate, can easily be produced through collaborative improvisation.

Composers working with notation are able to achieve certain things that can be difficult to achieve purely through oral means. And it is the job of the backbone to introduce such elements, where appropriate, into a collaborative composition process. In general, any backbone should bring to such a collaboration two essential qualities:

(1) Some kind of material focus. This might vary from a simple rhythmic or gestural indication, to a complex motivic structure.

(2) A structure and form that derives from and relates to that material focus.

These two elements can function in many ways throughout a collaborative venture. Firstly, they function as a starting point. They create a centred and focussed point that, although generally only played by one player, is the common and unified point of departure for all players, both as individuals and as members of an ensemble as a whole. From such a starting point, which is essentially an experiential one, players should be able to draw some element of material with which to proceed, whether it is in the concrete form of a motivic idea with which to work, a motivic idea against which they might work, or as a structural idea within which they might work.

Consider, for instance, the set of *Studybones Vol.II* (S13). Each study presents varying degrees of motivic detail within clearly defined structures, and offers a number of musical qualities and characteristics to the realising performers. In *Studybone II.2*, for example, the use of just two pitches (A and Bb) and two note lengths (long sustained and short staccato), allows for a wealth of interpretations by a realising ensemble that might perhaps be more limited by the intensity of *Studybone II.12*. Whereas No.2 is understated in the sparsity and simplicity of its



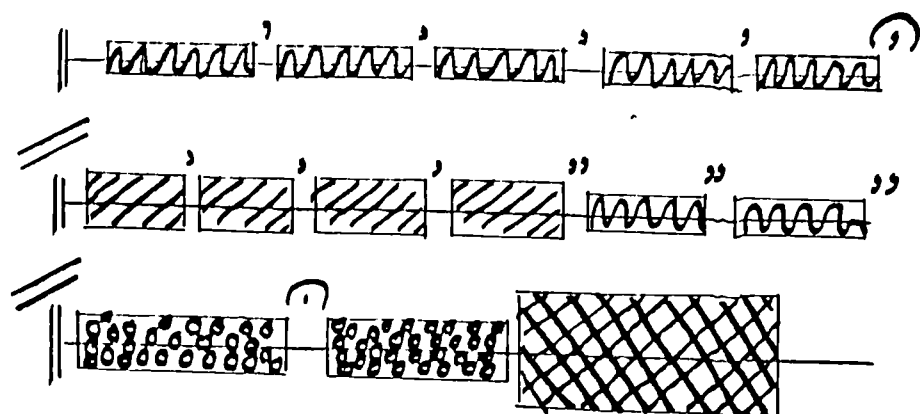
content, thus allowing for it to be interpreted simply in terms of a background structuring role, the intense nature of No.12 is such that it will be likely to play a very dominating and forceful role within a realisation. And this certainly proves to be true when we listen to the varying different realisations of these two realisations (see p194). Thus, No.12 is perhaps open to fewer interpretations than No.2 even though it still clearly exhibits essential backbone characteristics in terms of its offer of pitch structure, motivic and developmental ideas within a clear structure.

It is this essential duality, an essence of both form and content, which characterises a composition that can function appropriately as a backbone. On the one hand, the music is not so abstract, conceptual or sparse, that it forces the players working with it to enter into over-intellectual or objectified modes of creativity. On the other hand, the music is not so formed that it fails to allow for dynamic creative involvement by the players.

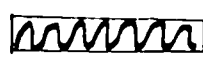
Consider, for example, how inappropriate *Studybone II.6* would be as a focus and structure for a collaborative composition if it was presented either without its motivic material content, or without its structural quality (see fig 5.1, Ex.a+b, p118). In the case of Ex.a, which presents only formal details, the first job of a realising group would be to decide what kind of thing to play for motifs a, b and c, in a way that would be appropriate for the given structure. The problem with this is that firstly, it is not a job that is going to benefit in any way from being done by a group in real time as opposed to a single composer, and secondly, that it is likely to involve a degree of objectivity or rationality that is more akin to conceptual puzzle solving than dynamic creativity. Rather than proceeding by exploring creative responses to experiential musical stimuli, the group is instead required to start by deriving those experiential stimuli. Score Ex.a is, to all intents

and purposes, no more than an abstract and conceptual framework offering none of the experiential qualities that make backbones useful scores to work with.


Ex.b, on the other hand, does offer an experiential stimulus through the presentation of motifs that may well serve to inspire or challenge an ensemble in some way. However, devoid of a structure, it fails to offer the essential focussing intensity of a backbone. It may well serve adequately as the basis of an improvisation, or of a composition structured through a process such as that used by Terry Riley in *In C*. But neither of these processes will easily allow for those unique elements of collaborative work that can arise through backbone techniques. They will rely more overtly upon improvised or process-based modes of musical production. And these may well result in effective and inspired compositions, but they are unlikely to produce the degree of intensity and detail that can be developed by an ensemble when they are challenged, not only by material but also a specific structure. For when there exists an appropriate combination of structural and motivic detail, as in the backbone, an ensemble can easily and effectively work both on a local (sound by sound) level, and also with reference to a global (large-scale structural) level. Furthermore they can focus particularly on those elements of composition that benefit from group work. These are elements of music that uniquely benefit from originating from, and being communicated through oral processes.



key

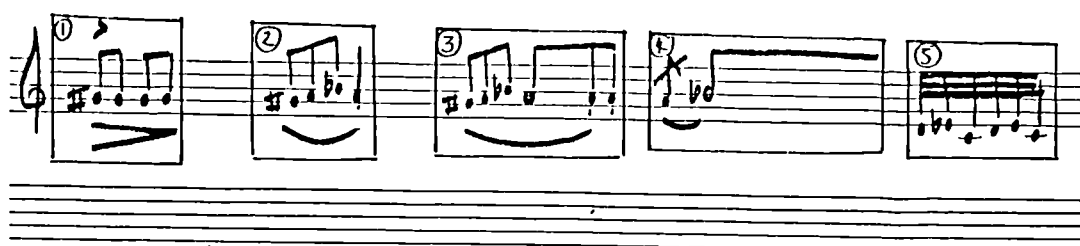
 = motif a.

 = motif a+b

 = motif b

 = motif c

Ex.a. Hypothetical score based on study II.6 presenting only formal detail



Ex.b. Hypothetical score based on study II.6 presenting only motivic detail

Fig 5.1, Ex.a+b - Hypothetical scores based on *Studybone II.6* (S13.6)

Again, balance is the most important consideration in the composition of a backbone. The backbone composer should be concerned with balance between form and content, between what the backbone fixes or constrains and what it leaves free, between what it determines in terms of the creative scope of a final realisation, and what it allows to be brought to that final realisation by the idiosyncracies of the creative persona of the realising ensemble. Examples 5.1a and 5.1b do not offer enough information that is particularly of use in terms of focus, challenge and inspiration. And in these terms they are unbalanced.

Conversely, a composition for solo instrument, such as a Berio *Sequenza*, would be inadequate as a backbone as it is too complete in itself. It represents the end product of the composition process and it would not only be inappropriate to attempt to work with it as though it were a backbone, but also creatively exasperating. Were it to be offered as such it would be criticised as offering too much information. It needs nothing more and it asks for nothing more. It contains more than just that essential essence of form and content and, as such could not adequately create the appropriate inspirational and liberating conditions that should be established by a Backbone.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Berio has actually used many of his *Sequenzas* within a process that might be confused with backbone processes. The *Chemins* are compositions that consist of the *Sequenzas* with written ensemble accompaniments and embellishments. However, in the case of these, the ensemble parts firstly are always subservient to the solo *Sequenza* part and secondly, never bring new or complementary ideas to the *Sequenza* part. They merely take ideas from the solo *Sequenza* and articulates them in a way that Berio describes as akin to peeling off the layers of an onion. That this is so is largely due to the fact that the *Sequenzas* do not really 'invite' other parts with new and complementary ideas to be realised. The job of the ensemble parts within the *Chemins* is rather to 'show up' and reinforce the qualities of the solo.

The backbone is located between the two extremes. It must offer enough of a certain type of information that will serve at once to focus, to inspire and to structure collaborative work. But it must do this in a way that will also challenge and draw the ensemble through new and renewed areas of creativity. It must make collaborative work enriching and rewarding, purposeful and essential.

The scores in Volume II of this thesis are intended to perform these functions. None is offered as a composition for solo instrument. And none is offered merely as a framework or idea to be used within collaborative composition processes. They are designed to function as backbones and therefore to bring to a collaborative project those special qualities that are unique to processes based on backbones.

### Parameters of Backbones

A glance through the various backbones accompanying this text shows that they vary considerably. The *Study backbones Volumes I and II* are clearly of a different nature to the *Backbones for Flute* or the *Backbone for Strings*. And these are different still from the vocal backbones, *Chant* and *Five More Love Songs*, and from the *Backbone for Clarinet*. But each one still performs similar functions within collaborative projects, despite the fact that they may affect the creative and technical processes in differing ways. Compare, for instance, the various poles of the factors that affect the nature of a backbone:

1. Free  Fixed
- Backbones vary in terms of the degree to which their content and structure is fixed or free. Backbones such as the *Flutebone No.3*

(S12.3), *Studybone II.11* (S13.11) and *Backbone No.48* (S5), are clearly freer in terms of what they leave to be determined by the performer than *Backbone No.31* (S10), *Flutebone No.4* (S12.4), or *Backbone No.44* (S11). But such degrees of freedom are further affected by the degree of intention the backbone composer, and by the context of the ensemble realisation. So, for instance, in the case of a study backbone written primarily for an educational context, the performer may well be left to interpret the backbone more freely than in the case of a specific composition project. So in the case of backbones such as those of the *Backbone Suite For Flute*, the varying degrees of determining notation are further fixed by specific emotional and/or stylistic indications. And in a backbone written for a specific player, or to be realised by a particular ensemble may well be of a more developed (ie.fixed) aesthetic and/or technical nature. The consequent creative effect of this, as will be discussed in the next chapter, can be to significantly determine the realisations.

## 2.General ←————→ Specific

Context and intention is important in terms of all of the backbones that are presented in this thesis. The two sets of studies, for example, were written without any specific players, instruments or ensembles in mind and have thus been realised by a number of different ensembles in a number of different ways, but generally working within an education context.

These backbones deliberately focus upon clearly defined elements and techniques that serve to challenge players in specific ways.

For instance, throughout *Study Backbones Vol.II* (S13), ensembles are forced to address the problems of coping with diverse material ranging from the sparse simplicity of *Studybone No.2*, through to the relative gestural complexity of *Studybone No.8* and the technical challenge of *Studybone No.12*.

In addition to this none of these backbones rely upon particular emotional or expressive qualities, and as such, are open to a plethora of diverse interpretations and realisations.

In this sense, the studies challenge an ensemble to develop those expressive and emotional qualities and characteristics to a greater degree than, for instance, the *Backbones Suite for Flute*. And they require the ensemble to actually bring those qualities to the music. On the other hand, those flute backbones, which were written specifically for the respective members of the flute quartet, present a reasonably developed degree of expressive and emotional quality to the ensemble. And in this sense, they are more developed creative expressions than the studies.

The importance of drawing a distinction between backbones for educational/training or exploratory work, and those for specific creative projects is emphasised by the six short studies that accompany the *Backbone For Strings* (S17, 17a - f). *Backbone for Strings* is a 60 minute Backbone consisting of six movements, each of which incorporates many varying characteristics of backbone structures. It was written for a mixed ability quartet (two improvisers, two novice improvisers), and is of a complexity such that an attempt to realise it without first undertaking significant

preliminary and preparatory work would be foolish. The accompanying studies were thus used as the basis of that preparation.

Each study focuses on one particular motive and/or structural characteristic of the larger backbone. And through work based on those studies, which took place during the first two sessions, the players were introduced both to the content and to the techniques of an extremely demanding and challenging project.

The studies thus perform a very specific multi-faceted function. This involves:

- a. Training and introducing new players to backbone techniques.
- b. Introducing the various motivic characteristics of the piece.
- c. Allowing players to explore the various characteristics of the work and to develop ideas concerning its aesthetic and technical nature at an early stage in the composition process.
- d. Developing the players' familiarity with the various characteristics of the piece, thus allowing them to more easily understand and cope with its large-scale characteristics.

### 3. Demanding/Challenging Easy

This throws up the issue of the relationships between those elements of backbones that are demanding or technically/aesthetically challenging to work with and those which are technically and/or aesthetically easy to work with. Backbones such as *17/10/89* (S1) and *28/9/90* (S3), for example, have consistently proved to be effective as backbones realised by inexperienced players. As well as being relatively easy to play, the simple modality of these backbones, combined with easily assimilable and straightforward



structures, results in a clear and recognisable focus that, throughout their use in educational contexts, has allowed for novice improvisers to work efficiently together without becoming intimidated by the demands that might have been imposed by more challenging bones. (see Ch.7).

The *Studybone II.6* (S13.6) is similarly both easy to play, and straightforward in terms of its material and of the relationship between that material and the overall form. However, the creative challenge to an ensemble is perhaps greater than in the previous backbones, as in practice it has proved to allow for a significantly greater scope for the realisations. And these have varied considerably in terms of the role that the backbone has been accorded. Whereas the two previous backbones tend always to be accorded relatively foreground, roles the *Studybone Vol.II.6* is often accorded a more latent structural role and this thus requires the realising ensemble to devise more of the specific musical content in their own terms.

Within its large structure, the *Backbone for Strings* (S17) varies considerably between the poles of constraint and freedom. For example, section L is highly structured and determined in its notation, and could be considered to be a fairly demanding structure with which to play. The ensemble is forced to devise a degree of material within the direction, "Fast and Funky", which at first (bars 1 to 16) is structured simply through 4 short figures, but which begins to develop at bar 17 through to bar 32. The tightness and formality of this structure thus challenges the ensemble to flesh out the music within clearly defined metrical and structural



mental, soloistic, or as a part of a general texture. And when working with the backbone, one of the fundamental decisions that the group makes, is that concerning the nature of the role of the backbone at any one instant.

This contrasts with *Five More Love Songs* (S15,16). Here the choice is already made for the group. In this case, the backbones simply consist of a melodic/soloistic vocal line, thus requiring an ensemble to respond by devising an accompaniment.

#### 5. Abstract Stylistic

It is significant that in *Five More Love Songs*, the backbones bring with them a great deal more than just a foreground/soloistic line. They bring with them a considerably developed stylistic and emotional element that is bound to have a deterministic effect upon the collaborative ensemble work.

