

# **Portfolio of Compositions**

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# Abstract

This portfolio is concerned with two new developments in my composition. Firstly, I have incorporated theatrical techniques in addition to and as an enhancement of my purely sonic writing. Secondly, I have aimed to engage with, and attempt to clearly communicate a central concept with each piece. This commentary outlines the various inspirations behind these goals, details the techniques I used, and reflectively discusses the results and reactions to the pieces.

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# List of Accompanying Materials

- Scores:
  - *'It isn't a noise...'*
  - *Stim*
  - *Murphy vs Mr Endon*
  - *Auras*
- CD with video recordings of the above in .mp4 format

# Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

# Introduction

This portfolio is an exploration of two relatively new interests of mine: a move towards a more theatrical presentation of my pieces, and a move away from completely abstract music. I have reached a point in my technical development where I am satisfied with my ability to manipulate sound, and am content to allow this to mature naturally. I have instead decided to focus on techniques outside of absolute music, so that each piece is driven by both content and context. This is motivated by a continuous desire to push myself forward, to make my music relevant within a twenty-first-century context, and to develop a (hopefully) unique, and personal style.

Despite recognizing the futility of defining 'music theatre' without any ambiguity, to fully convey the intention of my pieces I feel it is important to at least discuss how I interpret the genre. Some definitions<sup>1</sup> relate music theatre to opera (which exists as a fusion of 'the most evanescent and abstract of the arts with the most concrete physical manifestation'<sup>2</sup>), or to contemporary dance. This definition, labelling music theatre as either an extension of, or all that is not opera/dance, while possibly the least contestable definition, carries with it two major problems. Firstly, it implies a clear distinction: if music theatre, opera, and dance all involve a degree of abstract sound and concrete action, then one must either define the exact ratio of abstraction/concretion for each (which I contend is impossible), or acknowledge that the distinction is only nominal. The second problem is the opposite: to relate music theatre, opera, and dance, implies too much of a connection. The three articles I reference all argue that music theatre is indebted to opera and/or dance; however, this is reductive and implies a teleological move from one to the other. I believe that there is a far simpler, more accurate, and more inclusive way to think about, and thereby innovate in music theatre.

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<sup>1</sup> Clements (n.d.) describes music theatre as 'a kind of opera and opera production', and Heile's (2006) discourse persistently speaks about dance, opera, and music theatre in the same breath and with the same terms

<sup>2</sup> Heile, Björn (2006) 'Recent Approaches to Experimental Music Theatre and Contemporary Opera' in *Music & Letters* 87:1 (Oxford University Press) 72.

I propose that it is far better to define 'music theatre' as a constant concept throughout the history of 'music performance' – this includes opera and dance. Whether consciously devised or not, any musical (or even non musical) performance which is live or video-recorded contains theatrical elements. The conventional rituals of Western Art Music performance are all theatrical in their own way, namely: walking on and off of the stage, bowing, the positioning of the instruments, setting up between items in a programme, and the audience's interaction with all of these gestures. These can also be extended into what one might normally think of as 'music theatre', such as opera, and more experimental techniques like audience participation, the use of props, and intricate choreography, analogous to extended techniques. What distinguishes individual compositions and/or performances is the level to which these actions are acknowledged, controlled, and manipulated.

This line of thinking is becoming increasingly prominent in music academia, which has moved away from discussion of 'text' and 'discourse', to a point where 'scholars are now more likely to talk about 'performance' and "the performative"'.<sup>3</sup> However, my reasons for investigating this genre go beyond following fashion. At the risk of slipping into a teleological fallacy, I believe that a focus on the performance is the next logical step in avant-garde music's process of 'emancipation'; as much as one can speak about Schönberg's emancipation of dissonance, and Cage's emancipation of noise, one can speak about composers such as Kagel emancipating the stage and performance. In defining all visual performance as theatrical, relevant, and inherently interesting, it becomes almost wasteful not to manipulate it. In producing the scores, I decided that if I did not detail a part of the performance, that I would be content with any outcome (analogous to not including a metronome mark). I also see a high degree of control in the performance as a step towards a solution to the problem of contemporary music becoming increasingly niche and exclusionary (I expand upon this later in *The Influence of Artaud*).

My first aim in developing my compositions was the removal of abstraction from performance; the second was the removal of abstraction from the concepts

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<sup>3</sup> Heile (2006) 72.

behind the pieces. This latter goal was motivated in part by ennui with performing, listening to, or writing pieces that are either entirely abstract, or only focussed on technical innovation. The other motivation was considering to what extent absolute music is fitting for the twenty-first century, especially as a millennial composer from outside Europe and North America. Although examining the characteristics and differences between modernism and postmodernism and the merits of each is beyond the scope of this commentary,<sup>4</sup> I believe that a postmodernist approach is the most fitting. While the sound of my pieces draws heavily on European modernist traditions (most evidently in my harmonic language), it does so without the accompanying aesthetics, and it aims to move these sounds into new contexts.

Additionally, each piece revolves around a core concept, in such a way that it impacts each level of the creative process: from the initial planning stages, to the technical writing and production of the score, and eventually relating it clearly yet subtly to the audience. Each of these concepts began from a personal interest: my South African nationality, my (amateur) interest in chess and its contexts, and discourse around my mental health, which is partly autobiographical, and partly advocacy. *Murphy vs Mr Endon* is the most humorous of the portfolio, although it still has a serious edge in engaging with subverting the hierarchy of the choreography/music relationship. In contrast, the other three pieces are quite political, dealing with issues of multiculturalism and appropriation, and representation and advocacy of mental health – all very (positively) trendy topics. For me this is fitting for a highly political 2017, and has led to me a vast area of both academic research, and comparison with other political art. This line of investigation is still in its infancy for me, but is one I intend to pursue over my career. I will outline the beginnings of my research over the course of this commentary, particularly as it relates to the portfolio.

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<sup>4</sup> This discourse is, in the words of Jonathan Kramer (2002, p. 13) ‘maddeningly imprecise’ in any case.



# Summary of the portfolio

## ***'It isn't a noise...'***

### **for 9 performers (speech, singing, body percussion) and amplification**

Over the past few years I have grown to prefer the percussive sounds of consonants to the melodic vowel, and my vocal writing has increasingly centred on emphasizing consonants. However, this has only recently become a technical statement, thinking about them separately from their containing words, perhaps even emancipating them. I regarded consonants and vowels as the constituent elements of vocal writing, the latter being the more vital component. Therefore removing the 'essential' vowels subverts and renews vocal writing. (Upon reflection I could, even should, have included breathing as a constituent element of singing, though I did not consider it at the time of writing.)

From this conceptual germ, the obvious first step was to select which consonants to use, and which sounds would become the foundation of my sonic palette. I eventually decided to use the click consonants from the Nguni languages (Xhosa and Zulu), phonemes which I learnt when I was still in pre-school, and which I heard throughout my childhood, despite unfortunately never learning the languages. The purpose of the piece changed from exploiting consonants as techniques to celebrating the languages and their constituent sounds, and the title reflects this statement (taken from a quote by Miriam Makeba, discussing audiences' reactions to her singing in Xhosa): "Everywhere we go, people often ask me, 'How do you make that noise?' It used to offend me because **it isn't a noise**, it's my language."

