

IM-OS

Improvised Music – Open Scores

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Proposals from readers are invited

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EDITORIAL

Large groups of improvisors are a special challenge - not least for the musicians themselves. Usual challenges magnify: simply hearing each other physically to begin with - listening to the many collaborators - relating to them, and dealing with the more limited space for your own sound. Improvising musicians have to extend their “onemindedness”, as Carl Ludwig Hübsch calls it, even further than is the case in not so large ensembles. And composers can do well in considering this state of affairs and invent strategies on precisely this background.

This IM-OS issue will provide some deep looks into strategies for coping with these challenges.

Conduction systems by for instance Butch Morris and Walter Thompson (Soundpainting) have become very well-known. Even if there are people who engage in learning hundreds or even more signs, conduction is also practised within a more cross-musical context in highly individual, creative manners and mixtures. Like in all creative activity, we are free to allow details from one area of the music to inspire us in what we do in another area. A reason why conduction is treated in this journal is that it has in some cases a written symbol language of its own. Furthermore, human gestures are not to be overlooked: they represent an exciting part of the musical and interactional material which improvisors and composers work with. *“It is not – and never has been – my intention to use Conduction to redefine music or music theory, or to standardize Conduction as a system”* Butch Morris states in the introduction to his workbook from 2017¹. In a similar way, Walter Thompson makes clear in his Preface to Etienne Rolin’s Erolgraphs, vol.1² that one can mix freely the use of “pure” conduction with pre-composed material or with material visualising Soundpainting gestures - and this opens up *“new possibilities of exploration”*.

¹ Quoted from a presentation edited by Daniela Veronesi - https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309213161_The_Art_of_Conduction_-_A_ConductionR_Workbook . Concerning Morris, Lawrence & Veronesi, Daniela. (2017). The Art of Conduction - A Conduction® Workbook.

² See footnote 3 in the article on The symbols of conducted improvisation...inside this journal.

From the side of the performer of graphic scores, Una McGlone proposes no less than her own commented and fully illustrated list of the characteristics of successful ones.

And not least: the three scores by Hübsch, Rolin and The Noisebringers bring forward propositions in the form of scores, each in its own way, for facilitating improvised playing in large groups. As of course all the glimpses and quotes throughout the issue are there to get ideas from, too. You have new possibilities of exploration ;-)

CBN

CARL LUDWIG HÜBSCH ON ONEMINDEDNESS

Below is a selective summary by CBN of some of the thoughts in the essay titled Onemindedness found in the department with texts of the homepage here, translated from German:

<https://www.huebsch.me/index.php/en/text-en/154-onemindedness>

Our ability to perceive several music parts together in their individuality is limited - perhaps to three at a time. One can assume that above this limit, parts are perceived in ways that make similar-sounding ones heard as one group, and some sounds become masked.

But improvisors like to state their individual sounding ideas, and so the larger the group becomes, the stronger the wish to do exactly that. This, in turn, invites yet others to make their statements. That can act as an obstacle for sustaining long, static sounds - whenever anyone feels for something else, he/she imposes the decision on everyone. Different physical positions in the orchestra make different soundscapes available for listening, which furthermore amplifies the said problem. It also manifests itself in section durations becoming standardised - all of this according to the "smallest common denominator".

Strategies may, however, be applied. Large groups make it easy to hide oneself. Musicians may be tempted to start their statements in a half-hearted way, making fade-ins allowing them to withdraw fast if they feel this was not well received. Hübsch recommends that in a large group one should be especially careful about clarity and "**readability**" of playing. **Reduction** may mean to individually play less, through rules for the amount of pause, or for how many instruments at a time will play. Parts may be **grouped together** forming choruses (as it is a bearing principle in the score Floating Fragments - Groups), and Hübsch also sees pointillistic playing as a kind of chorus. A **common discussion** should not be carried out in order to establish rules, but may help to strengthen sensibilities by pointing out ways of playing that tend to become levelled out. Thus: "playing" erases "not playing" when it comes to end the piece - it can only end when the last player stops. In the same way, "forte" dominates "piano" - the latter can become masked.¹

¹ Compare the saying "Don't be a blanket" (in the sense that the blanket is thrown over someone else becoming covered up), heard from improvisor LaDonna Smith in her workshop at Jyderup Accordion Meeting, Denmark, May 2018.

Pauses, static sounds, solos, short sounds are examples of “endangered species”.

Thinking orchestrally - if musicians play in such an open way as to allow others to directly take it as a point of departure and continue it while stepping back oneself, then everyone is participating. This way, playing in unison would not mean to do the same thing, but to develop a timbre; to take over a tone from the other side of the orchestra would mean to play with the spatial panorama. The orchestra could become a meta-improvisor and one could speak of onemindedness instead of multimindedness.²

As a **conclusion**: tendencies towards the smallest common denominator and towards positions which cancel out each other may be counteracted when every musician is conscious of these dangers and knows which specific pitfalls for the orchestra in question to avoid.

² “multimindedness” in improvisation is a word coined by Evan Parker who comments it in an interview with Peter Niklas Wilson in: Hear & Now. Hofheim (Wolke Verlag), 1999 (in German).

FLOATING FRAGMENTS - GROUPS for large ensemble

by Carl Ludwig Hübsch

A realisation of this piece named "Schwarm" recently appeared on CD: The Multiple Joy[ce] Orchestra. Works by Carl Ludwig Hübsch, Impact Records, impakt 022. You may hear it here, too, played by 18 musicians: <https://youtu.be/bL4P7Z3x19w>

FLOATING FRAGMENTS – GROUPS

[“lead / follow – or get out of the way”¹]

A musical concept by Carl Ludwig Hübsch (www.huebsch.me)

the principles:

This piece is basically about choric playing or, even better, choric inventing.

“*To Lead*” means to play a clearly detectable material which can be imitated by the other players.

“*To Follow*” means you play immediately the same way another person does, without thinking about it or judging it.

An additional possibility is to bring in new material or add a new aspect on the existing material and thus to open a new lead. If others follow you will be leading a new group (probably only for a very short time).

If nobody follows, the group contains only one player.

“*To Get Out Of The Way*” means to not play. Which is always a useful possibility.

concrete:

One starts, others follow *immediately*.

At first, the whole group plays the same until the first (sub-)group starts with a new aspect or other material. Other subdivisions follow. “Unifications” will also happen, maybe even a new “unison” of the whole group.

Also “solo” by each player is thinkable. This might sound like some kind of free improvisation. But also if everybody follows everybody this could be considered as a form of free improvisation.

→

¹ this is a quote from the film “Idiocracy”

the form:

Multiple choric play in constant change builds the character of this piece.

You can leave your group in any (musically reasonable) moment to follow another group, to found another group or to stay alone (if nobody follows you).

Remember not-playing as an option. It might help to get a better overview.

Look for a clear ending of the piece in the given moment.

help:

Avoid mechanic playing and simple repetition. No Loops!! Tacet is better, or – if you have to do it – look for the extreme within the loops/mechanisms.

A “unison” might reoccur at any time in the piece and might clear things up.

The whole piece might consist only of one material and its various aspects. Less can be more.

Only join in when you are clear about what you play and what is going on.
Remember: “what you play” is not necessarily the material, but rather the way you play.

Offer clarity and recognizability in your playing, even if you are playing alone.

Even if you have initiated a new group you are free to leave it any time. You might also immediately follow one of your own followers. In the best sense of choric play there are as many leaders in the group as group members.

If you don't know what's going on or what to relate to, make a pause.

THE SYMBOLS OF CONDUCTED IMPROVISATION AND THEIR CREATIVE USE

by Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen

Conducted improvisation has become widespread in recent decades. This article will view it as an open field placed between open composition and free improvisation. Signs given by the conductor are a determining factor for the musical results, but these signs are usually also frameworks which embrace an ad libitum behaviour from the musicians. A sign for "long tones" may produce tones of any pitch and timbre, for instance. A sign for "pointillism" or "minimalism" will also produce results strongly depending on the group - etc.

