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THE PHOENIX MUSIC SOCIETY



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The Phoenix Music Society Conference 2022 Conference Report

New Music and Society

27th June 2022, 9:00am-5:00pm

Gonville and Caius College

Bateman Auditorium

Cambridge

Edited by

Oliver Rudland

Rajan Lal

Keynote Speaker

Jonathan Dove

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The Phoenix Music Society was founded in 2017 at the University of Cambridge. We are a group dedicated to the discussion, creation and performance of new music who aim to create an open and viable environment for the creation of music, which is rooted in the past, whilst looking to the future. The society takes its lead from thinkers such as the American composer Steve Reich, who has written, 'the reality of cadence to a key or modal centre is basic in all the music of the world – Western and non-Western.'¹

So far, the society has produced six events and concerts:

Musical Fables: Five Symphonic Poems: a concert of new orchestral music at the Fitzwilliam College Auditorium conducted by Mark Biggins, chorus director for English National Opera (March 2018).

Encounters with Persian Verse, Art & Music: a festival of Islamic artwork, Persian music, and new vocal chamber music with the Iranian Duo, Nasim-e Tarab, Cambridge choral scholars and the Ligeti String Quartet (May 2018).

WWI Armistice Centenary Concert: a commemorative concert of new choral and orchestral music with choral scholars from Gonville & Caius, St John's, Queen's, Homerton and Selwyn Colleges at Great St. Mary's, the University Church, Cambridge (November 2018).

New Chamber Music on Romantic Themes: a chamber concert at the St John's Old Divinity School performed by Instrumental Award Scheme holders and other chamber musicians from across the University (June 2019).

Concerto Concert: a concert of three new orchestral concertos at St John's College Palmerston Room, featuring soloists from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Royal College of Music and Cambridge University (February 2020).

Phoenix Songs: an outdoor gala of ten new songs by ten composers with singers and composers from ten colleges at Gonville and Caius College, Harvey Court Gardens (June 2021).

¹ Reich, Steve (2002). *Writings on Music 1965-2000*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 186-187.



The Phoenix Music Society Conference 2022

#phoenixconference2022

Conference Theme: *New Music and Society*

Date and time: 27th June 2022, 9:00am-5:00pm

Location: Gonville and Caius College Bateman Auditorium, Cambridge

Conference Organisers: Oliver Rudland, Rajan Lal

Keynote Speaker: Jonathan Dove

Even if the moment of inspiration comes when the creator is in the bathtub or gardening, it may have come only as a result of a prior encounter with a colleague, or exposure to some new ideas at a recent conference. Thus, creativity research has shifted to a concern with group creativity, and an interest in the role that group creativity plays in individual creativity.²

R. Keith Sawyer (2003)

I developed a more playful way of working, finding different ways of getting groups improvising together in song (while stamping and clapping and even dancing), splitting into groups to try out several different ways of singing just one or two lines of a libretto, then all gathering around the piano to stitch the fragments together: this process often led to surprisingly organic melodies. Obviously, from the piano, I had a hand in shaping the music, but there was always a sense of collective achievement, and shared ownership.³

Jonathan Dove (2020)

This conference will consider the ways in which encounters with musicians, participants and society at large can influence the idea-forming processes of composers. These might include activities in a community or teaching setting, an improvisatory setting, or even a musicological setting. In general, this conference seeks to explore how wider society or groups engaged in shared activities can help shape and impact upon the composition of new music and, in doing so, how new music can be written to be tailored to reflect the interests of modern society.

Oliver Rudland (2022)



DERIVATIONES MELIUS QUAM UTOPIA

² Sawyer, R. K. (2003). *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p. 25.

³ Dove, J. (2020): <https://www.traction-project.eu/who-needs-community-opera-part-one-lets-take-over-a-whole-town/>.

WHO NEEDS COMMUNITY OPERA?:

***The Monster in the Maze* as an example of participatory work**

Jonathan Dove, CBE

Abstract: *In this presentation, I will be drawing on over thirty years' experience of writing participatory works that include the community in both creation and performance, notably in a series of large-scale operas typically involving several hundred performers in a single work. I will consider the pros and cons of tailoring large-scale works to the abilities and circumstances of a specific community, the benefits and drawbacks of co-creation, and ponder whether there are necessarily aesthetic limitations to work that is designed to include a large body of amateur performers. I will use *The Monster in the Maze* as an example of participatory work that can have a wide appeal and high status, and be performed around the world.⁴ I will explain how it relates to my experiences of co-creation, and the highs and lows of making works of this kind. I will attempt to answer such questions as: What is the purpose of this kind of work? Is there a need for it? Who is it for? What good does it do? Is this suitable work for a modernist or experimental composer? Does it suit a particular kind of composer? What are the challenges for a composer working in this field? What might they get out of it? What does everyone else get out of it?*

Reflections: Dove's wide-ranging talk addressed the above questions. Amongst the reasons for the purpose of 'community opera' were the hunger and excitement of a community to be involved with the creative process. No matter how modest their contribution, creative input from a community makes those involved feel like it is 'their opera', greatly increasing its appeal to participants and their audience – it is more 'democratic'. In response, contact with community participants greatly assists with the creative processes of the composer, providing compositional challenges as a starting point and possibilities that stimulate the imagination; a blank sheet of paper is replaced by personalities and contingencies. Singing is the best context for this kind of activity as it is the great 'leveller' for people; 'singing is something people can do all together'. It also provides an impetus for the composer to get the very best music out of themselves, as there is the constant challenge of satisfying the expectations of participants during workshops and rehearsals. Community composition is the very opposite of the 'ivory tower' composer and is 'the key to a magical playground', making the composer feel like they are being of use to wider society. Community operas may not be 'experimental' in any technical or conceptual way – with community participants the music always tends in the general direction of tonal melodies and harmonic structures. However, they are experimental in a sociological and cultural way, which in turn filters into the music.