These elements of stylistic and emotional qualities are further important characteristics of backbones. They contribute to the nature of backbones as emotional and/or specific stylistic starting points as well as purely structural starting points. A backbone may well present specific and inspiring qualities of sound such as "gooiness", "spikiness" or "fluidity". And this alone may serve to inspire an ensemble and challenge them to work in that particular manner or with relations to those particular qualities. Through this, players may be drawn into qualities and characteristics of sound that they alone may well not consider exploring. But such qualities are well complemented by more overtly emotional or stylistic

qualities which may serve equally well to inspire and challenge an ensemble in other ways. Such qualities force an ensemble to consider those humanising emotional characteristics in their realisations. And they offer to musicians not only an added incentive to want to work with a backbone, but they also bring a type of composed dimension to the work that is likely to enrich the entire process. Such qualities are those that spark the intuitive and celebratory responses that tend to be harder to ignite through less overtly expressive backbones.

Backbones that are of a less immediate expressive nature in some ways call for a greater degree of inventiveness and creative response from an ensemble. With the voice backbones or the *Backbone Suite for Flute*, the aesthetic dimensions of the music are clearly laid out. But with backbones such as those of the studies, the ensemble is expected to create that aesthetic dimension for themselves. Thus in a Backbone such as the *Backbone for Strings* there is an attempted balance between the two poles. Balance between clear-cut emotional and musical stimuli within a formed expressive framework, and more purely structural stimuli about which an expressive framework must be developed. And as with all elements of backbone work, the nature of these two poles and the balance that is effected between them is extremely important. On the one hand, an ensemble should not always be stretched to the technical limits of its aesthetic capability through the constant challenge of intensely abstract backbones, but on the other hand, the aesthetic dimensions of its backbones should not always be so clearly formed and developed that the ensemble become aestheti-

cally complacent.

## 6. Formal Qualities.

Simply in terms of length, the backbones presented in Vol II of this thesis range from 10-second Study Backbones (S6,13), to the 28 minute voice backbone *Chant* (S15), the 22-minute *Backbone for Clarinet* (S14), and the 60-minute *Backbone for Strings* (S17). But there are also many backbones of about 3 to 5 minutes in length. These include those of the *Backbone Suite for Flute* (S12), *Five More Love Songs* (S16), and the various other collected workshop backbones (S1 to S11) that are presented in chapter seven. All of these shorter backbones have been composed for various contexts and conditions and all with specific intentions.

These shorter bones tend to function well as the bases for creative workshop sessions. A piece such a *Backbone No.31* (S10), for example, is free enough in its nature to be played without too much difficulty by a variety of instruments. It is long enough, formally, to introduce contrasting motivic ideas, to develop them briefly, and to have a clear coda. But it is not so long that its form cannot be easily assimilated by a group who have limited time with which to work.

Creatively, it challenges an ensemble to confront quite specific techniques and elements of form. The repetition of the initial motif during line 5 to 6 for instance, compels the musicians to be drawn into that material toward the end of the piece and to work formally on the relationships between that section and the opening statement. And further, throughout the backbone, the juxtaposition of

the various motivic elements calls for careful consideration of the formal qualities of the realisation in a more thorough way than, for instance, *Backbone May '89* (S4). For in this latter backbone, such formal qualities are less clear cut. Indeed, the material of this backbone, which is freer and less highly organised, changes merely through a broadening of the registral scope. And the piece is characterised by a more overtly 'organic flow' without any particularly apparent sectional or structural foci. As such, *Backbone No.31* and *Backbone May '89* represent two very different formal modes and therefore challenge realisers to confront those divergent styles.

Such formal considerations are brought to the fore in the study backbones. Due to the short and therefore intensely focussed nature of these bones, the players are compelled to consider even the most minute and slight inflection. In *Studybone II.2* (S13.2), for example, players can ignore neither the contrast between the sustained 'A's and the rapidly repeated 'Bb's, nor the effects of the two semiquaver 'A's that introduce the 'Bb's. Realisers are thus challenged to confront the change, the nature of the change, the function of the 'Bb's as a coda phrase, and the repeated sustained 'A's as the introduction. As will be shown in the following chapter, different players quite naturally rise to the challenge in radically differing ways.

*Studybone Vol II.7* (S13.3), however, presents a slightly different form, this time focussing upon everchanging inflections in

movement between the sustained 'A's, the demi-semi, the triplet demi-semi and quintuplet demi-semi 'A's, and the staccato quaver and crotchet 'A's. Here the intention is to draw the player deeply into those relationships and to bring such detailed and careful inflection into their own realisations.

A glance through all the various studies will show similarly focussed and detailed characteristics. Each one calls for a slightly different response and approach coupled with a varying intensity of detail and care in the realisation. Such intense detail is less likely to occur within large-scale structures due to the sheer breadth and scope of the larger work.

## **Summary**

A backbone is a central axis. It is a part for one or more instruments that gives a strong support to the structure, and invokes at least the essence of the feeling of the music. Whilst it is complete, and makes sense in itself, it also has the quality of creating space for and inviting other parts to be realised/improvised around it. At once, it serves to inspire and to nurture the creativity of an ensemble, but also to challenge it both technically and aesthetically, and to draw it into new and enriching areas of creativity.

Through effecting a balance within the process of composition between what is composed and notated by a single composer and what is realised or improvised by an ensemble working in a context of collaboration, those barriers between composer and performer, and between composition and performance, and between composition and improvisation are broken down. Such activities, although still experienced to an extent as identifiable practices, overlap within a holistic

and dynamic process of musical practice. Through the backbone and the techniques of the backbone, musicians find the 'middle way'. The backbone forces them to work hard, and to solve problems in a more practical and in a more dynamic way than a traditional composer, and in a more thorough and disciplined way than the free improviser. It is through such creative collaborative problem solving, and through the tension between freedom and constraint, and between improvisation and composition, that an ensemble can produce something rich, vibrant and unique.

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## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **BACKBONE REALISATION**

#### **Introduction**

Like any collaborative work, backbone work is subject to real time social interaction as well as musical interaction. Any project is only as effective or successful as that social interaction. And as with any improvisation, in order to understand the results of that work it is therefore necessary to understand it and to discuss it as both a social and as a musical process.

Any collaborative venture is subject to the ability of the participants to interact and to communicate. Thus, good backbone musicians are not necessarily those who are merely able to play well, or even to improvise well. Backbone work requires that extra social dimension in which a player must be able to contribute effectively as a member of an ensemble, and be able to give way to group decisions, even if they occasionally go against individual taste or judgment. Clearly, any two musicians differ in both those qualities of technique and ability to cooperate, and rarely within the scope of the projects presented here have all members of an ensemble been in absolute agreement concerning all aspects of their group realisations.

In some cases, a fundamental disagreement, or the inability of two musicians to work together due to intense musical and/or social differences has resulted in the abortion of projects altogether (see discussion of the Welsh Sessions, p144). In

other cases, it has been due to a lack of experience, of creative spirit, or of powers of social/musical intercourse or commitment by one or more of the players that has had the effect of draining the energy of all the participants in a project and resulted in uninspired and lacklustre realisations (see discussion of the String Quartet project, p147).

But by way of contrast, other projects have been uplifted and invigorated simply by the introduction of a new personality into the work. And just as one player can bring down and drain a project, so too can another save it and inject into it a new life and energy. Projects such as the *Quartet for Four Flutes* have been characterised by a continuing burgeoning excitement, energy, commitment and a general 'joie de vivre' which has spilled over into the work at all levels. During such projects, the therapeutic qualities of such an inspirational group creativity have simply served to inject even more richness and celebratory quality into the musical and social collaboration. Indeed it is during projects such as these that musicians realise how valuable, enriching and rewarding such collaborative work can be. And nothing can quite compare with the excitement, fervour and intensity that is reached at that point at which a group really manages to work together in complete harmony and with absolute concentration, dedication and respect both for each other as individuals, for the ensemble as a whole, and for the objectives of the collaboration.

Traditional musicology may be criticised for failing to recognise the essential human and social qualities of musical practice. In backbone work, or for that matter, any collaborative work, those qualities cannot be ignored. As with improvisation, any backbone work says as much about the musicians and the ways in which they interact, as it does about the purely musical qualities themselves.

Throughout this chapter, the discussion of the processes of realisation will examine these characteristics of work as well as the purely musical ones. As I will show, the nature and quality of backbone processes is at all levels wholly dependent upon those social relations.

There are many contexts and conditions of backbone work, and many purely practical as well as social and musical factors affecting the processes of realisation. For this reason, the following discussion is divided into three sections:

1. Musical considerations, discussing the purely practical musical parameters of the work.
2. Social considerations, discussing the more overtly social parameters of the work.
3. Overall considerations, discussing the various relationships between those parameters that function to affect backbone work in terms of what is happening, how it is happening, and why it is happening.

### **(1) Realisation - Musical Considerations**

The following three examples demonstrate varying and different degrees of intensity during the gradual process of realising a backbone. In each, the job of the ensemble has been to ‘flesh out’ the backbone in some appropriate way. This has been approached in different ways and with differing degrees of ease.

(i) *Flutebone No.5*

Tape examples T2.1 to T2.10 (refer to Appendix One for summary of tape examples) show the series of basic stages that occurred during the realisation of the *Flutebone No.5* (S12.5). This work took place during the middle hour of a three hour workshop, the first hour having consisted of warm-up and improvisatory work, and the final hour, of work on *Flutebone No.6*. The pressure of this time schedule meant that the ensemble was required to work fast, to make quick sharp decisions, and was therefore restricted in terms of the degree of exploratory and experimental work that they could carry out with regard to the realisation. The tape example represents almost every played stage of the work, although there was much discussion that accompanied it.

The process of realisation of *Flutebone No.5* was typical for a bone of this length and nature. It consists of three stages,

Stage 1 - Rough Draft and Ideas.

Tape Examples T2.1, T2.2, T2.3 represent the first stage of the realisation work. T2.1 is a recording of a preliminary solo performance of the backbone itself by one flautist to the other members of the quartet.

T2.2 is a recording of the backbone together with freely improvised accompanying parts. In the case of this project, this improvised stage immediately followed the solo stage without any discussion. The idea of the improvisation was to throw up ideas and responses as initial reactions to the bone itself. And it is during improvised performances such as these that a group tends to acquire an overall feel and sense of the form and content.

T2.2 was followed by a period of discussion about the improvised per-

formance. During this, the ensemble commented on their various responses and reactions to that performance and a rough plan for a second improvised performance, was devised. This plan drew on ideas both from the first improvisation, and from the reaction to it. T2.3 represents that second loosely structured improvised performance.

By the end of this stage, the ensemble has a rough overview of the entire piece: they have improvised and determined the basic material, the basic structure and role of that material and its relation to the backbone; and they have loosely determined the general feel and the form of the music.

#### Stage 2 - Refinement and development

Stage 2 consists of a process of focussing and of pairing down the loosely structured material of stage 1. The music at the end of that stage can be considered to be a rough draft, with the same characteristics of any rough draft. It contains most of the material, and a rough idea of its order and form. Stage 2, then, is the reworking process. A process of refining and re-refining as the material is delicately fashioned towards its final form.

Examples T2.4 and T2.5 show the gradual development of the first half of the realisation. Each one is a step on from the previous, as the various specific roles of each improvised/realised part are worked out. The harmonies and voicing during the sustained passages are developed, and the textures and the rate of change of the textures between the moving and the still sections are gradually refined.

The Bb passage, "moving but relaxed" (lines 3 to 4), was the least formed section of the first draft. Example T2.6 is of the consequent later improvisation based on a cycle of this Bb phrase. During this, the players

attempted to focus specifically upon the purely textural details of that section. However, during this they failed to acquire a solid feel or texture with which everyone was happy. And indeed, the cluttered and unfocussed complexity of this improvisation serves well to highlight one of the potential dangers of focussing too closely on material in isolated contexts. Although on the one hand such cyclic improvisational studies can function to highlight certain specific qualities of a musical line, on the other, they can result in the ensemble entirely losing sight of the role of the basic material within the larger structure. In this case, the ensemble lost all the quality of focus and economy that it had previously acquired during the rough draft stage.

The ensemble was therefore directed to attempt a second improvisation in which they were to aim at a plainer texture using just one or two notes each and without too much movement. Through this they were required to emphasise the quality of stillness and rest at that point of the backbone during which the Bb material occurred. Example T2.7 is of the second and more focussed improvisation.

Examples T2.8 and T2.9 display the gradual change and development of the backbone from the Bb material through to the end. The addition of a drone on T2.9 is particularly interesting.

### Stage 3 - Bringing together/Ensemble/Rehearsal.

During stage 3, work is returned to the realisation as a whole. The process here is more akin to a traditional rehearsal process as details of ensemble playing, articulation, overall dynamic and tempo etc. are refined and rehearsed. Example T2.10 is a recording of the stage that was reached in the realisation of the backbone by the end of that session.

The version that forms part of the suite presented in Chapter One was recorded during a session two weeks later following a further short rehearsal. During this rehearsal the ensemble listened to Ex. T2.10 in order to complement, firstly, their oral memory of the previous realisation work, and secondly, any mnemonic notation they may have written during the previous session.

The process of realisation in this case was a relatively smooth one. Each stage of the process was focussed about clear objectives and worked effectively towards those objectives through disciplined, thoughtful and sensitive improvisation. Much of this was due primarily to the relatively high technical and creative skill and experience of the musicians, and the primarily artistic objective of the realisation of a performance piece. But it was aided by the fact that the time-scale was limited, and by the short, organic nature of the backbones.

The processes of realisation in other cases might differ considerably.

This can depend upon many factors:

- (1) Type and scope of the backbone.
- (2) Amount of time available for work.
- (3) Context and objective of work.
- (4) Experience of musicians.

(ii) *Duet Study No.11* (S13.11)

The conditions of work on the *Studybones Vol.II* were very different. These pieces, which are all fairly short and limited in their range of pitches and gestures,

were designed primarily for focussed study by three string duos on the relationships between one notated part and one aurally composed part. Each duo worked on the twelve study set during intermittent sessions over a period of three months. No performance was planned and the working process was exclusively orientated towards the exploration, development and refinement of specific and exacting backbone realisations.