Conduction relies on body movements - but codified ones. They are often shown with pictures or verbal descriptions. In Fig.1 below, a continuous sound lasting as long as the palm is up is what is meant by "sustain". And "Repeat" means that the musician is to repeat a musical figure, most presumably of her own invention.¹



Fig.1 Butch Morris showing two of his signs.

A verbal description of a gesture within the Walter Thompson Soundpainting system could go like this:

¹ Thomas Stanley: Butch Morris and the art of conduction, Ph.D., University of Maryland, College Park, 2009, p.93

The arms move outwards from the middle. The body represents register (high-low).²

Fig.2 Example of a gesture described verbally

How clear is this to the reader - can you imagine exactly what was meant here? Take a few seconds to find out, and you may then study the photo at the end of this article, Fig. 6

However codified, body movements remain in some sense bound to showing what a person does. Names, titles may help to overview a series of signs. But visual signs, maybe in the form of "thumbnails", simple icons, are significantly easier to overview in a glance, to compare and to remember. Below in fig.3 are some examples from Aabo Larsen:³

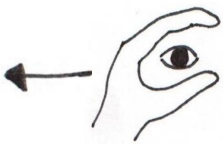


 <p>"New Eyes" (for instance using extended techniques or using objects or change position in the room)</p>	 <p>"You've got the ball". The player in question can play what she likes, thus even changing the direction of the ongoing music.</p>	 <p>"Change direction" - you should do the opposite of what you just did, following your first impulse.</p>
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Fig. 3 Some symbols from Aabo Larsen

² Helen Julia Minors: Music and Movement in Dialogue: Exploring Gesture in Soundpainting. Danse et musique : Dialogues en mouvement Vol.13, Numéro 1-2, septembre 2012. <https://www.erudit.org/fr/revues/sqrm/2012-v13-n1-2-sqrm0280/1012354ar.pdf> Downloaded 28.october 2021, p.94.

³ Nana Pi Aabo Larsen: Conducted Improvisation. A study of the effect of the concept of signs on musical creativity. Examensarbete 15hp, 2015, Lärarutbildningen i musik, Lunds Universitet. <https://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/search/publication/7362923> Downloaded 20.oktober 2021, p.27

It could seem that these symbols capture the essentials of the corresponding body movements: position of hand and fingers and movement away from the eye in the first case - two hands forming a circular shape together in the next - and some movement downwards using the arm in the last one.

Some authors emphasise the visual symbols and let them assume a life on their own. Etienne Rolin has created a sign system referring to conduction and its body gestures which emphasises the visual appearance. He has published two volumes of exercises - "Graphic palettes as a Composition Tool" and also uses them alternating with traditional notation in chamber works.⁴ See elsewhere in this issue for an example.

Ruedi Debrunner in his "Open Symphony" system uses visual signs which also take on a life of their own. They are not given by hand signs, but shown on a monitor or with projection by means of special software. So here, the visual symbols stand alone and do not refer back to body gestures. They appear on the monitor or in the projection in their own right.

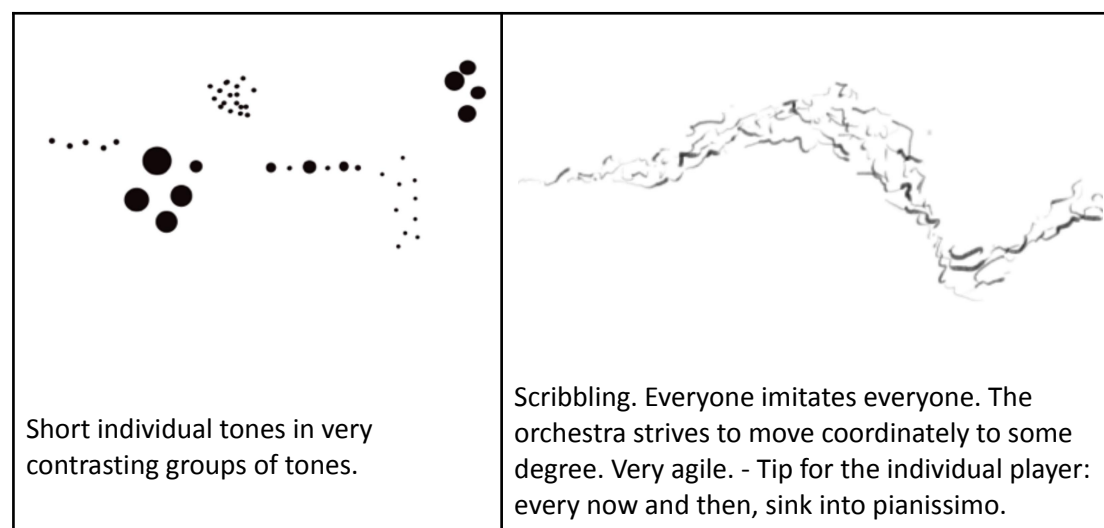


Fig. 4 Symbols from Debrunner⁵

⁴ Etienne Rolin: Erolgraphs. Graphic Palettes as a Composition Tool. Vol. 1 + 2, Questions de Tempéraments, www.temperaments.fr [2015 + s.a.]

⁵ Ruedi Debrunner: Open Symphony. Bild- und Zeichensprache zur Anleitung und Koordination eines improvisierenden Orchesters über Monitor oder Projektion. 2016-2021. Pdf from the author dated 14. February 2021. <https://www.ruedidebrunner.ch/>

Graphic visualisations of conduction signs arise from instructions to improvising musicians playing instruments *ad libitum*. They do not carry a direct heritage from traditional notation which is both pitch-fixed, fixed to rhythms you can count and based on details being added up to form musical entities. The conduction visualisations, on the other hand, work top-down, and thus they present, so to speak, more historically recent ideas about musical material in a direct form. Such ideas may concern material to be played - like those two in Fig. 4 above, or indicating use of long tones. They may also designate more composite characteristics, like those presented above in Fig. 3. This category may be of special interest to conductors and composers who like to work with complex processes and/or avoid giving too many details, but instead wish to let the music grow out of the ensemble's own invention.

Conduction signs may be interactive. As early as 1984, John Zorn premiered his *Cobra* piece. This was one of his so-called game pieces, a genre designation which became commonly used ever since. He used the word "prompter" instead of conductor. The piece is unpublished, but according to David Slusser's account and documentation which might be the most detailed one to be found⁶, the prompter is not in charge of the music alone, but reacts to "calls". Playing starts with the prompter waiting for suggestions and choosing one player. The player in question will point to a body part and show a number of fingers, indicating an action from the score to be taken. The prompter then shows a card to indicate the chosen action and presents a downbeat to start it. The prompter may subsequently ignore or accept further calls from the ensemble players. Players have, however, the option to engage in acting as "guerillas" or as a "spy" or as "squad leaders" all of which appear to be options with complicated rules which question or maybe reinforce the authority of the prompter in playful ways. So the piece is certainly interactive in a most elaborate way.

Even before Zorn, Toshi Ichiyanagi employed conduction in a playful manner in his piece *Sapporo* from 1963. Fig.5 below shows how the letter "C" appears in notated event groups and means that the player is to "watch or listen to whatever the conductor does". However, one is also free to disregard the letter. Instructions do not describe any situation in which players must follow the conductor. So the conductor appears on equal terms with the players, but "is free to" make movements suggestive of the sound elements found in the piece.

