

# IM-OS

Improvised Music – Open Scores

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Proposals from readers are invited

## CONTENTS:

<i>Editorial</i> (Joe Scarffe)	4
Astral Trigonometry - Grgur Savic	5
Visual Perception Shaping Interpretation (JS)	6
Becoming Again - Michael Boyd	7
Graphic Scores as Artistic Freedom (JS)	8
Embodied Perception and Performance (JS)	9
Judging a Score by Its Cover: The Role of Visual Design in Interpreting Colour Scores (JS)	10
What is “out there”? An instant field trip to the internet (Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen)	11
Contributors To This Issue	19

## EDITORIAL

Open scores sit at the crossroads of sound and image and text - a place where notation becomes artwork and interpretation becomes collaboration. This issue explores how open scores invite performers not to reproduce but to reimagine, translating shapes, textures, and colors into sonic movement.

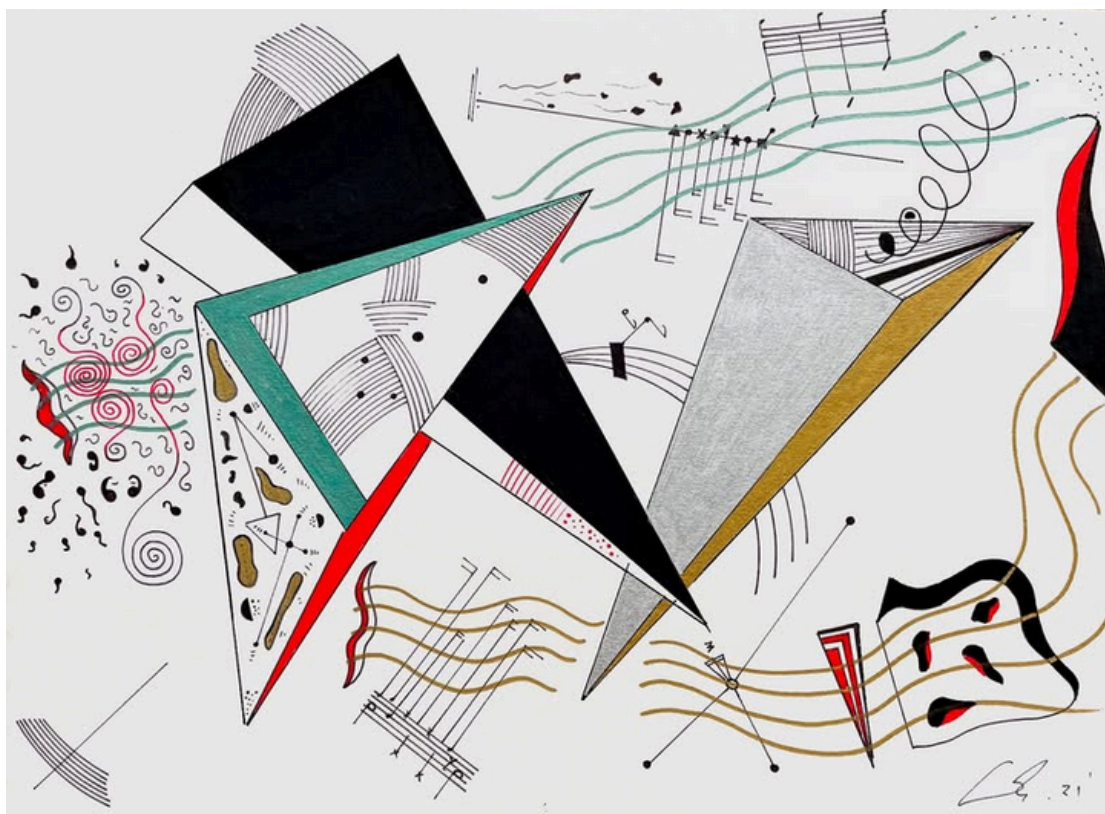
Across this field, perception itself becomes performative. The eye listens, the body reads, and the score - far from being static - unfolds as a site of creative negotiation. What follows looks at how vision, embodiment, and design continue to reshape what music can mean and how it can be played.

In the final article in this issue “What is “out there”? An instant field trip to the internet”, Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen extends this conversation into the digital realm, tracing how open-score practice finds new life and community online. His reflections move between search engines, exhibitions, and educational projects, showing how the networked world reshapes not only how such works are found and shared, but how the very act of composing, interpreting, and collaborating continues to expand through digital connection.

