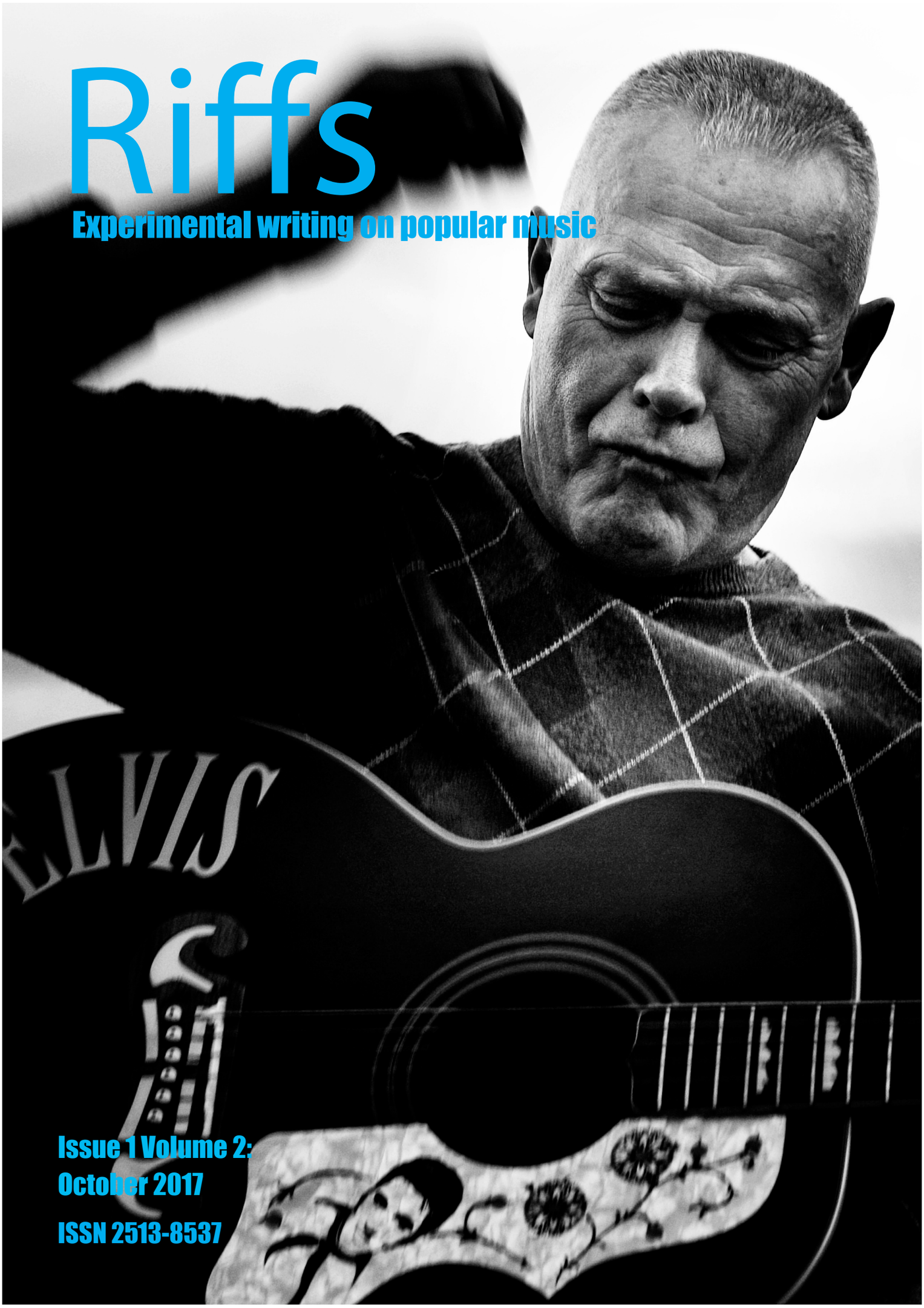
Riffs

Experimental writing on popular music



Issue 1 Volume 2:
October 2017

ISSN 2513-8537

I shot this photograph on a roof in Marylebone. Jesse Hector is one of the great lost figures from the music scene, his band The Hammersmith Gorillas steered glam into punk. You know that 'first punk festival' they had in France, with the Damned etc? Jesse headlined it. Yet at the moment when success was almost guaranteed Jesse withdrew from the limelight, escaping to the safety of his cleaning job, the only constant in his life. It's such a shame, Jesse is still a raw talent, it was a huge privilege to hear him play and photograph the man.

- **Brian David Stevens**

Riffs: Experimental writing on popular music

A song can be about anything

About peace or war, or the sins of industry

Or the discontents of fame, or of obscurity

Or how we first met, on the warmest day

And how I hadn't planned to love someone until you came

Or how we survived on happiness and sleeping on the floor

Or how you used to love me but you don't even know me anymore

- Dan Wilson, 'A Song Can Be About Anything' from *Love Without Fear*

Issue 1 Vol. 2
October 2017

Riffs

Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR),
Birmingham School of Media, Birmingham City University
5 Cardigan Street, Birmingham, B4 7BD, UK

Riffs is published twice a year.

