

Commentary on a Portfolio of
Compositions for Creative
Musicians by Jeremy Wigen
forming part of a Submission for the
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Declaration

I declare that I am the author and owner of the copyright in the thesis and that I have exercised all reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge break any UK law, infringe any third party's copyright or other Intellectual Property Right, or contain any confidential material.

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Date: 7 April 2014

Abstract

The portfolio works and accompanying thesis explore various structural possibilities for involving participants in the creative process of making a musical work.

Improvisation of various kinds is a common feature of all the pieces, which are designed to be played, ideally, by improvising musicians able to engage proactively with the material using their own developed, personal musical languages and initiative. I have explored the idea of ‘musician as material’ in developing the portfolio and some of the many ways in which personalised individual languages can be harnessed in the creation of time-specific works. Fundamental to my research has been the questioning of the role of the composer in developing a basis for genuine collaboration and shared creative input. In devising the pieces as frameworks for collective or individual activity, I am indifferent as to both how they might become transformed or used in the future, and to their potential for attaining any state of permanence. This is because I consider them as springboards for adaptation and realisation by other individuals and also because I consider them as means of social activity designed to generate imaginative thinking rather than as fixed entities.

Various formats have been used to document the pieces ranging from the tabular in *Guests* and *Tickbox*, in which verbal descriptions of sounds of undetermined sequence are set out, to the more formal sequential notation of the pieces *mutant cp*, *Liquorice Licks*, *epochal natter* and *olinola*. The musicians taking part in the pieces will deploy a range of practices from completely open improvisation, through choosing from variously specified materials in what has been termed aleatoric practice, to the occasional realisation of formally notated passages.

Contents

Part 1 – Introduction and Background, Influences and Methodology

Chapter 1:	Introduction and Background	6
Chapter 2:	Influences and Methodology	11

Part 2 – Portfolio Works

Chapter 3:	Guests	30
Chapter 4:	mutant cp	37
Chapter 5:	Liquorice Licks	43
Chapter 6:	The Bags of Time	48
Chapter 7:	Tickbox	52
Chapter 8:	epochal natter	58
Chapter 9:	Workshop	62
Chapter 10:	olinola	66

Part 3 – Conclusion

Chapter 11:	Conclusion	70
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Appendices	75
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Reference Materials	79
----------------------------	----

Contents Details for Recordings	83
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Part 1

Introduction and background, Influences and methodology

Chapter 1

Introduction and background

Chapter 2

Influences and methodology

Chapter 1

Introduction and background

My research for this thesis has focused on the latent permeability and flexibility of composed structures and the nature of musical material, especially that which is improvised. I am a composer and improviser with a broad range of musical interests, chief of which are improvised and open forms the praxis of which has been developed and explored in my work as both a guitarist and clarinetist. Largely self-taught as a musician, I learned the rudiments of music notation in junior and secondary schools, and committed to a formal course of music education in the late 1990s. Prior to the last fourteen years, my musical activity was sporadic but involved lengthy periods playing in various rock and fusion bands, notably the Brazilian and African influenced *The Republic*, signed to Charlie Gillett's Oval Records label in the first half of the 1980s. Prior to this I had developed an interest in the nascent free improvisation scene that was emerging in the early 1970s, and briefly attended the John Stevens/Maggie Nichols workshops held in Shoreditch in 1974/5. The full implications of this form of music were then slightly beyond my grasp and it was not until relatively recently that I returned to it with a renewed and more enlightened perspective.

In a more general sense, though, improvisation has been a fundamental part of my musical make-up since I started to take a serious interest in music, and specifically the guitar, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, almost immediately familiarising myself with the pentatonic-based blues patterns of so many players of the time and, through a combination of mimicry and experiment, eventually carving out my own improvisational style and approach, albeit in a then fairly idiomatic vein. This led to an interest in the progressive groups of the time such as Soft Machine and King Crimson, and from there to the discovery of jazz and the music of Miles Davis, Charles Mingus and John Coltrane, whose respective recordings *Live Evil*, *Mingus at Carnegie Hall* and *Selflessness* had a strong influence on me. By this time a London-based free improvisation movement was well established and I would attend concerts whenever I could afford to do so, fascinated by the music's 'otherness', particularly that of Derek Bailey, whose playing was quite unlike any other form of music I had heard up to that point, and which positively challenged all my previously held notions of what music actually was or could be. From 1976 I became involved with a number of bands whose styles ranged from pop, through rock and punk, to world music, none of which afforded great scope for improvising as most of the material was fixed in various song formats. However, throughout this process I came to realise

that I became restless having to play anything the same way twice, always preferring to introduce slight variations to my parts (which I tended to write myself as a lead guitarist based on the given modality or chord progression) and to play fresh and discernibly different improvised solos whenever I could.

I suppose this proclivity is largely a reflection of personal temperament, although I strongly believe that improvisational flair underlies distinguished performances of all kinds, and that attempts to promote definitive interpretations of musical works are not only misplaced but serve only to stifle a medium which by its nature should surely remain open to the spark of spontaneity and renewed insight. The fact that any given piece of music undergoes a certain transformation as the individual's listening experience and life perspective develop seems proof to me that musical works are not only always changing as perceived objects, but that they are also continually open to re-invention by, and subject to, the imagination of performers and interpreters. In the Frank Scheffers documentary *Frank Zappa – a Pioneer of Future Music*, Zappa declares that 'what something is depends more on *when* it is than anything else'¹, suggesting that all things must be evaluated in the context of when they are perceived and that this context is forever changing. The belief that musical material is continually open to renewal, either through the re-imagining of a piece preserved in notated form or through the spontaneous deployment of the improviser's acquired and evolving musical vocabulary, is one that informs the composed work presented here. These works do not seek permanence in the way that conventionally scored music does, my preference being for individuals to either transform the material over the course of time or to develop new ideas from it. I see my work as a means of facilitating creative thought on the part of others and of generating new ideas in a way that prioritises an open process of creativity in which forms are forever transitory. This principle of ongoing renewal feeds back into my own working practice in which the right to adapt and adjust my work according to inclination or circumstance is maintained by treating my compositions as entities with a continuing potential for transformation and re-construction. The individuals involved in a particular realisation of a piece will also certainly have a bearing on how I think about its content, and other considerations such as timeframes and location will also play an important part in its conception as a linear process. Since all these elements are variable, it seems

¹ broadcast by VPRO in the Netherlands in April 2007 and available to view on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpJOkWG6Bmk>. The quotation is at 1:34:23.

only right to me that my pieces are able to accommodate and reflect this variability in a flexible way.

The aesthetic approach reflected in my portfolio of works has been largely shaped by personal thoughts on the current and potential role of art in society. The general reluctance on the part of artistic bodies and academia to recognise transitory forms that are resistant to preservation in the form of texts has, until recently, reflected an outmoded attitude driven by the need to perpetuate a model of artistic production centred on the ‘gift’ of the individual rather than acknowledging the ever growing potential of collective and interactive models of creative enquiry. Although this is now changing there is still much to discuss as to how these new models might be defined, falling as they do outside former criteria for defining art but nevertheless serving a valuable social need (one arguably once served by art in its potential to enlighten and question). Whether or not my own work merits artistic status is of secondary importance to me, as its primary objectives are the facilitation of interaction and the encouragement of creative input; a social priority that I see as a small step in returning creative activity, whether it be termed art or anything else, to a more central and participatory locus within the community. Past attempts to destabilise notions of what constitutes art have been variously successful but perhaps Fluxus is historically important in this regard in its attempts to reconcile artistic production and community and its espousal of a do-it-yourself aesthetic opposed to commercial interest. The idea of a society that values individual creativity over cultural consumption is, for me, far more attractive than what might be seen as the current industrialisation of culture in which work deemed important by a chosen few rises to the surface. Such an ideal state was hinted at by Anthony Braxton in a conversation with his fellow musicians in which he spoke about his aspiration for culture and creativity to be the ‘main course’ of our lives rather than the ‘dessert’². This sentiment was also shared by performance artists active in the 1960s such as Piero Manzoni and Yves Klein. Commenting on their work RoseLee Goldberg writes:

Both artists believed that it was essential to reveal the process of art, to demystify pictorial sensitivity, and to prevent their art from becoming relics in galleries or museums. (Goldberg: 147)

² Part of BBC Radio 3’s Jazz on 3 broadcast of 14 January 2013 of Braxton’s Falling River Music Quartet recorded at Jazzatelier, Ulrichsberg, Austria on 11 October 2012.

The idea of 'artist as artwork' explored by Manzoni, Klein and others shares some common ground with that of 'musician as material' which I discuss later, but suffice to say for now that I find the idea of obsolescence in time-specific works and the need for certain works to be re-constructed with each new realisation increasingly appealing. The late improvising guitarist Derek Bailey, himself attracted by the obsolescent nature of improvised performance, had an ambivalent attitude to its documentation by means of recording, and once commented that the ideal recorded improvisations would somehow wipe themselves clean while being played, affording the listener the same once-only experience in keeping with the intentions of the form (see Watson: 416).

Chapter 2

Influences and methodology

Improvising percussionist Eddie Prévost has commented in detail on ‘communitarian’ aspects of music making (see Prévost: 2004) and my participation in his improvisation workshop between 2002 and 2010 not only marked my return to free improvisation but had a significant bearing on my thinking and general musical development. Participants in the workshop are encouraged to search for new sounds and ways of interacting, but with an emphasis on exploring their instruments, voices or sounding devices. Certainly I found this exploratory approach most rewarding and enriching in terms of my own playing, and my continued attendance doubtless instilled a rigour and discipline, and a focus on the quality of sounds produced, that I may not have developed otherwise and which have remained positive assets in both my improvised and composed work.

However, there came a point where I started to question whether the workshop could sustain my continued development in light of what I had come to perceive as a disproportionate emphasis on experimentation at the cost of expression and content. What I frequently witnessed did not, I suppose, correspond with my own ideas of creative music making and often consisted of a kind of self-absorbed activity that seemed to me to have little to do with musical adventure or collective seeking. I sought a space in my own work that didn’t necessitate a denial of past experience or acquired traits and which retained a willingness to explore without the compulsion to experiment. I had also grown quite disenchanted with the workshop’s somewhat entrenched structure and terms of reference, and the scant opportunity given participants to influence these in any significant way. This structure remained essentially unchanged during the time I attended and consisted of an opening exercise of rotating duos followed by a number of trios or duos selected by whoever was convening (usually Prévost) and ending with a collective piece designed to involve all participants. Of these finishing pieces a favourite of Prévost’s was one he called ‘Nominated Trios/Quartets’ in which a group of three or four people would start an improvisation with each nominating a successor at some point from the other participants who would continue this procedure until everybody had played. To have a basically unchanging format such as this was often an advantage when having to convene one of the meetings, as I did in Prévost’s absence on a few occasions, at short notice. However, in normal circumstances, and especially when large numbers were involved, it often detracted from the mutual benefit of all. For example, on occasion, the opening exercise would take up about two-thirds to three-quarters of the available

time, leaving individuals with very limited opportunity to participate other than as listeners, a situation that might have been avoided with a little creative contingency planning.

I suppose I wanted the workshop to have a broader remit, including composed elements, than may have been reasonable to expect given its basic premise of non-structured open playing. However, a more open and flexible approach to formatting might, I believe, have been both more practical and creatively stimulating. And I still find it somewhat paradoxical that a workshop committed to exploration and experimentation should be so resistant to any form of change in regard to its format and presentation.

Despite these rather late misgivings, my long involvement with the workshop did rekindle an interest in collaborative working and shared creativity that remains fundamental to most of my compositional work, which includes considerable improvised and personal creative input on the part of participants. Indeed, it generated an awareness of the possibilities of combined compositional process and free improvisation as a meaningful and socially-orientated activity which allowed for individual creativity beyond the merely momentary. And, despite the workshop's general structural inflexibility, I was able, on occasion, to introduce to it a few 'pieces' whose content was freely improvised, and which represented the type of idea I'd like to have seen encouraged more. These met with varying degrees of enthusiasm by participants whose attitudes ranged from conservatively purist opposition to curiously willing acceptance.

One of the pieces, which I subsequently entitled '*Wave*', involved a gradual rise and fall in intensity as a single pair of players started the piece and were augmented by successively joining pairs. When all successive pairs had joined in and were playing, the starting pair would withdraw followed by their successors, and so on, until the final pair to join were left playing to end the piece. The idea was that the members of each pair should retain some kind of link with their partners throughout, although in practice this was often difficult to sustain, especially when there were more than ten participants and the piece became busier and louder. Another exercise I tried was called '*Emergent Soloists*' for smaller groupings of three or four people in which the players, while improvising together, would listen for an emergent soloist who would

be left unaccompanied for an unspecified period until the group activity resumed and the process continued. This piece tended to work well with what might be called pure improvisers but less well with musicians whose background or training made them reliant on cues and/or planning. Both the above activities were attempts to introduce additional elements for the players to consider, other than the usual ones of ‘heurism and dialogue’ espoused by Prévost; elements calling for another layer of mental activity in which other aspects of judgement and timing might be exercised.

