'IS THIS YOUR COMPOSITION, OR IS THIS SOME SORT OF COLLABORATION?': EXAMINING A PROFESSIONAL MUSICIAN'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS GRAPHIC COMPOSITION

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Abstract: 'Is this your composition, or is this some sort of collaboration?': Examining a professional musician's attitude towards graphic composition

This study examines how a professional improvising musician establishes a personal sense of artistic value in the shadow of the Western classical music canon. The findings derive from an interview with double bassist Tom Blancarte on the topic of graphic score performance. Blancarte's reasons for not wholeheartedly embracing graphic compositional concepts reveal much about the perspectives, practices and challenges of a musician working in experimental settings. By phenomenologically examining Blancarte's views on graphic scores, improvisation, musical collaboration and the Western classical canon, this research shows how cultural hegemonies, social interactions and musical identity can impact artistic practice

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Introduction

This study examines how a musician working primarily in the field of free improvisation goes about establishing a sense of personal artistic value in the shadow of the Western classical music canon. The catalyst for this exploration was a pilot study on performer strategies for graphic score interpretation. Although the data from that study provided little in the way of results concerning interpretational strategies, the research participant's justifications for not embracing graphic composition revealed how the dominant cultural canon can influence even a musician working in experimental settings. By examining the participant's experiences with graphic scores, the research described here presents findings on performer attitudes towards composition, composer-performer relationships, improvisation and how one goes about exhibiting the validity of artistic practice in a medium without a codified set of aesthetic values.

History and Background

Before beginning the core discussion, a brief history of graphic compositional practice is necessary to contextualise the objectives and findings of this study. It is first beneficial to define what is meant by the term 'graphic score'. Although my ongoing research indicates that the definition is flexible and socially defined, a 'graphic score' is one that uses something other than the customary symbols and words of standard notation. It is typically associated with a diverse compositional style that reached maturation in the 1950's output of composers Earle Brown, John Cage, Morton Feldman and Christian Wolff.[1/2] Known as the 'New York School', these composers wrote works featuring idiosyncratic notational systems that include numerals on graph paper[3], geometric shapes[4], textual instruction[5] and invented symbols.[6] Frequently falling under the terminological mantle of aleatory, chance or indeterminate music, their scores often have no suggestion of tonality or rhythm and make considerable technical and creative demands of the performer.[7] Indeed, it is the performer, not the composer, who typically determines a work's specific sounding attributes.[8] The rapid and profound influence of the New York School can be evidenced by the way in which established European composers such as Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen also began to integrate 'chance' elements and idiosyncratic notations into their work by the late 1950's.[9/10] Today, practices derived from graphic composition are still very much alive and can be found in the music of Anthony Braxton, Barry Guy, Jennifer Walshe, David Young and countless others.[11/12]

Despite their propagation and influence, for many years graphic scores remained under-examined in academic and pedagogical literature. This is most keenly felt in the paucity of research concerning graphic score performance. Nevertheless, recent years have seen a growing body of literature that addresses this subject. 'New York school' composer Earl Brown has written about his own compositions, documenting the rehearsal methods they require and the role of improvisation in their realisation as well as making his own aesthetic evaluation of them.[13] Iddon and Holzaepfel have chronicled pianist and New York School collaborator David Tudor's performance preparations for works by Cage and Feldman respectively.[14/15] From the field of creative practice as research, Kanga and Hustas have documented their personal approaches to preparing and performing graphic works.[16/17] However, the heterogeneity of graphic notational systems and their associated performance methods necessitates further

investigation. Forming part of my current research, this article attempts to address this deficiency by seeking to discover how a particular performer, recognised as an exemplar of new music interpretation, approaches graphic score performance.

Research Objectives

My research has sought to answer three questions: *a)* what strategies has the research participant used for graphic score interpretation; *b)* what is the role, if any, that improvisation plays in the performance of graphic scores and *c)* what is the role of communication in the successful putting across in performance of such scores. For the purposes of this study, communication was broadly defined to include transmission methods such as speech, body language, textual communication and musical notation. The research examined communication between composer and performer as well as intergroup communication. What is more, it explored the interpersonal relationships of the communicating parties and the circumstances in which these communications occur. The research results were not used in an attempt to advance a global theory or method for graphic score interpretation, as the diversity of graphic composition precludes such an endeavour.[18] Rather, by focusing on detailed, local data, my hope is that the study has revealed something of how the personal, interpersonal and environmental affect graphic score performance.