JS

## Astral Trigonometry (2021) - Grgur Savic

Grgur Savic publishes a large number of notations on Instagram under the name *gs\_graphicscores*



*Performance instructions:* none

# Visual Perception Shaping Interpretation

by Joe Scarffe

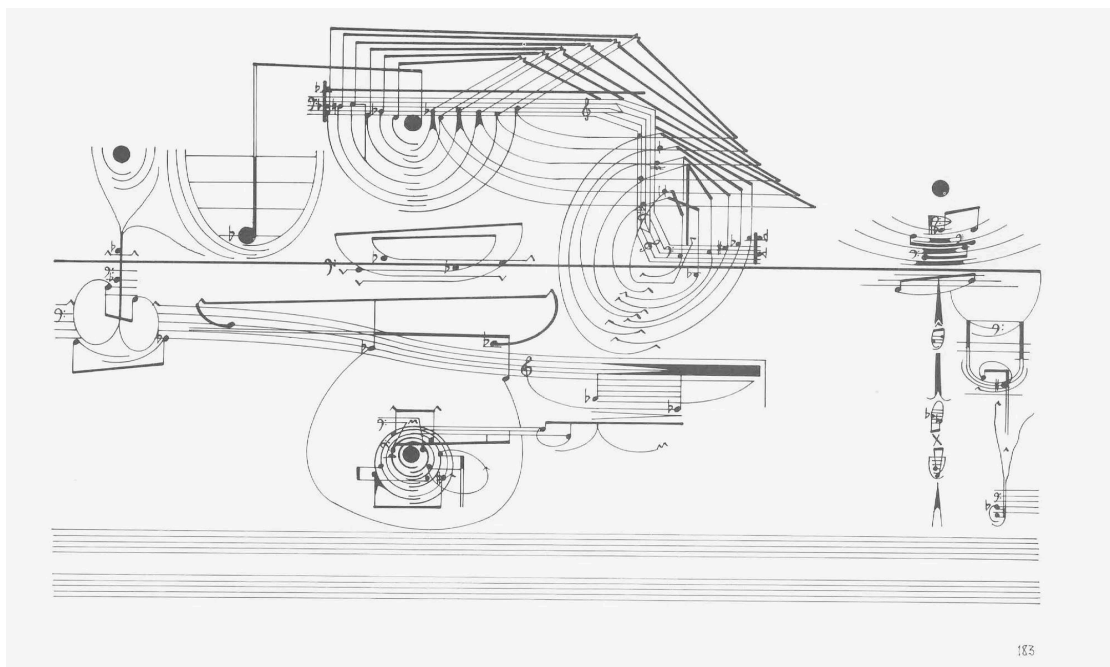
In graphic notation, the visual field is never neutral - it directs how music is imagined, heard, and brought to life. As Una MacGlone in *The Wire* observes, texture, line quality, and spatial design do more than decorate the page; they orient perception and guide the performer's body toward sound.

A jagged line might carry the weight of impact; a fading trace might invite silence or suspension. Scale and placement imply motion - time unfolding across the page, pitch lifting through space. These cues engage both eye and instinct, fusing seeing and sounding into a single act.

Interpretation becomes a conversation between visual and sonic awareness. Cardew's *Treatise* is a vivid example: its geometric abstractions invite endless variation, every performance a different reading of the same image. Graphic scores remind us that looking is itself performative—the eye becomes an instrument, shaping what the ear eventually hears.

Read more (the article was also featured in IM-OS Issue 8, p.34):

<https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/visual-strategies-for-sound-the-key-to-graphic-scores>



Page 183 of "Treatise" by Cornelius Cardew. Sourced from the original score. Published by The Gallery Upstairs Press, Buffalo, New York, 1967.

# Becoming Again - Michael Boyd (2019)

for one or more performers of any type

**Becoming...again**  
for one or more performers

**Michael Boyd**  
2014

**Performance Instructions**

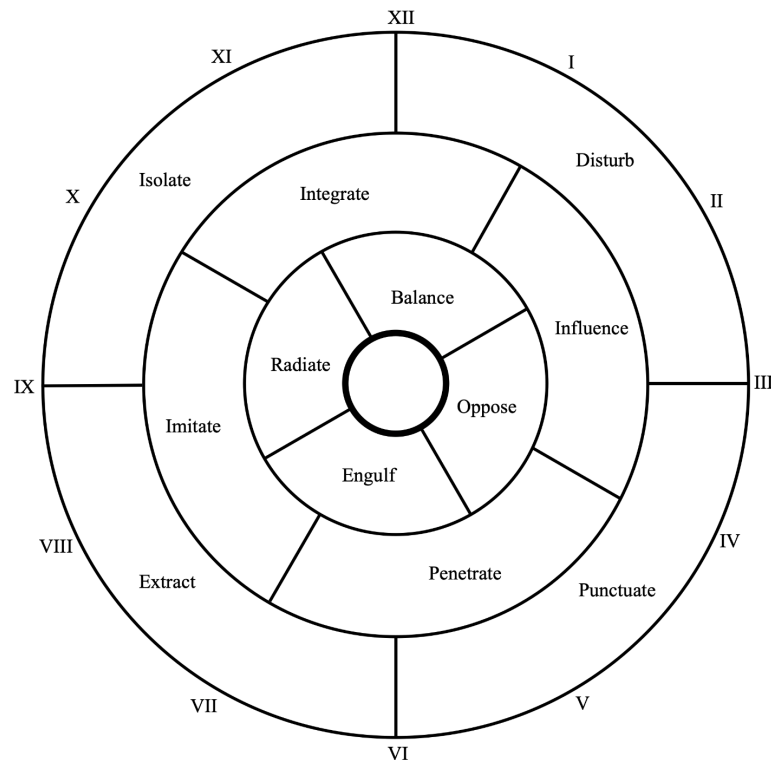
This piece is for one or more performers of any type.

