



## **The War on the Critical Condition Volume 1**

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# The War on the Critical Condition Volume 1

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## Abstract

In my so called ‘serious’ research (into best practice realisation of ancient and medieval music), a major theme has been the preparation of multiple realisations of a text or musical work, in response to music that has no critical or singular edition. This has applied to both scores and recorded works and this premise has had a profound effect on both my realised early music and new art music composition. This paper documents two methods of consciously working against the notion of a critical edition. The first is three recorded realisations of the prologue to Hildegard of Bingen’s 12<sup>th</sup> Century music drama *Ordo Virtutum* (ABC Classics 2007). Each realisation becomes an existing work in itself and sets to prove that early music notation allows the space for significant new composition. The second case study, *Namu Amida Butsu*, a new piece of honkyoku <sup>1</sup> for solo shakuhachi, is the genesis of another process. An existing scored and recorded work is currently being deconstructed with the purpose of being recomposed either on Garageband or a comparable music sequencing program. The ramifications of this method are significant because the technique of ‘comping’ <sup>2</sup>, from which this is derived, is common in popular and image based music where it is used to produce a critical edition similar to that of a score. However in this case new technology is not used to reinforce an existing structure, but to find multiple new structures from the source material.

## Introduction

This paper serves two functions: to document part of the practice based research contained in two composition and recording projects between 2004 and 2006, as well as starting a future research project into the processes and ramifications of recomposing around existing material. Both projects were commissioned works that had to work within the confines of agreements, budgets and players, and a process of artistic self-examination was undertaken concurrently, particularly as I was completing my Doctorate in composition at the time. Two of the findings of my research were that multiple editions of a work do not inherently endanger a musical tradition as long as the contributors to it are fully aware of the process of artistic investigation (Cunio, 2008), and that intercultural and early music can inherently benefit from not being defined by a critical or singular edition (Cunio, 2009). One of the conclusions was the need for a practical investigation of this premise, a process that this paper begins. Two works that I wrote in this period are therefore unpacked and reworked within the notion of resisting the singular critical edition. Three pieces from *The Sacred Fire* (Cunio, Lee, 2007), derived from Hildegard of Bingen’s *Ordo Virtutum* Prologue demonstrate my most common practice in breaking the concept of the critical edition, which is multiple realisations of the same textual and melodic source material. *Namu Amida Butsu*, the second work, is much more radical, as it experiments with postmodern representations of traditional music and will allow the listener to recompose the music itself. *Namu Amida Butsu* is presently being cut into multiple loops. When finished the loops will be imported into the Apple Garageband loop library. The loops will be sent to colleagues and students offering them the chance to recompose the work. No reference copy of the existing critical edition will be supplied.

## The Critical Edition

The critical edition is at the heart of western art music. When someone asks to hear Ave Maria at their wedding there is an inherent cultural assumption that they will hear a particular version of the Ave Maria, usually composed by Schubert or Bach/Gounot. Though the Bach/Gounot is an arrangement of an earlier critical edition it has been absorbed into the cannon of western art music alongside the Schubert, and as such either composition can be attributed to a composer(s). Musicology can document the works of western composers thanks to the invention of notated music by Guido of Arezzo in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, and the extant works of the thousands of composers who have worked in both sacred and secular music. These thousand year old notations give us many of the best and worst aspects of our current musical life: they allow copyright and patents to flourish, intellectual capital to be recognised, but they also allow singular editions to push their multiple counterparts to the side. For example an artist may

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<sup>1</sup> A traditional Japanese Zen music and meditation form.

<sup>2</sup> The arrangement of a final recorded version of a recording from multiple takes or versions on a music sequencer.

play a hit song many different ways but the critical edition is always the recorded and disseminated version of the work.