Method

The data for this pilot study came from a one-to-one interview with double bassist Tom Blancarte.[19] Tom was personal acquaintance who was familiar with my status as a PhD student and was prepared to act in a formal capacity as a participant in my research. I contacted him through social media and informed him that the subject of the interview would be graphic score interpretation. The interview was conducted via Skype on March 17, 2017 and recorded with a portable recorder. Tom has member-checked the interview and has responded with follow-up data through email correspondence. He has allowed his name to be used and was not paid for his participation.

Several criteria led to my selection of Tom as research participant. To begin with, I had known him personally for several years. Having attended numerous concerts of his, I was familiar with his playing and with many of the performative environments in which he works. Additionally, we had performed graphic scores together on two occasions. In both instances, Tom displayed a sensitivity to the music that impressed me as a musician and a skill set that inspired me as a bassist. Lastly, Tom has established an international reputation as an outstanding performer of new music composition and free improvisation. This last criterion was important to this study, as it was my intention to conduct an interview with a practitioner recognised in his field as an authoritative source for the subject of my research. To sum up, Tom's experience with the subject of graphic score interpretation, his abilities as a musician and his professional reputation made him an ideal participant for this study.

This study has used interpretive phenomenological analysis, or I.P.A., as its methodology. I.P.A. allowed for a detailed examination of the participant's lived experiences, his interpretations of these experiences and the perspectives of the researcher, which allowed me to draw upon my own background as a bassist, improviser and composer when interpreting the data.[20] The data were analysed following the methods outlined in Smith, Flowers and Larkin's methodology for I.P.A. in qualitative research.[21] The process consisted of transcribing the interview verbatim, coding the data to develop emergent themes and clustering these emergent themes according to thematic similarity. This final grouping led to the development of the

superordinate themes on which my analysis is based. The transcription key used for this interview was as follows:

- , = conversational pauses including breaths and slight hesitations for emphasis
- .. = longer pauses indicating a temporary cessation of speech
- brackets indicate supplementary commentary by the researcher

When preparing this write-up, repeated words and interjections such as 'um' were removed from the selected text.

Analysis

Four superordinate themes were derived from this analysis: *a)* doubts about the validity of graphic scores, *b)* improvisation, *c)* composition and *d)* successful performance. Although this analysis yielded little in the way of results on strategies for graphic score performance, the participant's resistance to graphic composition provided unique perspectives on musical performance, musical communication, improvisation and the influence of institutional power structures upon musicians working in non-traditional fields. A summary of each superordinate theme is set out below:

1. *Doubts about the validity of graphic scores*: Tom's experiences have left him sceptical that graphic scores are able to convey musical ideas successfully. Though initially enthusiastic about graphic compositional concepts, his experiences of performing graphic works have consistently failed to meet his expectations for a quality performance. His view is that the performer is the actual creator in a graphic score, as graphic composers often lack clarity about the musical ideas they wish their composition to embody. However, should the graphic composer actually succeed in imparting their specifically musical ideas through graphic notation, then graphic scores would still be redundant, as conventional notation can also accomplish this.

2. *Improvisation:* Tom views improvisational processes as separate from the Western classical cannon. Nonetheless, as an improviser, he endeavours to exhibit a comparable complexity to that found in the compositional structures of the classical canon in his own creative output. He values the freedom of the improvising performer and feels that graphic composition offers an unnecessary constraint upon what he can accomplish through improvisation. He also values musical compatibility amongst improvisers and believes that a graphic score cannot facilitate a quality performance from musicians who are incompatible.

3. *Composition:* Tom prefers traditional notation for its ability to demonstrate a composer's intentions and to facilitate replication in musical performance. He also makes distinctions between types of graphic score, referring to those that contain no elements of traditional notation or predetermined meaning as 'purely graphic'. He therefore suggests a new role for the purely graphic score composer, as these composers give generalised inspiration rather than explicit instruction

4. *Successful performance:* Tom is concerned that, as graphic composition offers neither sufficient instruction from the composer nor a codified set of aesthetic evaluative criteria, he will be unable to perform a given piece 'correctly'. He also discusses how a previous collaborative attempt to compose a graphic score failed to achieve the performative results he desired.

