Toward A Musical Monograph: Working With Fragments From Within The Improvisation-Composition Nexus

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1.0 Background

A senior academic suggested to me in an annual performance review that it might be time to think about writing ‘a monograph’. I’d moved out of a career as a professional musician into the university sector almost two decades ago and consequently this pathway would seem to be a logical development for an academic: a substantial published text. After further negotiation it was agreed that the monograph idea would take on a slightly different form in that it would be presented as a series of original musical works aiming to reflect upon seminal events and people that had been part of my development as an academic. Subsequently, my recent musical trajectory over the last 18 months has included regular instrumental practice, the rebuilding of a substantial collection of instruments (Draper: 2010), amplification and processing devices, through to the re-development of a home studio for writing and editing – and much jamming and listening.

As part of a 2012 research sabbatical, it was agreed by my university that I should expand upon earlier practice-based research (for example, Emmerson & Draper: 2011; Emmerson: 2010), and that the development of my music would be accompanied by research publications to track various processes and insights, this paper being one of those in the continuum. The overarching question for me is simply ‘how to successfully create new works’ to be satisfying and of suitable quality to meet the musical communication goals set out above. While this paper does not attempt to scrutinise the entire process, it does investigate a particular practice-based research component of the project – in understanding and refining technical working methods to bridge certain musical gaps between recorded musical improvisations and a number of proposed ‘final’ compositions.

2.0 A Theoretical Framework For Practice-Based Research

In what follows I situate the study within a meta-framework in order to clarify the sometimes ‘fuzzy’ idea of practice-based research. While a lengthy treatise is beyond the scope of this paper, the following hierarchy of approaches will apply.

Action research is often cited as a method suitable for arts-based projects given its broad approach: repeating cycles of plan, act, review, with each successive cycle aiming to clarify and refine solutions to problems as they emerge and develop. Rory O’Brien adds,

What separates this type of research from general professional practices, consulting, or daily problem-solving is the emphasis on scientific study, which is to say the researcher studies the problem systematically and ensures the intervention is informed by theoretical considerations. Much of the researcher’s time is spent on refining the methodological tools to suit the exigencies of the situation, and on collecting, analyzing, and presenting data on an on-going, cyclical basis. (1998, para3)
This stance tends to resonate somewhat as one cycles through the familiar, interactive stages of music-making. However – following its original scientific derivations – the method also assumes impartiality between the roles of the researcher and the researched. Donald Schön’s seminal work *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) explores exactly this point to argue reflection-in-action and -on-action as key methodological components of so-called ‘insider’ research processes. Within this the notion of *repertoire* is key to ‘in-action’:

When a practitioner makes sense of a situation he perceives to be unique, he *sees* it as something already present in his repertoire. To see *this* site as *that* one is not to subsume the first under a familiar category or rule. It is to see the unfamiliar, unique situation as both similar to and different from the familiar one, without at first being able to say similar or different with respect to what. The familiar situation functions as a precedent, or a metaphor, or … an exemplar for the unfamiliar one. (p138)

Mark Smith (1994) elaborates further about the associated idea of ‘on-action’:

We have to take certain things as read. We have to fall back on routines in which previous thought and sentiment has been sedimented. It is here that the full importance of reflection-on-action becomes revealed. As we think and act, questions arise that cannot be answered in the present. The space afforded by recording, supervision and conversation with our peers allows us to approach these. Reflection requires space in the present and the promise of space in the future. (p150)

To move ever more centrally to musical practices, the role of ‘intangibles’ must be acknowledged: intuition, inspiration, chance discovery, sub-conscious drivers and other impacting factors usually omitted (but in reality, often employed) in many traditional research write-ups. These considerations lead to the deep well of creativity literature espoused in ideas such as Mihály Csikszentmihályi’s “flow theory” (1996) or Guy Claxton’s concept of “the undermind” (1997). Without digressing too far, suffice it to say that many others have progressed significant insights in relation to creativity theory and music-making, in particular, Dave Collins’ work which tracks real-time composition processes (2011; 2007). In this he posits a set of strategies (adapted from Roozendaal: 1993):

