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# Opening Opera:

Developing a framework that allows for the interactive creative processes of improvised theatre in the productions of new music-dramas.

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## Abstract

Opening Opera explores creative collaboration and dramatic improvisation in new music-dramas. Looking towards the art of improvised theatre, the aim is to achieve a dramatic process in opera which facilitates a flexible kind of dramaturgy, enabling singers and directors to lead and inform certain creative processes that are normally in the hands of the operatic composer and/or librettist alone. By developing particular unorthodox scoring methods, along with specific rehearsal schedule considerations that support these flexible processes, the composer attempts to create not *improvised opera*, but what could be called an *open opera*, where the compositional focus is working with a free vocal line with active accompaniment. This framework is one in which the composer provides the parameters and material for dramatic and compositional flexibility, and then ‘takes a step back’ during a collaborative and improvisational process, whilst retaining sufficient leadership and creative authority to realise the overarching structure satisfactorily.

In order to develop said unorthodox scoring methods and processes, the creative team explored and informed structural, dramatic, technical and musical aspects of new material, utilising the performers’ specialised training and experience in an *interactive* creative process. This exploration brought up questions such as: how to allow an open process such as this one while still attempting to retain overarching artistic control; what are the parameters that the composer will need to determine (i.e. keep ‘closed’); and what are the parameters that he must allow to be spontaneous, improvised or open?

By opening up the process in this way, interesting genre specific problems were exposed that are more often than not left implicit rather than explicit by creators of opera. This exploration reveals knowledge beneficial to tutors, composers, librettists, singers, conductors and directors of music-dramas.

This inquiry is primarily grounded in several methods extracted and modified from improvised theatre, opera, and open-scored compositions of the mid-20th century.

The musical and qualitative data discussed in this commentary emerged during the preparation, writing and production of the author’s original music-drama studies. Studies include excerpts from two chamber operas; *A Glacier’s Requiem* (2013) (or “Bráð” in the original Icelandic<sup>1</sup>), and *Évariste* (2014); a short monodrama study, *Solitude 1* (2015); and a chamber opera presented in its entirety, *After the Fall* (2017).

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced /b r aʊ θ/ (<http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/phoneticsymbolsforenglish.htm>)

The commentary is divided into four parts.

- PART 1 will introduce the author's personal reasons for conducting this research, along with giving a brief theoretical framework to the primary methodology.
- PART 2 opens with a definition of collaborative processes, leading into an analysis and contextualisation from opera, ending with references to other relevant vocal and instrumental music.
- PART 3 comprises compositional and performance analysis of original portfolio studies.
- PART 4 concludes with thoughts about a potential compositional aesthetic that might derive from this framework, as well as providing considerations for the performance of future *open operas*.

# PART 1

## 1.1 Personal prelude

The reason for this academic inquiry lies in my long-standing desire for an interactive creative process during the rehearsals of new operatic compositions. I want to be able to develop the dramatic *moment* in a spontaneous way, in real-time during rehearsals, but the traditional musical score is usually an obstruction to such a process. In other words, I want to work with *reactions* between, and the *relationship* of, the characters in my chamber operas, developing their relationships in collaboration with my performers during rehearsals. In my work, I define this process as *real-time paralinguistic manipulation*.

## 1.2 Real-time paralinguistic manipulation

How characters are created and developed is not just in *what* they say (the scripted and/or scored material), but also *how* they say it and how they *react* to what others say. As the composer, by granting my performers the licence to vary, for instance, paralinguistics, silences, and pace (individual tempi of written material) I could achieve such character developments.

Let's imagine two performers on stage. Performer A is portraying an army general, while B is a private soldier. They are following a script, and the two first lines of the written dialogue go like thus:

*General: Please, sit down.*

*Soldier: Thank you, sir.*

Even though the two lines seem to outline a fairly straightforward and somewhat pleasant exchange between the two characters, these lines have the potential of playing out in near countless different ways dramatically. The performer portraying the general could, for instance, decide to be threatening by use of alpha posture, stern eye contact and loud voice, screaming “please, sit down!” (the “please” maybe elongated, sounding quite ironic in that case), forcing the soldier into submission. How the soldier reacts to this sets the tone for their following relationship. The soldier could shout back in a military manner “thank you, sir” and then sit down, establishing a fairly orthodox, professional relationship between them. However, if the soldier replies quietly before sitting down, muttering to him-/herself like a grumpy teenager would, with the words trailing off, their relationship becomes more complex, and quite comical. Even more complex relationship would be established if the soldier replied in a very calm, quiet and slow voice “thank you, sir”, *without* sitting down. What has been suggested there is that the general and soldier might not be actual general and soldier at all. Maybe we are witnessing a couple’s roleplaying game.

It is even more interesting if we start over and turn *both* characters into veteran generals standing in a room, both with the goal of trying to get the other one to be the first one to sit down on a low stool, which would in turn assert the dominance of the one who remains standing, claiming him/her the winner of the social situation, and create a hierarchy between them. Their only written dialogue would be the following two lines, but they could use them as often as they wanted until either one of them wins:

*General A: Please, sit down.*

*General B: Thank you, sir.*

*General B: Please, sit down.*

*General A: Thank you, sir.*

They are too close in rank (or “status”<sup>2</sup>) for either one of them to directly order the other to “sit down!”, but the scene *has* to end with someone sitting down. This could spur many different versions of manipulation and irritation from the characters. Now the paralinguistic properties of the speech (e.g. speaking tempo, intonational contours), their body language, interruptions, and silences become much more important in conveying subtle shades of meaning.

These examples are only that, examples, but developing those shades of meaning with my performers and directors is exactly what I want to be able to work on in my rehearsals and workshops of my new operatic work, developing these paralinguistic reactions and character developments, allowing us to co-develop characters and their relationships.

To support an ease of reference, I call this dramatic process *real-time paralinguistic manipulation*.

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<sup>2</sup> “Status” of a character is a combination of what he/she is and what he/she does. “Status is a confusing term unless it’s understood as something one does. You may be low in social status, but play high, and vice versa.” (Johnstone, 1979, p. 35)

If the examples I previously laid out were composed using a traditional score, with the singers' musical parts fixed temporally (vertically) to all other music happening simultaneously, I as a composer would be pushed to decide on the paralinguistic messages of the characters' relationships before getting a chance to develop it with the group. This might not sound like a bad thing to some (or even most) composers, and there are of course great composers who produce great pieces that way, but to me, simply because of the way I prefer to work, it feels limiting. I feel it deprives me of potential happy accidents that would otherwise pop up during workshops and rehearsals, which could lend the final performance a certain extra glimmer of exciting immediacy, given that the right framework and processes are in place.

### **1.3 Active accompaniment**

Not only do I wish to work with these specific dramatic parameters as *free* parameters, but I also wish to find a way to work with them in an *active* musical setting, with *active* accompaniment (as I personally choose to call it). Active accompaniment is all accompaniment that does not rest or sustain a note or a chord, during a soloist's performance (further example given in 2.2.3). Therefore, in my compositions, I am excluding all styles where during the time of a soloist's performance, the accompaniment rests, or sustains a note or a chord, which is what happens for instance in traditional cadenzas (Michael, 2003, p. 132) and recitatives (more on this in 2.2). Much of my interest, and some of the novelty of this research, is trying to master the balancing act of creating *closed* active accompaniment with a dramatically *open*, but still pre-composed, vocal part.

The journey towards achieving this particular interactive creative process unearthed considerations regarding scoring, resulting musical aesthetics, performers' training, and rehearsal planning.

### **1.4 My experience of two different performance genres**

The original catalyst for my research is based in my experience with two different performance genres, classical singing and improvised theatre, and a quick introduction to my experience of these is important to explaining why I felt the need to then later dig deeper into the possible opening-up of opera.

I studied these two radically different performance arts parallel to one another in Reykjavík, Iceland 2001-2006, before going into a BA in Composition Studies in 2006.

### 1.4.1 Improvised theatre

In my theatre troupe we would create devised plays, as well as compete nationally in live improvised theatre, better known as Theatre Sports. In the early 2000s I was lucky enough to have outstanding teammates, and with them I won the national title. Theatre Sports is a seemingly unpredictable performance art where opposing teams of four actors challenge one another to perform themed improvised scenes based on (for example) audience suggestions, with ratings given by a panel of three judges. This performance art builds on methods, developed in huge part by Keith Johnstone in the 1950s and 60s, that enable actors to participate in playful and collaborative impromptu improvisations.

### 1.4.2 Keith Johnstone and The Theatre Machine

“Keith, [William] Gaskill says, started to teach his own particular style of improvisation, much of it based on [...] word association, free associations, [and] intuitive responses [...]. All his work has been to encourage the rediscovery of the imaginative response in the adult; the refinding of the power of the child’s creativity.” Keith believed that “a director should never demonstrate anything to an actor, that a director should allow the actor to make his own discoveries.” (Johnstone, p. 24) With the use of specific exercises he developed, many with the goal of understanding and applying dramatic *status* and *spontaneity* effectively and collaboratively, his group was able to perform without preparing anything, “and everything was like a jazzed-up drama class.” Keith and his collaborators called themselves *The Theatre Machine*, and the British Council sponsored them to do a tour around Europe. Soon they became very influential. (ibid, p. 27)

These approaches to performance heavily influenced my attitude towards collaborative practises.

### 1.4.3 Classical singing

Meanwhile, at the Reykjavik Academy of Vocal Arts I studied some of the core elements of classical singing such as German lieder, Italian arias, as well as delving into 20th century arrangements of Icelandic folk songs. I attended performances of major works such as *La Boheme*, (Mimi’s death is still engraved in my mind), and partook in productions of *The Magic Flute*, and *The Marriage of Figaro*, under the baton of much respected Icelandic Opera founder Garðar Cortes. I was fascinated by the operas’ melodic beauty and the many potential ways that music could enhance and affect drama. I was also fascinated by the polarity between my two performance art studies: one a highly social and spontaneous process and the other highly directed and polished. On an intellectual level, the technical differences intrigued me (and they still do) and got me thinking about the dramatic infrastructure of opera and music in general. It inspired me to dig deeper into the possible different ways of creating and performing music-theatre.

These early operatic productions in which I partook were good experience for a young singer, but they were also highly traditional. Unlike new works, *La Bobéme*, *The Magic Flute* and *The Marriage of Figaro* have been performed near-countless times and therefore imply strong performance and production traditions. While I still enjoyed the musical and dramatic powers of the operatic pieces, my experiences of improvised theatre made me yearn for a more open process, where an enhanced creative conversation would be taking place between all participants. I felt constrained within the bars of the traditional score. I wanted to explore the drama found in the music in my own way, toss it and turn it, unearth my personal take on it in such a way that I felt could upset the traditional connotations of repertoire opera.

As a result, in this research I have sought to create a framework that allows elements of dramatic improvisation into the production of operatic works. I do not perceive that this would necessarily be a fundamentally better way to make opera, but it would simply be a different approach.

Even though I am exploring the possible combination of processes from improvised theatre on one hand, and classical opera on the other, I am not attempting to create *improvised opera*. In my *open operas* I am the composer of the music. The goal is to allow my performance group to freely work with very specific *dramatic* parameters only, but such freedom does of course unavoidably affect parts of the musical output, creating a certain musical aesthetic where *chance* plays a role in the alignment of pre-composed musical material. *Improvised opera* on the other hand is a piece of impromptu operatic work where performers make up the musical material themselves, often with clearly defined and pre-determined musical styles as starting point and framework for improvisation (Wilén 2017).

# PART 2

This part is in three main sections.

- Distinction of collaborative processes.
- Analysis of relevant opera and recitatives.
- Analysis of other relevant vocal and instrumental music.

## 2.1 Creative dynamics and processes

Another way of analysing and understanding the main differences of these two performance arts is to recognise improvised theatre as a *collaborative* art form, but classical singing as a *directive* art form (in the form it is taught within conservatoires, more often than not).

A helpful three-stage distinction of these creative dynamics was made by Hayden and Windsor:

“DIRECTIVE: Here the notation has the traditional function as instructions for the musicians provided by the composer. The traditional hierarchy of the composer and performer(s) is maintained and the composer aims to completely determine the performance through the score. [...]

INTERACTIVE: Here the composer is involved more directly in negotiation with musicians and/or technicians. The process is more interactive, discursive and reflective, with more input from collaborators than in the directive category, but ultimately, the composer is still the author. Some aspects of the performance are more ‘open’...

COLLABORATIVE: Here the development of the music is achieved by a group through a collective decision-making process. There is no singular author or hierarchy of roles.”

Hayden & Windsor, 2007, p. 33

One end of the continuum, the *directive* process, could be characterised for instance by works such as the aforementioned Puccini’s *La Boheme*, Mozart’s *The Magic Flute* and *The Marriage of Figaro*, but also Britten’s *Turn of the Screw* and *Curlew River* (to name only a tiny fraction of eligible pieces). We will take a closer look at these two works by Britten in 2.2.1 and 2.2.2.

### 2.1.1 Collaborative processes

At the other end of this continuum, *collaborative* processes can be found most prominently in e.g. improvised theatre, but also in the works of composers like Michael David Picknett in his devised *Apologetics* project (2012), and David Young's *Not Music Yet* (2012) where an abstract watercolour painting sets vague parameters for improvisation (Kanga, 2014). Despite Picknett and Young being named the composers of their pieces/projects, the nature of the process behind their realisation seems nevertheless to lean heavily on the side of a collaborative process. That is to say, there is no score, and the material is created by the performer or group. As opposed to a *pure* collaborative or devised process, in these pieces, there is "a director" (the composer), who then reacts to the improvised output. Picknett describes it as *directed devising*:

"Directed devising is where one person takes on the role of director, with overall responsibility for the process and project. The director takes every decision on the project alone after extensive input from the performers." (Picknett, 2014, p. 10)

Picknett goes on and cites Heddon and Milling when he says that "*devising* is a 'mode of work in which *no* script - neither written play-text nor performance score - exists prior to the work's creation by the company.'" In other words, the work is entirely created through the process. (Picknett, 2014, p. 12)

*Directed devising* can also be found in the world of contemporary dance. What follows are examples from the working practises of three different generations of choreographers: Jo Meredith, Wayne McGregor, and Pina Bausch.

Choreographer Jo Meredith describes the process of creating her airport set dance piece *Please Wait Whilst We Try To Connect You*, premiered at Wilton's Music Hall in London at the 2014 *Strike!* festival. She has developed a way of working where she'll come up with a theme as a starting point of what she wants to explore.

"I usually put the music on and then I improvise [on the theme], and then I get my dancer[s] to feed off what I've made. I improvise, they learn through doing the movement. Then what I usually do, based on what my theme is, I'll then set them creative tasks to try and mine and get the kind of material I am after, from them... [...] in order for me to be creative, I feel like I actually almost need to let go of where it will go in the piece, and just make stuff. Cause, otherwise, I feel like I might be trying to make something, and too early on its becoming too specific, and too literal. And if you are too literal, I think you kinda loose something. And if you have that idea of what you wanted at the very beginning and then you just go for that, you're just missing out on other things I think."

Meredith, 2017

Once the piece starts to take shape, she'll change things like the focus, who is looking where for instance, to get the material to say what she wants it to say.

Celebrated choreographer Wayne McGregor describes his process like creating a “physical alphabet [with the dancers] that’s different from one piece to the next. Then I create the composition.” (Hale, 2004)

Similarly, “the core of [choreographer Pina] Bausch’s new process [in the 1970’s onwards] was an approach to collaborative creation based on drawing material from her dancers through a process of asking questions. [...] The dancers answer the questions through spoken dialogue or movement improvisations, from which Bausch selects material to work on.” (Picknett, 2014, p. 17)

*Directed devising* has been experimented with within contemporary opera as well. The English group the *Voicings Collective* explores approaches to composing within the ensemble, transcending the formats of traditional opera making and utilising the skills of a multifaceted group of performers. The company aims to interrogate the democracy of devising: work is created collectively, shaped by the skills, creative practices, stories and unique voices of the individual artists taking part. Each step of the collective creative process (text, music, staging) has a director so to speak (writer, composer, stage director) but their role is only to be catalysts for creation, not to become the authors of the work. The work in the end is the group’s.

Compared to my own work, there definitely *is* either a written play-text or a performance score present in all my compositions, and they can therefore not fall under the distinction of *collaborative* or *devised* works. Although I find collaborative processes fascinating in theory, I found them to be incompatible with my desire to pre-compose the actual musical material (the accompaniment and most parameters of vocal parts) used in my works.

### **2.1.2 Interactive processes**

I do however want to sustain a particular level of dramatic unpredictability in rehearsals, allowing the performer(s) to influence to a greater degree the development of drama, interactions and characters. I wish to encourage, and be able to react to in real-time, types of musical and dramatic events, or happy accidents, which have the chance of occurring once the whole performance team is in the same room, exploring and playing around with different dramatic treatments of pre-composed musical material, while simultaneously being accompanied by *active* musical accompaniment. A few favourable events could then be accepted into the piece as a whole, informing the composition and drama, and then rehearsed in a fixed/strict manner for public performance. Or, alternatively, should the performance team wish, the process could also be left open for live public performance.

This seems to be in line with an *interactive* process as described before by Hayden and Windsor.

Such a process is achieved in musical styles like the traditional *recitative*, and works like *The lady in waiting* from Peter Maxwell Davies' monodrama *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, *Stimmung* by Stockhausen, *Anuras* by Jonathan Cole, Terry Riley's *In C* and *Captain Jack has the last word* from his *Cadenza on the night plain* string quartet, and Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*. These works will be discussed in an upcoming section of this chapter.

## 2.2 Recitative and active accompaniment

The “dry” *secco* or simple recitative is an operatic tradition which does indeed have the capacity to support creative interactivity and real-time paralinguistic manipulation, but not active accompaniment. If we consider its traditional dramatic utility then dry recitative is used for moments in opera where the story needs to be moved onwards and the shape of the sung line often imitates elements of speech, as opposed to the more lyrically sung and contemplative aria format. The drama is able to be moved more effectively onwards because musical texture takes a step back, so that text can take clear precedence: i.e. music gives way to text. This is achieved in various ways: e.g. with held note accompaniment which sits still and waits for the vocalists to finish their delivery, with complete rests in the accompaniment where the orchestra or ensemble might only occasionally interjected with short chords and accents in between vocalists' phrases, or with *basso continuo*. In that space, the classic score is no longer the same obstacle to the aforementioned dramatic process.

This elbow room from the accompaniment in the score allows the singers (in collaboration with the conductor and director) to freely shape the delivery of drama. It gives space for the possibility of various dramatic renderings. In such cases, with such stripped-back accompaniment, the free manipulation of the pre-composed vocal lines' paralinguistics and pace is relatively easily achieved. The dry recitative, as a scoring method, does therefore theoretically support the desired interactive dramatic process of real-time paralinguistic manipulation.

However, this inquiry strives to achieve more than just this process in a vacuum. The goal is to achieve active accompaniment alongside this process. The dry recitative does therefore not suffice in this instance. It is not considered to support active accompaniment as it is defined here, since it falls under the distinction of a musical style where during the time of a soloist's performance the accompaniment rests, or sustains a note or a chord (see 1.3). On the other hand, where active accompaniment does occur in music that is traditionally scored, the vocal line is temporally stuck. The score in those instances is detailed in its rhythms' vertical alignment, leaving no room for real-time paralinguistic manipulation in the performance without upsetting the musical performance.

With that being the case, it is necessary to consider opera, monodramas and other relevant works that contain experimental approaches to performance freedoms.

## 2.2.1 The Turn of the Screw

In act 1 scene 1 of Benjamin Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* (1954) a young governess (soprano) is traveling to Bly house, where she is to take up a new position as carer of two children. On the way there, she is feeling apprehensive about the whole affair.

SCENE I THE JOURNEY  
DIE REISE The lights go up on the interior of a coach. Das Licht blendet auf und beleuchtet das Innere einer Kutsche. Die Gouvernante ist im Reisekleid.

Free recitative

Cl. in A *pp*

Bsn. *pp*

Hrn. in F *pp*

T.D.

Perc. Timp. *pp* always in regular time

GOVERNESS

Near-ly there. Ve-ry soon I shall know, I shall know what's in store for me.  
Fast schon da. Und sehr bald seh ich klar, seh ich klar, was vor mir steht.

Free recitative

I. *pp*

VI. *pp*

II. *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

D.B. *pp*

Figure 1: Act 1 scene 1 from Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*.

The soprano is accompanied by timpani, and their vertical alignment is essentially free. The only guide Britten gives is that...

\* The quavers marked [...] can, if necessary, be repeated to fit with the stage.

"The quavers marked [with a dashed bracket below] can, if necessary, be repeated to fit with the stage."

For the phrase/bar presented in figure 1, and the subsequent six phrases/bars in the score, this marking appears on the second to last, or last, quaver of the timpani phrase. Additionally, the timpani is given the instruction to play "always in regular time", while the soprano alone has fermatas marked on rests before and after her phrase. She has the option to linger on the rests, depending on the desired staging.

Meanwhile, the timpani moves on, and then waits for her on one of the last quavers before they both move on to the next phrase. Here, the soprano (and by extension the director) are given the *option* to be playful with this fermata rest. Their time for stage action during this moment is (theoretically) limitless, but after the first fermata rest the vocal line is notated using accurate note values, which implies that Britten wants it performed with a particular shape – but not overly strictly because this whole section is still marked as *free* recitative. The soprano should not, and need not, worry that she might be out of vertical alignment with the timpani and can carry on with her *free-ish* dramatic interpretation of the written vocal line.

## 2.2.2 Curlew River

Another Britten opera, *Curlew River* (1964), contains a famous sign, the curlew sign: 

“The sign (curlew sign) over a note or rest shows that the performer must listen and wait till the other performers have reached the next barline, or meeting-point – i.e., the note or rest can be longer or shorter than its written value.”

Benjamin Britten, in the introduction to the score of *Curlew River*.



Figure 2: *Curlew River* by Benjamin Britten, from page 17 in the full score.