Having summarised the superordinate themes, the following section of this article explores these themes in conjunction with text from the interview.

Doubts about the validity of graphic scores

Throughout the interview, Tom refers to himself as a 'graphic score sceptic' and states that he is 'suspicious of it' as a valid notational system.

> **Tom Blancarte:** *I have yet to encounter something that's purely graphical that I feel like it's really super cool .. [laughs] I haven't really encountered that […] I guess that's why I'm a sceptic. I haven't been sold.*

Although his experiences with graphic composition have left him underwhelmed in this way, Tom won't say that graphic scores are without worth. Moreover, his language implies that he is still open to the possibility that he might, at some point in the future, encounter a graphic composition that genuinely convinces him. There are several reasons why he might have used noncommittal language in this exchange. He might have been reluctant to blatantly dismiss a subject he knows I am researching. He may be genuinely keeping an open mind, realising that his personal experiences are limited. He may also be hesitant to criticise a compositional form that other musicians in his field are known to value. To better understand his stated scepticism, it is imperative to explore his history with graphic scores.

Tom says his first exposure to graphic composition was reading liner notes for an album by pianist, Lowell Davidson.

> **TB:** *At one point he had these sculptures made out of [aluminium] foil and he was having people, trying to get the band to play the sculptures. I thought this was an interesting idea.*

Although Tom has positive things to say about Davidson's concept, there is an indicator of negativity. Using the word 'trying' suggests he thinks Davidson's attempt was not wholly successful, even though he has no additional information to justify this conclusion. This belief may be because, for Tom, the conceptual possibilities offered by graphic composition fall short of the realities experienced.

> **TB:** *There's the initial excitement just of the idea and the potentials of it […] and then there's actually putting into practice and the realisation of what's going on I think is actually, I've actually been more disillusioned than anything about graphic notation.*

While Tom can remember being excited about graphic scores, the actualities of performance have so far failed to match his expectation. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that graphic notation has a potential for creative expression. This points to why he considers himself a 'sceptic' instead of dismissing graphic composition outright. Additionally, the word 'potentials' implies that a graphic work is by nature incomplete, as it takes the creative interpretation of the performer to finalise the compositional process. For Tom, this is a point of contention.

Tom views the performer as the actual creator in a graphic score performance.

> **TB:** *Ultimately, what is the point of most graphic notation? Most of it is actually to give freedom of interpretation to a performer, and I guess, at what point does the performer say, 'Well, wait a minute. Why do I need this composer? […] At what point am I just being swindled by this person who's saying that it's them when actually it's me.'*

As this statement indicates, Tom is bothered by the idea that someone will take the credit for what he has accomplished. Although he states that 'it's not about a matter of money or even prestige', his use of the word 'swindled' implies that he is concerned about being robbed - either of the credit he deserves or of actual financial remuneration. An additional quotation

supports the idea that Tom wants credit, whilst also suggesting that he may be reluctant to say so.

> *TB: If I'm gonna do all the work of creating music, then I kind of want the credit for it. I guess? In a way?*

Tom states his position, but he then adds two interrogative qualifiers at the end of the sentence, as though seeking reassurance that this is an acceptable stance. This reluctance to emphatically demand credit may possibly be attributed to the social climate in which he works. As an American citizen, Tom has an extensive history working in a late-capitalist society that has bred competition rather than solidarity in creative musical communities.[22] From my own experiences playing experimental music, I am well aware that musical communities that function outside mainstream culture may expect little financial gain for their efforts. As a result, members of these communities often adopt attitudes of financial indifference or hostility, claiming that seeking monetary rewards dilutes the purity of their art.[23] It may be that Tom's asserting of his legitimate needs as a working musician is discouraged by his social environment. Nonetheless, his critique of graphic score composers is not limited to matters of improper attribution.

In Tom's experience, composers may use graphic notation to hide the fact that they do not possess a clear musical vision for their compositions.