⁶ <https://www.arvidtomayko.com/bnm/cobra-score/cobra%20notes.%20Slusser.pdf>

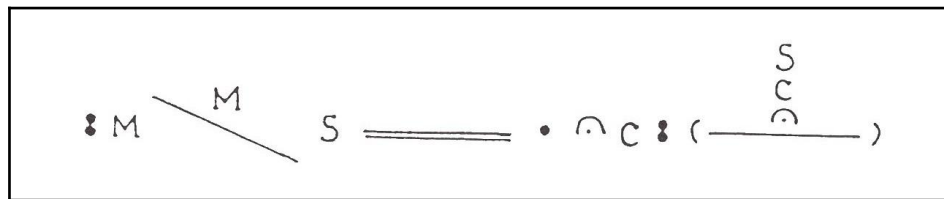


Fig. 5. Excerpt from Toshio Ichihara: *Sapporo* © 1963 by C.F. Peters

The excerpt in Fig. 5 exemplifies use of all the symbols of the piece. A dot is a short attacked sound - the “colon” represents not two simultaneous ones, but “more than two” (!). Lines stand for static or, if oblique, sliding sounds. Fermatas without other signs means long silence, together with a sound, they mean an extremely long one. “M” means to watch the soundmaking movements of another performer, “S” to listen to sounds from another performer. These forms of special focus away from one’s own playing, not least the “M” one, can act as a gentle meditative activity having a refreshing effect on the individual player, as of my experience.

Debrunner includes an interactive sign in his *Open Symphony*: a simple letter “W” (“Wer will”) asking “Who would like to join the next instruction?”. This may suggest yet one more way to proceed for the conductor: asking a question.⁷

He also describes a different mode in which to use the material which is more like a score simply shown on the screen or in the projection. In doing so, he is highlighting an essential difference between conducted improvisation and playing from a score: musicians are themselves in charge of who is playing when, how to start and how to develop the music onwards. So having a score provides the possibility for the ensemble to overview elements of the piece and to have more interaction between the members. In return, it requires musicians who are used to improvising in an ensemble, whereas conducting can be practiced even at very elementary levels.

Studying Debrunner’s two playing modes, along with the other signgiving means described above, open up for a comparative view of the different forms of free improvisation, conducted improvisation and the various forms of composition and traditional non-written music practises. There is a lot to be discovered here.

⁷ One could speculate about further possible questions to ask the ensemble. For instance, “what do you think the music needs right now”, to be answered in playing. A relevant background inspiration may be John Lely’s observation that scores must not necessarily consist of commands stated in the imperative mode - questions with their more open character are also possible. See “Part 1: Grammar” in John Lely and James Saunders: *Word Events*, NY 2012 (Continuum).



Fig. 6 - "Long tone", see explanation after Fig. 2 above.

DISCUSSION ABOUT CONDUCTED IMPROVISATION AT EUROPEAN INTUITIVE MUSIC CONFERENCE 2.OCTOBER 2021 IN BASEL.

Participants: Carl Bergstrøm-Nielsen (DK), Ingeborg Poffet (CH), Max Stehle (D), Stephan Grossenbacher (CH), Angelika Sheridan (D), Iouri Grankin (UKR/DE), Etienne Rolin (F), Thomas Zimmermann (D), Hans Tonino (NL), Diego Kohn (AR/CH), Brigitte Küpper (D), Esther Knappe (CH), Susanne Escher (CH).

This discussion was preceded by two separate, simultaneous workshops of 40 minutes, led by Etienne Rolin and Diego Kohn respectively. Etienne had his starting-point in Walter Thomson's Soundpainting, Diego in the system of Butch Morris, however, both has modified them. - After this practising, the two groups met and played for 16 minutes - in an overlapping manner.¹

MUSICIANS' IMPRESSIONS

Carl: what came out of this juxtaposition and meeting of two different systems and their conductors, focusing on the participants?

Ingeborg: I think I was changed a lot because I was adapting to the others - the system (Etienne's) was not very precise and then the listening became more important and reacting to the others, and then it's really interesting.

Max: I heard for sure that different ways to conduct realise their people's energies - Diego's much more controlled, Etienne's more crinkled, more of an outburst. Also I found there was a lot of connection to the personality of the two conductors.

Angelika: it was like in improvised music in a duo and the other plays really loud and energetic and needs lot of space, you can choose to do the same same or something else. Diego choose to do something else, to be quiet, as an answer to what Etienne did. And what I loved a lot is the pause - not to go into action.

¹ A video recording of almost the whole improvisation starting after one and a quarter minute can be found here: <https://youtu.be/Yd4jbCaJBMg>

(Several others agree)

Iouri: for me it was like an attempt to combine minimalism and not minimalism. I understand that Etienne tried to develop the material that was in our orchestra.

Angelika: I felt a bit that in both systems, we play something which you conduct - it's not about me, because I would choose to play something else, choose when I wanna go, you did not have a sign for exactly that.

Etienne: I only decide partly - I invited to improvise.

Angelika: that's one sign, yes, but there are a lot of other signs, and they reacted promptly...

Etienne: it's presented - and then it's imprecision - it's going back and forth...

Thomas: for me it's difficult to compare these two systems. I can only say that in my group (Diego's), we had the most possible freedom of everyone, and that was very impressive for me.

Max: it felt like a battle...

Etienne: yes I can tell you!

Stephan: I wished Etienne would have moved into the other room too.

SYSTEM AND AESTHETICS

Hans: I think both systems allow for freedom, expressiveness. I would like to ask the two conductors, what is the difference between the two systems, what they can do or not?

Diego: basically I would like to clarify whether you are talking about the different sign systems or the different aesthetics - sign system on one side and performance on the other side - Etienne can also make very similar playing to what we did, and the same from our side. - I choose some signs, and indicated only start and stop - the sound came from the group itself.

Brigitte: mentioning the question of what do you feel from the group - I also think there is something both ways - as a conductor, you feel something about what the group could do.

Diego: we have many, many possibilities to do everything we want. We could also go to the park and play music with just one sign, whatever (laughter). So I choose only one direction out of many...

Stephan: so this is about aesthetics?

Diego: yes, I think it is not decisive whether you use Butch Morris signs or something you invent

Stephan: and also I think that the group invents some aesthetics - we are all individuals - and the composition of the group, which kind of instruments - you had a lot of singers for instance

Angelika: ... there are a lot of signs...

Diego: yeah, that's what they think...

Etienne: that being said, anybody could do these basic signs: points, line and minimalism, just 3! even if there are 4000 Soundpainting signs. Now, what I choose when exercising with my group was what *they* have interpreted as this and as that.

Angelika: we got a lot of experience in conducting improvising orchestras - the main thing is what the conductor has in mind. If the conductor has in mind silence, there will be a silence. - There is a great story about Butch coming to London and worked with improvisors like Steve Beresford and Derek Bailey. And he said like "Hey Derek, you look at me" and then Derek said "No, you look at me", meaning something like "I don't need you to tell me to do this and this" (laughter), and he got his guitar and walked out. After that, they founded London Improvisors Orchestra with a huge change: everybody could conduct - I brought an article with an interview with Butch who stated that his goal was to do good music, and you have to do what I tell you to². If you are a mean conductor and force people, they will show you they don't like it...

² Peter Kowald: "Gespräch mit Butch Morris, dem Ort Ensemble und Peter Kowald", in: Almanach der "365 Tage am Ort". Luisenstrasse Wuppertal. Köln (König) 1998, S.150-155.

Etienne: I totally agree...

Angelika: And, I also do conducting and when I stand before the orchestra, I also try to send: that is happening right now. If you are open to that, you can make a music possible which is just there at the moment, but it has nothing with your idea to do. You feel it right away, when you press your idea upon the orchestra, it will function like a classical orchestra, or they can't ... I worked under both Walter Thompson, Butch and Sabine Vogel, and Butch acted as the boss - I didn't feel like a musician there...

Etienne: yes, I have heard similar stories ... Walter Thomson is unique, but he said, there is no error. If I said "play long tones" and people laugh, I go with it.

Esther: I was so much trying to come to understand all these signs...

Carl: I thought it was so funny that the two conductors began to improvise, such funny music came out of that!