Technology is changing how we perceive both music and tradition. It is no longer necessary to write a definitive score when working in many music styles. Indeed when notating and working with traditional music full scoring can be a burden, making future renditions unnecessarily complex or rigid in nature. The journal *Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music* defines this point of change:

*Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music* encourages scholars to rethink the critical edition as a crucial component in the current rapprochement between ethnomusicology, historical musicology, and cultural studies. As new media make it possible to experience musics from throughout the world, as oral traditions have become essential to the globalization of local musical practices, and as popular musics give postmodern meaning to historical diasporas, so too does *Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music* invite music scholars to conceive of editions that will contribute fundamentally to some of the most critical debates of our day. (Bohlman, 2005).

The computer has revolutionised music, and art music composers and institutions are only now coming to terms with the ramifications. The recording of music offers a potentially perfect copy of a performance that can then be transcribed or learnt orally, making it a meeting place between oral and written forms. It can be argued that notation, as we historically understand it, is now only one of a number of processes to preserve and record music. Innovations such as the Music Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI), the Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), and wave file composition (whereby the composition takes place after the recording of the individual parts), have replaced traditional scoring for many composers. In addition to this we now extend the term composition and composer well beyond the historical Western definitions. The composer of a work does not necessarily have to know the craft of notation, nor be able to perform a work the same way twice. Reid states that a written score can range from a chord chart to a Pro Tools file (Reid, 2007), yet a standard composition degree at a tertiary institution is still mainly concerned with the authorship of singular critical written works.

## Experiment 1: The Sacred Fire

I have worked with soprano Heather Lee for the last 10 years on a large variety of projects from Western classical music to traditional music. Consequently, Lee was an obvious collaborator for this project. Lee has had a strong interest in the music of Hildegard of Bingen, and her background in medieval and Baroque music was ideal for this project. Additional collaboration was with Cantillation, a vocal ensemble based at the ABC, and a newly formed intercultural ensemble sourced for the project.<sup>3</sup> The music was recorded in February 2006, at the Eugene Goossens Hall, Sydney, and released in May 2007 by the ABC.

This project involved taking the music of Hildegard of Bingen, (1098-1179), the visionary composer author and mystic, and recomposing around existing scores. The brief for the project was to create a CD recording of Hildegard of Bingen's music unlike any other to date. It was made clear by Lee that the vocal line would be performed as written, though there would be room for ornamentation and harmony (organum<sup>4</sup>) in the vocal lines.

Despite these constraints there was enormous room for innovation in instrumentation, texture, and accompaniment. A series of new pieces were written for the assembled intercultural ensemble, and one work was selected to be part of this larger experiment.

Lee and myself argued in the liner notes of the disc that the craft of medieval music notation is unable to provide anything like the nuance that we expect from a contemporary score, and as such the original editions of Hildegard's scores (the Riensekodex and Dendermonde collections) can enable a process of imagination and recomposition (Lee, 2007). Many things simply do not exist in the original scores, most prominently absent is any rhythmic duration or emphasis, and the interpretation of neumatic<sup>5</sup> notation in which this is expressed is far from standard. The argument comes down to one essential point: a

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Cunio, reed organ, Jamal Rekabi kemanche, Llew Kiek plucked strings, Paul Jarman winds and Tunji Beier percussion.

<sup>4</sup> Parallel harmony, most commonly up a 5<sup>th</sup> or down a 4<sup>th</sup> from the original melody.

<sup>5</sup> Sign based - a precursor to modern notation.

purely authentic rendition is not actually possible, and from this premise multiple realisations of a single text are valid.

The Prologue to Hildegard's play *Ordo Virtutum* was selected for an in-depth exploration in this manner. Because *Ordo Virtutum* is such a long piece, it was impossible within the confines of the commission to work with the whole piece (it is both significant and long enough to constitute a whole recording). The Prologue was therefore a perfect choice. Three main parameters investigated in this realisation of the *Ordo Virtutum* Prologue were the use of multiple realisations of a single text, the use of free and metric time with the same text, and the use of harmony.

### Three new pieces

The pieces written from this realisation process are: *Who are these?* The Sacred Fire (TSF) disc 2 track 6, *Patriarchs, Prophets and Virtues*, TSF disc 2, tracks 7-8, and *Ordo Virtutum – Instrumental Prologue*, TSF disc 2 track 10.

