

WHAT IS COMPROVISATION?

Thesis

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## comprovisation

I would like to begin to explore the middle ground between the poles we usually term ‘composition’ and ‘improvisation.’ While these terms themselves point at what we might say are pure or idealized polar opposites (in terms of the music-creation methodologies they describe), in actuality there is no way to ever completely separate them. Even the most ‘composed’ (i.e., written-down, through-composed, and/or predetermined) music has some elements of free and flexible interpretation; and even the most spontaneous improvised creations often have what some practitioners (and listeners) of this music would agree is a ‘compositional’ coherence, integrity, or intention. It is not *my* intention to separate these methodologies into their idealized forms for easier compartmentalization; rather, I would like to talk about **comprovisation**, a spectrum of music-creation methods that arrive at both *a relatively high degree of compositional structure* (through the implementation of some sort of predetermined directive and/or notation), *and a relatively high degree of performer agency, freedom, spontaneity, and flexibility* (through the implementation of a space where it is not only possible, but *necessary* for the performer to *create and shape* music at the moment of performance, rather than merely *executing* predetermined patterns). In this paper, I will look at my own comprovisational experiences, and those of many of the mentors I have had during my studies at Mills College; my intention is to extract some general operating principles of this type of music-creation, and to also begin to create an overview of *some* of the many possible ways of organizing a comprovisational musical space.



## point A to point B

Let's start with these polar opposites: what are the terms 'composition' and 'improvisation' referring to? And what about 'comprovisation,' the spectrum of possible combinations of these two methodologies? As I said, my ultimate aim is not to compartmentalize or idealize these activities. Nevertheless, I would like to start with these (personally generated) definitions to establish general boundaries from which to start:

**\* composition: one person predetermines as much as possible what a piece of music is going to be** (notwithstanding variability of performer style & execution, also: acoustic/atmosphere/audience/event).

**\* comprovisation: one or more people predetermine only some of what a piece of music is going to be; the rest is determined at the moment of performance or execution.**

**\*(pure or complete) improvisation: one or more people predetermine nothing of what a piece of music is going to be; it is determined at the moment of performance or execution** (notwithstanding the predetermination of one's individual conditioning and experience with regard to both culture and one's own psychology).

And along with those definitions, these corresponding characteristics of identity and variability:

**\* composition: can be repeated exactly** (notwithstanding fluctuations inherent in interpretation: e.g., rubato, tempo, etc.) **and maintain a recognizable identity.**

**\* comprovisation: can be repeated with greater or lesser degrees of variability and maintain a recognizable identity.**

**\* (pure or complete) improvisation: cannot be repeated exactly; recognizable identity ('as though seen before') may occur only through chance or through repetition<sup>1</sup> inherent in a particular performer's stylistic identity and technical ability.**

## music is music is music

In the midst of a discussion I had with Chris Brown, he makes the point (in speaking of Classical Music, New Music, traditional Jazz, Indian Classical Music, and others) that “there isn’t really a definable boundary [between composition and improvisation. They are] just poles that you can use to describe situations where there’s a lot of intermingling of approaches, usually.” He also points out that the method is “not easily separated from the act, or it’s probably better *not* to try to separate it; you know, ‘this part is the improvising, that part is the composition.’” If we take into account the fact that these and many other music styles (rock, Flamenco and other Romani musics, most of the world’s other folk traditions, etc.) are already arising *in essence* from a symbiotic and inseparable combination of compositional and improvisational means, then we could say that basically almost all of the music that has ever been made is

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<sup>1</sup> As for whether this repetition is intended or unintended is another matter. Most improvisers strive for endless variety in their improvisations, and most would probably agree this is very difficult to achieve. Feeling stuck ‘playing one’s same old song’ or ‘licks’ is a common complaint among the improvisers I have encountered, both seasoned professionals and younger players.

comprovisation. In other words, it is always a mixture of predetermined arrangement or structure and spontaneous elaboration, invention, and/or interpretation.

All music (including ‘free’ or ‘pure’ improvisation) may be considered ‘composition’ because the word seems to refer to ‘the creation of pieces of music,’ the actual assembling of the end product, no matter how real-time or non-real-time, predetermined or spontaneous, the process of arriving there was.<sup>2</sup> Pure improvisation is certainly regarded by many of its present-day practitioners as instant (or spontaneous) composition. Consider the experience saxophonist Steve Adams has had in his 30-year partnership with bassist Ken Filiano: “we have this ‘intuitive mind link’ thing that I’ve come *close* [to] with other people, but we can just consistently create things that sound like [compositional] form without any predetermination of what they’re going to be. We just both think compositionally when we’re improvising, in the same kind of way, and it really works great.” Roscoe Mitchell also acknowledges that “really good improvisation is viewed as a composition. [One definition of improvisation] is: everybody’s a composer.” He goes on to indicate some of the essential elements of this in-the-moment composition: “we make sure we have the basic fundamentals of music at work. Counterpoint, which is a very important factor in an improvisation. I think one of the things that can weigh things down [is] if all of a sudden there’s no counterpoint in the music, which is another indication of following.” So Adams and Mitchell are pointing to some of the considerations that make spontaneous improvisation more compositionally unified *and* diverse: independence of individual line (variety of material, not ‘following’

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<sup>2</sup> Consider the etymology of ‘compose:’ late Middle English (put together, construct); Old French *composer*, from Latin *componere* (component), but influenced by Latin *compositus* (composed) and Old French *poser* (to place).

or mimicking another player); counterpoint (cognizance of the *function or functions* of individual lines: main voice, supporting voice, background texture, pulsating or primarily rhythmic voice, etc.); and collective cognizance of larger, macro-level form as it relates to more micro-level musical materials.

And if improvisation has the potential to be in-the-moment composition, we could also say that composition has the potential to be a very drawn-out improvisation. Many of the great European Classical composers were known to be great improvisers: we may reasonably assume then that many of the materials for their compositions were arrived at through improvisational explorations; later honed, shaped and arranged into developed compositional forms, expanding out of the models of their time; and then further embellished spontaneously in performance with cadenzas, ornaments, perhaps some tempo fluctuations (*rubato*), and so on. This would apply most especially to the Baroque-era elaboration of figured-bass notations, in which the performer was free to voice chords in different ways, insert ornamental tones into melodies, and even invent and insert new countermelodies against the composed lines. So here is an example of how the compositional and improvisational methods (especially viewed over the timeframe of the whole generation of a piece, from conception to performance) are not easily separable; there is an “intermingling of approaches” and a flexibility of interpretation, as Mr. Brown points out. The ‘composition’ is (to some extent) a living organism, transforming itself somewhat with each new manifestation.

## the living part

Recently I asked Fred Frith what he saw as the value of composing or organizing pieces that have room for the agency and input of improvisers. His response was that the pieces “will always be alive, and [that] they will always respond to the exigencies of the moment at which they are performed.” This elucidates one of the key principles behind *comprovisation*: within the context of a repeatable structure, it aims to allow as much freedom of invention and variation as possible, so that the piece will function as a living organism, as noted above. Among musicians who work this way, there seems to be an impetus to balance some degree of *structure* (recognizable, repeatable identity of form and/or material) with the greatest possible degree of *freedom* (individual, spontaneously improvised gesture, syntax and/or vocabulary). To use an analogy: it’s as though your composer friend invites you over for a drink. She hands you a yellow tumbler (it’s the container you are going to put your drink in), and directs you toward the refrigerator. Is she going to tell you what to drink? Certainly not, that part is up to you. But she’s given you a container, and you are going to fill it up (and also empty it, we may presume).<sup>3</sup>

So what are the ways of organizing this material so that a balance is achieved? There seem to be two basic areas on either side of the *comprovisational* spectrum: one veers more towards composition (in that it uses specifically motivic or melodic material generated by the ‘composer’ as a basis for improvisational development, exploration, and/or arrangement), and one veers more towards improvisation (providing more of an ‘empty’ container, perhaps a sort of macro-form directive which allows for free invention

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<sup>3</sup> And if all you tend to have in your fridge is non-fat milk, people will probably stop coming over for drinks. Variety of options, and the freedom to choose an appropriate one for the moment, is essential.

within its boundaries). I would like to look at the slightly more compositional options first.

Roscoe Mitchell speaks of an approach he calls the ‘scored improvisation,’ which he says is one way for a composer to “integrate improvisation inside of their music.” Mitchell says: “scored improvisation means: you’re actually giving the improviser the materials that are going to be improvised. In this particular case, with my *Cards*, it’s up to the improviser to arrange these materials in any way that they choose . . . . And what this does is it helps the improviser with developing a concept of being able to have materials in your head, and different ways of arranging it.” So in this method of comprovisation, the composer has written out phrases that the musicians will play, retaining compositional control over many of the specifics of the melodic material, the micro-structure, the identity of the musical syntax and gesture. But the improvisational aspect consists of how the players listen within the ensemble and select very appropriate moments in which to project the materials, at a freely chosen tempo. There is a specifically pedagogical function in this, the construction of a framework in which to learn certain skills that are important in improvisational settings. Mitchell elaborates some further aspects of this:

For instance: it can eliminate the problem of not feeling as though you have the time to really listen to what is being presented. Also, there’s an element of allowing the player to project these materials at their own tempos . . . allowing them to rest when they want, and to play when they want. So these elements are integrated, so that the player can feel comfortable in not feeling as though they have to project things faster than they are able to, which gives them the opportunity to make sure that they’re projecting the materials in a clear and confident way. It also eliminates the possibilities of *following*, because in this case, the player is functioning entirely on their own, as an individual, which is the case on a written composition; each player is responsible for their own part.

So in this case, the improvising performer does not generate their own materials: Mr. Mitchell is offering you his ‘selection of drinks.’ But he is also asking you to engage in a many-pointed experiential exercise: drinking at different speeds; maintaining your communicative connection with everyone else at the soirée, experiencing a delicate balance of listening and speaking; and most importantly, speaking up when you have something to say, articulating it as clearly as possible. As Fred Frith maintains, this balance is perhaps the most important thing in improvisation: “I think the qualities you need to improvise well are the same qualities you tend to value in your friends—ability to listen, to support when support is needed, to put in your two cents when it’s important to do so, to be open to different possibilities, not to speak if you have nothing to say, and so on.” While the ‘scored improvisation’ approach may limit a performer’s invention of musical material, it asks the performer to very sensitively improvise an *interpretation* of those materials, affording them a focused opportunity to learn these valuable improvisational skills.

If we take one more small step away from composition on the improvisational spectrum, we might arrive at a situation where a composer is generating materials as the basis for a piece, but asking an improvising performer to bring the piece to life by not only projecting and interpreting those materials, but also more compositionally developing and arranging them. That is, the performer will be required to develop the motivic ‘seed’ materials using typical compositional operations: sequence, transposition, inversion/retrograde, additive/subtractive process, and so on. They will also be responsible for building the larger form: motives into phrases, phrases into periods, periods into sections, and sections into a piece.

This is an approach I used in my 2003 piece *the living part*:<sup>4</sup> the notation consists mostly of measure-length modules (along the lines of Terry Riley's *In C*, for instance) to which the performer is asked to apply these types of compositional operations. In the first manifestation of this piece, I was working with Ben Russell, a violinist who was classically trained, but was also familiar with improvisation styles of the folk musics of America and the British Isles; he was beginning to experiment with free improvisation as well, and his improvisations reflected these stylistic influences. He was also studying free improvisation (Third Stream and post-tonal) techniques with Ran Blake and others at New England Conservatory, and was making some first attempts at composition as well. Without being very conscious of any of this at the time, the compositional presentation of the piece was very well suited to this performer: the specificity and notational presentation of the materials seemed to mesh well with his classical training, while the improvisational methods required by the piece matched those employed in the musical styles he was currently familiar with. Fred Frith also responded to questions regarding this aspect of the improvisational process: "We're all different, and we have different training and backgrounds, different awareness. You have to be pragmatic and understand that what worked *then* with *those* musicians, may not work *now* with *these* ones! Always being ready to change and adapt the material while keeping the basic goals in sight seems to be the name of the game." When asked about providing necessary amounts of structure for mainly non-improvising performers, he continues, "in this case you have to provide whatever boundaries, structure or guidance are necessary to help such musicians to usefully participate. So again, how you interact with your musicians is crucial—there has

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<sup>4</sup> Originally for violin and electronics, I now intend the piece as an improvisational vehicle for any instrumentation.



to be a mutual respect and a desire to work together to find solutions.” So a key part of the comprovisational process is tailoring material and improvisation methods to specific performers, based on their background, so that they can usefully and comfortably participate in the in-the-moment genesis of the music. In the case of working with Ben, he was a very skilled performer who was near the beginning of his journey, his development as an improviser. It seems that the amount (and type) of compositional structure and guidance I provided him was useful in focusing the outcome of the piece; but at the same time, a great deal was asked of him as far as his improvisational contributions, and he was far enough along in his study and practice of certain methods that he was able to very effectively, uniquely, and passionately manifest the piece.

Another variation of this type of comprovisational structuring is the approach that Chris Brown used in his piece *Hall of Mirrors*, written for the group Room.<sup>5</sup> Brown describes the structure of the piece as follows: “we started with a completely written out head. And then we improvised either in a single cycle or two cycles, much slower, through each of the few bars of the piece, and each of those few bars had a specific transformation response system<sup>6</sup> associated with it that got called up.” So in this case, the piece starts with something completely composed, and each phrase of the ‘composition’ becomes the basis for the improvisational atmosphere and material of an entire section.

This is not the only way that compositional and improvisational approaches intermingle in *Hall of Mirrors*. As we saw earlier, the process of composition can be something of a long, drawn-out improvisation; that is, the composer will be continuously

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<sup>5</sup> Brown’s group with Larry Ochs, saxophones, and William Winant, percussion.