The disadvantages of community opera where participants are included in the creative process is the general inability for the final opera to be able to 'travel beyond that particular community'. Dove's *Dreamdragons* (1993) for example, was very much about Ashford and the opening of the channel tunnel; it does not easily make sense moving the opera elsewhere. For an opera to travel the composer and librettist are required to have the final responsibility for the choice of the story, which needs to be one that has more universal appeal. Nevertheless, there is much to be learned as a composer from partaking in such co-creative activities, especially the training in 'searching for common ground' between all the constituent elements of opera – the community, the professional singers, the opera house, the composer and librettist, the audience etc.

Community opera is primarily for the performers of that particular opera. However, there is still a very important place for 'community operas' in the older sense of the phrase, like Britten's *Noye's Fludde*; written on behalf of communities, but not *with* communities. Significantly, to establish new relationships between opera houses and new audiences, which was the primary purpose of the Berlin Philharmonic commission for

⁴ A production of *The Monster in the Maze* can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGMFmVsNCX8>.

The Monster in the Maze. Aware that audiences are getting greyer and smaller without new membership, part of the purpose of community operas of this kind is to educate young participants about opera by including them in performances. Participation is far more effective than opera appreciation lectures, or family-friendly productions, although these too have their place. Community opera productions of this kind are also very effective at getting people into an opera house who would not normally attend, as the participants bring along their relatives to watch – who may also have little experience of opera.

It was also the case that Britten's *Noye's Fludde* itself was failing to 'travel', as audiences increasingly do not already know the hymn tunes in that particular work; this is vital for the success of a performance. The composition of new community operas in the mould of *Noye's Fludde* is therefore arguably very important for sustaining the audiences of opera and classical music more generally.

When questioned about his compositional method, Dove replied quite openly that it "used to be at the piano, but now was *Logic* [computer software] with crude sounds with a lot of trial and error". This response reveals Dove's compositional method mirroring a major shift in approach to composition that took place concurrently with the introduction of computers, midi technology and music notation software into homes and schools during the 1990s. This is an approach that circumnavigates the traditional need for harmony and counterpoint training, whilst not jettisoning the natural tendency of young composers to write in a, broadly speaking, 'tonal' manner. It is a shift that has greatly polarised the teaching of composition in higher education. There is an ever-increasing division between those who have adapted to modern technology and wish to develop their skills at handling tonality in a more advanced and idiosyncratic direction, and a more conservative approach that retains a counter-intuitive 'ivory tower' compositional stance. In the latter method, deriving from conceptualised compositional procedures and orthodoxies of the 1950s, music is usually still written out by hand and requires little ear-training or intuition (see Lal below). Given that composition in schools is now dominated by the newer technologically-influenced approach, it will be interesting to see how this polarisation develops over time.

Dove added that as a student at the RCM and Cambridge "Steve Reich was my god", citing in particular Reich's *Six Pianos* and *Shakerloops* by John Adams. Dove explained that this fresh minimalist style (also stimulated by the use of new technology) opened up a world of compositional possibilities for developing his own style, whilst evading denouncement by authoritarian modernists for composing 'historical pastiche'. Intriguingly, Dove revealed that he was never attracted to the rigorous processes in Reich's music but rather to the soundworld and general approach that it created, presaged (ironically) in Schoenberg's famous statement that 'there is still plenty of good music to be written in C major'.

Dove encouraged those present to compose the music they wanted to write and to 'stick to their guns', avoiding the pressure to conform to institutional pressures. Given the global recognition that Dove's music has received – at least four stage works established in the active repertoire (*Flight*, *The Enchanted Pig*, *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, *The Monster in the Maze*) – this new approach would seem to be where the future lies; a musical style informed and facilitated by modern technology, but one also shaped by intuition which thus reaches out to wider society.

PAVING THE WAY FOR A 'FOLK OPERA': encounters with Galicia society in *María Soliña*

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Abstract: *In this presentation, I will explore the compositional and ethnomusicological research that led to my concept of 'folk opera' and the premiere of my work María Soliña.⁵ First of all, I will focus on the ethnographic fieldwork that I undertook in Galicia (Spain), investigating the links between the gaita performance of Galician muiñeira and aspects of language and regional identity. Then, I will show how my research conclusions encouraged me to traverse the borders of ethnomusicology and composition and bring them into dialogue through an innovative creative concept, which I have branded as 'folk opera'. The latter emerges as an attempt to fuse stylistic boundaries, bridge the gap between professional and amateur involvement and reach a wider audience through the use of alternative performance spaces. One of the intrinsic aspects of María Soliña is the presence of improvisatory and co-creative elements, especially in the form of deliberately unfinished parts that trigger a creative involvement from the performing team, in order to challenge pre-existing hierarchies in both the compositional and performing process. This was partly accomplished by the active participation of folk instrumentalists who had taken part in the preliminary ethnographic research, permeating the 'classical' palette of the accompanying chamber orchestra with the uniquely Galician timbral properties of the gaita, zanfona, asubío and tambor galego, among others. In addition, the vocal soloists did not only feature classically trained operatic singers, but also actors without any previous musical knowledge, thus emulating the Galician tradition of regueifa by exploring the inherent musicality and rhythm of the spoken word. The composition was also inspired by other Galician rhythms and techniques, such as the muiñeira, alalá and cantiga, which I will analyse through notational and audiovisual examples from recent performances of the work in Pontevedra and Lugo. Finally, I will reflect on the implications of my work on Galician society and identity as a whole, discussing the reactions from the audience and the widespread impact of the premiere on Galician community centres in South American and European countries through the use of live-streaming platforms.*

