

## A paean for theatrical scores

One of the ideas to emerge out of the engagement with 'extra-musical' theatricality in many composers' current practices is that of dealing in an overt way with the interaction between the score and its performative result – an interaction that underpins all notated music. In these practices, the score becomes theatrically active, either as a visible or audible object marked or played by the performers, as an object of analysis or discussion, or as an entity whose content is immediately imagined by virtue of the action that results from it. What might seem paradoxical about calling the theatricality in these pieces extra-musical is that it arises out of the acknowledgement of that most musical of objects: the notated score. It is not an important observation to dwell on, however; we might more usefully think of scores by joining Nicholas Cook in calling them "scripts", essentially involved in bringing about situations and actions that are social and theatrical rather than (or at least as well as) narrowly musical.

In James Saunders's *everybody do this*, each performer in the group has the power to shout an instruction (existing within a prescribed set of possibilities), which everyone in the group must then perform immediately. The score becomes aural, putting it on the same perceptual plane as the resulting actions. The relationship between performers and scores, usually in a state of stability wherein the performers have mastered the score and are familiar with it, is exposed as being completely open to negotiation, as are the social relationships between the performers themselves. Indeterminacy in this piece rests on this degree of defamiliarisation with the instructions, which are contingent on the mood, will, or whims of the other performers. No one in the room is familiar with the moment-to-moment progression of the score until it has happened. The upshot of this is a performance energised by liveness, where, in making sense of the score in real time, each performer's individual personality emerges and becomes a key focal point of the piece. We watch performers performing music as much as we watch people, with bodies, voices and personalities, doing stuff.

This is also true of Tim Parkinson's opera *Time With People*, where the prosaic nature of the performers' actions – answering questions about things that happened in the last few days, wading through items of household rubbish, naming sounds as they are transmitted through headphones – serves as a springboard for viewing human characters devoid of any performative artifice. Here the immediacy of the resulting actions forces us to imagine what stimulated them, and working out the questions to some of the answers ("Oh, the last time I did that was last Tuesday") becomes part of the intrigue. The palpable clarity of correspondence between text and act leaves no room for anything but earnest response, wonderfully rudimentary in its depiction of humanness.

In Matthew Shlomowitz's *Lecture About Bad Music*, a musical performance by a group of four players runs concurrently with a description of the music by a narrator. Comments and arguments about the music's technical and aesthetic content guide or mislead the audience's listening experience for the duration of the piece. A constant process of

referencing conceptual descriptions to sonic results is at play, daring the listener to enjoy the sounds that have been so meticulously dissected for intellectual consideration. In this play of cerebral rationality and musical indulgence, the score almost becomes an extra character, evoked through dialogue and description rather than directly seen. In one section, for example, we are told explicitly that there are five ideas, A B C D E, and that E always follows D, making it easier to anticipate and therefore potentially more pleasurable. There is no mystery: we have already been told what the material is going to do before we hear it. Knowledge of the score forces us instead to think beyond the sonic surface that is presented to us.

In all of these pieces, theatricalised scores make performer-text interaction important aesthetic concerns, and force us to acknowledge the relationship between textual artefacts and their resulting actions. In various different ways, the score is reimagined, taken out of its role of invisible prompt and made accessible to the audience. The pieces discussed above are of course by no means exhaustive of the idea: I could also cite Andy Ingamells's *a performance is never rehearsed, a performance is never repeated*, David Pocknee's *ECONOMICS*, Jennifer Walshe's *My Relationship to Mr. Stephen Patrick M. (i)*, or Mauricio Kagel's *Diaphonie I*, which used scores projected on slides, visible to both performers and audience, as early as 1964.

What we might note about all of these works is the immediacy of communication afforded by their theatricalisations of the score. Referring to Kagel's work, Bjorn Heile has already noted how the consequential inclusion into the music's "social drama" represents a "radical empowerment" for the audience. The knot that binds notation to action is undone, and in the process new ideas spring up, compelling us to confront our assumptions about music, text, and human interpretation.

Louis d'Heudieres