<sup>6</sup> For more details on the transformation response systems, see the interview with Chris Brown.

engaged in a dialogue with the materials at his/her instrument. Improvisation was an integral part of Brown's individual sculpting of the materials; he describes how he improvised on the materials of the piece in order to mold the interactive electronics into an effective atmosphere: "I just tried all these different combinations, and I'd work them out at the piano. I'd play all the parts at the piano, to 'tweak' the parameters until I found it was an interesting thing to play with." In this way, Brown was acting as a guinea pig for the rest of his group, making sure that both the musical materials and the electronic response system were going to provide a dynamic vehicle for improvisation.<sup>7</sup> And *Hall of Mirrors* definitely does achieve some startling 'flights of fancy,' indicating that its structuring provided *just enough* material for these skilled improvisers to work from in a very freed-up way.

As Brown noted earlier, there is no easy way to separate out the 'composing' from the 'improvising' in most musical situations. He and many others seem to be drawn towards making music that is inherently flexible, continuously open to change. He notes (in speaking of Cage's circle and their attempts to free up a piece's manifestations from habits and repetition, even as they resisted calling it 'improvisation') that "everybody tends to find ways of working that intrigue them, that allow them to get past the idea that what they're doing is reproducing exactly something that's been set, preset before." Even as Brown admits that he aims for *deep structure* in many of his pieces, *great freedom* is every bit as important. In speaking of his experience writing *Quartet with Shadows* for ROVA saxophone quartet, he says "it's hard to find a group that really can be as accurate

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<sup>7</sup> If I may be allowed to carry the drinking analogy one step further: Mr. Brown has done extensive individual research on several drinks. He invites you over and convinces you to sample each one separately. He then invites you to invent some original mixtures of those substances that have never been concocted before, and sample those as well.

in reproducing those parts of the piece that are pre-composed, but also understands that they're only there as vehicles, as a beginning point for them to elaborate on. *And without the elaboration, it's just not the piece that I was trying to make.*" [emphasis added]

## less is more (comprovisation as collective composition)

Now let's cross the midpoint of the improvisational spectrum, and explore some ways of fashioning an 'empty container,' that is, a vehicle for improvisation which will allow performers to freely choose their moment-to-moment vocabulary and material without *specific*, notated suggestions from the composer. In this type of improvisation, one of the composer's aims is to 'get out of the way' of an improviser's inventiveness, while at the same time choosing an overarching form, a mood or atmosphere, or a mode of interaction, in which to operate: a subject and format of discussion, if you will. Are we going to *debate* politics? Are we going to *contemplate* sadness? Or are we going to *run* as fast as we can? Fred Frith enumerates several approaches used to organize this type of situation:

It always seems to be about introducing some form of restriction, in order to limit the possible options (and therefore outcomes) while maintaining the autonomy of individual players to choose their material. Games (simple forms of rules—you can only do *this* when *this* situation occurs); graphic scores (you have to make a consistent and therefore limited interpretation); conducting (to control density and orchestration and types of material without defining what the actual material will be); instructions (which force the players to get involved in basic choices of material instead of just reading a score); and so on.

By the Fall of 2007, I had already composed several pieces which were most definitely on the *compositional* side of the improvisational spectrum; in these pieces, I

had composed and specified a great deal of motivic material for the performers to work from. I began to wonder what would happen if I stripped away as much typically musical information as possible, and got the players involved in (as Frith puts it) “basic choices of material” instead. As a class project, I made a piece entitled *cross that bridge when we come to it*, in which I cut up lyrics from Tin Pan Alley-era lead sheets and asked vocalist Amanda Schoofs to improvise with them. There were also parts for two (unspecified) instruments; these were given to a percussionist and a pianist. The percussionist received instructions to play a ‘prayer’ and a ‘shamanistic channeling dance’ in either order, and then both at the same time; the pianist received a score which read: ‘play in any order

inferno

purgatorio

paradiso’

After the initial class performance, we recorded three takes of the piece, each of which, other than the essential characteristics of the ‘channeling dance’ drumbeat, came out very differently. My compositional action in this piece still involved choosing basic moods or experiences that are to be conveyed, and it is therefore still somewhat *specific* in that sense. But there is a very small and *basic* set of oppositional choices and outcomes here, and *no specification* of how these are to be musically animated or illustrated by the improvisers. One may argue that I ‘put words in’ Amanda’s mouth by giving her specific lyrics to improvise with, and it is true that many of the lyrics were compositionally chosen for a sort of bruised sentimentality that most of them seemed to have; but the many emotions Amanda animated these words with were quite unexpected, and her musical choices completely individual and spontaneous as well. Again, my compositional

thrust here extended to the selection of a topic and format of discussion; this was my way of ‘limiting the possible options and outcomes.’ But the performers retained their ‘autonomy to choose the material;’ I may have selected a topic of discussion, but they did all the talking. They fashioned three completely different poems out of a couple of moods and a handful of words that I provided.

Another example of the use of minimal verbal prompts was the beginning of a series based on the Indian Rasas. I was interested in the selection of a focus on one particular feeling-state as a basis for improvisation, and I began looking at the Rasas, descriptions of the nine different basic feeling-types. I decided to use these as improvisational frameworks for a quartet I had been regularly working with.<sup>8</sup> My intention was to start by giving very minimal scores, utilizing only the single-word descriptor of the basic feeling-type (and perhaps elaborating with a couple auxiliary phrases). We tried the single-word scores at a few rehearsals and two live shows. The group members seemed to enjoy working from these: the scores gave no indication as to what to play, so the performers were free to invent their own musical manifestation; but they gave us a particular feeling and atmosphere to directly address at the beginning of a piece, and to return to again and again as a subject of contemplation and communication.

I very soon began to do more ‘composed’ versions of the Rasa pieces as well. The first of these was a graphic score of the Rasa *peace*: I decided in this case to use visual interpretation as the notational method; pictures of waves (taken from surfing magazines) were given as a representation of this feeling-state. Some were rather calm, some very tumultuous; the idea behind this was that ‘peace’ doesn’t mean things are always calm,

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<sup>8</sup> Jordan Glenn, drums/percussion; Jason Hoopes, double bass; Andrew Strain, trombone; myself, piano/saxophone.

easy, smooth . . . it means that one struggles to be *at peace* with whatever is going on, riding the waves even when they are at their roughest. I mixed-up the calm and rough pictures, arranged into four horizontal ‘voices’ (for our four players), and gave an indication of the total timing of the piece, as well as three time-points in the middle where the players would shift to the next photograph on their line. This notational method did seem to unify the piece with some qualities that were recognizable upon repetition and gave it a ‘limited outcome,’ a focused identity; but it also achieved a very high level of freedom to invent language on the part of the players, lending it a *variety* each time it was played.

At this point in my experimentation with different improvisational methods, and in developing partnerships with different performers, another interesting aspect became clearer. With any piece, it eventually has to leave the composer’s hands, and be brought to life—midwifed, so to speak—by the performer. With through-composed music, this happens relatively ‘late in the game;’ with the improvisational process, however, individual composition ends at a relatively early point, and collective composition takes over. As the quartet worked together more during the Fall semester, this was definitely true of our rehearsal method: every piece, from the mostly-composed to the mostly-improvised, was sculpted and edited by input (verbal and purely musical) from all the group members; and the details of the ultimate musical manifestations owed much to each person’s improvisational inventiveness, even though there may have been a guiding framework or ‘container’ given by whoever was in the ‘composer’ role. In this sense, the *individual* composer acts merely as an initiator, the *group* as a whole taking over the bulk of the ‘composition’ (assemblage or arrangement of the product).

## anything goes

Can there be any more minimal compositional directive than a single word?

While it *is* possible, I've gone just about as far as I can go (with the Rasa word-scores) in the way of removing predetermined structure from a musical piece.<sup>9</sup> Earlier, the question was addressed: what is the value of organizing pieces or structures that have room for this improvisational freedom, agency, input? Now we've arrived at the point where the converse of this must also be asked: within this breathtaking freedom, *what is the value of structure?* Why don't we all just freely improvise all the time, do whatever we want, whatever we feel, not be *bound* and *limited* by the 'vision' of some overbearing, egotistical composer who doesn't understand or care what it is *I* want to say? 'Anything goes,' right?

When asked the earlier question, Steve Adams' reply was that "composition, to me—or some kind of *structuring* of improvisation—is what will keep it from being just following your habitual patterns, so that it becomes an entirely predictable exercise."<sup>10</sup> I spoke earlier about being trapped 'playing one's same old song.' This was discussed with Roscoe Mitchell, and I also voiced my opinion that improvisation is "not just 'stream-of-consciousness,' flying along by the seat of your pants." He responded:

No, it's not that. If someone knows that, then I'd be glad to study with them, and learn that from them. I don't really think it's that. I think that that was probably experienced more for me in my time when many people were starting to be aware of the situation existing. But the ones that actually went on to *develop*

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<sup>9</sup> One could argue that I could use other words (or even syllables or phonemes) that are more open-ended, less specifically illustrative or evocative than the ones I have chosen. This is not an avenue that interests me at the moment.

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller (and brutally honest) explanation of Adams' experiences vis-a-vis the history of free improvisation and predictability in the listening experience, I would refer the reader to the interview with Steve Adams.

what they were doing are the ones that I still see around. Certainly, all of us are different enough that we have our own personalities that are all interesting, *but: not over and over again*. So, there is that work element that comes into that, just the same as you would be doing on a written piece of music.

And in his turn, Brown relates the value of this ‘work’ to free improvisation: “there are still elements of composition that come into play [in improvising, and] my feeling is usually that the more interesting they are as composers, the more interesting they are as players, too.”

So all the interviewees and I seem to agree: structure is necessary, mainly for the reason that it adds interest, variety, and new avenues of focused exploration to what would normally be a limited set of habitual reactions; and also for the reason that the *work* done to achieve this compositional variety will eventually reflect back onto one’s practice of free improvisation.<sup>11</sup> Steve Adams says that his graphic scores<sup>12</sup> function to create more unpredictability in the improvisational experience “because they force your mind to do something other than its usual pattern when you’re improvising, even if it’s just sitting there trying to figure out ‘what does this mean?’ It forces you out of your ‘comfort place’ in some way; and that’s, I think, when the more interesting things happen.” This, and the previous comments, lead us to see the ‘flip side’ of the earlier assumptions about structure and freedom: it is actually freedom that can *bind us*, because we become easily trapped in habit; and it is structure that can work to *loosen us* from

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<sup>11</sup> Frith also states that situations where one needs to provide *more* structure are “more common” than those where one needs to lessen the amount, but that in his opinion, this is “because of the lack of exposure to improvising in most music pedagogy.” We see this well-illustrated in Mitchell’s scored improvisations, which fulfill a necessary pedagogical function relating to improvisation.

<sup>12</sup> Adams’ graphic scores are paintings he has done; they combine abstract art elements, some traditionally-notated motivic musical elements, and (in some cases) verbal instructions about options for navigating through the score.



these habits, by forcing us to explore a variety of things we may have resisted, or been unconscious of, for a very long time.

## *light of the world* experiment

*light of the world* is a solo piano piece I first performed in 2005. It consists of notations that are a mixture of motivic, graphic, and verbal elements (sort of a cross-section of some of the structuring methods described earlier). In the process of reflecting on my improvisational attempts, I realized that I needed to give the notations for this piece to other improvising pianists. This would hopefully provide further results that would shed light on the effectiveness of certain approaches to improvisational notation. There were some questions underlying the experiment: 1) Does my notation communicate anything objective, does it limit the possible musical manifestations or outcomes into a ‘ballpark’ range? 2) Does it also free up the performer to contribute *improvisationally* to the music, to do something other than just fit into the mold of a particular section?

The pianists who took part in the experiment are Charity Chan, Matthew Goodheart, Jason Hoopes, and Kiyomitsu Odai. I met with each of them to record a couple short responses to each of four sections (notated on a single page each). My intention was to say as little as possible, to not interfere with their direct responses to what they were presented with. Two of the sections, *unmeasured prelude* and *abstract I & II*, had notational aspects which were very freely interpretable; the other two, *constellation* and *rumble texture*, had a more fixed identity which was (in my opinion) pretty clearly expressed through a mixture of motivic notation and verbal instruction. I

therefore predicted that these last two would end up more in a ballpark range, and the other two would have a wider variety of interpretations. (Also, with *unmeasured prelude*, it does generally occupy a sort of rubato, balladic/rhapsodic/atmospheric space. I predicted that this would generally hold true, while the specific musical manifestations would vary greatly, due to the aspects of the notation that were less specific. Please see *light of the world* score, pp. 57–60.)

These basic predictions were generally confirmed. And even in the sections with more fixed identities, there was a variety of in-the-moment manifestations.<sup>13</sup> As I listened to the performances, I was struck by how limited and contained my own previous interpretations of these sections had been, and I was given many new ideas about things to try in playing the piece. Also, listening to the way people started, developed, and ended each section opened up new possibilities for the ordering of the sections of the piece. (I had arrived at a fixed way of doing this, despite a desire to have the ordering be free.)

There *were* questions from the performers regarding what was being communicated by certain aspects of the notation, and I have to admit that I did enter into conversation with a couple of the performers during the process, despite my initial intention to remain mostly silent. In doing this, though, I attempted first to merely *point out* details that had been already put on the page, and see how the performer responded in the next take. I also probed them about how they were interpreting certain things in the notation that were freely interpretable.

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<sup>13</sup> Please see the accompanying reference CDs (and note on the recordings, p. 61) for comparative examples of the different sections.