The most important result of this was that the consonant sounds became contextualized within words. I selected *ncinci* ('small' in Xhosa), *xaxa* ('greater' in Zulu), and *qongqothwane* (referencing the song *Qongoqthwane*, made famous by Miriam Makeba, and historically derogatorily referred to as 'the click song'). These words in turn don't function as abstract text, but effectively control the surrounding material (I will expand upon this later). The accompaniment (or rather, secondary sound world) is body percussion, which I chose to match the sounds of the

consonants, and provide an element of choreography to emphasise the structure (again, I will expand upon this later).

## ***Stim***

### **for bass clarinet and piano**

*Stim* was written for a composition workshop with SCAW duo (Sarah Watts and Antony Clare). Approximately two-thirds of the clarinet part had been written two years earlier for clarinet in A. It was a (slightly edited) transcription of an improvisation of mine in which I experimented with varying levels of vibrato, and quartertone fingerings. For this workshop, I expanded the clarinet part significantly, adapted it for bass clarinet, and added a piano part.

Based on my current research interests, I decided to add an element of (at this point abstract) movement, particularly as I was going to be able to workshop the piece. Movement in a clarinet piece is certainly not without precedent, notably in Stockhausen's *Harlekin* and *In Freundschaft* (the latter providing the initial inspiration for the pervasive swaying). Reflecting upon the content of the piece, I realized that my writing in this piece reflected what I can only identify as obsessions, a trait of my diagnosed high functioning Autistic Spectrum Disorder: namely, a very rigorous use of pitch set transformations born of an extreme interest in the theory, and a similar need to explore as many permutations of the vibrato motif as possible.

I decided to explore this line of thinking further, by incorporating movements associated with 'stimming' (that is, repetitive actions which help provide calming sensory input – something which I have increasingly noticed in my own life). The piece also calls for staging reminiscent of how I personally used to perform as a soloist: completely disengaged from the audience, and neglectful of standard performance etiquette. I left the design of the choreography largely to the performers, informed through research. The intent of this piece became advocacy, attempting to educate both the performers through rehearsal, and the audience through performance, the results of which I will return to in *Reflections on Rehearsal and Performance*.

## ***Murphy vs Mr Endon***

**for 2 chess players, narrator, 2 pianos, and video projection**

The initial and prevailing thought behind *Murphy vs Mr Endon* was chess. I have long been fascinated not only by the game and its strategy, but also the culture that surrounds it (in literature and art), and the design of chessboards, which I see as primarily sculptural rather than functional. The aim of this composition was to feature chess as prominently as possible, using it throughout the compositional process, and most importantly having a live chess game in concert. A secondary motivation for writing this piece was that chess was seemingly absent in music (with a few notable exceptions I discuss in the sections on *Compositional Process*) in contrast to other art forms, something I feel should be amended (I will expand upon this conundrum in a later section).

My most immediate association with chess is the work of Samuel Beckett, which became a secondary theme. I initially experimented with *Endgame*, its chess-like narrative, and the chess-like movement of the characters. However, I found it too abstract for my purpose. Without a concrete chess game on stage, I felt the performance would not be able to communicate the chess theme strongly enough. I also doubted the potential of the material (and perhaps my own ability) to form a coherent structure.

I was recommended to look at the chess game from Beckett's *Murphy* as a possible resource. The game is fully notated, with occasional humorous asides written in a typically Beckettian, nonsensical fashion (referencing annotations in chess match transcriptions found in newspapers etc.). This essentially gave me a script, and a structure to work with, one which I followed as closely as possible. In referencing the novel, I also was able to work with characterization, and narrative.

***Auras: introduction, theme, and symptoms of temporal lobe epilepsy***  
**for cellist (with 2 celli), clarinetist (b-flat and bass clarinet), piano, and live electronics**

This final piece in my portfolio began as yet another reflection on identity, and aspects of my own life. *Stim* opened me up to the world of the health humanities and the connection between mental health and the arts. *Auras* began with this relationship. Temporal Lobe Epilepsy and its symptoms have been a significant part of my life since I was 13 years old, and this composition and the related compositional process is simultaneously reflection, introspection, catharsis, and an attempt at education/advocacy for this diagnosis.

*Auras* are the result of a localized seizure in the temporal lobe, sometimes (but not always) a precursor to a complex seizure, and a cause of a diverse range of psychological and physical sensations. These symptoms are incredibly varied, often very individual, so I selected what seemed to be the most common psychological symptoms as presented in medical literature and personal accounts. Each symptom is presented individually in short tableaux, all of which are tied together in what roughly amounts to a theme and variations form, mapping a transformation from a conservative style of writing to more adventurous language.

I also used this piece as an opportunity to begin exploring two more concepts. Firstly, in the *Introduction*, I work with the idea of transforming the mundane into performance, that is: the ritual of setting up the stage to which the audience is not privy becomes exposed and stylized. Secondly, particularly in the *Introduction* and *Symptom 3*, the instruments themselves become embodied; become performers in their own right, and even sculptures on the stage. This is a continuation of the first concept, attempting to diminish the barrier between performer and audience.

# Compositional Process

For this portfolio I allowed myself complete freedom in the range of techniques I used; this allowed me to create pieces in which the emphasis was the concept. This level of eclecticism also enabled me to divorce any techniques from their attached aesthetic, and allowed me to insert my own. As an example, I frequently use random number generators to create rhythmic and pitch patterns, but I allow myself to discard or tweak results I do not like, thus abandoning the Cageian aesthetic of keeping the results of chance operations irrespective of the result.

A vital part of the compositional process was a detailed engagement with each of the concepts. This occurred throughout the process of producing the piece: the planning and research, the production of the score, the rehearsal, and in discussion with the audience afterwards. The first two stages I will discuss here, the latter two in the later section *Reflections on Rehearsal and Performance*.

## Structure

The use of definite structures in composition is very important to me, largely stemming from an education that emphasized formal analysis. I also believe that structure helps to ground the piece, expediting the compositional process, and helps the audience to engage with the piece – if there is a recognizable element in the music, then the audience can comprehend the concept more readily. My emphasis on structure is also indebted to Cage's credo that 'the principle of form will be our only constant connection with the past'.<sup>5</sup>

*'It isn't a noise...'* moves along a clearly linear structure. As more performers enter, so the dynamic level increases, the sounds (both spoken/sung and body percussion) deepen, and the actions become larger, and move from created close to the performer to the bodies' extremities. This is derived from Hugh Tracey's observation that in Bantu musics the concepts of high and low pitch are

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<sup>5</sup> Cage, John (1937/1958) 'The Future of Music: Credo' in *Silence* (Marion Boyars) p. 5.

interchangeable with the magnitude of the sound.<sup>6</sup> Within this long-term structure, the piece is very sectional, with each rehearsal mark acting as a self-contained exposition, taking a new sound, rhythmic pattern, or texture, and developing them. These now developed ideas are then carried through the rest of piece, so that each movement becomes a self-contained discussion of its own sound world, and as the number of performers, sounds, and magnitudes of the sounds increase, so does the number of ways in which these sounds can be used. This is modelled after past analyses I have done of Lachenmann's *Guero* and *Serynade*, in which the deconstructed sounds of the piano are put together again through what amounts to a continuous exposition.