*Who are these?* is a recitation of a translation of the prologue text into English by Rebecca Frith and an intercultural ensemble. The music is constructed around a very simple descending Dorian fragment G – F – E – D, in which all instruments have the opportunity to improvise as Frith speaks. The traditional wind tarogato is the featured melodic instrument and plays a long phrase with circular breathing at the end of the piece.

*Patriarchs, Prophets and Virtues* is a significant setting of the text and music of Hildegard. A series of Burmese gongs stress the D Dorian scale (with a Bb available to augment it). A massive slightly detuned low E gong thunders the feeling of the piece into newly constructed cadence points before and after the singing, and the Cantillation male ensemble sing the primary text of the prologue very slowly. They then accompany Lee who sings the text of the *Virtues* over a I-V vocal drone. The men then respond to close the section, before all is repeated with variations and organum harmonies (Lee, 2007).

*Ordo Virtutum – Instrumental Prologue* is a setting of the same melody for an instrumental ensemble. In this version additive rhythm is used to provide a pulse that there is no record of in the neumatic notation. Material that was sombre and austere is now infused with energy. This piece retains the odd lengths of Hildegard's phrases, as opposed to *O beatissime Ruperte* (TSF1, track 13) which fits the melody into a constant time signature. Rhythm in this case is crucial, and an underlying quaver pulse ties the music together.

### Time and harmony

The *Ordo Virtutum – Instrumental Prologue* is in metric time. The following score shows the first two phrases of original melodic line of Hildegard followed by its instrumental adaptation. This use of metre responds to Hildegard's music - it is definitely pulsed in a manner similar to the original, yet it is not historically judged as being capable of being played 'in time'. The bars in this example are described as 14/8/ + 14/8/ + 10/8 + 9/8 + 10/8, in the scores of the realisation (Cunio, 2008).

The image shows a musical score for 'Ordo Virtutum Prologue' by Hildegard von Bingen. The score is divided into two sections: A and B. Section A, 'Prologue opening realised in free time', consists of five staves of music with a descending melodic line. Section B, 'Prologue opening realised in rhythmic time', consists of four staves of music with a more complex, rhythmic melodic line. The score is titled 'ORDO VIRTUTUM PROLOGUE' and 'HILDEGARD VON BINGEN'.

The *Patriarchs, Prophets and Virtues* explores differing uses of harmony. The music itself is repeated and developed in a modified strophic repeat. The first time there is a little harmony, principally a I-V drone from the male choir, the second time this radically changes. In the repeat (TSF disc 2, track 8) the gongs play through the text instead of only at the beginning and end. They provide a functional harmonic progression of I- bV1- 1V -11- 1 (D – Bb – G – E – D). The tarogato enters in a melismatic and dissonant manner, pushing towards suspended intervals such as the 2<sup>nd</sup>, commenting on phrases in the scale, and providing melodic emphasis completely different to the music of Hildegard. The voices are faster and more urgent and the male choir sings in organum harmony up a 5<sup>th</sup> from the original.

The voices are also different in the repeat. The men sing in organum with the tenors a 5<sup>th</sup> higher, the reed

organ enters with a drone and the texture grows to a tutti, culminating with the final refrain of the male choir in organum, with obligato lines for both the female voice and tarogato. The piece ends with the tarogato and gongs, with the tarogato not resolving its final phrase, finishing on the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

In summary all three pieces are completely new pieces of music derived from the same source text and score. They are not arrangements or variations, as the character of each work is completely different, derived from compositional intention, parameters and forces. They are newly composed, utilising the score, improvisation and a limited amount of post production editing.

I was feeling that the research proved a particular point, and would raise debate but to my surprise no-one was even mildly upset; reviewers either accepted the suppositions of the research or simply did not feel it necessary to mention. The ABC was more concerned about the marketing and packaging of the disc than any threat to the music of Hildegard, and academics responded to both the production values and sense of adventure in the project without addressing the implications of the new composition at all.