A couple unexpected things happened. One of the improvisers, while playing the *constellation* (one of the sections with a more concrete, fixed identity), ignored some things in the musical notation, and played an abstraction based on the musical gesture and some of the words in the verbal description of the section. The musical result was quite striking (see CD 1, track 15). Two other improvisers (also while playing the *constellation*) played it without pedal, despite the marking in the score that it be ‘heavily pedaled.’ Again, my reaction to the musical result was that it should have been included in the scope of the possible outcomes; it could serve as a transitional variation to or from the main *constellation*. One of these performers also (in describing their interpretive process to me) had some unique ways of interacting with the material; these seemed to be primarily based on treating the score as a sort of ‘art object,’ which could be navigated in any way the performer likes, and from which the words or materials to be utilized at any given moment could be very subjectively selected. I pointed out to this performer that while the principle of free navigation was true in the *unmeasured prelude* and the *abstract*, the notations of the *constellation* and the *rumble texture* were to be taken more as a whole. But the way these last two were presented on the page was ‘artistic’<sup>14</sup> to some degree, and this showed me that: 1) I needed to be more intentional about either presenting things this way or *not* presenting them this way; and 2) performer reception of things that *were* presented in such a way would become more subjective, and therefore have a wider scope of possible (and to some degree, unpredictable) musical outcomes.

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<sup>14</sup> By this I mean that I arranged musical, verbal, and decorative objects on the page in a way that was not just functional, but also (to some degree) ‘attractive.’

## considerations

Fred Frith, in speaking earlier of the graphic score approach, said that it could guide players to “make a consistent and limited interpretation” of a score that is (arguably) open to a lot of free and subjective interpretation (a photograph, for instance). In the *light of the world* experiment, it seems that the subtle reverse of these conditions could be seen: the performers made a free, open, subjective *interpretation* of a more consistently focused (and therefore limited) notational atmosphere (*score*). What is most satisfying to me is that the experiment seems to function as a good example of the most basic improvisational principles: 1) a balance of structure and freedom was achieved, and a piece that is a fluidly changing, living organism was created; and 2) the outcomes represented a collective composition effort, even more dependent on the improviser’s manifestations than they are on the composer’s conceptions.

The most important aspect of why I have moved towards improvisation as my main method of musical expression is that it *demand*s a living, breathing, heightened energy from all participants at the moment of its manifestation, and yet it still allows for a ‘composer’ to work with structures, musical or extra-musical entities or avenues, that interest him or her. Utilizing these repeatable entities, these ‘objects’ of contemplation and exploration, allows one to continually revise, reconsider, go beyond previous habits while traveling in the same ‘vehicle,’ body, or self. They allow the possibility of rejoining a living thread of communication, of dynamic interaction, of human give-and-take, of having a *dialogue* instead of listening to a monologue we have already memorized.

It feels now as though the ways I have tried so far to organize improvisational experiences represents the ‘tip of the iceberg.’ The musicians whose words appear in this paper have shared their immense and valuable expertise, and I have been alerted to new possibilities for exploration, as well as general principles to keep in mind, and assumptions that need to be questioned. Previously unknown options of mixing composition and improvisation have been presented, and as soon as I have a chance to try some of them . . .

I’ll invite you over for a **drink!**

## Interview with Steve Adams

MD: Now why would you want to *talk* about improvisation?

SA: I have no idea. [laughter]

MD: Steve Adams! Good morning.

SA: Hello!

MD: I'd like to talk to you about this meeting place that we're in between composition and improvisation. I guess I want to start by asking you about your background: what are some of the ways that composition and improvisation influenced each other throughout the course of your life? What was the progression of your experience?

SA: I started my first music lessons: I guess I was about six or seven, I had some piano that didn't really take very well. And then I started playing trumpet when I was nine, which was school orchestra stuff. And I did that until I was about fifteen, I guess. And that was entirely playing written music.

MD: Wow, six years of trumpet!

SA: Yeah . . . no idea of improvising. The thing I remember is that I wasn't good at practicing. The parents would have to tell me to go practice, and I'd do a lot of what they would call 'noodling.' So there was some kind of improvisational *impulse*, even at that point, but I had no idea what to do with it. And then I wanted to be in a rock band around that time, around fifteen. So I think I started playing organ at that age, and then flute a year later, and sax a year after that, and stopped playing trumpet around that time. And that was where improvisation started, rock soloing efforts. And the bands I was in sort of went from being cover bands, to being original bands, to being bands that were crossing over into electric Miles [Davis] territory, where it was just sort of heads and jamming for long periods of time.

MD: Modal jam?

SA: Modal jams, yeah. [laughter] And I had a few lessons in there on keyboard, and I sort of got chords and scales somewhere along the line, and how they related from an improvisational viewpoint. I think I had a little bit of that in there, but not a lot; it was just figuring it out by doing it. And then I was getting more interested in jazz, and wanted to get more of a legitimate handle on it, so I went to a school called the School of Contemporary Music, in Boston, when I was about twenty-one. The teachers I had there mostly taught at Berklee College of Music, so it was more or less the Berklee 'playing on changes' concept, which is pretty bebop-based: playing the right note on the right chord, and analyzing key regions in a piece, and this kind of stuff. So I did *a lot* of that for the next five or ten years, just working on playing on changes. Fairly soon after I got to that school I stopped playing keyboards in any serious way because it was just too much to keep up, so it was down to sax and flute. But I also studied Indian music for about four or five years, starting around then. Which was funny, because I was really much more interested in Balinese and Javanese music at that point, but I couldn't find any place to study them. And there was Indian music available at that school, so it was like: "Oh, okay, I'll take Indian music." And I think it was really formative for me in a couple of ways. One: that I think I've always tended to think modally anyway, and it was great for me to study a music that's a completely different system of improvisation, and it sort of *fit me* because of its modal orientation, interestingly. And, I think that was really

important, that I was studying these two completely different systems of improvisation at the same time, and seeing: there are rules *here*, there are rules *here*; they each work; they're each—to some extent—arbitrary; and there could be lots of other ways of doing it. Then after I got out of school I started teaching and playing in jazz and jazz-fusion bands around Boston for a long time, and it gradually headed towards more open improvising bands around that time, I would say. I went through this big 'playing on changes' thing in the 70s, and pretty much in the 80s there started being a lot more opportunities for more open improvising in Boston, and I started working with people who were more interested in that kind of stuff. So a lot more of that started happening around that point. I'd been a big fan of more open kind of music for a long time; I'd been exposed to Sun Ra at around age sixteen. I grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan, and Sun Ra was around all the time, the Art Ensemble [of Chicago] was there a lot . . . . There was lot of free music in the park, where you could see mostly rock bands, but occasionally bands like that. There was a lot of stuff available, so I was influenced by that kind of thing a lot from an early age. It's changed a lot since then, but that's where the University of Michigan is, and at that point they had a very conservative music school, basically only Classical music of the nineteenth-century and earlier. But in spite of that, they had a couple of really interesting composers there: Bolcom was there, and a guy named Albright, who wrote some really interesting pieces. I think maybe Ross Lee Finney was there. But I also remember seeing . . . oh, who's the *Wolfman* guy?

MD: Robert Ashley.

SA: They brought in Robert Ashley, and [I remember] seeing Luciano Berio pieces; they would do really interesting music in free concerts. So you could get exposure to a lot of stuff, and it was a great place to grow up in that way. If you want to turn out like me! [laughter]

MD: This was in your late teens.

SA: Yeah, this was in my late teens, until I moved to Boston. That's where I got interested in Indonesian music too, because they had a Javanese Gamelan there and a student course in Gamelan, so there would be regular concerts, which I often went to.

MD: As far as compositionally, what were you starting to do at that time? I assume you were writing tunes for your jazz and jazz-rock fusion bands.

SA: Right, it was mostly more or less orthodox jazz tunes—heads with chord changes—at that point. I did some Classical tradition stuff in school, but I didn't really pursue that outside of class. Fugues and such, studying counterpoint. A significant thing was, in 1980 I founded a sax quartet there called Your Neighborhood Sax Quartet, and that became my main writing vehicle for the rest of the time I was there. It was a more genre-oriented quartet than ROVA is, in the sense that we would do covers of really odd, unexpected pieces. So I did a lot of arranging of other stuff, which I think was good in terms of developing craft in that way, and studying a lot of different musics. But it was also four very open-minded people, so it became this great playground to just try anything you could think of. And we did a lot of free improvisation in that group, and we had some structured improvisation ideas that we would do. It still was pretty head-oriented, but opening up more. There was one James Blood Ulmer piece we would do where the head was written out, and there was no arrangement; [you would] just work off it, and it could go anywhere. That kind of thing, where it was not bound by tonality or form. And a lot of other ones like that, where the melody was more to set up an area, rather than to restrict

things in any more specific way than that. It was actually a little earlier than that, about 1978, I started working with a bass player named Ken Filiano, who I've had an ongoing relationship with ever since then. And that was really significant in that we have this 'intuitive mind link' thing that I've come *close* [to] with other people, but we can just consistently create things that sound like form without any predetermination of what they're going to be. We just both think compositionally when we're improvising, in the same kind of way, and it really works great. So I worked a lot with him, both as a duo and in a lot of different bands around town in that period. [In the early 80s, there] was also a group in Boston called Composers in Red Sneakers, which was a group of young composers—friends, people I knew—who were out of New England Conservatory for the most part. And they were putting on concerts that were sort of deliberately not in the stiff, formal classical tradition, even though it was for the most part entirely composed music. But they were trying to put it in a more informal, enjoyable setting. I played on a lot of their concerts and eventually became a member of that group, so I was sort of developing more interest and technique for composing through the 80s, writing a lot and having more outlets for it. I had certainly thought about, and had been aware of, things that Braxton and the Art Ensemble were doing. Braxton, particularly, was someone that I did a fair number of transcriptions of, and got some idea of some of the structural things he was doing, which I found really fascinating. He has one piece, just for an example: the structure is A, AB, ABC, ABCD, ABCDE, ABCDEF, ABCDEFG . . . it's just this accumulation thing, it sounds great, and the way the ideas transform is really interesting; it's a great piece.

MD: Now when you were composing for this group, were you starting to get into any notational approaches that were more open or inclusive of improvisation in any way, or was it pretty much through-composed?

SA: This one, a piece called *Squinch*, which was one of the earlier ones I wrote for Your Neighborhood Sax Quartet, it's solos with backgrounds, but one background is clusters with fermatas, and the other background is an eleven-bar phrase of syncopated stuff, so it cycles but it's really hard to hear it as a cycle; it just seems sort of like random attacks. I don't think I was doing anything that was more conceptual in a piece, in terms of improvising *strategy*. It tended to be either some sort of skewed written background, or some more or less free improvisation in these pieces, I think.

MD: So it was often material-based or free improv-based?

SA: Right.

MD: And this is something you still use, in your pieces for ROVA; you were telling me before about the 'wild card.'

SA: I *had* started doing that before I joined [ROVA]; I wrote one piece for sax quartet called *K-29*, while I was still in Boston. And that has pitch sets in boxes, that you improvise with, and some other non-standard notation in it. So I was *starting* to think about those things. But when I got in ROVA, and they had this whole thing of improvising strategies, and all kinds of ideas about other ways to structure improvisation, it was very stimulating for me. So I started using a lot of that stuff in my pieces, where there would be a written melody, and then some sort of improvised strategy in the middle, that worked off the written part in some way. Another thing I've used a lot is where you accompany a solo, you have a menu of options that you number, and then you can just bring those in on cues. I've used that one a lot; I find that really works well,



because you're not restricting the soloist, the soloist can really go where they want to go, and then you can respond to that in some helpful way.

MD: But in some of your structured pieces that we tried in our lessons, there was a 'wild card' option in there, which would be the more free-improv section; the option to do that. Which I always felt gave the pieces this extra openness, an extra layer or level of variation.

SA: Right. I just feel like it *needs it* a lot. You may have these interesting improvisational, structural ideas you come up with, like you just have a set of rhythms to work with, with no specified pitch content . . . It's interesting for a while, but it doesn't really give you enough to work with, and you need to have some other doorway you can go through, or some other layer you can add to that, to really have it work as a piece. That's one example, but it's often some kind of thing like that, where the improvisational idea is *interesting*, but it's just a little too restricted (by itself).

MD: It provides the necessary structure, but you want to find the balance between the guiding structure and the freest possible level of variation.

SA: Right.

MD: Well, this brings me to my next question: what do you see as the *value* of composing material or structures that have room for the agency and input and freedom of good improvisers?

SA: The *value*, was the question. . . .

MD: Why do this?

SA: Why do this. . . because free improvisation isn't really that interesting? [laughter]

MD: Well, it *can* be: you just said that in your duets with Ken, for instance, it's the ultimate 'instant composition.'

SA: Right. *But*: my honest opinion is there aren't a huge number of people that I would pay money to hear do free improvisation in the world. It's a pretty short list. It was a great innovation when it first happened, but I feel like it's really become pretty predictable, most of what will happen. Even with really great improvisers, you know what they're going to do when you show up. And it's really only the people that, you don't know what they're going to do, that I'm interested in hearing. Or people that can do that kind of thing I'm talking about, where they have a really engaged compositional sense, and that will shape and inform what they're doing. Have you read the book *This Is Your Brain On Music?* [by Daniel J. Levitin]

MD: No; I've heard of it.

SA: One of the things he talks about a lot in there is the function of predictability in the listening experience. It sort of aligns with your personality type; some people, they want to experience security in the world, in what they listen to, so they're going to want predictable listening experiences. And some people are looking for something that defies their expectations in some way, so that it's more exciting. And it's usually this finely-graded continuum: you want *just enough* unpredictability in the music for your own personal comfort level. [laughter] And when free improvisation started, it was the most completely unpredictable music there was, which to people in that time period, of that socioeconomic and political leaning, was the *greatest* thing in the world. *But*, it's not that anymore; for most people who do it, it's become the opposite—to me, anyway—where it's this completely predictable music. And it doesn't do it for me. As a footnote, that was one of the unbelievably great things about Sun Ra, who I saw many times. *Every time*:

there was something *completely* unexpected in what he would do. He was just unbelievably creative at coming up with new avenues of expression. You name it, he did it. You saw him do his disco rap about nuclear warfare one time, and you come the next time expecting that, and it was this written-sounding flute quartet, and it was like: where did *that* come from? So composition, to me—or some kind of *structuring* of improvisation—is what will keep it from being just following your habitual patterns, so that it becomes an entirely predictable exercise. And even the graphic scores, I think, function in that way, because they force your mind to do something other than its usual pattern when you're improvising, even if it's just sitting there trying to figure out 'what does this mean?' That it forces you out of your 'comfort place' in some way; and that's, I think, when the more interesting things happen. Limitations are another really interesting way of looking at this; free improvisations where 'anything is possible'—well, that's another discussion, but . . . [laughter]

MD: Free will. . . !

