IM-OS

Improvised Music – Open Scores

Issue 5, Fall 2020

Contents:

Editorial

Welcome again - to the IM-OS mix of open scores and texts!

This issue includes an enquete in which five specialised composers and musicians discuss open scores - answering questions regarding their experiences, their view of open scores within art and culture, their experiences within concert life and institutions, and the ambitions and challenges they see connected to both composition and performance. A many-sided discussion could certainly continue from all this, and here is a small picking of possible appetizers.

As Dennis Bathory-Kitsz says,

> *"graphical scores occupy a field rather than a road"*

Yet, as in every exercise of craft and art, quality matters as Stephen Montague assures us. Joe Scarffe calls for

> *"clarity of ambitions"*

in composing and Ruedi Debrunner asserts the necessity of

> *"a deep understanding of the ways of communication within a group"*

He also stresses the "common understanding" in his Schwarm 13 project as a relevant ambition, and the challenge may intensify with a combined group of different participants. There seems to be no great disagreement that

> *"openness and inclusiveness are central to this music form"*

(Federico Pozzer). As a consequence, Debrunner recommends

> *"you had better rehearse towards a common understanding but avoiding the exact setting of the performance"*

Pozzer points out that an open score

> *"supports discussion between performers"*,

an important element in a new performance practice, as also elaborated upon by Alexis Porfiriadis in his article in this and the former issue. The present part II deals with decisions taken *during* performance, whereas the former article investigated decisions taken *before* the performance. In the conclusion this time we read about performers working collectively on the musical form the thought-provoking statement:

"This process builds teams (even temporally)"

Joe Scarffe points out that graphic scores are not just impro prompters but a territory for collaborative work involving a

> *"dialectic of bounded and unbounded improvisation which is involved in the inherently hermeneutically playful process of the conceptualisation of musical ideas in performing open / graphic scores"*

Bathory-Kitsz proposes a distinction between scores having

> *"unintentional holes"*

as in much classical music, and this journals' field of *intentionally* open scores. Motivations with the composer may differ: Pozzer enjoys exploring the speciality of working with breathing, whereas Montague enjoys to work eclectically, therefore

> *"Music critics have no idea what to call me"*

…
For a small outlook at our working conditions - while universities according to Pozzer may be important centres for the cultivation of open scores, they may also, according to Scarffe, tend to be conservative about multidisciplinary work. Related to tradition in a different way, Bathory-Kitsz notes that

> *"for traditionally trained musicians it can become a crisis of trust. Musicians unfamiliar with, say, Cage or Braxton have generally needed guidance"*

Montague states, seeming contraily:

> *"It's far easier to write for professionals than amateurs. It is not hard to make the Berlin Phil sound good"*

And yet he loves the challenge from amateurs:

> *"One of the joys of working with amateur musicians is that they are there because they really love music and love to play. That is perhaps the most exciting element a composer can ask for"*.

Read the enquete and think on for yourself, and write us too.

Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen

Open Form – Open Decisions: decision making in open form compositions for groups

Alexis Porfiriadis

Part II

Taking decisions during performance

In the first part of this article I investigated who is taking the necessary decisions regarding the way an open form piece is to be performed, prior to the performance. The second part investigates who takes the necessary decisions during the performance of an open form piece.

Who is going to take these decisions and when they are to be made may:

- influence in a substantial way the relationships between composer and performer and change the established 'composer – interpreter' relation towards 'musical independence' (Wolff in Saunders ed. 2009: 361) between composer and performer.
- encourage either individuality or collaboration and collective decision making between performers in a group in comparison with the same relationships in a piece with closed form.

a. Composer decides

It is less common in an open form composition for the composer to take decisions that influence the form of the piece during performance. The composer could do that by giving instructions during the performance (in which case he is no longer just a composer but a kind of conductor or performer too), or by electronic means.

John Cage was one of the first composers who tried to interfere through electronic means with the sound result of an open form score made by him. The performance of his composition *Atlas Eclipticalis* (1961/62) in the 'avant garde' concerts of the New York Philarmonic (together with compositions by Brown and Feldman) in 1964 was a first attempt. In this composition Cage laid bands of transparent paper over the celestial maps in a 1958 Czechoslovakian astronomical atlas, the *Atlas Eclipticalis.* He inscribed on the transparencies what he could see through them – the position and size of the stars, their relative brightness determining the dynamics of the musical notes they became. (Silverman 2010:180)

The 86 independent instrumental parts may be played in whole or in part, for any duration, by any number of players and combination of instruments. It may also be combined with *Winter Music*, a piano composition consisting of 20 pages in which Cage marked a solid note head 'wherever he found an imperfection in the paper'. Then 'he overlaid the results with a staff that turned the note heads into notes' (Holzäpfel in Nicholls 2002:176) leaving clefs, rhythm, dynamics, order and total length indeterminate.

In the concert of the New York Philharmonic, Cage wanted to create 'a Brobdingnagian electronic version of *Atlas Eclipticalis*' (Miller 2001:549). To achieve that, he planned to provide each instrument with a contact microphone and to feed the output of each instrument into a single mixer. The mixer was build by Max Mathews and Phil Giordano of the Bell labs, and for practical reasons each instrument had its own microphone, 'but the signals from two players were combined into a single channel feed' (Ibid. 549). Cage and James Tenney operated controls on the mixer. Their operation was not based on a score but on spontaneous decisions by the two composers. Leonard Bernstein was the conductor of the concert. According to his description

> *...every instrument of the orchestra has a contact microphone attached to it so that the notes they play will be further subjected to random choices of the composer and his assistant who will be seated at the electronic controls. Thus the composer, at the switchboard, is ultimately responsible for what comes out over the various loudspeakers. (Ibid. 550)*

The concert did not go well. The Philharmonic instrumentalists were supposed to play through the piece for eight minutes. However, when the musicians found out that their microphones could be turned on and off randomly they reacted with hostility. They deliberately sabotaged the piece (Wolff in Silverman 2010: 202). Instead of

playing the score, many of them improvised, 'ran through scales, quoted other works, talked, fooled with the electronic devices or simply sat on the stage without playing' (Ibid.).

Cage and his collaborator James Tenney managed this complicated sound design, working at the mixing desk, trying to adjust 50 separate mixer controls (Miller 2001: 551). Regardless of the success of the project and the difficulties of controlling the electronic equipment and design, Cage and Tenney did try to interfere with the sonic result using the mixer control during the performance. Of course they could not 'control' the sonic result in a deterministic way. Their contribution should be observed in the context 'of Cage's desire to create aesthetic products that reflected multiple intentionalities – or perhaps unintentionalities' (Miller 2001: 562). In this work Cage superimposed the inputs of a large number of imaginative personalities – his way of making 'counterpoint'. Each participant could influence the sonic result and none could control it completely. As Bernstein noted in his introduction to the Philharmonic concert of *Atlas Eclipticalis*

> *No member of the orchestra ... know[s] when he will predominate over the others, over his colleagues, or for that matter, whether he'll be heard at all. (Bernstein in Miller 2001: 562)*

Nevertheless, by controlling the mixer Cage and his collaborator gave the final touch to the sonic result of this complicated sound design, taking their decisions during the performance.

In this case the indeterminate features of the score gave some liberties to the performers (which they did not use sensibly in this case) and made the composer the provider of a field of opportunities. The composer and his assistant were the people responsible for controlling the final form of the piece. The instrumentalists prepared and performed their parts individually. In this respect *Atlas Eclipticalis* has characteristics similar to any closed form piece with regards to the relationship between performers. As in the case where the composer decides prior to the performance by providing alternative paths, here also the composer decides on the final form of the piece during the performance. Therefore, there is no special encouragement of collaboration and collective decisions.

b. Director or third person decides.