Reflections: Mañá Mesas highlighted a compositional crisis which led to the development of his 'folk opera': the feeling of being socially disconnected due to his previous practice of writing difficult-to-perform works that received only single performances. He highlighted the fact that composers were up against the Western canon of established musical works and so, in order to connect with audiences and receive repeat performances, composers had to make an especial effort to seek out new ways of engaging with the public more broadly, whilst retaining a musical language comprehensible to contemporary audiences.

In 'María Soliña' this was accomplished by simplifying his musical language (particularly rhythm), making extensive use of diatonic themes, integrating uniquely Galician instruments from folk traditions along with their improvisatory performance practices, and by setting a story related to the history and culture of the Galician region, where the piece was premiered. In substantive ways, these features have proven successful: the opera has since its premiere been staged three times. Given the financial and institution investment in staging any opera, Mañá Mesas's new compositional direction would seem to have addressed the compositional crisis he outlined. This new direction is an approach he will be exploring further in future works.

⁵ A production of *María Soliña* can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDQP6c4-pc>.

CONTRASTING APPROACHES TO THE SAME PIECE:

Adapting Modest Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' for Different Ensembles

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Abstract: *Last year, I was commissioned to create a new orchestration of Modest Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' for the Royal College of Music Wind Ensemble and to then adapt this for the National Youth Orchestra Inspire Wind Ensemble. This talk will explore how the differing purposes of these commissions dictated the way in which I approached each, contrasting the freedom that I had to create the original orchestration with the far more constrained process of adapting it for the NYO Inspire Wind Ensemble. In creating a new orchestration of 'Pictures at an Exhibition' for the RCM Wind Ensemble, I had very few limitations: I was writing for advanced players and given the brief to create something challenging. And so, after noticing how 'ugly' much of Mussorgsky's musical language is (with dense left-hand textures, obtuse piano writing, and few expression markings), I used this as the main stimulus for my orchestration, seeking to create something more akin to the 'de-humanised' sound world of Stravinsky's 'Symphonies of Wind Instruments' than Ravel's orchestration of 'Pictures at an Exhibition'.*

In contrast, when adapting my orchestration for the NYO Inspire Wind Ensemble, my creative process was entirely governed by practical needs. This ensemble is made up of school children who are up to Grade 8, but with a wide variety of standards, and with a limited amount of rehearsal time before scheduled performances. Because of this, I substantially cut down the original into a suite of 'easier' movements, and heavily reworked it, transposing movements and re-registering passages which might be problematic. To bring this talk together, I will conclude by looking at how such 'real world' constraints can be a positive for composers and arrangers, questioning whether we need restrictions in order to create works that have the discipline to appeal to players and audiences alike.

Reflections: Huston was keen to differentiate between music that is difficult to perform, rather than music that is awkward or unplayable. Instrumentalists of all abilities relish being pushed to the margins of their ability, including school children and younger musicians, but this must be done in a way that fits idiomatically and intuitively within the capabilities of the instruments (and broader ensembles) in question. Most players resent parts being hard or unplayable for the sake of it, assuming either ignorance or ideological motivations, such as in the works of 'new complexity' composers. Huston demonstrated that using the capabilities of players is a fruitful creative starting point for an arrangement and, like composition, these kinds of 'limitations' catalyse profound musical invention.

Huston also argued that the extraordinary musical inventions found in Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' were in part a consequence of his position as a non-professional composer. That is, he had no pressures exerted on him to conform to the standard practices of his day; this music was written purely for its own aesthetic worth. Thus, non-professionalised composition has in some ways an artistic advantage over composers working under commissioned, commercial or academic constraints. Finally, it was highlighted in questions that arrangers themselves would not go to the effort of arranging music in this manner if they did not consider the work in question to be aesthetically rewarding, as Huston found in the Mussorgsky. The volume of arrangements of a piece of music is, along with the number of repeat performances it receives, a good indicator of its success.

INSPIRATION FROM COMPOSERS AT THE PRECIPICE OF TONALITY:

Liszt, Scriabin and New Music Reconsidered

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Abstract: *It has long been musicological commonplace to regard the history of tonality as a continuum of progressively greater dissonance emancipation. In this metanarrative, composer to composer teleology is foregrounded to the detriment of considering listeners and the wider society progressively more dissonant works are written into. In large part due to the writings of modernist composers themselves, we hear much about the insularity of Schoenberg, the elitism of Babbitt and the esotericism of Cage, but little about the general public who received their ideas. Certainly pertaining to music post-WWII, reception studies of modernist music are largely confined to the music intelligentsia.*

To consider twentieth century listeners and wider society is to consider an unsettling trend. Broadly perceived, twentieth century art music has experienced a steady downwards decline in terms of audience engagement, still commanding a certain intellectual prestige but unable to keep sales pace with popular or even film music traditions. In at least some part, the decline of art music audiences is attributable to listeners finding very dissonant music less aurally pleasant than traditionally consonant music, a feature Dmitri Tymockzo's recent interdisciplinary work (2008, 2011) has explicated through musico-mathematical principles.