A Call for Papers will be circulated before each issue. All written, audio, and visual contributions should be submitted in accordance with the editorial guidelines (provided at the end of this issue).

Send all contributions to info@riffsjournal.org

Advertising: For further details, please contact info@riffsjournal.org

Riffs: Experimental writing on popular music (online & print) ISSN 2513-8537
Printed and bound by Digital Print Services (DPS), Birmingham City University

Contents

Editorial

Simon Barber
Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research, Birmingham City University

Songs are funny things. Well, actually, humour is just one of the many tools a songwriter might use to convey meaning in a song. As vessels for musical and lyrical ideas, songs can provide listeners with everything from hedonistic escape to life-changing honesty. Songs might report to our ears, but they make their impact felt in our hearts and minds, claiming a central position in popular culture in the process. Sometimes even the most seemingly innocuous tune might contain a devastating line about heartbreak, a crushing critique of modern politics, a perfectly rendered observation on celebrity, or just a few laughs.

It was in this spirit that the words of songwriter Dan Wilson provided a fertile prompt for this issue of Riffs. If you're not familiar with Dan, he is a Grammy-winning singer, songwriter, producer and visual artist who was the frontman and principal songwriter for Semisonic, the Minneapolis band behind hits such as 'Secret Smile' and 'Closing Time'. He went on to become an in-demand co-writer, having worldwide success with songs like 'Not Ready to Make Nice' (Dixie Chicks) and 'Someone Like You' (Adele). The diverse group of artists he has written with and produced includes Adele, Dixie Chicks, John Legend, My Morning Jacket, Carole King, P!nk and Taylor Swift. His fourth solo album, *Re-Covered*, featuring his interpretations of songs he wrote for and with other artists, was released in August 2017.

On his previous solo album, Dan staked the following claim:

A song can be about anything
About peace or war, or the sins of industry
Or the discontents of fame, or of obscurity
Or how we first met, on the warmest day
And how I hadn't planned to love someone until you came
Or how we survived on happiness and sleeping on the floor
Or how you used to love me but you don't even know me anymore

- Dan Wilson, 'A Song Can Be About Anything' from *Love Without Fear*

In marrying these words with a striking melody, Dan not only wrote an affecting song, he also provided us with a productive way to open up discussion about what songs are, what they are for, and what they can be about. Reminded of the potential for songs to address a multiplicity of themes, scholars have responded herein through their own research. This issue of Riffs therefore contains a variety of experimental writing on popular music by Adriano Tedde, Fiamma Mozzetta, Camilla Aisa, and Leon Clowes; multimedia essays including performances of songs and interpretative musical scores by Tom Pierard, Tom Wilson, and Daniel Fardon; and photo essays by Brian Stevens and Katie Rochow. You'll also find a variety of 'bonus materials' on the Riffs website (riffsjournal.org) such as a podcast featuring a conversation inspired by one of the books under review in this issue. What better way to begin, then, than to turn to songwriter Dan Wilson for his memories of writing 'A Song Can Be About Anything' and a description of the 'shambolic and relatively random' process that led to this exchange of ideas.

Words from Dan Wilson

'A Song Can Be About Anything'. I wrote this song during a very fertile songwriting period. It was winter 2009 in Minneapolis. I was writing a song every day or two. My music studio was on the third floor of a very old house with ornate window casings. Snow rested on the high black branches of the oak trees just outside. The cold gray sky was bright and smooth beyond the branches. My notebook slowly filled with lyrics as the unchanging days passed.

Some song lyrics seem to spill out of my subconscious mind, with little effort beyond my desperately writing down the ideas as fast as they come. This was one of those. I think I had a finished demo within an hour of thinking of the first line at the piano. That title is a brave statement and maybe even a brave song title. For awhile, at least during the first verse, the lyrics proceed as though the title were true. These lyrics name possible things that a song might be about, strung together in a long list connected by the word 'or.'

Just to be clear, though, these things listed in the verses are not what the song is about. They're just examples of what other songs might be about. This song, if it's about anything, seems to be about how other songs can be about anything at all - how there are no limits to what other songs might be about.

But by the time the pre-chorus arrives, you might start to feel suspicious. For one thing, the list of things a song can be about starts to include a lot of things about falling in love with someone and feeling like you're always going to be with them. Your suspicions might be completely confirmed when the chorus arrives. Because a song can also be about '…how you used to love me but you don't even know me anymore.'

A friend of mine told me it was very clever of me to write a song about how songs can be about anything, and then to turn around and have that song really be about the one thing that almost all the other songs are about: losing in love.He might have been right, it might have been clever, except that I wrote the thing so quickly that I never even noticed its neat irony. In fact, I hadn't noticed that until my friend pointed it out. So much for cleverness.

Occasionally, I accidentally sail into the dangerous waters of assessing my life and my contributions to music. No one piece of music can ever be enough on its own to counterbalance mortality and time's all-erasing passage. The consolation I keep coming back to in those moments is my effect on other artists. Did some young musician learn some cool chord voicings from my songs? Did my melodies eventually seep into some other songwriters' melodies? Did some peculiarly Dan Wilson-ish lyrical turn of phrase become somebody's go-to move? Did a record of mine lead to someone's performance at a talent show?