Earle Brown was one of the first composers who used open form with one or more directors being responsible for forming the piece during the performance. He used this way of composing in a number of pieces throughout his oeuvre.[1] *Available Forms I for chamber ensemble* (1961) is one of the earliest examples of this approach. In the instructions Brown states:

> *The conductor may begin a performance with any event on any page and may proceed from any page to any other page at any time, with or without repetitions or omissions of pages or events, remaining on any page or event as long as he wishes. (Brown 1962)*

In his piece *From Here* (1963) Brown asks for the collaboration of two directors, one for the orchestra and one for the chorus. The orchestra director is primarily responsible for the 'forming' of the work during performance. He may use any sequence for the 14 sound-events provided by Brown or 'he may give a cue to the chorus director to begin with a vocal event' (Brown 1972). After cueing the chorus director

> *the conductor of the orchestra cannot be exactly certain of which chorus event will be forthcoming [...] he then responds with orchestral sound-events which seem complementary and appropriate. (Ibid.)*

What Brown describes here is collaborative feedback between the two directors, which determines the structure of the piece and its development. This indirect collaboration between the two directors cannot be better described than with Brown's own words:

> *Both conductors conduct simultaneously but independently. This 'independence' is of course conditioned by the coexistence of the other group, and, ultimately, is a collaborative and dependent process. It must be understood that this is one composition for essentially one group, a performance of which is the product of sympathetic musical collaboration between the two conductors in relation to the composed material and its formal potential. (Ibid.)*

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[1] Brown uses open form in compositions such us: *Available Forms I (1961), Novara (1962), From here (1963), Modules I-II (1966), event – synergy II (1967), Available Forms II* (1962) *– Time Spans (1972) – Sign Sounds (1972) – Folio II (1982) - Sounder Rounds (1983) - Tracer (1985) – OH, K (1992)*

Excerpt from Earle Brown: *From Here*. Source: www.earle-brown.org. Instructions state among other things: 'the conductor may begin a performance with any event on any page and may proceed from any

page to any other page at any time, with or without repetitions or omissions of pages or events, remaining on any page or event as long as he wishes'.

Brown often conducted his own open form pieces, and this in part explains why he often left the responsibility of forming a piece to the director.[2] However, Brown also suggests there is a more social aspect to this work. He asserts that the decision to permit the forming of a piece to be influenced by the individual sensitivities of other people is supported by his belief in seeking the 'collaborative poetics of "music making"' (Brown n.d.). This seeking was confirmed 'in the human musicality of Bruno Maderna' (Ibid.), who conducted his *Available Forms I* and to whom his 'first co-conducted orchestral work is dedicated and inspired by: *Available Forms II* (1962)' (Ibid.).

An example where more than two directors are involved is *GEOD for Large Orchestra (in four groups) with optional Choir* (1969) by Lukas Foss. In this piece there are four directors (each for an orchestral group), a percussion group and a principal fifth director. The principal conductor is responsible for giving cues to the remaining four sub-directors or to the percussion group to start playing. His task is 'to mix the four musics in varying combinations and unpredictable durations, blotting out now this, now that group' (Foss n.d.). In this way the principal director

> is literally "composing" the music at performance, in a spontaneous, non-predetermined manner, by deciding what should be heard, when, and in combination with what. (Ibid.)

Foss gives another instruction: if the work is to be recorded, then the job of the principle director is taken over by the person responsible for the mixer in the recording studio. By gating music in and out he can change the recorded performance. Foss explains why he composed the piece in open form, saying that composing had become for him working in a way that the resulting music is what he wanted it to be 'regardless of *what* emerges *when*, or *what* vanishes *when*' (Ibid.). This means that any sonic result of a situation where the principal director cues the sub-directors in and out, the person on the mixer 'gates now this, now that music and the listener emphasizes the channel on the right or the one on the left, *all* is valid and therefore correct (hopefully, beautiful)' (Ibid.).

A piece that depends heavily on the interactions between a group of improvisers and a 'director' (who in this case is called a 'prompter' by the composer) is *Cobra* (1984) by John Zorn. The prompter should be thought

> as a guide who (most of the time) responds to the performers and the
> musical directions they wish to follow. The prompter responds to requests made

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[2] Bruno Maderna conducted the premiere of his *Available Forms I* and Hans Zender the premiere of his *Time Spans* (source: http://www.earle-brown.org/)

by the players by relaying information to the other members of the ensemble and while the prompter often functions as a conduit of information, she/he can choose to ignore requests by the players. (Brackett 2010: 49-50)

The score of *Cobra* is a list of 19 possible 'cues' available to the performers.[3] The sonic material used during the performance of the cues is left entirely to the players. The cues

describe an event or action that can be called by a player ("caller") through a specific bodily motion (e.g., hand signals, pointing) that is relayed to the prompter who can either accept or decline the cue. (Brackett 2010:49-50)

Describing the interactions between players and between the players and prompter Zorn says that

It was the players themselves who were making the decisions. If there was something you wanted to have happen, you could make it happen. And so the pieces slowly evolved into complex on-and-off systems, dealing only with when musicians play and with whom. Musicians relating to musicians. (Zorn 2004: 199)

This sounds like a case where the individual performer takes the decisions about forming his performance. However, despite the potential numerous kinds of interactions between players and between the players and prompter, it is the latter that takes the final decision as to how the piece develops. While the prompter will be influenced by the calls made by the players, and so the players are also responsible for forming the piece in an indirect way, the final decision is his/her hands. The prompter is responsible for the form of a version of *Cobra*.[4]

In all those cases, responsible for the resulting form of the version are the directors (in the case of *Cobra*, the 'prompter') and not the individual performer or the group. In some of Brown's works performers have the opportunity to act creatively by taking individual decisions about pitch or dynamics. However, the director(s) decide when the players are going to perform and in what combination. In those cases the relationship

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3 The score of *Cobra* is not available in its complete form. A reproduction of the score is presented as part of the article 'Der Architekt der Spiele: Gespräch mit John Zorn über seine musikalischen Regelsystem', in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 152 (Feb. 2, 1991): 33–37. Brief descriptions of the rules can be found also in an interview with Zorn conducted by Edward Strickland in *American Composers,* 135–37 (1988). A color reproduction of the score was included on the double-LP release of John Zorn, *Cobra,* HatHut Records hatART 2034 (1987) and in the CD tray to John Zorn, *Cobra,* Tzadik TZ 7335 (2002).

4 In the improvisational conducting techniques like the *conduction* technique by Lawrence D. "Butch" Morris or the *Soundpainting* technique by Walter Thompson a similar situation can be observed. A conductor takes the final decisions on the form of a performance, influenced (or not) by the improvisational material used by the players. The difference in these cases is that there is no written score and this is why they are not relevant with this writing.

between performer and composer remains similar to a piece with closed form, where performers do not take any decisions about the form.

Cobra

	1.	P	POOL
MOUTH	2.	R	RUNNER
	3.	S	SUBSTITUTE △
	4.	SX	SUB CROSSFADE
	1.	D	DUOS
NOSE	2.	T	TRADES
	3.	E	EVENTS 1, 2 or 3
	4.	B	BUDDIES
EYE	1.	CT	CARTOON TRADES
	2.	CO	ORDERED CARTOON TRADES with guests
	1.	M△	G=G M△
EAR	2.	G△	M=M G△
	3.	V	VOLUME △
	1.	1	SOUND MEMORY 1
HEAD	2.	2	SOUND MEMORY 2
	3.	3	SOUND MEMORY 3
	1.	■	CUT
PALM	2.	◧	CODA
	3.	▤	HOLD & FADE

GUERRILLA SYSTEMS
Squad Leader + 2 Spotters

TACTICS
♪ 1. Imitate
⟷ 2. Trade
— 3. Hold
♪ 4. Capture
↻ 5. Switch/crossfade } to next downbeat

OPERATIONS (Squad Leader ONLY)
| DIVISI   Memory drone, squad leader tactics and systems control
|| INTERCUT Locus Unit return to same sound
||| FENCING Unit with alternates

G. UNIT LIFE SPAN: 7 Downbeats

SPY may cut unit during OPERATIONS **ONLY** if unidentified.

Unit members and alternates may cut at any time.

🌓 end of Divisi superimposition

Some Locus Hand Cues
♪ thumb=stop
✊ hand=rhythm
☝ finger=pip
— hand=drone
⌒ back and forth=trade
♪ one=intercut
⌒ cut=change

John Zorn © Oct 9 1984 NYC

Excerpt from Zorn: *Cobra*. Table of 19 cues from hat ART CD 2-6040 booklet.

In Zorn's game pieces all sound material is in the hands of the performers. However, players do not take any final decisions concerning the form of the piece. They try to influence the prompter by asking to receive the permission to begin with a cue but the final decision belongs to the prompter. However, even if the prompter is the one who

decides, s/he is in constant interaction with the players. In addition, if one considers that Zorn very often conducts *Cobra* himself, one understands that the relationship between the composer and the player is based on interaction and negotiation during the performance. When Zorn conducts *Cobra* he is a composer who does not take his decisions alone in the time vacuum of the musical composition process but in a live negotiation with the musicians.