Examples T3.1 to T3.5 show the various stages of realisation of *Studybone II XI* by the first duo. The process is a simple one and, in many ways, not dissimilar to that outlined above:

T3.1 - Backbone alone

T3.2 - Backbone with second improvised part establishing initial pizzicato figure.

T3.3 - Backbone with second improvised part based partly on the pizzicato figure whilst also searching for a second, complementary figure.

T3.4 - Following a spoken decision to simplify the material of T3.3, this performance aimed at the clarification of the structural role of the realised part.

T3.5 - Performance affirming nature and role of the form and content of the realised part.

This example demonstrates the process through which a simple but effective complementary part was realised. Each stage represents a development from the previous in terms of the growing clarification and focus of the realised/improvised part and its relationship to both the overall form and the note by note movement of the backbone.

The majority of the *Studybones* were realised with similar care and attention to detail. On one hand, the basic processes were similar to those of the *Quartet for*



*Four Flutes*: rough draft, refinement, rehearsal. But on the other hand, the added dimensions of the extended time scale, the somewhat abstract nature of many of the studies, and the effects of working simultaneously with three separate duos on three different realisations tended to distort those processes. So with the *Quartet for Four Flutes*, the three stage process took place during the duration of a single short session, thereby minimising some of the inevitable distorting influence of memory and of the objective distancing that inevitably creeps in with longer projects. But with the *Studybones*, those distorting influences often began to play increasingly determining roles as the duos were faced with the tasks, not only of developing the existing material and devising new material, but also with the job of actually remembering some of the nuances of the improvised/realising work that they had done, sometimes weeks earlier.

(iii) *Backbone for Strings* (S17)

The final realisations of the *Studybones* were fully composed and devoid of any improvised element. And the intensity of this detailed work contrasts with much of the large-scale backbone work in which sheer volume practically forbids such note by note realisation. Necessarily, the degree of improvisation in such large-scale works is greater and this was particularly the case with the realisation of *Backbone for Strings*.

Of all those presented in this thesis, the *Backbone for Strings* is the most challenging and demanding. This is due both to the demands of the less expressive nature of much of the material of the backbone, and also to the demands of the through-composed large-scale structure. So at any time, work on a section had not only to be concerned with the development of the aesthetic dimensions of that section in its own terms, but also with the development of the relationship between that section and all other sections of the backbone. Necessarily, this entailed that

work had to be simultaneously carried out at both a local level and at a large-scale level.

All kinds of practical, social and psychological problems have to be taken into account with a process such as this. And these were intensified by the fact that the work was spread out over a relatively large period of time. However, for the present study I wish to only consider the difficulties that occurred in the development of the realisation of the basic material for section C as these were typical of the realisation process as a whole.

The quartet that worked on the realisation of this backbone consisted of two music students from City University who were already reasonably familiar with processes of improvisation and backbone composition, and two young professional players, neither of whom had previously encountered backbone type work nor had had much experience of contexts involving improvisation. Therefore, the first two sessions, which took place in February 1991 were basically introductory/training sessions. Each involved a large degree of simple structured and conducted improvisation, combined with introductory realisation work using study backbones based on the material of the main backbone.

*Stringstudybone No.S4* (S17d) is drawn from the material of section C of the main backbone. Examples T4.1 to T4.6 are of extracts from improvised realisations of that study. Each explores a differing or developing idea:

T4.1 - Backbone, regular quaver 2nd violin, improvising cello.

T4.2 - Backbone, regular quaver violin, lyrical and sustained cello improvisation.

T4.3 - Backbone, regular quaver violin, low C cello drone with varying dynamics.

T4.4 - Backbone, regular quaver violin, regular cello stabs.

T4.5 - Backbone, 2nd violin/cello regular unison stabs.

T4.6 - Backbone, regular quaver 2nd violin, cello drone, wandering improvising viola.

Each of these study realisations focussed upon a particular idea or texture. And through these, the ensemble was able to develop a clear sense of the nature of much of the material of section C and to explore various ideas concerning the role of that material in relation to their exploratory improvised/realised material. However, two and a half months later, when the quartet returned to work on this material within the context of the main backbone, the clarity of the study work became lost due to a failure of the musicians to transfer ideas from those short focussed structures to the larger evolving structure. Examples T4.7, T4.8 and T4.9 are extracts taken from the work during this session.

T4.7 - Backbone with freely improvised accompaniment.

T4.8 - Improvisation based on the texture drawn from T4.7.

T4.9 - Realisation recorded at the end of the session.

In many ways, the work from this session demonstrates typically poor and unfocussed realisation work. There is a lack of clarity firstly in the individual realised parts, secondly in terms their roles in relation to each other, and thirdly, in relation to the backbone itself.

Such a resultant texture tends to be a result of individual musicians failing to establish their own identities with regard to others. In this case, they have merely improvised fairly indeterminate and insensitive material. For example, in T4.7, it is no coincidence that the improvised parts pause during the pauses in the backbone. This phenomenon (which often seems to occur with inexperienced players) is in this case the result of players failing to establish their own inde-

pendence from the backbone and merely playing along with that backbone in a similar fashion and within a similar structure. The act can hardly be considered to be creative, and certainly the realisations of these examples are significantly less emotive or compelling than those of the earlier string studies.

The third session of work on this section, which occurred a further month later, thus involved the group being directed to return to the ideas of the string studies. And after an initial discussion and specific deliberation on the music, the ensemble produced the realisation of which T4.10 is an extract. This at once brought to the music an aesthetic and technical clarity that had previously been lacking. Consequently, due to rapidly decreasing rehearsal time, the following work on the realisation thus consisted of a refinement and development of that basic idea. Example T4.11 leading to the final realisation T4.12. demonstrate this final stage of the work.

If the process of realisation in this instance is compared with that outlined for *Flutebone No.5*, then Stage 1, which in the previous example lasted just 20 minutes of simple and effective improvisation, in this case took place over a period of four sessions during four months. However, the time taken for stages 2 and 3 was the same for both. In the case of the String Quartet, the relatively short time for these latter stages was certainly due to the limited time available for the completion of the music. (Two of the musicians had to leave the country)

This section from the *Quartet for Strings* highlights the necessity of stressing the importance of focus and attention at all stages of the realisation process. And although this project was considerably upset by the large periods of time that divided the various session, and also by other peculiarly intense social conditions (see page p147) the initial post-study work could have been greatly improved had the ensemble taken more care to consider and remember the qualities of the

preparatory work of the earlier sessions. As it was, this work was neglected and the ensemble resumed work as though they were working from scratch.

As I have said, processes of realisation tend to vary from project to project depending on their particular aims and objectives. But of course, these are always subject to the limitations of time available for all the work that is involved: warm-ups, improvisation, training work, exploratory and creative work, development, refinement, rehearsal, and recording work. And in addition to this they are also subject to both the number and experience of the various participants in the backbone process. Each of the projects outlined above is thus unique in the specific nature of the processes and relationships due to the various demands and limitations that it imposes. However, they are in many ways typical of the sort of processes that were developed through the realisation of the works presented in this thesis.

## **Realisation- Social Considerations**

### **The Welsh Sessions**

In May 1990 a group of 5 musicians (including myself) rented a cottage in the Welsh mountains. For a week we were going to immerse ourselves in the composition of a work based on a 30 minute clarinet backbone . By the end of the third day one musician had left. By the end of the fourth, another was in hospital. And by the end of the fifth, having crashed the car on the return from a therapeutic visit to the cinema, we decided to abandon the project and return home.

The extraordinarily intense and bizzare events of this week served to emphasise the absolutely fundamental importance of the purely social considerations of

collective work. For creative collective work has a tendency to intensify social relations. And this can have as many negative repercussions as positive ones. In the case of the Welsh project, there was a basic lack of mutual respect between three of the players. And this manifested itself in a constant process of both social and musical blocking between those players as each attempted to work through the processes of interaction in their own way and with scant regard for the views of others. An example of this is provided by a situation that occurred on the morning of the second day. The clarinettist and the flautist were attempting to improvise with delicate Mozartian feel based on some of the ideas of the backbone. Upon asking the violinist if she would like to join in with a soloistic figure she responded by muttering words to the effect that she thought the whole idea was stupid and that she could not understand why the clarinettist and flautist were even bothering with such an approach! This type exchange was not untypical of the entire project. And it merely functioned to depress the whole ensemble.

In any situation in which a group of musicians work together, there are bound to be tensions, conflicts and disagreements. And often it is precisely due to those relationships that a group manages to work productively and creatively. But if creative productivity is to flourish, then those tensions and conflicts need to exist within a basic framework of trust and respect. This is especially true of improvisatory work, due to the qualities of honesty, sincerity and openness that it naturally tends to demand. For even if a player is to confidently express ideas, feelings or emotions, in an open and honest way, then they must have an underlying faith in the respect and support of the other members of their ensemble. And if those ideas are then subject to challenge, then it is even more important that that underlying respect functions as a supporting structure for any resulting conflict.

This clearly must be the case with backbone work. In any backbone process, the

music is forged to a large extent, out of the contributions of the individuals within an ensemble. Consequently, the conditions within which that process takes place must be such that individuals feel both supported by their colleagues and thus confident that their role will be accorded due respect. With the Welsh Sessions such conditions never existed, and a degree of personal and prejudicial conflict began to creep in. This had the effect of destroying any respect that had existed in the first place. And when a group cannot communicate in a respectful, open and honest way, then it can neither improvise productively, nor compose music collaboratively.

In stark contrast to the Welsh sessions were the Flute Quartet sessions of May 1991. For these were characterised by a continual sense of respect, consideration, and of the joy and celebratory qualities of creative group work. And throughout the five sessions spread over a period of three weeks there was not one difference of opinion that could not easily be solved through open and honest discussion and experimentation.

The four flautists gathered together for this project came from three different quartets, and only two of the players had not met before. Each of the musicians saw the project as a means through which they might be able to explore both improvisation and less formally composed music. All had a clear determination to enjoy themselves in an atmosphere free from the rigours and formalities of traditional ensemble work whilst working as positively as possible for the quality of the project as a whole. And for a while, the richness and quality of that work spread out into their other professional orchestral and ensemble work.

Each three-hour session of this project was characterised by an excitement that was continually nourished by the playing of the musicians. A typical case was

during the second session which was based around the realisation of *Flutebone No.2*. In this case, the initial performance of the backbone by one of the flautists, was followed by spontaneous laughter and applause. This was not merely as a formal response to a performance, but as an immediate and genuine enthusiastic response both to the music and the sight-read performance of it. The natural progress of the session was for that enthusiasm to carry over into the realisation work.

## Response

Indeed, it is indeed often that initial response to the backbone that sets the tone for the quality of the realisation process. It is a question of whether a backbone is immediately appealing and enjoyable, technically or aesthetically challenging, easy or difficult to understand and how much it inspires the players. Conversely, it is a question of whether it is merely received as unenjoyable, unimaginative, unmusical and unprovocative. So many of the projects presented in this thesis have hinged upon that initial moment of backbone performance and in the way in which players have responded, both inwardly and outwardly.

In the example outlined above, the moment was a simple and straightforward one. All players enjoyed the performance, found it inspiring *and clearly displayed the* fact. The open honesty and down-to-earth quality of the entire project both thrived from, and in turn made possible this kind of response.

However, many other projects suffered due to lesser degrees of openness and/or honesty. The String Quartet sessions, for example, were typically subdued due to the natural reserve of all the players, combined with a general lack of open communication. This condition was often further intensified by the particularly stoical nature of the cellist. So unvaried was his response to the improvised and



backbone performances that the other members of the ensemble were generally incapable of gauging either his mood, enthusiasm or even attentiveness at any stage throughout the project. Often he would appear touchy and uninterested only to reveal later that he was in fact, full of energy and enthusiasm. At other times, however, he would appear touchy and uninterested only to reveal later that he was indeed touchy and uninterested. This player, who was also frequently late for rehearsals, made it almost impossibly difficult for the ensemble to effect good relations. Further, he tended to inhibit the other members from displaying energy, enthusiasm or emotion at times when they clearly wanted to. And when, after a few sessions, it became clear that this was what was happening, a degree of self-conscious understanding of the problem began to make the situation even worse. During this project, solo performances of the various sections of the backbone were always greeted with unresponsive silence and greatly reserved interest.

A change began to take place throughout this project that deeply affected the outcome of the music. It had started out with quite specific aims, one being that the two violinists, both of whom had worked many times with backbones, should work in detail on a full large-scale recording and performance orientated backbone project. To this they could bring their experience, imagination and skill.

So during the first three or four sessions my role, as a director, was deliberately limited merely to that of a coordinator - setting the process in motion, and allowing the musicians to make almost all of the creative decisions concerning the realisation. But as it became apparent that there were specific communication problems that were blocking the creative abilities of the ensemble, I was forced to develop stronger and more prescriptive directions as a countermeasure. However, with time, that direction became so strong that it began to dominate all processes. And by that stage, the ensemble was no longer making decisions. It was merely

following specific spoken directives.

Of course, on one hand this direction served to unify the purely musical product, but on the other, it considerably reduced the creative role of the performers and withdrew much of the essential collaborative quality from the work. This direction served the function of depriving the musicians of the need to communicate, and resulted in an impoverishment of both the elements of improvisation and the dynamics of ensemble playing. The music, as it was left in an incomplete form, suffers considerably as a result, and lacks most of the spark and inventiveness of the improvisatory work carried out earlier in the project. In this sense, it is typical of a project undermined by poor communication and unbalanced relations.

Both the musical and the personal characteristics of individuals affect backbone work. During the string quartet project, it was clear that the work was suffering as a result of the dominating and draining influence of the cellist. But it must also be said that there was no personality within the quartet who could either challenge or even function as an antidote to the cellist's persona. And in many ways, the problems with the project lay more with the inability of the other members of the quartet to cope with and to challenge the cellist, than with the cellist himself. As it was, the quality of the work spiralled downwards as all participants gradually seemed to resign themselves to the negativity of the conditions.

The work on *Five More Love Songs* and *Chant* were, in many ways, subject to a similar energy-draining influence. But during these sessions, the openness and 'down to earth' characteristics of the singer generally served to bring a practical perspective into the work. This singer, who was well liked and respected by all members of the ensemble, naturally refused to allow any potential tensions to

overpower the working sessions. She did this simply by pointing out when and where they were beginning to effect a negative influence. Then she would then suggest simple and practical solutions to those problems. Her continual enthusiasm and practical essence constantly inspired and energised the other members of the ensemble. And although some of the sessions were still difficult, the general atmosphere was one of support and respect. The relationships that were formed within this consequently developed as the performances approached.