With Tymockzo's work in mind, the present paper suggest that composers writing art music today ought to return to the precipice and extensions of tonality explored by several innovative composers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Taking case studies of harmony from the late works of Franz Liszt and NeoTonal experiments of Alexander Scriabin, I compare these two composers to my own work, demonstrating that tonality is not a dead-end (as both composer's music has been described), but a fruitful departure point for composition in the modern world.

Reflections: Lal demonstrated (as scholars such as Taruskin have shown before) that the 'atonal' practices developed by the Second Viennese School went hand in hand with an indifferent attitude and even contempt for the reaction of audiences. These reactions that have been historically marginalised, with an emphasis placed instead upon technical analysis, itself prompted by an assumed teleological framework in music history. The reason for the contrasting social appeal of composers at the 'precipice of tonality' (Scriabin and late Liszt inclusive) is that even though the music of these composers employed distinctly musico-mathematical principles, they still composed in such a manner that left intuition as an important contributing factor in the compositional process. Lal demonstrated as such in reference to Dmitri Tymockzo's recent scholarship (2011). Therefore, intuition remained the final arbiter in the decision-making process even though musico-mathematical principles can be seen to be playing a large role in the deeper level idea forming processes of such composers.

Lal exemplified this with reference to his own work 'Hadean Rondo' for violin and piano.⁶ He conducted a 'Set Theoretical' analysis of his piece using Allen Forte's Pitch Class Set Theory, a system developed to analyse the early 'atonal' works of Schoenberg and subsequently applied by scholars with great vigour to so-called 'transitional' composers like Scriabin. Despite a plethora of complex mathematical relationships present between the harmonies in the introduction to Lal's Rondo (vertical sonorities often intersected with those found in Scriabin), the ways in which the hands fell on the keyboard and the decisions made purely on the basis of 'what sounded right' played a crucial role in the composition of the piece. Therefore, exploring musico-mathematical techniques in musical composition cannot be successful without reference also to the instinctive reaction of the composer's sensibilities and, by proxy, to the audiences'.

⁶ A recording of Lal's *Hadean Rondo* can be heard here: <https://soundcloud.com/rajan-lal-780841814/hadean-rondo>.

The point was suggested in questions, that perhaps one of the reasons for this observation was that audiences have *only* their intuitive reaction to judge and comprehend new music presented to them (either by not being privy to the compositional procedures, or simply by not being themselves musicians or composers). Thus, only music composed with intuition as the final arbiter could make itself appealing to audiences. For music to reach out to audiences and make itself a useful aspect of wider society therefore (in ways the Second Viennese School explicitly rejected), intuitive input from composers is of paramount importance. More practice research by composers using autoethnographic accounts of their own compositional procedures could be of great value in expanding the ideas raised in this paper in more detail.

“BEHIND THE SCREENS”:

choral composition in the virtual post-pandemic age.

Lucy Walker, *King’s School Ely*

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*Today I rise, I rise in splendour
As the day keeps unveiling all her grandeur
Let the chains of yesterday break away!
Today is here, I will not cling to yesterday!*

Ozioma Ogbaji

Abstract: *Alongside so many facets of society, live music was brought to a halt by the Covid-19 pandemic. Even more devastatingly affected was choral music, due to the increased threat of viral transmission caused by singing, and the prohibition of social gatherings. Overnight, the two requisite elements of this particular musical sphere – singing and collective music-making -- were forbidden. Facing a crisis, the choral community – composers, singers and audiences alike -- was forced to proactively devise alternative methods of musically engaging with each other. The result was an arduous mass-migration to virtual media, which has continued well into the aftermath of the pandemic.*

Composed in December 2020 for the Choir of Pembroke College, Cambridge, amid the second UK national lockdown, ‘Today’, a setting of Ozioma Ogbaji’s strikingly resonant words, perpetuates messages of hope and empowerment in times of struggle. Not only does its thematic content recall the resilient community spirit of the pandemic, but its conception, rehearsal process and first performances were all virtual, heavily affected by Covid-19.

Through the case study of ‘Today’, this paper will explore the virtual survival and repositioning of choral music, from conception to performance, during the pandemic, from the perspective of the composer. In a striking parallel with the text, this paper will observe how choral composers have harnessed the post-pandemic age, resulting in a more optimistic and connected community than ever.

Reflections: Walker provided a robust defence of live music-making with the aid of phenomenological concepts developed by the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty. She argued that a sense of “being with” the music in the flesh and the experiential knowledge generated by performing music in a person-to-person physical context was essential for the rewards of performing and experiencing choral music. This kind of experiential knowledge had been largely undermined by the Covid-19 lockdowns and had seriously hampered choral music-making which, perhaps more than any other form of live musical performance, depends upon in person contact.

However, Walker also identified various positive features created by social distancing restrictions when limited personal contact was permitted after full lockdown. These included the vocal discipline of increased

aural awareness generated by being forced to learn and rehearse new choral music, with singers required to stay several meters apart from one another. This was especially useful for new music in that it forced singers to carefully consider the internal dynamics of the music more carefully, rather than relying on an overall choral sound generated by close group singing, which is useful where singers are not already acquainted with the repertoire in question. It also generated a new quality of sound which represented a slightly different palette of colours. Finally, the overall process of filming and releasing a new choral work into the public realm via video and social media channels helped to build a far larger audience; Walker's 'Today' has received just over 100,000 views at the time of writing.