Concerning the relationships between performers, the cases of Brown, Foss and Zorn are different. In works by Brown and Foss players could perform their parts individually. They do not have to interact with their co-players more than in a piece in closed form. On the contrary, in the case of *Cobra* there are many different kinds of interaction between the players (if the 'prompter' acknowledges the calls by the individual players). This means that the relationship between performers is totally different from a closed form piece. In John Zorn's words

> *What you get on the stage, then, is not just someone reading music but a drama. You get a human drama. You get life itself, which is what the ultimate musical experience is: it's life. Musicians relating to each other, through music. (Zorn 2004: 198)*

Consequently in the cases of Brown or Foss, like in the case of a conductor deciding prior to the performance, there is no special encouragement of collaboration and collective decisions more than in the performance of a piece with closed form. On the contrary, in the case of the game piece by Zorn there is a fertile ground for the group to collaborate during the performance and to interact in many different ways. Despite that there is a real-time creativity through these interactions, the development of the composition is in the hands of the prompter.

c. Performer decides individually

In other open form works the composer explicitly instructs the players to perform the piece individually and consequently to make decisions regarding the form individually. Jez riley French's graphic scores such as *for strings-bruxelles* (2009) and *landscapes (then summer) for ensemble* (2010) and *surfaces #2* (2011) invite players to perform his pieces in an intuitive and spontaneous (even instinctive) way. In *for strings-bruxelles* performers should approach the score intuitively, 'allowing the images to form the visual cue for their explorations' (French 2009). Performers have to decide on duration and tempi in an independent way during the course of the performance 'on an instinctive basis' (Ibid.). In *landscapes (then summer) for ensemble,* French even goes a step further, asking the players to perform the piece without any prior rehearsal.

In French's compositions, players could decide individually on their performance. They do not (have to) collaborate with their co-players prior to or during the performance. In contrast, in Christian Wolff's *Duo for violinist and pianist* (1961) players take individual decisions on the form during performance, in *indirect collaboration* with their co-players. 'Indirect collaboration' indicates a situation where the individual player performs his actions taking cues from another player, who does not know that s/he is giving such cues. This is a standard technique in the compositions by Wolff,[5] and this composition is an early example of using cues to form a piece during performance. The cues are described with instructions like: 'Play as closely together with the next sound you hear as possible, but stop playing before it does' (Wolff 1963).

Pauline Oliveros works in a similar but much more loose way in *Interdependence* (1997) which is included in her verbal score *Four Meditations* (1971-1997). In this piece (as in two other pieces in the same set, (*The Tuning Meditation* and *Approaches and Departures*), performers have to make spontaneous decisions regarding the form during performance, in 'indirect collaboration' with their co-players. After all, the title of the piece describes the dependence between things, between performers, between sounds and reactions.

In *Interdependence* there are only two kinds of sounds: a very short staccato sound and a sustained sound with the duration of a breath or a bow length. Performers have two options: they can either 'send' a sound to their co-players or 'receive' and respond to sounds played by their co-players. To 'send' a sound, performers should play a short staccato sound. To 'receive' they can respond with a short staccato sound, with a sustained sound or with a glissando. No one knows who 'sends' and who 'receives' though. The notions of sending and receiving exist only in the mind of each performer and that is why the piece represents a case of indirect collaboration between performers who take spontaneous individual decisions during performance.

The individual character of the decision-making is described by the instruction that 'each performer decides independently whether to send or to receive' (Oliveros 1996) and that 'players remain autonomous in their decisions to send or receive throughout the meditation' (Ｉ bid.). The spontaneous character of the players' decisions is described by the instruction that a performer should 'react as fast as possible as a receiver. Reaction time is more important than pitch selection' (Ibid.).

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5 Other examples of compositions by Wolff using similar techniques are *Duo for Violinist and Pianist* (1961), *Duet II* (1961), *In between Pieces* (1963), *For 1,2 or 3 people* (1964), *Lines* (1972), *Changing the System* (1973).

III

Interdependence (1997)

♪ — Super short staccato only.

𝖔 — Breath or bow length in duration.

Dynamics are *pp – ff*.

Options

Either send or receive.

To send, play ♪ once at any time — any pitch any dynamic.

To receive, play ♪ once as a response to another ♪.

React as fast as possible as a receiver. Reaction time is more important than pitch selection.

Each performer decides independently whether to send or to receive.

Each performer may change from sender to receiver at will (any time).

The following variations are introduced in order:

Variation I
To send, play ♪
To receive, respond with ♪ or 𝖔

Variation II
To send, play ♪
To receive, respond to ♪ or to the end of 𝖔 either with ♪ or with 𝖔

Variation III
To send, play ♪
To receive, respond to ♪ or to the end of 𝖔 either with ♪ or 𝖔 or with 𝖔 (gliss up) or 𝖔 (gliss down).

Commentary

The ♪ pitches that are sent must be super short in order to be instantaneously received. by another player. The correct player reactions can create an atmosphere of electricity that runs through the ensemble in a rippling effect. These ripples of pitches will be in random patterns depending on the decisions of the players. A ripple could be short (one sender with two or three receivers) or longer depending on the decisions and reaction times of the players. An effective reaction time means that the player is aware of their own response slightly after the reaction has already happened (milliseconds).

The variations introduce long tones which develop into chords and textures inside of the ripples.

The glissandi in Variation III should be very slow. Players remain autonomous in their decisions to send or receive throughout the meditation.

4

Pauline Oliveros: *Interdependence* from *Four Meditations for Orchestra*.

Letting the individual performer decide on his/her performance of an open form piece during performance is a step further from letting him/her decide prior to the performance by making a plan. It changes the relationship between composer and

performer (compared to the same relationship in a closed form piece) in an even more dramatic way. The composer provides the players with a field of opportunities and trusts their *spontaneous* decisions, which are going to frame their version during performance.

The individualistic way of playing in the pieces by French demonstrated above does not change the relationship between performers. Each performer plays his/her part and does not have to collaborate with his/her co-players, similarly to a performance of a piece in closed form. Therefore collaboration and collective decisions are not encouraged through this way of working. However, in the demonstrated compositions by Wolff and Oliveros, people play 'together' in an indirect way. Even if there is no direct collaboration between people, one could infer that an 'intuitive' kind of collaboration is present.

Summary

The decisions about a version of an open form piece could be taken prior to or during performance by the composer, an individual performer, the group or representative(s) of the group, a director or a third party in general. Depending on who might take the decisions, one can observe potential changes in the relationship between composer and performer, and between the performers, as well as the encouragement of individual or collective decisions.

According to the cases discussed in this article it could be asserted that (compared to the relationships observed in the preparation and performance of a closed form composition) both the relationships between composer and performer and between performers are changed in an open form composition, which

      a. invites performers to decide collectively on the structure of the form or

      b. invites performers to decide collectively on representative(s) of the group

Firstly, open form changes the relationship between composer and performer. The composer does not provide an 'assemblage of sound units' arranged 'in a closed, well-defined manner before presenting it to the listener' (Eco 1989), the format of which performers are obliged more or less to reproduce to the best of their ability. The composer provides a field of possibilities for performers to use in a creative way. Secondly, when performers are invited to work collectively to construct the form (or to choose representative(s) to do so), they have to discuss, negotiate and come to a decision. This process builds teams (even temporally), i.e. groups of people taking collective decisions. In cases where collective work instead of individuality is encouraged and the responsibility for decisions shifts away from the individual and

towards the whole group of performers, then the growth of creativity which is a 'property of the group' (Sawyer 2003: 25) is most probable.

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Stephen Montague

Quintet (1976)

for Philip Mead

for any solo instrument plus

4 channel pre-recorded tape

Quintet is from a series of works I began in 1975 called "*graphic/text*" compositions. Each composition is a set of instructions telling in words, arranged in an analogous graphic layout, how the piece is to be constructed and performed. It was conceived as an extension of the Duchamp/ Cage concept of using "found objects" as art. In this case, five different performances of the same famous 18th or 19th century composition are to be used.

Quintet and a 2 channel version called *Trio* address several issues. The first is the wide variation of interpretation, tempo and duration inherent in different performers' readings of the same set of musical instructions, i.e. the composer's score. The second is the perceived morphic change into something else when the familiar works' musical elements, like harmonic rhythm, melody, structure and form, are pushed into kaleidoscopic distortion by multiple, simultaneous performances. One thing that inevitably happens is it becomes a kind of "phase" piece perhaps reminiscent of early Steve Reich. Harmony that was once functional is blurred and transported to a more static plain.

And finally *Quintet* also poses the interesting question about the music itself: at what point does musical quotation become plagiarism (the answer of which probably lies in the new "composer's" intent).

Duration: unspecified

- Stephen Montague

First professional performance: 11 June, 1982 The Almeida Theatre, London: Philip Mead (piano) playing Chopin's *Fantasie Impromptu in C# minor* with 4 further performances by Rubenstein, Horowitz, Ogdon, and Backhaus.

Quintet

1978

to Philip Mead

– Stephen Montague

Record one interpretation of a famous work on CHANNEL 1

Record another interpretation of the same work on CHANNEL 2

RECORD a 3rd INTERPRETATION ON a Third Channel

Record a FOURTH interpretation on a fourth Channel

Perform your own interpretation of The Work —

(live — with the tape: start all together)

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ENQUETE: DISCUSSING OPEN SCORES

The questions below were sent out to a number of composers and musicians. The texts on the next pages are the responses.