SA: . . .aren't necessarily as interesting to do, or to listen to, for me, as something where there's some limitation put upon what people can do. And a lot of the ROVA improvising games and strategies are things like that, where there's just some very simple limitation put on what you can do.

MD: I remember, we tried some of those things: simple, like if one person is more of the leader, the other one the follower; then there's a signal to switch, where you take over.

SA: Right. Or in larger groups, just controlling how many people are playing, you can do really interesting things. It forces you to be conscious about how and when you're playing in a way that you might not be otherwise.

MD: Now let's talk about your painted scores, the evolution of those. These scores combine some traditional musical notational elements, and abstract art elements. Can you talk a little bit about how you came to start doing this?

SA: Well, there's a fairly long tradition of graphic scores of one kind or another, but my personal exposure to it basically came from two commissions that ROVA did. The first one was a piece called *Witch Gong Game*, by Barry Guy, where the original score that he did is a piece of paper about 3' X 4.' And it's divided up into 'zones' that have more traditional notation to varying degrees in them, and [in] some of them, the staff lines bend around, or they're kind of stacked on top of each other. But then there's all this colored stuff, and more graphic stuff in between these zones of notation. And I think it's actually based on a painting that a friend of his did, in terms of the graphic layout of the score. But it's also intended to visually represent the nature of the piece, that you have these more composed events sitting in a sea of connective tissue of improvisation. And that piece, the way it works is there's a director who has a set of cards that have symbols on them which represent the different zones, the different notated areas. The director can cue those in, and there are some other parts where you can go off into improvisation, though some of those [notated] areas also go off into improvisation on their own. And there's a thing where you can have a soloist, and then you're cueing in background options behind them. I think that was the first score I did that really had these very non-specific graphic elements in it, and where it really worked well; it felt to me like they were a very important element of the concept of the piece, and they really worked musically. And then the Gino Robair piece [*I, Norton*], it has these very stark graphic elements; it has some other conceptual elements going on, but it has these pages where it's basically just

four black lines that show. . . it's Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bari, and: you play where there's a black line, and you don't play where there's not a black line. And they have some coordination between entrances and exits, where you both stop at the same time, or you stop when the other person starts. Which I didn't think was that interesting when we got the piece, but when we started performing the piece, really great stuff would happen in those sections almost every time. Which relates to that idea of the limitation; there was just a simple limitation that somehow created really interesting relationships between what people were doing.

MD: Also it seems like it would create these great moments of *anticipation*, where you *know* you're about to come in; you *know* this other person's about to come in, too; you don't know *what's* going to happen; but you're preparing yourself for the unlocking of that energy.

SA: True, true. That's a good way of putting it. The other piece—though it's not so specifically graphic—that I think was really significant in terms of getting into doing this kind of stuff, was the commission we got from Wadada Leo Smith [*The M'ad-Din (To the memory of Cerno Bokar Saalif Taal)*], where the notation is more traditional. He *has* done graphic scores, but this piece, it's pretty much notes on a staff; there are some multiphonics, and some 'play here' kind of stuff, 'improvise here.'

MD: You showed it to me once; it has the notes kind of splayed out in these interesting geometric trajectories.

SA: Right. The thing about that piece that was the mysterious and interesting part of it to me is: he'll have things where one of the saxophones is improvising for a fairly long time, and you'll have a little notated figure that you're supposed to play sometime during that improvisation (two of you usually, you'll come in with this 'thing' somewhere in that improvisation), and it almost always felt to me like there was this *exact right point* to bring that in. There was a couple that I cued in. And it's sort of like: how could he *know*? Given that there's something that the improvisation is coming out of. . . . But still it's a very open improvisation, and a very open piece. And yet this thing is going to sound exactly right somewhere in there; how does he do that? [laughter]

MD: Was there ever even *one* time, like when you first started rehearsing the piece, when there *wasn't* a right moment, and it just felt like throwing a banana at someone's face?

SA: No, it never really did. I don't think it always had the total 'Ah!' sensation, but it usually did: 'Wow, that is a great place for that to happen, and it really helps the improvisation, and it's compositionally beautiful there, and . . . *how did he do that?*'

MD: That's interesting.

SA: So [those were] two mysteries to me: how did Wadada write that stuff so it would *always* sound great; and how did Gino come up with these things that didn't look like much, but worked great in graphic scores? So I think my composing, up until that point, had been a fairly conscious, orderly process, even if the results didn't sound that way necessarily. I would work on compositions to a pretty fine level of detail; tinker with them a lot—

MD: It sounds like, with what you just described, there's an element of these moments in *these* pieces that is more like taking a leap into the unknown.

SA: That's where I was going with this: I think these pieces opened a door for me to being less conscious and less deliberate about composing. These pieces gave me permission, in a way, to do things I didn't understand. So, I just started painting for fun;

I'd always loved watercolor. And think it was around 2003 or 2004 that I just got some and started doing it. Actually it was from doing stuff with my son; he had some watercolors, and we would just mess around with them occasionally, and it was really *fun*!

MD: *Fun!*?!?

SA: Yeah! So I just started doing it strictly for pleasure. And I started having ideas for pieces that were more graphic concepts with occasional bits of notation, or sometimes just graphic concepts. The first one I did, I brought into ROVA and we did it. It was interesting; I didn't feel like it was a great piece, but it was definitely something worth pursuing. It feels like it's engaging the same part of my brain that I use when I'm composing in a traditional 'notes on paper' way, but it's making decisions about shapes and colors and densities on a piece of paper, instead of notes representing sounds. So it was sort of the freedom to do something intuitive, and not really know what it means, and trust that it would come out right, that allowed myself permission to do these. I'm in the forties now somewhere [of the graphic scores]: the first ten or so were somewhat exploratory, just trying things out; about the next ten or fifteen, there are some deeply mysterious ones in there, most of those have never been performed because they're *very abstract*. The earlier ones have these instructions like: you start here, and you interpret this stuff on your way over to end here. But that bunch, they're just like: 'I don't know, it's just stuff on paper, do what you want with it.' And then it sort of came out of that around 25, and the ones from somewhere around there to where I am now . . . I think I got a better handle on how to get something on a page which would create an interesting musical expression. So they're a little more controlled now, but I think they're a lot more performable. So the ones in the 30s and 40s have been played a lot more, they're more workable as pieces. I would be very interested to try those completely abstract ones sometime, but for the situations where I've been able to have these performed, it's always made more sense to do the ones that were a little easier to get a handle on what it meant.

MD: A little more clear, guiding structure.

SA: Yeah, where it has a bunch of rhythms that you work with; no fixed pitches, but play this rhythm with a set of pitches, and repeat it until I don't want to do it anymore, and then I can interpret this shape as an improvisation, and then go to another rhythm line and play that, it creates an interesting thing. I like that idea of path or progression in these a lot; most of them either have some sort of succession of how you move across the page, or it sets up some kind of matrix or grid that you have to choose a path through. That idea works for me.

MD: Have you guys tried to rehearse some of the more abstract ones, or at least try them out?

SA: No; the really mysterious ones, I'm not too sure about them myself. I would like to hear them sometime, but the situations where these have been performed, it didn't seem right for some reason.

MD: You can do an album of those someday, and call it 'The Mysterious Ones.'

[laughter]

SA: There is *one* from that area that has been performed, but even that one is like: there's a bunch of stuff on *this* side of the page, and a bunch of stuff on *this* side of the page, and then a variety of lines connecting the two. And you can at least say: okay, set up one sound area for *this* side, one sound area for *this* side, and then you have some kind of

connective thing between the two of them as you go back and forth between the two of them. Then there's also this sort of planet shape coming in at the top of the page, and you end up there but it's not clear how you get there. [laughter] Or, maybe you don't; but something like that was the instruction. It's interesting that this has also been reflected in my more traditional writing since I started doing those. I think I'm much looser with writing than I used to be. I guess I had enough compositional analysis in school that, even though I try to avoid it when I'm writing, I think my mind was working in that way in some way. 'Okay, how does this motivically relate to what's going on before?' . . . that kind of idea. And I'm much more willing to just let it fly now. One of the more recent notational pieces I wrote, it's got a *lot* of material in it, for the way I usually write. And I did some deliberate 'taking this theme out of this section and re-using it in this section.' It's written originally as two quartets, two duos, and two solos; it's for ROVA. And the original idea was that you had all this, and you basically just jumped in. And anybody could cue stuff, there were hand cues for each section. So you could have any layering of that going on also: the quartets would have to occur as quartets, of course; but you could have one of the duos and the two solos going on at once; or the two duos; or just two solos with the other two people out. And one of the duos is graphic, and one of the solos is about half graphic, or one-third graphic maybe. And the rest of it, it's just *lots and lots* of notes. Usually in the past I would have been much more judicious about putting that much material down on paper; but with this one, it made sense to me to have all this stuff and not really be that concerned about vertical relationships that might possibly exist between all these different lines. 'It'll all sound good somehow!' . . . No, it didn't really work. [laughter] That was the interesting thing, it didn't really work. So I ended up throwing out the two solos, and we do it as quartet—one duo—quartet—the other duo—quartet, which seems to work as a piece much better. I've also been doing this electronic music, which you know about; and the thing I *constantly* run into in that, which is true in a lot of my traditional notated composing too, is just that my initial impulse is *almost always too much*. So I get version 1 done, and I have to go back and throw stuff out; there's too much there, it's too busy, too dense, there's too many ideas. Cut it back to what *really* needs to be there, and it's a lot better. Looking back, that's been true of my notated composing for a long time, too.

MD: An in a way, that's probably better than not having enough to start with.

SA: You don't really need much!

MD: It's like having a block of stone you're going to start sculpting from, and gradually you get rid of things, make it finer and finer.

SA: A good analogy. I think some sculptors have talked about that process as looking at it, just seeing what doesn't need to be there, removing that. It's the same kind of thing: just because you wrote it, it may not need to be there.

MD: You talked a little bit about the pieces by Wadada and Gino and Barry Guy; of all the performances you've made as an interpreter of other peoples improvisational scores, what are some of the other ones that stand out in your mind?

SA: The first tour I did with ROVA, we did a bunch of concerts with Anthony Braxton as a quintet. We would do two sets; one set was ROVA music, and one set was Braxton's music. That certainly was another hugely significant event in understanding his music for me. The way his set was structured was [that] he had a piece that would begin and end the set, this notated thing—*head*, for lack of a better term. The beginning and end were

different, but they were related, as I remember. And then you had this great mass of other pieces of his. I don't think there were any set improvising strategies; but basically you could improvise, or you could play . . . he gave us big piles of these notated lines from one of his orchestra pieces. You could play those, or there were what he calls 'pulse tracks,' which are pieces that have short notated islands and improvisation between them. And I think they theoretically have a steady pulse through them in some way. In any case, the idea is that you have these notated elements and improvisational elements that alternate, basically. It was duo once, and it would be indicated if one or both people are improvising in that section. That's a concept I've used a lot in pieces since then. Like that piece I was talking about, the most recent ROVA piece; it has a lot of that structure in it, where it's short notated elements, and then indicated improvisations for one or both people in between. But [the Braxton music] had that same quality that I talked about in the Wadada piece: you'd have a big pile of pages on your music stand, and you'd somehow just *know* what the right thing to do at that time was. 'Oh yeah, I should pull out this page from the orchestra piece and do this now.' And it would sound great. It did not feel like an 'it's all cool, anything can happen' kind of situation; it felt like there was a very definite shape and momentum to what was going on, but at the same time you had this big menu of choices to pick from.

MD: And you're trusting . . . it's not just intuition, but it's *seasoned* intuition.

SA: Absolutely. And also there's a mysterious element to jazz bandleading, or improvisational bandleading . . . how Miles Davis, for instance, reputedly said little or nothing to the people in his band about what he wanted them to do, but still somehow controlled it, through example or force of personality or something. And I definitely felt that same thing with Braxton, playing with him, even though he said very little about what he wanted you to do with the material he gave you. He's a very sensitive and cooperative improviser; he does what needs to be done, and he's not going to just blast you out of the way. He's really great to play with. But I think there was that same kind of thing going on, where he was—through 'subterranean channels'—he was influencing things in a really interesting way.

MD: And it's interesting, his 'music system.' As I accumulate more improvisational scores of my own, [I'm] wanting to try this idea he uses, of being able to layer and combine what used to be different pieces at any point *in any of* the pieces.

SA: Yeah, that's a great idea.

MD: It's more like the sum total of your musical language keeps having new and interesting conversations with itself.

SA: And seeing everything you're doing as one big work, in a way, instead of all these separate things, which is a great concept, one of Braxton's many great concepts. Beware the 'good night syndrome,' which is sort of . . . the idea as I get it, is that there's this tendency in jazz to want to catch people . . . it's sort of: looking for the moment when they get to the mountaintop. You want to be there on the night when Sonny Rollins *goes off*, and that sort of devalues the rest of what people do in this negative way. And Braxton's point is that you should really look more at the totality of what somebody does, rather than trying to focus on that night when they break the sound barrier. (Which is a great thing.)

MD: Right. But it's about the sum total of all the qualities that can be explored and achieved, not just the thrill, that moment of titillation.

SA: The Art Ensemble were real important for me in these terms, because they also clearly did a lot of thinking about how to combine these elements in fresh and interesting ways, and came up with a lot of great ideas. Pieces like *People in Sorrow*, where they had this one melodic idea that keeps weaving through this long improvisation in a way that I'd never heard anybody do before they did that. The way they play off the written parts and the improvised parts in their performances was always very interesting, exciting. And that thing I was talking about, of [it] being an unexpected element that keeps you interested and excited in what's going on; they were real masters of that. Going back to that point that I was making about free improvisation being predictable: I think you *need* compositional elements in this historical time period to make improvising as interesting as free improvisation was when it started, because it's a way of introducing these unexpected elements.