*Murphy vs Mr Endon* was an interesting challenge with regards to structure, in as much as I largely removed myself from its creation. I decided that I was going to be restricted by the order of moves and commentary devised by Beckett, and find structure within this. For example, move 9 (Ng1, e6) resets the board to almost the initial layout, so the music at this point references the opening: a kind of false recapitulation. The five King moves at the end of the game, which imply the beginnings of a stalemate, form a coda, without the satisfaction of a definite resolution. The introduction of each type of piece also helped to provide structural points, for example: moves 14-17, the first time the queens and kings are moved, acts as a self-contained phrase, highlighting the new leitmotifs. Finally, the narrator's asides also provide breaks in the momentum, delineating phrases.

In order to represent an array of symptoms, I moulded *Auras* into a deformed theme and variations form. The 'theme' (described as *compos mentis*) is defined by the chaconne theme, the alternating use of instruments and spoken passages of text,<sup>7</sup> and the graphic notation from my own EEG. The pitch motif is used throughout

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<sup>6</sup> Tracey, Hugh (1953) 'The State of Folk Music in Bantu Africa: A Brief Survey Delivered to the International Folk Music Council, on Behalf of the African Music Society' in *African Music* 1:1 (International Library of African Music) 9.

<sup>7</sup> The texts used are taken from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (a novel partly inspired by Carol's own TLE), Fyodor Dostoyevsky's account of his own *Auras*, and (in *Symptom 3*), fragments from descriptions of auras that I found on various online forums.

the piece, transposed and/or inverted; each symptom has a section of freely spoken text, with the exception of *Symptom 2* in which the text is substituted for walking (both being traditionally non-musical, and literally prosaic/pedestrian); the EEG waves (either calm or erratic) are also omnipresent, either as graphics, notated, or from the electronics. As a secondary structure, the piece also moves from stability to chaos, from the human to the inhuman, and from *compos mentis* to the symptoms of epilepsy, and finally *status epilepticus*. This is accomplished both musically and theatrically: the recognizable 'setting up the stage' gestures of the *Introduction*, and the neo-classical style of the *Theme* represent points of stability, moving to the more abstract. Similarly, the use of electronics, initially only used to add colour, becomes almost overwhelming by *Symptom 4: Anxiety*.

The structure of *Stim* is the freest in this portfolio, and the only one not following any model. It is more technical in its structure: the ASD context is mainly delivered through the choreography. The bass clarinet part obsessively focuses around a written G, and is defined by its moving away and towards the pitch class. This is accomplished through vibrato, and quartertone movement. The clarinet's secondary material, a fast paced series of runs through all of the instrument's registers, acts as a contrast to the primary material, and as a signifier for performance anxiety. The piano part is very much an accompaniment sonically (though the pianist has an equal role in the choreography), and uses the same pitch-class set as doggedly as the bass clarinet's uses the G.

## **Multiculturalism and Appropriation**

A constant thought during the conceptualizing, writing, rehearsing, and presenting of '*It isn't a noise...*' was the ethics of taking from another culture. I cannot emphasise enough that I make no claim over Zulu and Xhosa language and culture. Western music (both popular and classical), and art in general, has a history of taking influence and concrete ideas from other cultures, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa and East Asia. However, in the majority of cases, this amounts to cultural appropriation, rather than a genuine, respectful dialogue. This was the case in

musical orientalism, from the Renaissance to the early twentieth century, where ideas invoking non-European cultures are included for their novelty value, without any engagement with the referenced culture. Sadly, there are more recent examples of this, for example: David Fanshawe's *African Sanctus*. The piece interweaves the Latin mass with field recordings of stereotypically African music. This not only conflates the entire continent into one interchangeable mass, but also does not engage with the non-Western musics – it simply uses them as a contrast. I decided that if I were to employ ideas from another culture, I would have to simultaneously engage with the culture through research, and integrate it into my own style, rather than simply copying what another group of people have created.

In dealing with music from Africa specifically, the concept seemingly most discussed, imitated, and incorporated into compositions are the rhythmic patterns. I wanted to move away from this purely rhythmic take on Africa: firstly out of a desire to distinguish myself and not follow fashion, but also to make a statement against the monotonous discourse of 'African rhythm'. Reducing African music to rhythm is incredibly problematic. It creates an 'us versus them' dichotomy of the primitive, percussive Africa against the sophisticated, harmonic Europe. It also diminishes the importance of melody and harmony in African music. Coming from, and being inspired by South Africa, it would be wrong to ignore the rich choral tradition, present in sacred, everyday, and political contexts.

This is not to ignore the importance of rhythm in African music – '*It isn't a noise...*' relies heavily upon rhythm and polyrhythm in the body percussion, the sounds of which are derived from the timbres of the consonants, and references to gumboot dancing (a dance style native to Johannesburg). Rather, I wanted to undermine the essentialist view of African rhythm. This is an on-going debate amongst ethnomusicologists. Even African ethnomusicologists such as Kwabena Nketia comment that 'since African music is predisposed towards percussion and percussive textures, there is an understandable emphasis on rhythm, for rhythmic interest often compensates for the absence of melody, or the lack of melodic



sophistication'.<sup>8</sup> Again, referring to South African choral tradition as a counterexample, I am more inclined to agree with Kofi Agawu, who in *African Rhythm: A Northern Ewe Perspective* and *The Invention of African Rhythm* advocates that African music is derived from African languages, many of which are tonal and rhythmic. Particularly as Ewe is from the same language family as Xhosa and Zulu, I have tried to create a piece that links spoken language, choral singing, and complex rhythms, all of which are derived from the language itself.

Having thus defined my sound world with reference to the culture, the next stage was to create a dialogue between it and myself. Being educated in a thoroughly European style, to abandon that and try to force the piece to sound stereotypically African would be both dishonest to myself, and disrespectful to those who I attempted to imitate. I therefore settled on a deconstructivist style, so that I could showcase each idea in an exposition, allow the audience to understand each of the ideas in a pure form, before manipulating them with Western techniques.

## **The Context of Chess**

My interest in chess as a concept is motivated by a casual interest in playing the game, my growing collection of chess sets, and a fascination with its wider contexts – particularly what I feel is an unfortunate dearth of chess in music when compared to other art forms. Chess has permeated the visual arts, both in painting and the sculptural construction of the chess sets (not to mention Duchamp's passion for the game), and literature, for example: Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*, *The Seventh Seal* directed by Ingmar Bergmann, *2001* directed by Stanley Kubrick, and of course Beckett's *Endgame* and *Murphy*. However in music, the only prominent examples are John Cage's *Reunion* and *Chess Pieces*, Vic Hoyland's *Dumb Show*, Arthur Bliss's ballet *Checkmate*, and Benny Anderson and Björn Ulvaeus's musical *Chess*, of which the latter two barely relate to the game.