Read, and become inspired by the individual stories and characterisations. Find thought-provoking insights and see the field in a maybe slightly new light. Write us with any comments.

1. Regarding experiences with open scores, which were your most significant experiences, and how were they?

2. In terms of art and culture, what are we dealing with?

3. How are you doing within concert and other institutions?

4. Which compositional ambitions and challenges do you see when creating?

5. Which performance ambitions and challenges do you see?

1. Regarding experiences with open scores, which were your most significant experiences, and how were they?
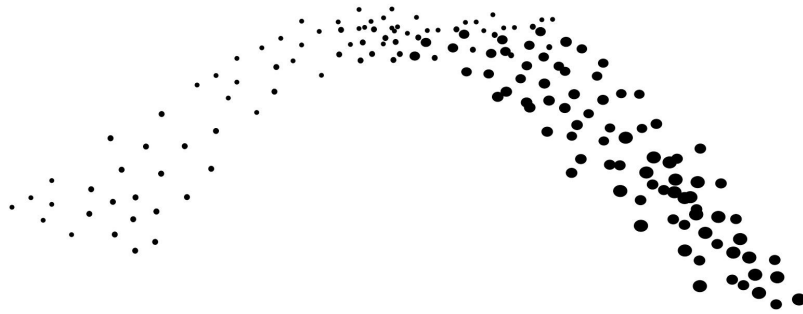
Joe Scarffe:
Performing open scores by non-musicians, such as Janet Boulton, have been my most significant experiences. The reason for this is that when non-musicians create open scores, specifically if they focus their practice on visual art, they are learning to consider sound and I am then learning to consider the visual domain when I perform it. This liminal zone of knowledge incrementation I find incredibly exciting and endlessly enjoyable.

Ruedi Debrunner:
I want to name three different experiences:
- Schwarm 13, a Berlin-based group of about 13 musicians develops the music from concepts of interaction (Schwarm, Konversation etc.), descriptions in words allowing much freedom. <u>Rehearsing those concepts creates a common understanding of sound-constellations</u>.[6]

- "Klangwerkstatt" was a project in November 2019, kind of research-concert. A group of improvisers-composers exchanged their compositional sketches and developed them further. It showed that graphic compositions gave very fast and good results. <u>The more open they were conceived the more you got an immediate unity of musical form and atmosphere.</u>

- "Sommernachtsrausch" was a musical drama with baroque-orchestra, choir, actors and improvising musicians, musically based on Purcells "The Fairy Queen". <u>It showed that in such a combined group the frame of open playing has to be set very precisely</u>. Yet it gives the music performance – as well in the parts of fixed notation – an extraordinary alertness and freshness.

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[6] See http://www.ruedidebrunner.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/IMPROFIL-Nr.79MAI2016.pdf for more details.

Ruedi Debrunner:
visualisation of a staccato figure in a Schwarm project for large ensemble.

Stephen Montague:

Stephen Montague's early musical training was rather conservative as a pianist and composer when he studied at Florida State University. However, during continued studies at Ohio State University the world of contemporary avant garde opened up to him, inspired particularly by David Behrman…

...we students organised a live-electronics ensemble called *The Junta for New Music* as the anti-Vietnam war movement accelerated across America. We were angry young men, anti-establishment, and used loud, improvised music as our political weapon. *The Junta* was radical, anti-war, and got lots of attention as well as trouble from the very conservative state of Ohio. We were a loud and proud part of the protest, and student audiences love it. It was exciting, liberating, infective and a baptism of fire smouldering under the war protests.

Montague spent 2 years in Poland working closely with numerous composers including Zygmunt Krauze, Krzysztof Knittle, Szalonek, Mazurek, Dobrowolski, Elzieta Sikora, Tomasz Sikorski, and Marta Ptasznska. The Polish composers were each in their own way "fighting their own oppressive system" and making music without censor. He formed his own new music ensemble and toured the Eastern Bloc.

In 1974 I moved to London where I became a freelance pianist and composer working initially with The Strider Dance Co. who were modelled on the NY's Merce Cunningham Dance Co. and John Cage's aesthetics. My skills and work in graphic scores and improvisation were put to full use in the dance company for the next 2 years. As my freelance work grew, however, new commissions began to require more and more scores written in traditional notation. Nevertheless as my work evolved I continued to incorporate graphic notation and some improvisation alongside standard notation when it was appropriate.

Since the 1980s I have been involved in many experimental music groups but one of the most interesting and dynamic organizations is the UK's Contemporary Music Making for All (CoMA) directed by Chris Shurety. CoMA specialises in "open score" work and the various techniques that surround that principle. CoMA has commissioned well over 100 open score works since they were founded in 1993, has a large library of open score works - see http://www.coma.org In 2005 I had the pleasure of being CoMA's Artist Director and for that season was able to commission and direct many new open score works as CoMA's reach and influence became international.

The current pandemic has put everything world-wide on hold but CoMA continues to quietly percolate while the world is in quiet lockdown.

Federico Pozzer:

I moved to Leeds in 2016 and there I got in touch with experimental music, graphic and text scores. I was quite new to that musical context (I studied jazz until I was 23). In Leeds I was in an experimental music group led by my current PhD supervisor and composition Professor Scott Mc Laughlin and we played pieces by Cardew, Christian Wolff, James Saunders, and Michael Winter. I was particularly fascinated by text scores, the use of language as a means to express relationships in a clear and specific way, but at the same time leaving space for unpredictable results. I think the most interesting experience for me was performing Doug Barrett's A Few Silence (2008). The piece is about transcribing the sounds you hear and then using the transcription as a score; in the first 5 minutes of the performance, performers transcribe the sounds they hear, specifying not the sound source but rather the qualities and the contour of the sounds, including duration, dynamics, timings, etc.. Then in the following 5 minutes, players perform the score they created using a set of instruments / objects. That was a remarkable experience. I was stunned by the fact that, although the instructions were the same for each performer, there were so many agents that could affect the performance, including external sounds, number of players, the way performers perceive, transcribe, and play these sounds in a different way. Of course I had other great times playing my or other composers' pieces, but I think playing Barrett's composition, probably because I was just starting to delve into experimental music, was extremely crucial for me.

Dough Barrett's A few Silence (2008) can be studied here:
https://gdouglasbarrett.com/music/A_Few_Silence_score/

2. In terms of art and culture, what are we dealing with?

Joe Scarffe:

Open / graphic scores are a means by which the palette of musical interactions between performers and composers have been broadened to allow for a reshaping of musical hierarchies. By requiring the performer to respond to graphics and text instructions using their own creative agency, they question the role of improvisation in performance and the phenomenology of musical performance itself. Performing open / graphic scores therefore require a process of psychological adjustment, as the learning trajectories of engaging with musical graphics are orientated towards confronting the metaphysical reality of the transitory present moment. A common misunderstanding about open / graphic scores, which has arisen from attempts to unpick the phenomenological complexity of performing musical graphics, is that they require the performer to engage in free improvisation in front of a picture or abstract textual description. This characterisation positions the musical material and score material anti-thetically and misses the dialectic of bounded and unbounded improvisation which is involved in the inherently hermeneutically playful process of the conceptualisation of musical ideas in performing open / graphic scores.

The contribution of open / graphic scores to music culture is that they have expanded the possible interactions between visual and musical artistic forms and, in so doing, have helped to reveal the beliefs and knowledge structures that inform performers' praxes. Also, by disrupting the traditional composer / performer relationship they have liberated musicians to embark on their own journeys of improvisation and performance. They have also opened up a wide vista of synaesthetic approaches to music making, which have spread as far as virtual computer based scores and 3D physical sculptures. The increasing global interest in open / graphic scores clearly shows the attraction of the compositional and performance possibilities that these types of scores have unlocked.