The sign in *Curlew River* is usually used in conjunction with a recitative style vocal line accompanied by freely repeated figures. In figure 3, the Traveller (baritone) is free to sing his line without considering any strict vertical alignment with the accompaniment, but he must wait on the word “faced” (on pitch A) until the ensemble gets ready to continue onto the next 2/4 bar. The freedom granted here by the curlew sign is therefore very similar, if not exactly the same, to that of a traditional recitative, and the sign has a nearly identical role to that of a traditional fermata. The only distinction seems to be that the sign is used where active musical parts may drift apart, and the sign then functions as a point for the performer in question to sync back up with the rest of the ensemble. The sign should help the soloist knowing exactly when these moments occur in the music, but it allows him only short duration for narrative freedom each





### 2.3.2 Anuras

In his piece *Anuras* (2014) for voice and three string instruments in the same register, Jonathan Cole creates a framework for relatively free performance interaction and leadership:

“In recent years I’ve become fascinated in finding ways of involving performers in making decisions during performances. The main reasons for this are an attempt to intensify the listening experiences between performers and also wanting the form of the piece to be spontaneously created within the performance itself. Both of these, I feel, increase the concentration within a performance which communicates itself to listeners as a structure being formed within the present moment.”

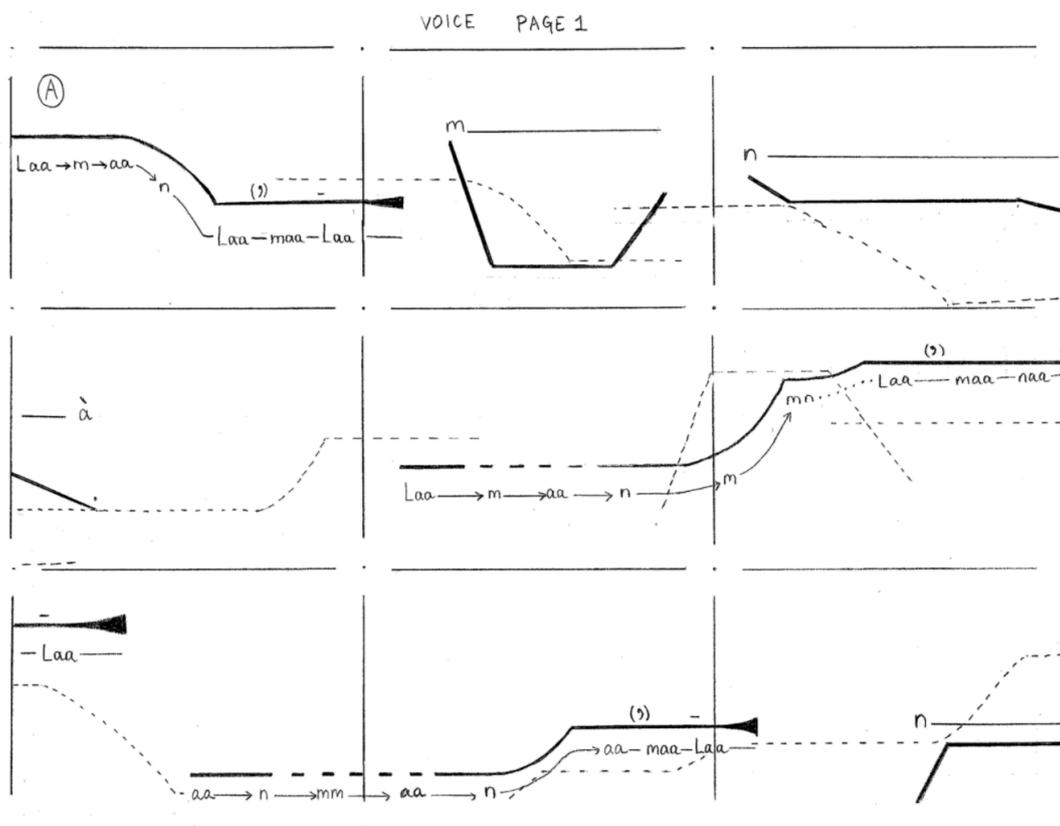


Figure 5: First page from the voice part of Jonathan Cole's "Anuras".

“Each page consists of 9 bars, each of which lasts between 15 and 25 seconds (this amount of time is flexible and can change throughout the piece.) In each bar the individual players music is notated in a thick line, whilst some of the lines of the other performers are also notated [using a dashed line] [...] From A [first bar top left] the register of each bar is roughly a minor 6<sup>th</sup> (no more than) [...]

On three occasions during the piece, chosen [by the performer] between pages 3 and 7 (there are 7 pages in total), the soprano claps loudly in groups of two, three or five semiquavers. At these points the string players immediately play the next two lines of their parts as quickly and loudly as possible. When they reach the end of the second line they return to the previous quiet dynamic and sustain that note waiting

until the singer reaches that point in the score before continuing. The location of these moments in the piece should not be decided in advance of the performance. The simplicity and consistency of the notated material in *Anuras* allows, I believe, for such overtly dramatic interruptions to become part of the natural continuity of the music, establishing an opposition to the linear unfolding of material whilst also demanding a high degree of concentration from the performers.”

Jonathan Cole

The singer is able to lead the performance up to a point, with the string trio following her cues, and her expanding or condensing of the bars’ duration (they can follow her line in their parts). But, unlike other pieces mentioned so far, *Anuras* is a piece without any text, so it could be argued that there is no drama per se to work with. The scoring method - if applied to a piece with text - does however invite the possibility of *real-time paralinguistic manipulation*.

### 2.3.3 The Great Learning

→ sing 8 IF  
sing 5 THE ROOT  
sing 13(f3) BE IN CONFUSION  
sing 6 NOTHING  
sing 5 (f1) WILL  
sing 8 BE  
sing 8 WELL  
sing 7 GOVERNED  
hum 7

→ sing 8 THE SOLID  
sing 8 CANNOT BE  
sing 9 (f2) SWEEP AWAY  
sing 8 AS  
sing 17(f1) TRIVIAL  
sing 6 AND  
sing 8 NOR  
sing 8 CAN  
sing 17(f1) TRASH  
sing 8 BE ESTABLISHED AS  
sing 9 (f2) SOLID  
sing 5 (f1) IT JUST  
sing 4 DOES NOT  
sing 6 (f1) HAPPEN  
hum 3 (f2)

→ speak 1 MISTAKE NOT CLIFF FOR  
MORASS AND TREACHEROUS BRAMBLE

**NOTATION**  
→ The leader gives a signal and all enter concertedly at the same moment. The second of these signals is optional; those wishing to observe it should gather to the leader and choose a new note and enter just as at the beginning (see below).  
“sing 9 (f2) SWEEP AWAY” means: sing the words “SWEEP AWAY” on a length-of-a-breath note (syllables freely disposed) nine times; the same note each time; of the nine notes two (any two) should be loud, the rest soft. After each note take in breath and sing again.  
“hum 7” means: hum a length-of-a-breath note seven times; the same note each time; all soft.  
“speak 1” means: speak the given words in steady tempo all together, in a low voice, once (follow the leader).

**PROCEDURE**  
Each chorus member chooses his own note (silently) for the first line (if eight times). All enter together on the leader’s signal. For each subsequent line choose a note that you can hear being sung by a colleague. It may be necessary to move to within earshot of certain notes. The note, once chosen, must be carefully retained. Time may be taken over the choice. If there is no note or only the note you have just been singing, or only a note or notes that you are unable to sing, choose your note for the next line freely. Do not sing the same note on two consecutive lines. Each singer progresses through the text at his own speed. Remain stationary for the duration of a line; move around only between lines. All must have completed “hum 3 (f2)” before the signal for the last line is given. At the leader’s discretion this last line may be omitted.

Figure 6: Paragraph 7 of Cornelius Cardew's *The Great Learning*.

In *The Great Learning* (1968) Cornelius Cardew uses a type of *interactive* process for realisation which Michael Nyman calls “people processes”, “...which allow the performers to move through given or suggested material, each at his own speed.” (Nyman, 1999, p. 6) The score is a *word score*, with no actual pitches or rhythms notated, and functions also as the part from which all performers perform; i.e. the score and part are the same document. Nyman cites Michael Parsons when he describes the process which emerges when each person reads the same notation: “The idea of one and the same activity being done simultaneously by a number of people, so that everyone does it slightly differently, ‘unity’ becoming ‘multiplicity’, gives one a very economical form of notation – it is only necessary to specify one procedure and the variety comes from the way everyone does it differently. This is an example of making use of ‘hidden resources’ in the sense of individual differences (rather than talents or abilities)...” (ibid, p. 6).

Cardew directs each chorus member to choose his own note (silently). For each subsequent line they should individually choose a note that they can hear being sung by a colleague. “*Sing 9 (f2) SWEPT AWAY* means: sing the words SWEPT AWAY on a length-of-a-breath note (syllables freely disposed) nine times; the same note each time; of the nine notes two (any two) [f2] should be loud; the rest soft.” You are allowed to move around the performance space between lines to better hear the different pitches being produced. You are not allowed to sing the same note on two consecutive lines. “Each singer progresses through the text at his own speed.”

The outcome is something that might be called a *sound sculpture*. A wall of sound, where an individual sound only occasionally rises out from the fog, before assimilating again into the busy, *active*, web.

The application of this approach to this inquiry is only implicit, but still present. It simply serves as an example of a piece which helped me think ‘outside the score’, when trying to achieve my own process.

#### 2.3.4 In C

Terry Riley’s *In C* (1964) is another example of a piece that presents all performers with the same notation.

“All performers play from the same page of 53 melodic patterns. [...] Patterns are to be played consecutively with each performer having the freedom to determine how many times he or she will repeat each pattern before moving on to the next. There is no fixed rule as to the number of repetitions a pattern may have...”

Riley, 1964, p. 2

This influence of ‘one part for all’ has been adopted in *Opening Opera* in the *mobile scores* of my chamber opera *After the Fall* (3.7). In *In C*, spontaneous events happen, deriving from the choices made by the performers.

“One of the joys of IN C is the interaction of the players in polyrhythmic combinations that spontaneously arise between patterns. Some quite fantastic shapes will arise and disintegrate as the group moves through the piece when it is properly played.”

ibid

A considerable number of parameters are left in the hands of the performers. This includes dynamics, tempo and octave transpositions.



Figure 7: Terry Riley's *In C*.

2.3.5 Cadenza on the Night Plain

2nd Violin - play every third cycle

Vn.2

Va. relentlessly to end

Vc. relentlessly to end

541

1st Violin Phrases (Rest at least one or more cycles between phrases.)  
with Afro lift

[A]

[B]

[C]

Score -56- Cadenza

[D]

[E]

[F]

[G]

[H]

[I]

A performance can end on any violin solo or pattern in between.  
Solos [A] through [I] can be recycled as often as desired.

Terry Riley

Figure 8: Terry Riley's Cadenza on the Night Plain: Captain Jack has the last word.

*Captain Jack has the last word* is the last movement of Terry Riley's *Cadenza on the Night Plain* (1984) string quartet. It features very sparse material for the second violin, viola and cello – a single 4/2 bar which is repeated as often as necessary – while the first violin has nine solo mobiles to play, marked [A] through [I]. The “performance can end on any violin solo or pattern in between. Solo [A] through [I] can be recycled [played] as often as desired.” If the Kronos Quartet recording from 1985 is any indication, the first violin doesn't have to play the mobiles in the given sequence either, but can jump between them as the soloist sees fit. This gives the soloist added expressive freedom, while the accompaniment keeps on rolling underneath until the soloist's desired end. The tempo is approximately crotchet = 110, but the score doesn't indicate whether the soloist should adhere strictly to that tempo or not. David Harrington, the soloist on the 1985 recording, seems to take some liberties with the tempo, which lends the music an exciting glimmer of immediacy, which is also the anticipated outcome of my own desired process.

## 2.4 A meeting-place: Bringing processes from improvised theatre into operatic production

I wanted to search for a *meeting-place* for improvised theatre and opera; a space where I could encourage these two art forms to meet. A *meeting-place* where they could interact, while certain glimmers of their original and exciting identities are kept intact.

The American psychologist Robert Keith Sawyer, an expert on creativity and innovation, defines improvised theatre performance in these terms:

“Improvisational theatre dialogues represent the extreme of unpredictability and contingency results in performance that, at each moment, have a combinatorial complexity: A large number of next actions is possible, and each one of those actions could result in the subsequent flow of the performance going in a radically different direction. At each moment the performer can choose from a wide range of actions that are consistent with the performance up to that point; a performer's action cannot be predicted by the other performers because there are so many potential creative acts, and the range of potential performances that might emerge multiplies from moment to moment.”

Sawyer R. K., 2003, p. 7

This definition contains three main elements.

In improvised theatre we find:

- the extreme of unpredictability,
- that each action could result in the performance going in a radically different direction,
- that a performer's actions cannot be predicted by the other performers.

According to Sawyer, backed up by my own personal experience, here we are presented with one of the most ‘open’, and unpredictable performance arts. But it needs to be noted that even though it is unpredictable at its core, and often seems to be so to the untrained spectator, Johnstone (1979) explains that performers can be trained in particular methods of e.g. *status transactions*, *advancing*, *accepting*, *storytelling*, *free-association*, and *non-association* which helps guide the unpredictability away from becoming an unentertaining mess.

Sawyer’s definition for a scored and conducted performance contrasts strongly with the one of improvised theatre:

“Scored and conducted ensembles [...] have an extreme degree of shared structure (the score of the piece, shared understanding about performance practise), and they have a well-specified problem (to perform the piece accurately and with an appropriate interpretation). In this sense, they represent the opposite extreme from [improvisational theatre].”

Johnstone, 1979, p. 176

Here I wish to highlight the following:

- Scored and conducted ensembles represent the opposite extreme from improvised theatre.

Even though we can find a relative amount of performative and interpretive flexibility within the genre and style of traditional operatic performance, the genre does nonetheless inhabit the most ‘closed’ end of the performance spectrum presented by Sawyer. In order to find the meeting place I seek, the research seeks to pull opera closer towards dramatic improvisation, closer towards the “extreme of unpredictability.”

The attempt is therefore to find a meeting place between these two aforementioned extreme ends of the controlled and the unpredictable where the process of *real-time paralinguistic manipulation* and *active accompaniment* can happen simultaneously.

### 2.4.1 Improvisation and opera: micro and macro

I will begin by presenting a broad definition of improvisation, and then relate that definition to my inquiry.

I will draw on the distinction made by Dolan, et al (2013) by dividing improvisation into the broad realms of:

the 'how'  
and  
the 'what'.

That is to say, improvisation may be represented in two ways...

- a) ...by means of extemporising notes or words: creating the 'what'.
- b) ...by an enhanced level of spontaneity at the level of 'how'.

“Improvisation may be represented by an enhanced level of spontaneity at the level of 'how' and not only (or even predominantly) by means of extemporising new notes [the 'what'] [...]. The 'how' level refers to aspects of performance such as timing, dynamics, timbre, accentuation and balance between lines in an ensemble.”

Dolan, et al, 2013, p. 3

In other words:

- The 'what' is: material.
- The 'how' is: treatment of material.

In my ideal meeting place, the composer creates the material and framework, the 'what', and then the performers are given extended capacity to apply the 'how'<sup>3</sup>. The composer gives them the permission to play around. Johnstone (1979) introduces playfulness as a very important part of improvised theatre:

“The first time I meet a group I might ask them to mime taking a hat off, or to mime taking something off a shelf, or out of their pocket. I won't watch them while they do it; I'll probably look out of the window. Afterwards I explain that I'm not interested in what they did, but in how their minds worked. I say that either they can put their hand out, and see what it closes on; or else they can think first, decide what they'll pick up, and then do the mime. If they're worried about failing, then they'll have to think first; if they're being playful, then they can allow their hand to make its own decision.”

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<sup>3</sup> In the case of *After the Fall* they are even required to create considerable amount of the 'what', see 3.7.2.

Playfulness can be applied to the improvisation or manipulation of both the *how* and the *what*.

It is of course undeniable that ‘playing around’, or applying the ‘how’, is something that takes place in any performance of any opera or any musical work on some level. You could in some cases say that the ‘how’ is simply: ‘interpretation’. At the highest level of operatic production and rehearsal, people are endlessly subverting the written text to create a spontaneous effect. There the singer can be said to be in charge of the material in many ways. Soprano and conductor Barbara Hannigan in a BBC radio interview shared this interesting perspective on how the operatic singer embodies, interprets and dramatizes musical-dramatic roles:

“... I think we [singers] [...] cannot help but to bring our own experience into every character, so I always think about the percentage of the composer, the character and the person playing the character making up the sound and the personification of that person on stage, and the relationship that person has with others.”

Hannigan, 2017

Being the embodiment of the music and the text written for the character in question, the singer cannot avoid becoming the vessel for interpretation. Hannigan describes sonic (e.g. dynamic, timbre, accentuation, balance) and dramatic factors as parameters for this embodiment, which encompasses the ‘how’ as defined by Dolan, et al (2013). These are standard parameters to use when ‘subverting the written text’. However, in the studies I present and discuss in part 3 I aim to unearth knowledge which hopefully will contribute to the furthering of dramatic interpretations in new chamber opera.

Let us look again at the parameters of the ‘how’:

- Timing, dynamics, timbre, accentuation and balance between lines in an ensemble.

Let us focus on “timing”.

There is more than one way to think about timing in musical performance. I see it as having at least two levels:

- First: as temporally fixed musical timing, where simultaneous musical events line up vertically with one another on a *micro* level.
- And then secondly: as *poly-timing*, where simultaneous musical events’ vertical relationship is much looser, that is, on a *macro* level.

*Micro* musical events are vertical events that happen in relation to beat-to-beat or bar-to-bar relationships or smaller (see earlier extract from *Tristan und Isolde* for instance). *Macro* musical events however relate to bigger and looser vertical relationships; between phrases, passages, or movements for instance (see earlier extracts from *Turn of the screw*, and *Captain Jack has the last word* for instance)

By opening up *macro* timings of the *how* to improvisation, I attempt to facilitate a free dramatic process in rehearsal while retaining control of the fundamental musical material. The composer is the creator of the detailed material being used, but a level of improvisation has been permitted in addition to anticipated interpretation, hopefully encouraging creative exploration by the group.

#### 2.4.2 The operatic score

It seems obvious to me, that to achieve *macro poly-timing* with *active accompaniment* my performers' verbal reactions, their text and musical material, must be released from the vertically fixed classic musical score. Several aspects within the genre of traditional opera seem to resist outright such an approach: namely scoring and performer's training.

Generally speaking, in a traditional operatic production singers and directors can only 'play around' with, or interpret, timings in one dimension. In the classic score the singer is usually vertically attached to the rest of the performers of the piece on a *micro* level, and is often guided by a conductor (or is at least 'collaborating' with him/her in real-time). This kind of *micro* interpretation allows some level of *rubato*, but still requires adherence to the vertical beat-to-beat or bar-to-bar relationships between each performer's parts.

One way of allowing the operatic singer to work at the *macro* level of musical timing is by making alterations to the score layout, namely by detaching (emancipating) the singer's part from the rest of the fixed score. That way *poly-timing* emerges, and we have the opportunity to play around with timings on a *macro* level. Hence, the singer's temporal relationship with the accompanying score is much looser.

Emancipating the singers' part from the score, and dividing each musical phrase there into a free mobile, would make it stand alone and in many ways start being reminiscent of a theatre script. In light of this, it seems that at least part of the answer to where the *meeting-place* lies between the two ends of the performance freedom spectrum could possibly be found by analysing the nature of the traditional theatrical script.

### 2.4.3 The theatre script

The conventional theatre script does not assume a singular, or particular, approach to timings. As we read through the script it only presents us with one layer of information at once: usually an actor's text line or a scene description<sup>4</sup>. While we read through the standard operatic score however, it presents us with multiple layers of simultaneous vertical events.

It is not completely unheard of however that *experimental* theatre scripts include performance instructions that have to do with accurate timings. Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957), *Happy Days* (1961) and *Play* (1962-3) showcase an above-average amount of performance instructions of which some are directly temporal. While directions like 'smile, 'smile broader', 'look left', 'open/close eyes' in *Happy days* have timing implications, there are more specific duration instructions for blackouts (5 seconds) and silences (3 seconds) in *Play* (Beckett, 1986, p. 308) But, despite numerous performance instructions, the actor is never told how to perform his lines in relation to another simultaneous temporal event, which is what the musical score does. Such a method would generally be considered unorthodox for a theatre script.

Being single-layered, the standard script allows the actor to develop his or her lines, in collaboration with a director (and despite the possibility of local social norm constraints), in any way that serves their vision for the production. The concept of *poly-time improvisation* in my research is, then, the attempt at transferring that working process from the scripts over to the score.

My attempt at this transferral is embodied in what I call a *script-part*.

### 2.4.4 The script-part

The *script-part* takes a different shape in each of the four studies included in the accompanying portfolio. What they all have in common is a central focus on the vocalist who is relating to an active accompaniment on a *macro* level. Usually, the material in the *script-parts* is divided into individual musical mobiles, with each mobile meant to function like a line in a script (in many ways similar to Riley's *Captain Jack has the last word*). The *script-part* will contain some form of musical suggestion, be it rhythm, pitch, timbre or in the form of a suggestion of tonality for each mobile. It should be noted that this is distinct from a purely text based script as will be seen in *Solitude 1* (3.6) and in act 2 of *After the Fall* (3.7). The script-part should, in theory, encourage musical and dramatic *poly-time improvisation* and exploration in operatic rehearsals and performance. Having a composed set of either chronological or aleatoric musical mobiles, individual singers are not capable of radically changing the course of the drama or the music, but

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<sup>4</sup> The script does *contain* many layers and types of information, but considering how we read through it from left to right, top to bottom, we are only presented with one information layer *at a time*, whether it is e.g. a text line or scene description.

they are able to manipulate the timing to allow additional dramatic expressivity in their performance. It is in this script-part that I see the potential for a meeting place.