> *TB: I'm thinking about working in particular with one composer [...] and he had all these squiggles and stuff on here, and I was asking, 'Ok, what do you want me to do and what do you mean by this?' [...] And then he started actually asking me about different sounds that I could produce on the bass. [...] Ok, well wait a minute! Is this your composition or is this some sort of collaboration? I mean, it's a little weird to me that, this is your composition because you're asking me about this stuff.*

Tom believes the composer should have concrete ideas. The composer's ignorance of the double bass' sonic possibilities paints him as incompetent in his role as a composer. When recounting the composer's suggestion that he interpret a specific graphic using a *col legno* technique, Tom, who uses this technique often in performance, refers to it as 'some sort of thing with the back of the bow'. The value of the technique has diminished because it was chosen by someone self-identifying as a musician who appears inexpert in the musical field. Since Tom believes that graphic works facilitate these kinds of conceptual impostures, it follows that the value of a musical system that could allow this to happen must also be called into question.

To contextualise Tom's views on composer competency, it is necessary to explore Western cultural concepts of musical composition. Predominantly influenced by nineteenth-century Romantic ideals, Western musicological discourses commonly view a composition as emanating wholly from the creative impulses of a single individual.[24] However, as sociologist Jason Toynbee contends, this concept is problematic in that it 'ignores the profoundly social nature of authorship in all forms of culture' (p. 163).[25] In this view of creativity, new art works are only created through complex interactions between artists and their social environments.[26]

Certainly, graphic composition's reliance upon the performer to realise the score's aural attributes supports Toynbee's view of composition. In his study of post-modern art, Nick Kaye credits graphic score composers with challenging the idea of music as a reified object originating from a singular source.[27] Nonetheless, the Romantic ideal of the singular autonomous composer is pervasive to the point that it is applied to compositional models that, by nature, employ collaborative processes[28]. The prevalence of this ideal could indicate why Tom is disappointed that the composer has relied on the performer for ideas. But, as Tom has

a history of collaborative musical activity in his professional life, why doesn't he embrace this concept when it is applied to graphic scores?

As Tom regards what graphic composers produce as more akin to the visual arts, he questions whether those who produce such artefacts should be considered as musicians.

> **TB:** *I feel a little uneasy when there's someone who's like, 'Hey, I'm a musician.' And it's like, 'Well, but are you a musician [laughs] if you don't have any musical ideas, you have visual ideas that you want musicians to interpret?' .. It's iffy, for me.*

Tom is concerned that someone who is not qualified to be in his community is claiming they are a colleague and equal when they are not. It is a debasement of his art when someone who is not adept at their craft within the terms of that art claims to be an equal. For new-music communities, this is a perennial concern. Twentieth-century composers as diverse as Igor Stravinsky and John Cage have been vocally critical of composers and performers whom they believed were not qualified to be accepted as peers or collaborators.[29/30] For Tom, the best way for a composer to prove their legitimacy is to forgo graphics and to work in conventional music notation. In his words, 'I'm sceptical of why the composer didn't just, if they had awesome ideas, why didn't they just make those into music?'

Lastly, as graphic notation offers no advantages over traditional notation, Tom views it as redundant.

> **TB:** *I think, a lot of, the biggest weakness of Western musical notation is timbre. But I haven't encountered anyone who's written .. used graphic notation in a way that successfully, actually categorises timbre in a cool way and visualises it so that it can be as beautifully regulated as pitch is, for example, in Western music notation.*

> **TB:** *There's different types of graphic notation, right? There's also graphic notation where it's like, you could also just be writing, you might as well write out the notes.*

Tom's comments imply an evolutionary model; for a new system to continue to exist, it must offer an advantage over that which came before it. For him, graphic notation offers no improvements over any deficiencies that remain in traditional notation. What's more, the phrase 'beautifully regulated' indicates that he values the clear and concise message concerning pitch that is conveyed in a traditionally notated composition. However, as noted earlier in the summary of superordinate themes, he further believes that even if a graphic score should succeed in communicating a clear message, that graphic notation would still be redundant, as traditional notation can already accomplish this. Since graphic notation offers no advantages over traditional notation, as far as Tom is concerned, its usefulness must be questioned.