So this issue of Riffs is a particularly gratifying event for me - the idea of using my song as a jumping-off point for these various experiments and commentaries is a highly organized version of the shambolic and relatively random method of 'sending songs out into the ether and seeing what comes back.'

I'm proud to be part of the conversation.

Dan Wilson

Dropping Pebbles

Brian David Stevens

A song can be about anything, and a single song can be about (can mean) many different things to many different people. They are little bits of magic in that respect. They travel in infinite possible directions, to innumerable locations, whether a song itself has been heard by millions, or else more modestly received. Yet songs almost always originate from a single source - a person, or a small group of people. These are the people who drop the pebble into the lake. Sometimes they hang around to watch the ripples, and sometimes they don't. In this photo essay, and in the accompanying notes describing 'how we first met, on the warmest day', you can decide for yourself whether thoughts of 'peace or war, or the sins of industry, or the discontents of fame, or of obscurity' can be discerned. If you don't know some of the songs these people have lobbed into the lake, maybe you will choose to seek them out, and perhaps enable the songs to travel just a little further from the source. That's what they do.

Billy Childish

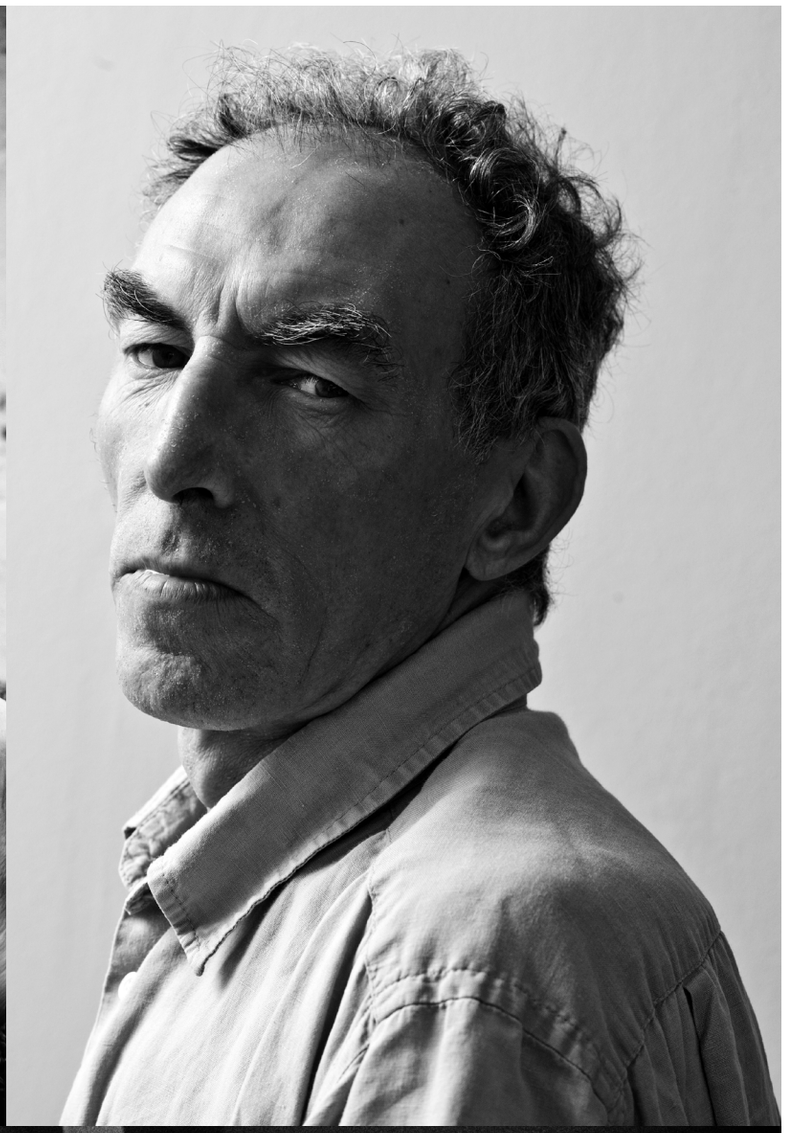
I spent a great day with Billy at his home in Chatham, Kent. He was the perfect host. It was one of those occasions when you feel you are in the company of a true polymath, albeit a dyslexic one with a fondness for garage bands and plastic Italian guitars.