Such pieces might bring to mind the work of John Stevens who devised workshop pieces designed to serve as both creative outlets for players and useful developmental or technical exercises. One such piece was ‘*Triangle*’, a listening piece in which three players attempt to remain detached from their own playing (which Stevens likens to ‘scribbling’) while trying to give their full attention to the activity of the other two³. Clearly there is a pedagogical intention behind such pieces which was not part of my own thinking in devising the pieces ‘*Wave*’ and ‘*Emergent Soloists*’, although there is an obvious shared concern for the importance of close listening. Of course, there isn’t a particular need for open improvisation to adopt strategies such as these but I was nevertheless keen to introduce an additional dynamic to the familiar interpersonal dialogue and interaction that is usual in improvised playing and which has been the subject of much discussion. I see this, though, very much as a variant on common practice as distinct from an enhancement of it: a variation whereby improvisers are asked to consider aspects other than momentary interaction in the production of their pieces. This interpersonal aspect is usefully questioned by Gary Peters in his book *The Philosophy of Improvisation* in which he challenges the notion of interpersonal dialogue being the key driver in contemporary improvised music. He writes:

As with so much else, what might be called the ontological significance of listening has suffered within the realms of improvisation – where it has regal status – by being cuffed to a rampant dialogism that cannot hear beyond the everyday mechanics and machinations of social interaction played out within the aesthetic domain.

(Peters: 123)

Peters seems to suggest, following a line from Adorno’s immanent critique of jazz improvisation through the incorporation of the thoughts of Heidegger and Nietzsche, that free improvisation is close to realising an ideal of freedom, which is only hindered by a continuing preoccupation with the inter-subjective and dialogical. He

³ See p.77 of John Stevens’s *Search and Reflect*

supports his argument by describing a need to heed the underlying ‘silence’ that ‘calls’ to be filled in the emerging work and which can only be perceived adequately, not just through a process of inter-subjective dialogue, which he sees as a potential distraction, but by a kind of listening through and above the work, embracing awareness of history, memory and personalities that converge to spur the creative input of individuals. I, too, find the de-emphasis of dialogue interesting in its potential to open the way for the simultaneous realisation of diverse processes, which can produce far more interesting results than the frequently reactive process of dialogue. This idea is explored in different ways in the pieces *Liquorice Licks* and *Tickbox*.

I should at this point say a few words about past ideological differences concerning the status of improvisation and composition. In an address to the Rotterdam contemporary music festival Zaal de Unie in 1992, Evan Parker referred to the:

‘false antithesis in which improvisation is talked about as an activity distinct from that of composition’;

further citing the term ‘instant composing’ used by the Instant Composers Pool.

Parker continued that:

‘whether music is played directly on an instrument, read or learnt from notes made on paper beforehand or constructed from algorithms or game rules operating directly on the sound sources or controlling the players, the outcome is music which in any given performance has a fixed form [which] reflects the procedure used to produce it.’

That an eminent improviser such as Parker acknowledges this ‘false antithesis’ is helpful to me, reliant as I am on improvising musicians to realise the works that I share with them and which are the subject of this thesis. My own view is that both notated music and free improvisation constitute poles of a creative continuum in which levels of fixed and indeterminate material fluctuate in inverse proportion to one another. A composer's language and style could be said to be a fixed element of their notated music, while an improviser's acquired and developed musical language could equally be seen as a fixed, constitutive part of the music in which they participate. To quote Evan Parker again:

Most players invent slowly and discard reluctantly.⁴

⁴ Evan Parker, quoted by Ronald Atkins in ‘A Tour of the Labyrinth’, *Guardian*, London, 9 February 1988

Conversely, open elements exist in even the most strictly notated ‘complex’ music in the form of interpretative scope and performance options at one end of the continuum⁵, while the wholly unplanned nature of free improvisation and its results at the other are obvious. I also consider that the choice of improvising musicians to work in certain groupings, or to designate other such groupings, is essentially a compositional act that generally involves known instrumentation and styles. Indeed, on a more practical level, I am often surprised that improvising musicians deny any aptitude (or inclination) for composition when, as listener or collaborator, I frequently observe them making compositional choices and decisions in the course of their work. Choices of pitch, timbre, density, texture, dynamics and attitude all come into play in the moment-to-moment course of such work. Trombonist George Lewis, a protégée of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Music (AACM), commented usefully on this in a workshop I attended at the 2007 International Conference on Music Since Nineteen-Hundred (ICMSN) at York University. His remarks concerned the reactive process at work in much free improvisation in which a broader perspective of structure is all but lost. Lewis emphasised the importance of assessing where a piece might be heading and making compositional decisions accordingly, emphasising also the importance of remembering what had gone before in shaping present and approaching directions. I therefore consider all the improvising musicians with whom I collaborate as composers in themselves, and consider the works that I present here as fields of activity which offer opportunities for completion and realisation in various ways by the musicians involved.

I also find it interesting, and encouraging, that African-American hubs of creative activity such as the AACM managed to explore simultaneously aspects of free improvisation and composition in their work, in contrast to an influential majority of their European counterparts who could be said to have evolved a praxis that refused any kinship with composed forms; a stance that, somewhat ironically, stressed the notion of individual freedom and an unwillingness to submit to any kind of formal organisation, a difference that was highlighted in an early collaboration between Anthony Braxton (another AACM protégée) and Derek Bailey (who could be loosely aligned with the European school of thinking) in which Braxton’s reluctance to work

⁵This was discussed in more detail by pianist Pavlos Antoniadis at his presentation at Goldsmiths College on 13 November 2012

completely freely and Bailey's aversion to any kind of pre-formed structure had to be somehow reconciled prior to their Wigmore Hall concert of 30 June 1974. A compromise was reached whereby broadly specified 'areas' of activity were introduced such as 'solo guitar', 'sustained sounds', 'staccato sounds' leaving the individual musicians to complete the detail.⁶ A variation of this idea is used in my own work in which I refer to 'zones of activity' to describe focus on a particular area of an instrument while playing. Similar use of planned improvisation also occurs in the John Butcher piece *somethingtobesaid* discussed below.

My revived interest in free improvisation and collaborative music making was accompanied by a growing awareness of, and interest in, forms of indeterminate composition, graphic notation and, to some extent, a method of directed improvisation known as conduction. A number of composers have therefore been influential in the development of my portfolio in my capacity as listener, reader or performer. These include John Cage and associates Morton Feldman, Christian Wolff and Earle Brown; also Barry Guy, Anthony Braxton and Cornelius Cardew. My participation in Cardew's *The Great Learning* in the Polish towns of Wigry, Sejny and Suwałki between 17-25 July 2010 (recorded by the Polish label Bôlt Records, BR 1008) was a particularly revelatory experience. It is a piece based on a Confucian text of the same name and written in seven 'paragraphs' which include a variety of communal musical activities ranging from the chanting of texts to open improvisation. Paragraph 2 called for several groups of individuals, separately positioned, in this case around the resonant space of a former synagogue, to work through a sung line that modulated with each repetition to the accompaniment of drummers who had been assigned to the various groups and who themselves worked through a different drum pattern with each vocal repetition. As each group worked at their own pace, a seemingly cacophonous melange ensued which nevertheless had a palpable sense of community and harmony, the sixty or so participants having worked closely together over the previous week. It was also impossible for participants, being preoccupied with their own parts and groups, to gauge the overall result of the activity, as if literally singing from the same sheet with a common, but locally determined, purpose towards an end that was simultaneously very real yet impossible to make out. Indeed, the few onlookers' perception of this realisation would also have been very different

⁶ See Martin Davidson's sleeve notes to the CD recording Anthony Braxton & Derek Bailey - First Duo Concert - London 1974 (EMANEM 4006)

according to where they were positioned in the space, and walking around would certainly have given an ideal sonic perspective that was not possible for the participants and could only vaguely be captured on the recording. The whole event made me aware of the desirability and possibilities of prioritising the activity itself over performance, and the importance of what Christopher Small has termed ‘musicking’ for its own sake, rather than strictly as preparation for presentation. Jam sessions, choral activity and the original purpose of chamber music all come to mind in this regard, and I like to think of my own music in the same light, in which the activity of learning and doing is itself as important as, if not more important than, any kind of performance or presentation. Social aspects of preparation and enactment, explored on a grand scale in *The Great Learning*, are also very important to me as my music is very much concerned with involving people both as individuals and as unique collective gatherings rather than as interchangeable operatives. Indeed, as indicated above, I also think of my music as being continually open to adaptation on the part of others and, by its nature, never fully defined in regard to its realisation. This idea is usefully reflected in the following quotation from composer Philip Corner in correspondence with John Lely:

I write generalized scores because I always glimpse many more valid possibilities than any written version could contain. Couperin said that he writes preludes for those who cannot improvise. I do not believe that Bach would ever have played a fugue exactly as he had written it. (Lely and Saunders: 171)

John Cage’s thought has also influenced my work in a number of ways. Of these, his treatment of silence as a material element of music has been important in both my improvised and composed activity, and I follow the work of others who attempt to build on and investigate this aspect of Cage’s work with interest. The idea of different types of silence is one that has been discussed in some detail by Wandelweiser⁷ composers Antoine Beuger and Manfred Werder and is one that interests me greatly. My own piece *Tickbox* is one that contains proportionately long sections of silence which participants are asked to work with as an integral part of the piece rather than treating as somehow separate from, or opposed to, their sounding activity. Also of importance to me has been Cage’s openness to sounds of all descriptions entering his work. This not only has a broader bearing on sonic diversity within music but also

⁷ Wandelweiser is a loose association of composers and artists whose shared aesthetic is rooted in the ramifications of Cage’s ‘silent’ piece 4’33”

encourages a more considered approach to how musical instruments can be used, especially in regard to the sonic potential of particular regions or structural parts of instruments and their modification and/or preparation. Cage's groundbreaking piano preparations are an obvious example of this approach that has influenced improvisers and composers alike. I regard this procedure as a means of finding instruments within instruments and is one I have explored in the portfolio piece *Tickbox* and also in a piece commissioned for right-hand only string quartet called *violaaarghh...* (2007) (see Appendix 1) written for the Post Quartet after their viola player sustained an injury to his left hand. Focus on what I refer to as 'zones of activity', finding regions of instruments that are possibly little used or ignored by convention, is something I intend to explore further in future compositional work in collaboration with creative instrumentalists. The final aspect of Cage's work that I have found useful in my own work is his encouragement of multiplicity in which synchronicity often takes a secondary place to the simultaneity of diverse trajectories. His *Musicircus* (1967) is a large-scale and obvious example of this in which multiple events take their own course providing an experience of unchained and disconnected diversity for the listener who can choose where, if anywhere, to focus their attention. Despite Cage's reservations about improvisation, I consider that the indeterminate results achieved with improvising musicians in my own work do bear some similarity to those achieved by Cage, especially in the pieces *Guests*, *mutant cp* and part of *Liquorice Licks*. Reginald Smith Brindle has referred to Cage 'coming to rely on what we may call 'human indeterminacy'' (see Smith Brindle: 124-125) whereby performers choose from various materials provided by Cage in pieces such as *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1957/58). My own use of human indeterminacy involves bringing individuals' personal musical languages, and consequently their taste and judgement, into my work to achieve unpredictable and collectively forged results. I therefore differ from Cage in being prepared to invite others into the creative process and accepting individuals' proclivities in so doing, as distinct from having musicians who are respectful of, but essentially neutral to, the creative process enacting prescribed materials in indeterminate ways.

Underlying the portfolio pieces is a clear intention that their content should never be the same from one performance to the next and should involve a commitment to the creative process on the part of participants who are free to exercise choice and discretion in varying degrees as to the content of the works. I have never felt entirely

comfortable about being the sole arbiter of a piece's direction, believing that collaboration and exchange of ideas are useful in reaching mutually and aesthetically satisfying solutions. And far from this being any kind of creative weakness or uncertainty, I look to my personal life experience which has shown me that consultation and deference can often result in a better and more satisfying way forward for all concerned. A band that I currently play in, *Astrakan*, which plays mainly self-composed, structured material with jazz-orientated individual soloing, has an unspoken policy of allowing individuals to develop their own lines and to find their own space within any newly presented composition, and only if the composer's wishes are seriously transgressed will an individual contribution be challenged. This calls for a high degree of honesty and flexibility on the part of the composer and a willingness to accept change or modification if an improved result obtains.