There are clearly some benefits to the techniques developed and used to circumnavigate Covid-19 social distancing restrictions. However, these cannot replace live musical performance but must instead be absorbed as techniques useful in the rehearsal, performance, and promotion of new choral music. Walker identified no benefits of social distancing on the actual composition of new music, except new video call technology brought into greater use by the lockdowns. This made it possible for Walker to discuss the poem she set with its author, Ozioma Ogbaji, which was a very rewarding experience.

GIVING OPERA SOME SWING: Co-creating a brass band dance number for a large-scale community opera project with the aid of improvisatory techniques

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Abstract: *Community opera projects have often integrated bands of varying types to involve participants in ways other than singing and acting (Dove, 2021) and this has often involved the use of brass bands (Tearle, 1996). Although many community opera projects involve co-creativity (Winterson 2010, Matarasso, 2019) and improvisation techniques (Sawyer, 2014) there is little coverage of how bands, in practice, can be involved as participants in the co-creative process of shaping a new community opera.*

This paper documents a practice-led research project with Waterbeach Brass Band based in Cambridgeshire, UK. It records in detail the process whereby aspects of a brass band dance number were devised during co-creative improvisation workshops and provides both audio-visual recordings and notated examples that capture the emergent creative process, alongside a commentary explaining the processes and methodological approaches employed. The paper examines the different ways in which members of the brass band responded to improvisational workshops, and how this fed into the co-creative process. The paper proceeds to examine how such co-creative elements can then form part of a larger musical-dramatic presentation, showing how they can be developed during an extended operatic scene and the rewards of adopting such an approach.

Reflections: Rudland presentation showed how it was possible to use an improvisatory workshop to generate materials for a community opera, *A Kestrel for a Knave*.⁷ In this case jazz or swing-style improvisation by a brass band for inclusion in a scene where a brass band are playing swing music for a dance – the setting of the opera being a small coalmining town during the 1950s where such activities took place. Rudland demonstrated how it was possible to replicate under controlled conditions the circumstances in which this kind of improvisatory music took place, as well as transferring this stylistic authenticity into a dramatic realisation of the circumstances in which it was created, thus infusing the scene with a musical-dramatic realism. Rudland also demonstrated how improvised melodies could later be applied to vocal parts giving the impression of a dance band playing in the background as an operatic scene is taking place in the foreground. The texture of improvised material in this context also provided a conduit through which the

⁷ Rudland's presentation in full can be seen here: <https://www.ceprajournal.co.uk/oliver-rudland-brass-band>.

dramatic content of the scene could be conveyed as its harmony is distorted to match the tone of the drama, thus creating a multi-layered musical-dramatic presentation.

During questions, Rudland's approach was compared to the Florentine Camerata, in which opera originally evolved out of a greater attention to actual vocal inflections of speech. In Rudland's case, this same trend amounted to the level of attention paid to the actual music inflections of improvised music conducted in the circumstances he had chosen to set his opera. Rudland responded that the history of opera was often a history of 'reforms', where composers drew back from the stylistic traits of their time to look towards different sociological circumstances for a fresher and more 'authentic' stylistic approach – a good example being the operas of Janáček, with their fabric constructed from Czech speech patterns in contrast to the dominant German vernacular of his time. Rudland argued that operas in a sense *are* communities, they tell stories about groups of people and so, quite naturally, the opera composer should be looking for circumstances to engage with modern communities to find 'material' of a sociological as well as a musical kind. Opera should be a 'mirror' of society in many ways, and so must look to society for inspiration and nourishment.

This process, Rudland argued, in fact works both ways in 'community opera' as the main value for participants is to discover some investment in the creative process, whilst the composer benefits musically from contact with participant's creative responses. Of course, this process has to be carefully regulated by the composer to elucidate the best musical results, but it is not possible for opera composers to work in a social vacuum. This is perhaps why so much new opera relies on this kind of community-composer interaction. Additionally, it is very easy for composers – particularly those working in educational institutions – to develop an 'ivory tower' tendency where 'rules' of one kind or another (ranging from fugal counterpoint or total serialism) become an end in themselves. Part of the political instinct which motivates the idea of the creative power of amateurs or the whole community (which at first glance would appear to be a rather idealistic stance) is the desire to break down arbitrary and ossified rules and to make music a natural outgrowth of human social life.

IMPROVISING INTO THE ABYSS: a collaborative creative process

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Abstract: *The Shallow Abyss was conceived as a collaboration between myself and several postgraduate performance students from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. I took part in several workshops with each individual performer in the piano quartet, collaborating on new ideas and potential techniques to explore, and eventually forming a new composition. The Shallow Abyss makes extensive use of improvisation, inspiring each performer to explore their instrument based on the existing material of the composition and the theme of a shallow abyss, resulting in a collaborative work. It was fascinating to explore the performers' attitudes to improvisation, some of them well-acquainted with the concept from experiences of jazz, and some much more hesitant and likely to repeat existing material from the composition.*

The freedom of allowing the performers to improvise created a structure which was bound by pre-existing material yet also had sections which were entirely free from metrical constraints. This is further conveyed by the oxymoronic title The Shallow Abyss, since the composition is initially very sparse in texture and motivic ideas, yet the depth of possibility created by the concept of improvisation means the abyss of possibilities is endless. This led to a composition which was a fusion of my own ideas as well as the ideas of the performers, forming a collaborative creative experience towards a piece which will never remain the same from one individual performance to another.