Performance length must be decided in advance by the performer(s) and may last for any duration that is easily divisible by twelve. A performance might be as short as one minute or as long as one year. Shorter durations lend themselves to focused performance settings such as a concert, while longer durations might be more fitting for a performed installation or modifications to one's daily life.

The performance score (right) is comprised of three concentric circles, each divided into four segments that contain one verb. The perimeter of the score is labeled with Roman numerals I through XII, similar to a traditional clock. Each Roman numeral position is associated with the three verbs found at that position in each circle. Adjacent Roman numeral positions share two verbs and differ by one.

Performers begin performing at any of the twelve Roman numerals, concurrently interpreting the three verbs associated with that position to create performance gestures. The performance gestures that result from this interpretation can be sonic, visual, and/or theatrical. The exact way that a trio of verbs suggests gesture(s) will vary significantly, as none have obvious performance connotations and might be interpreted in myriad ways. Performers should be creative, experiment, and explore! Performers should progress clockwise through the Roman numeral positions, spending an equal amount of time at each (one twelfth of the total performance duration). A performance ends when a performer returns to the position where he or she began.

When two or more performers are involved, they can perform independently, coexisting spatially, or may interact with each other based on the interpreted verbs. They may choose similar or different performance durations, leaving the performance space when not active. For longer performances further temporal/spatial customization may be employed (perhaps designating certain spaces and/or times for performance).



*Performance instructions:* The full instructions can be found on the score above.

## Graphic Scores as Artistic Freedom

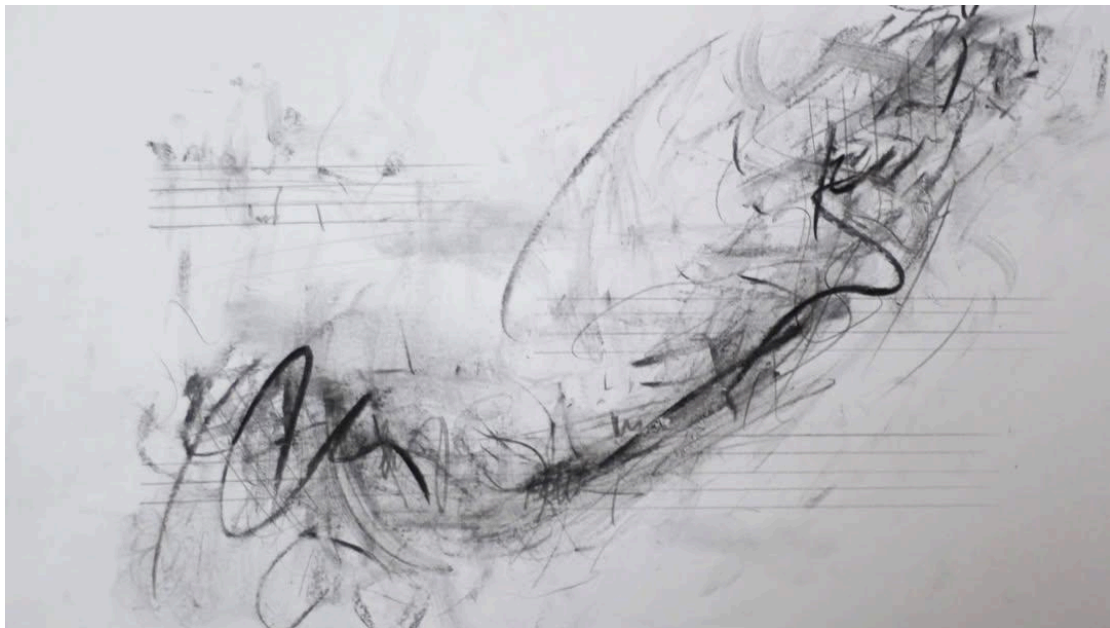
Graphic notation redefines authorship as collaboration. Ute Wassermann, speaking with 15 Questions, calls it a form of “structured liberation” - freedom framed by design.

Rather than dictating fixed notes or rhythms, these scores open a shared space for exploration. The performer moves within it, guided by visual impulse, intuition, and sound memory. In this exchange, authority becomes fluid: the composer proposes, the performer transforms.

This reciprocity resists hierarchy. Each realization is unique, not through chaos but through co-creation - a balance between invitation and response. Graphic scores extend composition beyond writing, into the act of interpretation itself.