1. Planning; knowledge-telling; clustering of concepts; noting the relations between concepts; associating concepts; and building and refining of a structure of concepts.
2. Noting large-scale relations; noting and correction inconsistencies in large-scale relations; and manipulating large scale relations.
3. Noting coherence between parts and constituents; restructuring of parts and constituents.
4. Judgement of musical units; transformation of musical units. (Collins: 2011, p50)

In sum, as a broad approach to practice-based research this project draws upon the concepts outlined above: action research (plan, act, review, re-act); reflection-in-on-action (music-making, recordings, notes, databases), and finally to the ‘processing’ of the music itself using Collins’ list as an indicative structural framework.

### 3.0 Reflection-In-Action: A Practical Approach To The Project

*Planning; knowledge-telling; clustering of concepts; noting the relations between concepts; associating concepts; and building and refining of a structure of concepts.*

Collins’ strategies broadly align with my own experiences although I believe there may be important differences in proportions. For example, where he places emphasis on earlier conceptual stages, I have tended to prioritise spontaneity and the inspiration that comes from interacting with other musicians. At the other end of the list, there is scant detail about what I consider to be major tasks in this continuum – the “restructuring of parts and constituents” and the so-called “transformation of musical units” (ibid). The following sections will work through these matters in turn.

### 3.1 Sound As Form, Music As Action
Initially this project began with a modest past-time. Every fortnight, myself and drummer colleague would meet in his Logic-based home studio to jam and record ‘evidence takes’. Aside from the social benefits, the early purposes were to develop our instrumental sounds – in my case, in terms of the timbres of electric guitars, FX and amplification, in his, in a quest for a better drum set. Along the way this impacted on the refinement of the recording space including acoustic treatment, microphone use, pre-amps and the digital audio workstation (DAW) itself. We recorded in an increasingly transparent set-and-forget environment, significant elements including: one-step self-recording, no use of headphones or click tracks, and the instrumental production sounds increasingly ‘excellent at source’ – a highly conducive improvisational space.

We stockpiled recordings and moved these through my own home studio with selection and editing additions to be shared. What began to emerge were a series of themes similar to Albin Zak’s ideas about “sound as form” (2001, pp48–96), that is, the range of sounds we were recording and post-producing began to take on clear thematic attributes based upon a shared “aural library” (Schippers: 2007, p36) of music we enjoy and aspire to. While we both have studied jazz, overall the music is far from a ‘free’ ethos by embracing elements of R&B, film sound, fusion, world music, melody, harmony, groove and wherever else the inspiration might take us on the day.

Working as a duo has been liberating given the lack of restrictions in moving across harmonic structures at will. However, the notion of “musicking” (Small: 1998) began to exert an ever stronger pull, that is, that music is a series of activities (not an object), and that greater social engagement, live performance and varied musical conversations all needed be part of our growth experience. While I began to play in live ensembles a little more, over time we also invited different musicians into our musical sand-pit, including bassists, keyboardists, wind players and world musicians from the Asia-Pacific, Turkey and India. Each have brought alternate viewpoints and many encounters have widened our vocabulary by challenging us to respond via new sound forms and musical ideas.

3.2 The Improvisation Of Musical Dialogue

Overall I have become strongly enamoured of the tangible communication energy and often surprising music that these improvisations can bring. To me, this is in stark contrast to the processes I have encountered in the past as a producer on many for-hire projects where formal composition, rehearsals, arranging and multi-tracking processes can sometimes lose musicality in a quest for technical perfection. Of course the history of sound recording is resplendent with stunning examples of music which communicates far in excess of what I could ever hope to achieve, and conceivably executed by every musical and technical method known to man. However, the creative activities outlined above have indeed become the philosophical framework for this particular project and to this end it takes a contrary view of one modern record production mantra that ‘the song is everything’. Rather, it explicitly seeks to bridge the gap between raw ideas and final mixes by aspiring to retain the on-going improvisational musical dialogue at the very forefront of the production processes.