MD: That was one of the main points Roscoe [Mitchell] made to me: he has preferred to work with a new compositional structure for each improvisational piece, to avoid repeating yourself basically, to stop 'playing your same old song.' [laughter]

SA: Right, exactly.

MD: I was glancing at an interview, I think it was mostly with Larry [Ochs], or with ROVA, and he mentioned—it looked like this interview was from maybe ten years ago—something you guys were trying to start up at that time. It was an education program: 'improvisation in everyday life.' Did this ever come to fruition?

SA: We never got funding for it, no. It was a great idea.

MD: I sounded really interesting. I'm definitely interested, as I head more into the teaching profession, in trying more structured improvisation with young people. What was the idea behind the program?

SA: It was something we developed under the guidance of this guy named Mitchell Korn, who is someone who's involved in developing new educational programs; trying to improve educational programs and figure out ways to make schools work better, and bring new people like ROVA into the realm of education, bring new ideas into what's going on. So the idea was that we broke what we do down largely into the concept of 'voice.' That was the key concept that emerged from this, was that each member of the quartet has a particular voice in the music, both in terms of a personality, a vocabulary of sounds and gestures and approaches that you like to use in making music, and in terms of a significant place in the structure of what's going on. And what we do is a lot about the democratic balancing of these four voices, which is a way that I think we're different from a lot of other sax quartets. I think most other sax quartets that I'm aware of are, to one extent or another, conceived hierarchically. There's the more significant people in the ensemble, and the less significant people in the ensemble. That can change from piece to piece, section to section, but it's generally conceived that kind of way. And ROVA is largely conceived in an egalitarian model, where all four of the voices are significant at every moment, and nobody is just marking time to make somebody else sound good. It's always about four expressions.

MD: And in a way, it's sort of a way of communicating to kids about individual responsibility, bringing whatever it is you have to the table, and being a member of a community.

SA: Exactly. It becomes this model of how societies can operate (without getting too much like we're putting ourselves on a pedestal). We figured out these ways to have

everybody have their space, and at the same time be able to work together to create this thing that none of us could do individually. And the skills that you learn musically from doing that are also applicable socially, in terms of how you interact with other people in a classroom, or in society.

MD: [It's] like a model of flexible communication.

SA: Yeah, and you want to maintain your personal integrity within that, but still be able to work with other people's personal integrity at the same time without compromising *that*. Using music improvisation as a way of developing these kinds of skills was the concept.

MD: And so was it intended to be a very hands-on thing?

SA: Oh, yeah. The thing about the idea is that you can't do it in the 'culture by inoculation' method of music education, which is the general model for artists when they go into a school. You come in, you're there for an hour or two, you give people some kind of exposure to what you're doing, and hope that that inoculation breeds something in them . . . and then you're gone. And *this* really requires residency. You have to go into a school, and work with a fairly small number of people for a pretty long time to really get this idea across, and so people can see the levels of how this is operating, develop the skills that necessary to do it. It takes time. Which means it takes money, and that's why it never happened. And you need a school who's excited enough about it to partner with you on it, and help get the funding happening. Schools are all having such a hard time that this is a pretty far limb to climb out on for them.

MD: That's an interesting point you make about the inoculation. The inoculation's important: as a kid you could see a concert and be blown away by it, and *know* you want to be a musician from that point on. But then the rest of it is doing it, how to get that to happen, from start to finish. So when you get in there with those kids and start sculpting something with them, *that's* education, because you're transmitting the process.

SA: That was something that I didn't quite realize at first, when I was doing workshops with ROVA. I sort of went in with the hope that *most* people would find what we were doing interesting and exciting, even if they had no interest in doing something like it. And *generally*, that's not true! It's generally more like the majority of the people in the workshop are going 'huh?' or they're just not interested. But there were usually some small number of people there who were totally excited by it; I've learned that that's what makes it work, those two or four or six people that you really hook up with. There are a few of those that I've seen again years later, and they go: 'Wow, that was the greatest thing that ever happened to me in music school, when you guys came!'

MD: I think that's all my questions. Thank you.



## Interview with Chris Brown

MD: Alright: Chris Brown.

CB: Yes . . . Michael Dale.

MD: Thanks for talking with me today.

CB: You're welcome.

MD: So I'd like to ask you some questions about your experiences in this world between composition and improvisation. I'd like to start by asking you: what are some of the ways in which composition and improvisation have influenced each other in the course of your experience?

CB: Let's see . . . I really would say that I was doing improvising before I was doing composing. So to me the process comes out of improvising originally. I never really embraced the idea of composing outside of the context of performing, for quite a long part of my career. I think it's only recently that I've started to have any interest in writing music for ensembles, or for people when I'm not involved myself. So I would say, it's definitely in that order: the improvising came first.

MD: Okay. And did you start improvising as a child? How old were you?

CB: No. I really had a more or less classical training, and improvising was not really something I did much in music, until I started becoming familiar with avant-garde music from the 60s and early 70s, when I was a student. Well, actually, I'd heard some: I grew up in Chicago, and I remember going to a couple of performances of people doing improvised music that just kind of blew me away, but I didn't really know what it was. I had no connection to that scene. And then in college, I started getting involved with indeterminate music. I took a course, actually; it was a workshop course where all the musicians had to leave out their instruments, and just improvise with movement and voices and language. I think I was a junior, or maybe sophomore at that time, in college, and: that did it. At that point I started improvising on the piano, which I was already practicing three or four hours a day. And that sort of opened things up.

MD: What school was this?

CB: UC Santa Cruz. I'd also say that, at that point, it seemed perfectly obvious to me that improvising was the natural way to proceed, to grow as a musician. There was some confusion that ensued, when I sort of ran into that part of the new music world that wanted to say that: no, *this* new music, you know, this sort of Cage tradition of music that I'd been introduced to, is not the same as improvising. And there's this whole aesthetic within that Cage orbit that basically said improvisers are always working off of what they already know, instead of working in a way that encourages them to have new experiences that they don't already know. And that was kind of a damper; there started to be a bit of a split there where, you know, I respected that music a lot, and I was very influenced by it, but I felt like: well, what's going on here? Why is this such an important distinction to make? And I think it was at that point that I started listening more to improvised music that really embraced the idea of itself as being *about improvisation*, sort of more of out of the Art Ensemble, Sun Ra school of music. And [I] became aware of that, started listening to it, and started listening to jazz. And at that point I started getting out of school. So at that point, those kinds of problems tended to go away.

MD: Yeah, that's sort of how it happened for me as well. And then coming to a school like Mills, where it's all embraced again.

CB: Right. I do think that there are different ways of working, and I think the Cage school, in a way, was trying to define its own improvisational aesthetic. And I think some political things insinuated themselves into that process that were pretty unfortunate, where so-called 'art music' and so-called 'vernacular musics' were being distinguished by those working methods being different. I think that actually it's fine to define for one's self different ways of working. But there seemed to be kind of a class-based put-down going on there somehow.

MD: Very much so.

CB: And that was not . . . it's taken a long time to get that out of the way, I think. Not for me, you know, but in the world generally.

MD: Now, you've spent a lot of time improvising with computers, and investigating types of computer interaction. I assume there's all sorts of types of computer interaction; there's also all sorts of human personality types, and types of interaction. As someone who's spent a lot of time improvising with computers and improvising with humans: do you feel any essential difference between those activities?

CB: [laughter] Boy, if I said 'no,' I'd really be in big trouble! . . . Yes. [laughter] What can I say about that that's interesting? I mean, obviously they're different. I think for me, the improvising with computers started as a function of extended instrumentation. I really started as an instrument builder, that was where I started. I was making instruments that were first, electroacoustic, and then I started wanting to make those instruments be more . . . basically I started wanting to automate their character more. In a way, they kind of functioned for me like compositional devices. You know, as an improviser, I wanted to make structures that I could improvise through. So originally, it had to do with sequencing effects, or basically putting compositional structure into the electronic aspect of an instrument, and then allowing the performer to play through that form. And, you have to understand that this came at a point when I didn't understand anything about computers really, and I was just teaching myself how to use them. And they were very primitive: they were basically turning on and off switches, and those switches controlled audio signals that would go through different effects. So that doesn't have any kind of artificial intelligence-like aspect to it at all. It really was more about: okay, I've built these circuits, I've built these instruments that I'm playing them through; how can I make them more lively, or use them as a foil for myself as an improviser? Or, sometimes with more specific, fixed kind of compositional ideas: how can I compose with them in the most interesting possible way? And I think I was aware of some of the more AI-like work that was starting to happen, where there was the idea of the computer being able to have its own 'life' or its own character, instead of just being a slave. But, you have to start somewhere, and I started by using it pretty much as my slave. Actually my first piece that I made with it, my first automated system, was called *Obedience School*. And it basically was trying to teach the damn thing to pick up—initially—my tempo; to respond to a cue that I gave it, and set a tempo, and then just using that basic bit of information [to] provide me with a rhythmic structure that I could perform through. So that was the beginning. But always, I think, in the back of my mind, too: when I studied at Santa Cruz, I was very influenced to get into electronic music by seeing Gordon Mumma's work and studying with him a bit. He's kind of one of those people out of that Cage orbit who,

when he was performing, was performing without a score. That is, performing his major pieces like a piece called *Hornpipe*, for example; I saw him perform that live in the early 70s, and it really influenced my ideas a lot about what live electronic music could be. And basically, that piece he sometimes described sometimes as sort of an analog computer that analyzes the sound a musician is making in a room, and measures the resonances of that sound, and gradually builds up a response to it that works with the resonances of the space. And eventually that response creates a cancellation of those resonances, and essentially creates a form. So there's a piece in an electronic music circuit that seems to have a lively, kind of organic responsiveness.

MD: An intelligence of sorts—

CB: It's kind of an intelligence, I mean it's certainly—it doesn't feel like a robot. It's like an investigation tool-process that has the same response to the lively character of a room and of a musician. His whole principle of cybersonic, meaning: the tools are driven, are directed by the sound. It's the sound that's actually the control. That's still an inspirational idea to me; I'm still kind of working off that, and trying to get closer to it in a new technology, and in a somewhat different artistic environment than exactly the one that Gordon was working within. He was kind of coming out of this deep interaction with David Tudor, and David Tudor's relationship to the Cage aesthetic, etc. etc. But I still think that's a profound model for thinking about the way machines can be used to influence the course of music, or of a composition. Now what was he doing; I don't think he described what he was doing as 'improvising,' he was kind of making a distinction there. But he wasn't reading any notes. And basically every time he played the piece, it had a kind of a shape to it, but in the macro sense, not in the micro sense. So I don't really find that there's a reason to distinguish that from any of the other millions of different ways that people improvise.

MD: And there was definitely an in-the-moment responsiveness and shaping and sculpting of it.

CB: Absolutely, absolutely. And you know, even eventually Cage and his inner circle . . . you should talk to Willie Winant about the last performance that he did with Cage in Central Park. He had structures he worked with all the time, but he was improvising, as far as I'm concerned, or as far as Willie was concerned, when he told me about it. It's just that everybody tends to find ways of working that intrigue them, that allow them to get past the idea that what they're doing is reproducing exactly something that's been set, preset before. You can also go into the whole conversation, if we had time or interest, that has to do with: what about Classical music as being improvised? Doesn't the performer always have a *kind* of a freedom in producing these . . .

MD: *Some* degree of flexibility in interpretation.

CB: Right. And it's not easily separated from the act, or it's probably better *not* to try to separate it; you know, 'this part is the improvising, that part is the composition.' Of course, in any classical music that involves improvising, like North Indian Classical Music, or traditional Jazz, there's often the composition, and there's the part where the performer improvises. But also: I think in those traditions, the way that the performer performs the music is maybe looser than in the European Classical tradition, which got so heavily influenced by this idea that the performer was a servant of the composer. Which is actually a very late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, early 20<sup>th</sup>-century idea, that sort of dominated the

century. But before that, I think it wasn't really the case, I mean all the great composers (so-called) were—

MD: Were great improvisers.

CB: Yeah.

MD: And generated their music that way (we assume).

CB: So maybe we've just been stuck in this other paradigm for a hundred years or less, you know. And now I think we're seeing the error of our ways, or at least some of us are!

MD: Some of us are! [laughter] There's this interesting story I read about Bartok: he was performing one of his concertos, or one of his orchestral piano works (he was the pianist), and at one of the performances, he just sort of 'took a left turn' and improvised his way differently through a section of it. Didn't stick to the notes he had written. And when he was asked about it later, he said: I just wanted to see what it would sound like *that* way.

CB: Yeah. It's his music!

MD: Yeah, it's *him*. It wasn't 'Some Pianist' *playing* Bartok.

CB: Yeah, I think whatever you [say] about it, it's better to talk about how there isn't really a definable boundary. These are kind of just poles that you can use to describe situations where there's a lot of intermingling of approaches, usually. Even in the practice of free improvisation, where you don't start with any preset structure at all, you're starting with the structures that you have, that you bring with you. And particularly if you're improvising with somebody whose structures you don't know that well, from not having worked with them, *that* provides a structure that you work with. So there's always things that have been worked out in advance: each performer's language, gestural language, sonic language, and all the ways that they have devised to produce the music they produce. I think, in a way, free improvisation—at least in a group setting—for me, is usually about that. About trying to discover what happens when these worlds collide.

MD: Yeah, it's like a collision of these form and language worlds.

CB: Yeah, and how they might work out an interaction with each other.

MD: The counterpoint of them. Yeah, that's interesting.

CB: So are we going to say that that doesn't involve composition?

MD: It does.

CB: Well, if each of those improvisers are composers, then the ways that they've been composing have to do with the way that they play.

MD: That's true.

CB: So that's where I'm saying: there are still elements of composition that come into play. My feeling is usually that the more interesting they are as composers, the more interesting they are as players, too. As long as they're the kind of composer that likes to play! I mean, there's plenty that don't.