### **Tuning the Ensemble**

Such parameters of social interaction do, as I have said, play a part in all ensemble music. But whereas in the case of traditional chamber music, social relations are generally subservient to musical relations, in collaborative compositional work, they are on an equal footing. Players need to talk to each other and to communicate with each other in a direct way if the processes of collaboration are going to flourish. In chamber ensembles, much of that communication tends to be mediated by the score.

Therefore, it is not only musical balance that is important for a backbone ensemble, but social balance is also a basic consideration. In the case of the string quartet the overwhelming dominance of the negativity of a single player served to drain the energy and enthusiasm of all members of the ensemble. With the songs however, the energy and enthusiasm of the singer energised and inspired the rest of the ensemble.

For this reason, the ability to work well and to communicate with others is as important a characteristic of a backbone musician, as is the ability to play well. And it is partly for the need to ensure productive communicative relations within an ensemble that the work of backbone sessions is generally preceded by some

kind of pure communication-based warm-up activity. And it is significant that those projects that did not involve much of this kind of activity, such as the String Quartet project and The Welsh Sessions, ultimately broke down due to a lack of effective communication.

This kind of basic communicative and ensemble focussing activity - an activity which is alien to conventional rehearsal sessions - stresses to the ensemble the importance of communication within backbone work. And it is the job of the overall director of a project, assuming that there is one, to ensure that such activities take place both at appropriate times and in appropriate ways throughout a project. So although groups rarely 'gel' with the immediacy and fluidity of the Flute Quartet, they can generally be brought together in ways that specifically focus upon relationships. Through this, individual players are forced to communicate with other members of the ensemble, and that ensemble is coerced into acquiring many varied modes of relationship and exchange.

For example, one of the most common characteristics of unconfident, shy, embarrassed or moody and sulky musicians is that they establish visual barriers between themselves and others. They do this by constantly keeping their heads down and avoiding eye contact. Now, *without discussing the many complex* psychological considerations concerning this, it is safe to say that such an activity most often detracts from free flowing communication. For even despite the fact that it prevents anyone from giving a visual cue or indication to such a player, it also has a tendency to remove that player somewhat from the dynamic exchange of those other players who are at least in partial visual contact.

A simple exercise that encourages individuals to look at each other will not necessarily entirely prevent such a situation from occurring. But it will, at the very least, force participants to confront the embarrassment of visual communica-

tion and therefore, to begin to get used to the idea of simply keeping their eyes, as well as their ears, alert and focussed.

An ensemble generally begins a rehearsal by tuning their instruments. They then retune and balance the sound between instruments at various times throughout the rehearsal. Now the activities, such as those outlined above, can be considered to be a kind of social equivalent. Warm-up activities are a way of 'tuning' the diverse personalities of the ensemble, of finding a common ground and a common meeting point. They effect a tuning together and balancing of the social as well as the musical dimensions of collaborative practice. This parameter of rehearsal/working technique is generally ignored within traditional ensemble work. However within backbone work, as will become apparent in the following chapter, it must be considered as both basic and essential.

### **Doubt and Misunderstanding**

Most of the musicians I have worked with during the past six years have been either recent converts to backbone work or entirely new to it. And many of these musicians have expressed strong reservations about the nature and value of the processes that have been involved. For example, during a discussion in a student workshop at City University, a participant commented that he found backbones far too restrictive to be of any real creative value. I pointed out to this player that he had a good deal more freedom and artistic license when taking part in a backbone project than he did when he was taking part in a rehearsal of the University orchestra. To this he replied that he did not expect to be given any freedom in the orchestral rehearsal so there was no problem. However, when he was taking part in a backbone project, he did expect to be given a degree of

freedom. But as that was not as much as he expected, it had led him to feel overly restricted and, hence, dissatisfied with the entire process.

I was at first surprised at the player's comment for he was both a talented and intelligent improviser and a regular participant in the workshops. But with time it became apparent that the player's attitude to backbones was such that he did not see them as creative processes at all. He approached them more as problems to be solved, as though all the musical parts had in fact already been written, but lost on the way to the rehearsal. The job, therefore, was for him to work out what his part was.

This doubting tendency seems to pervade all areas of backbone processes, and it was highlighted in an even more bizarre way during a seminar presentation of the *Studybones Vol II* by myself to the City University Advanced Composition Research Group. During this, a performance of three different duet realisations of the *Studybones* was followed by a short discussion of the various differences between the basic characteristics and techniques of each. It was during this discussion that one participant in the seminar (a composer who always worked in traditional and conventional ways) said that he was surprised at how similar the realisations were to each other and furthermore that he saw no role for the composer in such work as any reasonably musical performers would be able to devise such simple and basic scores for themselves.

Had the seminar been a presentation of three different interpretations of traditionally composed duets, it is unlikely that this kind of criticism would have been voiced. It has been one of the consequences of repeated performances of fully notated Western classical music that audiences of that music have become intensely conscious of the smallest differences between different performances of

identical compositions. And it is rare that a critic will make a significant statement to the effect that three individual interpretations of the same composition were surprisingly similar. It is more likely that a discussion would rather be focussed upon the varying different nuances in the articulation of a specific phrase or gesture, combined with a consideration of the tempo, dynamic and feel of the various individual performances.

But such a discussion such as this could equally well have applied to the backbone performances. In the Research Group we could have talked simply about the wildly varying interpretations of the backbones themselves, taking into account all those considerations that apply to the performance of traditional composition. And if these considerations were combined with the added dimension of the realisation of the backbones, then that discussion could have lasted almost indefinitely.

However, in this context it seemed that the composer in question had not listened to the duets in as focussed or critical way as he might have done had the work been of a more traditional nature. Given the element of freedom in the work, he had chosen to notice only those differences between the *Studies* that were particularly striking, i.e. only those striking differences between the various realised parts. And he had clearly considered details such as slight nuances of change between the realisations to be insignificant and unworthy of comment.

What the composer failed to realise was that, although the work is freer and more collaborative than traditional work, it does not necessarily follow that it is any less disciplined, specific or focussed; it is in fact quite the opposite. What that freedom and collaboration can allow for is an even greater degree of subtlety in inflection and variation between performances. Due to the nature of the processes,

details can constantly be modified, developed and perfected as the various musicians gradually develop their understanding of and feel for the music.

It is therefore not even enough to state that all those characteristics of interpretation and performance that apply to traditional work also apply to backbone work. What in fact must be said is that those characteristics are in some ways even more worthy of note as they form a more wholly integrated part of the processes of creativity. In the case of backbone music, interpretation and performance form part of a continuous and unbroken organically evolving process of creativity.

It is symptomatic of the nature of Western cultures that any change in process or concept must be proved in a formal logical way before it is accepted. As I discussed in Part One, Western cultures tend to doubt anything for which there is no concrete evidence. The above case is an example of this - a suspicion of the processes, seemingly only because they are unlike the norm. And generally, backbone processes are not criticised for problems that actually lie within the process itself; they are criticised simply for being different. And many commentators have tended to make ill-informed assumptions about the work, followed by consequent astonishment that anyone could even begin to take such work seriously. This is, of course, the problem that has faced all new initiatives. It is the problem of establishing a radical discourse in such a way that it can be subject to criticism not in terms of its unfamiliarity or novelty, but in its own terms and for what it says and does.



## **Realisation - Direction, freedom and constraint**

In the previous chapter I discussed various degrees of freedom and constraint in backbone processes. The way in which a backbone project is directed will, naturally, have as much effect upon the freedom of the musicians, as the backbone itself. At one extreme, a project may be an entirely collective effort, with no one individual playing a dominant directorial role. At the other, a project may be strongly directed with each player literally following the spoken directives of a dominant director. In practice of course, the processes tend to fall between these two extremes.

During sessions such as the those of the clarinet quartet *Ritual* (S14) and the *Quartet for Four Flutes* (S12), I have tended to assume a directorial role in which I attempted firstly to draw ideas from the players themselves, and secondly to ensure that those players were aware of both the long-term structural directions as well as the short-term movements of the backbones. And at those times at which the ensembles became lost for ideas, or stuck between differing points of view, I would make more specific suggestions or directions. Thus, my role in such projects was, that of a coordinator and arbitrator. However, when working on *Chant* (S15) my role was less clear cut. The ensemble was made up of musicians of very mixed abilities and experiences. On the one hand there were musicians such as the violinist and percussionist, with whom I had worked many times on backbones and improvisations, (*Studybones Vol I+II* (S6/13)). On the other, there was the saxophonist and clarinettist who were fairly inexperienced and unconfident young players. Somewhere between these two extremes was the singer, and a trumpeter who, although highly competent, required clear guidance due to his relative inexperience of backbone contexts. So during this project I would generally leave the violinist and percussionist to devise and develop almost all of their

material, secure in the knowledge that they had the skill and experience to do so. But as the saxophonist and clarinettist tended to require strong direction at some times, I almost literally described the music that I thought they could play.

In other contexts, I have deliberately avoided being present during the realisation processes. In educational contexts, for example, when part of the objective of the work is to allow participants to develop their own qualities of leadership and ability to cooperate, groups are required to devise their own structures of directorship. Such groups often attempt to work entirely collectively. (Many examples of this work are presented in Chapter Seven). Occasionally this works well. But in practice it tends to result in an overall slowing down of the work, as the processes of decision making become subject to often complex and everchanging differences of opinion between the members of the group. It is for the sake of pure practicality therefore, that I generally advise on, at least, a 'final say' director who performs the role of always making the final decisions. So that even though they may not actually direct anything, they can enable the group to work through differences that can otherwise destroy the processes of work.

### **Realisation - Memory**

Memory plays a crucial role in backbone work. Firstly, there is the accuracy of memory during a single session: that is, the degree to which improvised events can be recalled only minutes after they have occurred. Secondly, there is the accuracy of memory between sessions; that is, the degree to which realisation work carried out during one session can be recalled during the next. Thirdly, there is the effect of the inevitable change in perspective of remembered events over a long period of time such as occurs when a backbone work is developed over a period of weeks or months.

In the second and third cases, that memory is of course affected further by the degree to which improvised/realised parts are 'notated' during sessions, and the form that that notation takes. Inexperienced backbone players invariably tend to expect to remember most of the details of a realisation from one week to another. And, of course, they are surprised when they return to the work after a week has elapsed to find that often they can not only not remember details of the realisation, but that they can hardly even remember the backbone itself.

This proved to be a major problem in the string quartet project. During this there was a break of almost three months between work on some sections. In a couple of instances, when the players had failed to make adequate notes, they could not only not remember working on an already realised section of the bone, but also still failed to remember even when listening to a recording of their previous work. This indeed demonstrated the extraordinary capacity that the brain has for losing information.

Memory, as I mentioned in Part One, is rarely used in conservatoire contexts as an aid to creativity. All music tends either to be written in exacting detail, or remembered only through intense practice and parrot-fashion reproduction. But in backbone work, it is an indispensable tool, the use of which needs to be developed by most musicians. It is for this reason that players are constantly encouraged to notate certain key elements of their realisations. Such notations consist of any types and kinds of symbols ranging from traditional notation through to scant words and graphics that serve to function mnemonically. So although those notations may well mean little to anyone else, they will, for the musician concerned, make the difference between being able to remember work and simply forgetting it altogether.

## **Realisation - Conclusion**

There are many trends that have emerged throughout the work outlined in this chapter. And of these, the examples discussed here are typical. But the work is all extremely personal and idiosyncratic and it would thus be foolish to attempt to formulate and present a cogent theory of backbones. Each project is new. Each process establishes and develops its own path. And the work is constantly changing and transforming.

I will often begin a project with a clear level-headed idea about how I will organise the realisation process. And even in those cases in which I know the musicians well, I am invariably forced to allow the process to find its own path. There are so many crucial factors that come into play and which affect the balance of a session. Any backbone venture is subject to the ability of the participants to interact and communicate, and subject to the development and change in their ability to interact and communicate. And it is this which makes the work unique and constantly rewarding.

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## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **BACKBONES IN EDUCATION**

#### **Introduction**

The music presented in this thesis can be categorised in two groups. Firstly, that which has been improvised, realised and composed through specific creative projects with clear and defined productive, performance/recording-orientated goals. Secondly, that which has been improvised, realised and composed within the context of educational workshops. Such workshops, which although invariably led to performance, were more overtly concerned with the process of learning and of the development of the communicative and creative skills of the musicians involved.

Before presenting some of the music that formed the focus of this educational work, I will outline some of the principles and philosophy underlying that work, and some of the techniques through which young musicians are introduced to collaborative, improvised and semi-improvised musical practice.

Our conservatoires and universities continue to train and to examine young musicians almost exclusively in the practices of notated music. And those musicians are trained to become expert both in terms of their technical and their interpreting skills. Such training generally, although not exclusively, takes an individualistic form. It typically consists of a range of standard formats. Firstly, there is

one-to-one tuition, as in a conventional instrumental or composition lesson. In these, although the relationships formed between the teacher and the pupil are often dynamic, evolving and dependent upon a two way flow of information, the experience is essentially an individualistic one. Secondly, there is the lecture form of tuition. Again, this is essentially individualistic as the flow of information is most overtly that from a teacher to pupils. Those pupils are, more often than not, passive recipients within an environment that inhibits sharing. In addition to these, there are also various common forms of orchestral and choral training. But despite the fact that these involve a degree of dynamic and active exchange between participants, in practice they generally tend to favour director/directed modes of participation in which the majority of players are inhibited from making active creative contributions.

However, there is also the seminar in which students are both encouraged and required to play an active and discursive role. These are typically based around a presentation by one student, followed by a discussion or exchange of ideas, ideally between all participants. In such a context the 'teacher' generally plays a more levelling role, serving as a guide and arbitrator for the ensuing debates and discussion. This type of education, which is an essential feature of academic degree courses, encourages students to think for themselves, to work out arguments, to present their arguments and viewpoints, and to respond to the arguments and viewpoints of others through a dynamic oral exchange. And the success of such a seminar depends more upon that degree of participation and exchange than on the simple passive lecturing and reception roles of the traditional lecture or lesson.