Improvisation

For Tom, improvisation and Western classical music are separate traditions.

> **TB:** *If I'm playing something that comes out of Western musical tradition, it comes out of Western musical tradition. If it doesn't, then it comes out of improvisation.*

Tom uses the phrase 'navigate the gap' to describe musicians who 'somehow manage' to work in both improvised and fully-composed settings. Of course, the Western classical tradition does have an extensive history of improvisational practice.[31] But as Tom's views appear rooted in the post-1800 Romantic ideal, it is important to explore how this dominant view of classical music has historically impacted other musical traditions.

Since its emergence as a recognised discipline in the early twentieth century, Western musicology has historically 'othered' musical traditions outside of the classical canon, resulting

in the idea that musics and musical practices extrinsic to this canon are inferior.[32] As musicologist Lucy Green writes, classical music is typically seen as 'universal, complex, original or autonomous', while popular music, much of which derives from African-American improvised traditions, is often perceived as being 'ephemeral, trivial, derivative or commercial' (p. 207).[33] Since Tom professes an admiration for Western classical music practices, could the ideological hegemony of the classical canon be colouring his ideas concerning his own improvised musical practice?

Certainly, Tom does not think of improvisation as inferior. He has a strong musical identity as an improviser and, throughout the interview, speaks positively of improvisation. Nonetheless, articulating exactly how a freely improvised performance can merit aesthetic worth can be difficult. As musicologist David Borgo writes, improvisation 'often defies the standard musicological tools of the trade and the accepted conservatory methods for evaluating competency and aesthetic value'.[34] Moreover, whereas most improvised traditions have certain markers that must be acknowledged for a performance to be credible[35], free improvisation, in which Tom excels, intentionally avoids regularised stylistic features and expected outcomes.[36] This avoidance may explain why, for lack of any internal determinants, Tom often references evaluative criteria typical of the classical canon when discussing the merits of improvised music.

For both compositional and improvised music, the value of complexity is a recurrent theme with Tom. He states that 'one of the strengths of improvised music is the complexity of it' and that improvisation's 'complexities allow me to [create musical structures]'. Significantly, Tom's language indicates that he does not view graphic scores as having a comparable complexity in terms of their innate musical structures. He refers to graphic notation as 'squiggles and stuff' and describes graphic score performance as 'a lot of slurring and sliding around'. As he values complexity, his belief that graphic scores are not complex compositional frameworks indicates yet another reason why he is reluctant to embrace graphic composition in his own musical practice.

In addition to complexity, performer freedom is important to Tom and influences his view of graphic scores. He likes the fact that a graphic composition 'gives a lot of freedom to the performer'. However, he claims that graphic scores are too restrictive of the particular freedom he needs as an improviser.

> **TB:** *I can make the best improvised music by being able to have my ears open as much as possible and my imagination open as much as possible and not be restricted by something that I have to, like, I feel like I have to interpret in some way that I don't really know how to interpret [...] because I've basically been given freedom, but not really given freedom.*

Tom believes that engaging with notation, rather than with his sonic environment, impedes his creativity, as attempting to decipher the composer's intentions becomes an unnecessary burden. This is consistent with Tom's belief that a composer should communicate a clearly defined musical idea to the performer. It also underscores a belief prevalent amongst improvisers that one must be fully absorbed in the act of improvising to reach a state of optimal performance.[37]

In addition to performer freedom, Tom values improvisational compatibility. This concept can be exemplified by his relationship with composer and trumpet player Peter Evans. Tom states that he and Evans 'developed a kind of improvisational language' that gestated 'over a long period of time of interaction'. The time and effort needed to cultivate a relationship such as this makes it unique and difficult to replicate. In the following account, Tom relates the difficulties he and Peter encountered creating graphic notation when it then came to attempting to impart this language to others.

TB: I remember just being kind of frustrated trying to explain [the notation] to people [...] I felt a little weird telling people how to improvise. Because, for me, [...] you have to really want to improvise that way .. to do it right. [...] I could just sense from a lot of the people that it wasn't necessarily what they .. what kind of language that they gravitate towards.

