Conservatoire PhD Presentations
Thursday 21st September,
Workshop 2, Conservatoire

Session One

10.00-11.30
Corey Mwamba: 'Strike? Thoughts on Vibraphone Technique in Jazz and Improvised Music Performance'

Bobbie-Jane Gardner: 'Composition in a hyperlocal environment- *for-Wards*: Citywide'

Richard Stenton: 'Content -> Medium [Annual report] + copycomposing'

Break

Session Two

12.00-1.00
Helen Roberts: '*Substituti et tibicines*: Instruments in the choir at Canterbury Cathedral, 1598–c.1670'

Soul Zisso: 'Redefining Contemporary Vocal Music: Creating a Quarter-tonal Compositional Language for Voices'

Lunch Break

Session Three

2.00-3.00
Percy Pursglove: 'Extending Choral Tradition: New Compositional Language for Generating Improvisational Frameworks'

Trish Clowes: *Loujean & Lucy*

Break

Session Four

3.30-4.30
Susie Self: 'Creating New Opera: Alternative Directions'

Niccolò Granieri: 'Study and Implementation of Microgestures Towards an Expressive Digital Music Environment'

Abstracts

Corey Mwamba: 'Strike? Thoughts on Vibraphone Technique in Jazz and Improvised Music Performance'

My research is a portfolio of works that aims to begin deeper conversations about the vibraphone in jazz and improvised music. My intentions are to examine what we mean by technique in jazz, and also examine what is meant by vibraphone technique; and then attempt to relate these critical examinations to my lived experiences of the vibraphone in jazz and improvised music, and how the performer's embodied relationship with the vibraphone reflects a musical identity. This presentation is a summary of my critical thinking work so far, debating commonly held viewpoints about vibraphone practice in jazz from academic and professional sources, such as Cheesman (2012) and Burton (2009); and will show current and future directions in my project.

Bobbie-Jane Gardner: 'Composition in a hyperlocal environment- *for-Wards*: Citywide'

Bobbie-Jane Gardner is a practice-based PhD student at Birmingham Conservatoire in the field of composition in a hyperlocal environment. She is currently devising a compositional methodology that includes elements of socially engaged practice via the notion of hyper-locality and/or site specific working methods. Her fieldwork is carried out through a series of community-based participative composition projects including *for-Wards,* a citywide music programme. *for-Wards* celebrates Birmingham's diverse communities by commissioning a collection of 10 bespoke musical pieces creating a cultural sound map of the UK's incredibly diverse second city. She is commissioning 10 leading composers with a strong Brummie connection including alternative pop legends Pram, Call Me Unique (who draws on jazz scat and soul) and Godflesh's Justin Broadwick, to work in one of the city's 10 districts and all of its 40 Wards, to produce a distinctive sonic response, inspired by a bank of community generated field recordings collected in each district and shared stories. The 10 new works will be performed back in the districts in which the sounds are found.

Richard Stenton: 'Content -> Medium [Annual report] + copycomposing'

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Helen Roberts: '*Substituti et tibicines*: Instruments in the choir at Canterbury Cathedral, 1598–c.1670'

The presence of wind instrumentalists during services at Canterbury Cathedral during the seventeenth century has long been acknowledged. *Tibicines* [pipers] first appear in payment records alongside choir *substituti* in 1598 and continued to

contribute to the soundscape of the Cathedral until the late 1670s. However, further than the occasional cursory mention in the secondary literature, their role and function has never been examined in detail. This paper seeks to address this by presenting evidence from the archives of Canterbury Cathedral and the City of Canterbury which, together with a review of existing writing on the subject, reveals a vibrant musical scene which crosses the boundaries between the Cathedral precincts and the city at large. The identities and backgrounds of the cathedral musicians, along with snippets of surviving evidence for their function, will be discussed with reference to the shifting religious-historical landscape of Canterbury at this time. At a location where surviving musical evidence is scarce, this approach provides a glimpse of an urban musical scene from the perspective of its participants, rebalancing an historical narrative that so often privileges the musical text and hinting at the rich tapestry of music-making taking place in this provincial city.