In this seminar mode of education the emphasis is more upon the initiative of the students to learn for themselves through personal inquiry and discussion within their peer group. As such, it is a necessary and valuable antidote and complement to the formal lecture/lesson context. But although it has for many years been well

established within academic contexts, there is no genuine, practical musical equivalent. Indeed, the closest common musical form of training which involves a dynamic interaction and exchange is within the context of the chamber ensemble. But within this, communication and interaction is generally mediated by the score upon which all players are ultimately focussed. This score therefore, performs a function of inhibiting or devaluing, to a large extent, the direct unmediated exchange that might occur within a seminar. So although they are a valuable part of the training process, such chamber music contexts cannot be thought of as a genuine collaborative and interactional mode through which skills such as those of musical collaboration and improvisation can flourish and develop. They do not constitute a kind of training that takes as its premise the notion that if players are to be able to work collaboratively, dynamically, and creatively, then they must also be trained collaboratively, dynamically and creatively.

Such a form of training requires the active and interactional participation of the students. It entails a form of practical and dynamic interaction through which the skills of improvisation, composition and performance are explored alongside those of communication, presentation and creative leadership. It entails a more overtly integrated and holistic (multifaceted and interconnected) approach to learning and development in which skills are acquired through the active employment of them within creative contexts. So, for instance, whereas in a seminar a student might give a presentation and follow it by leading a discussion, thereby developing not only pure academic skills, but also those of presentation and leadership, a musical equivalent might entail a student conducting an improvisation, or directing the realisation of a pre-composed backbone. Such tasks require not only leadership and presentation, but also the basic skills of improvisation, composition and orchestration. And these are thereby developed, not in an academic, notation-based way, but in an oral/aural and dynamic way.

The composer/performer, Peter Wiegold, who along with the educationalist Peter Renshaw has initiated such a process of training through the establishment of the department of Performance and Communication Skills (PCS) at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, outlines ten clear objectives of such work (unpublished PCS handout):

- (a) To enable individuals to get in touch with their creativity and to unlock their potential.
- (b) To build up strength, confidence and self esteem so that individuals become more open and flexible to change.
- (c) To foster responsiveness to change through listening, looking, trusting and adapting in different circumstances.
- (d) To reveal and analyse processes of internal change and learning.
- (e) To enable individuals to become more critically reflective so that they can perceive and evaluate the process of change.
- (f) To provide opportunities for individuals to diversify in order to meet changing needs.
- (g) To acquire creative, presentational, performance and communication skills.
- (h) To develop integrity and self-honesty in relation to the making of creative decisions.
- (i) To enable individuals to develop creative leadership skills.
- (j) To develop interpersonal awareness and empathy in order for individuals to work constructively in groups.

These objectives are, of course, interrelated and all part of an integrated and holistic approach to education. But it is useful to consider the specific nature of such objectives and their role within that training process as a whole. For instance,



whereas (c),(f),(g),and(i) represent practical and technical objectives of the training, (a),(b),(d),(e),(h)and(j) represent the development of more personal qualities and those that are concerned with the development of character and persona, as well as their relation to interactional contexts. Hence, in order for a musician to develop presentational or communication skills, they must first have acquired a basic strength, confidence and self-esteem that serves to underpin those skills. And in order to develop skills of creative leadership and direction, they must also be responsive to various differing contexts through listening and looking, as well as trusting, and in turn they must develop an appropriate and practical degree of critical reflection.

Many practical music workshops, when they do happen to occur within conservatoire contexts, fail to recognise or understand the complex and integrated nature of such skills. It is not uncommon to find colleges operating (usually extra-curricular) 'improvisation' groups, or other collectives vaguely entitled the 'avant-garde' or 'experimental'. But these rather meagre and generally tokenistic offerings barely scratch the surface of a genuine integrated training. And they tend to ignore the essential interrelatedness of all practices of music. In practice, the development of skills in one area, such as free improvisation, music theatre or traditional performance, necessarily demands the development of skills in other areas that are concerned with those basic and fundamental skills outlined above. These are skills that apply equally to the simple act of walking on a stage, and conducting oneself with confidence and responsiveness in workshop and performance situations, as they do to improvisation and composition.

For these reasons, workshops need to approach the development of musicking skills within a general context of practice and communication. And they must do this even though they may be individually focussed on a specific activity (for

example, one may be orientated towards the development of harmonic resources, another towards rhythm, another towards composition). So, a free improvisation workshop (as well as actually setting up various musical contexts for improvisation) will also allow musicians to explore basic processes of communication. And it will develop degrees of trust and interaction within the group through a variety of musical, theatrical and movement exercises. Such a workshop takes account of a musician as a whole person, an individual personality and character. It recognises that those individual qualities are as important to improvisation as are purely musical ones. And it acknowledges that those qualities need to be developed and explored along with musical ones. Only through this approach can musicking truly become social as well a musical interaction.

### **Backbones in Education**

Backbone work draws on many skills. A good backbone musician must be able to work confidently and creatively as an active member of an ensemble. And for this a musician requires a basic grounding in almost all the varying skills of musicking:

(1) Improvising Skills: skills such as those that enable a musician to perform a variety of functions within both ensemble and solo contexts. Such skills would include being able to:

- add further parts to a riff/ostinato, in both rhythmic/arhythmic, tonal/modal/atonal/sound-based contexts.
- establish and develop clear and defined roles within any context and to understand the ways in which these roles contribute to the music as a whole.
- effect change within improvised contexts through the articulation of

clear cues and signals.

- to articulate all of the above within contexts ranging from the purely rhythmic, incorporating various metres, speeds and changes, to fluid gestural/timbral based contexts.

**(2) Composition Skills, that enable a musician:**

- to have an understanding of the basic differences of approach that might be required for composed/semi-composed contexts, as opposed to purely improvised work.
- to have a basic understanding of the functions of form and structure and a feel for pace, development and balance within composed/semi-composed contexts.
- to be able to work both in a specific, detailed way, but also in a rough and general way.
- to be able to work both on a large and on a small scale.
- to have an awareness of instrumental/non-instrumental sound resources that stretch beyond those of the basic instrumental conventions.
- to have an awareness and understanding of the varying textural considerations of music.

**(3) Communication and Participation enabling a musician:**

- to be able to work both confidently and creatively as a member of a collective ensemble.
- to be able both to direct and to be directed.
- to work in an altruistic way for the good of the group as a whole.
- to be able to communicate openly and honestly with others and to criticise and accept criticism in appropriate and constructive ways.
- to adopt an appropriate professional attitude to work; being ready to start rehearsals and workshops on time, and being prepared to take a full and

active role, practically, physically and mentally.

- to be able to disregard and ignore any and all of these tendencies occasionally if the conditions and contexts are appropriate.

These skills are, simply those required by any good flexible and open-minded musician. And their development should naturally form part of the basic training of all musicians. For backbone musicians they are indispensable. The nature of backbone work is such that it draws on all of the creative, technical and social resources and capabilities of the musician. For this reason, backbones serve well in educational contexts in order to challenge and to focus the development of those capabilities. They present a specific and demanding creative challenge to musicians. Through this challenge musicians can explore and develop their social and musical skills within the context of a creative process that results in a performable end product. It is this creative and directive role that backbones can play in an integrated and holistic workshop training.

Over the past four years at City University, such workshops have been developed as part of the training of the undergraduate music students. These workshops, which often incorporate backbone-orientated work, have attempted to develop the skills and qualities of the musicians in a way that will enhance all areas of their musicianship. So that even if they never work in contexts incorporating improvisation again, their conduct and performance will still benefit from the experience of the added dimension of that work and from the development of personal skills of communication and presentation.

Typically, such workshops take a three-part integrated form:

- (1) Non-instrumental warm-up and focussing work.
- (2) Instrument-based exploratory/skills/technical work.
- (3) Creative Work using backbones or other stimuli and foci.

(1) Non-instrumental focussing and warm-up work has the objective of tuning both the individual and the ensemble. Such tuning involves focussing and opening up paths of communication, unblocking destructive inhibitions, and creating a sense of group unity, group trust and individual and ensemble direction. The activities typically range from those which are simple physical/vocal 'games', to those which are highly structured, formal and challenging. But all work tends to have clear objectives and a role within the overall balance of the workshop. On the one hand for instance, much of the work is geared towards "loosening-up" and relaxing inhibitions. Through this, musicians are encouraged to throw themselves into the technical and creative work and to understand that they can make mistakes within a framework of camaraderie and playfulness. A typical loosening activity would be a game of tactical musical chairs, ensemble/duet sumo wrestling, or grandmothers footsteps.

On the other hand however, much of work is aimed at developing performers' self-awareness, self-assuredness and self-confidence. And it clearly emphasises control and discipline. In one such activity, the focus is placed upon the stresses of facing an ensemble of observers. In this, all the participants stand in a semi-circle at one end of a room. One person walks out to face the group. He or she takes a good breath, and looks carefully around the group. S/he breathes out and walks back.

Within this activity, the participants are encouraged to be aware of any physical and mental tensions, to be aware of the way that they walk, the way they hold their head and the way they stand up. During this basic activity, participants might be asked to face the group and to perform some simple task - perhaps simply to say their name, or a sentence, or to improvise a song about some event

from the last week etc. Ideally, a balance is aimed for between 'letting go' and informality, discipline and formality. This balance should be appropriate for the conditions and contexts of the group, and one that is within a context designed to develop group communication, group trust and a sense of common objectives and direction.

This work naturally varies depending upon the overall contexts and objectives of the workshop. But typically, different activities would be approached in such a way that they 'bounce' off one another. For example, a highly disciplined and emotionally challenging exercise, or a formal and concentrating task, might be juxtaposed with a very easy and playful game, or a competitive and aggressive physical match. But all such activities would tend to form a relevant part of an overall objective. And although they may be different, they function in a way that they are specifically appropriate to the objectives of the workshop as a whole. And in a more general sense, they serve to develop individual skills.

(2) Work developing technical and creative skills tends to grow out of the more general warm-up activities. It focuses upon the specifics of musical practice. Such work is aimed at developing the basic technical skills required for creative work.

At one extreme such work would focus upon the development of basic aural skills. For example, skills such as being able to hear and to easily reproduce rhythmic or simple motivic patterns, being able to improvise rhythms and melodic phrases, and to communicate simple rhythmic/melodic phrases with various differing restrictions. Such work includes exercises without instruments. A typical exercise would be one in which the group stands in a circle. The first participant claps and/or sings a simple riff. When that riff is established, the next person in the circle adds to it and so on around the circle until all participants have joined

in. By this stage they will have built a complex interlocking texture containing many elements. Different participants may then be conducted to stop, thereby allowing the group to hear various sub-groups of the texture. This exercise can then easily be translated to instruments, which in turn, might develop into a simple conducted improvisation.

At the other extreme, such work might focus upon the development of skills of complex solo or interactional improvisation. This would place an emphasis on such characteristics as sensitivity to role-playing, structure, and the use of silence in improvised music. Many different activities would be introduced, each emphasising one or two particular characteristics. For example, the ensemble might be asked to structure an improvisation in a very specific way. This might consist of a thirty-second or one-minute time limitation, thereby forcing them to develop the degree of intensity and focus that such short improvisations naturally demand. Other exercises might direct players to assume specific roles or functions within an improvisation. And these may have added parametric and/or stylistic limitations. For example, a duet may be directed to play. One player could be asked to improvise a melismatic solo using just four pitches, the other player to accompany them in any way using just one pitch.

This work clearly forms a basis for backbone work, or for that matter, any other creative work, in so far that it works towards developing a technical assuredness in both individuals and in the ensemble as a whole. So, for instance, when musicians come to the task of realising a backbone, they are not merely attempting to cope with the purely technical demands of the work, but are progressing through to the far more interesting creative areas of that work. So, for example, they do not spend their time learning that a consideration of roles is an important element of realisation work. But they spend their time actively engaged in creative deci-

sion-making concerning musical roles. Thus, the issues involved within the realisation process are tackled at a deeper level. For example, instead of a basic question being one such as, "is a drone a suitable addition to this music?", it might be a more informing and developed question such as, "if a drone is a suitable addition to this music, then what sort of drone is it?" Players thus have the scope to be able to delve deeper into their creative work. They have developed certain basic skills and, therefore, they can enter into the creative work at a deeper level with that basic assuredness, competence and technique.

### (3) Creative Work.

As I have argued, backbone work draws on all resources of the creative musician. As such, it serves well within educational contexts. It provides a means by which musicians can further develop and explore their creative and technical resources. But it also serves as a means by which they work collaboratively and within a disciplined context towards a performance. Backbones force musicians to learn for themselves and from within themselves.

Scores S1 to S11 and S13 show a typical array of backbones that have formed the focus for much of the creative educational work at City University. These range from the specificity and abstraction of *Studybones Vol II* (S13), which are limited to just 4 pitches and a few, short and simple rhythms and gestures, to the relative complexity of *Bone 78* (S9) and *Bone 48* (S5). But they are all relatively short and, therefore, eminently suited to a workshop context. And there is not one that an ensemble has not been able to realise to at least a rough performable stage within a single workshop session. But likewise, there is not one that hasn't provided the scope for more extended work and development over a number of sessions.



### **The Workshop Backbones and their Realisations(Scores S1 to S11)**

Each of these Backbones has been realised by a variety of ensembles in a variety of contexts. They serve to demonstrate the typical ways in which musicians of differing skills, abilities and experience respond to, and cope with similar stimuli. They display a range of techniques and variety of degrees of improvisation in the final realisations, showing the differences in both scope and intensity of the creativity of the varying ensembles.

Tape Examples T5 to T11 (Dat One)(refer to Appendix One for summary) present recordings of a selection of various realisations of workshop backbones. They are representative of a whole array of work that is varied both in its quality and its development. Some of these realisations are indeed as well formed and developed as the *Quartet for Four Flute* and as the composition projects that are presented in Vol.II of this thesis. Others are less well developed and take, rather, the form of collective compositional etchings or rough drafts. Others still are extremely crudely formed first attempts at backbone compositions by novice improvisers.

All of these recordings were made during shared performances between participants in the workshops and thus, are generally recordings of work in progress, rather than completed projects. They are presented here, not as examples of completed compositional projects, but as examples of the kind and variety of work that was produced by students as they developed their creative/backbone skills. Thus, they simply provide a taste of the wide ranging areas of creativity that can be reached through backbone work in educational contexts.

***Backbone 24/10/89 (T5.1-5.4),(S1)***

Realisations T5.1 and T5.2 are reasonably crude and straightforward ones made by inexperienced students. T5.3 is a more developed and formed realisation made by the same student group, eight months later. T5.4 was realised by a group of young professional musicians.