Bruce Benson (2003) tackles the relationships between improvisation and composition in his rather compelling book, The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue. In this, he unpacks aspects of music relating to audiences, performers and composers. He delves into the idea of improvisation and just how performers interact with compositions by devising and listing a series of 11 detailed definitions for improvisation (ibid, pp26–30) ranging from the subtle performance interpretations of classical music cannon, through to jazz, blues and adaptations of traditional musics. Within the range, I believe that one definition in particular has a strong relationship to this project:

Improvisation 9: Whereas the first eight forms of improvisation are those of the performer, [this] is a compositional form of improvisation. Here the composer uses a particular form or style of music as a kind of template. Thus Mozart’s Cosi fan tutte depends on the opera buffa form, which has relatively strict requirements. How far the requirements are followed, though, is subject to improvisation. (p29)

In terms of action research this echoes what I have developed to date in terms of selecting and ranking preferred, somehow familiar forms arising from the improvisations, often returning to perform new variations of over-aching themes. Interestingly, Benson refers to the derivation of improvisation as connected to ‘improve’ – to make profitable use of, and “to fabricate out of what is conveniently on hand … in order to create something new” (p32). This prompts the bringing together of several of the
ideas elaborated thus far and confirms my experiences that find interdisciplinary theoretical ‘remixes’ to be useful in understanding and responding to idiosyncratic practice-based research matters. Not only then do Benson’s ideas and that of action research have synergy, so too in Zak’s notions of “resonance” (2001, pp184–197) which provides clues to the more sophisticated processes of how a finite number of themes begin to distil for the purposes of the Monograph concept, that is, in terms of musically aligning with certain events, people and places. Schön’s reflection-in-action (1983) similarly picks up on resonances and familiarities to make sense of unfamiliar situations or new work though the use of metaphor to expand the repertoire.

Where Benson’s work (2003) does not seem to fit is in relation to its rather traditional stance of a ‘one-way process’. That is, from a pre-determined composition, through to the ways in which performers then interpret these instructions – be it a classical musician subtly adding inflections to well known works, or a jazz soloist improvising over generic changes. Never are recordings mentioned, nor in their topsy-turvy relationship to the compositional processes where the studio itself may be used by the performer(s) to create new works from raw materials and/or where the final recordings may often become ‘scores’ (to be then rehearsed in preparation for live performances). It is these features that I now turn to in terms of investigating the next stages of the project.

4.0 Reflection-On-Action: Strategies To Progress The Improvisations

Noting large-scale relations; noting and correction inconsistencies in large-scale relations; and manipulating large scale relations.

At the time of writing there is an archive of approximately 180 edited raw ideas drawn from many sessions recorded over time. In this process, a session would typically involve spending a day in the studio and improvising with no particular musical outputs or stylistic considerations in mind. Centrally a social process, this would include lunch breaks, a glass of wine and much talk about the issues of the day be they political, lifestyle, historical, musical, or something much more specific in terms of technical development with the instruments and/or equipment. When other guest players joined us, this of course would additionally steer the direction of the performances as well.

Whatever the context, each studio day resulted in a large recorded multi-track session. Typically, a performance take was quite long at somewhere between 30–60 minutes. In a given session, there would be four to six pieces like this, resulting in around four hours of take-home music to be reflected upon and to begin to try to evolve better questions “that cannot be answered in the present” (Benson: 2003, p150). This involved opening up a session, working though this and placing markers /notes throughout to not only move to the next editing stages, but also to ‘program’ one’s self with a deeper understanding of exactly what was ‘on the page’.