MD: So now, let me ask you: you create some sort of a compositional structure, but you are improvising your way through it—how much of it do you notate? Let's talk about notation, and how you've done that.

CB: We were talking about the electronic side of things . . . and starting from the point of view that I was building structures that I improvised through, I've also been trying to basically put a lot of the compositional structure that I work with into the form of an electronic . . . either a sequence or a mode of response. So in a way, my interest is in building instrument systems that influence the way an improvisation proceeds. So that's, in a way, a form of compositional structure, I think. Now I also sometimes make pieces

that involve particular kinds of notes and rhythms and harmonies and all that stuff, that are either synchronized, or somehow connected to the electronic structures. I have a lot of pieces like that. And usually, those are made up of patterns or materials that an improviser is supposed to use in different parts of the piece. So a score, a notation, would consist of those notes, those elements, usually in pretty traditional notation, and a particular ordering of them, or a particular way of arranging the order of them. And then: a connection between them and the electronic responses.

MD: Now this would apply, for instance, to the piece you did for ROVA; is that correct?

CB: Right. That one had some sections completely written out traditionally—

MD: Through-composed melodies?

CB: Yep. And then: basically that piece had four sections, in each of which, one of the sax players was playing through a four-voice harmonizer. So I was trying to play with the whole ability to have kind of a ‘ghost’ choir, or quartet, coming out of the sound of one musician, for the rest of the acoustic musicians to play along with. It started as something that was more interactive, but in order for them to be able to perform it without me there, I created a sequence of notes that would transform a saxophonist’s sound into a chord. And then that chord changed, just in the same way a MIDI sequence might change. So the performer was basically playing through it. And in different parts of the piece, like in Larry Ochs’ section, he sort of had guides: notes and motives that he was to improvise off of. But there was no time, direct time that he was supposed to follow, except that the sequence of transformations went through its thing in a fixed amount of time. But he could improvise really freely inside of it. The opening section, where Jon Raskin was playing into it, was actually really tight, and rhythmically . . .

MD: That was more set.

CB: That was more set, and he only at the end had a little cadenza that he did on it. So his part was not very improvised there. And Ackley also had more improvising. And then at the end, with Steve, I was particularly interested in his sound, and so he was basically playing single notes that would turn into chords, that the rest of the group improvised around. So that was a pretty tight piece in the end, but it still has room for improvising. It wouldn’t work if it weren’t about the players being able to improvise around it.

MD: Yes. And they’re such great improvisers, very coherent.

CB: Yeah, why would you write something for them that didn’t involve improvising?

MD: Exactly.

CB: In a way, I think that was an interesting experience because it wound up being too tight for them. And I don’t [often] like to make pieces that are completely sequencer-driven; to me that’s not very satisfying in the long run. But it was a practical thing. And I like the piece, but I think it was not really something that gave them a lot of room to grow with. It was a great situation being able to work with a group that like that, who really [do] want to extend from material; so you write certain things, and you see where they take it. It’s hard to find a group that really can be as accurate in reproducing those parts of the piece that are pre-composed, but also understands that they’re only there as vehicles, as a beginning point for them to elaborate on. And without the elaboration, it’s just not the piece that I was trying to make.

MD: That’s a very special ensemble that can do that. So let me ask you about some of the works of other improvisational composers that you’ve been involved in. I don’t know

much about your group Room; tell me about what you guys did there, and what was your working process.

CB: It basically came out of getting together with Willie and Larry and improvising together; our first gigs were more or less free improvisation like that. But Larry was always thinking about writing, or coming up with structures. So part of that was his way of working, which usually involved motives and certain ordering of events and things like that, and a lot of verbally communicated extra stuff that wasn't in the score. There's actually, if you can find it, a really interesting piece that Larry made, one of the best things that I was ever involved in that he produced: *The Secret Magritte*. That was kind of one of the most fleshed-out versions of his style; so in a way, I would say that was almost like an orchestration of some of the things he would make for Room. But my interest there was: I was starting to really get into the idea of composing structures of interaction with electronics. So for me, I'd been doing that in my own solo pieces, and I was extending it to the group. So I would write material that would be used, and that would have a response system associated with it. And that was usually a transformation—signal processing—and I was using the computer systems that I was starting to develop to do that. So it was partly being able to put the structure of a composition into the electronics, but not have it be so sequentially oriented. [Speaking of *Hall of Mirrors*]: of my early stuff, that was the one I was most proud of; it's where I'd really worked out a cycle of transformational changes that corresponded to a musical cycle. So what happened is, we played this tune—it was a little bit traditional—we started with a completely written out—

MD: Kind of a head—

CB: A head. And then we improvised either in a single cycle or two cycles, much slower, through each of the few bars of the piece, and each of those few bars had a specific transformation response system associated with it that got called up. It was when I started doing that piece that I needed somebody else to run the electronics, because I couldn't really *play* and operate the thing at the same time, and the mix got to be really complex. So Scot Gresham-Lancaster joined the group, and he was the 'mixologist' of the group—for a while it was a quartet.

MD: Now, any of the transformation response dynamics, were those communicated to the group as well?

CB: Yeah, I tried to, but Willie and Larry were not really interested in the details. They were interested in responding, they loved to play with it, but they were not interested in the gory details. That was kind of tragic, but necessary. [laughter] I found out that musicians don't always care. [Looking at score] There it is: that basically tells, for example, that in this section the pitch of the player is controlling the switch, which is basically what effects are currently present. So I was just mapping a pitch number to a set of gates that were on a number of different effects. So what it meant was that they were very rapidly changing; you'd get this kind of blur—

MD: With each pitch—

CB: Yeah, with each pitch. And this one: the reverse amplitude would control the delay length, and also the regeneration, or the feedback. So if you played soft, the delay would get longer. And then, there were some sequenced aspects for the other effects, and so forth. So I just tried all these different combinations, and I'd work them out at the piano,

you know. I'd play all the parts at the piano, to 'tweak' the parameters until I found it was an interesting thing to play with. And then I'd fix it.

MD: It gives the right sort of sonic, interactive atmosphere.

CB: Yeah, in a way it's the same process that we were doing in your lessons [working on *a divine comedy* for saxophone and electronics]. It was just like that, except the system was much more cumbersome; it was a lot of hardware and homemade computer stuff. But it had a character, too, that convinced me that I liked to work that way in terms of making my own instrumentation in that medium. And basically, this is one cycle: so after we'd played the head acoustically, the sax would take a solo using *this* material, and using *that* transformation system. And then he'd play as long as he wanted, and [then] I'd come in, and *that* says now the sax isn't being processed, it's just the piano. And then I'm playing through the system while he's playing acoustically, and we're working off the B material. And so forth: there was an instrumentation for each one of the thirteen sections, or however many it was. And then we'd go through it again with a different setup. So the final recording uses *this* chart, corresponding with *this* music, and then corresponding with *those* effects.

MD: That's a great synthesis of electronic and acoustic, and composed and improvised elements: it's all there.

CB: That's what I was really happy about, was that [with] each one of them, I felt like I really developed them so I knew what they were, they were working properly, and then we worked with the piece long enough that we could get an idea of what its potential was.

MD: You knew it, and it became alive.

CB: Right. It sort of got its identity.

## Email Interview with Fred Frith

MD: What do you see as the value of composing pieces or structures that have room for the agency and input of improvising musicians?

FF: That they will always be alive, and they will always respond to the exigencies of the moment at which they are performed.

MD: Can you briefly summarize the approaches you've used to compose or organize this sort of material?

FF: It always seems to be about introducing some form of restriction, in order to limit the possible options (and therefore outcomes) while maintaining the autonomy of individual players to choose their material. Games (simple forms of rules—you can only do *this* when *this* situation occurs); graphic scores (you have to make a consistent and therefore limited interpretation); conducting (to control density and orchestration and types of material without defining what the actual material will be); instructions (which force the players to get involved in basic choices of material instead of just reading a score); and so on.

MD: What are some approaches you may have used that failed or didn't work so well?

FF: It isn't that simple. It's more a question of finding what works better *with these people*! We're all different, and we have different training and backgrounds, different awareness. You have to be pragmatic and understand that what worked *then* with *those* musicians, may not work *now* with *these* ones! Always being ready to change and adapt the material while keeping the basic goals in sight seems to be the name of the game.

MD: What are the lessons you learned from those attempts?

FF: To be open-minded and ready to learn, and always ready to challenge what you thought you knew.

MD: Ever any situations where you exerted compositional control, and musicians who were mainly improvisers felt stifled?

FF: Actually no, but I have worked with others (John Zorn, Butch Morris and others less well-known) where that kind of 'feeling stifled' was widely felt. However, the way I see it is quite simple. If you agree to work with someone and accept that they're in charge, then you do whatever you need to do to realize their ideas. Constructively criticizing with a view to improving the material is one thing, complaining that your voice isn't being heard is another. In this sense the composition is also about choosing the musicians carefully! But I think that should always be the case, whatever music you're doing . . .

MD: . . . or, on the other hand, where musicians who were mainly non-improvisers felt they didn't have enough boundaries, structure, or guidance, and felt *too* freed-up?

FF: This is more common in my experience, because of the lack of exposure to improvising in most music pedagogy. And in this case you have to provide whatever boundaries, structure or guidance are necessary to help such musicians to usefully participate. So again, how you interact with your musicians is crucial—there has to be a mutual respect and a desire to work together to find solutions.

MD: To the best of your knowledge, where and when (and how) did conduction (conducted improvisation technique) come about?

FF: First time I came across it was Frank Zappa conducting The Mothers of Invention. Later (1970s) I saw the Italian group Stormy Six use it to great effect. I believe it was originally tried in the 1920s by Dadaists, but I may be wrong. Butch Morris (who also



saw Zappa do it incidentally) has taken it to its logical extreme, but there are many different ways of approaching it, and there are now many, many exponents.

MD: What I'm doing most of the time seems to be: exerting compositional control in terms of material (language), as well as certain aspects of form/structure. John Zorn, in his game pieces, created structures in which there was open space for the personal sound language of individual improvisers. He says: "My first decision, which I think was the most important, was never to talk about language or sound at all. I left that completely up to the performers. What I was left with was structure." Would you comment on this?

What was your experience performing Zorn's game pieces?

FF: Well yes, we were never in any way given restrictions as to our personal musical language—only when we could and couldn't play, and a general direction as to the kind of formal event that would be played. That sentence seems to be a very accurate summation to me. My problem at the time was that I felt that we were being *too* restricted, so that *as improvisers* we never really had a chance to improvise, and that therefore our vocabularies as improvisers became more like caricatures. So I began to wonder if the result of just improvising wouldn't be more *structurally* sophisticated. I expressed this at the time, and eventually we agreed to disagree and I didn't play in the pieces for many years. I thought I was wrong in retrospect. This wasn't really about 'improvising' in that way, and it achieved a result that couldn't be achieved in any other way, which seems a good test of its legitimacy as a compositional technique. So I started performing them again, especially after Cobra. And anyway, logically enough, I think the later pieces are more successful in the way they allow room for the players to breathe, so maybe this was a conversation that had a good result on both sides.

MD: A key component of Zorn's game structures seems to be the creation of a social interaction framework for creative musicians. You told me once that mirroring principles of social interaction is one of the most important things in improvisation. Have you attempted to work with these principles in any specific ways in more compositional (or improvisational) structures you have come up with (if so, what are they)? Or is it just more of an underlying principle in all of your musical activity?

FF: The latter, really. I think the qualities you need to improvise well are the same qualities you tend to value in your friends: ability to listen, to support when support is needed, to put in your two cents when it's important to do so, to be open to different possibilities, not to speak if you have nothing to say, and so on and so on. Zorn's Cobra does tend to sort people out into 'types' and create a dynamic between them, especially around issues of wanting to, or not wanting to, control the situation . . . .

## Interview with Roscoe Mitchell

MD: Roscoe, thanks for talking with me today.

RM: Thank you, Michael.

MD: I'd like to start by asking you this: *comprovisation*—what does this word mean to you?

RM: *Comprovisation*. I'm going to have to ask you, what does it mean to *you*? [laughter] I think I know what it means to you, though; you're saying composition and improvisation, you're combining those two words. That's a good question, and it's a question that's being asked by lots of composers today: how do they really integrate improvisation inside of their music? My methods of working on the answer to this problem would be a *scored improvisation*, with the possibilities of helping improvisers develop their skills in improvisation. I think what we all probably want to do is get enough vocabulary so that we can actually just do this on the spot. But in my work, I'm trying to figure out different ways that helps me get closer to that spot, that I can actually do it.

MD: And so what are some of the notational approaches that you use to do this?

RM: There are several—

MD: When you say 'scored improvisation' . . .

RM: Well, scored improvisation is one of them.

MD: And what does that mean, specifically?

RM: Scored improvisation means: you're actually giving the improviser the materials that are going to be improvised. In this particular case, with my *Cards*, it's up to the improviser to arrange these materials in any way that they choose.

MD: I see. So it's sort of like the materials are there, and they arrange a form.

RM: Absolutely. And what this does is it helps the improviser with developing a concept of being able to have materials in your head, and different ways of arranging it. For instance: it can eliminate the problem of not feeling as though you have the time to really listen to what is being presented. Also, there's an element of allowing the player to project these materials at their own tempos . . . allowing them to rest when they want, and to play when they want. So these elements are integrated, so that the player can feel comfortable in not feeling as though they have to project things faster than they are able to, which gives them the opportunity to make sure that they're projecting the materials in a clear and confident way. It also eliminates the possibilities of *following*, because in this case, the player is functioning entirely on their own, as an individual, which is the case on a written composition; each player is responsible for their own part. And that way, we make sure we have the basic fundamentals of music at work. Counterpoint, which is a very important factor in an improvisation. I think one of the things that can weigh things down [is] if all of a sudden there's no counterpoint in the music, which is another indication of following. And following is like being behind on a written piece of music.