Ruedi Debrunner:
Music can be created on the spot without any former understanding. On the other hand music can be planned in exact detail how it is the case with traditional staff-notation. Open scores are something in-between. A frame of action is described by words, symbols, graphics etc. Still in performance creational energy is demanded of the performer. This is what makes such performances often lively and spontaneous though foreseeable to a certain degree.
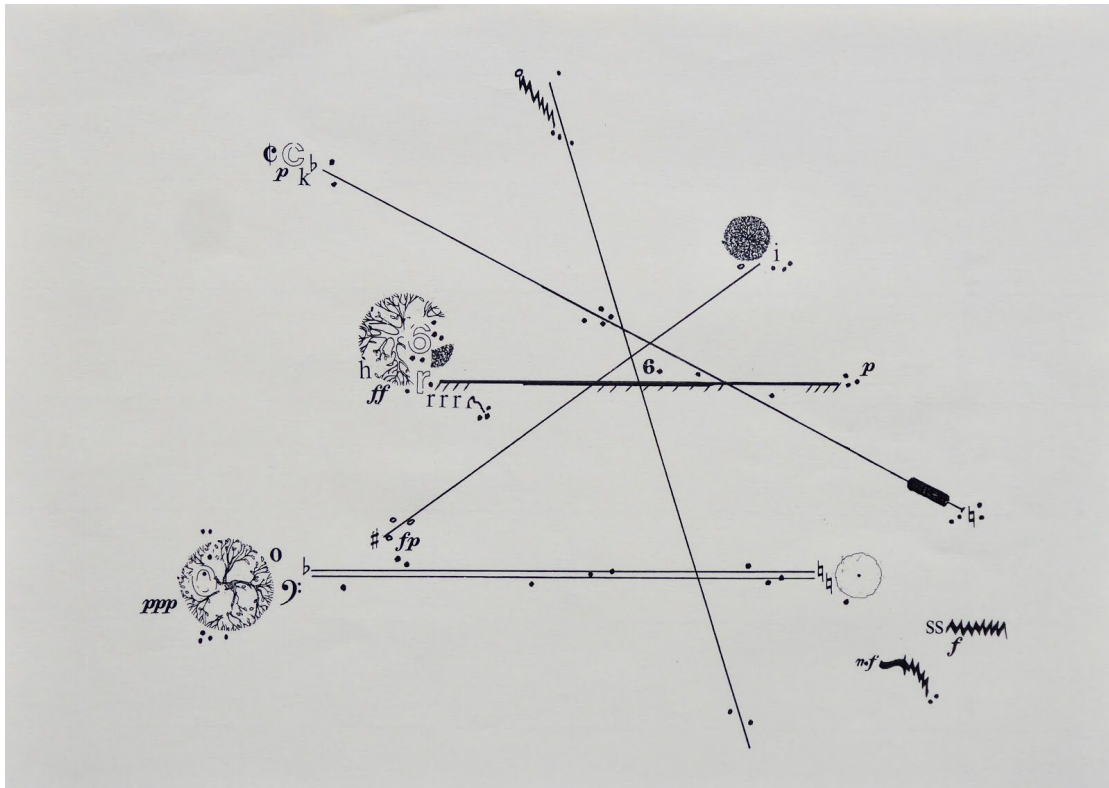
Stephen Montague:

The idea of "open score" and improvisation in Western culture of course goes back to the Renaissance and Baroque periods. It's vigorous re-emergence in our contemporary music culture has been an important development adding a glimmering hue to the much larger musical rainbow.

What is exciting about living in the 21st Century is that for the last 40 years now virtually "anything goes" musically speaking. There has been a tremendous shift in our Western culture since I was a student in the 1960s. Now there is a much wider audience available through the many new channels and platforms for fringe interest music groups and the other arts to flourish. For almost anything you wish to do these days there is an audience out there somewhere.

When I was a student there was a narrow strand of music that was considered "serious" and "important". That music was usually a gritty 12-tone piece that may have been structurally perfect but mind-bogglingly dreary. "Serious music" seemed to be considered a bitter pill you had to take from time to time to make you a better person (if it didn't kill you!). That narrow concept of "Serious" music I'm happy to say is largely now gone or perhaps just expanded to embrace a far wider range of aesthetics and a more cross-cultural reach. We are in a much more open and accepting environment these days and that has to be much more healthy.

For Montague, improvisation and notational skills are simply tools for composers and musicians - craft which helps stimulate the creative flow. The audience need only to experience the results:

What still remains an important benchmark however is quality. High quality is something everyone recognises and feels but is not easy to define. High quality work and performances are paramount in all fields for developing an audience. Quality makes or breaks a work no matter what the style or genre. I think the main thing an audience should care about is how good the work is- does it engage them in a meaningful and exciting way? Just how it is made or what the score may look like is probably incidental to the experience of hearing it and being moved. No performer can save a poorly constructed work, but likewise a poor performance can kill a work in any genre- graphic, improvised, post-Webern, or traditional.

[Stephen Montague: For Chris, 2005. Written to the birthday of Chris Shurety, Artistic Director of CoMA (Contemporary Music Making for All), http://www.coma.org/ *The composer states about the background of the piece that CoMA performed summer concerts in a place called Bretton Hall outdoors and that "some of the graphics ... reflect this rich, rural setting and hint at possible sound sources for a unique realisation"]*

Federico Pozzer:

For me, openness and inclusiveness are central to this music form. The fact that often the approaches required from open scores go far beyond conventional instrumental skills and specific music genres, provide the opportunity for performers from different backgrounds and also for people outside the musical context to be part of a musical activity. From this perspective, it could potentially open up several opportunities for culture that other music forms usually do not offer. I am thinking specifically about collaborations with schools and Universities, with cultural institutions that aim to foster some types of connections with specific locations through a music event, or concerts that involve audience participation, etc..

3. How are you doing within concert and other institutions in your work with open scores?

Joe Scarffe:

I have just completed a PhD on this topic and I have found it very frustrating that my institution, and institutions generally, do not seem to care about contemporary performance practice and regard it as an inferior practice. The other issue is that I have found institutions in the UK to be not keen to work in a multidisciplinary way and frown upon virtual and 3D mediums for score creation - this, to me, stifles innovation.

Ruedi Debrunner:

What I appreciate in such concerts is the sharpened sense of contact to the other players, since we have to constantly adjust our actions to the sounding result we hear.

Federico Pozzer:

I mostly collaborate with my own University in the UK and higher education institutions in order to have the possibility to perform this type of music. From my experience, UK Universities are amazing from this point of view. They offer support for organising and realising a concert. At least in my own experiences, this type of music is really tied to Universities and cultural centres. However, I hope that in the future experimental music could spread also to other types of contexts that are not necessarily related to higher education institutions and that might potentially benefit from these sorts of events.

Stephen Montague:

I have always been interested in variety, often quoting Henry Cowell who once talked about wanting *"to live in the whole world of music, not just one corner".* This is my position completely. The joy I experience in the music field ranges from working in the *avant-garde* with people like John Cage to writing large orchestral works for The Royal Ballet. I enjoy the freedom I feel to write in any style I wish and delight in almost every commission I do from a piano concerto for brass, percussion, and 8 motorcycles for the World Superbike Championships at Brands Hatch (soloist World Superbike Champion James Toesland), to a large multi-media works for 100s of performers in something like a Cage *Musicircus*. My music has been performed in an exciting range of venues from Carnegie Hall and Centre Pompidou to a sewer in London's East End.

One of the issues of working in so many different genres however is identity. Music critics have no idea what to call me, but I think my audience enjoy that quality and the certain unpredictable element I often bring to a performance. The 24 hour non-stop concert set I did for my 75th birthday event (2018) at St. John's, Smith Square, London would be a good example. There were over 100 performers ranging from top

professionals to children, soloists, chamber groups, concertos with full symphonic orchestra plus film, visuals and installations.

As far as institutions go there seems to be a certain interest in my music. I have been frequently invited for lectures at universities like Oxford and Cambridge, European and American universities and arts centres world-wide. I teach one day a week at Trinity Laban Conservatory (London) and last year was Visiting Professor at Florida State University, Tallahassee, 2018-19.

One of my missions has always been to shake things up wherever I go, and my year in Florida fulfilled that brief nicely with a number of projects including a Cage *Musicircus* in the Florida State Fine Arts Museum with over 100 performers and organising and directing the Florida element of the International Merce Cunningham Centennial Celebrations with a week of related events. The reaction? Generally after the initial shock of certain events there is an enthusiastic glow. The 3 hour *Musicircus* in Tallahassee left an indelible mark on the good citizens of north Florida with a number of events they could not have imagined.

4. Which compositional ambitions and challenges do you see when creating?

Joe Scarffe:
I have never written an open score and never plan to. But I think the main issue is clarity of ambitions. For example, Earle Brown's 'December 1952' has always frustrated me as a piece, as it is a symbol of openness and creativity in its pure presentation as a score, but Brown contradicted it time and again with his own interpretations of it and demands on the players. For me, the biggest issue is documenting performers ambitions to allow for a properly evolving performance practice. It is the performers who need to lead on this and it has just not happened thus far, which made my own doctoral research much more difficult than it needed to be.