Vic Goddard

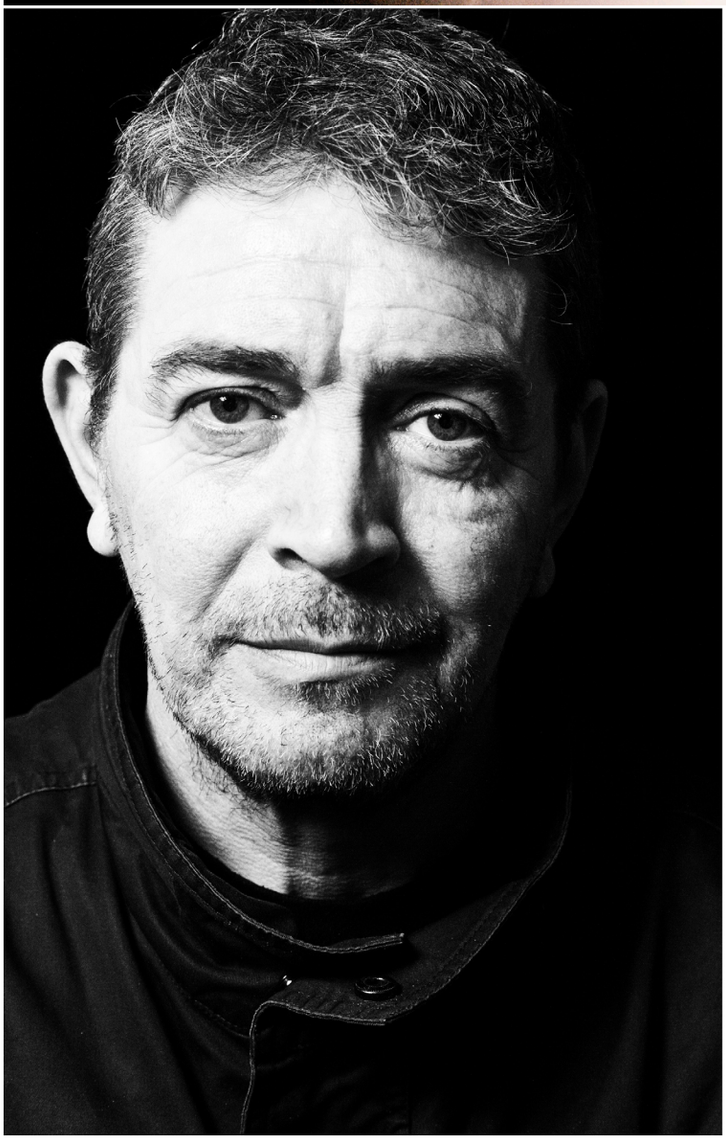
Vic's band The Subway Sect out punked everybody by donning grey v-necked jumpers from Marks and Spencer rather than cheesecloth, bondage shirts and swastikas from McClaren's 'Sex'. A very British songwriter and probably the country's most famous postman.

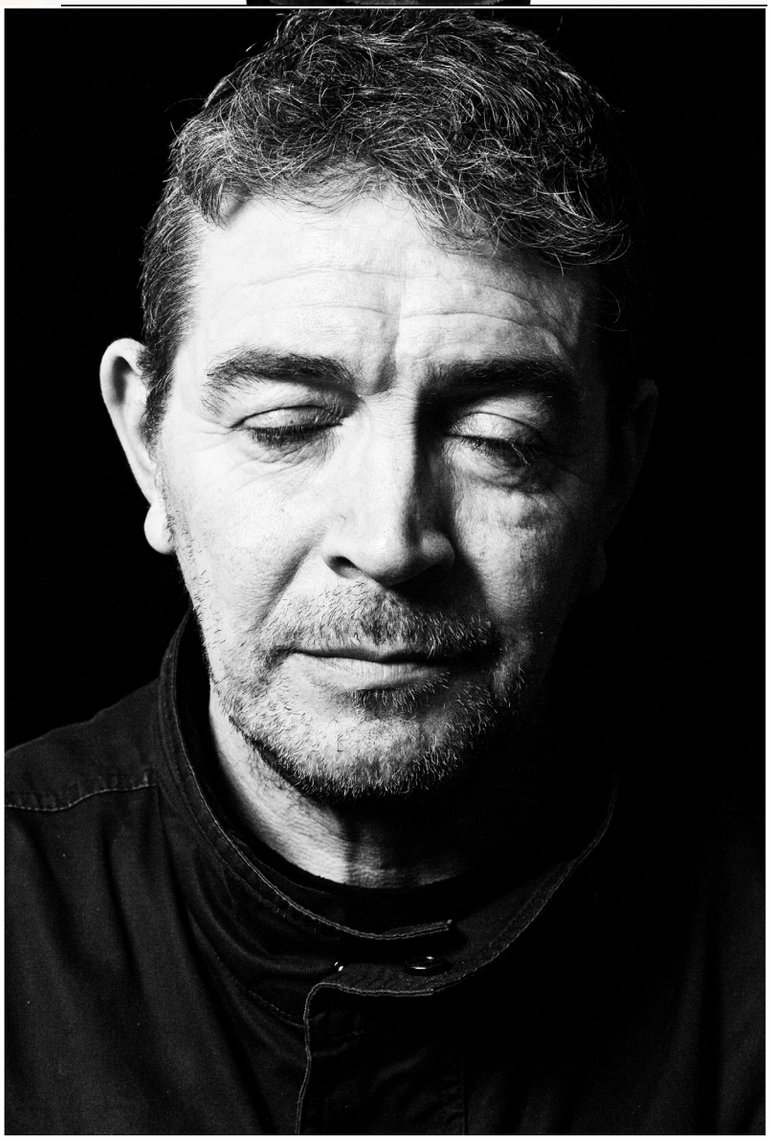
Mark Wood

Mark Wood sings in the band Readers Wifes (the misspelling a tribute to Slade). He also DJ's at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern at a night called Duckie. He is the most popular man in London.