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<sup>8</sup> Nketia, J. H. Kwabena (1974) *The Music of Africa* (W. W. Norton) p. 125.

While this imbalance might be attributed to music being too abstract, this is exactly the attitude that this portfolio is refuting – while the sound itself may lack the ability to clearly communicate the ideas, the overall performance can. My solution was to take inspiration from other artists' work with chess. First and foremost was the narrative structure devised by Beckett that I discussed earlier, and Beckett's statement 'drama is following music'<sup>9</sup> helped to lend credence to my aesthetic – if drama is following music, then I could create music by following said drama.

The leitmotivic nature was inspired by three sources: firstly, Cage's *Reunion* gave me the idea of having a clearly defined gesture for each move (rather than having a continuous score to accompany the 'dance'). However, I did not want the piece to be aleatoric, desiring as much control over the structure as possible. I also wanted live instruments, so that the musicians could double the duel at the chessboard. I also wanted to include the idea of chess sets as sculptures, as concrete rather than performative objects. The pieces of the Bauhaus chess set, created by Josef Hartwig in 1923, are all based on the movements of the chess piece. In *Murphy vs Mr Endon*, the Pawns' motif moves up the keyboard the same number of steps as the piece on the board; the Knight, moving up/down and to the side is mirrored by a motif that moves up/down and stays on the same note; the Bishop's diagonal movement becomes a zigzag on the piano.

I also drew on Man Ray's 1920 chess set, notable as being the first abstract chess set ever designed – I indicate this as the preferred chess set for the piece. Each piece has a definite inspiration (for example: the King is a pyramid, referencing ancient Egyptian kings), so I decided that each leitmotif should convey a character I associated with the piece, to emphasise a sense of narrative. As examples of this, the Queen's glissandi are meant to invoke a powerful character charging across the board. The King's single chords are slow moving, reflecting the piece's one-square movement, and dense and stately. The Rook, which exists in other language as a

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<sup>9</sup> McMillan, Dougald & Fehsenfeld, Martha (eds.) (1988) *Beckett in the Theatre Vol. 1. From "Waiting for Godot" to "Krapp's Last Tape"* (John Calder) p. 16.

(siege) tower, moves slowly, and evenly up and down the piano and board. The Knight's jumping (both over pieces in the game, and the horse in real life) is represented by disjunct, staccato patterns.

## Theatre

I will discuss some more specific technical details of the theatrical design in the next section, *The Influence of Artaud*. However, for me the process through which I designed the choreography is a useful thing to reflect on, particularly as this varied across the portfolio. The movements for *Stim* were devised after writing the notes, and while they were executed brilliantly, this may account for why they were perceived by the audience as disjointed (as to whether or not that is a positive, I discuss this later in the section *Reflections on Rehearsal and Performance*). The movement and sound of '*It isn't a noise...*' was devised simultaneously, and so the slightly lacklustre nature of the physical performance was compounded in the overall result. The process was similar in *Auras*, and I attribute the more fluent presentation to having learned from the rehearsal process of '*It isn't a noise...*'. *Murphy vs Mr Endon* was my first experience of writing accompaniment for a pre-existing set of movements (and thus an inverse of *Stim*). I believe that in the context of this piece, where I wanted the 'dance' of the chess pieces reproduced exactly by the pianists, a leitmotivic, move-by-move score was ideal. However, as a matter of personal development, I believe that I will need to develop more strategies in the future to create accompanying music that can exist in the context of an audio-only performance/recording.

# The Influence of Artaud

I first began thinking about Antonin Artaud's theories during the early stages of planning *Auras*. The piece was at risk of becoming pantomime, focussing on stereotyped realizations of each of the symptoms, for example: literally moving the performers from a higher to a lower staging to depict micropsia and macropsia. I needed to inject an aspect of discomfort, or surrealism, and settled upon the more abstract theme and variations model I previously discussed, aiming at depicting the symptoms more subliminally. I was also intrigued by Artaud's own history with mental health, and how this could relate.<sup>10</sup> Eventually, my reading of *The Theatre and Its Double* (particularly the manifestos on the Theatre of Cruelty) came to influence every piece in this portfolio.

Artaud perceived significant faults in early twentieth-century theatre: it revered the classics as untouchable, idolized masterpieces, which he believed were 'fit for the past, they are no good to us'.<sup>11</sup> These plays were grounded in language, and the actual theatre (stage design, lighting, costumes etc.) served only to convey the dialogue in the script. Furthermore, either the script or the staging of the script 'ought not to affect the public', becoming 'art for art's sake'.<sup>12</sup> His solution was a theatre in which all aspects of the production are given equal value to the script, and in which the literary aspect does not diminish the 'sublime, the concepts, and the objects'.<sup>13</sup> My goals in this portfolio are similar: I aimed to create a set of pieces in

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<sup>10</sup> I have subsequently largely abandoned this line of inquiry: the extent to which biography influences an author's writing is beyond the scope of this commentary. Suffice it to say, in this case I take a moderate position: while writers who dismiss Artaud's writing simply due to his history of mental illness and substance abuse are frankly wrong (such as Lyons 1974), and positions such as Bermel's (2001) which insist that these issues do not impact on Artaud's theory amount to erasure. I hope that something similar is evident in this portfolio: while my mental health does not define my composition, it would be wrong to deny that it does not influence me consciously or unconsciously.

<sup>11</sup> Artaud, Antonin (1938) trans. CORTI, Victor (2010) *The Theatre and Its Double* (Alma Classics) p. 53

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p. 54.

which all aspects of performance were important, rather than just the literary value of the score or of the pure sounds. I was also determined that the pieces would not be entirely abstract, and each clearly embodied and communicated a concept.

As much as I perceive similarities between my portfolio and Artaud's philosophies, it was important to me that I would not be constrained by Artaudian theatre. As influential as the ideas and techniques were, it is only one element of this portfolio. I allowed myself to employ the Theatre of Cruelty, adapt it, contradict it, or ignore it, as I desired. Theatre, in whatever form, is a technique in service of my intent, not an aesthetic goal in itself. This is Artaudian in itself: that to 'restrict [his writings] into a theory would do it an injustice', rather *The Theatre and Its Double* should be read as 'a theatre of possibilities ... the absence of limitations'.<sup>14</sup>

It was also important that whenever I used the Theatre of Cruelty, or derivatives thereof, that I was aware of the dialogue I was creating with theatre and music inspired by Artaud, if only to avoid direct imitation. This is not without its challenges, as Artaud's ideas have become subsumed with the likes of other modernist theorists such as Brecht, such that 'it is no longer possible to say that Artaud is purely responsible for many theatrical innovations that identify themselves with the Theatre of Cruelty'.<sup>15</sup> I have thus decided primarily to refer to and draw upon the primary source *The Theatre and Its Double*. However, I also drew inspiration from the wider nebula of avant-garde performances: for example I have drawn upon Samuel Beckett's use of austere staging (an Artaudian notion itself), specifically his generally minimal (yet specific and necessary) use of staging and costuming. Beckett also has a penchant for making use of mundane actions in novel, affected ways, such as the literally pedestrian *Quad* or the seemingly day-to-day actions in *Krapp's Last Tape*. Developing the seemingly unremarkable is also present in pieces such as George Aperghis's *Retrouvailles*. I have tried to capture these ideas in all my pieces, particularly in the opening 'setting up the stage' in *Auras*.