*Read more:*

<https://15questions.net/interview/can-graphic-scores-provide-new-visions-sound/page-1/>



*“Untitled” by Karen Hendricks is an example of the structured liberation that Wassermann talks about in her interview. From [Karen Hendricks Instagram Account](#).*



# Embodied Perception and Performance

Research in embodied music cognition (especially since the empirical studies undertaken by Leman and Maes from 2007-2014) has seen music as not something that passes from a performer's body into a listener's mind through a clean sequence of perception, interpretation, and response. Researchers from Macquarie University, Andrew Geevs and John Sutton, argue that this kind of separation is misleading: thinking, sensing, moving, and understanding happen together, in the same moment, through the same bodily engagement. Music is made and perceived through a dynamic mix of gestures, breath, attention, and shared timing.

But what if instead of treating cognition, emotion, and movement as distinct "systems," the body is already where musical understanding takes shape? Communication between musicians, and between performers and audiences, is then not an extra layer added on top of sound, but part of the music itself. Eye contact, posture, tiny shifts in weight, spontaneous glances - these form the real-time infrastructure through which performers coordinate, take risks, and respond to each other's impulses.

This perspective becomes especially powerful when thinking about open scores and improvisation, where fixed notation offers only a framework and the meaning of the music is created through moment-to-moment interaction. In these situations, performers rely less on predetermined structure and more on embodied entrainment: shared pulse, physical cues, sensitivity to others' gestures, and the trust formed over repeated rehearsals. Geeves and Sutton's analysis shows how musicians navigate these uncertain terrains not by consulting internal cognitive "plans," but by tuning into a constantly shifting field of bodily signals and social feedback. An audience's reactions feed into the performance too, shaping timing, intensity, and direction in ways that open scores are designed to allow.

Seen this way, reading an open score or improvising is not a purely mental act. It is a bodily, relational one: a process in which understanding emerges between people through movement, attention, and interaction. Meaning takes form in the shared space of performing and listening, where sound, gesture, and interpretation unfold together.

*Read more:*

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292226104\\_Embodied\\_Cognition\\_Perception\\_and\\_Performance\\_in\\_Music](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292226104_Embodied_Cognition_Perception_and_Performance_in_Music)

# Judging a Score by Its Cover: The Role of Visual Design in Interpreting Colour Scores

Visual design is an active force in musical meaning. Research from Griffith University shows how color, scale, and shape influence performance decisions, revealing a visual language that performers translate intuitively.

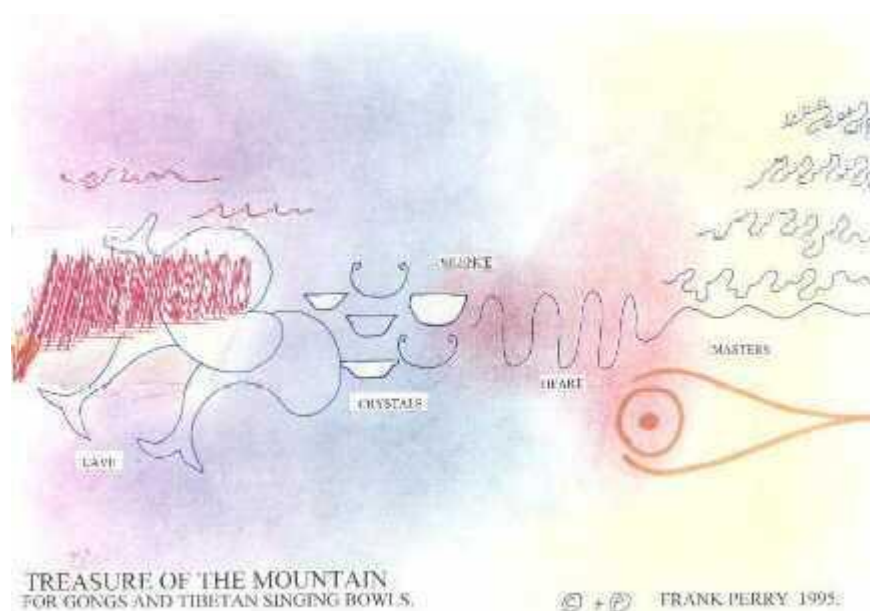
Color carries associative tone - red might feel urgent or percussive, blue fluid and sustained. Size and weight guide energy: bold forms suggest force or duration; finer lines invite delicacy. Together, these elements build a visual grammar that shapes phrasing, texture, and gesture.

Interpretation, however, remains open. Each performer reads through their own perceptual lens, finding different sonic possibilities within the same page. The score becomes a space of negotiation between sight and sound, design and imagination.

Here, notation is not instruction but provocation - an image that performs.

*Read more:*

[https://www.tenor-conference.org/proceedings/2023/21-TENOR\\_BOSTON\\_2023\\_paper\\_7999Reilly.pdf](https://www.tenor-conference.org/proceedings/2023/21-TENOR_BOSTON_2023_paper_7999Reilly.pdf)



Frank Perry's "Treasure Of The Mountain" uses coloured lines and gradients to influence performance decisions like is described in the Griffith University article. [Sourced from the composer's website.](#)

# What is “out there”? An instant field trip to the internet.

by Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen

Do you find it easy or difficult to find colleagues who are composers and/or musicians and circles of interested people? It depends of course on your location, but also on your way of working and networking and general musical outlook. We can talk about open scores as a matter possessing historical prestige. It brought the grand classical tradition up to date and so many honourable old avantgardists were involved. Open scores are also a subculture, not belonging to the dominating trends, not a matter of course to be found everywhere. Yet, with the internet, you can find them galore. So it depends...