Tom's frustration stems from his belief that it is difficult to improvise in a way that conflicts with a performer's natural instincts. Other musicians were unable to emulate Tom and Peter's language, not because of limited musical competence, but because they 'didn't really want to'. As Tom respects the improvisers' freedom, it is difficult for him to direct the improviser to perform in a way that is unnatural, even using the word 'guilt' to describe how he felt about his efforts. For him, this attempt as a graphic score composer demonstrated the futility of trying to replicate the fruits of an interpersonal relationship through a graphic notational language, when the latter is unsupported by a comparable intimacy of mutual understanding.

Composition

Tom states that he prefers traditionally notated compositions because they clearly present their compositional logic and the intended methods of performance.

TB: The structures [of classical composition] are so clear and so well-organised [and] dependent upon each other and there's relationships and forces at work that interact with each other and the music. [Composers have] researched and studied these ideas, they put them down on paper in some way or form, some sort of notation to say, 'Ok, this is the music.' And then the performer has to go and make that, reinterpret, go take that thing [and] make that into sound. But the idea was there, it can be reproduced by any of these people the same way.

Tom prefers traditional notation for its ability to convey the composer's intentions, facilitate replication and show structural logic. This is an idealised view of classical composition that, as well as underplaying the residual ambiguity of even the most precise notation, does not take into consideration the roles of copyists and editors, differences between published editions or the diversity of approaches to musical analysis. Certainly, this omission could simply be something lost in the conversational exchange. However, I felt in no doubt as to what he was referencing, and Western notation is indeed commonly acknowledged as making possible replicable performances.[38] Misunderstanding or not, it does imply that Tom sees musical communication from composer to performer as unidirectional - another viewpoint rooted in the Romantic ideal.[39] Moreover, the value he places on replication would seem at odds with his career as an improviser working in experimental music. What Tom does as an improviser is not reproducible, so why does he value so highly this attribute in composition?

For Tom, if the composer's ideas are too subjectively cryptic, the performer ends up doing the possibly fraudulent composer's job for them. The only way to prevent this from happening is to maintain a traditional composer-performer relationship, and these roles cannot be respected within an overly liberal definition of what constitutes a composition. As such, he values traditional notation's ability to clearly communicate musical ideas.

That being said, Tom is not wholly averse to works containing graphic notation. This is evidenced in his description of a graphic piece by Peter Evans.

TB: In Peter Evans' group, there's this one piece, this one composition where there's all these little musical bits of information [...] Drums and bass play this rhythmical pattern [...] but the specific notes aren't notated. [...] There's a [traditionally notated] piano and trumpet part that's written with chords and everything .. there's stuff for computer [...]

And the way it's laid out is as planets in orbit. So that you have the idea that these things are supposed to be moving through, in these orbits.

Tom seems to be suggesting that the concrete musical material - such as written figures, specific rhythms, chords and notation for computer – plus their being wrapped in a comprehensible metaphor establishes the validity of this piece. It conforms to Tom's ideal in that it is a stand-alone work that can be replicated by competent performers. In this way, it respects the traditional Romantic idea of the composer-performer relationship.

Tom's statements on Evans' score reveal that he makes a crucial distinction in his assessment of graphic compositions. He differentiates between graphic scores that retain traditional musical elements and pieces that are, in his words, 'purely graphic', meaning that the piece retains no elements whatsoever of traditional Western notation and that interpretive meaning is therefore to be determined largely by the performer. As the purely graphic composer infringes on Tom's idea of the acceptable roles in a composer-performer relationship, a new role for this kind of composer must be established.

TB: It's cool if you're an artist and you want to inspire musicians, you know, if you have cool art, that's cool.

Tom says that the purely graphic composer can become a 'kind of inspiration': not a composer in the conventional sense, but someone who, in their role, which is outside of the traditional musical spectrum, may nevertheless provide the spur to musical action. This new designation of graphic composer is acceptable because it respects the boundaries that Tom values. To better understand why these boundaries are so important, it is pertinent to discuss his ideas of a successful performance, a concept which is especially significant to a musician working in a field without a standardised set of evaluative aesthetic criteria.

Successful Performance

Concepts of right and wrong hold a strong place in Tom's evaluation of music. For a piece to be performed correctly, the composer's intentions must be respected.