However, something became apparent over the following year: I realised that, far from finishing this process, I had only just begun. A number of ideas were opening up for me as I began to teach composition increasingly with technology. In 2008 I asked students to write new compositions from motivic fragments that I prepared for them and the majority of the submitted works sounded like new compositions, despite coming from the same source material.<sup>6</sup> The logical next step was (as it still is currently) to treat my own work in a similar manner. This part of the project is in its genesis and I hope to expand it to include the work of a number of new and old composers, and to ask students, professional composers and interested third parties to undertake this process of recomposition with me.

## Experiment 2: Namu Amida Butsu

The war has begun and, like the city of Darwin in 1942, the war is now is close to home. It is all very well to play games with music that are held in the public domain, or to write a piece of music on a royalty free loop, where no-one really suffers directly as a result of the experiment. But what happens when I disown my own music, moreso a piece that I am personally proud of, that has strong aesthetic and cultural values independent of its mere score? Am I being simply naïve? And how does this disassociation take place, via the score or the recording? For me the answer is obvious: anyone can listen to a recording but few people can read a score. Further, the practical steps in manipulating a recording are very simple to learn. The selection of the piece was also important. I decided in 2007 that the first selection must be largely in one key and either in free time or strict metric time to allow for quick recomposition. There is also little point for me to undertake this process with popular music (though others researchers might want to). Garageband and other loop based programs already offer a large selection of popular and cinematic music styles to recompose with. Finally there are a few implicit cultural presumptions I hope to test during the project.

### Positive

- That new composition can be undertaken from motivic fragments on a program such as Garageband.
- That it is possible to write inherently new music from a static collection of source material.
- That any person with a computer has the ability to cut up and change the compositional structure of an existing work, and that these techniques, which are more common in popular and screen music can be applied to art music.
- That art musicians have generally distanced themselves from the loop revolution of Apple's Garageband and other software which allows composition from motivic fragments, and that this process of composition is potentially as valid as notation.
- That this process can be applied both to audio, and scores exported as MIDI data.

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<sup>6</sup> There were three discreet assignments. The first involved composing a rhythm track from a combination of rhythm recordings. They were in different music styles, primarily Egyptian and South African and were deliberately given to the students in different beats per minute so that they could not be merely placed one under the other as tracks in a DAW. The second was to recompose from the actual audio files from a 2005 television commission of mine in which new instruments and tracks were encouraged, while the third was to compose from the supplied parts of an instrumental Irish tune. The experiments were done by students at the Sydney Institute.

## Negative

- A perceived or actual reduction in the need for high level skills or training to realise a new composition.
- The loss of notation as a primary medium for western composition, though this can also be argued as a positive outcome.
- A singularisation not of composition, but psychoacoustic and other schematic data, as music is increasingly composed from a limited subset of recordings that all have the same sonic signature. A guitar track made entirely out of Apple audio loops might have numerous compositional possibilities embedded in its scale pitch, harmony etc, but it only has one recorded sound-world, instead of the almost limitless numbers of instruments, recording spaces, microphone and preamplifiers that would otherwise be available.
- A loss of respect for the traditions of music as everything becomes equal on the page of the DAW.

## My critical edition

Namu Amida Butsu was commissioned by Bronwyn Kirkpatrick. It was premiered in her Masters recital in shakuhachi,<sup>7</sup> at the Carrington Ballroom, Katoomba on September 12, 2004. Kirkpatrick had been a student of Grand Master Riley Lee in Australia for the previous six years and was about to embark on a course of study in Japan. Her Masters recital was a milestone in her career, the only available qualification in Australia, as the shakuhachi does not currently run as a performance major in the University system.

Kirkpatrick requested a piece of 'new music' that would relate to the body of traditional work for the shakuhachi, in particular honkyoku. It was decided to write a piece for solo shakuhachi that would interpret music written for the instrument, and the tradition which it has come from, Zen Buddhism. The piece is fifteen minutes long.