NO FUTURE





Jim Reid

The singer of the Jesus and Mary Chain. I wanted these to look very American, hot, sun-drenched, shot in the desert at Joshua Tree, Gram Parson's ghost in the background, Easy Riding.... We didn't have the budget so we shot it on a fire escape by the bins at the rear of a cinema in Islington.

Lawrence

Enough has been written about 'mad' Lawrence, a true English eccentric, but the image of Lawrence should not overshadow his music. If you don't know his old band Felt go look them up. Now. 'Primitive Painters' is a good place to start.

Michael Head

Once I had a mixtape which somebody had made for me that was pretty much stuck in the tape player of the car. Long since separated from the hand written inlay card I never knew who the last track was by, which was annoying as it became a favourite. About 7 years later at a party someone put HMS Fable by Shack on and there it was…. Thanks Michael.

Jeff Tweedy

One of those ten minute hotel shoots, I like it though, it's quiet and still, it's thoughtful. The magazine didn't use it.

The Jesus and Mary Chain

When I was 17 I did a pencil drawing of the Jesus and Mary Chain for my art A level. When I was older I did their press pictures. Always been a huge fan.

Memory Band (Stephen Cracknell)

The Memory Band is wonderful, a musical map needing to be explored and discovered. I love working with Stephen, it's a rare joy.

Brian David Stevens is a photographer based in London. He has work in The National Portrait Gallery and in the National Museums Of Scotland. Brian's work has been published worldwide. His favourite colour is gold.
http://www.briandavidstevens.com

Mimesis (1, 2 & 3)

Tom Pierard

This performance video and accompanying reference score are the result of reflexively taking the prompt for this issue of Riffs as the premise for a musical work, making a percussive deconstruction of song form through its rhythmic properties rather than from its lyrics. Instead of exploring and extrapolating the lyrical *intent* of the text, this work examines its rhythmic properties as spoken text and through the use of various digital production techniques.

The drumset performed in Parts 1 & 2 is a single take, as an *improvised* drumset. This allowed me to provide structure where necessary (e.g. playing consistent time at 04:15), whilst being as expressive as possible, for most of the work reacting to the vocal parts rather than functioning as a more congruent element. I recorded four drum takes of the whole work – the recording used in the final version is of the very last take.

The first section explores a mimetic relationship between innate rhythms occurring in certain lines of the poem and improvised drumset, and uses performance methods such as melodic imitation and metric superimposition. The audio was all recorded in the same session; first all vocal elements were recorded, then I sliced the samples and rearranged them using Ableton Live. Part 1 is the most dynamic of the three in that the instrumentation is sparse, and I tried to explore a broad spectrum of levels of intensity by utilizing specific parts of the text and exploring the different frequencies available on the drumset e.g. cymbal washes and (at times) frenetic kick drum parts.

The second Part explores creating rhythmic and harmonic foundation by producing more straightforward cohesion between the text and other instrumentation. It has two clear sections—distinguished by two main chord sequences—with the second being perhaps the climax of the whole work. Synths are introduced in this Part to provide further harmonic support and are side-chained to a deactivated kick drum to produce a ‘swelling’ effect. This was intended not only as a means of creating space in the overall frequency range, but also to simulate a sense of breathing intended to engage the listener through subconscious familiarity.

Watch here:

The third Part incorporates the isolated and digitally-altered inflections, formants and non-melodic elements of the spoken text to create a rhythmic foundation through the use of the Sampler midi tool in Ableton Live. Using this method I effectively switched the roles of the spoken text and the accompanying instrumentation. The method by which the percussion part is produced is introduced to the listener at 9:30, where the line "About peace or war" is deconstructed to produce the kick drum element of the percussion part (the hard 'P' in the word peace). This Part also serves as an outro of sorts; the progression of the work goes from being entirely acoustic sounding in nature (albeit looped in the vocal part) in the first part, and progresses through incorporation of more consistent meter and synthesized harmony in Part 2 before closing with what can be perceived as synthesizing process of sorts applied to the spoken text, rendering it largely unrecognizable as the source.

The high number of production techniques employed throughout this work means that using traditional notation alone as a visual reference was prohibitive, hence my developing this method. For a graphic score, this system is considerably less abstract than that employed by other composers, such as Cardew for his *Treatise* or that of Wehinger's listening score for Ligeti's *Artikulation.* Some premises are similar; this score is intended as an aide or reference while listening as opposed to a performance score (this is where the aforementioned works diverge) while incorporating colour differentiation as a means of ascertaining instrumental type and timbre at a glance.

Not every individual part is notated in this score. This is because I considered some elements to be textural, and as such didn't require it; I wanted to represent what I consider to be the core thematic material; adding less fundamental parts to the notation would make the score over-complicated and convoluted.

I have chosen to omit the dynamic symbols for each section. This is due to the mixing, which is consistent with the practice applied to modern popular music. That is, the track is mixed to a standard post-mastering volume (around 0dB) and so, when in the intended acousmatic setting, the listener wouldn't experience drastic dynamic variance. Rather than depicting dynamic range, I have instead chosen to portray the varying levels of dynamic *intensity*, which I define as variations in timbre and, at times, the number of instruments playing or being added. The symbol for this can be seen in the table Symbol key.