Figure 1: Overview of markers in a Logic session – 5 takes, 15 themes.
As per the indicative Figure above it emerged that long performance takes often evolved through a number of themes with periods of re-negotiation in between before moving on to new conversations. Conversely, the marker process also revealed sometimes stunning but completely unplanned recapitulations, retrograde inversions, rearrangements and internal quotations that referred back to earlier motifs. Following this broad analytical process, the session would be broken up into smaller components using the save-as option to create a number of individual pieces. Sometimes these would be left as is, others compiled more severely, some with a few overdubs, sampling and the like. The process was bi-directional and both myself and musical partner would post material over the Web, having been generated in isolated reflection on the material. After considering a number of methods, various idea tracks were simply bounced as .m4a format to iTunes playlists as an easily manageable archive. As shown in Figure 2, meta-tagging was utilised and refined over time to identify tonal centres, rhythm, tempi, genre, and other performance details as part of this iterative mapping and culling.

![Figure 2: Meta-tagging of iTunes playlist.](image)

After 12 months or so the process began to encompass other formats including recording in other studios, returning to evolve earlier ideas, experimenting with loose charts, minimalist directions and other obtuse forms of review and planning. Out of all of this has emerged some 30 potential themes for the Monograph album structure – musical fragments often strikingly mirroring each other in stylistic and/or emotional ambience across differing performance dates, ensembles and locations. The next steps outlined here continue to progress this particular mapping process in order to try to retain and enhance the original improvised takes if at all possible. Subsequently, while the technical details may be familiar to dance music producers, I believe they are less common in improvisation traditions.

### 5.0 Resurrecting The DAW

**Noting coherence between parts and constituents; restructuring of parts and constituents.**

Logic Pro 9 is the DAW used for this part of the process, not that I am especially aligned to a particular platform. This is simply for expediency given that the source recordings were produced on Logic. The next stages involve using Logic’s Beat Mapping tools (similar to that of many other modern DAWs, including Pro Tools’ Beat Detective, Cubase Tempo Detection etc.). Having said this, the process has revealed Logic’s suit of ‘smart tools’ including Beat Mapping and beyond to be quite effective in this context. In my experience, while modern DAWs provide highly sophisticated arrangement mechanisms, these work under implicit but important mass-market pre-assumptions. That is: to usually produce Western popular music with a regular beat, 4/4 time, obvious song structures, diatonic tonal centres, easily loop-able shorter audio forms and so on. Not that my intention is to disparage any such musical works but clearly, contemporary DAW tools have not progressed far from early sequencers in terms of many other musical genres including classical, world or jazz which do not necessarily adhere to popular music formats. In these cases the DAW takes on the status of digital recorder with excellent editing and plug-in FX but loses much musical ‘intelligence’ without...
pre-assumed reference points. For example, for those who work in classical music production, ‘comp-ing’ from many takes along with micro-surgery is often the norm, but where the original score bar numbers become the reference point for DAW markers, edits and post-production to follow suit. The improvisational material in this project does not have scores and content may range from ambient through to changing tonal centres, time signatures, tempi and other transitional items. Nonetheless, recent work has persevered with applying sequencer-styled tools and this has begun to pay off as follows.

5.1 Beat Mapping

As outlined above, sessions had already been dissected and saved as smaller themes for evaluation but now to be beat mapped. Logic provides a two stage process to extrapolate tempo information from audio waveforms: firstly a ‘detect’ function displays all of the transients of a given file in its own visual tack lane; and secondly it is assumed that then the DAW will auto-detect tempo from this information by using the ‘beats from region’ function. However, over the course of only a few bars /minutes this usually results in a great deal of garbled data irrespective of attempts to dissect material into smaller regions for analysis, or by setting various ranges of transient detection, note value grid, etc. (similarly to tests on other platforms).