MD: So it actually sort of helps strengthen each player's individual commitment to what their voice, or their statement is, at that moment.

RM: Yes, that's true. It allows the player to be in the moment of the music. If you're not following and you're in the moment of the music, this is something that you would like to achieve. With improvisations, it's about keeping that energy in the improvisation. Once

that starts to go out of the improvisation, then it's almost anybody's guess what will happen. Of course, an ensemble can regroup. I mean, it's just like, 'Oh, they didn't play that section so well, but—wow!—they played that next section very good,' in a written piece, let's say. And then, these scored improvisations also help you to work on your concentration, which is difficult in any kind of music that you're playing. I've talked to people that were playing written pieces, and they'll say, 'I really had a hard time concentrating there . . . ' but I thought what they were saying was that they didn't do it exactly like they wanted to do it, but they had practiced it enough that the listener may not have been aware of that. So, you want to try to relate this to music that is written, and music that is improvised. If you take a piece of written music and really practice it to a certain level, it's going to be on a certain level. It may not be the place you want it to be, but it's still going to be on a certain level, and you want to work to get your improvisations up to that same point, too. For me, music is a constant work-in-progress, so it's hard to reach the point where you're really satisfied. Sometimes you can do that, but that's not that often.

MD: Yeah, this is an idea I've been thinking about with regard to my own pieces, which, as you say, are kind of like scored improvisations. The players are given certain materials to work with, but there are certain choices in the way those materials are arranged, either as to the form, or the dynamic or tempo they're played with, or specifically how melodies are constructed by them. But it seems to me that even if you have a compositional thrust to the piece that *you* have decided, it seems important to allow these choices on the part of the players because, yes, it brings this heightened energy to that moment, to the in-the-moment interaction of them having to state a very independent melody statement, and be in a collective interaction with these other players that's determining the thrust of the form of the piece as well.

RM: Yes, that's absolutely true. And: making sure that the improvisation is fitting for the situation that it's occurring in, as it relates to the composition. I mean, really good improvisation is viewed as a composition. What improvisation is, is: everybody's a composer.

MD: Yes, that's another realization I've been coming to about this approach, is that it really is a sort of collective composition.

RM: Yes, especially when it *doesn't* relate to a composition. We—well, *I*—study the composition and improvisation to improve the skills as an improviser. What I've found is to study both as a parallel, and as I've gone along I've found that one is influencing the other, and vice versa.

MD: This is sort of a two-part question, sort of opposite extremes of a scenario. Were there ever any situations where you exerted compositional control, and musicians who were mainly improvisers felt stifled by it? And on the other hand, were there situations where you were working with mainly non-improvisers who felt they didn't have *enough* boundaries or structure or guidance, and maybe felt *too* freed-up?

RM: Well, the answer to the first question would be: I feel it's important for all musicians to function in all the different capacities of music. You should be able to function as a leader, and you should be able to function as a part of the ensemble that's performing another person's composition. And I think you learn something from both of those things because it helps you with improvisation also. It helps if you have the lead line, it helps

you if you have the supporting line, because this also occurs in improvisation. Now, refresh me on the second question again.

MD: Have you ever worked with musicians who were maybe non-improvisers, primarily, and who felt—in working with one of your scores—that they didn't have *enough* boundaries or structure or guidance?

RM: Well, there you go, that's the reason for the scored improvisation again. But even with that, there are still problems to overcome, in some cases. Depends, how the piece may be laid out. And I've found, working with people in the scored improvisation situation . . . well, let's say for instance, I'll just talk about my experience at Stanford. As I observed the band, when they first started to play it—

MD: Now which band is this?

RM: The Stanford jazz band.

MD: Jazz band, okay.

RM: When they first started to play the composition *Q*, which has notated, improvised, and scored improvised sections, I noticed that in the scored improvised sections, the ensemble was not really listening to each other that much and everything was a blur, mostly, and a bunch of run-on sentences. What I mean by that is: no real pauses in the music, which is, to me, an indication that maybe people are not listening. As a listener I'm listening, and I'm hearing all these wonderful shapes that are forming in the music, but I find myself wondering: are the musicians hearing these things, because there's no indication from them that they know what they're doing. But, as you continue to work with people, then these forms start to develop. Certainly, having some time to work with people over a period of time would give an opportunity to point out some of these shapes and forms. And then there's been people that performed some of my scored improvisations without my being there to guide them through some of these problems, and they would come up with their own solutions. Some solutions worked better than others. And what these working methods do is to help the ensemble develop its listening abilities. So the ensemble starts to know: wait a minute, we're doing *this*. So if we're doing *this*, then we can do *that*. So if the ensemble all comes together on a nice cadence that they're holding as a whole note, then everybody knows that they can hold that cadence out, and have a clean cut-off there, for instance. So, I've found that these forms *do* help people, people that are coming from, you know, their studies, where they're just totally in written music. And some people that are coming from that side of music have phenomenal technique, but if you say to them: improvise . . . they don't know what to do. So having these guidelines, I'm finding, can bridge that gap for people more rapidly.

MD: Also, last semester you told me that you often prefer to work with some sort of compositional structure for improvisational pieces, because it gets you out of your usual habits, and sort of 'playing your same old song' all the time. Would you comment on that a little bit?

RM: Yeah, what I meant was: let's say you have a composition that somebody gives you and the only thing you see is: 'improvise.' You come to a spot where you're called upon to improvise. I feel as though it works better for me if I actually draw from the composition that's been presented. Taking materials from the composition and extending those or expanding those in your own way. This also occurs in an improvisation, we're improvising together, and I've definitely chosen not to follow, and let's say that you're presenting an idea that I like and I might want to use, I'll wait to bring that material in

later, which eliminates following, because it's not occurring after you present the idea, it's occurring later, which also allows the possibility for counterpoint, because after a period of time you're probably going to be on to another idea, so all of a sudden you have two ideas going. And then, back to what I said earlier about looking at the materials that are being presented and expanding those materials, you can do the same thing in an improvisation. Let's say that the idea that you presented was a measure. I might be able to expand that measure by five or six measures, like that, and then by the time . . . at the end of that five measures, there may have been other selections to choose from. Or: *during* that five measures, some ideas may have come up to expand from. So you're constantly adding on to what your possibilities are inside of the improvisation. When improvisation gets to the point where there's only one option, then something's wrong with the improvisation. And the thing to do then is to dissect the situation musically, going back to your basic music fundamentals, and figuring out what the problem is.

MD: So it sort of gives a more conscious and intentional control over all the materials that have been presented in the piece, and the way that they're being organized and developed, instead of devolving into a sort of a small-scale . . . like you say, mimicking or—what was the word you used?

RM: 'Following.' I did say following, because it's the same thing as being behind on a written piece of music. It's the same thing. It doesn't sound as good as when all the parts are right there together in their rightful place. And that can weigh on concentration too, you know. What I've found with concentration is: it does fine if you leave it alone, and let it really develop itself. But when you start to erode, it doesn't fly as easily as it wants to flow. There's ways of repairing it, you know, but you still have to be aware of that. So you repair it, and then there's the time to make up, to get back to where you were before the erosion began. And so what you want to do is take the erosion out of the equation and let it really fly. And then, sometimes it can get up to that point to where it's really flying like that; I mean, you'd like to have that. And that does occur; not often, but it does occur. I mean, most of the times you still have to be there—really in the moment—and thinking about what you're doing.

MD: That's very interesting.

RM: It is interesting.

MD: I'll have to ponder that some more.

RM: But this is what happens. I mean, think of an improvisation that you've been in, and things are going along fine, and then a problem occurs. Perhaps there's been a situation where things got better, you know. Or, oftentimes there's a situation where things tend to get worse, you know, and then, once things start flying out of order, then there's more things to try to put back together, so . . .

MD: Or they might be bad the whole time . . .

RM: Well, that could happen . . . the thing is: you've got that moment. I mean, there's plenty of people that have played compositions, and maybe played one wrong note and recovered, you know—you have to view it in that way, so . . . I think it's a real marriage between composition and improvisation, and I think the more you know about both, I think it's going to help you to be a better improviser.

MD: But as you say, improvisation *is* composition.

RM: Yes it is.

MD: And it has that sort of intention about it.

RM: Yes it does.

MD: It's not just 'stream-of-consciousness,' flying along by the seat of your pants.

RM: No, it's not that. If someone knows that, then I'd be glad to study with them, and learn that from them. I don't really think it's that. I think that that was probably experienced more for me in my time when many people were starting to be aware of the situation existing. But the ones that actually went on to *develop* what they were doing are the ones that I still see around. Certainly, all of us are different enough that we have our own personalities that are all interesting, *but: not over and over again*. So, there is that work element that comes into that, just the same as you would be doing on a written piece of music.

MD: You've been quoted as saying, in relation to the Art Ensemble, that all of you attempted to strengthen the vision of the individual and the soloist, because this makes one a good improviser in solo or group settings, and makes one accountable for all the factors of improvisation as it relates to composition. I also prefer to work with musicians who have a strong individual drive and ability as improvisers, not only in purely improvisational settings, but in the manifestation of my compositions as well. Perhaps my experience is colored by some experiences with rather lifeless playing by traditional Classical players. And I've also been arriving at the fact that I've been operating under this assumption, which may be incorrect, that non-improvisational performers will not be as good at manifesting my pieces as skilled improvisers. Nevertheless, what I'm most excited about right now is working with skilled improvisers, who always seem to bring a heightened vibration, a very immediate sense of expression to what they play. I want my music to live and breathe very expressively in the moment, and this seems like a key factor in getting it to do that.

RM: Now, let's back up: you were talking about the Classical players. I think that *any* music, if it gets put into the situation of a 'still life,' then you're on a dangerous ground, because if people are getting focused on 'the way this piece was done,' and 'no one ever can do this *that* way,' and this has been the 'selected' version of this piece that we all are committed to . . . then it kind of takes out the aspect of a creative way of interpreting the music. I mean, some of the great Classical performers had something about them that people, in general, didn't like that much. In the case of Maria Callas, one of the great sopranos of our times . . . so it takes that kind of 'edge.' And certainly, there have been great performances of Classical music, but in my estimation, it has come from people that were good *interpreters* of that music.

MD: They had a way to make it live and breathe.

RM: To make it live, absolutely. And so then I would go back and relate all that to . . . some of these things actually were happening at the same time, you know, that these great performances and great compositions were being created. So that's linked in to *life* itself. And for me, it's a better connection, if I can somehow connect what I'm doing with real life and real situations. I think that most of the music that I've liked kind of comes from those kind of combinations. But now, just let me go on a bit, and say that we *are* faced with the problem where you've got people coming from all sides of music that want to get into this thing that never seems to go away, which is improvisation. And, as a composer, what *I* try to do, is to find that match there that works, where you *can* move these people into a situation. And so that kind of puts us back to the scored improvisation, in a way. Or, fixing the music in a certain way that can inspire, or give a little bit of what

the responsibilities are in this particular section of the music; even if it's people that are not improvisers, even if it's some empty measures, with certain designated time on them that the musician is to function, doing an improvisation there. It's a big study, you know, but it *has* come to a point to where there are enough people interested; so this could be the time to really do those experiments and make those real connections.

MD: I think it is the time.

RM: Yeah, I think it's the time, too.

MD: And I think this is the place.

RM: Yeah, I think this is the place, too.

MD: There's so many great improvisers in this general community, and so many of them are skilled, multitalented in so many different ways. They compose, they improvise, they read music . . .

RM: And so what would be the follow-up to all of that?

MD: . . .

RM: Make connections . . .

MD: Make connections, right!

RM: Make connections, so that the experience that's going on here can continue on beyond here. Because everything you do, of course, is part of your work. So you can either take advantage of this situation—'well, I worked in this situation for five years, so'—you can go and start over, or start over, and start over . . . I think that it's a situation that can benefit from past work that can carry over into the future. Because it's not an easy thing to do, and for myself, I feel like I'm just in the beginning stages of this whole process.

MD: Really? You feel that way?

RM: Absolutely. There are many things I would like to be able to do, many things. That never seems to end, in a way. Seems like once one thing is done, then there's something else that needs to be taken care of.

MD: Well, I'm excited about that possibility.

RM: Yes.

## the living part

Michael Dale

**I: INTRO: jete**  
 ♩ = 110

Violin

*mysterious: very 'mezzo,' but nervous & unstable;  
 provide FILLS of rough, detache 16th notes (wide register span, optional ponticello)*

*build energetically and without hesitation into I: VAMP*

**I: VAMP**  
 ♩ = 180

*primarily LOUD, but with quiet shocks (to be used sparingly, SHOCKINGLY!);  
 ponticello & overpressure AD LIB THROUGHOUT (section I) - use more than sparingly,  
 but not overbearingly*

**I: MELODIC MATERIAL A**

*wavery pitch, very vocal & 'nonwestern' (play mostly  
 on G string, perhaps...); use motivically (between 2  
 & 7 notes), transpose & change register freely  
 (as needed throughout piece)*

**I: MELODIC MATERIAL B**

**I: FILL \***

**I: FILL**

*quasi louré: change bow on accented  
 notes; hint at, but do not arrive at,  
 intermediate notes (again, very  
 'nonwestern,' vocal sound)*

**I: FILL**

\* all fills ♩ = 180 or 1/4 slower (♩ = 135); this rhythmic instability will lead to the transition of I into II.