TB: [Composers] have musical ideas that are very specific. And they set them down on paper, and they can be recreated by a performer with very, I mean of course there's lots of room for interpretation, but still the identity of this idea is very much there, and the composer can say, 'No, that was wrong. That's not what was intended.'

Repeatedly emphasising the negative suggests that Tom is concerned about the risk of performing in a way that could be judged as incorrect. He desires a clear, unambiguous message from the composer, whom he sees as the primary, if not the sole, creative authority concerning a work. For him, traditional notation provides this clarity in a way that graphic notation does not.

TB: It's this weird mixed signal from graphic notation. It's like, 'Well, what do you want? Do you want me to do what I do, or do you want me to something else that you want to do, but you're not telling me what you want me to do?'

Tom sees graphic notation as obscuring the composer's expectations. As he believes the composer's intentions should be respected by the performer, he is frustrated by the ambiguity and subjectivity of a purely graphic score. He wants to minimise this risk of an unsuccessful performance and therefore demands a clear message, as least within the realm of composition.

In member-checking this analysis, Tom clarified that he is not dogmatic in terms of respecting a composer's intentions.

TB: I wouldn't necessarily agree that the performer is obliged to do anything with regard to a composer's intentions, it's just that if they do something divergent from those intentions, they should probably acknowledge that in their presentation. […] People can do whatever they want, it should just be good!

As this statement indicates, the message and intention of the composer are not necessarily to be regarded as all-powerful and incontrovertible. However, while Tom does support the kinds of creative liberties a performer may take with a composition, he demands that they should have sound justification for doing so.

To conclude this analysis, I should like to revisit the rehearsal, discussed previously, where Tom and Peter Evans used graphic notation to convey their personal language to an ensemble.

TB: [Peter Evans and I] made these big graphic scores [with] all different kinds of stuff, and pieced it all together and made this big thing. For the parts that I was involved in, I didn't really feel like my .. I felt like I had failed as a composer to get those, my ideas across. I was trying to [develop a] shorthand, but the problem with that shorthand is that it took all that work in order to [cultivate with Evans] that language that I was trying to get across. And the only way to get that across would be to really play with those people a whole bunch.

It could be that the entirety of Tom's negative views on graphic scores are attributable to his own lack of success as a graphic score composer. But the sum of his statements indicates there is more to this experience than just failure. It represents a point at which he came to reassess what he values most: improvisation, compatibility and the affirmation that he is an *individual* whose accomplishments will always surpass that which may be supplied in advance by a notational system. For Tom, graphic composition does not allow these values to manifest themselves. As a result, for him, a graphic performance is likely to be unsuccessful or, if successful, to be the unfair result of a performer doing the composer's job for them.

Discussion

This study was unique in that it examined why a professional musician was reluctant to embrace graphic composition. Although a study by Cantwell and Sullivan demonstrated a link between musical training and reluctance by university music students to embrace graphic notation[40], similar studies in the professional sphere have not been carried out. The study has shown how personal experience, musical identity and cultural hegemonies can influence the adoption of musical practices. The research also reinforces other studies that challenge Romantic assumptions of composition as autonomous and universal by demonstrating that social interactions were crucial to the participant's assessment of a musical work.

As was apparent in every superordinate theme, practices and ideologies associated with the Western classical canon were highly influential on the participant. This was most evident in his attitudes towards composition. For Tom, the composer should provide a clear message that can be realised by a competent performer. He viewed an undue reliance of the composer upon the performer for creative ideas as an infringement of the acceptable terms of engagement within the composer-performer relationship. Thus, his negative feelings towards graphic composition were impacted by his belief that graphic scores often provide no directional clarity to the performer and his sense that, while practices that distribute creativity between composer and performer are perfectly acceptable, credit should be correspondingly distributed.