Perhaps the most direct successor to Artaud of whom I can think is Mauricio Kagel, particular in *Staatstheatre*. The opening piece *Repertoire* (and to a slightly

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<sup>14</sup> Bermel, Albert (2001) *Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty* (Menthuen Publishing Ltd) p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 89.

lesser extent the rest of the collection) is a dramatic summary of almost all of the tenets of Theatre of Cruelty, characterized by incredibly novel, complex, and surreal actions, sounds, props, and structures. Here is where I consciously depart from what Artaud seems to have envisioned for the future of theatre. I reject the outrageous staging in favour of something more austere, and more cynical, in keeping with my personality, and what I feel is more appropriate for today's postmodern aesthetics. That is: reflecting on the now and history, rather than trying to invent a future, and (for want of a better term, and without prejudice towards much of the avant-garde from the second half of the twentieth century), being more grounded.

## **The Audience and the Theatre**

One of the most fascinating aspects of Artaud's theatre is the disintegration of the divide between audience and performers, that '[d]irect contact will be established between the audience and the show, between actors and audience'.<sup>16</sup> The reasoning is two-fold: firstly to 'recruit the audience as participants'<sup>17</sup> in the performance, but also to subtly 'bring the individual spectator into a personal relationship with the individual performer'.<sup>18</sup> Artaud's vision was an auditorium in which the performers and audience were intermingled, forcing an interaction. In reality, performance spaces are rarely built to be capable of integrating the stage and seating, and so one must work within the confines of the traditional auditorium. From this emerged what I see as the stereotypical image of audience participation: actors walking 'up and down the aisles, asking spectators questions, sometimes tongue-lashing them, or even physically assaulting them'.<sup>19</sup>

As much as I find this form of breaking the fourth wall enjoyable, I find its seeming ubiquity in avant-garde performances to now border on cliché. This is not to criticize artists who use this technique, rather that I have little desire to use it and

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<sup>16</sup> Artaud (1938) p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> Bermel (2001) p. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 93.

feel that today's audience no longer sees it as innovative, or shocking as it would have been during the second half of the twentieth century. I feel a desire to add my own spin on audience interaction, modernize it, and make the practice subtler than the often aggressive and invasive methods of some performances. Rather than focus on physically connecting the audience and performers, I aimed to focus on establishing a subtler relationship between the two groups. Whereas Artaud and subsequent practitioners of audience participation wished to involve the audience in the performance as it occurred, I aimed to connect them to the creative process.

This is another reason for what I earlier described as an austere performance aesthetic. None of the aspects of the performance, from setting up the stage to the performer walking off, should be disguised in any way, and the audience is allowed to experience these as emancipated actions, hence why walking on and off stage are important, deliberate actions in all the pieces in this portfolio. This is my interpretation of what Artaud described as a 'naked theatre language'.<sup>20</sup> This is extrapolated backwards in *Auras*, in which the audience's attention is drawn to a (admittedly affected) setting up of the stage, attempting to show that this is no less an important and no less an enjoyable part of the creative process. The narrator reading the instructions in *Murphy vs Mr Endon* essentially amounts to them reading the score out loud, so that the audience is able to experience the same instructions that the performers use. *Stim* emphasizes the anxieties behind performance, and subverts what is usually a polished presentation, again inviting the audience into a world behind what they are usually confronted with.

## Artaud's music

Music and sound are significant in the Theatre of Cruelty, acting both literally and as a metaphor for his theatre. Artaud even goes so far as to suggest that music is its own 'character'.<sup>21</sup> From the essay, a reader cannot assume that he had any intimate knowledge of contemporary art music, but he clearly was thinking along the same

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<sup>20</sup> Artaud (1938) p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 67.

trajectory as many twentieth-century composers, namely in his calls for the use of 'unusual sound properties'<sup>22</sup>, what we might now refer to as extended techniques. He also advocated that 'research is also needed into ... appliances';<sup>23</sup> this either implies a foreshadowing of electronic musics, or techniques in the same vein as the Italian Futurists' work with noise machines. Most importantly though, Artaud considered music as integral to the performance, rather than background noise.

Unexpected sounds, extended techniques, and electronics are now firmly established in contemporary composition, all of which I employ freely. For my personal development, and for the purposes of this portfolio, Artaud's use of music as a metaphor for theatre is of particularly relevant. He described stage language as 'a tangible idea of music where sound enters like a character, where harmonies are cut in two and become lost precisely as words break in'. In Artaud's argument this is the theatre's double, the metaphorical face of the physical theatre; for me, this is an opportunity for absolute integration between theatre and sound through the use of technical musical language as a metaphor for the staging.

I primarily thought about the relationship between the physical and the sonic as dissonant or consonant, and how these relationships could create various effects based on context. The most basic example of this is in *'It isn't a noise...'*: here, the movement and sound are consonant throughout, and act to reinforce each other. Similarly, in *Murphy vs Mr Endon*, the movement of the pieces on the board and the music are consonant throughout, but to a different effect. Whereas *'It isn't a noise...'* establishes comfort, and security in the structure, the bizarre nature of the chess game is only compounded by reflecting it exactly in the music. *Stim* and *Auras* are examples of what I would describe as a dissonant relationship between music and theatre, in that I have tried to subvert the musical content in the choreography. In *Stim*, the nature of the music and movement were deliberately antithetical. In *Symptom 2 of Auras*, the clarinettist and cellist change their speed of movement without pattern, in contrast to the very patterned piano part. As with the two examples of consonant writing, the results are slightly different. The antagonistic

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<sup>22</sup> Artaud (1938) p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 67.



relationship between sound and choreography changes over the course of *Stim*, and employs actions that seem plausible within the context of a performance. This leaves the audience with a greater sense of unease than *Symptom 2*, in which the movement is constantly dissonant, and fairly abstract. The audience is more consciously aware of the dissonances in *Auras*, and it thus affects them less – the degree of subtlety is directly proportional to the extent it impacts the audience.

I also thought about the physical/sonic relationship as solo/accompaniment: not hierarchical, but fluid, such as the relationship between a soloist and orchestra in a concerto, where the two entities can be equal or unequal, working together or independently, or can be silent while the other takes centre stage. In *Murphy vs Mr Endon*, the music acts as a definite accompaniment to the action on stage, attempting to make the theatre the most noticeable element of the performance. In *'It isn't a noise...'* the action and the sound are inseparable, acting together throughout. The choreography and music in *Stim*, are structurally dependent, yet independent in character, and the emphasis changes between them in a solo/ritornello fashion. Crucially, this happens at different intervals for both of the performers, so that the audience's attention is constantly pulled from one to the other, or both. *Auras* is less systematized in this way, moving freely between all of the relationships I mentioned above. With this, I was able to give each section its own identity, and to create a narrative from the mundane 'setting up the stage' opening, to an abstract, surreal finish.