HOW CAN A LARGE GROUP PLAY TOGETHER

Jopo: of course we are all improvisers and like to have our freedom. But my experience is, the more we are the more difficult it is for everybody to play in this freedom. For me it was interesting what the conductor was feeling, because as a group we cannot find it - to make the piece with all members included. The softest tend to get lost. The feeling of being together is the main point, not the individual... the trust between conductor and player, soft or loud, should be the same.

Max: We need to slow down.. We need to listen to the body and through the body we can feel the energy of the room...I'm speaking from experience - even with big groups, if everybody is able to sense that event you can work with that. Another thing is, how can I intervene into a playing situation to give it a different direction if I think it needs that...it comes from space and from the body, and if one feels that, everybody can conduct... we started the Schwarm 13 seven years ago, not with conducting but having certain structures that helped us a lot, but I am really happy that nowadays we don't need it any more...

Carl: Conduction and conduction signs are like compositions. So many open compositions, frameworks, starting-points composed since the fifties really had direction, but also were created in community with the musicians who played them.

So - could not one imagine all degrees between having 4000 signs and just some few - and maybe not conducting or maybe musicians themselves making hand-signals. - I once saw the Prague Improvisors Orchestra - the conductor stepped away from the scene at some point, and I have tried that too. As long as you stand there, people look at you, knowing you might give a sign. - I think there are many, many creative forms to emerge in future between the big conduction systems and making a fixed piece. And seen from the musicians' point of view, we know that rehearsing a work requires serious work, trying to find out about the idea of the composer - afterwards, we are free to seek out new challenges. And there's got to be some economy to this work.

Hans: I see conducting as a kind of game. You can engage in this game for fun, or for discovering someone's aesthetic. I learnt something from Diego's aesthetic - and you can use this aesthetic later in your own freedom when you improvise freely. The system you use is not so important because you might have different aesthetics. You can like it or dislike it, but it's a good idea to get someone's idea - freedom is also to listen to other ideas.

Susanne: to Diego - I had a very nice experience with the low sounds - it gave me a big concentration, to do that together - a possibility to feel more and more finely, you were really waiting for that. And Etienne, you were very fast to integrate things.

*This text has been submitted to participants before publishing.
However, the transcriber cannot guarantee that all names are correct.
Carl Bergstroem-Nielsen*

COMPOSITION 5 from Erolgraphs, vol. 1

by Etienne Rolin

The following three pages are taken from Etienne Rolin: Erolgraphs. Graphic Palettes as a Composition Tool. Vol. 1, publ. by Questions de Tempéraments, www.temperaments.fr [2015].

“Palettes” are here synonymous with scores / pieces / exercises.

The table of symbols is given at the beginning of the collection and applies to all the pieces. The notion of “real-time composition” stated under the table is synonymous with conducting in the sense employed in this issue. The symbols are based on the Soundpainting system devised by Walter Thompson who has written a preface to the collection.

At the start of the second row of the score, there is a group of four “minimalism” signs, also mentioned in the text instructions. They may be interpreted ad libitum (such as individually in a cycle, ensemble divided into 4 or 2 groups. Should anyone wonder about the % - like symbol in the middle, it stands for repetitions (again to be interpreted freely).

CBN

EROLGRAPHS - Content Gestures Notation

C	<i>Change</i>		<i>Extended Techniques</i>		<i>Long Tone</i>		<i>Stab Freeze</i>
C⁺	<i>Change Add</i>		<i>Glissandi</i>		<i>Zig Zag Tone</i>		<i>Freeze</i>
C⁻	<i>Change Subtract</i>		<i>Hits</i>		<i>Pointillism</i>		<i>Silent Freeze</i>
V_{oice}	<i>Voice</i>		<i>Minimalism</i>		<i>Point to Point</i>	sync	<i>Synchronize</i>
#	<i>Pitch up</i>		<i>Pitch Down</i>		<i>Continue</i>		<i>Morph</i>

N.B. : For composers with experience in real-time composition, it is possible to integrate free form with the Erolgraphs as dictated by the moment.

© Q.D.T.

COMPOSITION 5

I refer to this palette as the dynamic palette whereby graphic size implies nuances.

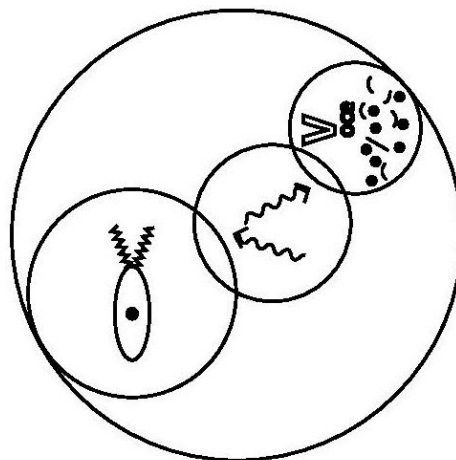
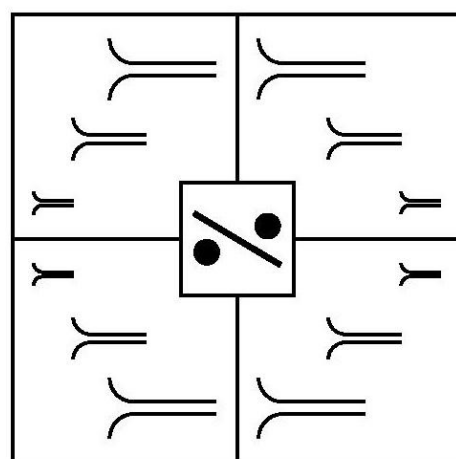
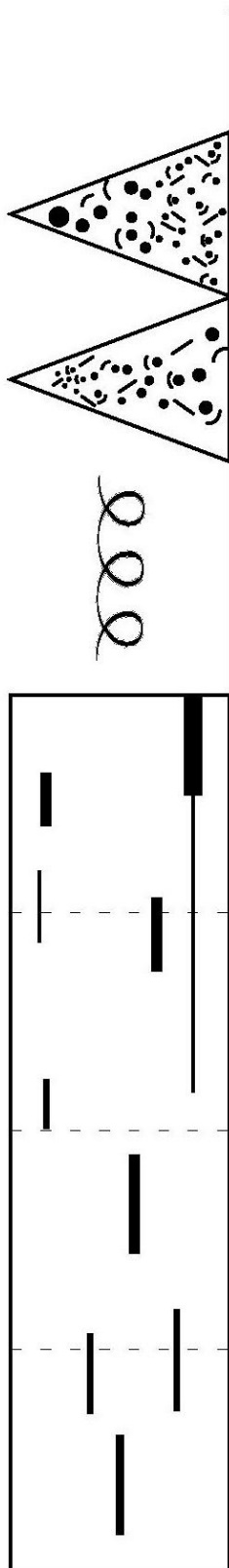
Rectangle : The four rectangle diagram implies medium register with *mf* dynamics. As the *Long Tones* move higher they get softer with the exception of the last note as a surprise *forte* element and as the *Long Tones* move lower they get louder. There is a lingering *low Long Tone* present as well, playable by polyphonic performers ie. piano, organ, accordion, guitar, etc...

Triangle : A self -evident pictogram, the bigger the dot in relation to the space, the bigger the sound.

Square : Four groups of *Minimalism* in a mirror form with repeated cells moving loud to soft according to changing registers.

Circle : Here we have a circle interlocking with smaller circles. The graphic suggests emphasis on *Extended Techniques* sprinkling a bit of *Glissandi* and little less of *Vocal Pointillism*. This goes on indefinitely until the composer - conductor - Soundpainter chooses to end, to move on organically or by contrast.

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VISUAL STRATEGIES FOR SOUND: THE KEY TO GRAPHIC SCORES

Five key factors in creating graphic scores for large groups of improvisors.

by Una McGlone

This article was first published in November 2021 on the website of The Wire magazine: www.thewire.co.uk. Reproduced by permission.