![Figure 3: Logic beat mapping (auto-detect).](image_url)

After returning to this matter at various times during the course of the project, a more satisfying outcome was produced by simply avoiding the auto-detection of ‘beats from region’. The process involves a selection of the following, depending on source material:

1. bounce a composite guide as single audio file for mapping (and later possible export);
2. create a starting tempo /time signature and locate the first transient at the first downbeat; if necessary, create a tap tempo MIDI track to span problematic areas;
3. use the ‘detect’ function to capture all the transients; and
4. manually work through the material to insert hit points by hand; this may include inserting arbitrary time signature changes and/or ‘beats’ that mark the start and end of lengthier, logical sections to more easily conform to the time line. This process then provides options to freely move markers to any waveform points as the ear dictates, as shown in Figure 4.
At first glance this would appear to be a time-consuming process and indeed it can be, but in my experience, much less so than persevering with many failed auto-attempts, editing processes and limited detection algorithms. Typically this manual entry takes around a day or so to encode an hour of material, but beyond this it opens a door to a progressively rewarding series of ‘smart’ encoding options that in a final assembly, results in the resurrection of embedded DAW intelligences /tools that were previously dormant.

5.2 Marker Mapping

Following the setting of tempo changes and time signature(s), the next step is to refine the marker system beyond the coarse overview provided in the session stage. This now encodes detailed information about the overall (still improvised) form of the piece, including repeating motifs, highlight passages, solos and so forth. Markers may include detailed notes, and audio regions can be subdivided along marker lines given they now have bar reference points, as shown:
At this point the piece is ‘sticky’ and regions may be freely cut, pasted, deleted, re-arranged and/or looped according to these time-based values. Some caveats include the fact that one needs to be attentive to exactly which arrangement tools are used and how, for example, not all editing functions necessarily ‘pull’ the tempo map with a given region selection. There are a number of ways around this including a little practice and review of the manual, together with judicious use of save-as. Logic also will embed tempi within audio regions via its bounce-in-place function to further encode and preserve the process thus far.

However, beat mapping represents only the rhythmical dimensions of the music along the horizontal time axis. Before too much re-arrangement then, the next save-as state includes work in the vertical domain using Logic’s Chord Track and/or MIDI functions.

### 5.3 Harmonic Mapping

Like many DAWs, Logic provides a range of analysis tools located just below the time ruler, in this case termed Global Tracks. The view of these tools can be hidden, viewed, expanded or collapsed as necessary to include: markers, beat mapping, key and time signatures, tempo, Flex tools (aka ‘elastic audio’), transposition and so-called Chord Tracks. This last feature provides useful functions to insert representative chord changes along the time axis (as shown in Figure 6). Unlike the more time consuming beat mapping process, this progresses quite quickly and allows one to not only indicate traditional changes where applicable, but also to analyse and make sense of more obscure settings where the ambient juxtapositions might be interpreted in varying ways depending on how the arrangement might be evolving. For example, if a general tonality might be perceived standalone, or as a altered note cluster leading to a future pivotal change.
Not to be underestimated in my experience, this scrolling chord track also provides an obvious guide chart to easily follow in overdubs should they be desirable (say, a bass track to be added). Chord Tracks may be converted to MIDI tracks and expanded from there, but as well, these harmonic reference points provide Logic with yet more smart sequencer-styled information to make it ‘pitch aware’ and therefore effecting the application of other tools such as transposition, Apple Loops library and so on.

5.4 Mind Mapping

To sum up thus far: by taking a given improvised piece and spending focussed time in thoroughly analysing and mapping it via the technical processes outlined above, most, if not all taken-for-granted popular music features of the DAW are indeed ‘resurrected’. Plug-ins which respond to tempo now resume active participation in the production process, e.g., DDLs to pick up note division values, as do Flex /Elastic Audio / beat tools. Markers allow for global cut and paste, loop and arrangement functions become quick, obvious and accurate (as opposed to ‘eyeballing’ and slipping regions around). Chord Tracks similarly inform pitch detection, harmonisation and other features of MIDI tracks, sample libraries or Flex polyphonic tools.