## **Critical mass**

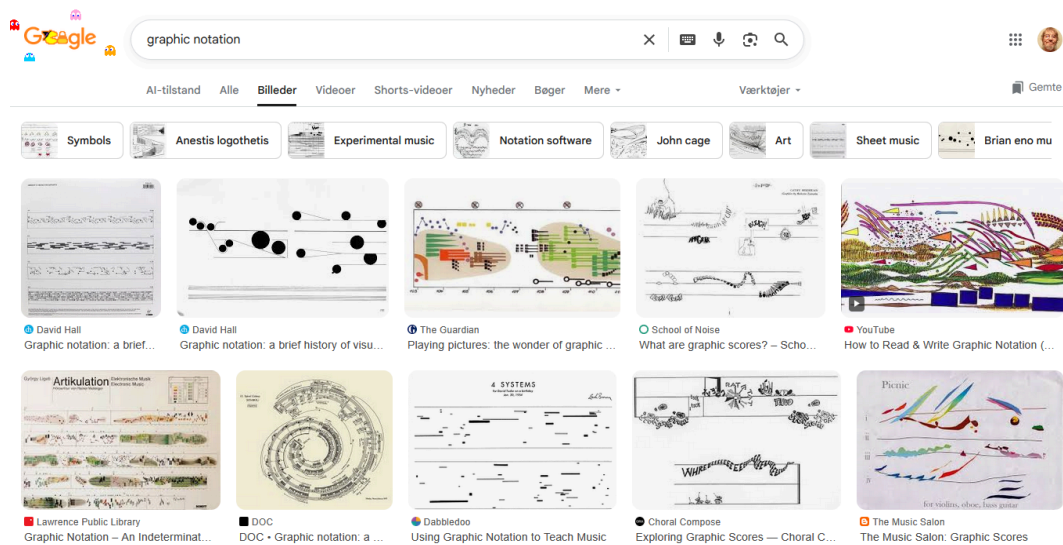
This notion comes from nuclear science and designates the amount of substance necessary to initiate a chain reaction. More generally, it describes how much difference is required to be effectful and gain momentum. For instance, how many audience members are attending a concert. What is an “effectful” number? It might have to do with what those who support economically think makes sense in the public context, or with whether the large media will review it. This functions notwithstanding our own experiences of the atmosphere and the quality of musical and human experiences within it. There is, indeed, an "algorithm" working inside what we call public attention. For this algorithm, quantity matters, not unlike in politics. The dynamism is circumscribed in the saying “nothing succeeds like success”. Success inevitably has social and psychological effects too - it provides prestige. Even on a modest scale, just the sustained effort to work with concerts in the “public sphere” may draw respect from others - one refrains from making it in a private circle of friends, and is prepared to meet unknown people. And to me, it makes the thing a really exciting one, connecting my activity to my geographical and cultural environment.

I will not deny that working with open scores and experimentalism much of your time entails uphill work. To survive economically, to make events happen, to have the compositions played. But we who accept it also experience much gratification. In the form of experienced music and sharing it with others.

## **Documentations**

Simply searching the internet for ‘graphic notation’ yields a lot of results, many of them small historic overviews. Search results appear fairly similar in different search engines, main sources for others being Google and Bing, but it could be a good idea anyway to try both these two and maybe others. If your results do not exclusively show music scores but include other technical matters, include the word ‘music’ in

your search phrase. You can let the browser show “pictures” only, and something similar to the illustration below will appear.



*Screen excerpt from the first page in a simple search of “graphic notation”. “Billeder” means pictures in Danish.*