Renee Baker, Altered Consciousness 2 (detail)

As a member of Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra for nearly 20 years, I have been fascinated by the diversity of approaches to making graphic scores for large improvising ensembles. Over the years GIO has commissioned graphic scores from George Lewis ([Artificial Life, 2007](#)) and Barry Guy ([Schweben – Ay, But Can Ye?, 2008](#)). Fred Frith, Satoko Fuji, Gino Robair and Anne Pajunen are among many other guests who have brought their own graphic scores to perform with us.

Alongside our work with guests, we encourage individuals in the band to explore and develop their own ways of creating visual strategies for a large improvising ensemble. This is in parallel to our continued mission to play freely, with no prearranged rules. The first night of this month's GIOfest XIV is a collaboration with the Gaelic arts organisation [Ceòl 's Craic](#). The featured soloists – singers [Debbie Armour](#) and [Alasdair Whyte](#), Brazilian saxophonist [Alípio C Neto](#), and Glasgow poet laureate [Niall O'Gallagher](#) – will bring song, poetry, spoken word, photographs and Gaelic place names, which I will incorporate into graphic scores for the Orchestra to perform.

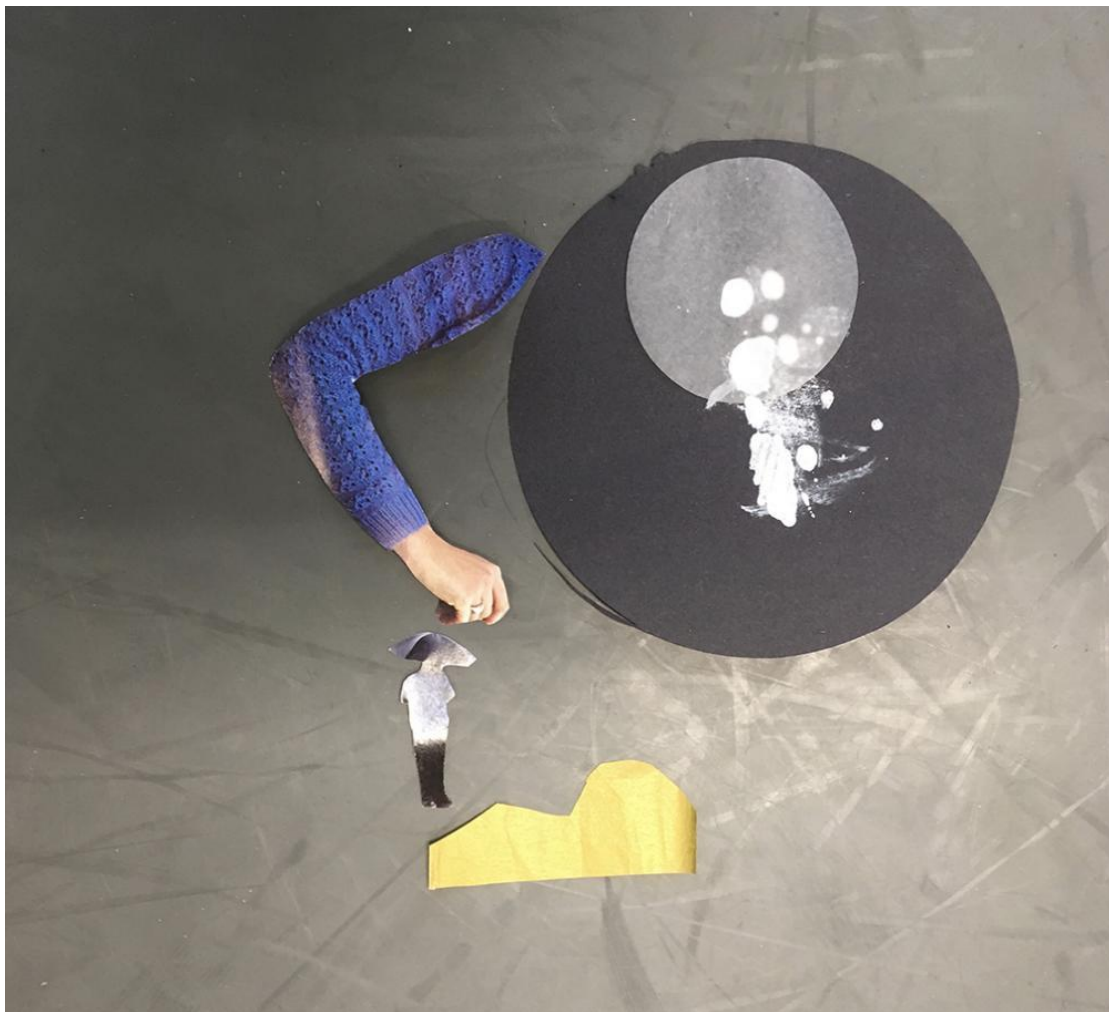
Here I describe my process of creating graphic scores, and outline key aspects which influence my approach, as well as discussing examples of other graphic scores that I have played as a double bassist.

Since 2016 I've used instant graphic scores packets created for me by artist Jean McEwan. These packets contain combinations of materials, for example, paper, tissue, images cut from magazines, plastic, painted card, sections of text. They are given to groups who arrange the elements to create a score and collaboratively decide how they will interpret it. There is, of course, always a third option – to let the elements fall where they may and to negotiate playing decisions in real time.



Jean McEwan, instant graphic score pack

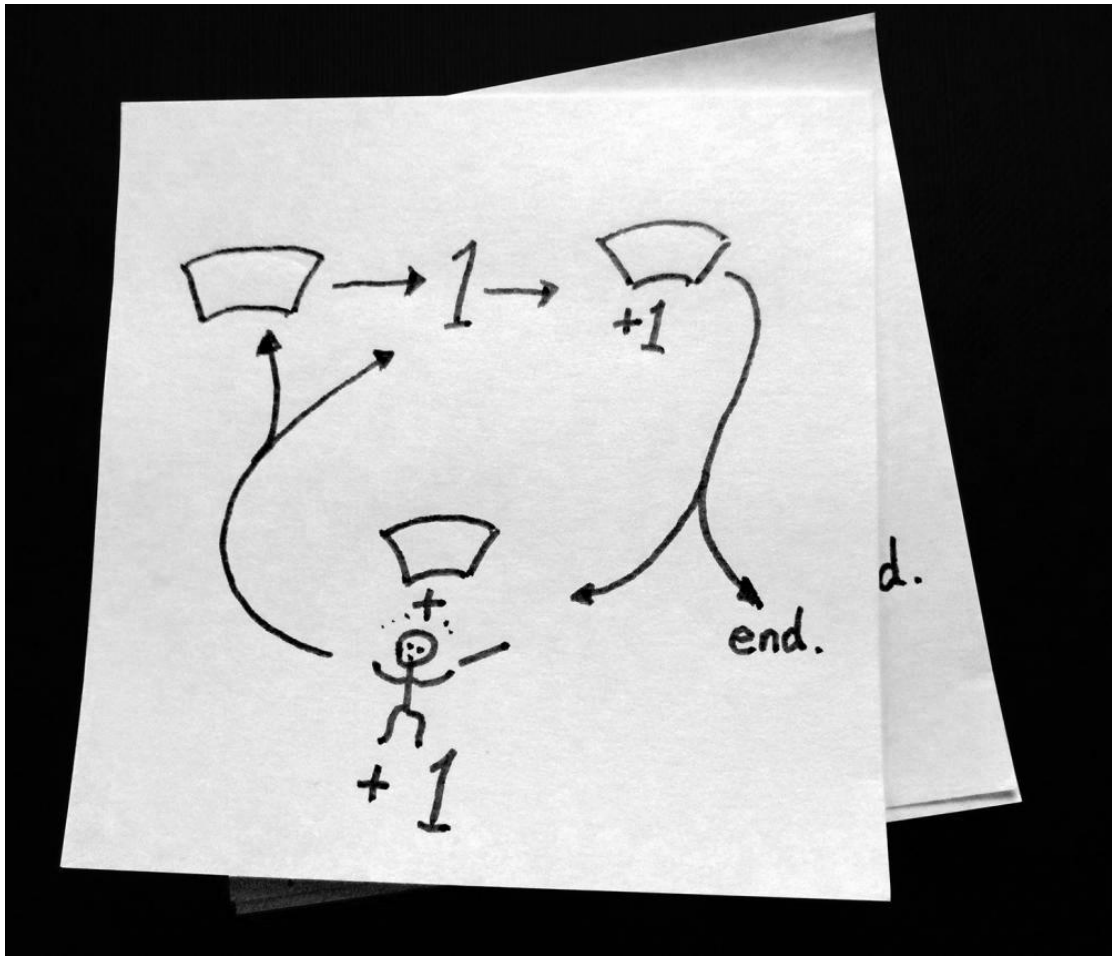
Working with instant graphic scores has led me to appreciate how they can simultaneously hold many elements. This is particularly suitable for the GIOfest XIV collaboration which will include text, visual and melodic material. In my process of thinking about how to combine these, the importance of negotiating the following factors emerged: form; energy; materiality; clarity; and fixed material.