2

**I: FILL becomes II: MELODIC MATERIAL \*\***



**I: FILL becomes II: MELODIC MATERIAL**



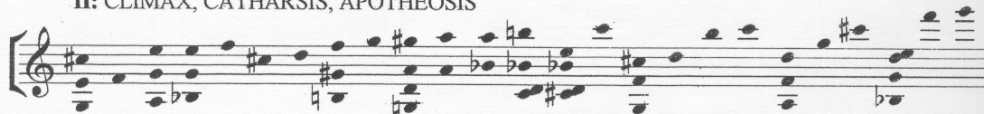
**I: FILL becomes II: MELODIC MATERIAL**



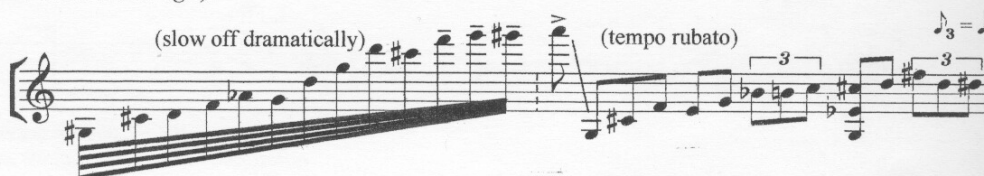
## ♩ = 135 II: MELODIC MATERIAL



## II: CLIMAX, CATHARSIS, APOTHEOSIS



*DO ANYTHING: break the triple stops, use them obsessively as motives, double back at any point, repeat the whole sequence; preach, scream, SING! (when finished, proceed and play next 5 measures straight)*



♩ = somewhere between 60 and 90

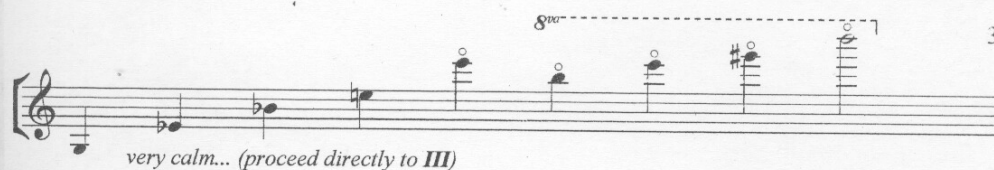
(may slow off)



*QUICK mood change: rather impassioned...*

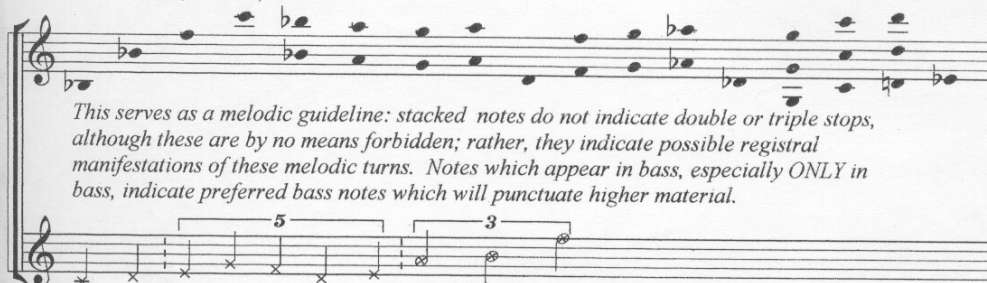
*immediately much calmer...*

**\*\*** as transition between I and II occurs, begin to use these as the main melodic material of II; treat them with a much freer sense of rubato and rhythm, as well as a wide-ranging vocabulary of character, dynamic, articulation, motivic treatment, etc.



### III: PITCH SEQUENCE and RHYTHMIC GUIDELINE

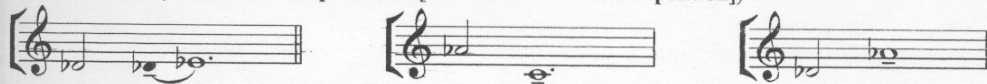
$\text{♩} = 50 - 60$  (variable)



*This serves as a melodic guideline: stacked notes do not indicate double or triple stops, although these are by no means forbidden; rather, they indicate possible registral manifestations of these melodic turns. Notes which appear in bass, especially ONLY in bass, indicate preferred bass notes which will punctuate higher material.*

*As with much of the other material, these pitch and rhythm motives may be segmented 'compositionally' and obsessively repeated, retrograded, augmented, octave shifted, etc. Enjoy; make this spacious and beautiful, but with the bony angularity of unasked-for, yet much-appreciated ELOQUENCE. In other words, make this a language and say something.*

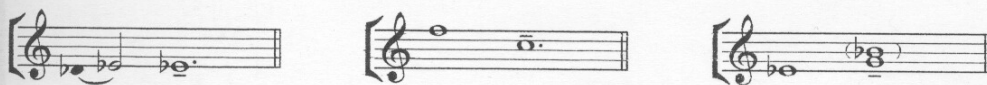
III 'slackens' and turns intimate, transitions to IV: MODULES (played sul tasto in any order and with any amount of **recapitulation** [rather than immediate **repetition**])



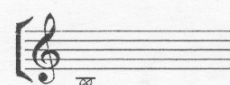
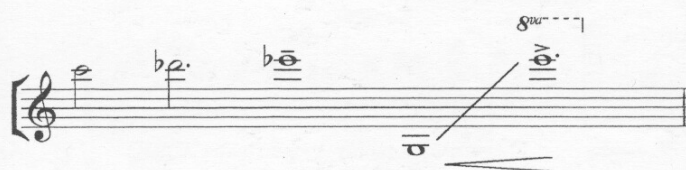
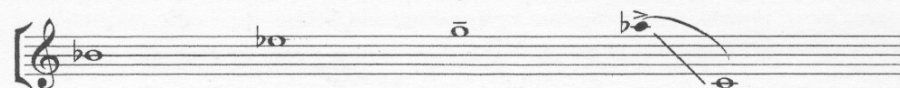
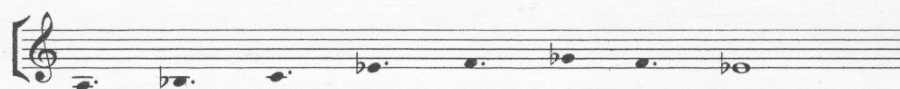
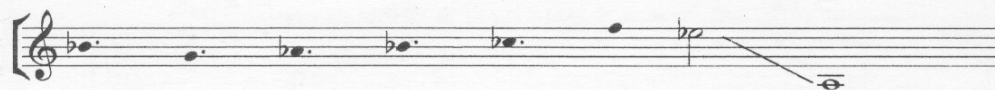
*senza tempo: romantic, open, and serene (dynamics up to you....)*

*also senza meter: rhythmic relationships are highly relative and flexible*

*alsoalso: as before, ad lib octave shifts are great (in higher registers, please use harmonics freely)*

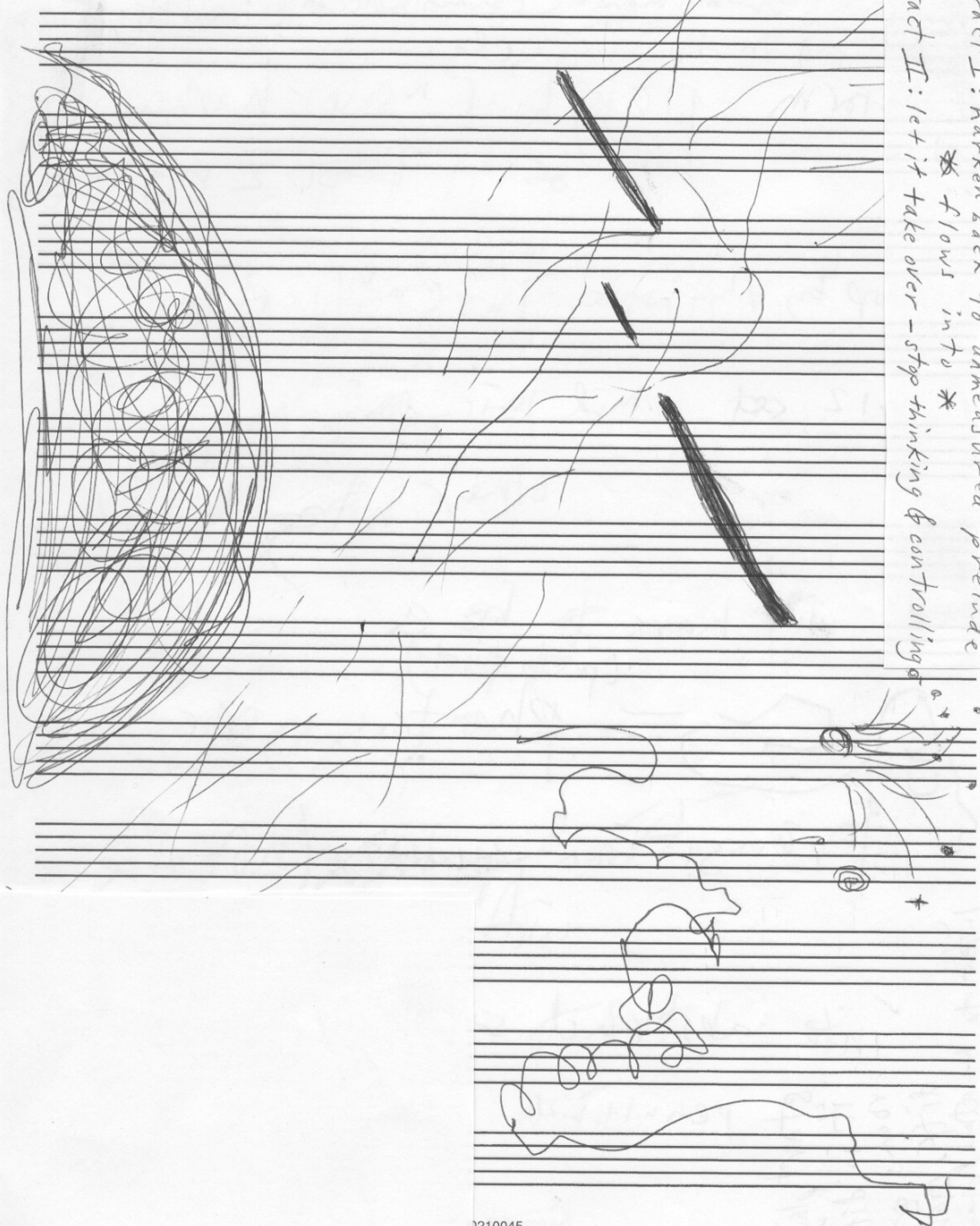


4



(any note;  
no stresses)

abstract I: harken back to unmeasured prelude  
\* flows in to \*  
abstract II: let it take over - stop thinking & controlling



3 18 08

\* constellation \*

♩ = 150 fast and loud etc.

upper texture

and heavily pedaled

\* cascading and vertiginous

\* use this interval content (any pitch level)

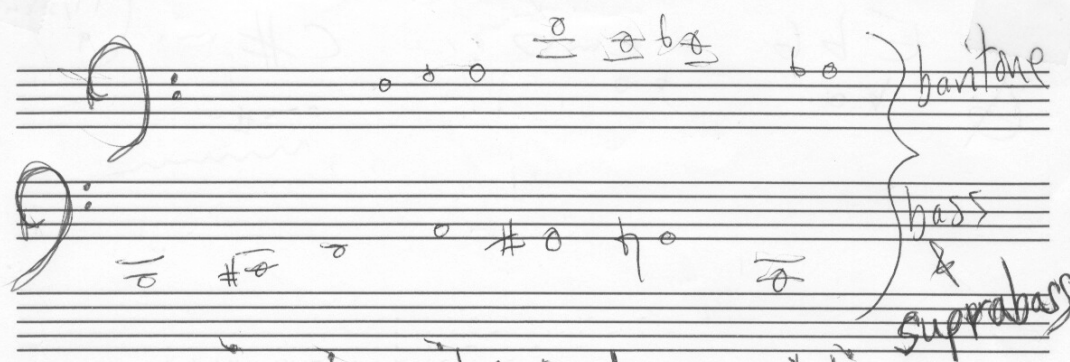
\* sustain this texture with one hand while injecting lower texture; other wise -

play multiple voices of it with both hands: crossing each other, careening off of each other in any register, expanding into cascading chromatic chords containing many voices.

lower texture \* sometimes octaves, but usually not etc.

\* these are only sample rhythms; lots of space between each attack, but work to sustain a line.





\* use: any inversion, pitch level, permutation,

\* Rumble ~~X~~ motivic segment \*

texture: tremolando, generally doubled in octaves in each hand; pedaled throughout, but with frequent changes.

clear, chromatic inner voice leading

may reference the

constellation

(unsettled / maelstrom feel)

## Note on the Recordings

Recordings are reference quality only.

### Reference CD 1

- 1) *the living part* (Ben Russell, violin; Michael Dale, effects processors)
- 2) *cross that . . .*
- 3) *bridge when . . .*
- 4) *we come to it* (Jordan Glenn, percussion; Jason Hoopes, piano; Amanda Schoofs, voice)
- 5) *rasa: peace* (Michael Dale, piano; Jordan Glenn, percussion; Jason Hoopes, double bass; Andrew Strain, trombone)

*light of the world*: comparative sections

- 6) Charity *prelude 2*
- 7) Matthew *prelude 1*
- 8) Jason *prelude 2*
- 9) Kiyomitsu *prelude 2*
- 10) Charity *abstract 2*
- 11) Matthew *abstract 2*
- 12) Jason *abstract 2*
- 13) Charity *constellation 4*
- 14) Matthew *constellation* (only take)
- 15) Jason *constellation 1*
- 16) Kiyomitsu *constellation 2*
- 17) Matthew *rumble 1*
- 18) Jason *rumble 1*
- 19) Kiyomitsu *rumble 2*

### Reference CD 2

- 1) *light of the world* (Charity Chan version)
- 2) *light of the world* (Matthew Goodheart version)
- 3) *light of the world* (Jason Hoopes version)
- 4) *light of the world* (Kiyomitsu Odai version)

These versions of *light of the world* represent yet another type of improvisation: that of organizing a ‘fictional’ performance through the editing of recordings. For another example, see Bob Ostertag’s *Say No More* series. In these pieces, Ostertag asked several improvisers to send him recordings of themselves improvising; he then edited the recordings into a ‘performance’ by this ‘band’ that never actually happened. The real band then learned the assembled pieces from Ostertag’s recordings and went out to perform them on tour! (These are also included on the recording of *Say No More*.)

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