Reflections: Offer expounded upon the many possible different levels of improvisatory input from performers in new music explicitly designed to ‘leave room’ for improvisational input; from the subtlety of dynamic contrast to wide-ranging melodic invention. ‘Reversing the composer-performer hierarchy’, however, was not as liberating as it might sound. Even though improvisatory and aleatoric techniques in new music might leave open an ‘abyss’ of possibilities, the abyss itself is rather ‘shallow’, prompting the title of Offer’s recent work. In most cases, the composer still carefully determines the parameters for improvisation, exerting a heavy influence on the ensuing creative outcome. The value of improvisatory input has much more to do with the relationship *between* composer and performer, and the respect it grants to the performers creative input in any musical performance. This in turn points towards the idea that composition itself exists within a community of composer/performers rather than as an introverted mental exercise.

THE SOCIETAL EFFECT ON COMPOSITIONAL OUTPUT:

An antipodean perspective on composing for the public concert stage

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Abstract: *Almost all funding for arts projects in Australia are chosen based on criteria that ultimately has little to do with the art that is purportedly being supported (Were, 2020). When this occurs, it renders the arts primarily as a conduit for servicing non-musical agendas, ultimately lowering the standard of art being produced (Dirt, 2021). Should the current trend of decisions made based on extra-musical criteria continue? And if so, how long until the art primarily produced within a society eventually deviates entirely from the fundamental function of art? During a time of declining audience numbers (Manley, 2020) and continual cuts in funding to music education (Ewing, 2020), should music instead be written as a way of educating and reminding its audience of the crucial elements in retaining a sustainable, culturally rich society in the modern age?*

The proposed presentation will discuss my String Quartet No.1 “The Australian”, which was commissioned by the Australian String Quartet and has received considerable critical acclaim after being toured nationally, ‘Paterson’s new work proved a revelation - attractive tonal music that seems to spill off the page’ (Moffatt, 2022). It will examine the ways in which I composed the quartet to both showcase the strengths of the ensemble, my craft and, crucially, in such a way as to educate society on the value and intricacies of purely absolute music. I will also elaborate on the work’s underlying surreptitious protest which addresses the societal effect on compositional output in Australia. In doing so this paper will aim to consider how the current societal climate has affected the art music scene and music education in Australia from the perspective of the performer, educator, and composer.

Reflections: Paterson first made a clear exposition of the features of his String Quartet No.1 *The Australian*, that positioned the piece in a tradition of European classical art music ranging from the quartets of Haydn to Bartok. In doing so, his quartet demonstrated features of form from fugue to chorale that structure the quartet, whilst dipping into more ‘modernist’ textures and dissonances to provide a variety of colours, even though the quartet is predominantly composed of tonal conventions and structures. Paterson then proceeded to explain that the purpose of adopting such a ‘conservative’ or ‘conventional’ approach was due to audiences in Australia who, for the most part, are not so well acquainted with the European tradition of composition. The quartet was thus partly designed to provide an ‘introduction’ or ‘living example’ of a composer writing music within this idiom, intended to enliven the tradition and make it visible to Australian audiences not disconnected from modern society.

However, in deciding to take this compositional approach and adopting the particular subtitle of *The Australian*, à la Haydn, Paterson encountered substantial resistance from the musical organisations that commissioned and performed the piece around Australia. Despite the fact that the ensemble who

performed the work were the 'Australian String Quartet' – to say little of its popularity with audiences – the choice of the title *The Australian* was bizarrely dropped, under the pretence of it being somehow reactionary or 'nationalistic'. Paterson proceeded to paint a picture of an Australian music scene which prioritises the manifestation of various political agendas within works of art – particularly symbology related to the Aboriginal people of Australia – that had become far more significant than the artistic value of the music itself. This had developed into a series of clichés where if a piece of music did not reference 'kookaburras' or 'digeridoos' (the latter ironically the colonial term for the instrument) then it would be considered somehow inadequate or even 'nationalistic' to attach itself to the European tradition, and thus to the imperial past. Paterson argued further that it is in part the development of this cultural orthodoxy that has created the collapse in awareness and appreciation for European classical art music, an orthodoxy that he is challenging in his work for string quartet.

In questions, it was suggested that there was perhaps some kind of snobbish subtext or jealousy in the criticism of a composer of mixed European and South Asian heritage choosing to position a piece within the tradition of European classical art music, as if this were not an appropriate approach for someone of his background. In response, Paterson strongly asserted that he did not feel that it mattered at all what 'his background' was, that art should always be judged on artistic merit alone, and certainly not on the ethnicity, 'background' or other any other form of immutable characteristic possessed by the composer. If Paterson wished to write a work to engage and educate modern audiences on European classical art music, then this cannot in any way be considered a 'colonial' activity (even more so given his 'background'), but rather as a means of enriching the public concert stage and rejuvenating the appreciation of absolute music in Australia.