Save-as files are made at all stages should the process go off course and interestingly, this broadly corresponds with Collins’ strategies for mapping the “real time composition process” (2011; 2007). Similarly in my experience then, this tends to clarify and refine the multi-step work flow, but more centrally, these processes powerfully program one’s own musical understanding of the shape and content of the material. Guy Claxton’s creativity theories (1997) and notions of “the undermind” resonate strongly here – review, distil, program the mind, ‘sleep on it’, then return to potentially high creativity scenarios given preparation and a little explicit distance. To continue this particular trajectory, the next stages would appear to be in relation to the capacity of the material to be exported out of this environment as the creative process might dictate. This includes to other DAW platforms and/or in relation to potentially dissemination of the work among other collaborators in distance environments.

6.0 Transportability
Judgement of musical units; transformation of musical units.

While the following observations are at a relatively early stage of development, they do represent evolving possibilities for the project. In the first instance, much of my own sound production work in recent times has used Pro Tools /Apple computers. As a very broad personal work preference, while I find Logic to be useful as a composer’s environment (its evolution deriving from the Atari /Notator MIDI sequencing platform), Pro Tools on the other hand has a very different feel and approach (progressing from the hardware-based, sample-locked Sound Tools /Mac platform). Suffice it to say, I find Pro Tools to provide a relatively more stable and precise sound production suite and therefore I see the final stages of overdubs, post-production and mastering as taking place in this environment.

The most obvious transportability options for such sessions would appear to be that of OMF (Open Media Framework) or AAF (Advanced Authoring Format), now built into many platforms as import /export options. Both file formats are meant to provide common media interchange information, AAF being the more recent and expanded format for video, audio and metadata. In practice however, this tends to be inconsistent depending on exchange direction, or the version and/or type of platform involved. For example, in the case of Logic to ProTools transfers, AAF provides no tempo or marker data. In reverse, Logic often fails to successfully import subsequent new material, but often surprisingly imports tempo changes embedded in audio regions. Nonetheless, I have developed a simple process which works consistently. Firstly, it is clear that OFM or AFF transfer cannot be bi-directional between these two platforms. Hence, Logic sets up the compositional and initial arrangement work, and this is then moved into Pro Tools for final production via AAF which provides audio regions located at correct time-code points. Following this, the provision of a MIDI file automatically allows Pro Tools to import all tempo and marker information as developed in the earlier mapping process, as shown:

![Figure 7: ProTools AAF and MIDI import arrangement.](image)

The next emerging steps are in co-composing /arranging with colleagues in the US and the UK who have historical connection with the Monograph reflective themes. Thus far, the most intriguing aspects have been in how material is re-mixed and re-interpreted at a distance, often resulting in creative disturbances, provocations and indeed ‘transformations’ certainly not considered by myself to date. To this end, I have been borrowing from film sound experience to share audio stems and MIDI files via cloud storage given that colleagues work on other DAWs, and in terms of ‘judgement’, live in very different cultural settings. I hope to expand this process in a bi-directional fashion aiming to lead to a little more research and publication about the compositional process, not the least of which involves questions of what is the ‘critical edition’ (if any), and/or – ‘when is it done?’.

7.0 Findings
For me, improvisational energy and musical risk have been the most engaging and palpable aspects of this music and I have imagined the least desirable next steps to be to formally rehearse and multi-track set pieces in an attempt to somehow mimic earlier ‘channelling’. Nonetheless, this paper has explored technology-based, problem-solving approaches as part of an overall solution with an audience of sound producers and DAW enthusiasts in mind.

7.1 Technology

To summarise what has been explored in this paper, one approach is to follow the technology trail via a systematic series of enhancement steps including:

- marking up the original source session, understanding the material in overview, followed by saving notable sections as individual pieces;
- developing rough mixes to review, disseminate, categorise and sometimes remix in order to progress potential album themes and possible structures;
- using DAW smart tools to map tempi, key and time signatures, section markers, tonal centres and chord structures in order to retrieve expanded DAW arrangement abilities;
- progressing an export /import framework to allow for post-production in external environments along with further collaboration with other musicians;
- acknowledging a not-to-be-underestimated by-product of the process — to deeply program one’s understanding of how a given piece ‘works’, both technologically and musically.