My preference when considering performances of the pieces presented here has been to use musicians who are either principally improvisers or who have a strong understanding and experience of improvised forms. My aim as far as possible is to allow participating musicians to express themselves within a defined space; to complete the works as I have outlined them. Although it is true that performers are required to complete any piece of music, I like to think that my music calls for a more specifically creative role on the part of participants, and I include among these directors (or conductors) of the music who, in several of the pieces, have to make fundamental decisions and choices as to the length and content of certain sections, thus directly influencing the form of certain pieces. I therefore consider that I write primarily for those whom Anthony Braxton has described as 'creative musicians' as distinct from those who have a merely executive role. I should stress that my preference for performers of these pieces should in no way prevent them from being attempted by other musicians who may not necessarily have backgrounds in improvised music but who wish to develop their skills in this particular field, and I do recognise a secondary, educational function for them.

This leads on to one of the key ideas that I explore in my work: that of the musician as material. This notion was introduced to me by improvising guitarist and electronicist

Keith Rowe in the margins of the COMA⁸ Summer School 2002. When I asked Rowe about the idea of material for the improviser, where it comes from and so on, he declared that the other musicians were his material. This puzzled me at first but on reflection started to become a kind of revelation that has intrigued me ever since. As a composer, the idea that a musician can be chosen to contribute a certain kind of personal material to my works became increasingly attractive and is one that is explored in varying degrees in this portfolio of works. Of course, the basic idea is not new and jazz composers such as Duke Ellington, Charles Mingus and Miles Davis all realised the importance of their musicians in realising their own work, their writing factoring in individual characteristics of band members whose styles or solos would help realise their overall conception of a piece. For the freely improvising musician, though, the idea that they and their playing partners constitute the material of a piece takes on a more profound significance. Just as a formally trained musician will play music from a score, so the improviser is both generating and responding to the musical gestures, timings, impressions and personalities of co-players, interpreting these things and responding to them as material to be worked on and developed. They and each member of an improvising group therefore invariably become one another's material. And although the dynamic of exchange between the players differs from freely improvised situations in my own pieces, there nevertheless remains a priority to involve players with a high degree of creative initiative who are prepared to invest their creative skills, their 'material', in the outcome of the creative process. They may not be my first choices, as circumstances of individual availability frequently determine the final group, but will invariably be of a mindset that accepts the individual responsibility of contributing to the creative whole. Like John Cage, 'I write in order to hear something I haven't yet heard'⁹, but I am reliant on a known ability on the part of musicians to initiate and execute worthwhile ideas in real time on their own initiative. And unlike Cage, I am keen for these musicians to awaken and apply their acquired taste, judgement and memory as essential material elements necessary to complete the whole. In a very real sense, then, they become the material of the pieces.

⁸ Contemporary Music-Making for All, an organization founded to involve amateur musicians in contemporary music making activity

⁹ From 1983 audiotape of interview with Joel Eric Suben quoted in *Conversing with Cage* by Richard Kostelanetz (p.67)

This idea is exemplified in improvising saxophonist John Butcher's score for the piece *somethingtobesaid*, commissioned for the 2008 Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, extracts from which are shown at Figures 1 and 2¹⁰. A variety of notational means are being used here to harness the individual languages of a specific group of improvising musicians. One of the most striking features at first glance is the use of individual musicians' names on the score rather than instruments, suggesting immediately that this is a work to be realised by a known group of individuals for a single performance or series of performances rather than by unknown players of specified instruments at unknown points in the future. It is true that the musicians involved¹¹ are all associated with specific instruments or sound sources but it is their individual approach to these things, along with a known body of developed work, that interests Butcher as composer of the piece; not so much their instruments themselves, then, as what they do with them. It should be mentioned here that in improvised music there is frequently an indifference towards traditional aspects of balance manifested in instrumentation that is concerned with an even coverage of frequencies from low to high (obvious examples being rock bands, jazz groups, orchestras, string quartets and so on). The exploration of all aspects of instruments has now become such a defining aspect of non-idiomatic improvisation that sounds' origins are often difficult to determine. Butcher's piece is no exception to this with harpist Clare Cooper's work sounding particularly ambiguous for much of the time.

A second notable feature of the work are the grey sections in the first, fourth and fifth systems (marked off by thick black lines) of the extracts in Figure 1. These represent freely improvised sections for different groupings of players, the first for John Edwards and John Butcher, the second for Clare Cooper and John Edwards and the third for a trio of Chris Burn, Adam Linson and Dieter Kovacic. The important thing to observe with these timed improvised passages is that only the lightest of directions is occasionally used, and this is generally to narrow the field of reference as when, for example, a named individual plays more than one instrument. Other than this, the individuals are free to do what comes naturally in interacting with one another as material entities and, in so doing, contribute to the overall material content of Butcher's piece. These passages, cued in and out by other events which are either

¹⁰ Reproduced with permission of the composer

¹¹ Chris Burn, piano; John Butcher, saxophones and pre-recordings; Clare Cooper, harp and guzheng; Dieter Kovacic (dieb13), turntables; John Edwards, double bass; Thomas Lehn, analogue synthesiser; Adam Linson, double bass and electronics; Gino Robair, percussion and energised surfaces

Fig. 1: Extracts from John Butcher's piece *somethingtobesaid*

3

John B
ditto
John E
Chris d---e---c---a---y
Play as chord.
Hold down for d---e---c---a---y

John B
John E
5 mins

Chris
CHORD ATTACKS with decay
brought out by pedal/amp.
ending with →

Gino
Oscillate double GONG chords
with Chris's chords. End together

Clare
Thomas

Chris
d---e---c---a---y
Play as full *mf* chord.
Hold down for decay

Clare
Thomas
Adam

John B cue
computer
clock

Adam 0
Sound File 3

Friction stick, on strings.
with same technique

Gino bowed

John E arco

0 0:20 0:30 0:32 0:45 0:50 0:55
E F E G# I

5

Chris
Interrupt in a breath gap.
Drop Chinese cymbal on strings.
Allow to ricochet freely.

John B

Clare
Gino
Chris
Continue with coinciding SOUND INCIDENTS
THAT DECAY. (Chris cue if needed).
Make gaps longer and longer, vary type of
sound each time.

Chris Drop out

Clare
John E
Begin to improvise together

Adam
John E
Thomas
Dieter
Introduce independent,
quiet sounds
mainly in the decay/silences
of Clare/Gino/Chris

Adam
Thomas
Dieter
Drop out

Clare
John E
5 mins

Clare
John E
John B
Chris
Adam
John B

Follow the shape of speech from Dieter.
Don't play in the silences

Dieter
work with speech records and leave gaps

Clare
John E
John B

Chris mainly keyboard
get ready for cue

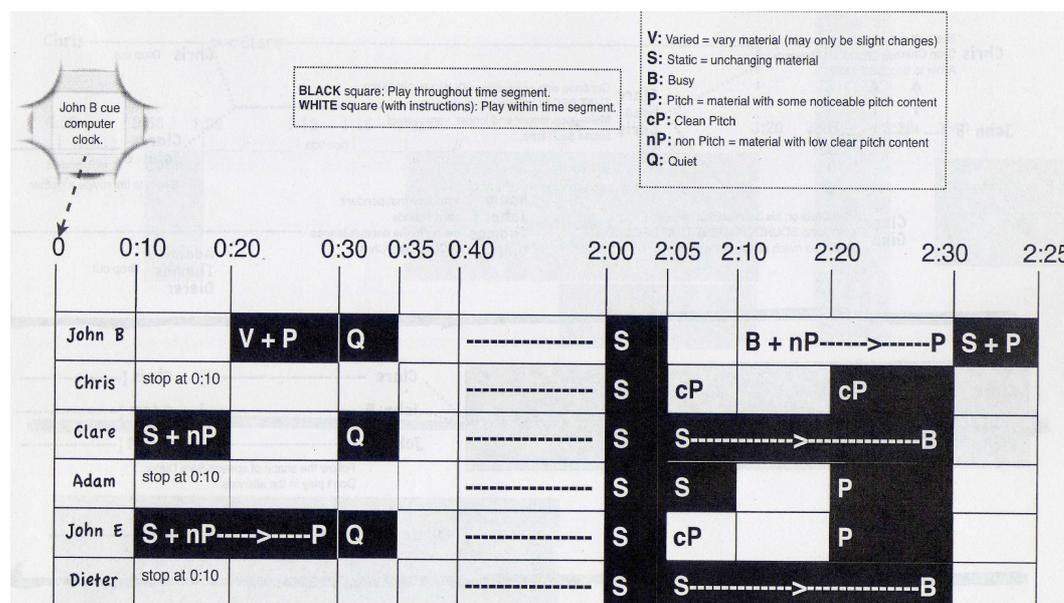
Adam with electronics
5 mins

Dieter not speech records

Dieter speech continued not speech

formally notated or indicated verbally, are an example of the type of compositional process referred to above, whereby material is generated by the choice of and grouping together of individuals for their intrinsic musical or sonic qualities. The extract shown in Figure 2 gives a visual representation of a more detailed section of the piece in which more precisely timed activity is required of the participants.

Fig. 2: Extract from page 6 of John Butcher's piece *somethingtobesaid*



Such notation is somewhat redolent of Morton Feldman's graphic notation, an example of which is shown below at Figure 5, although clearly Butcher is more concerned with timbral, textural and dynamic considerations than ones merely of register. Taken as a whole, Butcher's piece can be seen as an attempt to utilise diverse compositional means without compromising the individual voices of the performers. There are, however, clear constraints on the performers in large parts of the piece and, although they are very much the 'material' of the piece, their activity might at times be considered secondary to its overall form and subject to its requirements for quite specific, timed entries. The process of conduction, which I discuss below, is a method of realising pieces in real-time through the direction of improvisers' entries, techniques and dynamic levels, and in many ways Butcher's score achieves similar, if more complex, ends. But although coloristic aspects of individual styles are integrated into the whole, certain freedoms such as individual determination of development and direction are inevitably sacrificed to a considerable extent.

I have made no attempt in my own work to incorporate the kind of timed detail evident in Figure 2 although consideration of duration on every level is highly important for my own work's successful realisation. However, this is frequently variable and left to the discretion of either director, performer, or perhaps, in the case of *Tickbox*, programmer, to determine according to inclination, time and space. Butcher's piece has served to validate much of what I seek to achieve with simpler means in my own music. And, despite its 'closed' appearance, I have found many aspects of his score useful in developing notational ideas for my own more open work that seeks a nexus of individual freedom and formal transparency. Perhaps this formal transparency is the most difficult thing to achieve in writing for improvisers without compromising their expressive freedom. Much precisely notated music commonly referenced as 'complex' nevertheless has clearly synchronised passages that leave no doubt as to its composed nature. Music of ostensibly similar complexity that is improvised, albeit undesignated by a single individual, necessarily lacks such clearly defined formal markers, even when, as in the case of *somethingtobesaid*, there are clear points of cued correlation.

My own work has been concerned, to some extent, with overcoming the difficulty of formal clarity by devising pre-formed elements against which improvisers can work freely. In the case of *Workshop* this element is a recording of spoken and played material; in that of *Guests* it is a directed octet; and in *The Bags of Time* it is a loosely 'written upon' guitar effect. Each of these varying fixed elements presents the freely improvising musicians with a different kind of material with which to engage. We often hear of trained musicians having to 'internalise' strictly notated pieces with which they are engaged in order to convey the composer's intentions convincingly and coherently. In contrast to this, a key objective in my own work is for musicians to 'externalise' the music they hold within themselves and to express this within broad frameworks of my own design, the idea of 'musician as material' discussed above being of significant conceptual importance. The frameworks I use are variable and the choices which the musicians are called upon to make might range from ones specifically of pitch, tempo and rhythm to the almost completely open ones that face improvisers in entirely free situations. Characteristic of my work is a need for performers to consider the 'what' rather than the 'how' in terms of their involvement in the pieces, concern for their material contribution being more important than technical issues of execution. With many of the pieces the end results are highly

variable from one realisation to the next and issues of technical compliance are generally less important than a willingness to contribute creatively and to utilise skills of perception and individual judgement. The performer will frequently be required to prepare material that is not given but which nevertheless must be a considered component of an overall plan. The primary concern for the performers is not, therefore, getting the music 'right' in terms of technical precision but making a creative contribution to a composite whole. The performers are therefore required variously to compose, improvise, introduce found material and occasionally play formally notated material in realising my work.