CONTRIBUTER BIOGRAPHIES

Jonathan Dove's music has filled opera houses with delighted audiences of all ages on five continents. Few, if any, contemporary composers have so successfully or consistently explored the potential of opera to communicate, to create wonder and to enrich people's lives. Born in 1959 to architect parents, Dove's early musical experience came from playing the piano, organ and viola. Later he studied composition with Robin Holloway at Cambridge and, after graduation, worked as a freelance accompanist, répétiteur, animateur and arranger. His early professional experience gave him a deep understanding of singers and the complex mechanics of the opera house. Opera and the voice have been the central priorities in Dove's output throughout his subsequent career.



Starting with his breakthrough opera *Flight*, commissioned by Glyndebourne in 1998, Dove has gone on to write almost thirty operatic works. *Flight*, a rare example of a successful modern comic opera, has been produced and broadcast many times, in Europe, the USA and Australia. Dove's innate understanding of the individual voice is exemplified in his large and varied choral and song output, and his confident optimism has made him the natural choice as the composer for big occasions. In 2010 *A Song of Joys* for chorus and orchestra opened the festivities at the Last Night of the Proms, and in 2016 an expanded version of *Our Revels Now Are Ended* premiered at the same occasion.

Throughout his career Dove has made a serious commitment to community development through innovative musical projects. *Tobias and the Angel*, a 75-minute opera written in 1999, brings together children, community choirs, and professional singers and musicians in a vivid and moving retelling of the Book of Tobit. His 2012 opera *Life is a Dream*, written for Birmingham Opera Company, was performed by professionals and community choruses in a disused Birmingham warehouse, and a church opera involving community singers *The Walk from The Garden* was premiered at Salisbury Cathedral as part of the 2012 Salisbury International Arts Festival. 2015 brought the World Premiere of *The Monster in the Maze*, a community opera commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, Berliner Philharmoniker and Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, performed under the baton of Sir Simon Rattle in three separate translations and productions. *The Monster in the Maze* has since been performed around the world, translated further into Taiwanese/Chinese, Portuguese, Swedish and Catalan, and received a BASCA British Composer Award in 2016's 'Amateur and Young Performers' category. He was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the Queen's 2019 Birthday Honours for services to music.

Nacho Mañá is a Spanish composer, saxophonist and educator currently based in London. He studied at Chetham's School of Music and then completed his undergraduate studies in Music at the University of Cambridge (St John's College), specialising in Composition and Saxophone Performance. There, he won First Prize in the Cambridge University Musical Society Concerto Competition and was awarded numerous academic prizes, such as the Earle Prize, Wright Prize and the Donald Wort Prize for the best overall mark in Part IB of the Music Tripos. He graduated from Cambridge in July 2020 with a Triple Starred First, receiving the prestigious Larmor Award as one of the best undergraduate students across all subjects and disciplines at St John's College. During his studies at Cambridge, he was also selected for a fully funded exchange programme at Georgetown University (Washington, DC), where he wrote film scores and participated in numerous audiovisual projects with American and Chinese filmmakers. Inspired by this experience, he is currently pursuing a Master's degree in Composition for the Screen at the Royal College of Music. Nacho's concert music has been commissioned and premiered by the Choir of St John's College Cambridge, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group, Sigma Project Quartet, Amatis Trio and Fidelio Trio, among others. Furthermore, his folk opera *María Soliña* was commissioned by the town council of Cangas do Morrazo (Spain) and premiered in May 2021, achieving wide critical and public acclaim and receiving four performances in Spain so far. Upcoming projects include a recording at Air-Edel Studios, a film score for a short Spanish film and a new operatic project in Galicia.



After reading Music at the University of Cambridge, **Samuel Huston** is currently finishing his postgraduate studies at the Royal College of Music. Whilst studying in Cambridge, Samuel held an instrumental award from the University and two academic scholarships. As part of the Music Tripos, he undertook extensive studies in harmony and counterpoint, which inspired him to begin writing arrangements and creating new editions of early music for his ensemble Dorian Consort.



He graduated from the University of Cambridge with a double first in 2020. During his time at the RCM, Samuel has performed as a section principal with the RCM Symphony Orchestra and been featured in the RCM's 'In Focus' series. He has also created arrangements of challenging repertoire for the RCM Wind Ensemble: his arrangement of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's 'Overture to the Marriage of Figaro' was premiered in July 2021 and his orchestration of Modest Mussorgsky's 'Pictures at an Exhibition' was premiered in November 2021.

Following a commission from the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, Samuel's orchestration of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's 'The Willow Song' was recently performed by the NYO Inspire Wind Ensemble alongside an adapted version of his orchestration of 'Pictures at an Exhibition'.

Rajan Lal is a pianist, composer and PhD student at Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, where he previously completed BA (2020, with distinction) and MPhil (2021) degrees. At Caius, Rajan was formerly a Tammy Chen Graduate Scholar, and is the recipient of a Senior Scholarship and the Compton Wills Prize for Music. Under the supervision of Professor Nicholas Marston, Rajan is presently researching a new analytical/music cognition approach towards the music of Alexander Scriabin; further research interests include the late music of Franz Liszt, Russian music in the early Twentieth Century (particularly Stravinsky) and mathematically oriented analytical musicology (particularly Fortean Set Theory and Scalar Theory). In Cambridge, Rajan supervises all undergraduate years in music analysis, as well as technical papers from harmony to orchestration across five different Cambridge colleges.