7.2 Symbols And ‘Musicking’

Throughout the live improvisation and performance processes I have offered collaborators a number of symbolic approaches as a potential pathway to progress beyond pure inspiration and interaction. This has variously included: chord charts, directions and significant melodic lines culled from certain early improvisations; informal directions, signals and minimalist approaches to composition (see Soundspace: 2011) via abstract ideas, texts and visual prompts; even Eno and Schmidt’s Oblique Strategies (1979) were explored as interesting phrases to prompt a starting point. To my great chagrin, most of these techniques have stubbornly refused to progress the music, the reverse in fact — such constructs have tended to shut down the performance communication that I have been seeking to retain and refine.

Clearly this matter is a work in progress but one I believe worth progressing in the life of this project. Two signposts have emerged. Firstly, the most effective use of any overt symbolism took place in an unfamiliar studio with a now expanded trio (bass added). This followed a simple format: prior to each performance we talked at length about the thematic concept for a piece (but never musical). We shared highly personal views, abstract intentions, visual references then proceeded to play some of the best music we have to date. Notably, each piece left us emotionally exhausted where we had to take unusual recovery breaks. The second realisation follows the first: that it is through personal interactions, friendships, and growing musical empathy that the most comes out of such musically risky explorations. Music indeed is action (vs. product) and to this end, the next recording phases intend to explicitly ‘workshop’ our intellectual and emotional aspirations for the emergent themes.

8.0 Conclusions

As I have often found in many cases of arts-based research projects, the creative cycle continues to turn and answers are never as clean or straightforward as our colleagues and managers in quantitative research disciplines would have us believe or imitate. Practice-based research provides a snapshot at a given point in time, a few matters clarified, but more often than not the fundamental outcome is that better questions are devised. The realisation may well be that perhaps the work is never finished, and that ‘findings’ become yet only another starting point.

In the case of this paper then, I have delimited its scope to a particular pathway of i) arguing one format for practice-based research, and ii) then utilising this to investigate and develop a method for the analysis of improvised recordings within a modern DAW system. Following this approach and its findings another insight has become clear. While it is true that DAW ‘smarts’ allow
access to a remarkable suite of digital arranging and sound manipulation tools, the most notable outcome for me to date is in the easy loss of the very improvisational energy and musical risk that the project seeks to enhance. Now armed with such expanded power, clearly, my first attempts are to over-produce the material in an effort to ‘craft the song’ and thus far I remain unsatisfied with the interventions. The spark is lost, and the net lesson learned is that ‘less is more’. Here I am reminded of Roger Reynolds’ insightful *Mind Models* (2005). In the closing chapter he speaks of “the implications of abundance” (pp158–168), given that contemporary musicians are now able to access an almost infinite range of information, tools, techniques and opportunities. He writes,

Historically, composers have achieved by additive construction Their training has centred on the control of clearly characterized relationships that were built up according to prevailing values and techniques … We can now begin with a surfeit … Such abundance is perhaps the most genuinely new resource with which we are faced. Now, in a demanding, clangorous environment, one may select rather than construct, sample differently, rather than develop. In short, the composer’s function might become essentially subtractive, rather than additive. Working in this way, one could seek an enlarged sensitivity to trends and concurrent streams of eventuation. One could learn to be adaptive and persuasive rather than deterministic and manipulative. (ibid, p158).

This prompts changes in old habits that I recognise. I also find these thoughts simultaneously liberating by indeed supporting the emerging direction of the album in that no two pieces need correspond to a pre-imposed consistency of style. Rather, that the selection and sensitive rendering of a given piece will speak freely as individual vignettes to the time-track of the Monograph concept. Overall, I believe that none of the work will have been wasted in attempting to better understand the context in which the creation of the album operates. Now armed with new insider knowledge, I look forward to yet another cycle of the music-making process. As they say in the music business, ‘once more with feeling, from the top’.

**Bibliography**


Discography


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