Traditional honkyoku is a dialogue of sound and silence. The piece begins with silence and then the first breath, which is consciously experienced as it enters the whole body by means of the skin surface coming into the "hara" and then slowly up into the whole of the lungs. There is a slight holding of the breath and then the sound. The sound is entered into, developed, colored and exited, and then with just as much attention the silence is entered into. A seamless connection, unbroken. Silence of breathing leaving the music unbroken sound. The silence then becomes part of the sound as the sound becomes silence. Words only, if not experienced in minute detail in the body; this is the rhythm of the traditional Honkyoku (Brandwein, 1999).

Musical excerpts of Namu Amida Butsu



The piece develops from this motivic fragment and the intervals become increasingly jagged as time progresses alongside subtle additive rhythmic variations. This piece is designed to be played relatively 'in time', a response to the strict physical disciplines of Zen which gives the illusion of formlessness through great attention to form itself. The lead up to and the opening of figure B illustrate this. The piece starts to move, and a melodic flow begins to take shape within the tonality of the opening. At figure B the alternation between 4/4 and 6/4 gives the piece a rhythmic flow that is subtle, yet still regulated.

(Cunio, 2004).

The piece then moves to the extremes of the instrument with many jumps, using either octave displacement or the intervals of a major and minor 9<sup>th</sup>. This section represents the yearning desire for

<sup>7</sup> A cylindrical bamboo flute extant from medieval Japan.

enlightenment, and the stage of actively seeking that often comes before surrender. It is introduced towards the end of the first page at the figure D animato. The grace note leaps of a 7<sup>th</sup> (bar 46), followed by a 9<sup>th</sup>, are evocative of much of the piece. This outward focused section peaks on the high G# (the highest note of Kirkpatrick's instrument) at bar 53, before retreating at bar 56. The repeated section at bar 56 gives the player the opportunity to explore the subtleties of repetition.

(Cunio, 2004).

Figures E and F represent the transition towards enlightenment and an increasingly introverted state. The peak of this section is bar 70, the end of figure E, where the words 'Namu Amida Butsu' are written. They can be whispered, spoken or thought in the accompanying General Pause. The music is sparse. Long notes are punctuated by recurring grace notes, in the manner of much honkyoku. Fermatas are used at the end of every phrase to allow length in the playing.

(Cunio, 2004).

The piece ends with one last flourish at G, a representation of the Zen Buddhist quote and parable 'Before enlightenment chop wood carry water, after enlightenment chop wood carry water'. Though everything is outwardly the same after this musical representation of enlightenment, bar 97 is marked 'with delicacy'. A final point of stillness is achieved at H. The markings are all soft and the note to play 'breathy' in bar 102 sets the tone for the final phrase, which is a merging with the cosmos. A ppp morendo at bar 103 makes the final bars as soft as possible.

(Cunio, 2004).

## Let the War Begin

Namu Amida Butsu is currently being prepared for the upcoming collaboration. The following questionnaire will accompany the composition task.

### THE WAR ON THE CRITICAL EDITION VOLUME 1

#### NAMU AMIDA BUTSU

I am making war on the critical or singular edition of music. Will you participate?

Namu Amida Butsu was written for shakuhachi Master Bronwyn Kirkpatrick in 2004. I am hoping to find out whether it can be used as a basis for new composition in the manner of the Apple loop library or similar software looping programs.

The original piece has been cut up into randomly numbered motivic fragments that can easily be imported into your loop browser. From there simply drag, drop and compose, everything is up to you. You can form any structure, use or not use any part of the source material, combine multiple tracks, process the audio in any manner you wish, change the tempo, duration, amplitude, formant or anything else you can think of. Or if you are really stuck you can try to recreate what I did!

When finished please burn the track to CD and post:

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Qld 4101 Australia Or email via <http://www.yousendit.com/>

To me: [k.cunio@griffith.edu.au](mailto:k.cunio@griffith.edu.au)

I hope to report the results of this research at Create World 2010, and release a disc of the results in 2010.

While this process is in its infancy I feel strongly that there are two legitimate means by which to challenge the critical edition, the mode of multiple source based composition (Hildegard of Bingen) and the recomposition of an existing composition (Namu Amida Butsu), utilising the technologies of popular music. Both require substantive further investigation.

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