Prior to coming up to Cambridge, Rajan studied piano with Nissho Astridge and David Sams, and violin with Julian Milone of the Philharmonia Orchestra. Composition played a key part in this early music education; following studies with Karl Geitzmann at the Kent Academy of Music and the offer of an academic place at Cambridge, Rajan was one of four Phoenix Music Society founding members. He has since seen performances of his compositions by the Phoenix Orchestra and Chorus, the Ligeti String Quartet, the 2020 Chamber Orchestra and several chamber ensembles including players from the Royal College of Music. Rajan is also the founder of the Gonville and Caius College Jazz Band, a keen senior member of the Gonville and Caius Music Society, as well as the head of Oxbridge admissions at Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School, Rochester. Outside of musical and academic engagements, he is a keen weightlifter, food enthusiast and passionate supporter of Arsenal Football Club.

Lucy Walker (b.1998) is an award-winning choral composer and music educator based in Cambridge. Since completing her postgraduate studies at Gonville & Caius College in 2021, Lucy has received major commissions from the BBC Singers, Northern Chords Festival and St-Martin-in-the-Fields. Her works, performed frequently across Europe and the US, have been described by BBC Radio 3 as "real emerging talent".

Lucy is passionate about making classical music, especially choral music, accessible and inclusive, and her compositions reflect this mission. Lucy also enjoys writing for chamber ensembles, and, alongside composing, continues to pursue piano performance. Career highlights so far include performing at the BBC Proms in 2016 and her Carnegie Hall debut in 2019.



Oliver Rudland is an English opera composer, librettist and artistic director known for his accessible style of modern composition. He was educated at the Royal College of Music, London, and at Cambridge University. His operas include *The Nightingale and the Rose* (a one act romantic opera after Oscar Wilde), *The Owl who was Afraid of the Dark* (a children's opera after Jill Tomlinson) and *Pincher Martin* (a cinematic opera after William Golding), all of which have been highly acclaimed by critics and audience members alike:

'Rudland's compositions are not simply appealing and original. What makes his music so powerful is the way he uses it, whether in his operas or his orchestral writing, to tell a story.'

Simon Heffer, *The Telegraph*



Recent commissions include *Flying Free*, a work for the orchestra of Opera North (March 2020), and *The Christmas Truce*, a cantata for soloists, choir and orchestra for the London Choral Sinfonia (November 2018). His chamber music has been showcased at the Southbank Centre (London) and the DiMenna Center (New York) and performed at many other venues and festivals across Europe and the US.

Oliver is currently undertaking a PhD at Leeds University for which he is composing a new two act opera based on Barry Hines's novel *A Kestrel for a Knave*. His research investigates the use of co-creative and improvisatory techniques in the composition of large-scale community opera projects. He has presented his research at the *International Centre for Community Music* (York St. John's University), Høyskolen Kristiania University (Oslo) the *Biennial International Conference on Music Since 1900* (Royal Birmingham Conservatoire), the *Transnational Opera Studies Conference* (Bayreuth University, Germany), Leeds University Research Symposia, and the Cambridge University Composer's Workshop. Oliver's research has been published by *Sounding Board: The Journal of Community Music* and he has publications forthcoming with *WROCAH Journal* (AHRC), *Tempo Journal* (CUP) and he sits on the editorial board for *CePRA Journal* for practice research in the arts. Oliver teaches at Cambridge University where he founded *The Phoenix Music Society* in 2017.

Mary Offer is in her final year at Jesus College, Cambridge, reading Music with a choral scholarship. As a composer, she has won the *Minerva Festival Composition Competition* and the *Homerton College Composing Competition*, and her pieces have been performed by *BCMG*, *Isleworth River of Music*, *The Ripieno Choir* and featured on *CamFM*. She has recently received commissions for new works from *The Ripieno Choir* and *The Choir of Jesus College Cambridge*, and her opera *Esther: a voice for the voiceless* was premiered by *Cambridge University Opera Society*.

Mary was the organiser of the Jesus College Music Society's *New Music Festival 2022*, which premiered several new works by student composers, and her work has been selected for masterclasses with Diana Burrell and Nico Muhly. As a conductor, she has been Musical Director of *The Tempest*, *Antigone: the Musical*, *Esther: a voice for the voiceless*, conductor of the *Orchestra-on-the-Hill* and Jesus College Orchestra, and director of the Upper Voices of Jesus College Choir. Mary has also been selected for conducting masterclasses with Ben Glassberg, Paul Brough and Nicholas Cleobury. She looks forward to studying an MMus degree in composition at the *Royal Academy of Music* with a scholarship next year.



David Paterson a former protégé of the late Richard Gill and an alumnus of the Royal College of Music (London), Australian National Academy of Music (Melbourne), Sydney Conservatorium and Elder Conservatorium. He continues to work extensively as a pianist, composer, researcher, and educator. Having recently completed his MPhil research thesis, David is currently progressing to a PhD in composition with a Research Training Program scholarship at the Elder Conservatorium, University of Adelaide, under Graeme Koehne as Principal Supervisor.



David has become established as one of the next generation of critically acclaimed Australian composers with past commissions including: *Introduction and Rondo* for small orchestra (Sydney Symphony Orchestra Sinfonia) 2009, *The Legend of Nintendo* for String Quartet (Ensemble Urbane) 2012, *Tasting Notes* (Tarrawarra Estate, Yarra Valley) 2014, *Septet* (Melbourne Ensemble for ABC Classics) 2020, *Quartettsätze, Scherzo, and String Quartet No.1* (Australian String Quartet) 2016, 2020, and 2022 respectively.



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