Soul Zisso: 'Redefining Contemporary Vocal Music: Creating a Quarter-tonal Compositional Language for Voices'

Composers have been increasingly using microtones in their works, especially since the 1970s rise of spectralism, led by Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail, yet few have written microtonally for voice, blocked by the difficulties faced by singers in learning to pitch new tuning systems. As part of my PhD, I will develop an idiomatic quarter-tonal compositional language for voices through the composition of a portfolio of original works, developed in conjunction with the ongoing creation of a step-by-step quarter-tonal training system for singers.

Percy Pursglove: 'Extending Choral Tradition: New Compositional Language for Generating Improvisational Frameworks'

The divide between music generated by predetermined composition and that of improvised indeterminacy is ever reducing. My research challenge is hinged around creating a compositional portfolio that focuses on developing choral frameworks with a compelling impetus that both broadens the influential sphere and disturbs the narrative of the improviser. Furthermore, beyond presenting a number of examples of my compositional output in this arena, I offer an insight into developing universally accessible notation devices allowing non-singer/non-musician participants access to music making through the use of a bespoke app. delivery system. This system offers accompanying improvisers a unique sonic heteroglossia within which to operate.

Trish Clowes: *Loujean & Lucy*

A presentation of the research and processes used during the composition of my orchestral work *Loujean & Lucy*, which is dedicated to refugees and all those that welcome and support them.

Susie Self: 'Creating New Opera: Alternative Directions'

My research aims to demonstrate how contemporary opera could broaden its appeal to a wider spectrum of communities through innovative methods of creation. I explore possibilities from three main angles by a) allowing my composing practice and opera production to become interactive with communities, b) engaging with opera subjects that address relevant social issues and c) incorporating new performance technologies and other art practices into my concept. In particular through my practice-led research I am addressing these issues by composing an opera called *Quilt Song.* This takes as its starting point the play *Abraham Lincoln* (1918) by poet

John Drinkwater which premièred at The Old Birmingham Rep. The play promotes three philosophical viewpoints: a) creating unity through diversity, b) facing up to mortality and c) standing up to bullies. These themes are developed by travelling through a timeline of narratives from Abraham Lincoln to today. Complementary to *Quilt Song* is an innovative form of audience engagement which I call 'Installation Opera'. This consists of soundscapes, videos and materials which interface with the opera's content in and out of a theatrical context. My overall compositional and production method is inspired by the techniques of quilt making. From this practical model a social/artistic metaphor emerges, that of holding diverse fragments successfully within a structure.

Niccolò Granieri: 'Study and Implementation of Microgestures Towards an Expressive Digital Music Environment'

Pianists often develop throughout years of study a set of microgestures that define their personal sound: their acoustic signature. This research focuses on the importance of analysing pianist's expressive microgestures in order to implement them in a digital environment. The analysis of these nuances with a particular focus on hands and fingers, will be directed towards the creation of a new keyboard-like interface that will enable a broader control on sound parameters. This control will be enacted through the musician's technique developed throughout the years on the acoustic instrument, having the instrument itself adapt to the player's microgestures thanks to machine learning.

In this research the instrument is seen as communicative vehicle: in order to convey expressiveness the musician must attain fluency with the instrument. This fluency is automatically attained when the virtual instrument is able to recognise and react to the player's "already learned" gestures. Taking into analysis the interfaces that are being developed in these years (Roli's Searboard, Touchkeys) there is clearly the need to develop a digital instrument able to convey expressiveness. The mentioned digital instruments have achieved this goal by modifying the keyboard interface in order to accommodate physical ways of transforming microgestures into control parameters. The goal of this research is to achieve a high level of expressivity on the instrument without changing the keyboard instrument itself.