Ruedi Debrunner:

Composing open scores asks for a deep understanding of the ways of communication within a group. With too many details you easily suffocate the creational process of the musicians. On the other hand there should be enough information or stimulation to get a common understanding of the music.
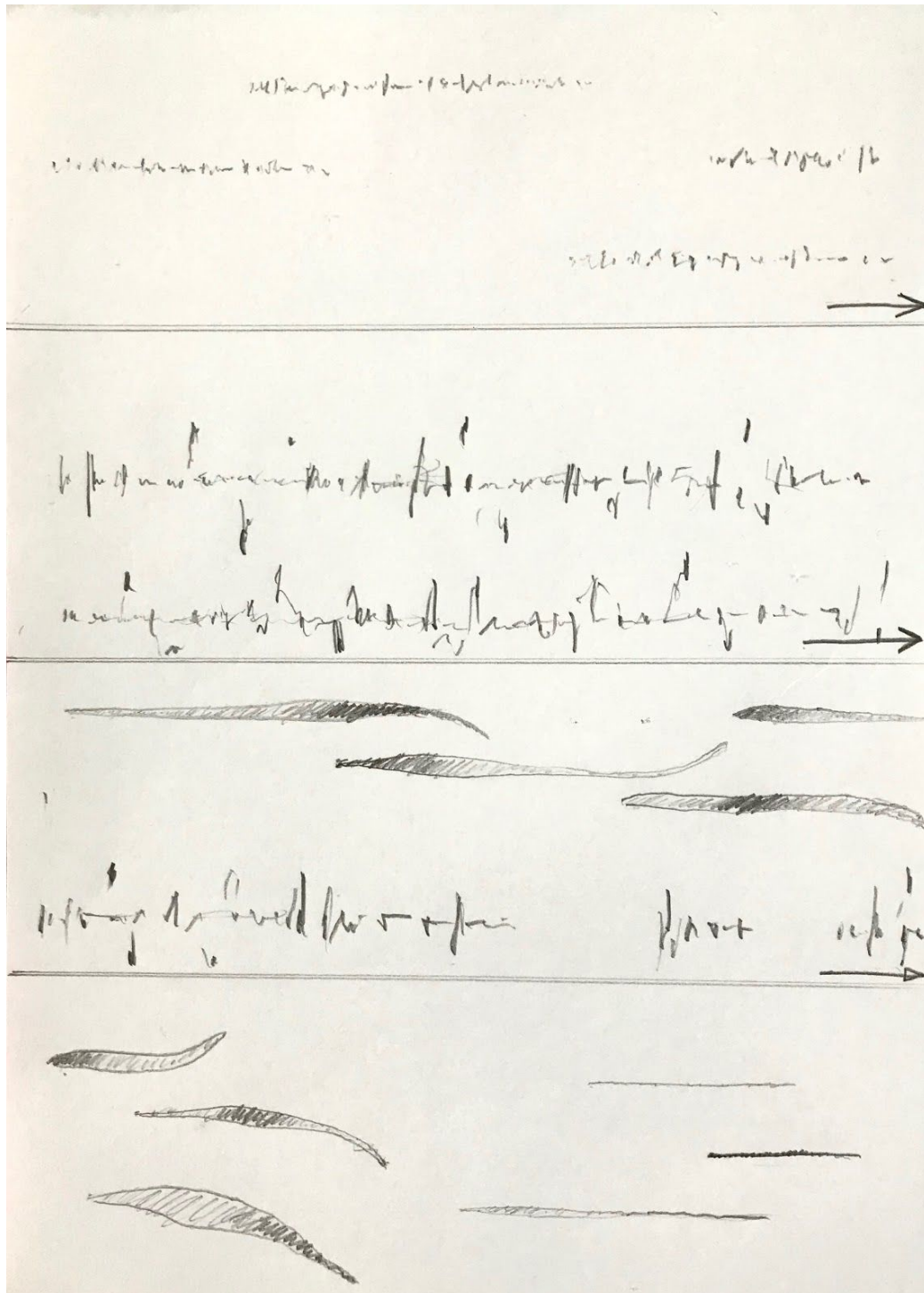
Ruedi Debrunner: excerpt from "Pulsar" for chamber ensemble.

Stephen Montague:

Montague sees himself as a radically eclectic composer, one who takes pleasure in using both traditional and non-traditional tools. This is both in order to enjoy the variety himself and in order to surprise and stimulate the audience. However, there is also a specialised know-how regarding open scores he comments on.

I approach each new commission with an open mind and a large box of compositional tools I can choose from to make the piece work as effective as possible. Even with a mainstream orchestral work, The King Dances, for The Birmingham Royal Ballet I was keen to make use of some free-flowing electronic elements for special effects-something never done in the ballet scores they've commissioned over the years. In each new work I like to add a variety of techniques and colours into the fabric for some unusual and surprising effects.

In writing an "open score" work my focus is always on how to best create a piece that will work convincingly in an ensemble of mixed abilities. That is always the challenge. It's far easier to write for professionals than amateurs. It is not hard to make the Berlin Phil sound good.

My own music often combines traditional notation with areas of freer, improvisational activity. I like the idea of giving performers some musical choices but I also recognize the danger. The challenge is to marry creative ideas at the right level to give performers the ability to realise the music within their technique to produce a lively and engaging performance. I like the careful play between the strict constraints of traditional notation and the use of improvisatory elements.

Federico Pozzer:

Finding the balance between what needs to be fixed and what can be open is actually one of the main points within my musical practice. My current research is focused on players' breathing and how changes on players' breath can affect the musical result. In many of my works, breathing is conceived as an action that at different degrees is indeterminate, malleable, and changes depending on the players and on the task they perform. For this reason, I personally like the fact that players' decision-making is somehow restricted and that the outcome and the interactions taking place within a piece are consequences of a sort of negotiation between determined instructions imposed by the score and players' breathing. The central questions to me are usually: Should breathing be spontaneous? Should it be constrained in some ways? How can players be pushed to alter in unpredictable ways their breathing? I love the fact that this negotiation leads to outcomes that you cannot predict. What I constantly try to do is to explore one solution and if I fail I try another one. For me it's quite essential to try many possibilities to determine what should be defined and what should be left open.

The result that comes out from this process is informative in the way that it helps me to understand which contingent and fixed elements can be changed. I think this is a never-ending process, but each result pushes me to come back and forth and comprehend some aspects of the relationships between 'fixed' and 'open' that were not so evident in the beginning.

5. Which performance ambitions and challenges do you see?

Joe Scarffe:
There are enough ambitions and challenges to fill a thesis! But, in summary:
- What is the role of rehearsal and is that the correct terminology?'
- How much should prior performances increment knowledge into new performances?
- Clarifying what is the role of improvisation?
- Do open scores even have a performance practice? What does that term mean in this context?
- Should open scores have stylistic boundaries? If so, where should they be drawn?
- What is the role of a conductor in open score performances?

Ruedi Debrunner:
Rehearsal of open scores has to deal with the variability of the outcome. Therefore you had better rehearse towards a common understanding but avoiding the exact setting of the performance. Otherwise the performance might just be a cheap copy of the rehearsal. The challenge is to achieve a good balance between determination and freedom. The rules you rehearse should serve as an inspiration not a hindrance to good music. What is our understanding of a good sound, of a good musical form? This is what we should find out by rehearsing.

Stephen Montague:
One of the joys of working with amateur musicians is that they are there because they really love music and love to play. That is perhaps the most exciting element a composer can ask for. The challenge for the composer is then to give them something that engages and harnesses this energy and commitment for a satisfying result.

The fact too that often the rehearsal periods are over several weeks gives the composer an opportunity to try things out to achieve the best possible results. The open score is a wonderful opportunity for both composer and performer. It is a real

test of a work to see if the work stands up as well with different combinations of players. A special skill is required to make this work effectively.

I love that challenge and am always surprised at the results - both ways: good and not so good. I enjoy working with groups and editing and modifying my work until it fits.
It is vitally important for professional composers to learn how to write effectively for mixed ability groups and something that is happening more and more in the UK. As part of every commission should be the requirement of the composer first attending rehearsals to get the measure of the ensemble and see the challenge. For the creation of the new work attending further rehearsals should be required to develop the new piece directly with the performers. I think what is doing in the UK is a wonderful model of doing this well and those principles should take root everywhere.

Federico Pozzer:

My pieces often involve the use of a limited set of sounds and musical actions and sometimes these sounds are freely chosen by the players. I don't use conventional notation and during rehearsals, I usually give the players verbal instructions that inform them on how to act and interact with the others. They are not required to study some music parts, but rather to follow objectively explicit instructions. This type of process encourages me to easily try more versions of the same piece during rehearsals, to change some instructions and the approach I might use with the players. What I think it is great about this procedure is that it supports discussion between performers, and between performers and the composer in a collaborative and fruitful way. Also, as I specified above, what I find rather stimulating in this music form is the way performances of experimental works might involve inclusive situations in which the audience interacts with the players (for instance I'm thinking about James Saunders or Andy Ingamells' pieces among others). That's a dimension that I would like to explore more as I often work with breathing-actions that everybody can do, also people outside the realm of music. I think it would foster other types of unpredictable situations that I haven't explored yet but they could expand my current practice.