I consider the works presented here as essentially invitations to create music for which I have provided some kind of framework or context. My intention is, as far as possible, to allow participants to be themselves within a defined musical space. In some of the pieces I have even considered naming certain individuals as co-composers, so indispensable and defining have been their contributions in determining the final performances. I discuss this in a little more detail in my commentary to the piece *epochal natter* below. A very important part of the compositional process for me, and one which is, I believe, a consideration in planning all music from free improvisation to the most rigorously scored music, is the selection of individuals to play it. Certainly individuals are chosen for their particular qualities across a broad spectrum of music, either in advance of the compositional process or as an extension of it, and the specific involvement of particular individuals could, in some circumstances, be considered integral to the process of, possibly even an act of, composition in itself. It would perhaps be unrealistic, however, to claim ownership of a freely improvised piece, for example, on the basis that you had selected and organised a particular group of musicians.

The structures underlying the pieces in this portfolio could be seen as my participation, in absentia, in the performance. I am not needed by the musicians in order for a meaningful performance to take place, but, by having my contribution to the proceedings set out, they are obliged to recognise my presence in a way other than as a performer. In other words, it is a bit like enabling me to play with them without actually, physically playing. The fixed elements should not therefore be seen as an attempt to stabilise, but as a kind of participation; another element for the players to consider in their work as improvisers other than their own and others' immediate

playing contributions. As distinct from the usual composer/performer relationship, my pieces could be seen as a means for me to contribute to the performer's individual musicality that they enact whenever they improvise; a way for me to get into their mix and contribute a framework or context for their art. This can be seen to challenge the conventional composer/performer hierarchy by levelling the roles of all participants. Earle Brown, in his prefatory note to *Available Forms I* (1961) speaks of composer and performers being 'forces' in the realisation of a piece whose 'plasticity is an indispensable element which engages the performers, the conductor, the audience and [himself] in the immediacy and life of the work', his emphasis on process being also important in my own work.

The activity of conduction referred to above in connection with John Butcher's piece and conceived by the late Butch Morris (1947-2013) is an intriguing system of organisation whereby players generally encountered in freely improvising contexts are called upon to realise works devised by a 'conductor' who directs the course of the music by means of predetermined gestures which are known by the performers and to which they respond in indeterminate fashion. Signals as to whether or not to play, for levels of activity and volume, and for particular techniques are all called upon to create a piece which may or may not be improvised by the conductor but which is dependent on the players' choices for its fine detail. The London Improvisers Orchestra provides a regular opportunity to observe the various applied methods of this form. Despite a seemingly free role in the production of such pieces, the musicians are nevertheless required to fix their attention on the conductor in a probably even more intense way than conventional orchestral musicians on the conductor of a written piece. This is because the pieces are being made in real time and are thus dependent on the moment-to-moment response of the musicians for their realisation.

So while choices of pitch, rhythm and timbre are left largely undefined, the freedom for the individual players to pursue their own pathways is in fact often very limited. This isn't necessarily a bad thing given that a fair amount of good will exists within the orchestra and that there is a general desire for these conceptions to succeed. However, I find the use of players as mere colouring objects denied the opportunity to develop their own ideas somewhat unsettling, and have tried to avoid this in my own pieces, the long cues given in *olinola*, for example, being designed to give the

performers ample time to round off their individual improvised contributions. The creative role of conductor, or director, is also explored in my own works *Guests* and *Liquorice Licks*; in *Guests* as an arbiter of content determining which given materials the octet will play at a given time, and in *Liquorice Licks* as an arbiter of time determining the length of particular sections according to their own judgement. In both of these it is incumbent on the director to remain aware of the sonic climate being generated by the musicians.

Part 2

Portfolio Works

Chapter 3	Guests
Chapter 4	mutant cp
Chapter 5	Liquorice Licks
Chapter 6	The Bags of Time
Chapter 7	Tickbox
Chapter 8	epochal natter
Chapter 9	Workshop
Chapter 10	olinola

Chapter 3

Guests

of activities tabulated in the score and embodied in the octet at their disposal. The players of the octet are their means of joining the trio as part of the process of improvisation.

The opportunity exists, especially if the players are familiar with one another's work and are all improvisers, for the circulation of roles whereby at a different performance the foreground trio would become part of the octet and three octet members would assume the leading role of trio. This possibility lends the piece a social angle which is an ongoing priority in my work. The octet material is necessarily flexible and leaves considerable scope for creativity on the part of the musicians in their interactive, complementing role. Whichever sound field is in play at a given time has the textural potential to be either a background or foreground function, and there is considerable freedom and scope within this ambit. Likewise, individual elements of the sound fields introduced by the director or directors will involve choices on the part of the individual concerned that will hopefully be sympathetic (but not obligatorily so) to the trio's activity. The members of the octet therefore have three considerations at any given time: cues given by a director; the need to integrate within the sound field; the need to blend with the trio, this being particularly important if given an individual cue to join the trio. The conventional reliance on the conductor as a guide through predetermined structures is therefore modified to enable an increased degree of self-reliance on the part of the octet performers in listening to the trio and making and acting on judgements as to how to integrate with them using the material indicated by the director or directors.

The directors' role therefore involves a more direct creative input than the strictly interpretative one usually called for in conventionally scored pieces. This role is indeed an improvisational one that should involve interaction with the trio by means of the octet and its individual players. This piece does not call for interpretation but for the active involvement of the director in the creative process through the choice of given materials. The octet's creative and listening skills are therefore called upon to a high degree to make the piece work effectively.

Everyone involved in a performance is therefore required to make creative judgements and decisions at different levels.

- (i) The **improvising trio** will not only have one another's material as a basis for continuity but also the shifting colours of the sound fields and individual contributions of the octet brought into play by the director(s). Their activity is determined by one another and the external material introduced by director(s) and octet.
- (ii) The **octet's** material will be determined by those elements of the score introduced by the director(s). However, although bound by the activities of the specific sound fields and their individual sound sheets, a huge range of choice as to pitch, timbral and rhythmic material exists, demanding creative initiative and integrity. Their activity is determined by the directors' choices and, to a lesser extent, by the activity of the trio.
- (iii) The **directors'** creative role is to bring into play the materials tabulated in the score by means of the octet. They will make judgements as to which sound fields to introduce and which individuals to call upon to introduce sounds extraneous to them. As mentioned above, there is also the option of selecting an individual or individuals to join the trio's improvisation while the remainder of the octet rest. This is indicated by showing a card with the letter 'J' in the colour of the chosen player's part. The directors' activity is determined by the octet's responses and the directions taken by the trio.

I was pleased with the efforts of all participants in the initial performance of the work at Goldsmiths Composers Forum on 29 January 2010, although a number of problems came to light. The first of these was that the participants, on the whole, would probably not have classified themselves as improvisers first and foremost, and had difficulty generating the fluidity of ideas that an ideal performance would call for; a performance, in other words, by improvising musicians who were accustomed to generating continuity on their own initiative rather than relying foremost on a series of signs and cues from a conductor. This reliance, in my view the result of an education system that presents music as skill rather than creative art, is a major hindrance to musicians acquiring improvisational ability, as there exists a debilitating reluctance to produce sounds for their own sake which escape association with notated music. An example of this was the interpretation of 'trills' by the clarinettist,

perhaps based on her experience of scored material, as having to be expressed as sounds curtailing long notes rather than as sounds in their own right.

The second problem arose from my erroneous decision to let the director start the piece and for the improvising trio to follow. This set everything off on a false trajectory as the intention was for the trio to lead events. It was also inappropriate for the director to give indications of dynamics to the trio for the same reason: namely that the integrity of the freely improvising trio should not be compromised. The related issue of over-direction also became obvious to me on listening back to the recorded performance whereby the sound fields lost definition as a result of the over-involvement of elements that deviated from them. Of course, only through successive realisations of the piece can such issues be identified, indicating that the piece could be considered as a continuous learning process in regard to what works best in given circumstances.

A number of additional points of interest were raised in discussion of the piece shortly after the performance in the Graduate Forum of 2 February 2010 at Goldsmiths College at which I gave a presentation that included reference to the work. The first of these concerned performer spacing. During the performance the trio and octet were positioned side by side as groups with the director facing both. A better alternative was suggested by one of the participants whereby the trio would be positioned facing outwards in front of and back-to-back with the director who would then face the octet as their sole focus, thus eliminating unnecessary visual distraction between director and trio and making for a more homogeneous overall sound picture. The second concerned the notated instructions which were felt to be too open to respond to spontaneously. I resolved to modify the score as a result of this (see Figure 4) and also to include the option for the director to nominate any individual from the octet to join the trio to form a transitional quartet.

The second performance of the piece, at a concert of my music held as part of the Pure Gold season at Goldsmiths College on 15 June 2013, incorporated these and several other quite important modifications. To achieve the space that I considered to be lacking in the first performance, I decided that the sound fields should occur in intermittent waves rather than being continually present. Also, the idea of the trio

next card (see Chapter 3 of accompanying video). Occasionally one of us would request the other to hold back for a particular passage to develop further but generally the shared role of direction worked well. Careful attention to the trio's activity also ensured that more interesting and varied levels of contrast and support were achieved than in the first performance in which the sound fields were more prominent. Other factors which, for me, made this a better performance were the more clearly defined role of the trio as the leading unit and the fact that the octet was wholly comprised of musicians well versed in improvisational practice. The 'guests' of the title refers to the improvising trio who should be accommodated and welcomed by director or directors and octet in the same way as guests would be in a domestic situation.

Chapter 4

mutant cp

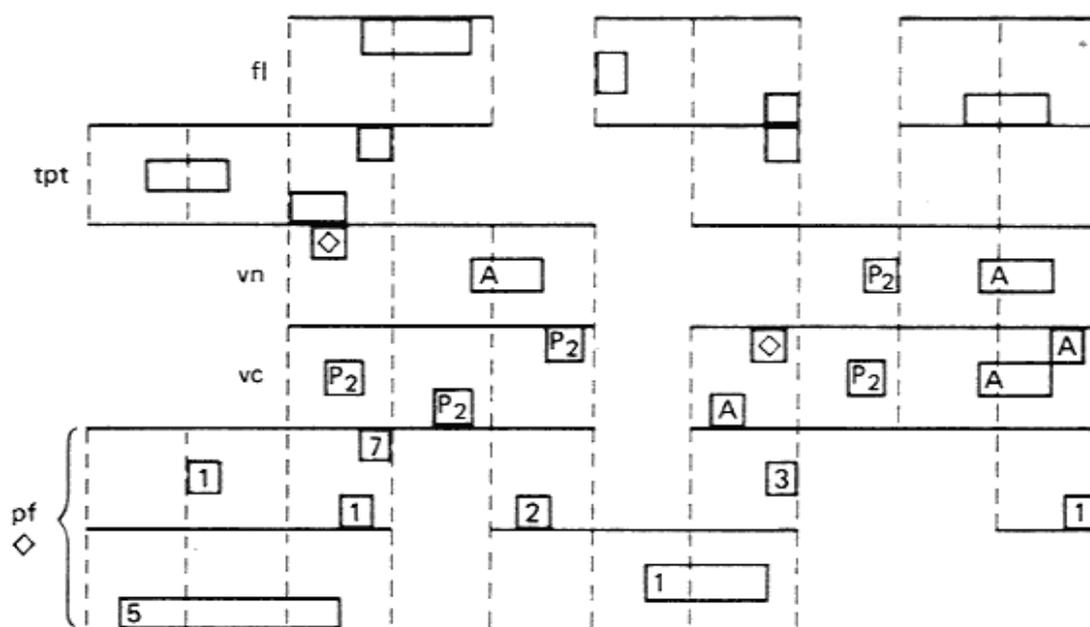
This piece, in three sections for voice, violin, cello, bassoon and recording, was originally based on two earlier pieces of mine which used light, tonal material and were written respectively for piano duo (*Glider*) and brass trio (*Blustering Home*). Four lines were ready-made from the piano piece whilst the material from the brass piece needed a fourth line (for voice) added. The pitch material was then stripped from these pieces leaving only the rhythmic material which was levelled to one line staves. *Glider* therefore provided the rhythmic template for the first section while *Blustering Home* (see Appendix 2) provided that for the third section. The second section used the same principle of one-line staves but was freely written new material designed to provide a kind of scherzo interlude between the other sections with hocketing to the fore. Throughout the piece the performers should introduce pitch material of their own choice whilst strictly observing the tempo and rhythmic patterns indicated in the score. Dynamic markings were also indicated but no timbral or technical markings were used. An additional element was added at the point of performance when a recorded arrangement for electric guitars of the original *Glider* is faded in without the ensemble having heard it previously. The reason for withholding this material in rehearsal (a different tape was used for this) was to avoid influencing their pitch decisions for the first section in performance. As it is introduced, the ensemble improvises with the pitch material they had used for the section's final bar, eventually settling on single sustained pitches to accompany the recording with which they then fade out.

Other pieces which have explored freedom of pitch include the *Intersections* and *Projections* series of graphic scores produced in the early 1950s by American composer Morton Feldman. The example below from Projection II shows how tempo indications (the broken vertical lines mark seconds) and event density are given, with pitch choice being determined only by relative register, high, middle or low.