Finally, there is the physical instrument for consideration. Artaud envisioned music as a 'tangible' character, and for the instruments to exist as part of the set (even proposing 'musical instruments as tall as men'<sup>24</sup>). I feel that instruments can become more than objects or tools, and become part of the theatrical action. In *'It isn't a noise...'* the performers' own bodies are the instruments: therefore, any musical gesture is a theatrical action and vice versa. In *Stim* and *Murphy vs Mr Endon*, the instruments (and in the latter case even the sheet music) are necessary to the theatre, while *Auras* takes this to the extreme, thinking of the instruments,

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<sup>24</sup> Artaud (1938) p. 69

even without their performers, as scenery, characters, and performers in their own right.

# Reflections on Rehearsal and Performance

Due to the nature of my portfolio, my pieces can only be properly tested through rehearsal and performance; they cannot exist on paper alone (not to dismiss the score as an essential part of my process). In this section I will outline the process behind the recording of each piece, the challenges and their implications, and also audience reaction.

## ***'It isn't a noise...'***

### **Western musicians without instruments / Visuals: distraction or enhancement?**

Due to the number of people required, and the length of the composition, each movement of *'It isn't a noise...'* was recorded separately over the course of two months. I was able to work with the first six performers prior to the recordings, but due to difficulties in finding the last three performers and a substitute for performer 4, this was not possible before the third recording. Each recording session included approximately an hour of rehearsal, allowing me to discuss the aesthetic, and demonstrate/teach the consonants and body percussion. While I would describe the resulting video as giving a good indication of the general concept, I also found that it did not reflect all of my intentions (not least of all due to my limited editing skills). People who have watched the video have reached similar conclusions. They commented that although it is largely enjoyable, it felt stilted, and the performers seemed hesitant.

While this is undoubtedly partly due to limited rehearsal time, I noticed that some of the performers struggled to translate the score into physical sound.<sup>25</sup> While

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<sup>25</sup> Surprisingly, teaching the consonants was relatively easy compared to teaching the body percussion.

I acknowledge this may be due in part to my notations,<sup>26</sup> the difficulties in executing the body percussion were most pronounced in those who normally solely performed with their instruments. (I knew that all of the performers were capable instrumentalists, all of whom had engaged in contemporary music, and several of whom are experienced improvisers, but not all were experienced with non-classical performance).

The removal of the performers' instruments touches upon the emerging field of embodied music cognition, based on the premise that 'bodily involvement shapes the way we perceive, feel, experience, and comprehend music'.<sup>27</sup> This idea can be perfectly fitted to '*It isn't a noise...*'. I ask the performers to use the body percussion I had provided to influence the performance of the sounds, and vice versa. However, I did not account for removing the performers' instruments (indeed, some of them arrived to rehearse with instruments, even after being shown the score – the assumption was 'instrumental unless otherwise told'). The performer's need for their instrument is born out in research that suggests that the musician "no longer experiences a boundary between [themselves] and the instrument"; that for a performer to effectively perform they need "clear feedback" and "clear goals".<sup>28</sup> Even having demonstrated the actions (what I thought of as a clear goal), I had removed an instinctive level of feedback, thus limiting the ability of the performers to achieve these goals.

I also believe that the performance was hampered by a failure to communicate that the performance was as, if not more, important than the physical translation of the score. This resulted in a performance that lacked a sense of

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<sup>26</sup> The use of different note heads with a key might have slowed down the sight-reading process. A solution could be using a separate stave line per sound, as with a drum kit.

<sup>27</sup> Leman, Marc & Maes, Pieter-Jan & Nijs, Luc & van Dyk, Edith (2017) *What is embodied music cognition?*  
<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319260279\\_What\\_is\\_embodied\\_music\\_cognition](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319260279_What_is_embodied_music_cognition)> accessed 24/10/2017 p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Nijs, Luc & Lesaggre, Micheline & Leman, Marc (2009) *The musical instrument as a natural extension of the musician*  
<[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/200539833\\_The\\_musical\\_instrument\\_a\\_natural\\_extension\\_of\\_the\\_musician](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/200539833_The_musical_instrument_a_natural_extension_of_the_musician)> accessed 24/10/2017 p. 3.

casualness and energy; a performance style I have rarely seen in classical/art music choirs, but often in folk and pop (and in particular, black South Africa) choirs.<sup>29</sup> This is not to establish a white vs. black/us vs. them duality, but rather points to (what I perceive to be) an issue with Western art music performance values, that the traditional view is that classical pieces are 'ideal objects, approximately realized through repeated performances'.<sup>30</sup> While I definitely agree with perspectives such as Nicholas Cook's call for a performance, rather than text driven, view of music, the latter is prevalent.<sup>31</sup> In this piece (and in other performance situations I have been in) the performer's instinctive first priority is to reproduce the score as accurately as possible, and this was never surmounted in the recording. Upon reflection, the primary problem in this instance was my choice of performers, but it also has opened up a topic I aim to explore in the future: making clearer my rehearsal and communication technique, as well as thinking about how to maintain my compositional aesthetic while including those who have little experience in this style.

Audiences also found the hesitancy in visual performance to be distracting from the sound; that the sound was more coherent with their eyes closed (a point I conceded after re-watching the recording). For me, this was both a positive and a negative reaction: it was firstly proof that the sound world had enough substance to exist on its own, fulfilling one of my objectives for this portfolio. However it also surprised me, as I viewed and still view the performers' movements as a significant part of the piece, enhancing the sound and the structure. As much as I agree that the level of distraction is a negative, I equally feel that there is something positive to be said about the faults of a performance being evident: that there is a certain beauty in

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<sup>29</sup> As a rather crude, stereotyped example, one could compare a performance of *Shosholoz*a by the Drakensberg Boys Choir (trained in a European style), and the Soweto Gospel Choir (who perform in a black gospel style):

<https://youtu.be/saJmOw0GGyI> vs. [https://youtu.be/zmOaChSct\\_E](https://youtu.be/zmOaChSct_E)

I would characterize the first performance as expected within a Western art music tradition, but thusly less engaging than what is a casual, instinctive, and energized performance.

<sup>30</sup> Kramer, Lawrence (2007) §1 'Classical Music and Its Values' in *Why Classical Music Still Matters* (University of California Press) p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Cook, Nicholas, (2001) 'Between Process and Product: Music and/as Performance' in *Music Theory Online* 7:2 (Society for Music Theory) ¶16.

mistakes being made, and the recording not appearing so polished that it appears artificial. This brings me to the question: to what extent the recording reflected my intent. My current opinion is that as a proof of concept, and to give an audio-visual guide to the score, it is a more than adequate result. I have added this recording to the YouTube playlist of resources I link in the score, to provide a solid example to be built upon for (hopefully) future performances/recordings.