Later in the development, the exploration of the script-part led to the creation of the accompanying *mobile score*. More will be said on the mobile score in 3.7.2.

Each exploration using the script-part takes place as an open-form composition in the way that it opens up the sub-structures of the drama without necessarily affecting its conclusion. A *sub-structural* unit, in terms of a whole opera, can be a whole scene or a section of a scene. It is contrary to *super-structure*, which in this case is the unalterable story arc, which in traditional terms could be: Exposition – Rising Action – Climax – Falling Action – Denouement. A script-part could then affect the internal assembly of the ‘falling action’ section of the story, but does not change the fact that ‘falling action’ takes place after ‘climax’ and before ‘denouement’.

At the outset, I was interested to see what effect this would have on my compositional aesthetic when the operatic singer and director are allowed to exist in this macro realm of spontaneity and improvisation, less affected by temporal decisions made by other performers<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.5 A note on the audience

This research does not specifically concern itself with the audience, but Dolan et al (2013) suggest that although the audience might not explicitly be aware that an improvised compositional element is being utilised in a performance, they still perceive the performance as “more innovative”, “more moving” than a traditionally notated one (2013, p. 31). Despite theirs only being a preliminary pilot study, a live improvised performance was rated higher on every measure by the audience than an earlier prepared performance. “This was true for every piece on every dimension, a highly consistent effect.” (ibid) I find these preliminary results very exciting,<sup>6</sup> and hope that the script-part, as well as creating new avenues for the singer and director to explore, may also enhance the audience’s experience in this way.

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<sup>5</sup> The roles of the director and conductor within this are prevalent in e.g. 3.5.3 and 3.5.4.

<sup>6</sup> Shirley Keane, my director for *Évariste* (3.5.3) did comment on the audience affect during an email conversation we had in July 2017: “I think in the ‘free scenes’ [...] I encouraged [the singers] [...] to tease, to tempt, to flirt. Always working with active words, thinking in verbs. ‘I want you to like me therefore I flatter you. I want you to understand I love you therefore I tease, I woo you.’ What was wonderful for the singers is that because they were not tied to a very definite number of beats and bars that there was room to play if some new energy or idea came to them, even in performance. I think this adds to the excitement for an audience too.”

# PART 3

PART 3 comprises compositional and performance analysis of portfolio studies, composed during 2013-2017.

Here I present in chronological order my search for a process to create music-dramas that suits my preferred way of working as a composer and performer. In the spirit of practice based research, I spent 2013-2017 composing studies that allowed me to dig deeper into the parameters and processes I was interested in and that I wanted to open up. Not all of these studies made it into this commentary. After having premiered *After the Fall* (3.7) I managed to realise a framework and process I was happy with, a summary of these can be found in PART 4. It is important to note, that the studies discussed here in PART 3 are only stepping stones towards discovering that complete working framework, but not attempts at realising it per se, as it didn't yet exist. That includes the leadership techniques and training exercises for performers discussed in PART 4.

## 3.1 Suggestiveness

The starting point for all of my *script-parts* presented here was the search for a subject matter or text which then would become the foundation for musical mobiles. I wanted my performers to be able to improvise something reflective, I wanted to appeal to their individual initiative<sup>7</sup>, so I used fairly abstract ('open') dramatic source material. That is to say, I wanted to facilitate a *suggestive* dramatic situation (in contrast to a relatively obvious one) which I hoped would allow the singer additional capacity to merge his or her own personal emotional world with the dramatic world suggested in the score, opening up the dramatic world for improvisation and enhanced interpretation<sup>8</sup>. I wanted the team to find 'the answer' together, rather than the work spelling it out for them. This is in big part inspired by the ideas of Umberto Eco:

“The search for suggestiveness is a deliberate move to ‘open’ the work to the free response of the addressee. An artistic work that suggests is also one that can be performed with the full emotional and imaginative resources of the interpreter. Whenever we read poetry there is a process by which we try to adapt our personal world to the emotional world proposed by the text.”

Eco, 1962, p. 22

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<sup>7</sup> Eco, 1962, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> See Rannveig Káradóttir's personal development of her role, Eva Ende, in *After the Fall* in 3.7.5.

### 3.2 An interactive aesthetic

The *open opera* compositional aesthetic is derived from, and is shaped in many ways, by granting my performers the means and permission in rehearsals to be playful and to make mistakes. Allowing this without losing sight of my musical integrity can be (I learned) a difficult balancing act, but I believe that in that balance lies an interesting musical aesthetic. It is only in part dependent on the actual composition, the artefact, the score. It is a developing interactive creative conversation: between the music, drama and staging; between the composer and the performance team.

In a fully *directive* process the composer could control the aesthetic to a greater degree, but this being an *interactive* one, the chosen performance team for the workshops for, rehearsals and performances of the composition will be able to put a greater mark on the aesthetic output. This research is therefore about more than just me and my works in a vacuum. It is also about my performers, directors and writers, and our creative communication.

The way in which the rehearsal and staging periods are carried out guides how the interactive elements of the music will evolve, and how or whether the aesthetic is successful, interesting, or pleasing (all highly subjective terms of course). That is where, for instance, the director's style and methods could have a significant impact (a summary on this topic is presented in 4.3). I worked with a number of teams, so as I go on to explore and analyse the musical and text material contained in my four script-parts and one mobile score, I will also consider my recorded observations, along with feedback from my performance teams.

### 3.3 Aims

Here I will present a chronological compositional analysis of my portfolio works. The analysis as a whole aims to:

- 1) spark speculation regarding a possible compositional aesthetic,
- 2) lead to a framework of working methods and considerations that will support future developments of *mobile scores*, *script-parts* and *open operas*.

That twofold overarching exploration is divided into four chapters, each exploring a main theme, or a set of specific themes:

1. *A Glacier's Requiem* explores:
  - i. The option of synchronisation: the relationship of calculable ratios between mobiles and accompaniment.
2. *Évariste* explores:
  - i. Leadership: Balinese dance and the conductor.
  - ii. The directional style of director Shirley Keane.
3. *Solitude 1* explores:
  - i. My preferred compositional balance between free and controlled.
  - ii. Leadership: soloist's and accompanist's communication.
4. *After the Fall* explores:
  - i. The option of synchronisation: dissolving the calculable ratios between mobiles and accompaniment.
  - ii. Leadership: conductor cues.
  - iii. Transitions between fixed and open scoring.

### 3.4 A Glacier's Requiem (excerpt)

*A Glacier's Requiem* explores:

- i. The option of synchronisation: the relationship of calculable ratios between mobiles and accompaniment (see 3.4.5).

#### **Characters:**

*The glacier's avatar (soprano)*

#### **Instrumentation:**

*Flute & Piccolo*

*Bb Clarinet*

*Bassoon*

*Harp*

*Piano*

*Cello*

#### **Setting:**

*The ensemble (or solo piano) is set up on stage right. In not so far distance we see a glacier peak through a misty sunrise. During the first half of the performance, as the sun rises, the mist clears until at the approx. halfway point of the performance we clearly see a beautiful glacier in all its glory. At that point the glacier starts to melt rapidly, and the sun starts to set, until there is nothing left but a barren mountainside by the end of the piece.*

*After a short intro from the ensemble, the glacier's avatar (soprano) enters from stage left. She is wearing a long dress, which in textures and colours is reminiscent of Icelandic nature and ice. It drags graciously along the floor as she walks. She is mystical and otherworldly as she shares with us the glacier's last message to humanity.*

*A Glacier's Requiem* is a 40-minute-long operatic performance written for soprano and ensemble sextet. It was the first piece in which I experimented with the idea of a script-part. The soprano was Rannveig Káradóttir, who has performed two different versions of the piece in London to date. The first in the Platform Theatre, Central Saint Martins, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2013; and the second at the Kings Head, Islington on the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2014 as one of the shortlisted pieces for the *Flourish* opera competition, hosted by the *OperaUpClose* opera company.

*A Glacier's Requiem* is in many ways a theatre of thought rather than of characters. In this instance that means that the opera is not made up of scenes or conversations, but rather something more in line with an internal thought process. Each different thought becomes a section in the work. With the soprano as the glacier's avatar we explore the effect of global warming on a glacier in western Iceland (Snæfellsjökull), which is melting so fast that it will have completely disappeared within a few decades, if nothing changes. The opera explores this warning through several different fictional, historical and

scientific references. One of these then became the foundation for the first script-part. We will look at that in more detail in the ‘text’ section of this chapter (3.4.2).

There was no designated director for either of these performances. The minimalistic staging for both shows was developed by the group.

### 3.4.1 Music

The raw temporal values for the accompaniment were inspired by published meteorological data collected in relation to the rapid melting of Snæfellsjökull-glacier in western Iceland<sup>9</sup>. I calculated the ratios between rapid retreats (melting) and one partial re-advance in square kilometres during the period of 1910-2008 and came up with a set of rounded up note values which developed into the main rhythmic motif for the opera. These values also function as bigger yardsticks, once multiplied, for the overarching structure of the opera.

All melodic and harmonic material derives from the analysis of recorded spoken word turned into speech melodies (examples in 3.4.3). In the case of all the speech melodies in all the studies presented here, I start by recording myself and/or others reciting the text in question. I then edit these recordings into little fragments, usually a sentence each. Using a software, Soundplant, I loop each spoken fragment, listening to them in headphones repeatedly, until I start noticing the inherent natural rhythms and pitches of the spoken voice. In the case of *A Glacier’s Requiem*, all the found text used is linked in one way or another to Snæfellsjökull-glacier. The speech melodies make up the soprano’s material throughout the opera, as well as being used as the foundation for the accompaniment throughout the piece. This method applies to the creation of all vocal material in all script-parts covered in this thesis.

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<sup>9</sup> “The average ice thickness of Snæfellsjökull-glacier is only 30 m, the area of the ice cap was reduced from 12.5 Km<sup>2</sup> in 2002 to 10.0 km<sup>2</sup> in 2008, while it was 22 km<sup>2</sup> in 1910. The picturesque Snæfellsjökull is the only ice cap that can be seen from the capital of Iceland, Reykjavík. It has persisted for many centuries, at least since Iceland was settled in the ninth century AD. The extent of the ice cap varied substantially during the 20th century with rapid retreat in the warm period 1930–1965, a partial readvance in the cooler period 1970–1995, and retreat since 1995. Most of the ice cap is likely to disappear within a few decades if the warm climate of Iceland in recent years persists.” (Tómas Jóhannesson, 2011, p.19)

### 3.4.2 Text

The script, as well as the opera as a whole, is the result of an experimental working process, initiated by Icelandic designer Friðþjófur Þorsteinsson (Frithjofur Thorsteinsson), or ‘Fiffi’, where the creative pathway was reversed from the conventional: music/libretto - staging - design; to: design - music - script. First, Fiffi presented me with stage design ideas, and once I had responded to them with several musical sketches, we made up the script from several different references to folk-lore as well as popular culture. References include the spooky early-14<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic Saga *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, and Jules Verne’s *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*.

I specified a section, a thought, in the script during which the soprano recites excerpts from the 20<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic form-revolutionist poem *Tíminn og Vatnið* (The Time and The Water) (1956) by Steinn Steinarr (Steinarr, 2014). There I wished to get a chance to develop the dramatic deliverance via poly-time improvisation<sup>10</sup> with the soprano in rehearsals and performance. I hoped this would give Rannveig the opportunity to bring something highly personal and reflective to the role, deepening the experience, making it about something more than just the glacier.

The poem’s content is very abstract, metaphorical and suggestive, allowing for quite an open reading (or singing), but the general themes are the sun, heat, melting, water, decay, and nature. The poem is presented here in both the original Icelandic, and an English translation:

*Yfir sofandi jörð hef ég flutt hina hvítu fregn  
og orð mín féllu í isblátt vatnið  
eins og vornætur regn.  
Sólin, sólin var hjá mér eins og grannvaxin kona  
á gulum skóm.  
Á brennbeitt andlit fellur blátt regn  
hinna blævængjuðu daga.  
Og tíminn og vatnið renna veglaust til þurðar.  
Og tíminn hvarf eins og tár,  
sem fellur á hvíta hönd.  
Rennandi vatn, risblár dagur, raddlaus nótt.*

*Í nótt mun ég sofa undir sjóstirndum himni  
við hinn óvæða ós.  
Ég finn mótspyrnu tímans falla máttvana  
gegnum mykja vatnsins.  
Ég hef búið mér hvílu í hálffluktugauga  
eilífðarinnar.*

*Over reposing ground I bore the white tidings  
and my words fell into the ice-blue water  
like rain in the night of spring.  
The sun, the sun was with me like a petit lady  
in yellow shoes.  
On a burning face falls blue rain  
of aerated days.  
And the time and the water flow aimlessly to depletion.  
And the time vanished like a tear,  
that falls on a white hand.  
Running water, ascent-blue day, speechless night.*

*Tonight I shall sleep beneath the Pleiades sky  
by the unwadeable river-mouth.  
I feel the resistance of time descend feebly  
through the water’s softness.  
I have forged my resting place in the half-shut eye of  
eternity.*

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<sup>10</sup> See 2.4



#### 3.4.4 Aesthetic speculation

At the time of writing this piece (2013) it was still early days in my understanding of what a script-part really was, and what it would need in order to be practical as well as musically satisfying to me. Considering the output of this first script-part experiment at the time, I got quite excited about how the vocal line started to ‘take flight’, temporally speaking, during these open sections.

Having strong family ties to northern Iceland, I pictured Rannveig’s treatment of the mobiles as an arctic tern, and the accompaniment like a strong northerly wind. The arctic tern hovers and balances gently in the air and has to adjust its flight according to the wind, but ultimately controls its hovering instead of being swept along. The soprano steps into the accompaniment, hovers within it, lets it move around her as she delivers her own material.

In my view, the open nature of the mobiles affected Rannveig in a way that added an extra layer of excitement to her delivery. Being in a quite low, speech-like range of a soprano’s voice, the occasional dynamic and rhythmical outbursts from the sextet - meant to represent cracking and melting of the glacier - sometimes push her delivery somewhat out of the way, musically speaking (the gust of wind), but she ultimately stays on course. The accompaniment, the melting and the cracking, is what is killing the glacier. The Glacier’s Avatar is struggling to stay in one piece, to deliver her message to us before she sleeps the long sleep “in the half-shut eye of eternity”.

The outcome was successful enough to ignite in me further interest in the method. However, we uncovered a few issues that stood in the way of further poly-time improvisation and dramatic exploration. The score, it turned out, conveyed too strongly the *option for synchronisation* which pushed Rannveig towards a pre-calculated performance rather than a more explorative one.

#### 3.4.5 Calculable ratios

The notion of *calculable ratios* (a term coined by myself) refers to the vertical relationship between soloists’ script-part and scored accompaniment. That is to say, ideally, it should be impossible to calculate the ratio(s) between the two, as was finally achieved with the mobile score of *After the Fall* (3.7). In such a case, calculable ratios are not present in a work. If present, calculable ratios can have a negative effect on poly-time improvisation, spontaneity and playfulness. I experienced the latter in *A Glacier’s Requiem*.

The script-part in *A Glacier’s Requiem* does not contain any bar lines or time signatures. Before meeting the ensemble for rehearsals however, Rannveig analysed her mobiles into 4/4 bars (which is the time signature given in the score for the accompaniment), and calculated the ratios between her part and the

ensemble's material on a micro level<sup>11</sup>. Her calculations changed mobile no. 1, for instance, to roughly this:



Figure 11

Her training and experience with traditionally scored operas prompted her to count out the beats in the script-part and compare it with the score to see how the two could align vertically. This was probably largely due to two compositional oversights:

- 1) Her allotted time in which to perform the mobiles was quite narrow. She had 29 bars of mobiles, but only 44 bars to perform them in. That amounts to only about one and a half bars of accompaniment per mobile. This rushed the soprano onwards, forced her to calculate in order to be sure she would be able to cover her mobiles in the time given, and limited her poly-time improvisational options. Eventually, I would need to completely dissolve this relationship of calculable ratios between mobiles and accompaniment, which I will discuss further in *After the Fall* (3.7).
- 2) I left a soprano staff line with bar lines in the score for the duration of the open sections (in order to specify the *macro* space in which the script-part mobiles were to be performed) which even though it does not contain any musical material, could be seen to support a pre-supposed alignment.

The presence of that staff in the score, along with the narrow performance time span, is at the very least an unintentional hint that some *micro* synchronisation is optional, rather than discouraged. Such a mathematical approach by the performer is ultimately counter-productive to any interactive exploration of the potential musical and dramatic aesthetics that could derive from the script-part. If I had kept up the rhythmical analysis of the mobiles from where Rannveig left off I would have discovered that the inherent stresses of the sentence in mobile no.1<sup>12</sup> actually called for a different time signature division:



Figure 12

<sup>11</sup> This is not an isolated event. Similar calculative approaches were used by performers of at least one other work of mine that is not included in the portfolio nor covered in this thesis. The work is *Humming* for cello and trio (2014).

<sup>12</sup> See figure 10 for the original iteration.

I deemed such further analysis unnecessary, and tried my best to discourage further similar analysis. Leaving the mobiles in their raw states at the outset was deliberate.

Months after our performance, Rannveig told me why she felt the need to calculate the vertical alignment:

“When you approach something that is new, one must have a rule, something to hold on to, something that is familiar. I needed to learn the rhythms so I allocated bars for them...”

She told me how this freedom had been completely new to her at the time and that she hadn't really known how to begin to work with it.

Helgi: “But as we got further into the process... if we would perform it again in this version, would you then erase the bar lines? Or [had] you erased them already in your mind maybe [after rehearsals, for performance]?”

Rannveig: [She does not answer the question directly] “Let's take this rhythm for instance [she points to a small segment of a mobile on the screen]. For me it's simply easiest to memorize if I put them into such boxes.”

Helgi: “So, it doesn't have anything to do with expressiveness, it is only a method to learn the music?”

Rannveig: “Exactly. [...] as I had learned the rhythms I could allow myself more freedom, but not until I had taken a strict [temporal] approach.”

Helgi: “So, you needed that framework to be able to get to the point of flexibility in the first place?”

Rannveig: “Yes, totally.”<sup>13</sup>

She then goes on to tell me that after having rehearsed and performed publicly this first script-part experiment of ours, she started to understand the idea behind the method which is that “...the significance of the project lies not in any one of its realizations but in their very multiplicity...” (Welsh, 1994, p. 255), and that, considering the vertical alignment of vocal mobiles with accompaniment, the project takes place as a real-time composition. This seems to have been somewhat unclear to her at the outset.

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<sup>13</sup> “Musicians need to feel that they are sure that everything technically is fine, and then they can be free to make music.” - Mariss Jansons, conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. (Service, 2012, p. 83)

Having now realised the concept, and listened to our 2014 recordings, Rannveig experienced her own performance as rigid. In her own view, she had been too ‘traditional’ and ‘mathematical’ in analysing the script-part.

Rannveig: “I [...] feel like I am too much in rhythm with the rest of the group.”

If she were to be given the chance to perform it again she said she would approach it from the outset with this thought: “*ok, I have this rhythm but I do not need to listen to, or follow you [conductor/ensemble] or anything.*”<sup>14</sup> This is further explored in section 3.7.5.

She goes on to explain:

“When I listened to it again [the 21.09.14 live recording] I was like [she sings mobile 2 from the *script-part* while conducting herself in a strict manner with one hand], but now I would be [she then sings the same mobile in a playful manner, without conducting]”.

If the score, parts and project are properly prepared by the composer, then theoretically the singer should be able to pick up the script-part, and explore it according to these ideal four steps:

- 1) Soprano receives the script-part,
- 2) she learns her mobiles in a musical vacuum without considering the accompaniment and without feeling the need to calculate time,
- 3) she analyses the general harmonic relationship her part has with the accompaniment, and lastly,
- 4) she meets the ensemble/director/pianist/composer to explore and inform structural, dramatic, technical and musical aspects of the new material.

This script-part of *A Glacier's Requiem* did accomplish some amount of poly-time flexibility, but because of the restrictions placed upon the singer, further exploration was limited. Due to the presence of and suggestion towards vertical synchronisation, of calculable ratios, the arctic tern was only able to hover in a relatively static manner, as it was simultaneously tethered to something. It could not hover freely about. The process turned out to be more *directive* and less *interactive* than I would had liked.

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<sup>14</sup> “...I do not need to listen...” she said, but that’s going too far. There needs to be a level of connection between all performers during any cohesive performance, and Rannveig knows this of course. Her enthusiasm was simply heightened, and definitely heading in the right direction.

### 3.5 Évariste (excerpt)

*Évariste* explores:

- i. Leadership: Balinese dance and the conductor.
- ii. The directional style of director Shirley Keane.

#### **Characters:**

*Évariste Galois* (baritone)

*Examiner Pochon* (soprano)

*Examiner Boulier* (soprano)

*Examiner Dinet* (bass)

*Stephanie du Motel* (mezzo soprano)

*Auguste Chevalier* (actor – speaking role)

#### **Instrumentation:**

*Flute & Piccolo*

*Bb Clarinet*

*Acoustic Guitar*

*Cello*

#### **Setting:**

Introduction:

*Based on real events: "In the fog of a Paris dawn in 1832, Évariste Galois, the 20-year-old founder of modern algebra, was shot and killed in a duel. That gunshot [...] marked the end of one era in mathematics and the beginning of another. In the eighteenth century [...] mathematicians were idealized as child-like, eternally curious, and uniquely suited to reveal the hidden harmonies of the world. But in the nineteenth century, brilliant mathematicians like Galois became Romantic heroes like poets, artists, and musicians. The ideal mathematician was now an alienated loner, driven to despondency by an uncomprehending world."* (Alexander, 2010)

*"It took more than seventy years to fully understand the French mathematician's first mémoire (published in 1846) which formulated the famous "Galois theory" concerning the solvability of algebraic equations by radicals, from which group theory would follow. Obscurities in his other writings - mémoires and numerous fragments of extant papers - persist and his ideas challenge mathematicians to this day."* (Rigatelli, 1996)

Scene 1:

*Évariste Galois, a hot-headed 21-year-old mathematical genius, is sitting at a desk in his room, feverishly writing. His two great passions, maths and politics, have been sabotaged by his first crushing experience of love. Now, he is more fervent than ever about being understood, being important, being accepted. As Évariste searches through his papers, a pistol falls from the paper mess to the floor. Évariste tries to retrieve it, but fumbles and it clatters to the floor again. He starts a goodbye letter to his friend, Auguste, explaining his work and his grave situation.*

*Évariste* opera was commissioned by the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and the Courtauld Gallery, finished in August 2014 and performed 12<sup>th</sup> July 2015 at the Courtauld Gallery, and then the 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July as part of the London *Tête-à-Tête* 2015 Opera Festival. The libretto was written by Lori Ann Stephens, winner of the 2012 English National Opera's "Minioperas" competition.