See IM-OS 2, Fall 2019, for Pozzer's "Breathing Instructions".

Dennis Bathory-Kitsz has written this integrated essay "*On Creating Open/Improvisational Scores*":

I am a practical person, leaving philosophy to others. Yet the question of artistic control troubles me. In my view, *all* scores are open—even fixed electronic pieces where technical and playback circumstances are outside the control of their composers. Throughout history and across cultures, holes in scores—and oral

traditions—are always present. A Donegal fiddle tune, a Renaissance madrigal, a Classical sonata, a Gregorian chant, a Stockhausen opera are all open music, open scores with open ends and holes in different places. Obvious holes are cadenzas with musico-cultural guidance or jazz improvisation with rhythmic and harmonic underpinning or chant lacking harmonic underlay; the control is internally and traditionally modulated. But it is still open and inviting improvisational treatment.

In coming to music without a childhood background, I guessed how to convey sonic ideas. Even with later schooling, rigid music bored me, whether Mozart or Schubert or *Duke of Earl.* Primary influences became composers of open and improvisational scores, where control was at best implicit and the unexpected moments were just over the sonic horizon: John Cage and Anthony Braxton. I then asked friends (some musicians, some not) to make sense of my scores because no professional performers or ensembles were interested. Open and improvisational scores had become a necessity.

To me, scores that are open or improvisational by the composer's choice are *intentional* in order to distinguish them from the Donegal or Renaissance or Classical or Gregorian or Stockhausen that have *unintentional* (or unanticipated) holes. Now, half a century later, I have composed more than 200 *intentional* full or partially open/improvisational compositions, and have a lifetime of experiences with their creation and manifestation—and explanations of their place in art and culture.

Working with musically aware non-musicians, especially artists and writers, has been successful. Like the scores themselves, non-musicians are open, exhibiting a kind of fearlessness coupled with an intuitive, emotional expressiveness. The abstract nature of my scores paralleled art and culture, particularly in the 1970s. Explaining such scores at that time was rarely necessary, helped by an analogy to speech: we always improvise our conversations with internal 'content guides', so why not improvise the musical sounds we make with external 'content guides'? Explanation done. The content guide for *Dr. Dollar's Magic Salad* (1972), for example, uses a painting by Willem de Kooning and its familiar abstract designs. That and other compositions from the era were stresslessly performed in concert, received by audiences with at worst curiosity and at best with overwhelming enthusiasm.

On the other hand, for traditionally trained musicians it can become a crisis of trust. Musicians unfamiliar with, say, Cage or Braxton have generally needed guidance. Lack of improvisational experience—at least in the middle and recent past—has generated fear of mistakes, fear of foolishness, and mistrust of open/improvisational scores as themselves unprofessional and unworthy. Such mistrust leads to damaged performances that bear little relationship to the content of the score.

In the case of the two-movement duo *Aveaux Gadreaux* (2014), reluctance to study the score carefully, to discover and describe its sources, and to absorb its internal coherency led to tense rehearsals—especially of the second movement [**image**]. The movement is a highly modified retrograde inversion with colors and textures and dynamics suggested in the graphics,w ith a specific central portion: a chord progression from Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, overlain with itself in retrograde inversion using, for visual symmetry, the rare baritone clef. They did not *trust* the score, and so did not discover this tonal key to unlocking the sounding contents, weakening their improvisation of their lines over the graphical shapes. Mistrust (combined with a lack of study/rehearsal time) damaged their grasp of *this* symbolism *vs.* the traditional notational symbolism they used daily (what I call "colonial notation").

By comparison, the performances of *DEX* (2017, published recently in *IM-OS*) and *DEX II 3d* (2018) were handled comfortably and with inherent trust. The first was performed by a group of student musicians, guided by the composer who had commissioned the work; his assurances and explanations engendered trust. The second was performed by a professional trio who committed to playing the card-based score on its own terms, using the cards as source materials, modifications, and guides for their improvisations—and wearing 3d glasses. Both versions of *DEX* call for real-time presentation of the card dates and times as part of the performance introduction and visual character, but the trio decided to deal a single hand of cards in advance to study—thus being able to rehearse a 'stable' version while keeping the concert's length in mind.

There have been several successful performances of *Aurora Cagealis* (1992), written on the death of John Cage. Twelve imaginary star charts are printed on transparent overlays and pinned to a set of circular staff lines below.
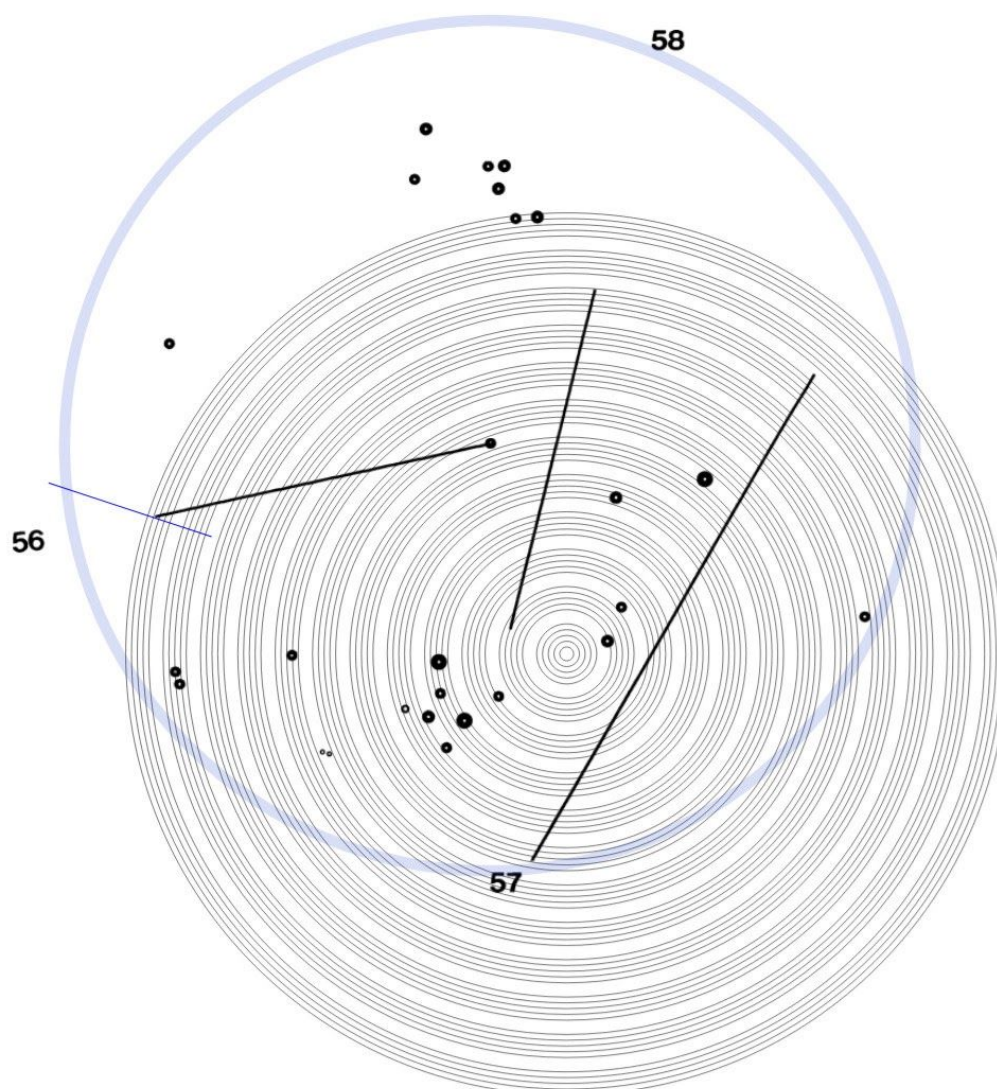
Deciding among themselves how the size and position of the stars may be performed, the musicians play around their star charts' staff circles, leaping inward until the final staff, with few notes, is repeated in a quasi-rhythmic manner. The workings of the score can be seen in James Ingram's animation:

https://james-ingram-act-two.de/writings/OnCursors/auroraCagealis/webScore/aurora.html

The challenges in creating open/improvised scores are not unlike scores in colonial notation: being taken seriously; being substantial; being original; being coherent; being musical/artistic. Colonial notation, however, is a craft with well-known elements and expectations; even the most avant-garde composition explains itself to performers. With open/improvised music, this is unlikely to be the case. In a sense, graphical scores occupy a field rather than a road: at the four corners, the score can leave everything to the performer except for a sense of musical purpose, as with an abstract drawing *sans*

instructions (Cornelius Cardew); it can claim to leave nothing to the performer by means of detailed complexity and invented notation (Bil Smith); it can be a visual reference work with layers of embedded symbols, shapes, colors, textures, guideposts, and stylistic history (Anthony Braxton); it can emulate or embed colonial notation with unique methods of performance (Larry Austin).