Despite the freedom to select their own pitches, the performers can still be seen to be operating under considerable constraints in Feldman's piece. Indeed, his priority was never to let performers loose onto his own sound canvas but to release sounds themselves from organisational strictures, and his subsequent return to a less open and

more specific system of notation bears this out, Cage once having remarked that his formally notated pieces were actually personalised realisations of his graphic scores¹².

Fig. 5: Opening of Projection II by Morton Feldman



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My own piece seeks, in some ways, to achieve similar ends to Feldman's but also reflects my interest in involving musicians in the creative process by prioritising collaboration over direction. While Feldman allowed freedom of pitch choice within three broad regions of low, high and middle registers and allowed discretion as to choice of dynamics and placement of notes, my own piece explores the process of development that results from leaving pitch and register totally free while imposing strict requirements on the placement of those chosen pitches and their dynamics. And despite the strictures of rhythmic notation imposed in my own piece I believe the composer/performer dynamic is also quite different, with the emphasis on a more social approach towards creativity than on one that emphasises the authority of the composer. By allowing completely free pitch choice but strictly specifying rhythmic configuration, I am attempting to provide a platform for collaborative creativity to achieve the piece's final form; a means, in other words, for individual parts to coalesce by means of experiment and interaction.

¹² See Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond* (Cambridge, 1999), page 53

This social approach is, in fact, one that had already been explored by composer Louis Andriessen in his piece *Workers Union* (1975) which also consists of unpitched rhythmic material. I was not aware of this piece when writing my own although the freedom to choose pitch material is clearly a common factor. However, while Andriessen shows a predominant preference for rhythmic unison in his own piece, mine, as the 'cp' (standing for 'counterpoint') in the title suggests, seeks a rather mutated form of rhythmically independent melodic lines. The introduction of the recorded material in the second section serves to give a partial indication of the material that has undergone 'mutation'; a fixed reminder of what part of the piece once was. This stark contrast between the rather sweet harmony of the recording and the essentially dissonant results of the quartet's freedom of choice was one that I was keen to emphasise and I encouraged the quartet to resist collusion with the recording and maintain this dissonant stance, especially in the final long notes of the second section.

The initial performance of the piece at a Goldsmiths Composers Forum concert on 14 June 2010 was rather unstable despite a tendency in rehearsal for individual material to bond into a quasi-written form whereby performers settled on particular pitch zones that seemed to work well for them individually and collectively. The piece therefore offered a template on which to base various collective re-writings, with choices of pitch and timbre being demanded with an urgency by the strict rhythmic outline in a way that was quite different to the opposite scenario in which specified pitch material is allowed rhythmic freedom. The improvisational element tended to diminish as the ensemble found individual and collective harmonic areas that they found mutually pleasing, and my own direction to prioritise improvised material in the first performance was, in hindsight, somewhat misguided as the demands for meaningful interaction within such strict rhythmic parameters were probably unrealistic. This realisation came about all the more sharply as I had to play clarinet in the initial performance due to the bassoonist being unavailable, and was therefore made uncomfortably aware of what I was expecting of the others. My participation as performer also meant that the group had to play without the direction that may have helped to hold the piece together more. Performers would be encouraged in later performances to develop material in rehearsal and to try to loosely memorise what, to them, seemed to work well. The piece therefore evolved into a collectively composed entity that involved everybody developing roughly fixed parts derived from

improvisational exploration and negotiation. Comments made by the performers after the first performance included these by violinist Mizuka Yamamoto and cellist Assaf Gidron:

Although I had a freedom to make choices for the pitches, it was difficult to use various pitches and register. I easily forget to use pitches in high positions. At the same time, it was difficult to make sound balance with other instruments/voice. Because if I use high pitches, I could easily cover other sounds, so when I hear interesting pitches from clarinet and cello, I try to stay on the low string. (Mizuka Yamamoto)

I found that while playing the piece I was too occupied with reading the rhythms correctly and producing “good” sound, and could not consider what pitches I am playing in “real time”. The character of the pitch and line I would use was determined more by decisions I made before starting to play than by improvisation. I would have liked to have been skilful enough to be able to improvise and reconsider the pitch according to how the performance progresses. (Assaf Gidron)

These remarks confirm the difficulty of making creative choices while simultaneously attempting to observe fixed rhythmic patterns and remain aware of the need for effective balance and cohesion. In an attempt to lessen the arbitrary nature of such choices I decided for the second performance to narrow the field of reference by introducing specifications for each of the three sections of the piece. The first section therefore required each musician to work within a close interval chosen by themselves that should be no greater than a major third. The second was to focus on sounds that had unclear pitch profiles or were percussive in nature; and the third was to consist of bright, open pitches. This decision was also necessitated by extremely limited rehearsal time being available as a complete quartet, with only a brief run-through of about fifteen minutes having been possible immediately before the performance. There was therefore very limited opportunity for the mutual exploration and negotiation intended to be part of the piece’s preparation.

Despite this, the second performance, at the same Pure Gold concert of 15 June 2013 mentioned previously, was a marked improvement on the first, benefiting both from a clear indication of tempo by myself as conductor and from the shortened material choices available to the quartet. Celia Lu, whose forthright vocal contribution ensured cohesion in the first performance and was key to the success of the second, was the only individual to have participated in both. Herself a composer, she additionally

remarked on the difficulty of deciding whether the piece's repeated rhythmic phrases should also imply melodic repetition. This formal consideration is perhaps one that can be explored in future, more extended, preparations of the piece. Certainly I think realisations will improve with increased rehearsal time, negotiation and discussion being essential parts of its preparation, although I remain unsure how this improvement will manifest itself. My wish, as originator of the piece, is for the players to achieve a certain unity of purpose which I think has been lacking in the performances to date. This will result, I believe, from more extended exposure to and application within the piece; something I believe will become audible once achieved.

An interesting observation that struck me while listening to the second performance was that the discordant result of randomising certain materials was something that rarely occurs in free improvisation or music in which pitch is distributed according to one kind of system or another. It seems that within free improvisation there generally exists a drift towards some kind of centre, be this rhythmic or pitch-based, that gives some feeling of cohesion as a piece unfolds. This cohesion can also be felt in extremely dissonant music because of organisational principles designed to structure material. When, however, a system of random choice is grafted onto some fixed element that seems somehow unprepared for it, the results seem somehow 'wrong'. This isn't of particular concern to me as long as the musicians play with conviction, lending the piece the desired, mutated feeling as a whole. This 'wrongness' came across particularly strongly in the third section of the second performance when I was reminded suddenly of the Portsmouth Sinfonia who achieved a measure of notoriety in the 1970s for their uniquely distorted versions of popular classics, the result of combined technical inexpertise and staunch determination to reach the end of pieces. The players of my own piece were all technically proficient and competent improvisers yet similar results occurred whereby a casual listener might think that they were playing in different keys or somehow playing the music wrongly. My tentative and rather general conclusion was that the juxtaposition of complexity (freedom of pitch choice) and simplicity (fixed, simple rhythmic frameworks) results in something that is neither one nor the other, but remains an interesting aberration.

Chapter 5

Liquorice Licks

This piece was conceived for six clarinets in Bb: three soprano and three bass, and is an attempt to capture the warmth and resonance of a multiple clarinet grouping. I had experienced this in an improvising group of five clarinetists called ICE (Improvising Clarinet Ensemble) founded by Noel Taylor, and had since been entertaining the idea of creating a piece which stabilised some of the more abstract and, for me, unconnected meanderings of that group. The intention was to provide the performers with a variety of contexts and choices. Essentially consisting of five sections, there are elements of completely free improvisation alongside fully notated sections with varying degrees of concurrent performer freedom. The piece was partly inspired by John Coltrane's extended piece *Ascension* which mainly alternates free sections involving rhythm section and soloist with ones of full and free ensemble playing. The opening of my piece is a variation of Coltrane's initial riff idea which offers the possibility, among others, of playing the same riff but with optional cells of pitches derived from a pitch set of five notes. The group is given a pitch set of five notes from which they must select three notes to use in a given rhythmic unit of four semiquavers with the last tied to a note of unfixed length: all in free time. This is intended to produce a loosely interwoven modal declamation prior to the cued introduction of the second section's central line. As became evident in *mutant cp* players have difficulty with spontaneously assigning pitches to a fixed rhythmic unit and an element of preparation therefore became necessary whereby the performers were expected to more or less settle on the notes they would use in advance. Because I also wanted the harmony implicit in the pitch set to be expressed I also checked with the performers in rehearsal to ensure that all pitches had been covered by their choices of notes. This section worked well enough in the initial performance although I found myself dissatisfied with the melodic contours of some of the choices made and resolved to introduce another condition whereby the first and third notes of the four-note rhythmic unit had to be the same.

The notated figure of the second section comprises two fixed complementary lines. Although there is a discernible chord progression running through the lines approximating to F# minor – G major – E dominant 7th – F minor, the musicians are not required to adhere to any kind of tonal reference points when soloing over the line. My original intention was to have a central extended riff akin to those written by Keith Tippett for the band Centipede in 1970/71 (September Energy Part 2 at 03:38 – BGOCD 485) (see Figure 6)

The third section is designed for four consecutive improvised solos above a written harmonic sequence of long notes. This sequence becomes altered as the re-joining soloists replace written pitches with ones of their own choice. Therefore by the time the last soloist has finished, the harmony will hopefully have been transformed considerably. This worked well in the first performance with the transition from the light, tonal underpinning of a fairly conventional four chord progression based around G major to a more ominous harmonic area generated by the player's choices of long notes being effectively executed. This and the following section were designed as a calm contrast to the opening and ending ones in which more robust activity occurs. Again there is a clear derivation from jazz practice here with the use of successive soloists although each plays over a changing background due to the introduction of new pitches which slowly supersede the initial ones. The held chords thus become increasingly discordant with successive solos reflecting this development.

The fourth section is a quiet interlude of breath tones which involves the players inhaling normally and then exhaling into their instruments and creating breath and key sounds preferably with interesting techniques such as flutter tonguing or hissing. The reed is not to be engaged and fingering is restricted to the low F, G, A, B and C keys. An interesting feature of this section in the first performance of the piece was the emergence of sounds from players unfamiliar with having to create breath sounds on their instruments, suggesting that the musculature of the embouchure was struggling to resist being employed in a conventional note-producing way. In the event this did not detract from the piece and, in fact, eased the transition to the following section which did in fact call for randomly spaced, short articulated tones.

My original idea for the final section was for the players to move into a circle and bounce pitches selected from a pitch set around the group, with each player responding as quickly as possible to her/his assigned partner's note ending. These endings would therefore become active, quickfire cues for the next player in the round. However, because of very limited rehearsal time, I decided to withdraw this plan for the initial performance and instead retained the same pitch set from which I asked the musicians to select in a sequence cued by the conductor: i) very short single notes; ii) upward moving pairs of notes of slightly longer length; iii) upward moving triads of notes of still longer length; and finally iv) upward moving tetrachords given still longer time values. This was all performed in free time with only the transitions

and ending cued and indicated respectively by myself as conductor or director. The final ascending four-note phrases in this section also built to a fortissimo climax in the initial performance. It occurred to me subsequently that this may have been a subliminally influenced attempt to evoke 'ascension' of some kind.

As with *Guests*, the director of the piece has considerable freedom to determine the lengths of various activities and is called upon to make improvisational decisions in this regard. I directed the piece in its first performance and found it necessary to indicate tempo only on the entries of the notated unison line, the players able to maintain cohesion once the line had become established. Other than this, it was necessary to cue the five sections to ensure a smooth transition between each and to indicate the rising dynamic only on the final crescendo passage. The lengths of the four parts of the final section were left to my judgement as was the first section in free time and the freely improvised section of the second section.

The first performance of the piece took place at Goldsmiths College on 4 February 2011 as part of a Composers Forum concert and had Chris Cundy, David Ryan and Horace Cardew on bass clarinets and Sue Lynch, Noel Taylor and Ricardo Tejero on standard B-flat clarinets. Two subsequent performances took place in quick succession on 15 and 18 June 2013, respectively at the Pure Gold concert referred to above and at one of the improvisation evenings hosted by Sue Lynch and Hutch Desmouilpied at The Horse in Lambeth. These were well received if slightly under-rehearsed, although Cundy, Lynch and Taylor were involved in both and their familiarity with the piece helped establish a firm grounding which I'm sure was helpful to two of the players who had not played the piece before, Guildhall students Aidan Pearson and Charlotte Bartley. Alex Ward also took part in the concert at The Horse adding a virtuosic zest and energy to the piece which more than compensated for any imprecisions by others in the section playing.