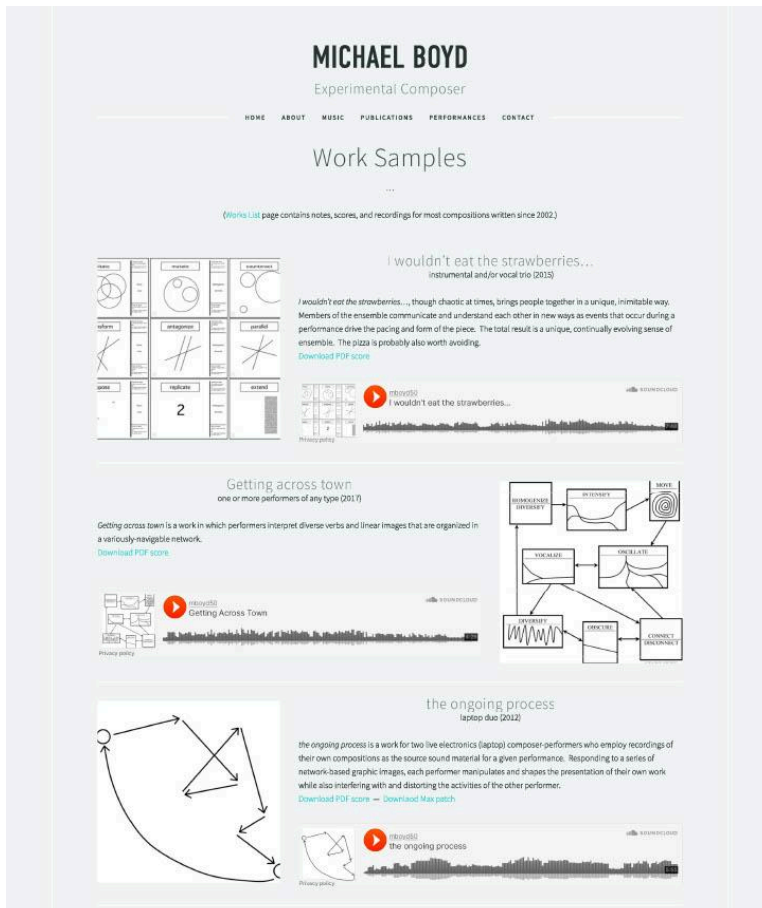
So we are not alone. Even without special efforts, innumerable items pop up. And hey! I even found a special place for graphic notation composers where to meet and exchange - [graphicscoreexchange](#), see below. It has many downloadable contributions and a large list of participating composers, many with links. We could unfortunately not have confirmation that the site is still active, but you can in any case look at and download what is there while it is still up.

## Composers

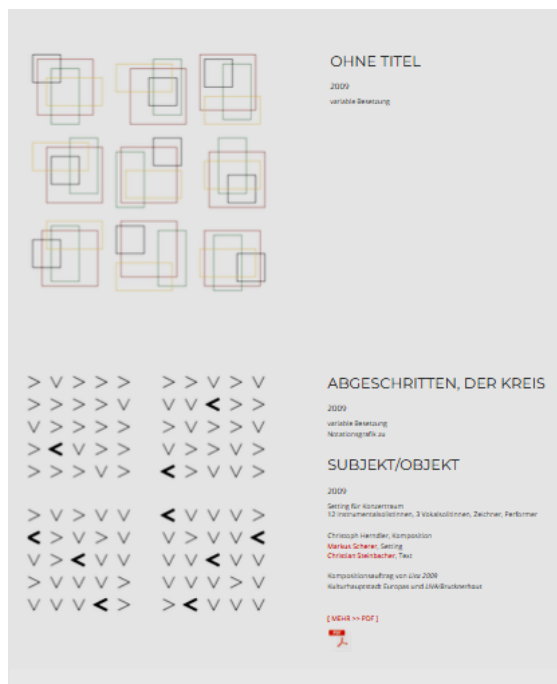
With some more search, you may find composers’ homepages presenting some of their work. An example is Michael Boyd, one work of whom we feature separately in this issue. Searching for this segment, we get beyond the grand historical accounts, to study closer what has recently been created.

Another example is Christoph Herndler - see the other excerpt below. His page is in German language, but you may have it translated through the browser.

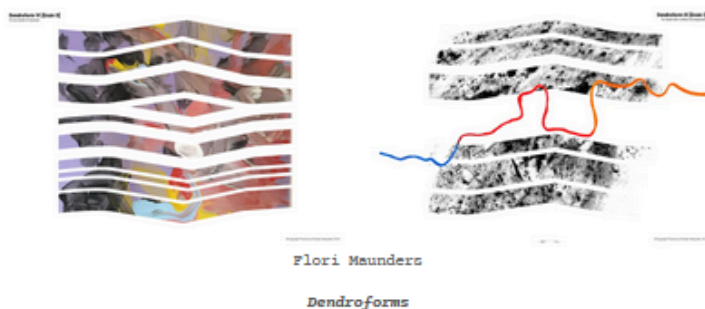
Some compositions are not free- or shareware and therefore, for various reasons, beyond paywalls, for instance those by Anthony Braxton. On another note, a social medium like Instagram may supplement the shareware repertory. You may view this as a “Robin Hood” instance of reversed critical mass: those less established receive the maximum exposure in public!



From Michael Boyd's homepage



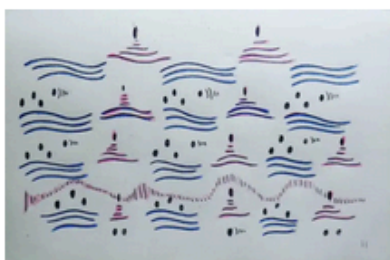
From Christoph Herndler's homepage



Flori Maunders

Dendroforms

This piece was the result of a collaboration between me and my son Reuben. Between us we collected, arranged and created pictures and shapes using found materials, including "paints" and "crayons" made from natural pigments such as soil and charcoal. The graphical shapes reflect, in stylised geometrical forms, two naturally occurring tree-shapes - the concentric rings of cross-sections through trees and the parallel lines of wood grain. Juxtaposed with these, are designs evolved from the shapes and colours of found materials gathered on woodland expeditions. The collaborative process threw up a number of surprising images, and these were selectively edited & combined, exploring the use of negative space to turn the images into strips of sound. The piece has since been performed by Northern Contemporary Collective in 2019 and Prism Ensemble in 2020. Click [here](#) to view the full 29 page score.