Guide to using the reference score

Rather than using bar numbers and tempi as a system of reference, this score is centred around a black horizontal timeline. This is largely due to the high number of looped parts. Note that the timeline isn't necessarily to scale; its function is primarily to indicate when sections begin and end as well as the exact point in the track when each individual part begins and ends. Key vocal parts appear above the timeline and corresponding instrumentation below, therefore the timeline can appear at differing vertical points – this is the case for each track. It should also be noted that production methods which affect the entire track are marked as per their corresponding symbol just above the timeline. Markers along the timeline indicate significant entry points.

Each individual part is represented by a coloured bar. The part is notated directly beneath the bar, and the coloured bar serves not only to differentiate between instruments, but to indicate the duration each part is played along the timeline. If a part is looped (as per the symbol) it will be repeated until the corresponding coloured line ends along the timeline. If the coloured line stops and then begins again on the same page or a later one, the same looped pattern as before will be repeated unless indicated by new notation directly underneath. When a notated section is vertically 'stacked' (i.e. the top vocal section in Section 2) it represents a continuation in the parts rather than implying that they are being played simultaneously.

Rather than giving tempi I have written the beats per minute (bpm) at 00:00 just above the timeline. This remains as the global tempo throughout the track, and if there are changes in meter, or polyrhythmic passages, these are represented within the individual parts.

SYMBOL KEY

A Song can be about anything

About peace or war, or the sins of industry

Or the discontents of fame, or of obscurity

Or how we first met, on the warmest day

And how I hadn't planned to love someone until you came

Or how we survived on happiness and sleeping on the floor

Or how you used to love me, but you don't even know me anymore

Drumset Articulation

Rhythmic Mimesis

Melodic Mimesis

Metric Super-imposition

Building tension

Releasing Tension

Creating Background texture

Implying Consistent Meter

Low-pass filter

High-pass filter

Sliced audio

Digitally distorted audio

Delay effect

Part is duplicated

Effect continues

Sidechained audio

Intensify
(volume/timbre/rev cymbal)