Chapter 6

The Bags of Time

This is a short piece of about seven minutes in length written for two electric guitarists, and specifically for myself and James O’Sullivan. Its origins stem from a personal practice session in which I was investigating the more extreme settings of the Boss ME-50 effects unit with my electric guitar. I found that, when the effect level and feedback switches were turned up fully on the ‘pan’ delay effect and the time switch turned down fully (see Figure 8), an ambient pulsing effect could be achieved with very little activation which continued to serve as a backdrop for further engagement with the guitar fingerboard. I chose to improvise a very simple arpeggio figure (F-A-C#-G) between sections of light lower string scratching and record the result. Though this produced a quite pleasing overall piece, I felt that an additional electric guitar, being played entirely without effects external to guitar and amplifier would not only add significant contrast in terms of instrumental deployment but would also add interest in juxtaposing an improvised part (played by James O’Sullivan) with one that was loosely written (my own). The written element of the piece can therefore be seen to have emerged from an improvising situation from which I derived the essential pitch material to be used in performance and which I then notated. This was fairly easy to do as a sketch as very little activity had been needed to establish and maintain a substantial sonic output, most of the sound being generated by the chosen effect setting. The little engagement I had with the fretboard was able to bear slow repetition in coming to realise the part. It was quite a new experience for me to rely so heavily on an electronic effect for generating material in this way and it occurred to me that another interesting aspect of the piece was the activity ratio between musicians, O’Sullivan having to engage more fully in a physical sense with his instrument (notwithstanding his carefully applied use of feedback) than myself.

The piece again is one which explores the idea of ‘musician as material’ and I had a very clear idea of how O’Sullivan’s improvised work would complement or work against the composed element. We had worked together quite extensively in a number of freely improvised contexts, mostly with laptop/percussionist Thanos Chrysis and at the Eddie Prevost Workshop, although this was the first time that we had attempted anything together that included any formally composed material. I decided to adopt John Butcher’s practice of naming individuals in the score for the piece for two main reasons. Firstly, the instrumentation is made clear in the subtitle of the piece and has no need for repetition in the (admittedly brief) score, and I felt that the names of

individuals and their activity was possibly far more useful than the already named instruments. Secondly, I consider the score for this piece to be a document recording a particular performance for two specific individuals. There is, therefore, no prescriptive intention behind its production for future realisations, my objective having been to present an idea that might be realised in numerous ways. Rather than attempt to reproduce the piece I would far rather other musicians grasped the essential idea and made something of their own by whatever means, whether by elaborating on the process of the piece or using different instrumentation and effects. Having said that, it was necessary for the purpose of this thesis to produce a score, and in

Figure 8: Detail and face of Boss ME-50 effects unit displaying 'delay' settings for The Bags of Time



finalising this I encountered a minor difficulty. It occurred to me that the score as I had sketched it did not give an accurate picture of the sonic activity taking place in the piece. I decided, therefore, to bracket a separate part for the effects unit to my own notated part (see Figure 9) in an attempt to indicate that musical material was also being generated mechanically. This seemed to neatly address the conundrum posed by the fact that, although I could be said to have conceived the material elements of the piece, much of the sound generated in my own part was the result of electronic processing of fairly minimal physical input. There did remain, however, the obvious difficulty posed by the impossibility of notating in advance what the improvising guitarist would play, highlighting the inadequacies of conventional scoring to portray a piece such as this. Certainly, by looking at the final score, one does not, for

example, have a clear idea of the relative material input of the two players referred to above; this despite my prior knowledge that O’Sullivan’s physical input would be greater than my own. Given this difficulty, it is perhaps the role of the recording to serve as the best document of the piece with the score serving as a kind of rough guide to the potentialities of the work.

Fig. 9: Extract from The Bags of Time showing bracketed part

The image shows a musical score for a guitar. The top staff is labeled 'JERRY WIGENS' and the bottom staff is labeled 'BOSS ME-50 EFFECTS UNIT'. The guitar part consists of several notes on a six-string staff. Annotations include 'Minimal scratching of low E and A strings' above the first few notes, 'Free realisation of arpeggio' below a group of notes, and 'Further scratching of low E and A strings plus D string' above the final notes. A horizontal line with arrows at both ends spans the width of the score, with the text 'Delay setting at PAN: Time = 0, Feedback = 10, Effects Level = 10' written below it. A bracket is drawn under the notes corresponding to this delay setting.

Of course, concerns with conveying accurate visual representations of musical works tend to be associated with a traditional need for the perpetuation of the composer’s idea in his absence. As my works tend to be time-specific, in that they are written or modified, ideally, for particular people and events and generally with my own involvement, to some extent the inability to describe by means of notation a freely improvised passage ceases to be an issue and it is quite probable that a listener’s familiarity with a particular individual’s work will give them a clearer idea of what to expect than an anonymously marked score. The practice of using persons’ names in a score can therefore be seen to serve a useful descriptive function that might engage with the potential listener’s memory of past musical events rather than projecting an unheard entity.

Our performance of the piece at the Pure Gold concert of June 15 was much longer than anticipated with both of us extending the piece into an open improvisation that lasted eighteen and a half minutes in total. My written material had partly provided a springboard for this although the piece moved into a quite distinct area of activity towards the end with both guitarists working out on a more equal footing and without the use of effects. The accompanying video material (Chapter 2) is an excerpt from the performance taking in about the first ten minutes in which the playing remains fairly true to the compositional intention.

Chapter 7

Tickbox

This is a piece that can be adapted for any timeframe and any number of players of any instrumental configuration, the initial parts having been designed for three spatially separated quartets comprising musicians participating in the Second Athens Composer/Performer Conference 2011. The majority of these were the more experienced music students of St. Catherine's British School aged, I would estimate, between 16 and 18 years. However, an additional player from St Catherine's wished to take part in the performance which resulted in a final score for two quartets and a quintet. The remaining players were an assortment of post-graduate instrumentalists, guest performers or adult associates of St Catherine's. The piece can therefore be seen to be adaptable according to the available or desired instrumental configuration. Adaptations might be made by either myself as the originating composer or by anyone who wished to take the idea of the piece and make something of their own from it.

In the performance note copied to participants I explained that Tickbox was a piece about space, time, sound and silence. Each participant would be given five sound events which had to be introduced separately, and once only, during the performance's 10-minute timeframe. One of these would be the free interpretation of a descriptive word such as 'furtive', an idea partly inspired by Erik Satie's use of unusual performance instructions. However, whereas Satie's performance markings referred to how specific notated passages were to be played (an example being 'Looking at yourself from afar'), my own words had to be interpreted with music of the respective musician's own device. The introduction of these words was an attempt to introduce a less fixed element within the general context of the piece and, despite its brevity, I hoped that this would afford an opportunity for more open and abstract invention than the other more specific events.

The other four events are instrument-specific and linked to the idea of 'zones of activity' usually relating to the construction and tuning of the particular instruments. A cellist might therefore be asked to play tailpiece notes on the strings behind the bridge of the instrument. Each event had an upper time limit indicated for its realisation. No individual's five events would exceed thirty seconds in total which meant that no individual would be playing for more than thirty seconds in total during the 10-minute performance. How, when and where sounds were introduced would be up to individual participants, but the set time limits for each event were to be observed, at least approximately. Sections of silence would be inevitable and it was

important to relax and enjoy these as a backdrop to the ensemble's sounds. They were an integral part of the piece and should be accepted and made welcome.

Despite the piece's lack of any clear expressive intent in a conventional musical sense, the piece was not to be seen merely as consisting of isolated sounds. The piece explores aspects of memory as each introduced sound lays the foundation for succeeding events and a forced association becomes necessary in a similar way to that required when listening to pieces by Feldman and Cage, in which the composers eschew any formal logic of continuity in favour of open systems that allow for greater creativity on the part of the listener, be they performer or audience. It also involves aspects of anticipation as a social enterprise in which participants are bound together by a common temporal tension between sounding and silence and the perceptions and thought processes this entails.

During his keynote talk at the Conference at which the piece was first performed, composer Roger Redgate unexpectedly asked me whether I considered the piece to be improvisation, something which I had not given very much thought to. My instant and reactive response was that I considered that it was not really improvisation; but subsequent consideration made me realise that this was far more problematic than it at first seemed. It would be quite possible, though quite cynical and not at all in keeping with the spirit of the piece, for a performer to contribute a wholly predetermined part by introducing pre-formulated sounds at specific points within the given timeframe. By adopting such a strategy, an individual might be considered to be playing the piece wrongly, but more importantly they would be denying themselves the essential experience of the piece which is very much a social one, and indeed as important as the resultant form. So participants in the piece needed to have an improvisatory approach whilst working with broadly prescribed materials in a determined but open timeframe. And for it to work effectively participants had to be relaxed but confident about introducing their sounds when they saw fit and were not to be concerned about whether or not their actions coincided with those of others.

When a particular event had been completed the relevant box could be ticked on the participant's paper part. This could either be done literally with pencil or pen, or mentally if individuals were sufficiently familiar with their parts. There was no 'right way up' for the paper parts and they could be viewed in portrait or landscape

orientation either way up, the intention here being to avoid the parts suggesting any sequential order. When all boxes had been ticked, either literally or metaphorically, individuals' instruments were to be laid down or some other signal given that their events had been completed. Singers, for example, could join their hands behind their heads. The piece would be over when all instruments had been laid down or corresponding signals given.

The idea underlying the piece was that time, as a pure concept, should have the opportunity to play with us, much as we, as musicians, play with it. Especially in music, time is a vehicle which we use for our own expressive purposes, filling it with ideas which would not take form without its benign assistance. Here, then, was a piece which attempted to let time have *its* say rather than being articulated and manipulated by means driven by conventional notions of continuity. However, the purpose of introducing tickboxes was to add a discrete theatrical element that would to some extent undermine the seriousness of any metaphysical 'message', bringing the piece down to earth by simulating a production process while more mystical or philosophical aspects were being explored.

It was decided prior to the first, ten-minute performance that signals would be given to participants to start the piece, and then at the five-minute and nine-minute points to indicate the middle and coming-to-end of the piece. It was felt that this would minimise distraction and allow the musicians to develop their own temporal space and trajectory, considerations that were also necessary in other portfolio pieces such as *olinola* in which open improvisation plays a significant part.

The first performance at the hosting establishment, DERE E - The American College of Greece, was successful and I sensed that the St. Catherine's participants had overcome their initial reservations about the piece, although it seemed to me that there were still certain lingering uncertainties about the general concept and the unfamiliar expectation to act on one's own initiative in a situation that lacked the normal drivers of freely improvised musical continuity such as melody and rhythm. However, given the age and limited experience of most participants, I think the essence of the piece had been grasped successfully, if slightly hesitantly, and the St. Catherine's students did well to pursue and persevere with their own understanding of the piece.

The instrumentation of the piece for this initial performance was:

Group 1: Clarinet 1, Clarinet 2, Classical Guitar, Soprano Voice

Group 2: Clarinet 3, Percussion, Cello 1, Alto Voice 1

Group 3: Clarinet 4, Piano, Electric Guitar, Cello 2, Alto Voice 2

The score was essentially a table setting out the above groupings with each individual's activities and their timings. With the exception of the percussionist, Enrico Bertelli, I had no knowledge of the other participants and any specialisms or proclivities that they may have had. I therefore had, for the most part, to imagine as discrete entities each of a bundle of activities based on my knowledge of the possibilities of the voices and instruments involved and hope that their description would be interpreted with imagination and openness. I had heard some of Bertelli's work and knew that I could take a few additional chances with the percussion part in the knowledge that these wouldn't come as a shock or surprise to a post-graduate performer with considerable experience and theoretical knowledge of diverse percussion techniques, including body percussion.

A second performance took place at the Pure Gold concert of June 15, 2013, this time for four quartets as originally intended but with a quite different instrumental configuration. This was as follows:

Group 1: Oboe, Bassoon, Acoustic Guitar, Voice 1

Group 2: Violin 1, Cello, Piano, Voice/percussion

Group 3: Trombone, Violin 2, Electric Guitar, Voice 2

I decided to extend the timeframe for this realisation to twelve minutes although in retrospect it might have been more interesting to extend it to fifteen. None of the musicians had played the piece before and had not had the opportunity to internalise the concept of the piece through rehearsal as had the St Catherine's ensemble, and I sensed that the silences were being perceived more as inactivity than as integral material. There had also been less opportunity to become familiar with the timescale of the piece which resulted in a relative flurry of activity when the final minute was cued. This wasn't a particular problem but did, for me, detract from the natural flow of the piece to some extent, and led me to consider the issue of whether participants should actually be encouraged to produce all of their sounds rather than adhere to the more natural principle of introducing sounds as and when they saw fit, thereby admitting the possibility of some of their sounds remaining unheard. It was also

interesting that this flurry and an earlier passage in the piece took the form of ‘chains’ of events as distinct from the more frequent ‘clashes’ of participants’ sounds that had occurred in the Athens realisation.