Caminauta

Inspired in an ambient piece, slow motion water movements, the symbolism of the sweet pink colour and peaceful blue with rhythmic elements patterns and atmospheric vibes.

Interpretation by Joe Buchheit

Samantha Van der Sluis

Artemis' Orchard

Artemis' Orchard is inspired by the Greek mythology goddess, Artemis, known for vegetation and nature. I love earthy colours and wanted to create a colourful abstract score that musicians can interpret as their own. The differing colours should inspire an emotion or orchestration within the musician (such as softer, sweeter sections, or bold vibrant phrases according to which colour they seem fit). The spacing and shapes also allow for interpretation of rhythm or length of phrasing.



Excerpt from *graphicscoreexchange*

## Exhibitions

Exhibitions are seen fairly frequently over the years. They boost the diversity of graphic notation approaches, they support those who participate, and they form a fine overlapping field to the visual arts, possibly diminishing the critical mass issue a bit. They can attract the interest of researchers and of the press. So yes, hang it up on the wall!

You simply search “graphic notation exhibition” and results change a little but significantly.

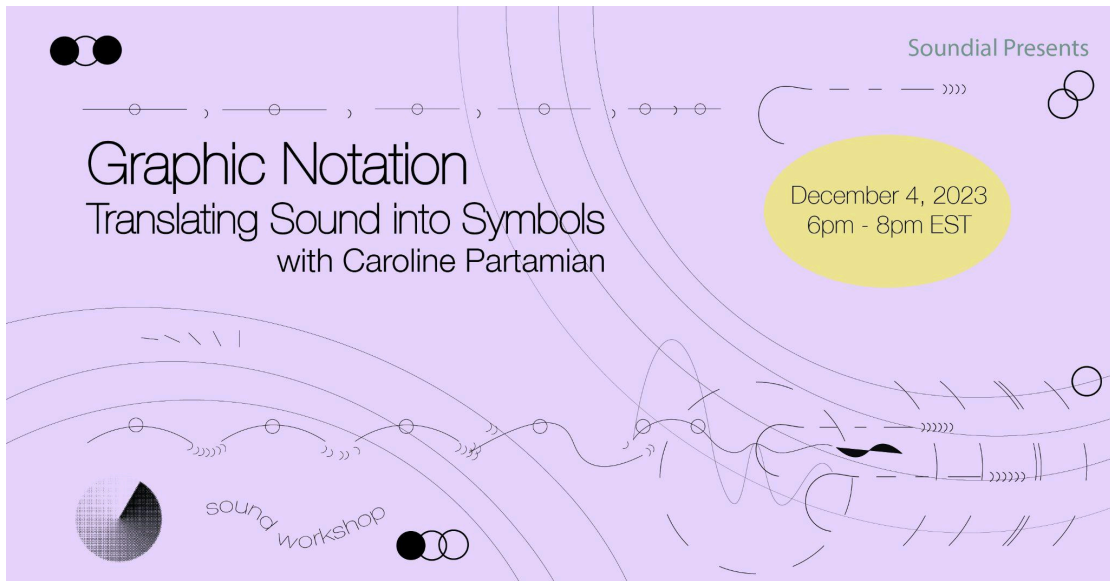


*Nathan Gray: Treatise: Pages 131 and 78, (2012), in exhibition The Score (2017) , Potter Museum of Art, installation view. Photograph by Christian Capurro. Courtesy of the artist.*

## Workshops and Educational institutions

Searching “graphic notation workshop” is also possible... and you may find both privately arranged ones like the following...

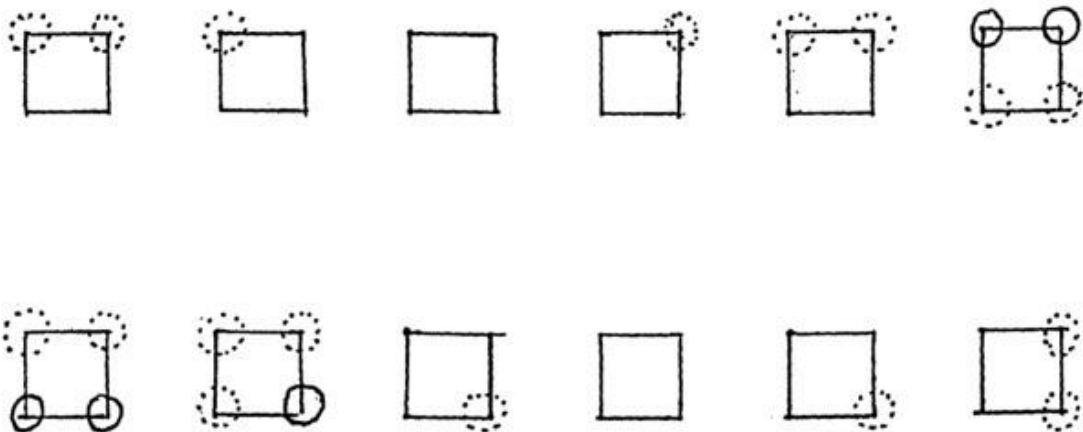




*Flyer for graphic notation workshop, 2023*

...as well as occasionally some arranged by higher educational institutions.