An instant graphic score, laid out on the floor, created by workshop participants, Glasgow, April 2018

Form

Form is my first consideration and through this finding a balance between flexibility, so musicians have creative agency, and structure, so they know where they are in a piece. A graphic score that I have tucked away in a notebook is George Burt's *Improcherto (For HB)*, a piece designed to fit on to a post-it note. (HB is Harry Beckett; a recording with soloists Lol Coxhill and Evan Parker is available on the [lorram label](#).)



George Burt, Improcherto (For HB)

The score begins with a collective group improvisation denoted by the symbol in the top left hand corner. This is followed by an unaccompanied solo, denoted by the figure 1; after a while, the group joins the soloist. The piece can then move to an end or a conductor may step in to shape the group's improvisation. After this part, the conductor steps down and either the group begins improvising or a new soloist steps up and the cycle begins again. In performance notes, Burt emphasises that decisions about moving from section to section should be negotiated collectively. Another important aspect is that the group can choose to follow or not follow the conductor based on their assessment of whether the conductor improves the music being made! For me, this piece presents a clear form yet allows the group to make decisions.

Energy

Thinking about conveying energy and atmosphere in scores leads me straight to a multidisciplinary, cross-genre artist from the AACM. I met [Renee Baker](#) in Chicago in 2009 and played with her groups in a variety of venues from the Velvet Lounge to a school gym hall. She brings a distinctive flair and energy to her projects, creating settings where performers can push their technique and artistry. A good example of this is her score *Altered Consciousness 2*.

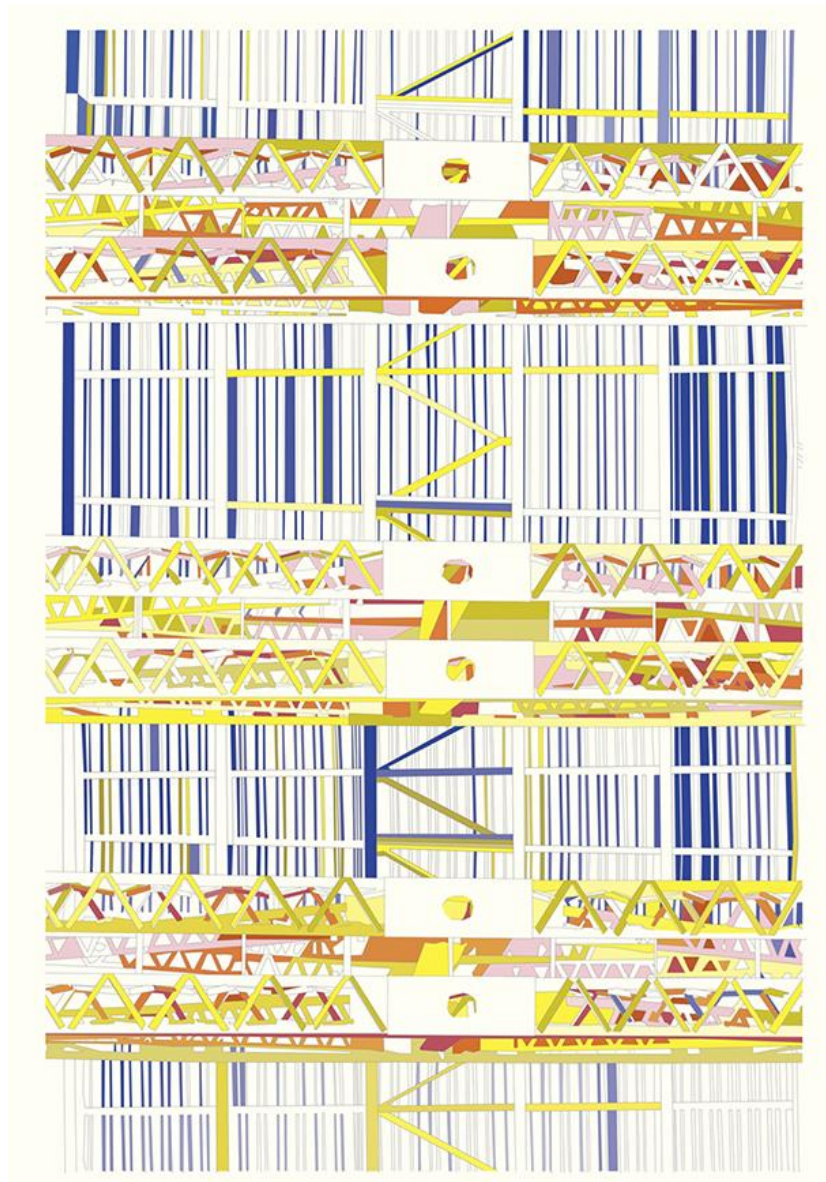


*A page from Renee Baker's Altered Consciousness 2,
a 24 page painted score for chamber ensemble*

Baker's work is simultaneously art and musical score, hung in galleries and read by musicians from the wall. She describes this work as 'emotionally charged' and informed by the aim to create a score that performers can respond to intuitively. Her practice as a composer of graphic scores has been informed by noticing how visual aspects are translated by performers into emotion, dynamics, texture, ranges of sound qualities, as well as harmonic and melodic material. This process of building up a knowledge of how people can respond to visual material and recognising the role of emotion in both interpreting and playing graphic scores is a shared aspect in both of our approaches.

Materiality

The quality of a score, how I perceive the dimensions and tactile-ness of the imagery, has a powerful effect on how I interpret and play it. This example below is from a collaboration by a visual artist ([Jo Ganter](#)) and an improvising musician (GIO saxophonist [Raymond MacDonald](#)). Their work has the goal for both to immerse themselves in the other's discipline and take equal responsibility for images and direction of the resulting music. As with Baker's work, their collaboration has been both performed and exhibited in art galleries.