Another change I introduced for the second performance was giving the participants their words for interpretation (as in column 5 of the score) on A5 sized pieces of paper separate from their parts. This was to further avoid any suggestion of fixed orientation that the words might suggest if written on parts. Because the words were open to abstract interpretation and not particularly aligned to particular instruments I decided to use the same ones as in the first performance. However, the new instrumentation called for new parts and score to be written and certain generic indications were also introduced which departed from the previous, strictly instrumental instructions. For example, the acoustic guitarist had ‘Country and Western’ as a six-second sound event and the trombonist had ‘Reggae’ also as a six-second one. This idea might be pursued in future performances.

Chapter 8

epochal natter

Originally conceived simply as a piece for improvising clarinetist called *Pillars*, my idea was for a piece with intermittent fixed and improvised passages in which the performer would base his improvised playing on the past and approaching fixed passages or ‘pillars’, having the opportunity, being cognisant of both what has passed and of what is approaching, to create links between them. The clarinetist was to have been free to approach the piece either having made choices in advance, effectively predetermining the details of the piece, or to adopt a more spontaneous and improvisatory approach, the latter of which I was inclined to encourage on the grounds that it would ensure the piece’s plasticity and be more rewarding and challenging for the performer.

In its final form, the piece had become one for vocalising clarinetist in which the instrumentalist remained essentially free to either make compositional choices in advance, effectively predetermining the details of the piece, or to adopt a more spontaneous and improvisatory approach. However, I recommended having at least a basic plan for an initial performance of the piece and the spoken parts would also need to have a short piece of text which, again, could either be improvised or taken from a written source.

The idea for the piece came from a desire to conflate the vocal and instrumental potential and possibilities of a single performer. I had experimented on my own with this idea on clarinet and wanted to write a piece that explored certain gestural ideas while remaining essentially open for the performer to realise in a personal and uniquely expressed way. The title derives from the speculative idea of a possible dialogue between eras of human history divided by time and space, how they would respond to one another and how much human beings had evolved or remained unchanged through the ages. This, in turn, led me to consider the origins of music and how simple means such as voices and objects and their imaginative use could have resulted in a prototypical music. The piece therefore ended up with spoken, played and sung elements, mostly separated but sometimes combined, to approximate a quasi-primeval feel.

The piece has two staves of three lines each. The top staff is for sounds derived from the instrument and contains black notation. The lower staff is for sounds derived from the vocal cavity and has red notation.

The middle line of each staff represents free choice on the performer's part. All the indicated events on this line can be chosen pitches or sounds. Events indicated on the top line must be higher in pitch than the preceding chosen sound. As a basic example, if a middle C is chosen as a middle line event, a higher pitched sound must follow if this is indicated on the top line and this can be any sound above middle C. In a like manner, sounds following freely chosen events that are indicated on the bottom line must sound lower in pitch. If consecutive events are indicated on top/bottom or bottom/top lines the same rule of relative pitching applies but a middle-line event is always a free choice. Instrumentalists must be careful not to view middle line events in terms of relative pitch value. This is solely the role of the outer lines. Each middle line event should be seen therefore as a new start. Care should also obviously be taken not to play notes on the middle line which cannot be raised or lowered should following indications so require.

The piece is in free time throughout and contains only longer and shorter sounds indicated respectively by open or closed stemless noteheads. It is up to the instrumentalist to determine time values which can be as flexible as desired. They may also wish to add beams at certain points to assist in the counting of sound events. I have resisted doing this, though, to avoid ambiguity.

The piece has a freely improvised section in between the scored material in which the instrumentalist is free to create links between the notated parts of the score. This idea is explored further in *Olinola* (see below) in which linkage involving harmonic elements is explored.

The first performance by Tom Jackson also took place on 15 October 2011 at the Second Athens Composer/Performer Conference. Jackson's performance of the piece was, in fact, a tour de force of music theatre in which he presented the piece in the form of a self-accompanied lecture, partly spoken, partly sung as the score required. Indeed, on viewing the video of his performance it struck me that he had lent the piece a strong visual perspective that I had scarcely envisaged. The presentation was by no means mandatory and displayed his gift for both formal inventiveness and improvisation, the result of which provided a fresh and surprising performance of the piece for which I had only vague preconceptions beforehand, these being largely of a

purely sonic nature. Jackson also took the opportunity to use indications for long events in the score (which I had envisaged as being delivered as long syllables) to insert blocks of text. This came as a surprise but I didn't consider it to be a deviation from the score as such, and was content for the notation to yield to Jackson's interpretation.

When, after the concert, I suggested we share composer credits in the light of his considerable and thoughtful contribution, Jackson said that he would not have been able to conceive or do what he had done had it not been for the stimulus provided by my piece. I found this response gratifying and one that served as a kind of validation of what I sought to achieve with my work. However, it also made me consider the issue of authorship and what might constitute a good or bad performance of this and other pieces. If I were to share composer credits following every realisation of *epochal natter*, it would effectively mean that each different performance became a new work with a different co-composer. With a piece such as this there can clearly be no definitive performance and each realisation is likely to be radically different from the next, assuming that a particular performance doesn't set any kind of precedent for future ones: something that would be quite against my wishes. However, despite its wide scope for interpretation it is clearly a unique work in and of itself and, inasmuch as it might be judged critically in the future, I concluded that the responsibility that comes with ownership of the work should lie squarely with the composer, especially as, in my own work, choice of performers is considered very much part of the compositional process. Comparisons may obviously be made between the different realisations of the piece and these judged to be better or worse than one another. However, what is important to me is the effort of the performer as colleague and friend in applying something of themselves to my work in attempting to make something that speaks to and for us both.

Chapter 9

Workshop

and in John Cage's text pieces such as *Lecture on Nothing* (1949/50) and, more pertinently, *Where Are We Going? And What Are We Doing?* (1961). John White's *Newspaper-Reading Machine* (c.1971) is another, slightly more recent, piece I have discovered which explores the idea of multiple speaking voices.

Preparation of the piece involved lengthy and detailed editing of interview material recorded for transcription for my Individual Research Topic on Eddie Prevost's Improvisation Workshop for my Music Masters degree. I decided that the spoken material should have a narrative quality to it, so my first task was to edit out all material spoken by myself in the course of the interviews. I was fortunate in that the interviewees chosen for the piece, Sandy Kindness from Scotland, Ross Lambert from Northern Ireland and Samantha Rebello from Essex all had quite distinctive and diverse speaking voices, an element of timbral and expressive colour I was keen to exploit. Following the editing out of my own speech, I proceeded to select sections of the interview material which I found sonically interesting while ensuring that complete sentences were retained to avoid undermining any literal sense conveyed. In making the piece I suppose I was less interested in the sense of what was being spoken than in its musical qualities although certain phrases seemed to demand inclusion for reasons of both message and sound; in other words literal and musical meaning seemed to coalesce.

In Section 1 each of the recorded narrators is given a separate block of approximately 1 minute and 20 seconds with each joined by one of the three live vocalists. The first four minutes of the piece therefore consists of a sequence of three narrator/vocalist pairings.

The idea of speech as musical material is extended in Section 2 in which literal meaning is further obscured by pairing the recorded narrators so that a kind of narrative counterpoint is established. Again, the three available pairings are introduced separately and consecutively with each occupying an approximate time block of 1 minute and 40 seconds.

In Section 3 fragments of spoken material in the form of words or short phrases have been extracted from the previous recorded material creating a fractured array of 'sound bites' for the improvising live vocalists to work collectively with or against.

I added a Section 4 quite late in the compositional process when I was listening back to the edited results of the piece. At the end of this, a section of randomly stored material in which all the narrators were speaking at once appeared and sounded very good to me. This gave me the idea of rounding the piece off with one minute of this material accompanied by the live vocalists coming together in casual conversation.

The first performance of the piece at Goldsmiths Composers Forum on 1 March 2013 was well performed by Portia Winters, Celia Lu and Hywel Jones all of whom grasped the essence of the piece and achieved a happy balance of individual and collective creativity within the prescribed restraints. Despite a technical problem which effectively took out one side of the stereo recording, the piece was generally well received and successfully performed. I had provided the vocalists with several of the transcribed 'sound bites' (mainly from Section 3), the inclusion of which was optional in their improvised parts. I think this was considered helpful and at one point gave rise to an exchange between the performers based on one of Sandy Kindness's narrative contributions. However, these words and phrases were intended simply to provide an additional, external source of material should any of the vocalists wish to make use of it. I sensed some awkwardness on the part of the live performers in the very final section in which they are asked to converse casually along with the recording. This was probably because of the novelty of combining natural conversation with performance with both somehow losing their definition in the process. It was also the first time that the three individuals had met, however, and this made their efforts all the more impressive.

A second performance took place at the Pure Gold concert of June 15, 2013 which, in technical terms, worked far better than the first with a good balance being achieved between recording and performers. Hywel Jones and Celia Lu were joined by Suzi MacGregor to form the trio of live vocalists and all performed well. My one reservation was the rather overt and raucous contribution of Jones in his solo passage which I thought displayed a certain lack of concern for the overall shape of the piece. Nevertheless, the trio's attention to the recorded element and their work with it was generally very good and the final conversational section felt far more comfortable in this performance.

Chapter 10

olinola

This is a piece for improvising violin and violist in which a harmonic sequence is interspersed with free solo or duo sections. The harmonic sequence, which is based on the first part of a Steve Swallow tune *Arise Her Eyes*, is stretched out and expressed by both instruments either as dyads with freely articulated specified pitches or as modal interludes in which each player is free to select material from a pitch set which has one dominant pivot note. This pivot note has somehow to be accentuated to maintain the feel of a harmonic progression. The form of the extracted free sections is as follows:

duo - viola solo – duo – violin solo – viola solo – duo – violin solo – duo

It can be seen that this apportions equal improvising space to both musicians. The piece is in thirteen timed sections marked consecutively A to Q and involves three different types of activity, all in open time. Sections A, E, M and Q are notated as semi-breves and require a single note to be played throughout with free articulation and optional ornamentation. Sections C, G, I, K and P are improvised with notes from various pitch sets with pivot notes that the players have to make predominant. The pitch sets are flexible in terms of register although the pitch of the pivot notes must be observed strictly. Sections B, D, F, H, J, L, N and O are freely improvised duo or solo sections.

Fig. 11: Extract from Olinola showing section types

The figure shows three sections of a musical score for violin (Vln.) and viola (Vla.).

- Section E (02:30):** A semi-breve section where both instruments play a single, sustained note. The violin part is marked with a '5' and the viola part with a '5'.
- Section F (03:00):** A duo section where the violin and viola improvise together. The violin part is labeled 'IMPROVISE WITH VIOLA' and the viola part is labeled 'IMPROVISE WITH VIOLIN'.
- Section G (04:00):** A semi-breve section where both instruments play a single, sustained note. The violin part is marked with a '7' and the viola part with a '7'.

With this piece, I have reprised an idea from the initial workings of *Epochal Natter*, namely the possibility for the soloist to anticipate approaching fixed sections in their improvised work. I find this interesting as most free improvisation does not tend to play *towards* a specific fixed event and I was keen to see whether a coming ‘fixture’

might have an influence on the musicians' choices and, if so, how this influence was handled.

At the first rehearsal of the piece Sylvia Hallett played viola and Susanna Ferrar violin. My previous reservations that the timings of certain sections might be too long proved ill-founded as these worked out well for all concerned. Also, my original idea for the players to reach an agreement between themselves in regard to the timings was considered impractical, and it was decided that the timings would be cued by a third person. Although this kind of direction might be considered unusual for a piece for two players, the instrumentalists felt, and I agreed, that it would enhance the creative potential of the piece by removing the need to indicate changes to one another or for them to have to follow a timing device, both of which were considered unwanted distractions. By having each section cued ten seconds in advance, it was hoped that any disruption to their improvisatory thought processes would be minimised. Another issue that arose was the possibility for the players to add their own layer of arrangement to the piece. For example, they might decide that they wanted to play one of the pitch set sections entirely pizzicato, and I confirmed that this would be perfectly acceptable.

The arrangements decided upon in rehearsal worked well for the first performance at Goldsmiths Composers Forum on 1 March 2013 and positive feedback was received from members of the audience. The timings of the sections were strictly observed by myself as director using a stopwatch, which meant that my attention was to some extent diverted from the piece and its overall flow. However, my one concern was that, because of the length (and striking nature) of the freely improvised sections, any sense of a harmonic progression may have become lost. I then had to consider whether this was an issue that I felt I needed to address as a composer for future performances or whether the piece had actually become something other than originally intended that was equally, if not more, interesting. On listening to the recording of the piece, I decided that the latter was the case and that any more explicit exposition of the chord progression might risk sounding like a standard jazz improvisation and undermine those aspects of forward and backward looking afforded to the performers in their creative role.