The opera was performed by singers from Guildhall School and was directed by Shirley Keane, whose staging methods and style turned out to be, in my view, very compatible and helpful to poly-time improvisation. We will go on to explore her impact later in the chapter, in section 3.5.4.

### 3.5.1 Music & text

In *Évariste* there are three open sections in which I was eager to see how I could extend poly-time freedom during pre-determined dramatic moments. Three main changes were made to the way in which I constructed these in *A Glacier's Requiem*:

- The open-section accompaniment in *Évariste* is of a very simple harmonic nature, contained within a diatonic scale;
- here the script-parts contain aleatoric mobiles;
- instead of a limited accompaniment of fixed duration, I wrote a canon which repeated in a loop.

### Diatonic mode

As with all new works, there was no recording for the singers to listen to, and no prior performances that the team could use as a springboard. When any brand-new piece is being rehearsed and produced for the first time, a bigger input of creativity is required from everyone in 'translating' the work from the page to the stage for the very first time. In addition, the singers each need to know how their part fits in to the bigger tectonics of the piece, and ideally, if they are then to play around with any experimental features on

top of that, they will need to know the piece just as well as the composer does<sup>15</sup>. With that in-depth knowledge of the piece they should feel confident that the basic technical elements are in place, and then they can be free to experiment.

Michelle Santiago, rehearsal pianist for *Évariste*, had a similar thought when looking back at the project:

“I think that’s the main thing, [...] if the musical base is very, very strong then you can make them do whatever you want. Something has to be automatic, before more things are added.”

This is not to say that any experimental work would necessarily need to adhere to any notational or harmonic convention, but, in the interest of keeping the project focused on the matter at hand - the poly-time improvisational experiment - I wanted to exclude the possibility of the harmony ‘getting in the way’ as it were. I did not know how my singers would cope with adjusting to a new open-form performance technique whilst simultaneously learning atonal vocal lines for example, so I kept it harmonically ‘simple’. The first open section in *Évariste* is simply in B minor, the second one is in E minor, and then the third goes back to B minor.

On reflection, I realised that this is further evidence of my struggle to find the meeting-place between the open and the closed, and ultimately I am confronted with the compromises that I have to make in order to keep compositional control while also creating space for this added improvisational input. (Further explored in *Solitude 1* (3.6) and *After the Fall* (3.7))

### **Aleatoric mobiles**

As opposed to the chronological mobiles in *A Glacier’s Requiem*, two of the characters, *Évariste* (baritone), and his alleged lover, *Stephanie* (mezzo), can perform their mobiles in any order and any number of times during the three open sections in *Évariste*. The number of repetitions of the mobiles, and consequently the duration of each open section, should be developed during the staging process with the director. By the end of the process the team could do one of the following:

- a) decide upon, in great detail, the sequence of mobiles that will be performed live;
- b) develop a semi-open, interactive sequence pattern; or,
- c) leave the sequence completely open for spontaneous performance decisions.

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<sup>15</sup> “The freedom the players have is to interpret Abbado’s gestures the way they want to [he doesn’t like to beat the music, he wants to provide the extra, expressive factors], to give themselves to the moment of their music-making. But to do that in the context of orchestral performance, their responsibilities are greater. They need to know how their part fits in to the bigger tectonics of what’s happening in the rest of the orchestra at the same time [...] and they need to know the piece as well as Abbado...” – in relation to conductor Claudio Abbado and the Lucerne Festival Orchestra. (Service, 2012, p. 260)

Due to the director's semi-open staging methods<sup>16</sup>, and our collective development and exploration, we ended up with approach b. Namely that the sequence of the repetitions was slightly different each time.

I chose a particular moment in Lori Ann Stephens' libretto to open up. The moment in question was scene 3, or the 'love scene'. In order to facilitate a *suggestive* dramatic mood there, I decided to search for the true essence of that scene, and cut the text found there down to the absolute minimum necessary. By having less text, my aim was to end up with a single dramatic suggestion: 'young and naïve love'.

Scene 3 was originally six pages of text, but I cut it down to roughly two. From those two pages I then chose the following eight text fragments to make up the script-part:

- "Évariste"
- "What is happening with us Évariste?"
- "Do I dare to hope for us, Évariste?"
- "Say it again"
- "Love will shield us from the sadness outside these walls"
- "Oh Stephanie. My universe is overthrown by Stephanie"
- "Stephanie"
- "I'll protect you from the madness outside these walls"

Now scene 3 consists of three open-sections with fixed music linking them together.

As in *A Glacier's Requiem*, I then recorded people reciting these fragments and analysed those recordings into speech melodies and rhythms. The eight text fragments became thirteen mobiles: seven for Stephanie, six for Évariste. For all of the mobiles I kept the analysed pitches (rounded up to equal temperament), but I only kept and specified rhythms for some, creating a varying degree of musical control. The mobiles in figure 14 are five out of the total seven mobiles I wrote for Stephanie.

Considering the script-part as a whole, most of the mobiles should be applied to all of the three open sections despite a change of key happening between the open sections (B minor - E minor – B minor). The mobiles' harmonic relationship to its accompaniment therefore changes slightly in section 2 as it goes from B minor to E minor. For instance, the mobile titled STEPH.3 in figure 14 would start on the dominant in open section 1 and end on the mediant, but in section 2 (E minor), by keeping to the same mobile, she starts on the supertonic and ends on the leading note. This gives some colour variance and development to the music. The only exceptions to this are mobiles ÉV.1, 2 and 3 (figure 15) where I made transpositions to accommodate the different keys.

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<sup>16</sup> See section 3.5.3

Steph. 1  
Éva - a - riste.

Steph. 2  
Év - a - riste.

Steph. 3  
What is happ - ings with us Év - a - riste?

Steph. 4  
Év - a - riste.

Steph. 5  
Do I dare to hope... for us, Év - a - riste?

Figure 13

Év. 1  
Bm Em  
Say it a - gain. Say it a - gain.

Év. 2  
Bm Em  
Say it a - gain. Say it a - gain.

Év. 3  
Bm no pitch ord. Em  
[S] Say it a - gain. Say it a - gain.

Figure 14

## Endless loops

The accompaniment during the open-sections are loops, endless three voice canons, which repeat for as long as the creative team wants. This effectively allows endless time, theoretically speaking, to explore dramatic incentives, as well as those incentives' musical renderings, in rehearsals. The canon is made up of this twenty-four bar motif:



Figure 15

The canon is then created by adding a new layer of that motif each eight bars:

Figure 16 illustrates a three-voice canon for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Violoncello (Vc.) in 2/4 time. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The notation is arranged in three systems, each with three staves. The first system (bars 1-8) shows the Flute part starting with a *p* dynamic, while the Clarinet and Violoncello parts are silent. The second system (bars 9-16) shows the Clarinet part starting with a *p* dynamic, while the Flute and Violoncello parts are silent. The third system (bars 17-24) shows the Violoncello part starting with a *p* dynamic, while the Flute and Clarinet parts are silent. Each part plays the same 24-bar motif as shown in Figure 15, but shifted by eight bars relative to each other.

Figure 16 (non transposing)

A vertical, chordal sequence emerges from these three layers which is reinforced by a classical guitar line, and the vocal lines are sung over this accompaniment. Open sections 1 and 2 are essentially the same, except for the difference of key. The third presents a slight development where chosen note values have been shortened, leaving the phrases punctured with rests. A somewhat fragmented version.

### 3.5.2 Balinese dance and the conductor

In reality, the loops had to end at some point. That would not have been an issue if the performance had included a conductor, but in my attempt to pull opera closer towards my meeting-place I had decided to exclude the role of the conductor completely from this project. In improvised theatre, there is no parallel role to the musical conductor, so I wanted to see if I could replace it with something else. I concluded that we would need an interactive system that would enable the singer-soloist to cue the ensemble so that they would know when to proceed to the next section of the piece. I wanted the singer to be able to cue the ensemble rather than the other way around, because the text, the dramatic narrative, was in their hands. I wanted the text, the narrative, the drama, to lead the way.

I turned my attention to performance interactivity and communication, and commenced a study into Indonesian music culture, namely the improvisatory tradition of Balinese dance and the gamelan ensemble.

“The improvisatory format of topeng [a type of Balinese dance] requires an interactive system that enables the dancer-actor to cue the musicians so they know what piece to play and when, at what tempo, and when to stop playing. The choreography is not fixed either; the dancer dictates the sequence of movements following a general framework while leading the musicians to a certain extent. The drummer [in the gamelan ensemble] acts as intermediary, receives cues from the dancer and giving cues to the musicians.”

Gold, 2005, p. 99

Drawing from this description of traditional Balinese dance, I created a leadership hierarchy within my group of performers. I am drawing on the idea, but in contrast to this I want my signalling to be imperceptible to the audience.

For scene 3 my singers take on the role of a Balinese dancer-actor - the highest authority, and my cellist (Andrew Power) acts as intermediary like a Balinese drummer, receiving cues from the singers and giving cues to the ensemble.

Once the desired dramatic relationship of the first open section in *Évariste* has been established between *Évariste* and Stephanie (‘young and naïve love’), Stephanie gives a signal to the leader of the ensemble to advance to the next section. The singer’s signal should be created in collaboration with the director during rehearsals and can be, for instance, any type of movement, paralanguage<sup>17</sup>, or change to a position in physical space that best fits the staging and the drama of the current production.

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<sup>17</sup> Paralanguage: (vocalics) is the study of nonverbal cues of the voice.

Director Shirley Keane developed our signals in parallel to staging the scene. We experimented with several types of signals, for instance visual ones such as:

- a singer standing up from a table,
- a singer moving across the stage from one prescribed point to another.<sup>18</sup>

However, we concluded that visual cues were not in the best interest of the staging or the drama. A cue based on a pre-determined visual action would hinder the singers' ability to respond on a moment-to-moment basis to their co-singers' actions. Therefore, the cues for the open-sections ended up being vocal. We decided that Freya Jacklin (performing Stephanie) would continue near-seamlessly from the aleatoric mobiles on her script-part, to her scored material in bar 52 (figure 18).

Figure 17 shows a musical score with two systems. The first system starts at bar 52. The vocal line for Stephanie (Steph.) is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Every day I catch you wri-ting myster-ies. I dont und-er-stand the mean-ing. I can on-ly". There are three boxes around the vocal line: one around "Every day I catch you wri-ting", one around "I dont und-er-stand the mean-ing.", and one around "I can on-ly". Below the vocal line, there are instructions: "For all ensemble, except guitar: When Stephanie gives signal, hold the pitch you are playing at that moment until after she says: 'How is this maths? With so few numbers?' Then quickly fade out to nothing." The instrumental staves for Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Guitar (Gtr.), and Violoncello (Vc.) are shown below. The Gtr. staff has the instruction: "Keep playing bars 28-52 until after Stephanie says: 'How is this maths? With so few numbers?'". The second system continues the vocal line for Stephanie with lyrics: "watch and wond-er. How is this maths? With so few numb-ers? I must write my in-sight." There are three boxes around the vocal line: one around "watch and wond-er.", one around "How is this maths? With so few numb-ers?", and one around "I must write my in-sight.". The instrumental staves for Fl., Cl., Gtr., and Vc. are shown below, with some staves having a fermata or a long note.

Figure 17: A box around a singer's line was meant to highlight the fact that the line was a mobile, with little vertical temporal relationship to its accompaniment. In other words, a box around music indicated that it functioned like a line in a script, rather than a line in a score.

<sup>18</sup> Inspired by Luciano Berio's *Passaggio*, where he uses stations on the stage as markers for progression. (Spagnolo, 2014, p.42-44) A diagram shows the distribution of stations on the stage and how to move between them. (ibid, p.43) "Each station is characterized by vocal expressions of contrasting kinds." (ibid, p.42)

Upon hearing Freya sing “*Every day I catch you writing mysteries*”, the ensemble ‘freezes’ on whatever pitch each individual instrumentalist is playing at that given moment (except the guitarist who keeps playing the material from the canon) and holds a fermata on that pitch while Freya sings her next three mobiles in the score. This creates the ‘frozen ensemble chord’. When she sings the last one, “*How is this maths? With so few numbers?*” the ensemble suddenly stops the ‘frozen ensemble chord’ during a fermata rest, before resuming their normal score playing following that fermata. The goal is to make a cue that passes through the hierarchy, but is not perceptible.

Similar cueing methods are used for progressing from open sections no. 2 and 3 (see accompanying portfolio).

Shirley Keane: “To help the musicians [...] Jonathan [Évariste] gave a clear visual cue that fitted in with the scene. So was fixed with the musicians but looked like a gesture of frustration or anger and hopefully was not obvious to the audience.”

### **3.5.3 Director Shirley Keane**

Shirley’s approach the poly-time experiment in *Évariste* then became the benchmark style of directing for future open works. Out of the talented directors I worked with over this four-year period, I have found her methods to be the most inspiring and accommodating in relation to what I am trying to achieve.

In *Évariste*, Shirley worked with the framework I had provided knowing that eventually we would need to perform the piece in a gallery space in the Courtauld Gallery, Somerset House. The space created both issues and opportunities for us to consider. I say “opportunities” because certain perceived limitations of the space actually further encouraged us to push the openness of the staging.

Shirley: “The [performance] space [in the Courtauld Gallery] was a long narrow room with incredibly expensive paintings all around us. The gallery would be open and we could not block off the doorways as visitors had to be allowed [to] move freely through the room. The one workable space where the musicians and singers could actually play out the work was tiny to the point of ridiculous. There was no set audience space. The challenge [therefore] was how to create a production [...] without any set moves [or] any blocking.”

No conductor, no set stage, no set moves, and unpredictable audience impact. Shirley described the situation as: “liberating, exciting and terrifying.”

The singers spent the first staging rehearsals being playful. Playfulness is an important factor of improvisation, as it supports informality. This type of informality allows people to let go of some inhibitions, conventions and expectations. This child-like freedom can then lay the groundwork for innovation and less rigid performance expectations<sup>19</sup> (see for instance 1.4.2).

Shirley: “In the *Évariste* rehearsals we were given permission to play a lot, we improvised physically and with the dramatic intentions and turned many ideas inside out. [...] My job became about saying yes to everything. Huddling in corners, crawling under chairs, ripping up paper. Whether the physical action suited the moment did not matter in the first few days. I had to encourage silliness, playfulness, banish any negativity (for example comments like ‘well that didn’t work’...). My question was always ‘What worked?’ ‘What clicked?’ ‘Why?’.”

Here Shirley applies what I consider to be one of the most fundamental rules of improvisational theatre: *accepting* and *advancing* action (as opposed to *cancelling* action) (Johnstone, 1979).

So, to avoid blocking<sup>20</sup> the scenes - where individual actions and reactions would be set to happen in a pre-calculated manner on a *micro* level - she instead created games, general rules and patterns which could be triggered or altered by individual singers during a prescribed period of time during live performance.

Shirley: “[Later] I introduced some game rules which then carried into performance ... for example in certain scenes the three singers who played multiple characters [Callie Swarbrick (soprano), Claire Bournez (mezzo-soprano) and Christian Valle (bass)] always had to create a triangle shape between them, wherever they were in the space. They could be close together or at opposite ends of the room, but they had to hold that triangle shape. If one person moved the other two must reform a [equilateral] triangle. So their work became about connection and awareness. And excitingly, as they never knew who would move or what might change, they had to stay active, open-eyed and aware of each other all the time. Or in one rehearsal *Évariste* [baritone Jonathan Hyde] was not allowed to look Stephanie [mezzo-soprano Freya Jacklin] in the eye. But I hadn’t told Freya this. Her genuine ‘un-acted’ efforts to make him look at her leant many of the lines a new and very direct energy. Gradually it became clear to everyone how important this energy, this trying to connect, was to the driving of the work.”

Her staging method therefore was working with the piece on an interactive macro level. She describes how this process affected her and the singers:

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<sup>19</sup> “The common thread in all [...] uses of the term [jamming, or improvisation] is that they refer to the collective activity of a group creating together, and they suggest a high degree of [...] informality.” (Sawyer R. K., 2003, p. 3)

<sup>20</sup> Please note that “blocking” can mean different things in classic theatre and improvised theatre. For the sake of clarity, here “blocking” only means ‘setting the staging in stone’ as it were, as opposed to ‘blocking/cancelling the flow of impromptu/improvised dramatic action’.

Shirley: “This for me as the director of an opera was a phenomenal thing to be allowed to do and ultimately had an incredibly positive effect on the singers. Their energy and alertness when moving and playing in the space meant that the dramatic moments felt alive and vibrant for most of the time. Just as with actors who will play with the dramatic intention of a script and if lines are fluffed or words forgotten well, it doesn’t matter in rehearsal as long as the dramatic intention is delivered in as truthful a way as possible. [...] As a result, the singers in *Évariste* [...] developed connections and focus that became more and more about the unfolding drama in ways that for me were very close to a ‘play rehearsal’ process rather than a ‘music focused’ process.”

Michelle Santiago, our rehearsal pianist, also shared her view on the process:

“... I thought the staging process was really fascinating. [...] that was a great example of how [pause] even with someone in charge it can be very egalitarian with the way ideas are being pitched, and decided on, and ... and yet the process was very efficient because she was still directing...”

#### **3.5.4 Aesthetic speculations**

Musically speaking, rehearsing the script-parts and open sections of scene 3 felt easier than expected. The harmonic, melodic and rhythmic elements of the music were straightforward, and maybe more importantly, there was no real need for the singers to concern themselves with such things as presupposed tempi or any musical communication with any type of ensemble leader or conductor. Hence, they could put more focus on the development of the relationship between the two main characters. I emphasised to Shirley and the singers that they would have ‘all the time in the world’ to realise the dramatic situations and should not feel pressured by the accompaniment to move on. And this they did. Eventually, I confess, during our dress runs and performances, my heart would race when we reached these open sections in the opera. I had in many ways let go of my control over musical and dramatic time, and it was completely in the hands of the singers at that point. Ironically, when it came to it, that same thought crept up on me in a different tone: I was afraid that they actually might take all the time in the world. Letting go in this way was new for me as a composer, but ultimately, I think the outcome was sweet, subtle and intimate. The script-parts and accompaniment achieved what I meant for them to achieve.

Shirley: “[In the open sections of scene 3], *Évariste* and *Stephanie* had room as characters to breathe and take time. Natural time. Dramatic time as dictated by the actors which was slightly different each time they did it.”

However, I do not feel that the open section music itself was that fulfilling to me as a composer. I had compromised on the musical language to secure the performers' ease with the experimental elements of the piece. In *After the Fall* (3.7) I would try and make fewer compromises.

Additionally, leadership and instrumentation issues played a part in some of my dissatisfaction. At the beginning of the process, and during performance, I distanced myself considerably as a leader and a conductor, in order to see better how the piece would do on its own, as the document it was. I wanted to see if some knowledge would emerge that might have remained hidden if I had given the team the answers at the outset.

However, leaving the conductor out may have moved the process more towards a collaborative situation. I do personally believe that a fully collaborative process - where many different voices have a final say - often leads to a musical compromise, rather than a clear aesthetic language.

I share the following view expressed by Hans Keller:

“One grand illusion [...] has to be destroyed at the outset [...] that in the string quartet, there are ‘four equal parts’. [...] on the contrary, there isn’t a single leaderless juncture or stage [in the master quartet]. [...] either whoever leads at a given point makes his solution – ideally, everybody’s solution – convincingly and persuasively clear through his playing, his phrasing, his tone production and tone modulation, or there just won’t be any solution, and what will be heard instead will be the most inartistic sound imaginable – a compromise.”

Keller, 1986, p. 6

The conductor can help prevent a compromised output to some extent. In the case where a conductor would be included in the process, the singers have time to develop and perform as before, but the conductor will ‘translate’ their actions for the ensemble, and assist in keeping a convincing shape to the macro musical language. The conductor will take on the role of the gamelan drummer instead of a member of the ensemble, to function as a leader for the accompaniment, and relay information from the singers to the instrumentalists, leaving the instrumentalists to focus on their parts.

Michelle Santiago: “...generally what we [operatic performers] are accustomed to is someone being in charge. And so, as wonderful as the idea is, that it is a collective effort, there still needs to be some sort of a hierarchy.”

I may have identified the same paradox as conductors Simon Rattle, Mariss Janson and Jonathan Nott:

“...the counterintuitive notion that to best realise your musical intentions as a conductor, you have to set the frame of how the players work together – and then get out of the way.”

Service, 2012, p. 165

Therefore, I decided in *After the Fall* that having a conductor is quite necessary for the script-part in order to create a better shape for the overall musical output. Someone needs to be in charge of that, exclusively. One example is at the end of the first open section (figure 18), when Stephanie sings “*Every day I catch you writing mysteries*”; I repeatedly experienced quite a hesitant and unconvincing ‘frozen ensemble chord’ from the ensemble, through no real fault of their own. A conductor could very possibly have made that change sharper, and more musically effective.