Open composition teaching in higher education is not very frequently encountered when simply searching the internet. But, as if it were happening by way of compensation, PhD dissertations on the subject are not missing. Often it is elaborated within artists' PhDs. Below is a quote from a piece by Michael Joseph McInerney (2007).




*Quote from "Fall, rain, on this dry earth" (1994) by McInerney, from his PhD (2007). The squares depict the performance room, upper parts as the farthest corners and lower ones as the closest.*



And now to a special case of collaborating between higher music educations worth noticing. AEC stands for *European Association of Conservatoires* which organises a project called *METRIC - Modernizing European Higher Music Education through Improvisation*. This is an ongoing ambitious project aimed at innovation as the title says, in a sense that can be applauded by improvisers and by composers of open works. It is not, nota bene, to be seen as a direct turn towards experimentalism, but it is inclusive of it and strives towards a balance between classic studies and contemporary feeling, so long missing. Its long list of collaborators could serve as a compass for would-be composition and instrumental studies within Europe. Members of the project are presently 15 major European conservatories. Oddly enough, my own country Denmark is presently not participating although other Nordic ones are, but I have noticed that 2 conservatory teachers located at different institutions across my country have independently taken initiative to projects with a similar aim, while at least one of them was not familiar with the European movement. The idea that improvisation must be studied to a greater extent is so to speak “in the air”.

So what is “in the air” for you ... wishing you all good work on wherever you are!



About History

## Welcome to *metricimpro.eu*

### The official website of the METRIC Network

**METRIC (Modernizing European Higher Music Education through Improvisation)** is a cooperative network of several leading European conservatoires and the AEC (European Association of Conservatoires) with the aim to focus on the modernisation of higher music education through intensive international cooperation in the field of improvisation. This aim is based on the conviction of the METRIC institutions that improvisation education can have a notable effect on existing curricula in higher music education institutions. Through a continuous process of mutual enrichment, METRIC wants to support the development and improvement of improvisation teaching, performance and research. In doing so, it also wants to take care of genres and styles with less-established activity in improvisation.

The METRIC Network is open to all genres and styles of improvised music, from stylistic, tonal and modal, through to free improvisation.

METRIC intends to achieve its aim through the following actions that will raise collective interest and awareness among institutions, teachers and students active in the field of improvisation:

1. the organisation of an annual Intensive Programme on improvisation, five full days of workshops and masterclasses held by experienced teachers;
2. the creation and implementation of Joint European Modules in the area of improvisation, designed to share and develop the knowledge, traditions and

*“Mankind’s first musical performance couldn’t have been anything other than a free improvisation.”*  
- Derek Bailey

To be informed about the METRIC Network’s activities, [subscribe to the METRIC Newsletter!](#)

Welcome page of [metricimpro.eu](http://metricimpro.eu) excerpt. See next page for “Read more”...

*Read more:*

About notation generally - Christoph Cox in an exhibition catalogue:

[http://intuitivemusic.dk/iima/cox\\_es.htm](http://intuitivemusic.dk/iima/cox_es.htm)

Composer Michael Boyd's homepage, works:

<https://michaelrboyd.com/work-samples>

Composer Christoph Herndler's homepage:

<https://www.herndler.net/index.html>

graphicscoreexchange:

<https://graphicscoreexchange.uk/>  
[graphicscoreexchange@gmail.com](mailto:graphicscoreexchange@gmail.com)

Exhibition "The score"

<https://potter-museum.unimelb.edu.au/whats-on/past-exhibitions/the-score>

Graphic notation workshop, announcement flyer, [soundial.com](http://soundial.com)

Composer Mike McInerney's homepage:

<https://researchportal.plymouth.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/performance-and-the-page-an-artists-investigation-of-the-dialogue>

Modernizing European Higher Music Education through Improvisation:

<https://metricimpro.eu/>

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## CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS ISSUE

**Joe Scarffe** (b.1988) UK, musician, editor, researcher and multi-instrumentalist.

**Grgur Savic** (b. 1983) Croatia, [https://www.instagram.com/gs\\_graphicscores/](https://www.instagram.com/gs_graphicscores/)

**Michael Boyd** (b. 1978) USA, composer, scholar and improviser.  
<https://michaelrboyd.com/work-samples>

**Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen** (b.1951) DK, composer-musician, editor, researcher, teacher. <http://www.intuitivemusic.dk>