Part 3

Conclusion

Chapter 11

Conclusion

Chapter 11

Conclusion

My concluding remarks shall attempt to give a broad definition of the portfolio as a whole and outline some of my thoughts and observations stemming from the research generated by the preparation and performance of the pieces. I shall also set out some further possible areas of exploration in what is an ongoing field of research for me.

The portfolio works accompanying this thesis share the common aim of presenting a platform for musicians to exercise their own creativity within prescribed contexts and with varying degrees of creative responsibility¹³. This responsibility ranges from forthright involvement in the compositional process, as required by the solo clarinet/vocal piece *epochal natter*, through to the completely open improvisation of the trio in *Guests*, and the ‘free’ guitarist in *The Bags of Time*. Between these poles lies a middle ground in which participants are asked variously to contribute improvised or loosely planned interpretations of broad directions, as in the case of *Tickbox*, through to free engagement with certain specified materials, as with *olinola* and *mutant cp*. All the pieces are reliant for their successful realisation on the capacity of the musicians involved to think creatively and to imbue performances with their own musicality and sonic identity. I have attempted to explore how performer freedom can interact with various given frameworks and the formal considerations that this entails: to test the extent to which performers’ own expression can successfully integrate with composed forms.

Integral to my aesthetic aspirations for the works has been the idea of ‘musician as material’ which I have considered at some length, and which is essentially concerned with the deployment of individual musical identities within pieces in order to realise an undefined but necessary material aspect. Although the second of the works’ performances came close to reflecting my preference for the *type* of players involved, individual availability meant that my ideal ‘people’ content for some works was often compromised to some extent. However, I realise that my personal wishes in regard to particular realisations is a quite small part of the works’ bigger picture, especially given their inherent indeterminate nature and the fact that they are mostly open works which, as already stated, are available to all musicians and subject to further modification and re-working as circumstances demand. The pieces’ material content is therefore always a combined function of personality, direction, space and time.

¹³ I am grateful to James O’Sullivan for the idea of ‘creative responsibility’.

What the pieces are in any given realisation is always a reflection of who is participating and their decisions at given times in particular settings, with loosely-formed individual material brought to the pieces becoming an integral part of any given performance or realisation. I find it helpful to think of the musicians with whom I collaborate as being endowed with their own unique musical thought streams which become manifest in improvisational practice and which complete my structural designs.

It has become clear during the course of my work generally that improvisational skills are something to be honed and practised like any other musical activity and that the possession of an advanced instrumental technique is no guarantee of improvisational or creative calibre. The perceptible difference in the performances of the works by improvising musicians on the one hand and those being *asked* to improvise on the other was clear, and reflected the fluency of thought and execution of the former in contrast to a frequent hesitancy and reluctance to act on one's own initiative on the part of those musicians who were more familiar with being directed or cued. That said, and as I acknowledge above, use of the pieces as a means for individuals to develop improvisational skills is quite acceptable and I recognise such use as an appropriate extension of their function.

I have suggested that the shared frameworks designed for the musicians to clothe or colour in their own way should serve as a source of surprise inasmuch as the material detail of the pieces remains unknown at the start of a performance. However, despite their open nature, I have become aware that I do have broad expectations for the pieces, and of particular interest to me has been the vanishing point at which structure remains discernible or becomes hidden and the creative tension resulting from whether one or other is desirable. The audible results of my compositional practice have therefore been a continuing concern and, although I have questioned the priority of performance over activity, and continue to maintain the importance of musical practice as a valuable social activity in and of itself, I have also to acknowledge the importance of audiences in the dynamic process of communicating ideas. The sharpened focus resulting from the presence of an audience is, I believe, a reflection of the need to ensure that what one plays is what one intends to be heard. This is not a case of 'playing up' to audiences or of their influencing the performers' material, but

is rather linked to a need for clarity which, like spoken ideas, is often only felt in the moment of communication.

Four of the portfolio pieces, *Guests*, *mutant cp*, *Tickbox* and *Workshop* have had two performances at the time of writing, one, *Liquorice Licks*, has had three performances, and the remaining three, *epochal natter*, *The Bags of Time* and *olinola* a single performance, and although I consider the results of the various collaborations to have been relatively successful, certain conceptual aspects of the pieces remain to be explored more fully, as programming constraints have meant that more extended timeframes for pieces with unspecified lengths such as *Guests* and *Tickbox* have not yet been tried. In the case of *Tickbox* the spatial separation of the three groups has also, hitherto, been within quite confined spaces, so the use of different and larger spaces is another possibility to be considered for the future. Similarly, the possibilities of a piece like *mutant cp* and variations of it are still open to further collaborative investigation in regard to potential realisations.

In addition to the collaborative aspects of *mutant cp*, notational issues such as those that seem to have hampered the creativity of its performers need to be given further consideration along with more general issues of presentation which might enhance the flow of ideas and comfort of the musicians in the pieces generally. The notation developed and arrived at for each of the pieces has generally been an attempt to convey their particular characteristics and requirements as unique creative platforms. I was conscious, also, in making the scores that the ideas should be accessible to musicians from various backgrounds all of whom would, ideally, have highly developed creative ability but, perhaps, varying competence in regard to formal notation. Future possibilities for text and graphic scoring, the latter of which has been only lightly considered in this portfolio, suggest themselves in this regard. I also hope to develop ideas already explored in the piece *Workshop* and *mutant cp* concerning the juxtaposition of improvised playing with pre-recorded elements, and extend this to its incorporation into settings in which it might alternate and combine with other musical, visual, theatrical or literary components.

Finally, I hope that the pieces presented here will continue to develop, sometimes morphing into other entities, sometimes undergoing greater or lesser transformation,

sometimes becoming extended or reduced in scale. As units of continuing creative potential, I hope their lives are interesting ones.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Extract from Violaaragh...(2007)

28 Knock body

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Imitate violin knocks

Dow a single tailpiece note in same rhythm and tempo as violin knocks

120''

3

5/4

5/4

5/4

5/4

5/4

B

$\text{♩} = 90$

34 Pluck any single tailpiece notes

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

Pluck any single tailpiece notes

mf

mf

mf

mf

mf

X 3

Appendix 2

Blustering Home (2007)

Blustering Home

Jerry Wagens

$\text{♩} = 100$
With unrestrained gusto

Trumpet in B \flat
mf *f*

Trombone
mf

Tuba
mf

6

Tpt.
mf

Tbn.
f *gliss.* *gliss.*

Tba.

12

With uncertain gusto

Tpt.
p

Tbn.
p

Tba.
p

17

1. 2.

With wholly convinced bluster

Tpt.
mp *mf* *f*

Tbn.
mp *mf* *f*

Tba.
mp *mf* *f*

23 With the gusto of experience

Musical score for measures 23-28. The score is for three brass instruments: Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Tuba (Tba.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a dynamic marking of *mf* and a breath mark (<). The first two measures are marked *mp* and feature a slur over the notes. The piece then repeats from measure 23. The second ending concludes with a glissando (*gliss.*) in the Trombone part.

29

Musical score for measures 29-33. The score is for three brass instruments: Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Tuba (Tba.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.). The Trombone part features glissandos (*gliss.*) in measures 29 and 30. The piece then repeats from measure 29.

34

Musical score for measures 34-38. The score is for three brass instruments: Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Tuba (Tba.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.). The piece then repeats from measure 34.

39

Musical score for measures 39-43. The score is for three brass instruments: Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone (Tbn.), and Tuba (Tba.). The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The music begins with a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.). The second ending features dynamic markings of *mp* and *pp* in the Trombone and Tuba parts. The piece then repeats from measure 39.

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Discography

Astrakan: Astrakan (Jaguar Steps, JAST 01)

Astrakan: Comets and Monsters (Jaguar Steps, JAST 02)

Gary Burton Quartet: Throb (Atlantic, SD-1531)

John Cage: The Piano Concertos (Mode, mode 57)

Cornelius Cardew: The Great Learning (Bôlt Records, BR 1008)

Centipede: Septober Energy (RCA Victor, DPS 2054)

John Coltrane: Selflessness (Impulse, SIPL 522)

Miles Davis: Live Evil (CBS, 67219)

John Edwards: somethingtobesaid (Weight of Wax, WOW 02)

Morton Feldman: Morton Feldman (Edition RZ, ed.RZ 1010)

King Crimson: Court of the Crimson King (Island, ILPS 9111)

Charles Mingus: Live at Carnegie Hall (Atlantic, SD 1667)

Nucleus: Solar Plexus (Vertigo, 6360 039)

Steve Reich: Early Works (Nonesuch, 979 169-1)

The Republic: Three Songs from The Republic (Oval, OVAL FLAG 24/12)

Soft Machine: Third (CBS, 66246)

Spontaneous Music Ensemble: Karyobin (Chronoscope, CPE 2001-2)

Wandelweiser Komponisten Ensemble: Christian Wolff - Stones (Edition Wandelweiser, EWR 9604)

Contents Details for Recordings

CONTENTS DETAILS FOR RECORDED MATERIALS

COMPACT DISC 1

Track 1 - Guests

Personnel: **Directors** – Celia Lu, Jerry Wiggins

Octet – Susan Lynch (flute), Paul Burnell (oboe), Noel Taylor (bass clarinet), Laila Woozeer (bassoon), Susanna Ferrar (violin), Melanie Powell (violin), Ivor Kallin (viola), Hannah Marshall (cello)

Improvising Trio ‘Found Drowned’ - James O’Sullivan (electric guitar) Peter Marsh (double bass), Paul May (percussion)

Goldsmiths Pure Gold Concert, 15 June 2013 (second performance)

Track 2 - mutant cp

Personnel: Celia Lu (voice), Laila Woozeer (bassoon), Melanie Powell (violin), Hannah Marshall (cello)

Goldsmiths Pure Gold Concert, 15 June 2013 (second performance)

Track 3 - Liquorice Licks

Personnel: Alex Ward (Bb clarinet), Aidan Pearson (Bb clarinet), Charlotte Bartley (Bb clarinet), Susan Lynch (Bb clarinet), Chris Cundy (bass clarinet), Noel Taylor (bass clarinet)

Improvised Music Club at The Horse, 18 June 2013 (third performance)

Track 4 - The Bags of Time

Personnel: James O’Sullivan (electric guitar), Jerry Wiggins (electric guitar)

Goldsmiths Pure Gold Concert, 15 June 2013 (first performance)

COMPACT DISC 2

Track 1 - Tickbox

Personnel: *Quartet 1* - Paul Burnell (oboe), Laila Woozeer (bassoon), Henri Vaxby (acoustic guitar), Suzi MacGregor (voice);

Quartet 2 – Susanna Ferrar (violin), Hannah Marshall (cello), Jerry Wiggins (voice/percussion), Celia Lu (piano);

Quartet 3 – Hywel Jones (trombone), James O’Sullivan (electric guitar), Lucinda John-Duarte (voice), Melanie Powell (violin)

Goldsmiths Pure Gold Concert, 15 June 2013 (second performance)

Track 2 - epochal natter

Personnel: Tom Jackson (voice/clarinet)

Deree – the American College of Greece, 15 October 2011 (first performance)

Track 3 - Workshop

Personnel: Hywel Jones (voice), Celia Lu (voice), Suzi MacGregor (voice)

Recording: Samantha Rebello, Ross Lambert, Alexander Kindness (speech), Dave O'Connor (flute), Seymour Wright (alto saxophone), James O'Sullivan (cello), Jerry Wiggins (clarinet), Chris Prosser (violin)

Goldsmiths Pure Gold Concert, 15 June 2013 (second performance)

Track 4 – olinola

Personnel: Susanna Ferrar (violin), Sylvia Hallett (viola)

Home recording, 22 January 2013 (first performance)

COMPACT DISC 3

Background recording for the piece Guests

DVD

Chapter 1 - epochal natter

Personnel and performance details as above

Chapter 2 - The Bags of Time

Personnel and performance details as above

Chapter 3 – Guests

Personnel and performance details as above

Chapter 4 – Tickbox

Personnel: St Catherine's Improvisation Ensemble - Marilyn Wyers (piano), Tom Jackson, Krista Martynes, Paul Koutselos, Memos Kattis (clarinets), Enrico Bertelli (percussion), Marimel Chrissi (soprano), Silvia Ruth Fernandez Caria, Daniella Noemi Fanelli (altos), Leslie Jones, Rosa Papandonakis (cellos), Antony Daskalakis (guitar), Philip Dellagrammaticas (electric guitar)

Concert of the Second Athens Composer/Performer Conference for PhD Students at Deree – the American College of Greece, 15 October 2011 (first performance)