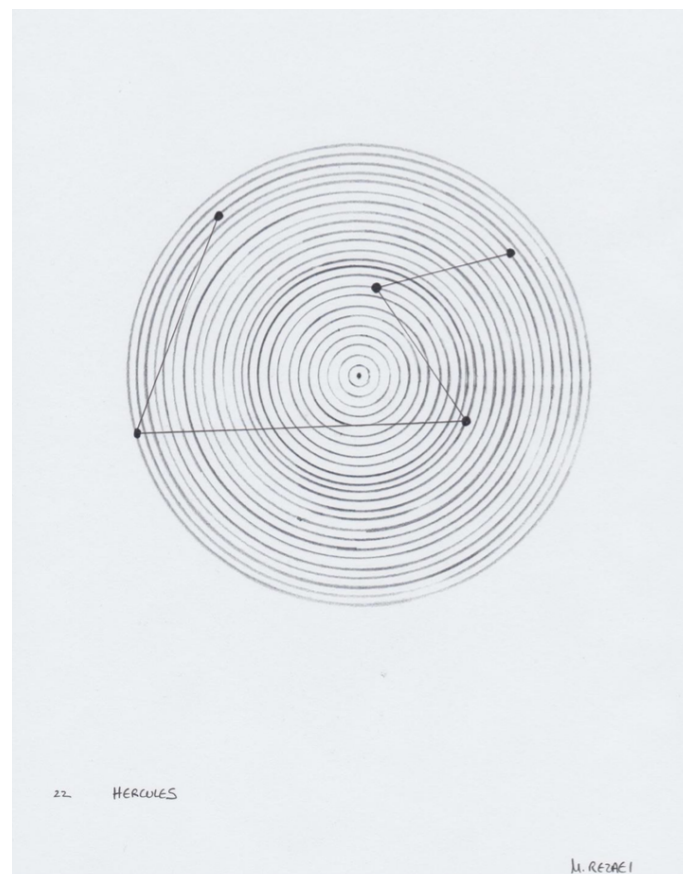


Jo Ganter & Raymond MacDonald, Running Under Bridges

When performing this score, I feel drawn into the detail in the underside of the bridge and I picture my bass becoming a part of a massive sounding structure. This allows me to experiment with my musical role and material. When freely improvising, even though material is spontaneously created, I can sometimes find myself in old habits, where the music I play has a grounding, stabilising function. This score facilitated exploration of metallic sounds through preparing my bass with metal rulers and chopsticks and the mental imagery to occupy a different musical role.

Clarity

An intriguing challenge for me is to create clarity, particularly when an overarching aim is to offer choice and creativity to musicians. In her 2015 graphic score *ANX*, for GIO and The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, [Mariam Rezai](#) skillfully creates space and intensity through a clear narrative. Each player has their own pitch diagram. This is my part:



Una MacGlone's part from Mariam Rezai's ANX

Players are grouped into different constellations, depicting ancient mythological characters. Each group has bespoke dynamics and operates as an independent organism within the larger whole. *ANX* is an immersive experience where sound slowly pulses around a large space. As a player it feels like being inside the middle of dynamic shifting universe. The score creates subtle shifts and relationships; the precision and delicacy in this process is demanding to achieve over a sustained time when improvising freely. These outcomes are of particular interest to me as an important theme in the forthcoming GIOfest collaboration is depicting a distinct and nuanced sense of different Glasgow places and their associated myths.

Fixed material

Another key challenge is integrating and negotiating fixed material, both melodic and rhythmic. [Corey Mwamba](#)'s score was performed by GIO in 2014 as part of the Commonwealth games and shows an innovative approach to offering performers expressive possibilities around and with fixed pitched material.

dare not speak

{ar. m: sm;} *energetic*

$$\begin{aligned} f^\sharp \bar{c}^\sharp. \\ \bar{f}^\sharp d e f^\sharp \bar{b}^b: \\ c \bar{g}. \\ \bar{a} b c^\sharp b^b \bar{f}; \\ c^\sharp \bar{f}^\sharp. \end{aligned}$$

$$c^\sharp f^\sharp \curvearrowright \bar{a} e^{(b)'''} f \bar{c}, e^{(b)'''} d: \bar{b}^{(b)} \curvearrowleft$$

Corey Mwamba, Dare Not Speak

The punctuation symbols function to suggest rhythm and the accent marks denote melodic contour. Material within the $\curvearrowright \dots \curvearrowleft$ symbols forms a cycle. Performers have a choice how they articulate, express and move between notes within the parameters. The layout of the graphic notation is designed to aid memorisation,

taking the music off the page and into the imaginations of the performers. In my experience, I found that when I had internalised the score, I could listen in more detail to others and also hear more playing options for myself. The later aspect is what I understand as the process of creative audiation in other words, imagining multiple musical options that may be played or not. For me, this process forms my experience of 'flow' when improvising.

At this point in my preparations for the opening night of the GIOfest, the elements of the collaboration are spread over floors, Google drives and emails. Before drawing these together, considering others' graphic scores has allowed me to immerse myself in remembering their innovative and diverse strategies for musical creativity. I have presented my key concerns for creating graphic scores thematically as: form; energy; materiality; clarity; and fixed material. However, these are inextricably interlinked, one affects another. Performers can have their own visual, emotional, musical, sensory and aesthetic perception(s) of a score. They can create their own meaning and incorporate this into their interpretation. The possibilities for these diverse perceptions and interpretations is a key reason, for me, in why graphic scores offer exciting potential for both personal and group creativity.

GIOfest XIV took place at Glasgow CCA between 25–27 November 2021. Selected graphic scores performed at the festival will be published on the GIO website <https://www.glasgowimprovisorsorchestra.com/> after the event. In 2022, as part of celebrations marking their twentieth anniversary, GIO will present a retrospective of their work with graphic scores.

SMALL NOTES

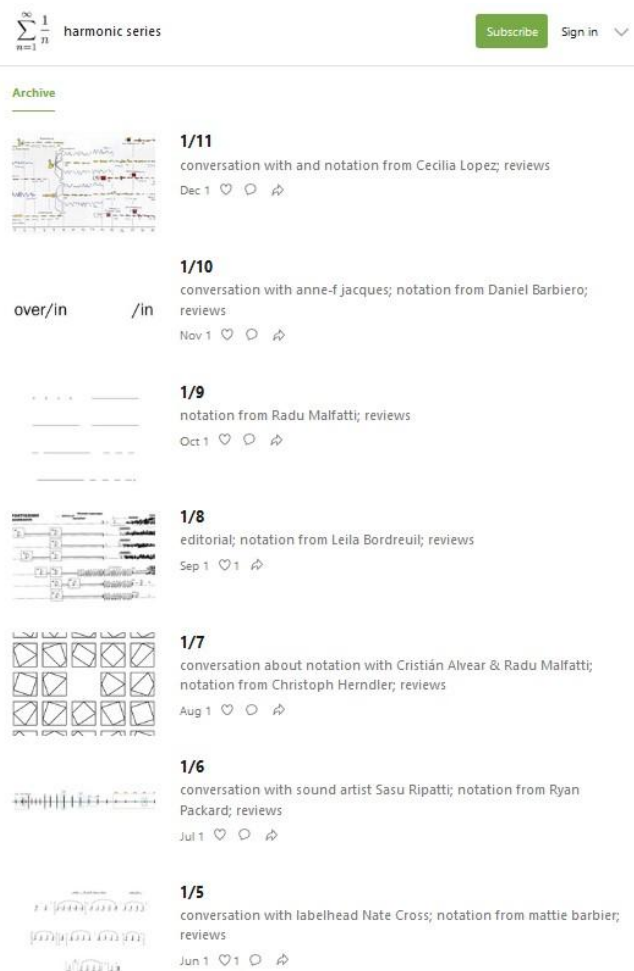
HARMONIC SERIES

Harmonic series is an USA based monthly newsletter and a homepage, being published since the beginning of 2021. Every newsletter features, among other content, a commented notation quote. The archive with thumbnails of notations from all issues already looks impressive - see the illustration to the right.

In the editorial in number 1/8, organizer Keith Prosk wrote this beautiful statement on how new notations can both inform and inspire:

"...access to the notation deeply changes my interpretation and engagement with the sounds it can represent as a listener; there are some recordings I would not be so fussed about if I were not awe-struck by the interpretive possibilities behind the sound that the notation illuminates. It has incalculably increased my appreciation for the ingenuities involved in performance interpretation and composition. Its often intuitive symbologies allow those illiterate in traditional notation - like myself - to meaningfully engage with the score and dilutes a lot of the mystery and the snobbishness around scores".

<https://harmonicseries.substack.com/archive>





GRAPHÈME

Published by Smallest Functional Unit, www.smallestfunctionalunit.com, this is, as the subtitle says, “A publication for experimental music scores”. Founders in 2020 were Tony Buck (AU), Mazen Kerbaj (LB), Magda Mayas (DE), Ute Wassermann (DE) and Racha Gharbieh (LB). The editors combine this publishing with arranging concerts with the music - the first one was held in K28 in Berlin in October 2021.