In realisation T5.1, the ensemble have imposed a particular stylistic idea on the backbone. In doing so, they have managed to organise the backbone through a regular pulse and metric structure. Within this they have accorded the backbone itself a soloistic role, and merely worked out accompanimental and commenting figures.

In contrast to this, realisation T5.2 establishes more integration between the realised parts and the bone. The creation of complementary parts through the development of unison, canonic and contrapuntal textures as well as in the establishment of various more complex sound-based textures, serves to enhance the qualities that are already in the bone. In this sense, the range of techniques and the scope of the realisation is greater than that of T5.1

Realisation T5.3 treats the backbone in a more overtly abstract and gestural way. In this case the musicians created a sound world which, again, accords the backbone a soloistic role. But in this case, it also tends to enhance its feel and movement. Characteristically, less attention is paid to the note by note movement, and more to the overall direction and structure of the backbone.

Realisation T5.4 is the simplest of the four realisations. Each of the two realising players have restricted the pitch content of their music considerably and have based their entire part on one simple idea. In the case of the flautist, it is a simple repetition of a bottom octave G sharp. This varies only in frequency and intensity. In the case of the violin, it is a more recognisable riff-like figure. But again, it

changes little throughout the piece. Both parts, together with the backbone serve to produce an overall complete and slowly changing texture.

Of the four realisations, T5.2 is the most specific and determined. Each note has been worked out with a specific role and function. By way of contrast, in T5.4 the realised parts are only very loosely structured and still retain an improvised relationship to the bone. And whereas in T5.2 the backbone has been realised into a complex progressing and developing structure, in T5.4 it has been realised in such a way that it works rather as a single, flowing gesture.

***Backbone 17/10/89(T6.1-6.3) (S2)***

This backbone was specifically composed for use with inexperienced improvisers. To this end it has a simple a-b-a form and a clear modal structure. The three realisations of this bone were devised by the same ensembles in the same contexts as those of *Backbone 24/10/89*.

Realisation T6.1 shows the development of an organically evolving piece in which the backbone part is enhanced by the realisation of a single flowing harmonic accompaniment. As with T5.1, the backbone is accorded solo status.

T6.1 contrasts with T6.2. This latter realisation represents an attempt by the ensemble to treat the backbone in a rather incidental way. The cello and piano establish a slowly moving and harmonically indistinct texture that continues to be heard throughout the realisation as a stable and continuous element. Against this, the bone is heard as a quirky and intermittent solo. A third role is created by the violinists who improvise various commenting and responsive figures in relation to that solo.

Realisation T6.3 as T5.4 is the simplest and most straightforward. A duet is rea-

lised by the two players simply playing the bone in canon.

***Studybone Vol I.4*(T7.1-7.4) (S6.4)**

The four realisations of *Studybone I.4* display four wildly varying techniques and approaches, each with varying degrees of success. Realisation T7.1 initially works well due to the clarity of the roles - the backbone as solo and the realised parts as simple improvised pizzicato accompaniment. However, these roles are abruptly dispensed with during the third line of the backbone and the realised parts join the backbone to form a more integrated and evenhanded texture. The effect is somewhat weak after the clarity of the opening.

Realisation T7.2 is worked as a kind of dialogue. Both players take responsibility for the performance, both of the backbone and of the realised second part. Sometimes they play the backbone in unison, sometimes just one plays it, and sometimes one plays it accompanied by a mutated form of the backbone played by the other. The result is a freely flowing and fluid realisation although it perhaps occasionally lacks clarity.

Realisation T7.3 as an example of a more carefully composed piece. In this case, the ensemble have worked out specific harmonies and entire carefully controlled phrases and roles. No element of improvisation is left in the final form.

Unlike the other examples here, realisation T7.4 was produced during a specific creative project. But for the sake of contrast, it is presented here as an example of a very formal and rehearsed realisation of a backbone.

***Backbone 28/9/90*(T8.1-8.2) (S3)**

Like *Backbone 17/10/89*, *Backbone 28/9/90* presents an ensemble with a simple

form and a basic modal structure. But what is interesting about the two realisations (T8.1,8.2) is that whereas in the first, the realised parts simply follow the movement of the bone through the use of simple canonic and repetitive figures, the second adopts a similar approach but within a metric framework established by a continual piano pulse. In this latter example the simple device performs a unifying and structural role that underpins much of the improvisation. And although in this case the improvisation is somewhat meagre, the device is a constantly useful one and occurs in much of the music in Vol. II of this thesis.

***Studybone I.I***(T9.1-9.2) (S6.1)

The vocal realisation of this backbone (T9.1) was devised collectively by the 15 singers involved. The ensemble was divided into three groups. The first group sang the backbone twice as written. The second and third groups sang it in canon. Each time the second and third groups reached the fourth figure they broke out of the written part to improvise any figure for the duration of that phrase.

The second realisation was produced by the ensemble who produced backbone realisation T6.4. This again, is an example of an extremely formal and rehearsed realisation.

***Studybone I.IX*** (T10.1-10.3) (S6.9)

The three realisations of this backbone again demonstrate hugely different approaches. Realisation T10.1 treats the backbone in a rather incidental way. Each of the realised parts works its way through the piece with aimless and wandering roles. And only at the end of the first page do the musicians play closely to the bone. But despite this they still allow space for the bone itself to be heard. And it is accorded a latent soloistic role that surfaces only during its more

distinctive phrases.

In contrast, the ensemble who produced realisation T10.2 managed to treat the backbone in an unbelievably crude and blatant manner. In this case the musicians have divided the performance of the backbone part between the instruments and merely played the first two lines as written, the only addition to this being a drone under the first figure of the second line. However, at the end of the second line the structure of the backbone is dispensed with as the musicians develop a structured improvisation loosely based on the material of the backbone. The reason for this given by the group was that they had spent so much time working out the first and second lines they did not have enough time to realise the rest of the backbone!

This realisation thus typifies many of the potential pitfalls of backbone work. The first pitfall, is that of an inappropriate approach. This is an approach involving a specific note by note realisation whereby the first phrase is fully realised and rehearsed even before the second phrase has been played. This is certainly a more difficult working method than one based on an initial rough draft process. Despite being an incredibly laboured and tedious process, the note by note approach fails to allow the realisers to acquire any notion of the work as a whole.

The second pitfall is that of the scope of the realisation itself. The typical technique of realising parts that are at least in gestural unison with the backbone is occasionally a creative one. However, it often merely represents, as it undoubtedly does in this case, a one dimensional approach to composition and a lack of awareness of the variety of layers and roles that can be easily be brought to a realisation.

A third typical pitfall is one relating to a general attitude that the players had to

the backbone itself. There is a characteristic irreverence that is demonstrated by the ease with which the realisers freely allowed themselves to fall into an improvisation and to entirely dispense with the backbone. A more respectful, and certainly more challenging and appropriate solution to the problem of performing the unrealised part of the bone, would have been to present an improvised realisation.

Realisation T10.3 by a violin/guitar duo, like realisation T7.2 and T6.4 is an extremely simple one which in some ways is similar to realisation T8.2 in terms of the degree of unison in gesture. However, unlike in T8.2, in T10.3 that gestural unison has an added commenting function. Thus in this case, when the realised violin motif recurs throughout the piece, it is heard not only as an accompaniment to the bone, but as a recurrent theme in its own right.

#### ***I Used to Love You*(T11.1-11.4) (S16.d)**

Musicians have generally found vocal backbones easier to work with than instrumental backbones. For with vocal backbones such as *I Used to Love You* from *Five More Love Songs*, there is an extra dimension brought by the text and its various expressions. This is combined with the fact that the roles of the realised parts are generally going to be accompanying/commenting ones, perhaps with an occasional solo or counter melody.

This is the case with each of the four realisations presented here. The players have accorded a variety of functional structural, commenting and soloistic roles with an ease and naturalness that has been less forthcoming with instrumental backbones. The use of a drone, for instance, which was an immediate response by the tuba player in realisation T11.1, is a strong and enhancing gesture. But rarely do inexperienced musicians tend to consider playing such a role in an instrumen-

tal backbone. Similarly, the technique of question and answer, which is incorporated in each of these four realisations as a basic technique, is far less frequently incorporated in purely instrumental backbones. And none of the players even consider realising these vocal bones in that mono-dimensional gestural unison manner that was characteristic of many of the previous backbones.

## **Conclusion**

The path of music in the future lies entirely in the way in which we educate our young musicians. Only if we can effect change in the ways in which those musicians come to understand the processes of composition and performance, can changes in those processes take place. And as long as those musicians continue to be trained in the dominantly individualistic and disparate manner which is central to the practices of the traditional conservatoire and university, they will continue to practice music which reinforces those conventional divisions between composer and performer, and between composition and improvisation.

Writing music collaboratively, according as much importance to improvisation as to composition, realising the need for integration between musicians of different backgrounds and preferences, assuming the need for placing as much emphasis upon traditional oral practices and processes as upon notated practices and processes. These are all characteristics of musicking that must flourish. As such they must become central issues within education. They can no longer be considered to be optional extras, or side issues. They are core, basic assumptions.

The question of the way in which young musicians are trained, the way that they are encouraged to develop their understanding of the nature and processes of



creativity and the way that the different issues concerned with the performance arts are emphasised, is of the most important and urgent nature. As educators we have a duty to ensure that the present generation is the last that will have grown up with the prejudices and determinations of the conservatoire tradition. And yet we must ensure that the positive qualities of that tradition are maintained and developed in a way that promotes and encourages creative processes involving participation and interaction alongside those more traditional individualistic ones.

Musicians need to be trained in a multifaceted and yet integrated and interrelated way. They need to emerge from institutions, not merely as idealist, would-be concert soloists in a competitive and divisive commodity culture, but as musicians equipped for the multi-faceted demands of a culture that is hungry for art and for artists, and which needs them to work within the many pluralistic layers that contribute to it. Only through a response to these challenges by our educational institutions, and through a development of genuinely radical programmes through which our future professionals can receive adequate and necessary training and support, can our musical culture flourish and meet the changes taking place in society. We must develop and progress, and ultimately recognise what is needed: educational initiative, radical creative development, artistic and social responsibility, institutional support.

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## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **BACKBONES - EVALUATION**

#### **Criteria of Backbone Evaluation**

The identity of a traditional composition is to all intents and purposes limited to two fundamental forms. Firstly, there is its identity as existence in notated form as a prescriptive journal. Secondly, there is its identity as existence in performance, either at the instant of performance or in recorded or remembered form. The major criteria for assessment of such work, are thus related to these two forms. Firstly, assessment of the composition in terms of its notated form, and all the varying criteria that that involves. Secondly, assessment of specific interpretation and performance of that composition, and the varying criteria which that also involves. Within these relations of assessment, concepts of process are generally unimportant. And contextual considerations only come into play in special cases such as in the evaluation of a performance by a school orchestra.

The identity of a backbone composition is more complex however, and necessarily involves the consideration of a number of criteria that are generally ignored with regard to traditional composition. Firstly, there is the backbone itself. This is open to criticism both in formal traditional terms (those regarding the traditional parameters of composition assessment), and also in its appropriateness and achievement as a piece intended to function as a backbone. It is this latter parameter that is most likely to be overlooked or misunderstood by a critical observer or audience. For example, it is possible for a backbone to be a thoroughly competent

and adequate composition, but an inadequate backbone. For instance, as I argued earlier, a Berio Sequenza works quite adequately as a solo piece. It even works reasonably well within the context of carefully notated ensemble embellishments. But it would not function well as a backbone as it would be likely to fail to create that essential aural space that 'invites' other parts to be realised.

It is clearly quite possible to discuss backbones almost exclusively in terms of their quality of 'backboneness'. As I discussed in Chapter Five, backbones perform special functions in musicking and therefore need to boast a special nature. And different backbones are likely to perform those functions in differing ways and with varying degrees of success. They will challenge players and ensembles in a variety of ways, bringing more or fewer amounts of information to the realisation process, and they will vary in qualities such as those of clarity and structure.

The second consideration concerning the evaluation of backbones is related to the nature and scope of a realisation and all the associated criteria which that involves. And as a realisation is the result of an aural/oral process that is as important a part of the creative act as the performance of the end product, then that process must also be a consideration in terms of evaluation. So, for example, when comparing three realisations of the same backbone, typical questions cannot be limited to those such as "which one is the best?", or even "which realisation most suitably responds to the stimuli of the backbone?". Rather, those questions should also be aimed at assessing each realisation in terms of the creative and technical experience of the respective ensembles and the varying resources that were available to them. Such questions will at the very least acknowledge that it is not only the aural product of the music that is important in evaluation.

Within this, there is also the issue of scope and inventiveness. For instance, a

backbone by an ensemble of professionals may be extremely carefully and clearly worked out. It may be well within the creative and technical limits of that ensemble. And in performance, the realisation may indeed work well. But just as within traditional conservatoire parameters great performances tend to grow out of performers taking risks and pushing interpretations through certain preconceived limits, so too do realisations. And in a sense, a technically assured but unadventurous realisation offers little more than any technically assured and unadventurous performance. And as the nature of backbone work is far from what one might call safe, one perhaps has a right, or at least a desire to expect that an ensemble will attempt to stretch itself and to take calculated creative risks *within realisation*. For it is partly this that the backbone process is attempting to do. The extent to which an ensemble achieves this must surely be accounted for when assessing backbone work.

A third consideration of evaluation in backbone work is related to context. Throughout this thesis, I have discussed the various contexts within which the backbone projects take place and for which the backbones were realised. And it is clear that context must be a basic consideration. For example, it was important to understand the contexts of the educational work discussed in the previous chapter. And the associated aims and objectives of that work must necessarily be seen to contrast with those of the more overtly performance-orientated objectives of the Flute and Clarinet Quartet projects.

Of course, context forms an important but usually ignored part of all musicking. But backbone work demands that context be a central consideration due to its exploratory and process-based nature. When listening to a performance, audiences generally do and indeed can quite rightly expect to know what experience and background the players have in collaborative or improvisatory work. And it is not surprising that they tend to want to know whether the work results from an

essentially educational/training process, or is the result of a specific artistic project; whether the music has been heavily directed, whether it has been fixed in rehearsal or whether it is partly improvised in performance.

### **Identity**

A backbone composition has a transience that is unknown to traditional notated composition. There is, of course, the unchanging notated backbone itself, which may form the basis of many realisations in many contexts. And that can be duplicated, passed on and faxed just like a traditional composition. But a realisation is unique. And it does not exist in a faxable form. One realisation by one ensemble cannot generally be easily reproduced by another. And even if it could, the act of reproduction would somewhat defeat the point of backbone work in any case.