Further challenges come in choosing expressive materials. For me, the choice is often paper with instructions—but not always. The lost *String Quartet No. 1* (1973) includes four movements of large transparent overlays for each player with pathways through multi-colored graphics below. *Gendarme* (1977) is a sheet of instructions in flow-chart form, a cake box, and a whistle. *Rando's Poetic License* (1978) is a computer program with audience cue cards and audio feedback. *Permutrance V* (1985) uses solo vocal improvisations with an oil lamp and a garden of broken mirrors. *Water No Fire* (2012) uses hand-painted gold overlays on Katsushika Hokusai's "The Great Wave". *99 Events for the Found, the Made, and the Natural* is in the form of a book of performance pieces. And finally, the untitled, in-progress, three-dimensional *Physical Score*

is a wooden book 24 inches (61cm) square and four inches (10cm) thick with sculptural elements that are played both with transparencies (above the score, in different positions)
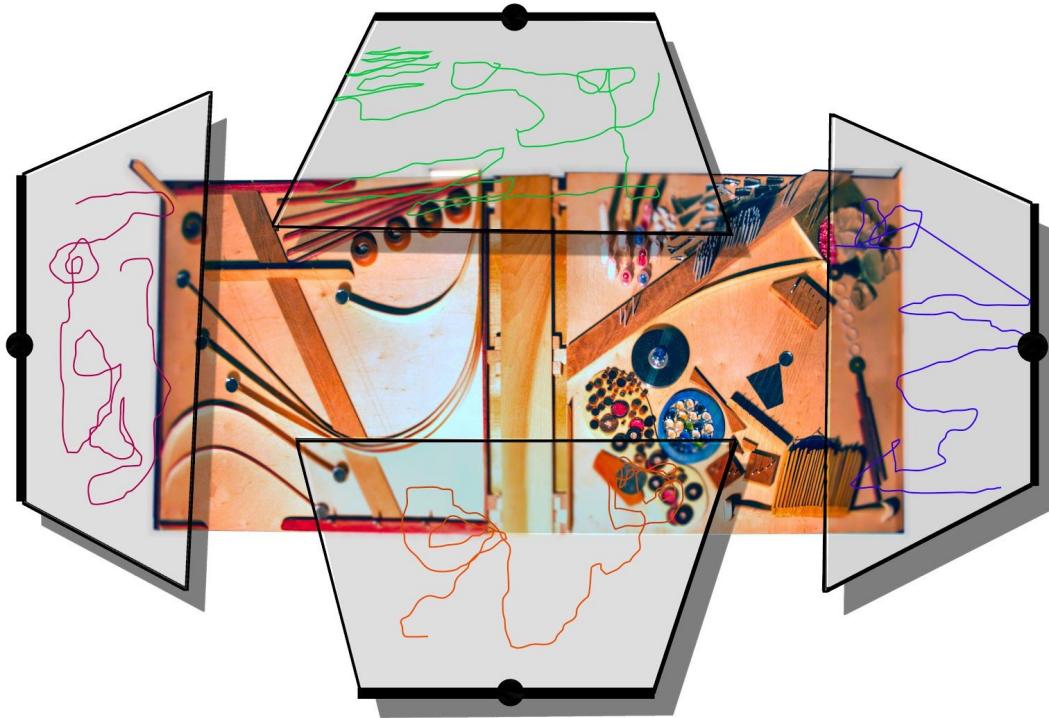
and by the players' hands (inside) the physical score.

There has been a recent and substantial rise of 'personal compositions' that are unique for both composers and performers. This personal nature makes improvisational and open scores welcome. For me, it is a drive to 'access' and manifest an idea, reaching back as far as my earliest compositional days, searching for an opportunity to be heard and settling on open and graphical and improvisational scoring. Sometimes it is a method that infuses music with art and vice-versa, searching for a solution to what for me is the problem of traditionality. Sometimes it resembles the familiar. Sometimes it is a stream of abstract items (such as any of my colonial notation scores) open to traditional interpretation (though still with open holes). And sometimes it is an acoustic or electronic manifestation in real time (a guided improvisation).

I do not focus on a product, even if there is such a goal, and scratching the obsessive-compulsive itch with charts or sketches is not any kind of product, much less a marketable one. Trying to evaluate it that way leads to sadness. Better, I think, to consider it an open-ended, improvisational journey.

***

Juan María Solare
Punctuation

Signos de puntuación / Satzzeichen / Punteggiatura

four improvisation pieces
for variable ensemble

cuatro conceptos de improvisación para ensamble de formación variable /
vier Improvisationskonzepte für Ensemble freier Besetzung /
quattro pezzi di improvvisazione per ensemble ad libitum

I - *una lettera manoscritta*   *(A manuscript letter)*
II - *sobria astrazione*   *(Sober abstraction)*
III - *espressione facciale*   *(Facial expression)*
IV - *i colori parlano di noi* *(The colours speak about us)*

variable duration

(Duración variable / variable Dauer / durata variabile)

Bremen, 15 August 2011

About the structure of the second (II) piece

- The inner, "algebraic" structure of each line (=section) is always the same:

(w xx y ww yyy w z w)

- In each section there is a predominant sign (that appears 5 times), a secondary one (4 times), a "tertiary" one (2 times, together) and one sign that appears only once, anticipating the main sign of the next line. Also: in each line there is one absent sign. This motiv will appear timidly in the next line (and, after that, it will be the main motive two lines below).

Synthetically, the transformation mechanism (from one line to the following) is:

a → e
b → a
c → b
d → c
e → d

The sign " → " reads "*becomes*", so the first step of the transformation mechanism would read "element a becomes element e in the next section"

So the general plan of the piece looks as follows

I) b dd c bb ccc b a b
II) a cc b aa bbb a e a
III) e bb a ee aaa e d e
IV) d aa ee dd eee d c d
V) c ee d cc ddd c b c

About the structure of the last (IV) piece

line 1 = a b
line 2 = c d
line 3 = c e f   (same beginning of the line 2, different continuation)
line 4 = d c b a   (reversed order of materials in lines 1 and 2)
line 5 = e f   (delayed echo of the line 3)
line 6 = f e g   (reversed order of the previous line plus new element)

The colours are derived from those of the rainbow:

a = red (#f10606) these are the html codes of each colour
b = orange (#f87217)
c = gold (#fdd017)
d = green lime (#41a317)
e = blue sky (#6698FF)
f = blue cornflower (#151b8d)
g = indigo/violet (#4B0082)

The shapes are also roughly structured to achieve an incrementing surprise: first only rectangles, later some ellipse appears, and sporadically an irregular form as "deviation" (lines 4 and 6)

This piece is the simulation of a conversation, but instead of *text* you read colours.

Ideas for the performance

Get your inspiration from (and get propelled to action by) the scores, but don't be arbitrary: be faithful to the structures. It means: if the same sign (or colour or shape) appears twice, both will be *somehow* related.

Besides:

"One could contemplate having even more tempo layers, also very slow ones which would push elements into gaining inner life and which would create dynamic contrasts of form? Just two signs could in face fill out many minutes, with three elements, combinations and cross-relations could become even intricate..." (**Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen**, email 16/AUG/2011)

JMS * www.JuanMariaSolare.com

Punctuation

(Signos de puntuación / Satzzeichen / Punteggiatura)

four improvisation pieces for variable ensemble

cuatro conceptos de improvisación para ensamble de formación variable
vier Improvisationskonzepte für Ensemble freier Besetzung
quattro pezzi di improvvisazione per ensemble ad libitum

Juan María Solare
(Bremen, 15/AUG/ 2011)

I - *una lettera manoscritta*

@ ~ & @ \ :
!, ¡ !
/ ...
¿ ? ? = ~
& / ...

- ! (~ ! , ! ?)
- < ' = < . > '
- ? { ~ ? ; ? ! }
- & " = % , & "

/ / ~ / :
« ¡ \ ! » ... ? ¿

Juan María Solare 2011, DonSolare@gmail.com

Punctuation

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II - *sobria astrazione*

~ "" & ~~ &&& ~ ? ~

? && ~ ?? ~~~ ? , ?

, ~~ ? „ ??? , " ,

" ?? „ "" ‚„ " & "

& „ " && """" & ~ &

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III - *espressione facciale*

• • •

¿ <–>   <;> ?

!

(~)

/ "

Punctuation

IV - i colori parlano di noi

Juan María Solare

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