## ***Stim***

### **Engaging the performers / Disturbing the audience**

The process of rehearsing the purely musical content of this piece was very simple, resulting in only a few minor notational changes. The main issues arose in directing and encouraging the performers to make use of the choreography. In the first workshop, SCAW duo indicated both trepidation and enthusiasm at trying something new. Both of the duo said that they had never attempted a choreographed performance before, though Sarah Watts was knowledgeable of Stockhausen's *Harlekin* and *In Freundschaft* and picked up on the relation between them and *Stim*. The swaying choreography was relatively unproblematic, however the acting was met with reservation. Both of them pointed out that they were not actors: a very fair point, yet one that surprised me. From my personal perspective, my solo performances always involve a degree of acting, attempting to appear more sociable, and engaging than I am in life. The choreography for me was *anti-acting*. Asking other performers about this, they commented that although they also put on some level of persona, they didn't experience all of my difficulties.

Prior to the performance I gave a short introduction to the piece, my personal connection, the origin of the choreography, and of the musical metaphors involved. Some audience members were not present for this introduction, which gave me a (very small) sample of reactions from people who saw the performance knowing my intent, and from people who only saw it as an abstract composition. The former group seemed to grasp the link between the sound and the ASD easily, and primarily discussed ASD, neurodiversity, and the ethics of its representation. This

dialogue was exactly what I had hoped for: the music and even the theatre became secondary (though not unessential) to the discourse. I was particularly buoyed by performers, both of whom not only engaged in what was necessary, but spoke about taking a very active interest in the topic as a whole, even speaking to acquaintances and people involved in ASD care and advocacy about the project.

With those people who were not present for the introduction, the ASD subject was not evident (understandable considering how abstract the title is). Their reactions were more technical, concerning the relationship between the choreography and sound, and the interaction (or deliberate lack thereof) between the performers and the audience. Although my intent was not fully imparted, the feedback prompted me to think how I could develop my compositional technique. With regards to the choreography, the audience found the dissonance between the music and movement very distinct, especially so with the acting. One audience member even went so far as to describe the performance as 'very disturbing' (a positive response, as it implies that the performance did not end up as a pantomime of stimming). A more critical reaction was that the uncoordinated nature of the choreography was distracting: in creating the contrast, I had also created two simultaneous structures, forcing the audience to concentrate on one to the detriment of the other. Reflecting critically, I can see how this can be interpreted as a technical error, flying in the face of compositional unity, and I even agree with this. However, for me, the audience's reaction is the deciding factor. The sense or disconnect, even if it wasn't understood in tandem with ASD, was my goal. While the ultimate aim of my compositions is clear communication of my intent, in combination with sound compositional technique, reflection upon this experience has left me resolute that eliciting a strong reaction from the audience is worth sacrificing some or even all of my objectives.

The final performance was very successful in the end, and captured a lot of what I had intended. I attribute this to three things: firstly, SCAW duo's desire to engage with the piece and present a convincing performance (for which I am incredibly grateful). This attitude enabled the second and third ways in which they achieved the result. Part of the rehearsal process involved me demonstrating and

talking through the actions I required. I also provided a list of online articles and videos relating to ASD and stimming in particular so that the performers could learn and understand where I was coming from (effectively a form of advocacy), and develop their own interpretation on top of what I demonstrated.

These points interestingly relate back to the rehearsal process of *'It isn't a noise...'*, in that I attempted both of these, but without great success. Upon reflection it is obvious that very few of the performers actually engaged with the online resources I provided, or benefitted significantly from my demonstrations. With no intent to demean the performers, I feel that this could be put down to a contrast in motivation between the *'It isn't a noise...'* ensemble and SCWA duo. This is not due to an inherent lack of care, but rather due to disparity in skill level and the complexity in the work. In the case of *'It isn't a noise...'* the lack of rehearsal time caused the performers to struggle with the new techniques I presented. As discussed by O'Neill and McPherson, 'if an activity is too difficult and skill levels are low... [performers] feel apathy'. With *Stim*, although the instrumental technique was low, the choreography challenged the duo: 'to remain in flow [motivated], the complexity of the activity must... [take] on new challenges'.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Murphy vs Mr Endon***

### **The value of intent / The programme note**

*Murphy vs Mr Endon* was performed by members of York University Chimera Ensemble. During the rehearsal process, I left many of the decisions up to the other performers. The pianists and narrator decided exactly how the timing would work. The narrator and Mr Endon were free to act within my instructions, and we devised the final staging and costuming as a group, most significantly the pianists swapping places at the beginning which I have included in the score. For me this was as important a part of the composition process as producing the score, as it engaged

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<sup>32</sup> O'Neill, Susan A. & McPherson, Gary E. (2002) §3 'Motivation' in eds. Parncutt, R & McPherson, Gary E., *The Science and Psychology of Music Performance: Creative Strategies for Teaching and Learning* (Oxford University Press) p. 35.



the performers in the topic, rather than relying on the old-fashioned production model of composer-performer-audience, and a statement against Taruskin's idea that '[p]erformers are essentially corrupters—deviants, in fact'.<sup>33</sup>

Of this entire portfolio, this was the piece I was most determined to be a clear communication of a concept, namely that the audience should immediately understand chess as the central theme, and that the music was only an accompaniment. The piece was performed twice on the same day. The evening performance was a very accurate representation of the score (and is the recording submitted in this portfolio). The afternoon performance was less successful, especially the chess game in which there were numerous mistakes. As with *Stim*, I was able to speak to both people to whom I had explained the concept, and those who came to the performance with no expectations. There were also people who attended both performances.

My explanations of the piece began in different ways depending on the person, such as the history of chess in the arts, the reference novel, or the technical consideration, but always stating that the central element is the chess game, trying to explain how I see it as dance. Based on audience feedback, it seems that this explanation was required: as with *Stim*, the audience was sharply divided between those who received an explanation of the concept and those who did not. The former grasped the ideas readily and discussed them, and the latter were more concerned with what they had just witnessed. Unlike *Stim*, this group predominantly expressed confusion, and ignored the game entirely, discussing *Murphy vs Mr Endon* as a piece of pure music. The accuracy of the chess games did not affect this opinion, further suggesting that their entire concentration was entirely on the music (conversely, for those who knew the context, the mistakes were distracting and noteworthy – in several instances, the inaccurate layout of pieces necessitated my rearranging of the board mid-performance).

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<sup>33</sup> Taruskin, Richard (1995) *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford University Press) p. 13.

As to why this occurred, I can only speculate. Following on from my experiences with *Stim* and '*It isn't a noise...*' I believe that this is a result of concert culture.<sup>34</sup> Specifically, thinking about what the difference between what the audience expected versus what they received. In both performances the piece was presented alongside performances of purely sonic music – perhaps some of the audience were unable to change their perspective for a single piece in the programme, and so only concentrated on the pure music. It was also performed in an academic environment, and so victim to (as with '*It isn't a noise...*') Cook's distinction between the score as text versus script.<sup>35</sup> The score, the notes are still predominantly viewed as an absolute text, rather than a script as I intended.