### **3.5.5 Issues with instrumentation**

This was a low budget production, like all of the productions presented in this thesis. I got support from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama who provided me with rehearsal spaces and funding to hire Shirley Keane as our director. The Courtauld Gallery provided us with a beautiful performance space, and online promotion. Apart from that support in kind, for which I am very grateful, I had no budget. The key musical issue was that I had originally written the opera for a string quartet, but after contacting dozens of string players across three of the major music conservatoires in London - the Guildhall School, the Royal Academy of Music, and the Royal College of Music - I only managed to recruit a cellist, my dear friend Andrew Power. Therefore, I had to hastily revise the piece for flute, Bb clarinet, acoustic guitar and cello. That led to the omitting or changing of a lot of idiomatic ensemble string writing which was, for instance, meant to represent Évariste’s frantic note-taking with his pen and paper, and would have also created a better natural balance and blend between the lines in the open section canon. *Évariste* has not been performed with my preferred instrumentation yet, but in September 2015 I was granted the opportunity to premiere the instrumental music from the opera as my first string quartet, titled *Évariste: Love Equation*, in Harpa Concert Hall, Reykjavík, Iceland. The score and recording are included in the portfolio to give a clearer image of the original musical idea.

### 3.6 Solitude 1

*Solitude 1* explores:

- i. My preferred compositional balance between free and controlled.
- ii. Leadership: soloist and accompanist's communication.

**Instrumentation:**

*Singer / Actor*

*Left hand piano*

**Setting:**

*A man is alone on stage. He acknowledges the audience, approaches them, and shares with them a memory. Or at least what he can recall – fragments – of a car crash. His recollections take on metaphorical shapes as he tries to convey the emotions that he felt during that brief moment.*

It should be clear by now that I do not wish to completely let go of my compositional reins, but how far am I comfortable in going? The furthest I went with a collaborative process was Version 2 of *Solitude 1*. This was an experiment, a study, in contrast to the other works presented here. During the rehearsal period of *Évariste* I discovered that I was not willing to leave all parameters up to an interactive process. There seemed to be some elements that I wanted to keep directive. Before going on to write my next script-part piece, I decided to explore this further. In parallel with that exploration I wanted to observe the creative and performance communication between soloist and accompanist, to see if there were any inherent features of this relationship that I had overlooked.

The result was a monodrama study in two versions, titled *Solitude 1* after a poem by Tomas Tranströmer of the same name.

*Solitude 1* is written for a soloist and left hand piano. It was first performed 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 at the Guildhall School by tenor Gustav Hasfjord, and pianist Michelle Santiago. The second performance took place on 11<sup>th</sup> September of the same year at St. Johns Smith Square, where a spoken word version was delivered by Eliza McCarthy, with the pianist Siwan Rhys. Gustav and Michelle's workshops helped me to distinguish between which musical parameters I wanted to keep directive; while Eliza and Siwan's collaboration unearthed some important knowledge regarding the creative and performance communication between soloist and accompanist<sup>21</sup>. After a general analysis of the piece, I will explore the two themes further in two separate sections.

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<sup>21</sup> Please note that *Solitude 1* was being written and realised parallel to the rehearsals and performances of *Évariste* opera. The concrete knowledge gained from *Évariste* had therefore not yet made its way to becoming completely explicit prior to the making this study.

### 3.6.1 The text

*Solitude 1* was written as part of a Guildhall School project led by pianist Rolf Hind, for which several Guildhall composers wrote music for vocals and left hand piano inspired by the works of Swedish Nobel Prize poet Tomas Tranströmer. The reason for it being for left hand piano, is that in 1990 Tranströmer suffered a stroke that paralyzed the right side of his body and affected his speech. He then trained himself to play piano only with his left hand. The poem I chose to work with has a clearer, more traditional narrative than I previously presented in *A Glacier's Requiem* and *Évariste*<sup>22</sup>.

*I was nearly killed here one night in February.  
My car slewed on the ice, sideways,  
into the other lane. The oncoming cars-  
their headlights- came nearer.*

*My name, my daughters, my job  
slipped free and fell behind silently,  
farther and farther back. I was anonymous,  
like a schoolboy in a lot surrounded by enemies.*

*The approaching traffic had powerful lights.  
They shone on me while I turned and turned  
the wheel in a transparent fear  
that moved like egg white.*

*The seconds lengthened out- making more room-  
they grew long as hospital buildings.  
It felt as if you could just take it easy  
and loaf a bit  
before the smash came.*

*Then firm land appeared: a helping sand grain  
or a marvellous gust of wind. The car took hold  
and fishtailed back across the road.  
A signpost shot up, snapped off -a ringing sound-  
tossed into the dark.*

*Came all quiet. I sat there in my seatbelt  
and watched someone tramp  
through the blowing snow  
to see what had become of me.*

In *Solitude 1* the soloist is given space to improvise, and the only thing provided by the composer is the poem. The soloist can choose to either improvise a sung vocal line, or speak the text. There are two versions of the piano accompaniment, presenting varying degrees of openness, but only one script-part for the soloist. The soloist should use the same script-part for both versions, but alter the interpretation of the poem greatly between versions. Dynamics and tempi are free for both soloist and pianist. Performers should experiment with these factors in their development of the dramatic performance.

Two versions were presented to both sets of performers.

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<sup>22</sup> The following is the translation of the poem I presented in the part. For Eliza's performance however, she asked for the permission to mix and match a few different translations together. I agreed to this.

### 3.6.2 Version 1

In Version 1 of the accompaniment the pianist has ten, repeatable mobiles to be played chronologically. The soloist controls the pace at which the pianist advances through these mobiles.

1. *Right here I was nearly killed one night in February. My car slewed on the ice, sideways, into the other lane. The oncoming cars- their headlights- came nearer.* 1
2. *My name, my daughters, my job slipped free and fell behind silently, farther and farther back. I was anonymous, like a schoolboy in a lot surrounded by enemies.* 2

Figure 19: Mobiles 1 and 2 from piano Version 1.

Figure 20: Verses 1 and 2 from soloist's script-part, with corresponding piano mobile numbers to the right.

Each verse of the poem has been allocated a piano mobile. As soon as the soloist finishes reciting or singing the text in a verse, the pianist should move seamlessly on to the next mobile. For instance, the pianist moves straight over to the second mobile (figure 19) after the soloist performs 'their headlights- came nearer.' He or she should not wait for the soloist to start reciting 'My name, my daughters, my job' before playing the second mobile. On the contrary, the pianist should move on to the second mobile before the soloist starts their next line. No matter where the pianist is located in the 24 crotchets of the first mobile, he or she should jump to beat one of mobile 2. Sometimes the soloist's script-part calls for dramatic silences. These are represented by ellipsis (...) (figure 21). Here the fifth piano mobile should be played until the soloists shows signs of delivering the next verse.

...

} 5

Figure 21: First dramatic pause of three.

### 3.6.3 Version 2

In Version 2 the pianist is essentially playing the same material as in Version 1, but here it is presented as twenty-six chords and four rhythmic patterns. The two sets can be freely combined by the pianist in response to how the soloist interprets the drama. The sectioning of the text from Version 1 does not apply here so the brackets and boxed numbers in the script-part should be ignored. Instead, the pianist simply moves through the material as he or she sees fit, until the soloist reaches the poem's last paragraph. The pianist should then move to the coda (chord 22) no matter what they are playing at that time. In this version, the musical communication between singer and pianist should, in theory, be at least slightly quicker because the pianist can react to the soloist's interpretation more quickly, with smaller units of music. This requires both performers to approach the performance with a degree of playfulness.

### 3.6.4 Gustav and Michelle: composer's musical control

The collaboration with Gustav and Michelle was very pleasant, and together through discussion and run-throughs, they developed a good performance connection. It took them a while however to get into a good flow, as this way of approaching performance was completely new to them. By the end of our first rehearsal Michelle commented:

“This is definitely harder at first, because usually you are used to having the accompaniment being [pause] being [pause] more active, in a way, [as opposed to] ‘reactive’.”

Here Gustav improvised a sung line. I observed their rehearsal and prompted conversations between runs. The goal was to try and shape the study into a semi-open, interactive performance. But from listening to them improvise, completely irrespective of the quality of their improvisation, a visualisation of how I would like to finalise the piece was created in my head.

That is to say, I discovered that I wanted to control most if not all of the musical parameters of individual parts in a directive manner. I wanted to determine the musical material in the parts, while simultaneously, to dissolve the vertical relationship between musical parts, keeping that relationship interactive.

When writing and developing *Solitude 1*, I called the soloist's part a script-part, but after this experience I narrowed the definition of that document to what is presented in chapter 2.4.4: “The script-part will contain some form of musical suggestion, be it rhythm, pitch, timbre or in the form of a suggestion of tonality for each mobile.” Theoretically, the parts supported creative collaboration between soloist and pianist, but they took the output too far away from me, the composer. I realised that I would have to be present in order to help shape a piece like *Solitude 1* into a presentable musical state (according to my personal taste). I did not feel comfortable giving up so much musical control. It was however easier with Eliza and Siwan, since Eliza did not improvise a tonal line, but performed the poem as spoken word.

As for performance interaction, the two different versions seemed to generate a different reaction from Gustav and Michelle:

Gustav: “Maybe [Version 2] is a bit [inverted] from [Version 1], where I have to find my space within her music...”

Michelle: “...and [Version 2] is the [place where] music finds its space within his [performance]”

Helgi: “You have the same temporal control in Version 1 though, because you can pace the text...”

Gustav: “But it’s like, it’s the difference between paddling [down] the river, and being the river.”

I liked that image. As I understand it, for Gustav, when Michelle plays Version 1, she is the river. The river has greater control than the one who paddles. The paddler has to adjust to the river. In Version 2 however, Gustav is the river. There, the piano has fewer imposing notational instructions in the part – being free of any relation to time signatures, bar segmentation, and pre-supposed assembly of harmony and rhythm – which seems to have opened Michelle up to paying more attention to how Gustav was interpreting the text. Due to these factors, they seemed to prefer Version 2. This is a contrasting view to how Siwan later describes her experience of the difference between the two versions.

### 3.6.5 Eliza and Siwan: performance interaction

Eliza and Siwan performed both versions of *Solitude 1* at the St. Johns Smith Square concert, and their collaboration seems to have been quite successful.<sup>23</sup> Eliza had certain ideas for dramatic interpretation, some of which then became cemented before the performance:

“...one of the things I wanted to explore was the physicality of it. And I quite enjoyed being in different places of the stage. For Version 1 I was on stage with Siwan very close to the piano [introvert performance], and this other version [no. 2] I’d be three feet away from the audience, it was intimate. [...] I decided to perform the [intimate] one first, so the audience would know the poem.”

Eliza performed Version 1 first, in an extrovert style and close to the audience, as an introduction of sorts to the poem. There she seems to have taken on a role of a narrator, a storyteller, who described the car crash directly to the audience. That was followed by a more introvert performance in Version 2, where Eliza’s persona was working her way through a memory, and re-living the event. That latter performance seems to have been more emotional.

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<sup>23</sup> Sadly, due to personal reasons, I was unable to attend said concert nor record the performance. But thanks to a rehearsal recording they shared with me, along with two respective interview sessions post-performance, I was able to get a good idea about how they approached the piece and how their collaboration functioned.

They describe their interpretation as being “never totally one-sided.” Their communication in performance was based on intuition and instinct, as opposed to a pre-planned (Balinese-style) cueing system like that in *Évariste* (3.5.2). Siwan says:

“[Our spontaneous] cues were a combination of vocal and physical for [Version 1]. [Eliza] moved around the room a lot and it was a very energized performance. She moved around the room and I could see that and her voice kept changing.”

Contrary to how Michelle and Gustav described it, she then goes on to say that Version 1 was the one that was easier to use in order to adjust to the soloist’s interpretation:

“With the one that’s notated [Version 1] I felt more confident to be spontaneous because I could see what was coming up and could therefore plan, or at least know what was gonna happen. Whereas where you give me the chords and suggested rhythms [Version 2] I have to go through two processes of like reading a chord and reading a rhythm and therefore my response time is slower. [...] You could counteract that by already knowing the material and never looking [at your part] [...] but that takes more time.”

During a Songart study day at the Royal College of Music on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2014, accompanist Libby Burgess remarked: “Accompanists don’t react, that’s too late. It’s about anticipating what could happen beforehand.” Even though her words were meant in relation to more traditional song repertoire, this comment struck me at the time.

Eliza describes how it felt to her to approach the openness of the study:

Eliza: “I think ... one of the things that occurred to me was that it would be helpful to have more parameters, and maybe it’s just because of where I was coming from as a non-actor trying to act. ‘Where do I even begin? I don’t know. I don’t have the techniques to use’<sup>24</sup>. So maybe it was my own fear of having no parameters, not really knowing how far I could go, so maybe not pushing myself enough, maybe playing it a bit too safe. Maybe some direction in how far it could go, I don’t know how that would go.”

Helgi: “[Listening to the rehearsal recording] it was very interesting [to hear] how you would dive into it [...] that takes courage and creativity.”

Eliza: “Yeah, maybe even just writing that! It’s giving the permission to the performer, to do that.”

Eliza under-plays her acting abilities a little, but she then goes on, incidentally, to describe her process in many ways as Shirley Keane then later did for *Évariste*:

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<sup>24</sup> Eliza is first and foremost a pianist.

Eliza: “If you come in to a project thinking about what you don’t want to do then it can be very restrictive. [...] I think it’s like with any kind of exploration, you got to try anything and see what fails, rather than fearing away from possible failure. You just got to say ‘yes’ to everything.”

What Eliza is describing here is basically *accepting* and *advancing*, one of the core procedures of, for example, improvised theatre. (Johnstone, 1979) I would consider her approach to be quite an informed tactic to performing an open piece like *Solitude 1*. If you are making something up in a group, a great place to start is to throw ideas around - both figuratively in performance or actually in conversation – and then you need to accept your partner’s input and react to it according to the context at hand, developing it further.

### 3.6.6 Outcome

The ultimate goal of *Solitude 1* was not to create a piece of music per se, but a *situation* in which performance and communication styles could be tested and observed. As such, *Solitude 1* helped me clarify my role as the composer, as well as shedding further light on the creative and performative relationship between soloist and accompanist.

I realise now that I had expected the soloist and pianist to approach the process as if they were both actors of improvised theatre: in a *collaborative* process. That is, both throwing around ideas, as they simultaneously accept each other’s ideas into the ongoing performance. During the initial rehearsals this created musical uncertainty, but as the duos started to understand the poem and piano part, a different, more traditional relationship emerged. If we consider Hayden and Windsor’s creative relationship spectrum of *directive – interactive – collaborative*<sup>25</sup> it seems to me that all of the accompanists’ accounts (Santiago, Rhys and Burgess) could be said to reflect an opinion about a preferred working method that is predominantly *interactive*. The accompanist has not set their reactions in stone prior to performance (directive), nor are they completely open (collaborative), but loosely planned and developed in rehearsal – or “anticipated” (interactive). The pianist takes on the role of a somewhat traditional accompanist, observing the soloist and reacting by altering the accompanying music, based on a sequence developed in rehearsals.

It helped me to consider *performance communication* as having a place on Hayden and Windsor’s creative relationship spectrum, which I had hitherto been considering purely from the perspective of the composer. I believe that if the composer can set up the performance communication between performers as explicitly interactive (a creative partnership where there is still some leadership) as opposed to being a completely open and equal collaboration, then the work should stand a greater chance of effective

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<sup>25</sup> As presented in chapter 2.1.

realisation. Hence, it is not just my relationship with my performers that needs to be interactive, but also the relationship between the performers of my works.

### 3.7 'After the Fall' and the mobile score

*After the Fall* explores:

- i. The option of synchronisation: dissolving the calculable ratios between mobiles and accompaniment<sup>26</sup>.
- ii. Leadership: colotomic structure and conducting.
- iii. Transitions between fixed and open scoring.

#### **Characters:**

*Eva Ende* [sometimes referred to as "the Singer"] (soprano)

*The Doctor* (baritone)

#### **Instrumentation:**

*Flute (with B foot) & alto flute*

*Percussion*

-*Vibraphone*

-*Xylophone*

-*4 pots and pans (P&P) of varying sizes*

*Piano*

#### **Setting:**

*This is a story of musical perception; physical, neurological, emotional.*

*A bright red light comes up on stage, a recording session is about to start. Eva Ende stands alone on stage in front of a studio style microphone with headphones on. She sings with great passion and skill her signature aria "Ecco mormorar l'onde". It's a perfect take. As the recording session nears the end, we hear the actual recording of Eva singing the aria superimposed on top of the live recording session. Slowly, the live music fades out, until all we are left with is the faint output of a spinning record player from somewhere else. Simultaneously to this sonic transition, the stage turns, revealing the office of The Doctor. The office contains a desk, a blackboard and a hospital bed. He is listening to his own personal copy of Eva Ende's "Ecco mormorar l'onde" as he prepares his notes. He is expecting a very interesting patient any minute now who will, he hopes, help guarantee his academic legacy.*

*After the Fall* is presented in its entirety in the portfolio. The analysis presented here is, however, almost entirely based around its open sections and script-parts, and how they fit dramatically and musically into

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<sup>26</sup> See a definition in 3.4.5.

the whole. The open sections constitute roughly half of the 60-minute opera. These are presented in the context of the full piece to give a better understanding of the possible function of a script-part and poly-time improvisation in a larger composition.

*After the Fall* was premiered 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of May 2017 at the Lion and Unicorn theatre, Kentish Town, London, with generous support from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. There are two singing roles, and the leading role, Eva Ende, was filled by soprano Rannveig Káradóttir. The second role, The Doctor, was performed by baritone Nick Morton. The instrumentalists were Helen Whitaker on flute and alto flute, Katherine Tinker on piano, and Adam Bushell on percussion.

### 3.7.1 The story

*Doctor:*  
*And now the case of a singer (we shall call her E.).*  
*A young woman of 29 in perfect health.*  
*One evening she falls down a flight of stairs.*

*E.'s next memory*  
*is of a doctor leaning over her.*

*Cannot remember the date*  
*Cannot remember her name*  
*She is in the intensive care unit*  
*of a Manhattan hospital*

*Yes, that's the ticket, that's the tone*

*Now music presents as an aura*  
*or the lightning bolt that triggers*  
*a seizure—grand mal—status epilepticus*

The libretto is by Rebecca Hurst, who is currently finishing her doctoral studies in the field of poetry and fairy tale studies at The University of Manchester. I contacted her in late 2015 with the idea to create an opera loosely based on Oliver Sacks' book *Musicophilia*.

The book is described thus on its back cover:

“[Oliver Sacks] explores the place music occupies in the brain and how it affects the human condition. In *Musicophilia*, he examines the powers of music through the individual experiences of patients, musicians, and everyday people. Among them: A surgeon who is struck by lightning and suddenly becomes obsessed with Chopin; people with ‘amusia’ to whom a symphony sounds like the clattering of pots and pans; and a man whose memory spans only seven seconds – for everything but music.”

Sacks, 2007

We spent just under a year discussing the themes of the book and Sacks' work in general, and how it could become an opera. During that time, Rebecca created about ten drafts of the text, which we sent back and forth between us in further discussion.

*After the Fall* addresses, in both words and music, the neurological and emotional effects that music can have on us. It tells the story of opera singer Eva Ende, whose successful career has been cut short by an accident, a fall. The resulting brain injury has caused her to lose the ability to comprehend music and perform. She is treated by a doctor, who is also experiencing his own loss of musical sense following the death of his mother. Frozen by grief, he is cut off from his emotions, and in that way unable to 'hear' music. Before her death, he and his mother were huge admirers of Eva, and Italian opera in general, but now he grapples with trying to understand his own condition through his treatment of Eva. While the Doctor's condition has a chance of a cure, the Singer's own musical ability might never be repaired.

The result is a philosophical, and sometimes quite surreal libretto in two acts that deliberately blurs the distinction between imagination and reality, and plays with ever-shifting perspectives - the Singer's, the Doctor's and that of the audience.

The two characters, Eva Ende and The Doctor, are compilations of some of the numerous people mentioned by Oliver Sacks in *Musicophilia*, but they also draw upon Rebecca's experience of working in a college for young people with epilepsy and other neurological disorders. Additional influences include a close family member's battle with life-changing illness, and more joyfully, six-years working at Glyndebourne, where she overheard many intriguing conversations about opera and singing.

Eva Ende's character is divided in two, with different versions of herself existing 'before' and 'after' her accident. This aspect of catastrophic illness was something Rebecca wanted to draw out and investigate: how one version of the self gets definitively cut-off and left behind. This 'before' and 'after' represents two different timelines, each with its specific musical language.

'Before', is characterised by a main, melodic, motif: An original ornamented pastiche of a 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian bel canto aria, composed by myself, titled *Ecco mormorar l'onde* ("Now the waves murmur")<sup>27</sup>. The aria represents the skill Eva Ende possessed before her fall. The main aim with this aria was to try to capture the melodic and ornamental quality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Italian vocal school. I wanted Eva Ende to be able to amaze the audience with her skill at the outset of the opera. To achieve that aim I studied repertoire works like: *Ab! non credea mirati* from Bellini's *La Sonnambula*, and *Prendi, per me sei libero* from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*.

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<sup>27</sup> The poem has been set to music before, by Claudio Monteverdi and Salvatore Sciarrino ("12 Madrigali"), but their renditions are quite unlike mine, and did not serve as inspiration pre se for my aria.



Figure 22: The end of Bellini's "Ab! non credea mirati", displaying ornamental vocal writing.

We hear the aria, *Ecco mormorar l'onde*, from time to time throughout the opera, either sung live by Eva in several different versions, or played by The Doctor from a recording on a record player.