However, like rock music, there is a sense in which backbone processes do produce finished works that acquire the nature of reproducible products. That occurs through recording of a concert performance, or through studio recording which, like rock music, may also involve the further processes of editing and multi-tracking.

This comparison with rock music is strong. Rock groups generally regard the production of both studio and concert recordings as one of their basic productive creative objectives. And it is through the record that many groups present their music to their audience. So it is also useful to consider backbone work in this way. An ensemble works partly to produce a composition for performance and/or recording. And it is quite easy to conceive of an ensemble that works primarily for the recording medium, and which produces a series of records of their work. These records are then the productive creative offerings they make, and means through which the music is exchanged.

Such a process is not dissimilar to that carried out by the electro-acoustic composer. For what the electro-acoustic composer generally produces are not scores (although they may produce follow scores) but studio recordings. So when, for example, one reads a list of compositions by, for instance, Karlheinz Stockhausen, the list contains music that exists in many different forms, one of which is purely recorded. In the case of the music presented in this thesis there are:

(1) Studio recordings, as in studio produced recordings of realisations by various ensembles. These constitute the compositional product. And the production of the recording was the final objective of the process. The *Quartet for Four Flutes* and *Ritual* are examples of this.

(ii) Performance recordings as in the case of *Five More Love Songs*, *Chant*, and the *Studybones Vols I and II*. The final objective of such projects was live performance and the recordings represent merely a record of that performance. They are therefore once removed from the artifactuality of the recordings of the above category.

In the case of these recordings, as with live recordings of any kind, they are subject to the mistakes and conditions of the performance, and also to those elements of performance that do not, or did not, translate well to record. This is particularly the case with the recordings of *Five More Love Songs* and of *Chant*, which are presented 'warts and all'.

(iii) Recordings of work in progress. The recordings of the educational work presented in the previous chapter are clearly simply records of work in progress. Many represent merely one stage in the evolution of a realisation either at the end of a project that has run out of time, or at the end of a specific session or workshop.

There is, of course, a sense in which all the backbone work has an element of work in progress due to the essentially transient nature of a realisation. And there is not one project presented here that could not have been taken further either through being refined, developed or even re-realised.

(iv) **Backbones.** The backbone score itself is in many ways a traditional artifact. And it carries with it many of the conventional meanings and aesthetic criteria of a traditional score. In the context of this thesis, backbones are generally presented with accompanying realisations. But it is important not to confuse the identity of the backbone alone with that of its context within a realisation. Although many of the realisations are essentially complete and whole compositions, they are not the only ones that could occur. There is always scope for new and different realisations. For this reason, it is essential to consider the music presented in thesis, and particularly in Volume Two, not only in its recorded realised form, but also simply in its purely notated backbone form. Indeed, in some cases, the realisations of backbones have not been included.

## **Conclusion and Evaluation**

*"We need more cooks, not more cookbooks"*

Charles V.W.Brooks

Theory and practice rarely lie easily together. Thus the question of what can and cannot be achieved by a written and objectified presentation of an approach to musicking that is in essence, a practical and personal one is not at all insignificant. Many parts of this thesis suffer remarkably from the inadequacy of language and of the recording medium to communicate human emotions and communications. And nothing, or at least nothing written, can describe the sheer frustration

and disappointment I felt when I realised that the many videos I had made of workshops and rehearsals not only failed to communicate the intricacies and nuances of the occurrences of those sessions, but in fact, distorted them, often to such an extent that they changed both the meanings and the relationships. Through this, a workshop that had been full of joy and playfulness would appear dull and uninspired.

In general, practical work is best understood through experience. And although a written commentary or analysis can often serve well to complement an understanding of that work, it can never sufficiently replace or reproduce what can be learnt through experience of that practice. As is the case with all the intense contextual work, meanings and experiences are often limited only to those within the context - those that understand and experience the conditions, and who form a part of, and who contribute to those conditions.

The work that is presented within this thesis is intended to function as a complement to such experience. Throughout, I have attempted to explain the reasoning behind the practical work that has taken place, and to make sense of some of the often surprising results of that work.

A great deal of the essential experiential essence of much of the work presented here is therefore merely outlined, hinted at and pointed to. Regrettably it has not been possible to communicate such experiences as the excitement and fervour of a really good backbone session, the collective experience and feeling that can occur when everyone 'knows' that something is right, or the joy and celebration of group improvisation in one of those moments when an ensemble really begins to feel together, to move together and to improvise as one. Likewise it has not been possible to communicate the intensity and therapeutic qualities of a workshop which really brings people together and effects genuine change and pro-



gression.

Backbone work, like all collaborative creative work, can be difficult for many musicians. And of course, experiences can often be poor, deflating and intimidating. Without doubt, there are many musicians who, for reasons too numerous and complex to mention here, will never come to terms with the joy of collaborative creative expression. But for most, at times when the conditions are good, such work can provide the most rewarding, enriching and celebratory creative experience. For myself, this has proved that musicking is both a basic and natural human expression.

Within this thesis I have attempted to stress the more positive and enriching qualities of collaborative composition based on a balance between individual and group skills and literate and oral processes. And I have deliberately set this within the context of some of the more negative aspects of the traditional conservatoire-based process of composition and communication. Indeed, more than anything, this thesis might be regarded as an offer of a kind of solution to some of the problems caused by various aspects of such traditional processes.

The future of conservatoire musicking lies in our hands. What we must acknowledge is that a change has begun to take place, and that it must continue to take place. That change involves the very nature of the relationships between those involved in the processes of music, and indeed, even those who might traditionally have been regarded as mere passive listeners of music. What I have attempted to demonstrate here is that there is a wealth of creative possibilities to be gained simply by allowing the line between 'composer' and 'performer' to become slightly blurred. And such a blurring represents only a beginning and a small part of a new, or rather renewed way of thinking about the various practices of musicking. And this surely has implications not only for the composition-perform-

ance process, but also for education, the role of the musician in society and indeed, the role of the 'non'-musician in musicking. The future is full of possibility as we are beginning to experience those forces for change that have the power to revolutionise Western musical practice. That future is full of excitement and innovation, and will flourish if the forces for change are promoted, nourished and allowed to do their work. Musicking is such a rich and vital art. No one is unaffected by it and it is up to us, as active musicians working within powerful institutions, to see that that art fulfills its potential functions as part of a liberating and celebratory social process. Musicking can be so good if only we let it.

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## **PART FOUR**

### **COMPOSITION PROJECTS**

## CHAPTER NINE

### COMPOSITION PROJECTS

#### Introduction

Part Three of this thesis was concerned with the principles and processes of backbone work. This part follows that as a presentation of a number of works that have been composed through such processes. The written text of this chapter is therefore intended, not as a further discussion of backbone techniques, but rather as a programmatic complement to the accompanying backbone scores and the recordings of their various realisations.

#### *Backbone For Clarinets* (Score No.14) (Dat Two, ID 1)

In January 1990 I wrote a thirty-minute backbone inspired by the music of the clarinettist Neyire Ashworth. The process of realisation of that backbone resulted in the aborted 'Welsh Sessions' that were discussed in Chapter 7. A year later Neyire and I were still talking about that backbone. It seemed almost imperative that we should continue the work and resolve the tensions caused by the unfinished project. Thus came the idea of realising a revised version of the backbone with Neyire's clarinet quartet *No Strings Attached*.

A second impulse that led to the composition of the backbone was a more long term one. It found its roots in a recurrent dream that I had had as a child. In this dream, I would see a large car travelling across a flat desolate terrain. The journey would be smooth, quiet and peaceful. However, at various times, it would be

abruptly interrupted. The car would suddenly become twisted and contorted and begin rolling and turning in on itself. It was as though it was taking part in a horrific crash, although I could see nothing that could have caused such a crash.

Within the dream, I had a certain degree of power. If my will was strong, I could minimise the unsettling effects of the incident. And I could work towards resolving the tensions caused by an incident that had caught me unaware. Sometimes the effort required on my part to bring the car back to its original state would be huge. And at other times, the incident would have less effect and I could bring the car back easily.

The dream never got out of control. Often it was unnerving and unsettling, but I was always able to resolve the tensions.

The *Backbone for Clarinets* does not literally reflect this dream, but it is affected by some of the feelings that that dream used to evoke. Within the backbone, I have tried to create a sense of competing motions; of differing forces each existing within the same space at the same time, but with one or other dominating the action. Some of the forces appear peaceful and restful. Others are more violent and energetic.

The realisation of this backbone took place during five short days in August 1991. During this process I allowed the group to find their own meanings for the piece. We jointly decided to title the piece *Ritual*.

The ensemble plan to develop the realisation further at some time in the future.

Musicians: *No Strings Attached*.

Neyire Ashworth, clarinet.

Nick Hayes, clarinet, bass clarinet.

Andrew Sparling, clarinet.

Sara Lee, clarinet.

Recording: Studio Recording from the City University Recording Studio

***Five More Love Songs* (Score No.16) (Dat One, ID 62-66)**

I have been writing songs since I was 11 years old. Strangely, most of them have accidentally taken a kind of backbone form.

The songs that constitute *Five More Love Songs* were written for the singer Louise Nicholson. Louise used to despair at the role that singers were generally accorded in improvisational contexts. She had felt that she was always expected to improvise along the same lines as the instrumental improvisers. And she often had trouble in finding her own voice within such contexts.

Many singers have voiced similar worries concerning their role in improvisational contexts. They seem to have to continually rely upon the sensitivity of the instrumentalists to create space for them within collective improvisations. And even when that space is forthcoming, many singers naturally have trouble in improvising both words and music together. And most singers tend not to find singing exclusively without words to be a very satisfactory form of expression!

Louise found two solutions. Firstly, she would carry a book of poems with her to serve as a text for improvisation whenever one was needed. Secondly, she suggested that I write some backbones for voice.

I have always enjoyed those story-tellers who spend most of their time attempting to start their story, those who keep returning to the first word or phrase, those who keep being distracted by some other story or anecdote. The English stand-up comedian, Frankie Howerd is a classic example of such a story-teller. Invariably, when telling a story he will become 'stuck' in an array of distracting asides that have the function of delaying the start of the story. The frequency with which this happens can be quite infuriating. But it is generally this long-windedness and the abruptness and clumsiness of the delivery that actually makes the performance so

effective.

The songs are influenced to an extent by this mode of delivery. They tend to rely upon techniques of repetition of initial phrases and motifs and upon the sometimes incessant meditation upon particular ideas. Through such a process, one or two simple phrases comes to tell an entire story.

The songs were realised by a small chamber ensemble that included myself. During a period of three months we developed an overall theme based upon a quasi-jongleuristic presentation. This included the development of fairly extended structured improvisations that function as introductions or codas to the songs. By the time of performance this was developing both in terms of the theatrical content as well as musical content.

The recording which is presented on the tape is simply that of an informal live lunchtime performance.

**Musicians:**

Louise Nicholson, Voice.  
Lara Pearson, Violin.  
Jackie Walduck, Vibes, Percussion.  
Richard Hammond, Trumpet.  
Tim Steiner, Percussion.

***Studybones Vols I and II* (Scores No.6 and No.13) (Dat Two, ID 38/2-37)**

I find the process of writing short focussed and tightly structured compositions to be both therapeutic and creative. It is generally through the process of writing such short studies that I gain inspiration for larger backbones.

It is usually during the summer months that I work on such studies. I will carry a small manuscript pad around with me and whenever I get the chance, note down a

short study. During such periods I will write up to twenty studies in a day.

By doing this, I work my way through a multitude of different ideas. But I rarely worry too much about them. I find the short form to be immensely refreshing because, if a piece turns out poorly, I can then cast it aside without feeling that too much has been lost. I can simply take any ideas that may have been good and try them again in a further study. This process keeps me in touch with my composing self and keeps it toned up - a little like playing scales each day.

I had never intended such studies to be realised. But I used one once within a workshop and I discovered that they served a similarly focussing, creative and therapeutic function for the realisers (These functions were discussed in Part Three). The musicians seemed to enjoy the brevity of the score. So it was because of this that I assembled the two short volumes of studies that are presented here and attempted to work with them as part of a specific creative project.

I chose six string players with whom I had previously worked, and divided them into three duos. These duos then worked independently on the studies of volume II.

Musicians:

Duet 1, *Realisation No.1* - Charles Nancarrow Vi.  
- Christina Taylor Vi.

Duet 2, *Realisation No.2* - Lizzie Gilchrist Vc.  
- Cath Dobbins Va.

Duet 3, *Realisation No.3* - Barley Norton Vi  
- Lara Pearson Vi.

The recording is of an informal performance that was part of a seminar presentation to students of the City University Advanced Composition Research Group. This was the seminar that was discussed on p149.



Recording: Sony Pro Walkman

*Volume I* was realised by a trio that included myself. Many of these studies were realised in two or three different ways. Sometimes as duets, sometimes as trios. The differences between them are in some cases extremely slight.

Musicians:

Tim Steiner, Guitar  
Lara Pearson, Violin  
Jackie Walduck, Vibes, Percussion.

*Backbone for Strings* (Score No.17) (Dat Two, ID 39/40)

Sid Caesar was one of America's top television comedians in the 1950s. But it was in 1990 whilst watching Sid Ceaser's 'Show of Shows', a rerun of the old classics, that I first learnt of the outbreak of the Gulf War. The Show Of Shows was interrupted for a customary urgent news flash and the viewer was rudely whisked away from the bedroom in which Mr Ceaser was hilariously attempting and yet failing to get to sleep, to Iraq in which the bombs were pouring down on Baghdad. The shock of the allied attack was for me intensified by the shock of the context of the news report within the 'Show of Shows'.

It was the following morning that I began work on the *Backbone for Strings*. However, my mind was filled with the memory of the pictures I had seen the night before. And as I began to write the pictures remained clear.

That evening as I watched the news, I saw more pictures from the Gulf and I listened to the reports of the latest attacks. This was the beginning of a pattern that lasted for several weeks. For during that time, my work on the backbone continued to be interspersed with the increasingly depressing news from the gulf.

It was a sad and depressing time and the events of that war inevitably had a deep bearing on the music that I was writing. When writing a dance, I could think only of the dance of war. When writing a march, I could think only of the allied troops marching unreservedly through the Gulf. When writing a section that I had considered to be peaceful and meditational, I found that it began to evoke the barren bombed wasteland that I saw on my television each night. The *Backbone for Strings* is not *about* that war, but it certainly was written partly as a response to the things that seemed to be happening.