Scores in this first issue are by Tomomi Adachi, Lotte Anker, Tony Buck & Lloyd Swanton, Marina Cyrino, Tina Douglas, Mazen Kerbaj, Magda Mayas, Phill Niblock, Jon Rose, Ute Wassermann and Nate Wooley. A few scores are readily open for one or more performers of any kind, one is for large orchestra, some are closely related to personal playing practises. In the words of the publishers, composers featured find *“ways to notate and share personal techniques and sonic elements”*.

FOUTRAQUE

by The Noisebringers (Maria Sappho, Brice Catherin, Henry McPherson)

The score on the following two pages was first performed at the GIO fest, arranged by the Glasgow Improvisors Orchestra 25-27 November 2021. GIO conducts weekly open video sessions, and one peak event at the GIO fest was a concert taking place both on the scene and with virtually present participants.

See details in the score instructions. Where instructions say "Follow the Zoom screen!", AR Objects ("Augmented Reality") appeared which played sounds and "semi-directed" the orchestra...

Foutraque

For the Glasgow Improvisers
Orchestra, with love from the
Noisebringers (2021)



This is a not so oratorio, oratorio of personal things. It comes with a time score (see next page) which consists of material to be played, as well as directions as to who will play (the orchestration).

There will be some players in physical form and some players digital on zoom. If you are on Zoom you will see the physical players via web- cameras in the space. If you are in the room you will have TV's to see the Zoom window. There will be a stopwatch in the zoom call, which will sync all players for the score. Please feel free to get up and perform to the zoom cameras if you are in the physical space.

The materials and the orchestration change at different times in the score. If you identify with the current orchestration part in the timeline, then play the material indicated at that moment. Stop playing when you no longer identify with the orchestration. You do not have to play continuously in a section you identify with.

How and why you identify is your own decision, for example 'mothers' is not a rule bound societally normative role. As Brice Catherin would say, 'follow your heart'.

At two points in the score you no longer have materials or orchestration, but the instruction 'follow the zoom screen'. Please do just this. At this point you will be taken on inter-dimensional travel via the international magic of Rachel Joy Weiss. In these sections feel free to respond to what you see and hear freely. But remember to give space, as the inter-dimensional beings will be attempting to reach us at this time (and the speakers they use for communication are not very loud...). Due to the chance of possible turbulence the seatbelt fastened sign will remain on during the duration of this section.

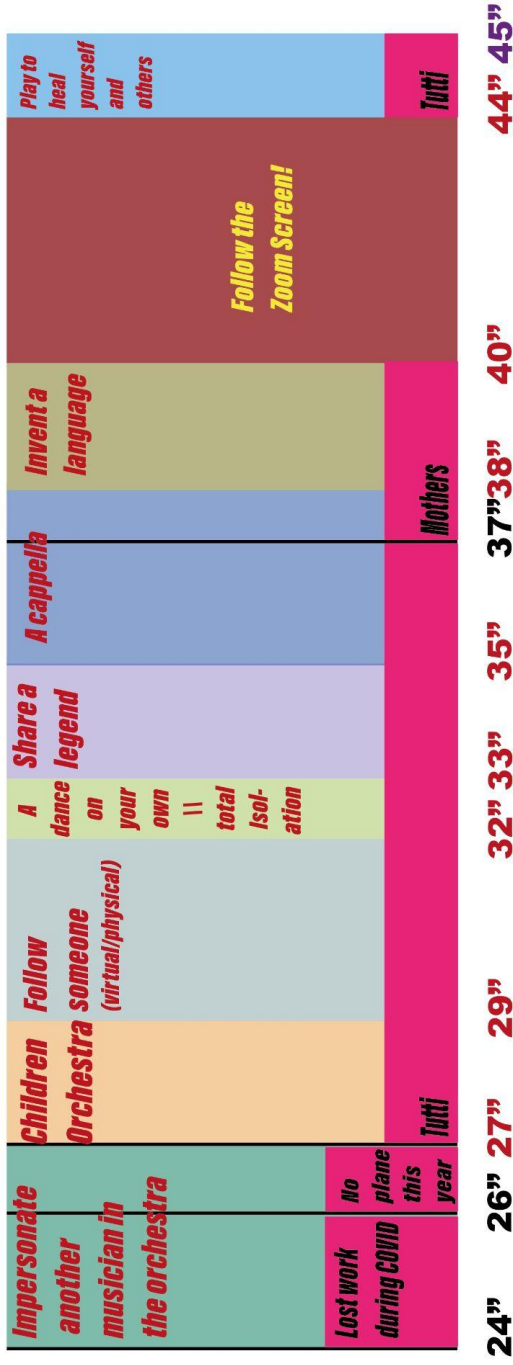
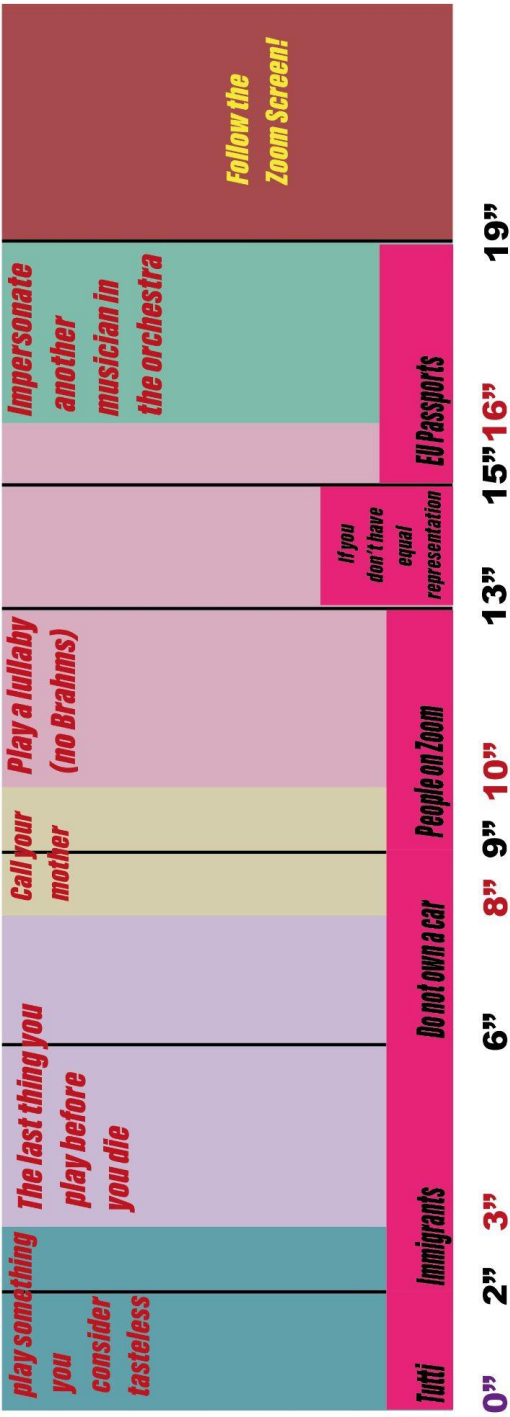
The materials:

1. Play something you consider tasteless
2. The last thing you play before you die
3. Call your mother
4. Play a lullaby (no Brahms)
5. Impersonate another musician in the orchestra
6. Children orchestra
7. Follow someone (virtual/physical)
8. A dance on your own/ total isolation
9. Share a legend
10. A cappella
11. Invent a language
12. Play to heal yourself and others

The orchestration:

1. TUTTI (everyone)
2. Immigrants only
3. Do not own a car
4. People on zoom only
5. Play if you don't have equal representation
6. EU passports
7. Lost work during covid
8. No plane used this year
9. Mothers

for the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, with love from the Noisebringers (2021)



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