The audience's reaction prompted two questions: what can one do to inform the audience, and whether or not this is actually helpful or desirable. Apart from speaking to each audience member individually (an unrealistic exercise), the best methods of communication would be an oral introduction, or a programme note. The first, from my perspective is undesirable: from personal experience, unless one elects to attend a pre-concert lecture, it can be an offputting, even condescending experience. Although I did this to a certain extent with *Stim*, it was in the context of a workshop, and so some degree of quasi-academic introduction seemed appropriate.<sup>36</sup>

As to whether or not the programme note helped, I am inclined to think that it didn't. Firstly, there is no guarantee that, nor way to make the audience read it (in this case I suspect that it was not widely, nor intently read). It also changes the emphasis of the concert. Relying on the audience reading the programme note shifts the emphasis from being engaged with the action on stage in the moment, to pulling them out of the figurative performance space into a more literal concert hall. An

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<sup>34</sup> I am not dismissing the possibility that it is due to a failing of my design, but as I am at this point unable to think of solutions, I can only pursue this question.

<sup>35</sup> Cook (2001) ¶15. Cook refutes the traditional notion of the score being an absolute 'text' to be venerated and reproduced as accurately as possible in favour of regarding it as a 'script', that is the starting point for creating a performance.

<sup>36</sup> Although I described the audience of *Murphy vs Mr Eondon* as part of an academic environment, the context of the performance itself was that of a public performance.

extension of this is that it changes the performance, of which the programme note becomes a part. As discussed in the *Music Educators Journal*, the performance begins when the audience reads the programme note, but that this note is 'better unwritten than unread'.<sup>37</sup> In saying all this, I see no harm in providing a programme note, and it is my concession to the traditional formality of classical concert etiquette.

Ultimately, this experience changed my ideas about intent. This was not only prompted by the performance of *Murphy vs Mr Endon*, but by subsequent research into the reception of other experimental performances. Firstly, a comparison suggested by Roger Marsh: the premier of Beckett's *Not I*. The nuanced monologue cannot be understood after a single performance, due to its complexity, speed, and fragmentary nature. But the sense of bewilderment is enough for the work to be fully realized. A similar example is of the performance of Birtwistle's *Panic* at the 1995 Proms. Although it is far from experimental to the educated audience, it was perceived as experimental in the context of the largely traditional Last Night of the Proms. For all the background to the composition (such as the dialectic between 'panic' as in hysteria, and 'Panic' as in cheerful and impish as relating to the character Pan), that the audience were 'awed and dumbstruck'<sup>38</sup> was not detrimental to the piece. As journalist Robert Maycock comments, 'it ought to shock'.<sup>39</sup> Whatever the reaction was, it is an active and important contributor to the performance. The sense of confusion, or lack of understanding, is in itself a perfect reaction to the absurdity of the scene. As I allowed the performers to be active participants in my 'script', so too the audience become authors; I allowed myself to not worry about dictating the intent of my 'text'.

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<sup>37</sup> N.A. (1968) 'Program Notes: Better Unwritten than Unread' in *Music Educators Journal* 54:7 (Sage Publications Inc.) 96.

<sup>38</sup> Maycock, Robert (17/09/1995) *Last Night of the Proms BIRTWISTLE PREMIERE Royal Albert Hall, London* in *The Independent* <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/last-night-of-the-proms-birtwhistle-premiere-royal-albert-hall-london-1601655.html>> accessed 06/11/2017.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

## ***Auras***

### **Creating a video that reflects performance**

As an ensemble, it was decided early in the rehearsal process that we would not perform the piece live. With our various commitments, and a large department performance midway through the rehearsal process, we felt that it would be impractical to get the 20-minute performance up to a sufficient standard to perform in one sitting, and to organize an audience during the end-of-term period. I also believe that the piece would not have had the full narrative impact if only sections were performed. This is in contrast with the similarly long *'It isn't a noise...'*, in which the simple structure can be understood more readily (hence I have retroactively outlined which sections can be cut in performance).

This decision had both advantages and disadvantages. I was very conscious that the piece was designed to be performed live. There would have been more sense of surprise in the *Introduction*; the 'setting the stage' gestures would blur performance and the behind-the-scenes action (if only for a few seconds), whereas in recording it obvious that from the start that it is devised. Another illusion that is affected is that of the instruments playing themselves – either being mimed or left standing while the electronics provide the sound. In the context of a video recording, this can at times simply look like a technical issue: that video and audio are not coordinated. Finally, in being designed for a live performance, the composition to a certain extent counted on an audience member watching the performance from a single point. The reality of a video recording is that this cannot be achieved: cuts necessitate a change of camera angle, and to film the entirety from the audience's perspective can create a dull, un-dynamic result.

However, each of these problems led to solutions that I think benefitted the overall result. The use of a camera allowed me to artificially create the audience's perspective. While I think the results are very effective, I have mixed feelings about this approach. On the positive front, I was able to create a more authoritative production, and display only what I want the audience to focus on. This was not entirely contrived; in reality, the staging was designed to force the audience's gaze.

A watcher would naturally observe areas of action rather than inaction; for example one would watch the clarinettist and cellist in the *Introduction* and *Symptom 4*, rather than the stationary pianist. It also allowed me to manipulate the periods in which the instruments are made to 'perform' without the instrumentalists, simply focussing on a photograph of the instruments, and not having to move the instruments around the stage. It also removed the need to work out the best placement of the speaker. It also allowed me to emphasise the narrative from human to inhuman, by beginning with shots including the performers, and moving to (where possible) shots of just the instruments. However, all of these positive results are essentially compromises, and diminish the role of the audience as an autonomous contributor to the creative process.

Another advantage of creating a recorded production is a greater degree of control over the electronics. I was able to time the notated electronics in the *Introduction* and *Symptom 3* precisely. I was also able to try multiple versions of the improvised electronics in the *Introduction*, the transformed recording in *Symptom 1*, and the exact length of the delay in *Symptom 3* and *4*. Similarly with the visuals, this absolute control over the sound is good for creating an authoritative interpretation of the score, in removing the potential for mistakes it ultimately becomes a less authentic realization of a performance.

# Conclusion

The process of conceiving, writing, performance, and discussing this portfolio has afforded me many new directions for developing my composition. I am very pleased with the way my technique is developing, especially in my ability to devise and direct the theatrical actions – this is something which I aim to continue developing organically. The idea of writing conceptual rather than abstract compositions is very appealing to me, and this will probably become a substantial part of my future work, particularly reflecting upon my nationality.

I intend to continue all of these ideas over the course of a PhD, refining the concept of general 'theatre' into 'physical movement'. That is, I will focus on the performers actions (be it part of instrumental technique, choreography, or otherwise) outside of any narrative context, synthesizing physical gestures fully into my sonic language, and researching and discussing the various ways in which they can interrelate.

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