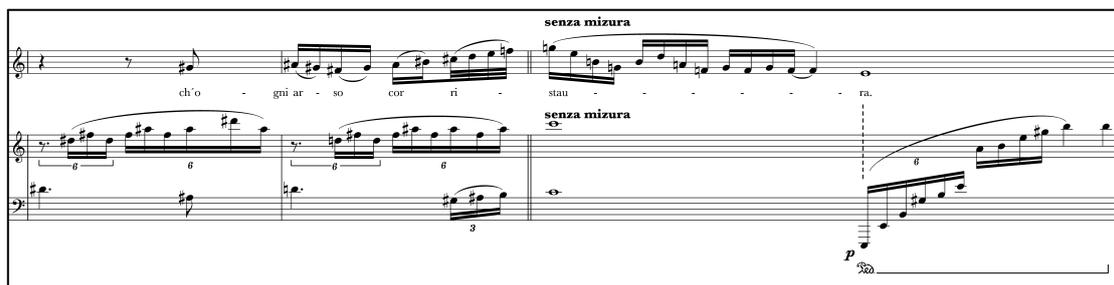


Figure 23: The end of "Ecco mormorar l'onde" from "After the Fall" act 1, scene 1. Written for soprano and piano. Ornaments were developed with the soprano, Ranneveig Káradóttir.

'After' is represented as a stark difference from 'before' by the use of script-parts and mobile scores, quarter-tones, pots and pans, and poly-time. Then we, the audience, experience music and sounds through the neurologically or emotionally inhibited ears of either Eva or The Doctor.

Doctor:  
How to explain this paradox:

music allows us to experience  
pain and grief

music brings  
solace and sweet relief.



## Layout

The opera is in two acts. In the open scenes of act 1 I created a mobile score that includes mobiles for the ensemble and a script-part for the singers. For act 2 however, I created a mobile score for the ensemble, but developed the script-part with the singers over the course of our rehearsals from a text only script. That is to say, in act 2, the singers were allowed to create the ‘what’, the musical material, in collaboration with the composer. Let us start by addressing the mobile score from act 1 (figure 24).

The elements I was working with were:

- aleatoric mobiles for three instruments.
- chronological mobiles for two singers.

As can be seen on the right hand side of figure 24, the mobile score includes a script-part. In order to simplify the process of realising the piece from the score, translating it from page to stage, all of the five parts are included in the same score (something that slowed the performers down a bit in *Évariste*), while at the same time the score avoids any ‘option of synchronisation’ as occurred in *A Glacier’s Requiem* (3.4.5). To allow for more effective musical leadership, the aim was for the conductor to be able to flip through from start to finish in the same document, seeing all the parts that are at play in the opera at any one time. I wished to avoid a situation where I would need several separate documents, each referencing the other, like we see for instance in Stockhausen’s *Stimmung* (Stockhausen, 1968) (see 2.3.1). That would add to the difficulty for any subsequent singers, directors and conductors who approach the piece. No one should have to physically ‘assemble’ the scenes in question for them to make sense.

The result was a landscape mobile score on one to two pages.

I began by notating all the material I wanted to use, but containing each part in an individual Sibelius software document. I then printed all of those to be able to cut them up and assemble by hand.

The three aleatoric parts for the instruments are segregated from the vocal part on the left side of page one. At the same time, the singers have their chronological mobiles on the right side of page one, continuing on page two. The vocal script-part is therefore written into a ‘score’, without suggesting any clear vertical alignment with its accompaniment on a micro level, nor having any obvious timing connotations between them. The singers then move through their columns freely, from top to bottom, left to right, until reaching “scene end” on page two.



Rannveig replies:

“I don’t know, I don’t necessarily think so.”

Ultimately, the act 1 mobile scores’ seeming unpredictability didn’t prove to be an issue for the singers. Later, after the first full run of scene 3, act 1 baritone Nick Morton actually exclaimed in relief: “That was easy”.

Our director - perhaps due to his training in traditional, repertoire opera and his lack of experience in improvised theatre and experimental music - decided on a relatively safe staging method when it came to the mobile scenes:

“From a dramatic point of view, because it is experimental and potentially complicated and potentially not, depending on how it goes, I obviously want to keep things as simple as possible. So these all correspond to the consultation type scenes [the mobile scenes], [...] I would like to have them just sitting down. [...] I want to keep that naturalism going [...] all I’m going to keep ... is, small gestures. ... I’d also like to try one on the move, walking, as if you were like walking in a garden or something. [...] that’s all I have in mind for these, to keep them quite straight forward, just make sure they look like people are having conversations.”

This was quite the contrasting approach to that of Shirley Keane in *Évariste*.

This naturalistic staging method worked well for the two mobile scenes in act 1, as they are both fairly short and are not consecutive (approximately 4 and 3 minutes in duration respectively). But the three longer, consecutive mobile scenes in act 2 would have benefited from further involvement from a director (approximately 13 minutes in duration together), as they, in my opinion, became a bit static, thereby limiting the expressive potential of the scene. I will discuss the act 2 mobile scenes in more detail later on in this chapter.

## The musical material

The inspiration for the musical material used in the mobile score is a dramatic one. First, after her fall Eva Ende wakes up in a hospital's intensive care unit (ICU) where she is surrounded by hospital machinery: there is a respirator, heart monitor and other equipment that monitor her vital signs. All of this machinery makes various noises, sounds, pitches and rhythms. Having lost the sense of music she had before the fall, this material ultimately becomes what Eva then holds on to and uses to communicate<sup>28</sup>. Based on several field recordings of real ICU sounds that I found online, I wrote down twenty different motifs of rhythms and pitches. These ICU motifs are the sole foundation for both the aleatoric ensemble mobiles, and the chronological vocal mobiles. When assigning ICU material to Eva Ende's text in this scene (along with scene 6, act 1), I tried my best to make the rhythms and pitches seem out of place, to feel unnatural, in relation to her sentence structure, without it becoming completely unintelligible. In order to communicate, Eva superimposes the ICU motifs onto her words as she says them, the result being fairly unnatural in terms of phrasing and stresses. Column number four from page two of the act 1 scene 3 mobile score is a good example of this (figure 26).

While Eva's mobiles are fairly varied, although disjointed, The Doctor's mobiles are more monotonous. In his attempt to understand the Singer, he follows her music by sometimes picking up a lone pitch or fragments of rhythms from her preceding mobile. He, being emotionally inhibited for this scene, does not have what it takes to sing a melody fitting to his text. Eva however is not emotionally restrained, so she tries her best to come up with a speech melody, but due to her brain injury, the best she can do is to superimpose the material from her time at the ICU.

All vocal tempi are free, but the tempi for the ensemble are prescribed. The only rule relating to the free vocal tempi, is that you can never synchronise with anyone else's tempo or rhythm. This is important, because the ensemble sometimes play material related to Eva Ende's mobiles. If it so happens for instance that her line "*do you have difficulty sleeping at night*" (mobile 7 in figure 26) is sung at the same time as the flute player decides to play mobile 6 (figure 24), the soprano should try her best to create a heterophonic effect, rather than a homophonic one. Homophony would create an undesirable dramatic situation, where Eva was able to relate to the music around her.

---

<sup>28</sup> We should take it as given that the world of *After the Fall* is one where music has the simultaneous dual role of being recreation for the people that inhabit it, as well as being the main method of communication.

Soprano   
Can you tell us how you feel

Soprano   
de - scribe your pain

Soprano   
on a scale of one to ten

Soprano   
do you feel numb do you get pins and need-les do you ex - per-i-ence a bitt-er taste or smell

Soprano   
would you de-scribe this as an aur - a, a wave

Soprano   
or vis - u - al di - stur-bance

Soprano   
do you have diff - i - cul - ty sleep-ing at night

Soprano   
form-ing close re - la - tion-ships

Soprano   
sex - u - al dys - func tion

Soprano   
do you re-mem-ber to take your med - i - ca-tion do you de-li-be - ra-tely not take your med i - ca-tion

Soprano   
Does your med - i - ca-tion

Soprano   
all - ev - i - ate or ex - ac - er - bate your symp-toms?

Figure 26: Column four from page two of the act 1, scene 3 mobile score. See full page 2 in figure 25.

The accompanying ensemble material is a continuous texture of beeps and ticks, with the space for silences should the staging require it. It is always changing, from rehearsal to rehearsal, and from performance to performance. There is always going to be something different about it each time it is played.

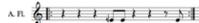
This brings us to the mobile score and the creation of the script-part in act 2, where the script-part's musical material would be the result of a creative collaboration between the singers and the composer.

## Act 2 mobile scores

**ENSEMBLE MOBILE SCORE**

SINGERS PERFORM FROM SCRIPT

A. Fl. 

A. Fl. 

A. Fl. 

A. Fl. 

A. Fl. 

A. Fl. 

A. Fl. 

A. Fl. 

---

1  
Psn. 

2  
Psn. 

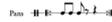
3  
Psn. 

4  
Psn. 

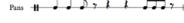
**A BOLT FROM THE BLUE**  
reprise  
*After the Fall - ACT 2 SCENE 3*

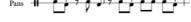
Psn. 

Psn. 

Psn. 

Psn. 

Psn. 

Psn. 

Psn. 

Psn. 

Vibraphone 

Psn. 

Xylophone 

Psn. 

Xylophone 

Psn. 

Vibraphone 

Psn. 

**PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCENE 4**

Very similar to act 1 scene 3, but tempi are free. The overall expression marking for this scene is "intense", but do not play louder than mf.

Play mobiles in any order as is dramatically required

Mobiles with repeats should be repeated ad-lib, while other mobiles are only played once on each go.

Play mobiles until scene end.

The scene ends with the soprano singing: "does your medication alleviate or exacerbate your symptoms? Is this my story?" then move seamlessly over to scene 4.

Figure 27: Ensemble mobile score for act 2, scene 3.

For the mobile scenes in act 2 (scenes 3-6), the singers' script-part has been removed from the mobile score. At the outset, they are only presented with the raw libretto for these scenes (figure 28).

Doctor:  
*(fusses over the scratched LP, then moves over to the board where he continues examining his notes with a new thought. Doctor tries to get some answers from Eva, he's clutching at straws)*

An aural hallucination  
preceding a seizure  
is like a dream  
a voice in the dark.

Singer:  
*(Sitting on the platform inspecting her bruised face in a hand mirror. Projections of her face, the bruise, and other black and blue images, appear on the hospital curtain.)*

Haunting, familiar  
a dangerous spell  
draws me deeper

Doctor:  
How to explain this paradox:

Singer:  
Haunting, familiar

Doctor:  
music allows us to experience  
pain and grief

music brings  
solace and sweet relief.

Singer:  
Almost a dangerous spell

Doctor:  
A dream, a voice in the dark.

Figure 28: Opening lines of act 2, scene 3 from the libretto.

I originally wanted us to improvise the vocal music from scratch for these last scenes of the opera. This, I hoped, would create a different musical language for the end of the opera, a development of sorts that would show the character's slow transition towards a slightly more carefree state of mind. This turned out to be very difficult for everyone involved. Robert Keith Sawyer cites jazz bassist Charles Mingus when he says:

“You can't improvise on nothing, man, you've gotta improvise on something.”

Sawyer R. K., 2007, p. 170

This is also true for improvised theatre. There the actors often ask for scenario suggestions from the audience before commencing a free improvisation. Similarly, the singers here would need stronger suggestion of musical material to build upon.

We therefore ended up using fragments and phrases of previous music, from both act 1 and act 2, as a ‘bank’ for improvisation.

“Good jazz improvisers have years of experience. Through years of practising alone and playing with others, they build a repertoire of phrases, overall forms, and memories of other musician’s famous solos and recordings. When master musicians improvise, they draw on this large repertoire of existing material, but they never simply insert past material directly; they always modify and embellish the past to fit the unique demands of the night’s performance.”

Sawyer R. K., 2007, p. 170

Having a ‘bank’ helped, but the process was still fairly stiff. It turned out that a more detailed dramatic analysis of these last scenes, of the dramatic relationship between the individual lines, was needed before the singers felt comfortable with any further musical improvisation. As stated earlier in section 3.7.1, Rebecca’s libretto “deliberately blurs the distinction between imagination and reality, and plays with ever-shifting perspectives”. Without any further analysis, this proved to be a stumbling block for us. If you do not understand fully what you are improvising on, the improvisation becomes unfocused. This also rang true with the instrumentalists for all of the open scenes in *After the Fall*. As soon as they got the chance to familiarise themselves with the text and the drama that was happening simultaneous to their performance of the mobiles, their improvisation improved, and blended better with the whole<sup>29</sup>.

In order to better support improvisation in scenes 3 to 6 in act 2, soprano Rannveig Káradóttir created this diagram (figure 29):

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<sup>29</sup> There is a parallel to *Solitude 1* here. The pianists, Michelle and Siwan, worked better with the soloist’s interpretation after having familiarised themselves with Tranströmer’s poem.

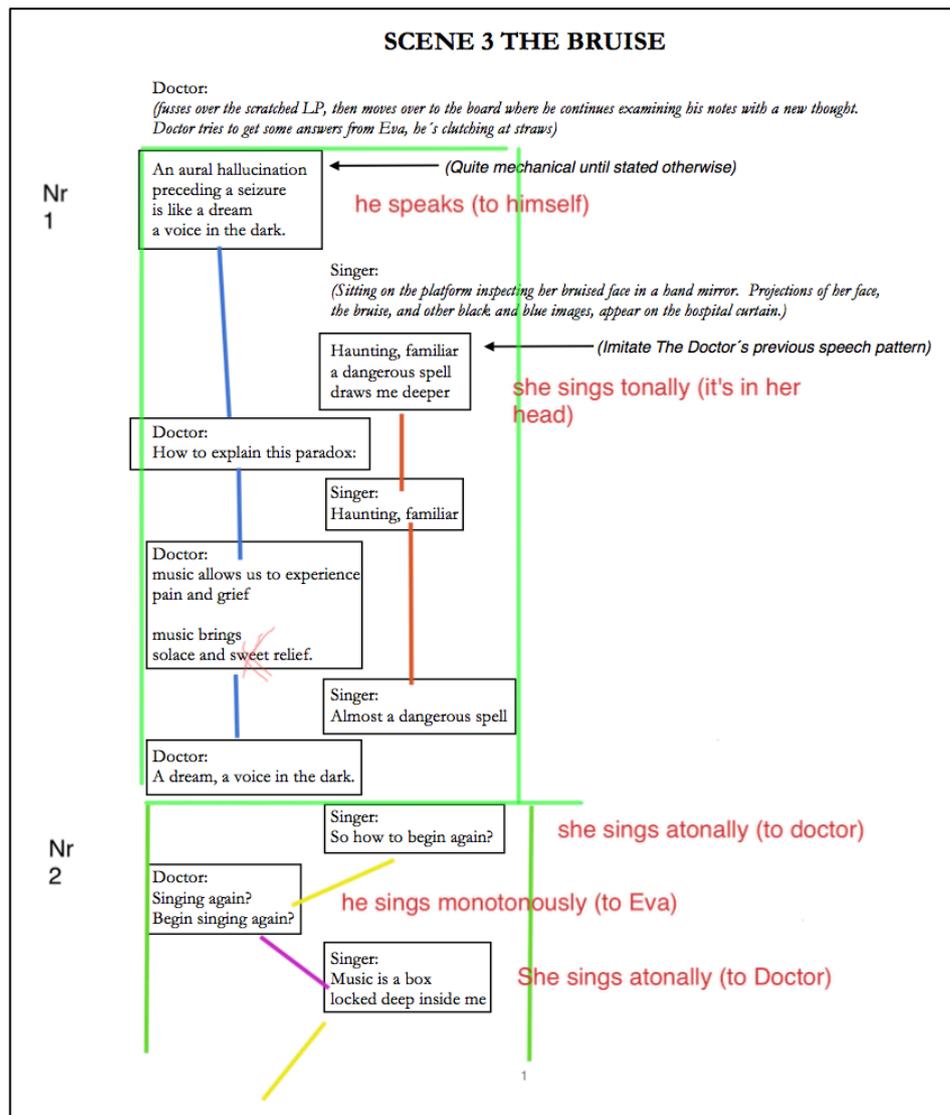


Figure 29: Rannveig's dramatic analysis of the raw libretto. Scene 3, act 2.

She identified the difference between times when the characters were talking to themselves (blue and red vertical lines), and when they were reacting to one another (yellow and purple diagonal lines). Green boxes then isolate thought units (marked nr 1, and nr 2<sup>30</sup>). She then suggested a pattern for different improvisational styles: “tonally” for when she is singing ‘inside her head’ and “atonally” for when she is singing to the doctor. This functioned perfectly in regards to the drama, as Eva Ende could not sing tonally when singing ‘out’, but in her head her thoughts had a chance of sounding tonal to herself. As for The Doctor, when he speaks to himself, he becomes more “tonal”, but goes “monotonic” when speaking directly to Eva. This pattern is interrupted only when The Doctor, inspired by Eva, slowly remembers and sings one of his mother’s favourite arias, *Sois immobile* from Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell*.

With this structure, an improvisation of material was possible.

<sup>30</sup> Nr: is the Icelandic abbreviation of *Númer* or “number”. Nr. 1 then meaning no. 1.

### 3.7.3 Leadership: conductor cues

For these final scenes, I provided the ensemble with loose structure, mobiles and music which we then - in the last few rehearsals before performance - adjusted to the singer's improvisation framework (as described in the previous chapter (2.6.2).

I set out to create clearer performance leadership, as opposed to the somewhat unclear one in *Évariste* (2.4.1.4) and the near-collaborative one in *Solitude 1* (2.5.6). By having clearer performance leadership from the beginning in *After the Fall*, I hoped to simplify the rehearsal process, as well as gaining slightly more quality control over my overarching compositional intention.

By adapting a method loosely inspired by gamelan *colotomic structures* (Brinner, 2008) I feel that I achieved interactive control, without stepping on my performers' toes regarding their *poly-time improvisation* freedom.

“Colotomic structure, in music, [is the] use of specified instruments to mark off established time intervals. In the tuned percussion ensembles (gamelan) of Java and Bali, for instance, a musical unit of 16 measures may be marked by four instruments: a small gong striking once every odd-numbered measure; a larger gong striking each 4th, 8th, 12th, and 16th measure; another gong striking each 6th, 10th, and 14th; and the large gong ageng sounding in the 16th.”

Britannica, 1998

The traditional colotomic concept is a much stricter time keeping system than the one I eventually used, but it helped me to think about alternative methods of conducting and time keeping.

This inspired me to include ‘conductor cues’ in the mobile scores (figure 30). These serve to indicate to the instrumentalists which section of the work has been reached, thus confirming their position in a sequence or cycle of material.

## Act 2 Scenes 4 *After the Fall*

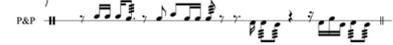
*Senza misura*  
*sempre delicato e quasi meccanico*

1  
Fl. 

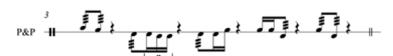
2  
Fl. 

---

*Sempre misterioso*  
*Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp*  
*Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer*  
*Let all hits ring*

1  
P&P 

2  
P&P 

3  
P&P 

---

*Sempre misterioso e delicato*  
*Extremely slow*  
*Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp*  
*Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer*

Pno. 

### PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCENE 4

#### FLUTE:

Use the pitches and rests given as a skeleton for improvisation. You can play from either C Flute (mobiles sound as written) or Alto Flute (mobiles sound a 4th lower). Experiment with articulation, tempi and note values. Experiment with octaves. Experiment with simple ornamentation. Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp. Feel free to deviate from the written pitches by a quarter tone up or down, every now and then. Feel free to experiment with superimposing subtle extended techniques.

#### PERCUSSION:

Play pots and pans (P&P). Experiment with tempi and rubato. Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp.

#### FLUTE AND PERCUSSION:

Move freely between mobiles (marked 1, 2, 3), but play each one in its entirety. You can repeat individual mobiles before moving onto a different one. Repeat the whole set of mobiles until the scene ends.

#### PIANO:

Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp. Repeat your current bar until cued otherwise (see: CUES).

#### FLUTE, PERCUSSION AND PIANO:

Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer.  
**Conductor's cues** mark changes to your performance:

#### CUES:

##### CUE 1

-Flute: hold your current pitch on a fermata, subito pianissimo, when out of breath, fade to nothing.

-Percussion and piano: let the last note or chord you struck ring out.

##### CUE 2

-Flute and percussion: resume playing your scene 4 mobiles.

-Piano: move onto your next bar and repeat until scene ends.

##### CUE 3

-Everyone: end scene.

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Figure 30

For scene 4 there were three cues (bottom right in figure 30). I, as the conductor, would stand still while the instrumentalists improvised according to the instructions in the score, until a certain point in the script was reached by the singers. At that point, I would give a clear cue with my hand, representing Cue 1. The points in the script which would indicate these cues were not fixed until the singers and director had developed the staging. In the last rehearsals before the premiere we then determined the cues before the performance.

With this method, I was able to compose mobiles for the ensemble while leaving the length of sections between cues open, to be determined by the staging. Additional space was therefore created for the exploration of dramatic incentives. For example, the singers along with the director could decide where they wanted to take time, and where they wanted to keep a high dramatic tempo. The score was then adapted to their structure.

### 3.7.4 Transitions

A secondary goal for the mobile scenes of *After the Fall*, was to effectively braid them musically with the other ‘fixed’ music of the opera, and avoid a ‘stop-start’ type transition between the two scoring techniques<sup>31</sup>. I opted for a somewhat gradual ‘cross-fade’ method, near the end of act 2 scene 2 from bar 132 for instance:

The musical score for bars 132-137 in act 2, scene 2, features four staves: Baritone (Bar.), Flute (Fl.), Vibraphone (Vib.), and Piano (Pno.). The tempo is marked 'Allegro alla misura'. The Flute part begins with a trill (tr) and a 'fin-al point' marked with a fermata. The Piano part is marked 'f' and 'agitato'. The Baritone part has a 'Sprechgesang' section marked 'f' and 'agitato'.

Figure 31: Bars 132-137 in act 2, scene 2.

The Doctor is alone in his study, frustrated by not being able to solve the mystery behind his own and Eva’s musical impairment. For inspiration, he puts a record on, which contains the recording of Eva performing *Ecco mormorar l’onde*. We hear the live ensemble perform an intro to the aria as if it was coming from the record player (figure 31), but before Eva’s singing is able to start, the record starts to skip (figure 32).