The backbone develops some of those ideas that I discussed with reference to the *Backbone for Clarinets*. I have attempted to create a sense of cross-reference between the various movements and sections. So although each of those sections and movements is, to an extent, complete in itself, each contains elements that refer to other areas of the piece. So in a sense, each movement carries with it both the memory of movements past, and also elements of those that are yet to come.

This aspect of the work presented an interesting problem to the realisers. For when familiar material returns throughout the backbone, the players were faced with the problem of realising it, not only in context of its immediate surroundings, but also with reference to its occurrence elsewhere in the piece.

Due to the fact that the realisation work remains incomplete (see ch.7), only sections C to I and section N are included on the tape.

**Musicians:**

Barley Norton, violin  
Christina Taylor, violin  
Jenny Newman, viola  
Mike Fairbain, cello

The recording is of an informal performance at City University

***Chant* (Score No.16) (Dat Two, ID 41)**

Having completed the realisation of *Five More Love Songs*, Louise Nicholson asked me to write an extended song for her. The twenty-five minute backbone *Chant* was the result.

The text, which again is influenced by similar story-telling techniques as the *Five Songs*, tells the story of a struggle: this is a struggle in the mind of the singer as she battles between two sides of her psyche. On the one hand there are qualities of aggression and impulsiveness, and on the other there are qualities of sensitivity and care. Within the story, these are explored in terms of her relationship with an imaginary lover. However, she really sings to the immediate reality of the world about her, her friends, her environment and her place within it.

The realising ensemble was the same as that of the *Five Songs*, with the addition of two new musicians playing saxophone and clarinet. There was also to be a bassist, but he had to drop out at the last minute due to circumstances beyond our control.

The recording is again, taken from a live recording of an informal performance.

**Musicians:**

Louise Nicholson, Voice  
Lara Pearson, Violin  
Jackie Walduck, Vibes, Percussion  
Richard Hammond, Trumpet  
Tim Steiner, Accordion, Percussion  
Matthew Stockton, Clarinet  
Fiona Mitchell, Saxophone

**Recording: Casio DA1**

***Backbone Suite for Flute*, (Score No.12) (Dat One, ID 1-6)**

Sandra Skipper had been a member of the ensemble involved with the Welsh Sessions. She left that group soon afterwards and it was a year before she realised how much she missed creative group work. So in May 1991 she suggested that we collaborate on the composition of a flute quartet. *Quartet for Four Flutes* was the result.

**Musicians:**

Sandra Skipper, Flute  
Katy Gainham, Flute, Alto Flute  
Fiona Howes, Flute  
Janet Larsson, Flute

**Recording:** Studio recording from the City University Recording Studio.

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## APPENDIX ONE - TAPE EXAMPLES PLAYLIST & SUMMARY

The taped examples are included on two Digital Audio Tapes accompanying this text. Specific examples can be located through reference to the ID codes.

### DAT ONE (cassettes 1, 2, 3a)

#### **Chapter One / Chapter Nine.**

1. *Quartet For Four Flutes*. A composition that is the result of a creative collaboration between the four flautists and myself. Score No.12 represents the notated part of the composition. (refer p12) (ID 1 to 6)

#### **Chapter Three - The Roles of Orality**

Extract from 'Frownland' by Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band. Example of piece of music that would be difficult if not impossible to adequately communicate through notated means. (refer p44) (ID 7)

#### **Chapter Four - Improvisation Experience and Relationship**

I1. A free improvisation by the clarinet quartet No Strings Attached. Follow Calvino's advice: "Relax. Concentrate. Let the world around you fade. Dispel any other thoughts." This is an improvisation to be listened to. (refer p80) (ID 8)

I2. A solo clarinet improvisation by Neyire Ashworth. This is an example of an improvisation that although is the result of a basically intuitive impulse, displays characteristics that are clearly the result of learnt or acquired formal musical skills. (refer p87) (ID 9)

I3. A violin duet improvisation by Christina Taylor and Barley Norton. The players determine a basic mode of improvising at the very start of the performance. This allows for them to then concentrate on the more intuitive, responsive modes of improvising based on the support of that framework. The combination of both technical and intuitive modes of improvising. (refer p92) (ID 10)

I4. A trio improvisation demonstrating clear formal modes of exchange between the players: 'Question and Answer', and 'Shadowing'. (refer p94) (ID 11)

## **Chapter Five - Backbones - Introduction**

**T1.1. to T1.2.** Examples demonstrating the first stage of realisation work. This first stage is essentially experiential. It involves the realisers listening to a solo performance of a backbone (T1.1) (in this case *Flutebone No.5*, Score No.12.5), followed by them improvising along with it (T1.2). (refer p112) (ID 12)

## **Chapter Six - Backbones - Realisation**

**T2.1 to T2.10.**(refer pp135-138) Examples demonstrating an entire process of the realisation of *Flutebone No.2*. (Score No.12.2).

**T2.1.** Solo backbone performance at start of working process.(ID 13)

**T2.2.** First improvised realisation throwing up ideas.(ID 14)

**T2.3.** Second improvised realisation drawing upon ideas from first realisation and throwing up some more. (ID 15)

**T2.4.** Start of second stage of the realisation process. This involves working in more detail on the ideas of the rough draft. In this example, the musicians focus on the material of the first half. (ID 16)

**T2.5.** Continued focussing work on the first half of the backbone. (ID 17)

**T2.6.** Improvisation based on line four of the backbone. This is intended to develop a good feel for this section as it was the least developed at the end of stage one of the realisation process. In this case, the improvisation proves to be somewhat uninspired. (ID 18)

**T2.7** Second and more focussed and inspired improvisation based on line four of the backbone. (ID 19)

**T2.8.** Focussing work on second half of the backbone. (ID 20)

**T2.9.** Continued focussing work on second half of the backbone with the inclusion of a drone on the final line. (ID 21)

**T2.10.** The realisation as it stood at the end of this working session. (ID 22)

**T3.1 to T3.5.** (refer pp138-140) Examples demonstrating a highly focussed note-by note realisation process based on *Studybone Vol. II.9*.

**T3.1.** Solo performance of backbone at start of working session. (ID 23)

**T3.2.** First improvised realisation establishing initial pizzicato figure. (ID 24)

**T3.3.** Second improvised realisation developing pizz. figure whilst exploring the possibilities of developing a second complementary figure. (ID 25)

**T3.4.** Focussing of first figure and attempting to improvise a complementary sustained figure. (ID 26)

**T3.5.** Solidifying the feel of the entire realisation. (ID 27)

**T4.1 to T4.12.** (refer pp141-144) Examples demonstrating the problems that emerged with regard to the realisation of the *Backbone for Strings*. These examples focus on the realisation of section C of the backbone.

**T4.1 to T4.6** are examples of study based preliminary realisation work. This work was carried out during a single session (*Stringstudybone d* No.17d).

**T4.1.** Study improvisation based on the material of section C. (ID 28)

**T4.2.** Study with improvised sustained figures from the cello and a regular pulse from the second violin. (ID 29)

**T4.3.** Study with improvised cello drone. (ID 30)

**T4.4.** Study with more regular improvised cello part. (ID 31)

**T4.5** Study with unison violin and cello stabs. (ID 32)

**T4.6** Study with improvised cello drone and wandering viola part. (ID 33)

**T4.7 to T4.9** are examples of realisation work on the backbone itself. This work took place two and a half months after the preliminary study work and as the examples show, the focus of that previous work has clearly been lost.

**T4.7.** Backbone with appalling improvised realisation. (ID 34)

**T4.8.** Uninspired improvisation based on march material. (ID 35)

**T4.9.** Desperately poor realisation as it stood at the end of the working session. (ID 36)

**T4.10 to T4.12** are examples of the realisation work that took place during the following session. This took place a month after the previous. After the poor quality of the work of that previous session the ensemble were directed to deliberately return to the ideas of the preliminary study work.

**T4.10.** Improvised realisation based on drone idea drawn from previous study work. (ID 37)

**T4.11.** Developed realisation with the addition of a second violin pulse. (ID 38)

**T4.12.** The realisation as it stood at the end of the working session. Markedly improved. (ID 39)

The final recorded version of this work is referred to on p192.

## **Chapter Seven - Backbones in Education**

**T5 to T11** (refer pp172-178) are all examples of various realisations of backbones that have been carried out within the context of educational workshops.

**T5.1 to T5.4.** are realisations of *Backbone 24/1/89*, (Score No.1). (refer p168) (ID 40-43)

**T5.1.** Realisation No.1. This represents an attempt by the ensemble to realise the backbone within the context of a quasi-flamenco style. (ID 40)

**T5.2.** Realisation No.2. A more challenging realisation than T5.1. In this case, the ensemble have managed to successfully articulate the backbone and the realised parts in such a way as to produce a reasonably integrated and organically evolving texture. (ID 41)

**T5.3.** Realisation T5.3 was produced by members of the ensembles who produced realisations T5.1 and T5.2. However, the work on T5.3 took place six months later. It is a significantly more developed and mature realisation both in terms of its scope and its performance. (ID 42)

**T5.4.** Realisation T5.4 was produced by three experienced backbone musicians. The realised ideas are clear and focussed. (ID 43)

**T6.1 to T6.3** are realisations of *Backbone 17/10/89*, Score No.2. (refer p174) (ID 44-46)

**T6.1.** *Backbone 17/10/89* is a backbone that is reasonably straightforward both in content and gesture. This realisation was the result of the ensemble's first taste of backbone work. (ID 44)

**T6.2.** This realisation was produced by members of the ensemble that produced T6.1. However, the work took place six months later. The example serves to demonstrate the development that has taken place in the quality of their realisation work during that time. (ID 45)

**T6.3.** This was produced by two experienced improvisers. It serves as an example of the way in which an effective realisation is produced through the use of a simple technical device. (ID 46)

**T7.1 to T7.4** are realisations of *Studybone Vol.I.4, Score No.6.4.* (refer p175) (ID 47-50)

**T7.1.** Initially works well due to the clarity of the roles. However, they are abruptly dispensed with during the third line resulting in a poor shape to the realisation overall. (ID 47)

**T7.2.** Worked as a kind of dialogue. A freely flowing and fluid realisa-



tion. (ID 48)

**T7.3.** An incredibly sensitive realisation by a group of inexperienced improvisers. They have considered the roles of the realised parts carefully and made sure that each made a genuinely creative contribution to the whole. (ID 49)

**T7.4.** A duet realisation by experienced improvisers. The clarity of the structure is enhanced by the simplicity of the ideas. (ID 50)

**T8.1** and **T8.2** are realisations of *Backbone 28/9/90*, Score No.3. Whereas there are many similarities between the two realisations, T8.2 might be considered to be slightly more successful if only due to the inclusion of a steady regular piano pulse. This pulse serves a structural function in so far as it unifies the entire realisation.

**T9.1** and **T9.2** are realisations of *Studybone Vol I.1*, Score No.6.1 (refer p176) (ID 53/54)

**T9.1** is a vocal realisation. In this case the ensemble have realised their textures through a simple canonic articulation of the backbone. (ID 53)

**T9.2** was produced by three experienced improvisers. Again, the use of simple and clearly defined roles results in an effective improvisation. (ID 54)

**T10.1** to **T10.3** are realisations of *Studybone Vol I.9*, Score No.6.9. (refer p176) (ID 55-57)

**T10.1.** The realisation treats the backbone in a rather incidental way. All the roles are wandering at the start. However, the result is to offset and enhance the backbone in an unusual and effective way. (ID 55)

**T10.2** In this realisation, the strength of the opening soon gives way to a rather lack-lustre improvisation. The members of the ensemble spent so much time realising that opening that they left no time for rest of the work. A classic example of one of the problems of a 'bar by bar' process of realisation. (ID 56)

**T10.3.** A realisation by experienced improvisers. (ID 57)

**T11.1** to **T11.4** are realisations of the vocal backbone, *I Used to Love You*, Score No.16.4. (refer p178) (ID 58-61)

**T11.1.** Musicians tend to find vocal bones easier to work with than purely instrumental bones. One of the reasons for this is that there is an extra dimension brought to the realisation work by the text and its various meanings. This is combined with the fact that the role of the backbone in the final realisation is generally going to be a foreground, soloistic one. The realisers have the job of developing an accompaniment of some sort.

In the case of this realisation, the ensemble, which was an inexperienced one, used a variety of techniques such as drones, and commenting figures as a matter of course. (ID 58)

**T11.2.** A carefully structured and well formed realisation in which the backbone is enhanced by the addition of a number of complementary roles. (ID 59)

**T11.3.** A realisation by an inexperienced ensemble. In this case it is interesting that the singer has chosen to sing the backbone at the pitch at which it is notated, rather than transposing it to make it more suitable for her range. (ID 60)

**T11.4.** A realisation by an ensemble of experienced improvisers. This forms part of the realised suite, *Five More Love Songs* that are presented in Chapter Nine. (ID 61)

The following compositions represent the results of the composition projects that were presented in Chapter Nine.

***Five More Love Songs***, Score No.16. Realised by a quintet including myself. (15mins) (refer p189) (ID 62 to 66)

### **DAT TWO**

(cassettes 3a, 4, 5)

***Ritual***, Score No.14 realised by the clarinet quartet No Strings Attached. (22mins) (refer p192) (ID 1)

***Studybones Vol.II***, Score No.13

Three duet realisations (refer p195) :

- (i) Realisation No.1 - Christina Taylor, Vi.  
(10mins) - Charles Nancarrow, Vi. (ID 2 to 13)
- (ii) Realisation No.2 - Lizzie Gilchrist, Vc.  
(10mins) - Catherine Dobbins, Va. (ID 14 to 25)
- (iii) Realisation No.3 - Barley Norton, Vi.  
(7mins) - Lara Pearson, Vi.(ID 26 to 37)

***Studybones Vol.I***, Score No.6

Various trio and duet realisation compiled to create a short suite. (10mins) (refer p191) (ID 38)

***Quartet for Strings*, Score No.17**

Extracts from an incomplete realisation. Only sections C to I and section N are included on the tape. (20mins) (refer p196) (ID 39/40)

***Chant*, Score No.15**

Extended song realised by the *Five Songs* quintet with the addition of saxophone and clarinet. (28mins) (refer p198) (ID 41)

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