Tom's musical identity as an improviser was also significant to this analysis. As an improviser, he valued performative freedom. In his experience, graphic notational systems typically infringed upon this freedom by compelling improvisers to perform in a way that is

unnatural to their personal aesthetic. Tom also stated he improvised best when engaging directly with his sonic environment and own creative processes. As such, he felt restricted by graphic notation, as he found it an unnecessary burden on optimal improvisation. In addition to performer freedom, Tom valued aesthetic compatibility amongst improvisers. This was evident in his belief that improvisational compatibility develops through shared experiences and that graphic notation is a poor substitute for the quality of improvisational interactions that are cultivated over time. As this study demonstrated, values flowing from Tom's musical identity as an improviser were influential towards shaping his views on graphic composition.

Social processes were also influential in relation to Tom's feelings on graphic composition. Communicating with a composer whom he judged incompetent, realising that a performer may want to improvise a certain way and experiencing feelings of guilt for infringing upon performer freedoms demonstrated the importance of social interactions in influencing Tom's feelings on graphic scores. This was significant in showing the influence of communication and interpersonal relationships on musical practice.

Contributions to current research

Tom's belief that graphic composition renders problematic the traditional roles between performer and composer is corroborated by current scholarship. Alden notes composer Earle Brown's intentions to alter the performer-composer relationship by expanding the performer's role in the creative process.[41] Brown himself states that the graphic composer doesn't 'abandon responsibility,' but instead 'creates a new relationship with the performer' (p. 190).[42] Kanga and Zorn both stress the creative responsibilities of the performer in graphic and aleatory works.[43/44] What is unique in this study, therefore, is not Tom's belief that the performer-composer relationship has changed, but his elucidation as to why, in his view, this change is unacceptable.

Tom also suggests that graphic score composers are not so much composers as visual artists who provide inspiration to musicians. The idea that graphic composers are producing plastic, non-temporal works of art dates back at least to a notable 1959 Darmstadt lecture by Karlheinz Stockhausen.[45] Indeed, the visual appeal of graphic scores has led to their being gathered in printed collections[46/47] and exhibited in art galleries.[48] What is less discussed is the degree, if any, to which a graphic score composer needs to be educated in the traditional musical craft of composition. Ganter and MacDonald suggest that the creation of a graphic work, despite being intended to be realised musically, may be open to those without formal compositional backgrounds.[49] As Tom sees this as a negative attribute of graphic composition, the degree to which contemporary musical communities share this belief is worthy of investigation.

Tom states that the Western classical canon influences his approach to free improvisation, a sentiment echoed in Borgo's documentation of free improvisation's Eurological roots.[50] But, at the same time, Tom also sees improvisation as separate from the classical tradition, a view also held by Borgo[51], Lewis[52] and Nettle.[53] Although Tom places what he does as an improviser outside of the classical tradition, he recognises the influence of many aspects of the Western classical canon upon how he forms judgments as to quality in his improvisational practice. This dual orientation of a non-classical practice operating within an at least partly classical aesthetic framework is noteworthy, as MacDonald and Wilson demonstrate that negative attitudes from improvising musicians towards the performance aesthetics of classical music are more the norm.[54]

Conclusion

It is my hope that this research may serve as a means of improving communication between composers and performers. By better understanding performers' critiques of modern composition, composers can more effectively present their work to performing musicians. In the example discussed here, there is a complex interaction at work between the performer's need for clarity and their desire for a space in which to act freely and creatively. Freedom does not simply increase as specificity is reduced; a lack of concrete musical instructions may simply exacerbate a distracting worry within the performer's mind that they are missing – or mis-reading – the composer's intentions. Although the research participant believes a graphic score may be, in part, an aesthetic object in its own right, in order to exist legitimately in the sphere of music, it must remain, on some level, a comprehensible set of instructions for the execution of an aesthetically meaningful sonorous event. Knowing the boundaries between what is essential to the composer's conception and what has willingly been left open to the performer's discretion is a necessary prerequisite to the performer's being able to perform and, just as importantly, to their being able to judge the success of that performance.

The composer who wishes to depart from normal notational conventions may do well, whenever possible, to consider developing a creative relationship with an actual performing musician, thus enabling them to understand that person's musical identity and potential needs when composing. Doing so with one or more individuals may ultimately aid the development of a more generalised appreciation of which instructions are helpful to performers and which merely induce unproductive head-scratching and even a sense of resentment. This, I believe, would increase the chances of better communication, more efficient use of resources and, ultimately, more performances of high quality.

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