The musical score for bars 138-141 in act 2, scene 2, features four staves: Baritone (Bar.), Flute (Fl.), Vibraphone (Vib.), and Piano (Pno.). The tempo is marked 'Parlando quick and agitated'. The Flute part has a 'Damn it.' marking. The Piano part is marked 'f'.

Figure 32: Bars 138-141 in act 2, scene 2.

<sup>31</sup> Except where a ‘start-stop’ transition was dramatically feasible, in the end of act 1 scene 6 for instance.

This upsets The Doctor even more, but despite him removing the needle of the record, the skipping keeps going. Escalating. He cannot control it. It is now happening inside his head. Eventually elements from the subsequent mobile score from act 2 scene 3 start to appear.

Figure 33: Bars 151-154 in act 2, scene 2.

In several steps, the tempo slows down from the original *Allegro*, the ensemble texture somewhat dissolves, becomes thinner and the music becomes quieter.

Figure 34: Bars 155 to end of scene in act 2, scene 2.

By the last two bars of the scene (bars 158-9 in figure 34), the material for the vibraphone and piano has transformed completely into being identical to the mobiles of the subsequent open scene (act 2, scene 3). At that point they should “seamlessly move over to playing the mobiles of next scene.”<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> A similar transition method, for going from fixed to open, is used when moving from scene 2 to scene 3 in act 1.

### 3.7.5 Aesthetic speculation

I was fairly happy with the overall effect of the mobile scenes in *After the Fall*. I found them to be dramatically effective in creating a strong musical character for the ‘after’ sections, a stark difference from the ‘before’. They were tense, and created a completely different energy within the performance group. Everyone seemed to switch gears when moving to the mobile scores and script-parts. This is based on my own perception at the time, but it seems to be in line with the findings of Dolan, et al (2013, p. 32) regarding improvised performances:

“Our data suggest that the performers were in a state of heightened listening or attunement during the improvised mode, as evidenced by their rhythmic flexibility and ability to give musical space to the other players who may have been extemporising notes or leading a rubato.”

Baritone Nick Morton described the mobile scenes as “sinister”, and Rannveig Káradóttir, laughs as she says she finds them to have a “maddening effect”.

Rannveig developed the role of Eva Ende from a very personal standpoint. She told us about her aunt who had recently died of motor neuron disease, and her friend who had perfect pitch when she was a child, but after a car crash lost that ability. By seeing aspects of her loved ones in Eva Ende, she created something highly personal, and in my view, moving. In contrast to Rannveig’s experience in *A Glacier’s Requiem*, in *After the Fall* she seemed to have grasped, and fully embraced, my poly-time improvisation concept.<sup>33</sup> That, together with me successfully dissolving the calculable ratios<sup>34</sup> between script-part and accompaniment, allowed the soloist to achieve the image I presented in 3.4.4: The arctic tern is able to hover around freely in the northern wind.

By utilising the performers’ specialised training and experience in an interactive creative process, we were able to create a framework for improvisation for the open scenes in act 2. Coming up with that framework was a lot of work for everybody, and sometimes very stressful for the singers, who - due to their training - prefer the safety of a clear musical direction<sup>35</sup>. But having found the minimum musical direction needed to support (some) operatic singers in improvisation of musical material could potentially be useful for the future development of my open operas.

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<sup>33</sup> Rannveig said in chapter 3.4.5 that “if she would be given the chance to perform it again she said she would approach it from the outset with this thought: “*ok, I have this rhythm but I do not need to listen to, or follow you [conductor/ensemble] or anything.*”

<sup>34</sup> See definition of *calculable ratios* in 3.4.5.

<sup>35</sup> More on this in the conclusion chapter.

The story and libretto of *After the Fall* are a good fit for the open-form poly time improvisation. Open-form compositions, by their very definition, deny or resist structural closure or finality. They insist on their provisional, mobile status. (Ayrey, 2005, p. 6) Simultaneously, Eva Ende cannot be cured. She even comments on it herself at one time (in act 2, scene 4):

*Singer:*  
*No beginning, no tidy end to this tale*  
*just telling and telling*

*And what if there is no story?*  
*No beginning*                      *no end*

As their consultation sessions progress, the two characters start figuratively chasing their tails in a cyclical search for a non-existent cure. On another level, their dialogue also represents the conversation about music as an intellectual versus an emotional phenomenon. The Doctor speaks the case of the intellectual, Eva the emotional. Rebecca and I agree that both are equally important when appreciating and understanding music, and the false dichotomy set up between The Doctor as the ‘intellectual’ and Eva as the ‘emotional’ will help neither to understand nor resolve their trauma. All of this is framed and musically represented in open-form mobile scores, extending the conversation about non-finality into the musical domain. *After the Fall*, is therefore, in many ways, an opera without an end, without an answer.

# PART 4

## 4.1 Conclusion

Chapter 3.3 set out two overarching aims to give clearer structure to the analysis of the works presented in PART 3:

- 1) To spark speculation regarding a possible compositional aesthetic,
- 2) To lead to a framework of working methods and considerations that will support future developments of *mobile scores*, *script parts* and *open operas*.

## 4.2 The compositional aesthetic and a definition of open opera

When searching for the meeting place between opera and the interactive creative processes of improvised theatre I was confronted with the initial compositional compromises that I had to make. I had to let go of the musical reins up to a degree, which became quite unnerving at times. But by doing so, I managed to reveal the mechanics at work which were either standing in the way of, or had the potential to support, my preferred process. The resulting meeting place became what I like to call an *open opera*.

An *open opera* is an operatic piece that uses notational and scoring methods, such as a *mobile score* and *script-parts*, which support the dramatic improvisational process of *real-time paralinguistic manipulation* with *active accompaniment*.

This *manipulation*, as taken on by the group - as I touch upon in section 3.2 – gives birth to a sort of *interactive* compositional aesthetic. This process does by its very nature affect the musical output, in a similar way to chance music. But here ‘chance’ only affects the arrangement of pre-composed vocal mobiles on top of more compositionally controlled accompaniment. This could be called *chance-of-assembly*, or maybe *chance-in/of-polyphony*. Important to the aesthetic, in this composer’s mind, is to support a group dynamic where many different permutations of the overall texture can be assembled during the rehearsal phase of a new work. The most favourable theme can then be used as a structure for any improvisation taking place in live performance. The chance can therefore be guided. To achieve this, it is very important to effectively support informality, or playfulness, in rehearsals. The success of playfulness as a compositional tool depends in large part on the intangible chemistry between the members of the group. (Sawyer R. K., 2003, p. 4) This will be covered in more detail in section 4.3.

But apart from the parameters already discussed above, when it comes to open operas, it seems that the wider aesthetic will change from project to project, from creative teams to creative teams, from composer to composer. With regards to the four studies covered here however, they all seem to have at least one more general characteristic in common: They put substantial weight on narrative. In other words, all the sections that I chose to work with could be said to be, in a strict sense, the *recitative* sections of those studies. Perhaps they could be called *open* recitatives. This is particularly evident in *After the Fall* (3.7). The defined difference between my work and traditional recitatives was covered in section 2.2.

### 4.3 A framework of working methods and considerations that will support future developments

The following framework in 9 steps is created to support operatic performers who are new to open operas and dramatic improvisation. If operatic performers are not supported effectively in future open opera works – since they are not usually trained in performing using the processes described here<sup>36</sup> – any further developments of the method will be problematic.

This framework is not meant to be exhaustive or final. It is likely that it will keep changing and developing in the years to come. At least it should give an idea of what is required when preparing to perform open operas.

#### Step 1: Considerations for assembling and maintaining a suitable performance team

Having the right team of performers and creative leads – who are interested in performance experiments; who have some experience of group creativity and improvisation; and have experience and understanding of traditional operatic performance – is the tripartite imperative for performing open operas.

Prior to writing *After the Fall* I co-formed the Brighton based ALDAorchestra with this in mind, to surround myself with like-minded musicians. For *After the Fall* I worked with an ensemble of three musicians from the orchestra who are trained classical musicians as well as being experienced improvisers<sup>37</sup>. The four of us had already established a good working relationship through previous concerts as ALDAorchestra, which helped in realising this first attempt at a *mobile score*. Soprano Rannveig Káradóttir was also a good addition to that dynamic, given our previous collaborations. Considering that we were often in the dark in terms of how the experimental scoring for *After the Fall* would work, *trust* became a big factor.

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<sup>36</sup> Although, it is not completely unheard of either: “Opera improvisation, as an art form and as a pedagogical tool (where improvisation is sometimes combined with notated material) appeared internationally about 30 years ago, in USA (Play it by Ear, Opera Works, Opera Columbus), Great Britain (Impropera), and later in Finland (Improah!)...” (Wilén, 2017, p. 32)

<sup>37</sup> Helen Whitaker on flute and alto flute, Katherine Tinker on piano, and Adam Bushell on percussion. A list of all collaborators is in the appendix.

When working on open operas one needs to assemble a team where mutual understanding, informality (or playfulness) and trust can be supported and maintained. (Sawyer R. K., 2003, p. 3) The quality of the relationship between the members of the group is an important factor in supporting collaboration. (Miell & Littleton, 2004)

“There seems no doubt that a group can make or break its members, and that it’s more powerful than the individuals in it. A great group can propel its members forward so that they achieve amazing things.”

Johnstone, 1979, p. 28

The singers need to have the technical proficiency to understand advanced musical notation and grammar, and perform from challenging musical parts, whilst also being improvisers of drama. The latter skill is highly unorthodox in the world of opera, therefore this framework includes information necessary to begin training dramatic improvisation. Requesting any professional performer to apply a set of performing skills they are not trained in, is to ask a great deal of them, and this was repeatedly confirmed in my work related to this research. Traditionally, operatic singers are already concerned with processing a great quantity of performance information. In addition to memorising words like actors, they also memorise music (with all that entails), apply appropriate singing technique, and take part in musical communication with leaders and fellow performers on stage. (Rudolf, 1995, p. 405) Adding another task on top of that, is very demanding (although definitely possible), and it is good to keep that in mind going forward.

In his work *The Photocopier* (2014), former Glyndebourne composer in residence Luke Styles requests his musicians to perform as actors. He reports that “the performance suffered because of the lack of ability of the musicians to utilise a different set of performing skills, which they had not developed.” (Styles, 2016, p. 24)

When discussing his work *Millennarium* (1997) choreographer Wayne McGregor discusses a similar parallel within the dancing world. He seems to be mindful when seeking collaborators.

“[The dancers], they have to have the technical ability to do the work [...] but just as importantly, they have to have an open curiosity, be able to [...] generate movement themselves based on the tasks I set them. [...] That willingness to explore isn't something you often find in the big classical companies – and it’s not that the dancers don’t want to do it, it’s just that they’ve never had the chance.”

Apter, 2010

Director Shirley Keane describes the singers of *Évariste* opera as having been “very willing to be a silly [i.e. playful] cast. Yes, it had to be encouraged, but this group in particular were brave and open. Not all singers are able to be like that.”

## **Step 2: Script-parts distributed**

Once one has a suitable performance team in place, as per step 1, the next step is to send out script-parts to the soloists. No accompaniment should be sent out, no score, nothing else. Soloists get some time to look over their lines and mobiles at home, but do not necessarily need to learn them by heart (although that would of course be of value).

The soloists are not given the mobile score at this stage, as in my experience this confuses them more than it helps. If soloists are however veterans of open operas, they could receive all the music earlier, before step 1 for instance, but only if they are familiar with this style of performance. Most traditionally trained operatic performers will not possess the skills required for dramatic improvisation, or the experience to fully comprehend the unorthodox nature of mobile scores. The prescribed sequence in this production schedule is advised so performers know 'where to start' when receiving the rest of the music later on, or in step 5.

## **Step 3: An introduction to the basics of dramatic improvisation**

For the main part of this step, performers do not need any of the music from the actual opera in question. They just need themselves, comfortable clothing, and an open mind.

Introducing all soloists to the general working methods of dramatic improvisation is very important. I recommend reading *Impro* by Keith Johnstone if a full sense of the working methods practised in improvised theatre is desired- focusing mainly on the *introduction, notes on myself, status* and *spontaneity* chapters. Here I will present only what I consider to be directly useful to the realisation of open operas based on my own discoveries, occasionally cross referenced against Johnstone for clarity and contextualisation.

For those who are not used to improvisation or creative collaboration, steps 3 and 4 are the most important steps of the framework. Consequently, these steps are likely to be stressful and maybe even intimidating for those people, if an environment of complete trust and informality is not present in the group. Normally, what operatic singers are used to is a clear creative hierarchy, not collaboration, and receiving something that they can specifically work on to achieve a beautiful sound prior to performance. Improvisation and creative collaboration is therefore often an unknown world to most classically trained singers.

Counter-tenor Patrick Terry of The Voicings Collective<sup>38</sup>, who experiment with devised opera, says in one of their video research documentations:

“I really really like this [improvising] but I would like if you [composer Michael Betteridge] synthesized it and then by the end there is something for me to learn, because I’m aware that tone quality is not my first [he pauses] I think that if I have music in front of me [...] once I have something on paper I can get it to sound beautiful.”

The Voicings Collective, 2017

Shirley Keane offers a director’s perspective on a similar topic:

“... for good or bad reasons, singers and actors tend to want to have moves set for them, they learn them and are reassured by knowing their ‘moves’ on stage as much as their music.”

If such fears are prominent in the group, the singers can be reassured by the fact that there *will* be steps later on where they absolutely *can* put tone quality and memorisation first; e.g. steps 5, 6 and 8. However, it should also be made clear that the current steps, no. 3 and 4, are not amongst those.

The act of improvisation, or ‘making something up on the spot’, can be frightening or intimidating to improvisation novices. That is understandable, since in our daily lives we often “suppress our spontaneous impulses, we censor our imaginations, we learn to present ourselves as ‘ordinary’, and we destroy our talent [for spontaneity]...” (Johnstone, 1979, p. 84). Sara Wilen cites Vilc (2015) when she says that:

“...to those who are not familiar with this tradition, to go on an empty stage without any conception and still be able to produce a satisfying performance often seems like a terrifying, if not impossible, task. However, this perception of improvisation is based on the assumption that what its actors do onstage is completely unregulated and free. This is not the case. Theatre improvisation includes rules, principles and restrictions that professional improvisers spend years training in before they become second nature. Theatre improvisation is a technique, a craft to be learned.”

Wilen, 2017, p. 25

The goal is to help the group feel comfortable enough to let down their shield, and to be in the moment. The importance of trust and playfulness in the group cannot be overstated. Supporting this is the director’s responsibility in the first instance. In open operas playfulness is a tool for creativity, which is essential, for instance, in step 7 of this framework. If there is no mutual trust in the group, then there can be no playfulness, and if there is no playfulness, there is no open opera.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.voicingscollective.co.uk/>

One of the basics everyone has to understand in order to feel comfortable is that you cannot, and should not, try to anticipate ‘the problem’, and prepare solutions in advance. According to Johnstone this is quite a common ‘ploy’ for beginners to use, whether it is done knowingly or unknowingly.

“... probably it started when they were learning to read. You anticipate which paragraph will be yours, and start trying to decipher it. This has two great disadvantages: it stops you learning from the attempts of your classmates; and very likely you’ll have calculated wrongly, and will be asked to read one of the adjacent paragraphs throwing you into total panic. Most students haven’t realised—till I show them—how inefficient such techniques are.”

Johnstone, 1979, p. 31

A good place to start is to send the message that what might typically be considered as ‘failure’, is fine. For performers new to improvisation, it might help if the director (or any other creative lead) accepts any responsibility for any failures.

“The first thing I do when I meet a group of new students is (probably) to sit on the floor. I play low status, and I’ll explain that if the students fail they’re to blame me. [...] I have already changed the group profoundly, because failure is suddenly not so frightening any more. [...] I really will apologise to them when they fail, and ask them to be patient with me, and explain that I’m not perfect.”

Ibid, p. 29

It needs to be made clear at the outset, that the tools we are using, namely mobile scores and script parts, are developed to support dramatic spontaneity, and to achieve spontaneity performers must not try to anticipate the future, as it were. The only thing required of them for this step and the next is to have an empty head, watch, listen, do what they are asked to do, and see what happens.

#### **Step 4: Dramatic improvisation workshops**

The director leads workshops (as many as deemed necessary) to equip the performers with the skills and insights necessary for step 7.

What follows are examples of exercises, reminiscent of the ones I used to do with my theatre troupe in Reykjavik, but the descriptions here are borrowed from Johnstone.

To clarify dramatic spontaneity and playfulness to the group, one could start with this simple exercise:

“The first time I meet a group I might ask them to mime [...] taking something off a shelf, or out of their pocket. [...] Afterwards I explain that I’m not interested in what they did, but in how their minds worked. I say that either they can put their hand out, and see what it closes on; or else they can think first, decide what they’ll pick up, and then do the mime. If they’re worried about failing, then they’ll have to think first; if they’re being playful, then they can allow their hand to make its own decision.”

Ibid, p. 90

This should be simple for anyone with actor training, but it might prove to be an obstacle for most classically trained musicians. The reason for that *might* be a fear of being unoriginal. The performer needs to be reassured, by example from the leader, that such fears are unnecessary.

“The improviser has to realise that the more obvious he is, the more original he appears. I constantly point out how much the audience like someone who is direct, and how they always laugh with pleasure at a really ‘obvious’ idea. Ordinary people asked to improvise will search for some original idea because they want to be thought clever. They’ll say and do all sorts of inappropriate things. If someone says ‘What’s for supper?’ a bad improviser will desperately try to think up something original. Whatever he says he’ll be too slow. He’ll finally drag up some idea like ‘fried mermaid’. If he’d just said ‘fish’ the audience would have been delighted. No two people are exactly alike, and the more obvious an improviser is, the more himself he appears. If he wants to impress us with his originality, then he’ll search out ideas that are actually commoner and less interesting.”

Ibid, p. 87

“If I tell a student, ‘Say a word’, he’ll probably gawp. He wants a context in which his answer will be ‘right’. He wants his answer to bring credit to him, that’s what he’s been taught answers are for. ‘Why can’t you just say whatever comes into your head?’ ‘Yes, well, I don’t want to speak nonsense.’ ‘Any word would have done. A spontaneous reply is never nonsense.’ This puzzles him. ‘All right,’ I say, ‘just name me a list of objects, but as quick as you can.’ ‘Er . . . cat, dog, mouse, trap, dark cellar . . .’ He trails off, because he feels that the list is somehow revealing something about himself. He wants to keep his defences up. When you act or speak spontaneously, you reveal your real self, as opposed to the self you’ve been trained to present.”

Ibid, p. 119

With this in mind, the exercise could be repeated in various versions until everyone in the group is comfortable with coming up with simple impromptu answers like these on the spot.

As in my example in Part 1 with the general and the soldier, understanding *status* is important for the dramatic process in open operas. First a word of caution:

“If you wish to teach status interactions, it’s necessary to understand that however willing the student is consciously, there may be very strong subconscious resistances. Making the student safe, and getting him to have confidence in you, are essential. You then have to work together with the student, as if you were both trying to alter the behaviour of some third person. It’s also important that the student who succeeds at playing a status he feels to be alien should be instantly rewarded, praised and admired.”

Ibid, p. 55

If any of the performers are having trouble with coming up with things to say during the following exercises, they can be carried out in gibberish, “just to make it quite clear that the things said are not as important as the status played.” (ibid, p. 49)

The following are two examples of exercises that aim to teach dramatic status.

### **Pecking orders:**

“I introduce pecking orders as clown games, oversimplifying the procedures, and creating complex absurdities which ‘cartoon’ real life. Orders and blame are passed one way along the hierarchy, excuses and problems are passed the other way. So far as possible [sic] each person is to interact with the one next to him in rank. 1: Chair! 2: Chair! 3: Get a chair! 4: Yes, Sir. 1: What’s happening? 2: I’ll just check, Sir. Where’s the chair? 3: Number Four’s getting it, Sir. 4: Beg pardon, but I can’t find one, Sir. 3: He can’t find one! 2: ‘Sir!’ How dare you address me without calling me ‘Sir’? 3: Yes, Sir! Number Four reports that there is no chair, Sir! 1: What’s going on here, Number Two? 2: There’s no chair, Sir. 1: No chair! This is monstrous! Have someone crouch so that I can sit on them! 2: Number Three, have Number Four crouch so that Number One can sit on him. 4: Permission to speak, Sir! (And so on.)” (Ibid, p. 67)

“Number One in a pecking order has to make sure that everything is functioning properly. Anything that irritates him must be suppressed. At all times everything must be organised for his personal contentment. He can also add his own rules, insisting that absolute silence should be maintained at all times, or that the word ‘is’ should be abolished from the language, or whatever. [...] Number Four has to keep Number Three happy while avoiding the attention of One or Two. If addressed by One or Two he must avoid any appearance of wanting to usurp Three’s position. [...] Number Four has to be an expert at making excuses, and in evading responsibility. He must also be inventing problems to pass up the pecking order. [...] Basically, One imposes aims and tries to get them fulfilled, while Four discovers that the house is on fire, or the enemy approaching, or that there’s only three minutes’ oxygen left, and so on. Two and Three are mostly concerned with maintaining their respective positions, and with the communication of information up and down the line.” (Ibid, p. 69-70)

### **The wrong room:**

This exercise is a little bit more advanced, as it puts more pressure on the individual performer, as opposed to the pecking order exercise where you are always in a team of four.

“[The wrong room exercise is] for one character—let’s say he’s a teacher, although he could be any profession. He arrives late carrying the register and a pair of glasses. He says something like ‘All right, quiet there, now then’, treating us as the class. As he is about to read the register he puts the glasses on, and sees not his class, but a meeting of the School Governors. He apologises, dropping in status frantically, and struggles to the door, which sticks. He wrestles with it and after about ten seconds it comes free. The actor feels a very great drop in status when the door jams. [...] Once outside, the actor either stops the exercise, or if he feels brave, re-enters, and plays the scene again and again [with a different scenario each time].”

Ibid, p. 48

There are numerous other exercises to consider for this step of the rehearsal process, and any combination of them could be used to best suit the needs of the group, as long as the group develops trust, as well as a good understanding of dramatic spontaneity and status before moving on to step 5.

By the end of this step, the leader could have the performers bring their respective script-parts for the opera in question and use them as a basis for an exercise. For instance, the leader could have them perform them with any and all combinations of statuses and settings, without worrying about making musical mistakes.

### **Step 5: Rest of the music distributed**

All performers are given the remaining material in question, along with the mobile score and a simple accompanying analysis that clarifies the harmonic *macro* relationship (see 2.4.1 for *macro musical relationships*) between script parts and the mobile score (most likely on a scene-to-scene basis). This accompanying analysis is meant to make it easier for the soloist(s) to rehearse at home in the correct harmonic environment, since no clear vertical alignment with accompaniment is present in the score.

### **Step 6: First music-focused phase**

This step includes what is traditionally called a ‘sitzprobe’, or a seated rehearsal, where all singers come together to run their music in relation to the accompaniment.

### **Step 7: A second drama-focused phase<sup>39</sup>**

Here the group explores and informs dramatic aspects of the script parts and mobile scores in question. After having done the exercises in Step 4, the group should be ready to take an informed (yet playful) approach to the development of the drama in the piece, namely its characters and their relationships, twisting and turning the pre-composed vocal mobiles as a result. The primary goal here is for the action to ‘pop’, to be immediate, exciting and entertaining.

Ideally, the conductor (if applicable) would be present as well, since the music is affected as a result and he/she needs to be aware of that process.

### **Step 8: A second music-focused phase**

The conductor takes over the leadership from the director and makes sure that the overall structure is musically satisfactory and effective. Preferably, this should not take more than a day or two. If in the unlikely event that there are any frictions between the drama and music at this point, then all finalising decisions should ideally favour the music.

### **Step 9: Performance**

What follows are traditional full runs of the piece, technical rehearsals, dress rehearsal and finally, the performance.

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<sup>39</sup> First drama-focused phase are steps 3 and 4.

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## Appendix

### 5.1 List of collaborators

#### *A Glacier's Requiem:*

- Designer: Friðþjófur Þorsteinsson ('Fiffi')
- Soprano (Glacier's Avatar): Rannveig Káradóttir
- Flute & Piccolo: Jenni Hogan
- Bb Clarinet: Joy Boole
- Bassoon: Ruth Hardwick
- Harp: Gabriella Jones
- Piano: Siwan Rhys
- Cello: Andrew Power

#### *Évariste*

- Librettist: Lori Ann Stephens
- Director: Shirley Keane
- Rehearsal pianist: Michelle Marie Santiago
- Stand-in pianists: Pierre Riley & Héléne Favre-Bulle.
- Designer: Friðþjófur Þorsteinsson (Fiffi)
- Évariste: Jonathan Hyde
- Stephanie: Freya Jacklin
- Examiner Pochon: Callie Swarbrick
- Examiner Bouliez: Claire Bournez
- Examiner Dinet: Christian Valle
- Flute: Jenni Hogan
- Bb Clarinet: Alex Roberts
- Acoustic Guitar: Julian Vickers
- Cello: Andrew Power

*Évariste: Love Equation (a string quartet)*

- 1<sup>st</sup> Violin: Helga Þóra Björgvinsdóttir
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Violin: Pétur Björnsson
- Viola: Jonathan Larson
- Cello: Guðný Jónasdóttir

*Solitude 1*

- Soloists: Gustav Hasfjord and Eliza McCarthy
- Pianists: Michelle Marie Santiago and Siwan Rhys

*After the Fall*

- Librettist: Rebecca Hurst
- Director: Alisdair Kitchen
  
- Eva Ende: Rannveig Káradóttir
- The Doctor: Nick Morton
  
- Flute & Alto Flute: Helen Whitaker
- Piano: Katherine Tinker
- Percussion: Adam Bushell

## **5.2 Additional material**

Further reading, recordings, scores and other additional material can be accessed online at:

<http://helgingvarsson.com/>

## **5.3 The script-parts and mobile scores**

# A Glacier's Requiem

Soprano's script-part

Steinn Steinarr

Helgi R. Ingvarsson

1



Yf-ir sof-and-i jörð. hef ég flutt hin-a hvít-u fregn og orð mín féll-u í ís- blátt.vatn ið eins og vor-næt-ur regn.

2



Sól - in, sól - in var hjá mér eins og grann-vax - in kon - a á gul - um skóm.

3



Á brenn - heitt and - lit fell - ur blátt regn hinn - a blæ-vængj - uð - u dag - a.

4



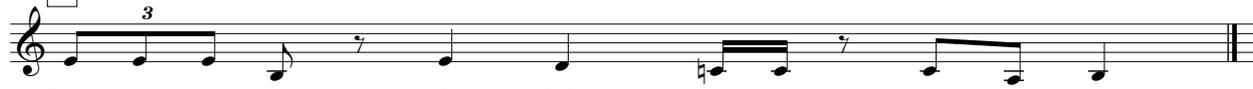
Og tím - inn og vatn - ið renn - a veg - laust til þurð - ar.

5



Og tím - inn hvarf eins og tár, sem fell - ur á hvít - a hönd.

6



Renn - and - i vatn, ris - blár dag - ur, radd - laus nótt.

7



Í nótt mun ég sof - a und - ir sjö - stírn - um him - ni, við hinn ó - væð - a ós.

8



Ég finn mót - spyr - nu tím - ans fall - a mátt - van - a gegn - um mýkt vatn - sins.

9



Ég hef bú - ið mér hvíl - u í hálf - lukt - u aug - a ei - lífð - ar - inn - ar.

# ÉVARISTE

## Scene 3 script-part

Lori Ann Stephens

Helgi R. Ingvarsson

Steph. 1  
Éva - a - riste.

Steph. 2  
Év - a - riste.

Steph. 3  
What is happ - 'ning with us Év - a - riste?

Steph. 4  
Év - a - riste.

Steph. 5  
Do I dare to hope\_ for us, Év - a - riste?

Steph. 6  
Say it a - gain

Steph. 7  
Love will shield us from the sad - ness out - side these walls\_

Év. 1  
[Bm] Say it a - gain\_ [Em] Say it a - gain.

Év. 2  
[Bm] Say it a - gain. [Em] Say it a - gain.

Év. 3  
[Bm] no pitch ord. [Em]  
[s] Say it a - gain\_ Say it a - gain\_

Év. 4  
Oh, Steph - a - nie. My un - i - verse is o - ver - thrown by [s] Steph - a - nie.

Év. 5  
[s] - Steph - a - nie.

Év. 6  
I'll pro - tect you from the mad - ness out - side these walls\_

# SOLITUDE

## SCRIPT-PART

To be performed with versions 1 and 2 piano accompaniment

1. *Right here I was nearly killed one night in February.  
My car slewed on the ice, sideways,  
into the other lane. The oncoming cars-  
their headlights- came nearer.* } 1
  
2. *My name, my daughters, my job  
slipped free and fell behind silently,  
farther and farther back. I was anonymous,  
like a schoolboy in a lot surrounded by enemies.* } 2
  
3. *The approaching traffic had powerful lights.  
They shone on me while I turned and turned  
the wheel in a transparent fear that moved like egg white.* } 3  
*The seconds lengthened out- making more room-  
they grew long as hospital buildings.* } 4
  
- ... } 5
  
4. *It felt as if you could just take it easy  
and loaf a bit* } 6  
*before the smash came.*
  
- ... } 7
  
5. *Then firm land appeared: a helping sand grain  
or a marvellous gust of wind. The car took hold  
and fishtailed back across the road.* } 8  
*A signpost shot up, snapped off -a ringing sound-  
tossed into the dark.*
  
6. *Came all quiet. I sat there in my seatbelt  
and watched someone tramp through the blowing snow  
to see what had become of me.* } 9
  
- ... } 10

# A Bolt from the Blue

## After the Fall - Act 1 Scene 3

### MOBILE SCORE

#### ICU mobiles for ensemble - perform throughout scene

**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 66$   $p$   
**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 104$   $p$   
**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 80$   $mf$   
**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 60$   $mf \Rightarrow pp \text{ } mf \Rightarrow pp \text{ } mf \Rightarrow pp$   
**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 132$   $mf$   
**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 95$   $mf$   
**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 110$   $pp \text{ } p \text{ } pp \text{ } p \text{ } pp \text{ } p \text{ } pp$   
**A. Fl.**  $\text{♩} = 72$   $mf$   
**Pno.**  $\text{♩} = 66$   $mf$   
**Pno.**  $\text{♩} = 140$

**For ensemble:**  
 Play mobiles in any order as is dramatically required  
 Mobiles with repeats should be repeated ad-lib., while other  
 mobiles are only played once on each go.  
 The mobiles have varying tempo markings, and you should  
 stick to them as strictly as possible for the bigger part of the  
 scene. Should the dramatic opportunity arise, a new tempo  
 could be applied for a limited time.

#### Scene start

*Use pitch as focal point. You can stray away from it, but not more than a minor 2nd*

**Baritone** *improvise a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 Hello Eva Erle  
**Soprano** *improvise a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 I hope you had a good week Eva Erle  
**Baritone** *partially imitate the soprano's preceding rhythm in the pitch given*  
 I see from your notes  
**Soprano** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 I recommend further tests.  
**Baritone** *improvise a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 By you feel discouraged?  
**Soprano** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm using the pitch given*  
 No singer take to perform there are duty when I am lost in the world  
**Baritone** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 A slight adjustment  
**Soprano** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 When I am lost to my self

#### Vocal mobiles for singers - perform like a theatre-script - sempre senza misura

**Baritone** *improvise a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 We recommend a slight adjustment to your medication.  
**Soprano** *imitate a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 Head or heart? Sh-boom Sh-boom Sh-boom  
**Baritone** *improvise a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 I see from your notes  
**Soprano** *imitate a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 Words or music? da do wop de wadla-wadla  
**Baritone** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 A slight adjustment to your medication...  
**Soprano** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 Mind or body? da do wop de wadla-wadla  
**Baritone** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 I recommend further tests.  
**Soprano** *improvise a speech rhythm using the pitch given*  
 By you feel discouraged?  
**Baritone** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 No singer take to perform there are duty when I am lost in the world  
**Soprano** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 A slight adjustment  
**Soprano** *partially imitate the preceding rhythm*  
 When I am lost to my self

Soprano  
Can you tell us how you feel

Soprano  
describe your pain

Soprano  
on a scale of one to ten

Soprano  
do you feel numb do you get pins and needles do you experience a bit of dizziness or tired

Soprano  
would you describe this as an aura, a wave

Soprano  
or visual - a disturbance

Soprano  
do you have difficulty sleeping at night

Soprano  
forming those regular tonalities

Soprano  
sexual dysfunction

Soprano  
do you remember to take your medication not take your medication

Soprano  
Does your medication cause

Soprano  
all events related to your symptoms

*partially imitates the preceding rhythm*

Baritone  
to your medication?

Soprano  
Who am I without music?

*partially imitates the preceding rhythm*

Baritone

An excellent question. One that doctors have tried to answer. If we could hear notes...

Soprano  
Her notes?

*imitates a speech rhythm using the pitch given*

Baritone  
In your notes?

Soprano  
You think the answer is in my notes?

*partially imitates the preceding rhythm*

Baritone  
In your notes...

Soprano  
Cascades are not my life. This is not my story

*partially imitates the preceding rhythm*

Baritone  
Do you feel discouraged?

Soprano  
Is this my story?

*imitates a speech rhythm using the pitch given*

Baritone  
moving on...

Soprano  
A list of symptoms and side effects. Extra. Do they mention I am a musician? That I can no longer sing per form?

*parlando*

Baritone  
That's the ticket that's the tone.

Soprano  
And now I have a question

*partially imitates the preceding rhythm cantando*

Baritone  
A question?

Soprano  
Who is Eva Ende with our music? Why is Eva Ende with our music? Where is Eva Ende and what is her story?

*partially imitates the preceding rhythm*

Baritone  
In your notes

Soprano  
What is her story?

Scene end

# The locked box

## After the Fall - Act 1 Scene 6

MOBILE SCORE

ICU mobiles for ensemble - perform throughout scene

**A. Fl.**  $J = 66$   $p$   
**A. Fl.**  $J = 104$   
**A. Fl.**  $J = 80$   $mf$   
**A. Fl.**  $J = 60$   $mf \Rightarrow pp \Rightarrow mf \Rightarrow pp \Rightarrow mf \Rightarrow pp$   
**A. Fl.**  $J = 132$   $mf$   
**A. Fl.**  $J = 95$   
**A. Fl.**  $J = 110$   $pp \Rightarrow p \Rightarrow pp \Rightarrow p \Rightarrow pp \Rightarrow p$   
**A. Fl.**  $J = 72$   $mf$   
**Pans**  $J = 66$   $mf$   
**Pans**  $J = 140$   
**Pans**  $J = 120$   
**Vibraphone**  $J = 110$   $p$

For ensemble:  
 Play mobiles in any order as is dramatically required  
 Mobiles with repeats should be repeated ad-lib., while other mobiles are only played once on each go.  
 The mobiles have varying tempo markings, and you should stick to them as strictly as possible for the bigger part of the scene. Should the dramatic opportunity arise, a new tempo could be applied for a limited time.

SCENE START

**Soprano** *quite sensitive*  
 leep de leep  
**Baritone** *rough, almost like the preceding rhythm (p.p.)*  
 I have a question for you Eva Eble.  
**Soprano**  
 de leep leep  
**Baritone**  
 What is mus-ic?  
**Soprano**  
 A ques-tion?  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 Mist flows through  
 un-like water.  
**Soprano**  
 sh-boom  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 Embodies emotion  
 leep leep de leep  
**Soprano**  
 sh-boom  
 do wip de wadda  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 And it is some-thing  
 music presents as an aura,  
**Soprano**  
 de leep de leep da de wip leep  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 provides seizures.

Vocal mobiles for singers - perform like a theatre-script - *sempre senza mizura*

**Soprano**  
 deeg - a - ling - a - ling - a - ling  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 So I have a question for Eva Eble.  
**Soprano** *leap sensitive*  
 A ques-tion?  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 What happens in the musical brain  
 when things fall apart?  
**Soprano**  
 You're ask - ing me this quest - ion?  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 As a singer  
**Soprano**  
 Not a Sing-er?  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 Singers, they're Singers  
 perfect pitch and a voice  
 of great power and beauty.  
**Soprano** *agitated*  
 Not a singer are a ble to list-en to mus-ic or per-form  
**Soprano**  
 there are days when I am lost  
 to my-self  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 What happens  
 when things fall apart?  
**Soprano**  
 No leep - leep-ing no leep - leep-ing no end to this tale  
 just tell - ing and tell - ing  
**Baritone** *f.p.r.*  
 Making notes on the board as she speaks  
**Baritone** *performed*  
 There's the ticket  
 that's the tone  
**Soprano**  
 What if there is no story  
 no leep - leep-ing no end to this tale  
**Soprano** *f.p.r.*  
 like a locked box I can not op - en

Continue to fixed score on next page

# A BOLT FROM THE BLUE

## reprise After the Fall - ACT 2 SCENE 3

### ENSEMBLE MOBILE SCORE

### SINGERS PERFORM FROM SCRIPT

A. Fl.

1 Pno.

2 Pno.

3 Pno.

4 Pno.

Pans

Pans

Pans

Pans

Pans

Pans

Pans

Pans

Vibraphone

Pans

Xylophone

Pans

Xylophone

Pans

Vibraphone

Vibraphone

Pans

### PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCENE 4

Very similar to act 1 scene 3, but tempi are free. The overall expression marking for this scene is "intense", but do not play louder than mf.

Play mobiles in any order as is dramatically required

Mobiles with repeats should be repeated ad-lib, while other mobiles are only played once on each go.

Play mobiles until scene end.

The scene ends with the soprano singing: "does your medication alleviate or exacerbate your symptoms? Is this my story?" then move seamlessly over to scene 4.

# Act 2 Scenes 4

## After the Fall

MOBILE SCORE FOR ENSEMBLE

SINGERS PERFORM FROM SCRIPT

*Senza misura  
sempre delicato e quasi meccanico*

1 Fl.

2 Fl.

*Sempre misterioso  
Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer  
Let all hits ring*

1 P&P

2 P&P

3 P&P

*Sempre misterioso e delicato  
Extremely slow  
Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer*

Pno.

### PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCENE 4

**FLUTE:**  
Use the pitches and rests given as a skeleton for improvisation.  
You can play from either C Flute (mobiles sound as written) or Alto Flute (mobiles sound a 4th lower).  
Experiment with articulation, tempi and note values.  
Experiment with octaves.  
Experiment with simple ornamentation.  
Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp.  
Feel free to deviate from the written pitches by a quarter tone up or down, every now and then.  
Feel free to experiment with superimposing subtle extended techniques.

**PERCUSSION:**  
Play pots and pans (P&P).  
Experiment with tempi and rubato.  
Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp.

**FLUTE AND PERCUSSION:**  
Move freely between mobiles (marked 1, 2, 3), but play each one in its entirety.  
You can repeat individual mobiles before moving onto a different one.  
Repeat the whole set of mobiles until the scene ends.

**PIANO:**  
Stay within the dynamic range of pp≤mp.  
Repeat your current bar until cued otherwise (see: CUES).

**FLUTE, PERCUSSION AND PIANO:**  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer.  
**Conductor's cues** mark changes to your performance:

**CUES:**  
CUE 1  
-Flute: hold your current pitch on a fermata, subito pianissimo, when out of breath, fade to nothing.  
-Percussion and piano: let the last note or chord you struck ring out.  
CUE 2  
-Flute and percussion: resume playing your scene 4 mobiles.  
-Piano: move onto your next bar and repeat until scene ends.  
CUE 3  
-Everyone: end scene.

# Act 2 Scene 5

## After the Fall

Mobile score for ensemble

### MOBILE SCORE FOR ENSEMBLE

SINGERS PERFORM FROM SCRIPT

*Sempre molto rubato, misterioso e espressivo*  
Stay within the dynamic range of *ppSmp*  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer

1 Fl.  
2 Fl.  
3 Fl.  
4 Fl.  
5 Fl.  
6 Fl.  
7 Fl.  
8 Fl.

*Sempre misterioso e delicato*  
*Extremely slow*  
Stay within the dynamic range of *pppSmp*  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer

Pno.

*Sempre misterioso*  
Stay within the dynamic range of *ppSmp*  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer

1 P&P  
2 P&P  
3 P&P  
4 P&P  
5 P&P  
6 P&P  
7 P&P  
8 P&P  
9 P&P  
10 P&P

### PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCENE 5

#### FLUTE:

Only play C flute.  
Experiment with simple ornamentation.  
Feel free to experiment with superimposing subtle extended techniques.  
Play the following mobiles either **extremely slow, or extremely fast**, and never stronger than **mp**.  
Treat mobiles 1-8 like subtle counter-melodies.

#### PERCUSSION:

Play the following mobiles either **extremely slow, or extremely fast**, and never stronger than **mp**.

#### PIANO:

Stay within the dynamic range of *ppSmp*.  
Repeat your current bars until cued otherwise (see: CUES).

#### FLUTE, PERCUSSION AND PIANO:

Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer.  
Conductor cues mark changes to your performance:

#### CUES:

##### CUE 1

-Flute and percussion: very slowly fade out to nothing.  
-Piano: Let your last note/chord you struck ring out and then prepare to play Rossini's **Sois immobile**. Start playing the song after the baritone says: "My mother's fondness for Rossini". The song ends on bar 31.  
After you finish performing *Sois immobile* with the baritone, repeat the song from the top extremely slow, but only play bars 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 22, and 25. After playing each of those bars, interject one of the bars on the bottom-right on this page before moving on to the next one. E.g. after bar 4 in *Sois immobile*, interject one of the bottom-right bars, then play bar 5 in *Sois immobile*, and so on.

##### CUE 2

-Scene end. Everyone: start playing scene 6 mobiles.

# Act 2 Scenes 6 After the Fall

## MOBILE SCORE FOR ENSEMBLE

### SINGERS PERFORM FROM SCRIPT

#### Flute mobile set no.1

*Sempre marcato*  
Stay within the dynamic range of *pp*-*Sp*  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer

1 Fl.

2 Fl.

3 Fl.

4 Fl.

5 Fl.

#### Flute mobile set no.2

1 Fl.

2 Fl.

3 Fl.

4 Fl.

5 Fl.

6 Fl.

7 Fl.

8 Fl.

#### *Sempre misterioso e delicato*

*Extremely slow*  
Stay within the dynamic range of *pp*-*ppp*  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer

6 Fl.

7 Fl.

8 Fl.

9 Fl.

10 Fl.

*Sempre misterioso*  
Stay within the dynamic range of *pp*-*mp*  
Do not sync up with the beat of any other performer

1 P&P

2 P&P

3 P&P

4 P&P

5 P&P

6 P&P

7 P&P

8 P&P

9 P&P

10 P&P

## PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS FOR SCENE 6

FLUTE: play 'flute mobile set no.1' **very fast**, and never stronger than **piano**, until cued by conductor.

PERC: Play all mobiles **very fast**, and never stronger than **mezzo piano**, until cued by conductor.

PIANO: Just like in scene 5, continue playing only bars 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 22, and 25 from *Sois immobile* but now **extremely fast** and two to three octaves up. In between these *Sois immobile* bars interject the bars given here instead of those from the previous scene, played **extremely slow**.

### CUES:

#### CUE 1

-Flute: Start mixing in mobiles from 'flute mobile set no.2'.

#### CUE 2

-Piano: choose one of the following bars from *Sois immobile* to repeat continuously, still extremely slow: 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 22, or 25.

#### CUE 3

-Flute: Only play mobiles from 'flute mobile set no.2', **calmer** than set no.1.

#### CUE 4

-Flute and Perc: fade out to nothing slowly.

#### CUE 5

-Piano: fade out to nothing slowly.

The doctor plays the recording of Eva Enda singing Ecco mormorar l'onde

END OF OPERA