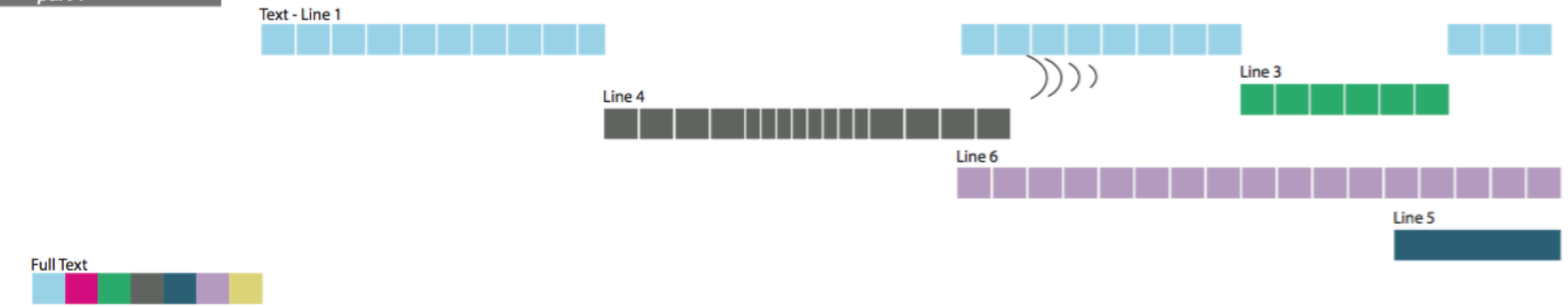
De-intensify

Sample is digitally manipulated
to produce alternate pitch

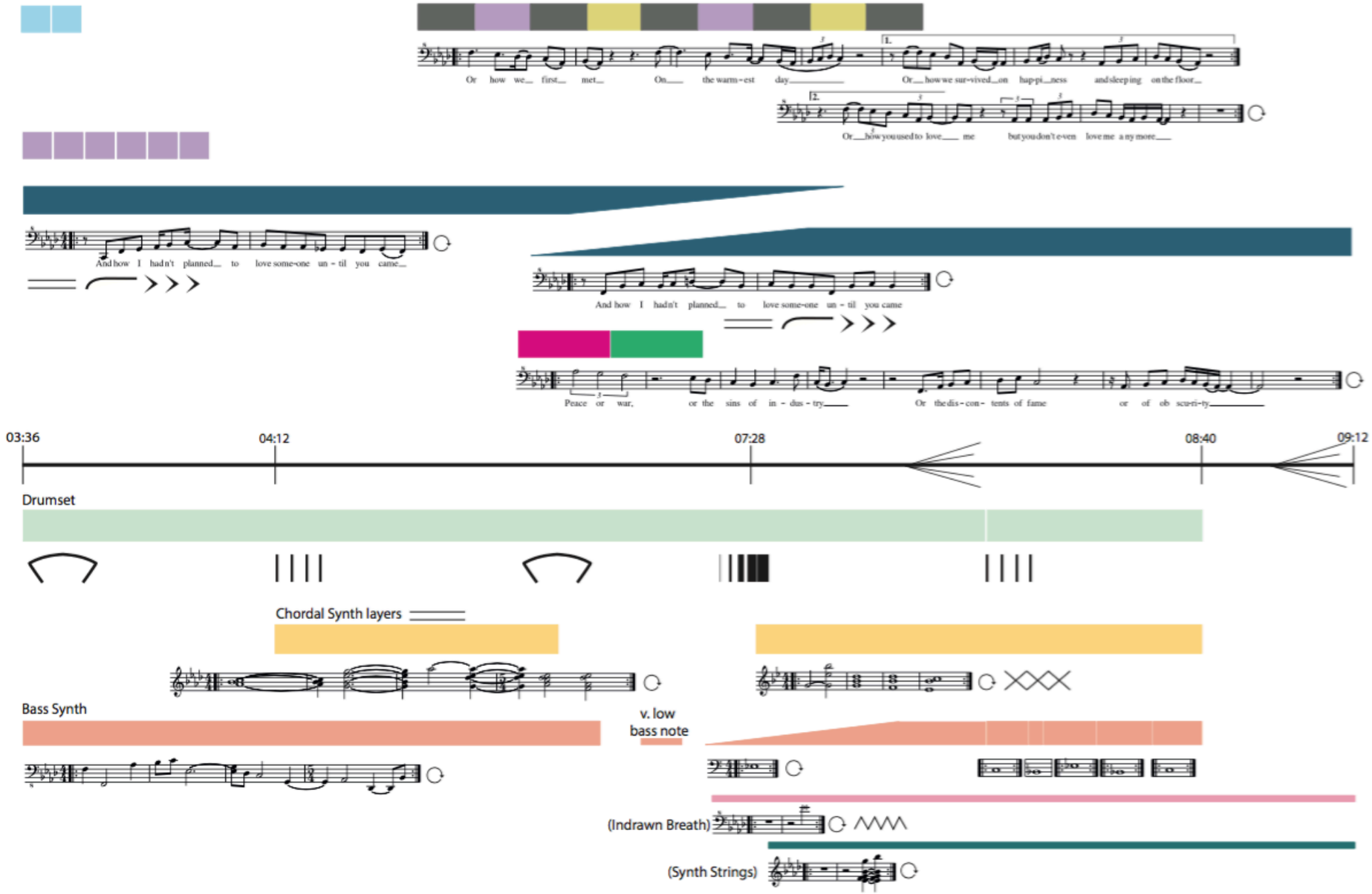
Frequency oscillator is applied

Part is looped

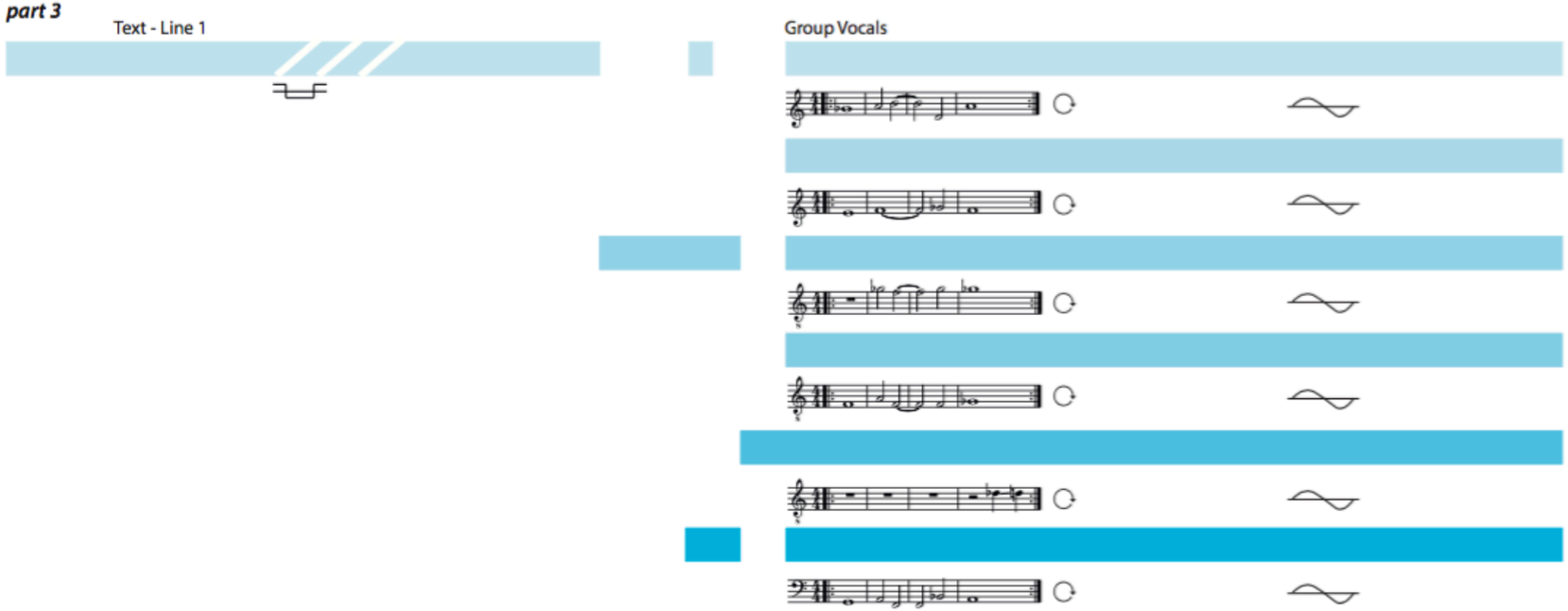
Mimesis
part 1

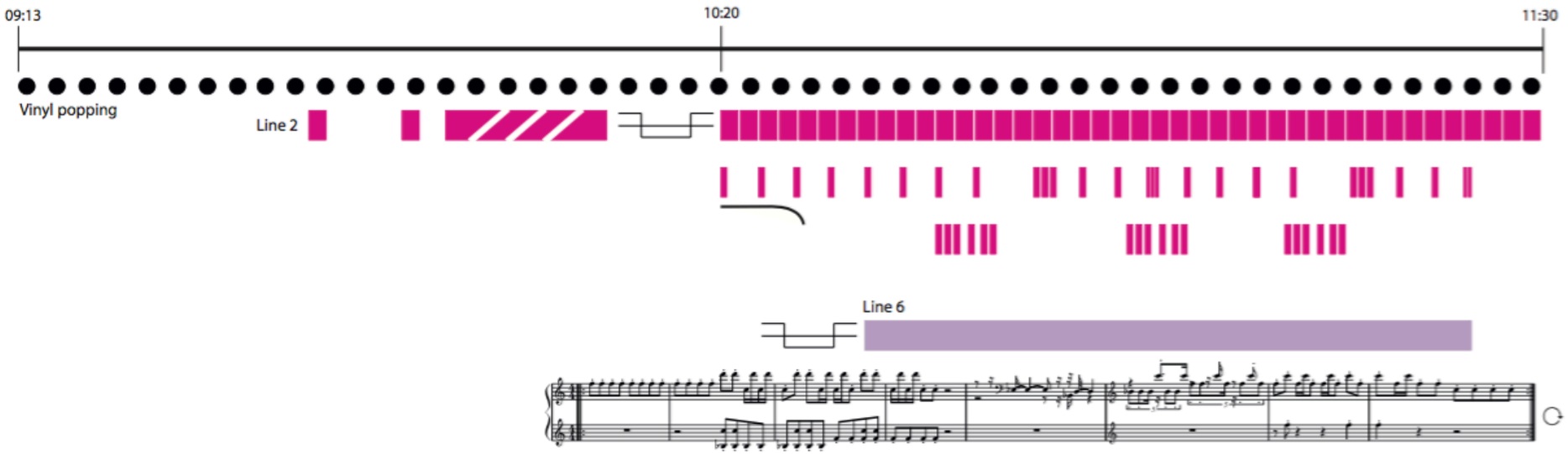


Mimesis
part 2



Mimesis
part 3





Tom Pierard is a performer, producer and educator currently living in Hawkes Bay, New Zealand. After completing a degree in jazz performance (drumset) at Massey University, Wellington in 2005, Tom was appointed to the ensemble Strike Percussion, with which he toured extensively for the next five years including performances at the Taiwanese International Percussion Convention. Tom moved to Hawkes Bay in 2011 to take the role of Head of Music Studies at the Eastern Institute of Technology and has developed programmes as well as numerous online teaching resources, including the website 'The Modern Beat' which hosts a number of comprehensive video and written courses and practice tools for drumset players. As a drumset player and percussionist he can be heard on recordings such as Rhian Sheehan's *'Standing in Silence' (2009)*, Strike Percussion's *'Sketches' (2009*), The Family Cactus' *'Spirit Lights' (2011)* and many more. As a solo artist Tom has produced four EPs and one full-length album *(The Devil You Know, 2013)* under the alias Kingfischer. He completed a Master of Music in contemporary composition through the University of Auckland in 2016, focusing on atypical rhythmic stress and transfigured audio in contemporary popular music.

About About: A songwriter's perspective

Tom Wilson

I've always liked musical magpies. Let's look at some nests. Up here: a pop song woven from discarded string quartet feathers. Down there: a jazz suite embellished with coins from a barrel organ. These were what I collected and alphabetised as a younger man, the B of the first example (Beatles, The) placing it high above the R of the second (Riessler, Michael). But this was an organisational tool, not a hierarchy: I loved both.

It's hard to fit that kind of prose in a pop song, which is why I'm using it here. I'm a songwriter, and writing something untethered by verse/chorus/bridge feels wonderfully liberating. To take advantage, I'm going to try and make words do some things they don't do in my songs. Nowadays, that includes telling a story. But it didn't always.

Back when I was alphabetising those nests, wanting to tell a story in song felt perfectly natural. After all, my magpie role models mixed up *their* enthusiasms — that's what made their work so exuberant and idiosyncratic. So, I reasoned, why shouldn't I blend my passions for music and narrative? While my ears were full of Beatles and Riessler, my head was full of plot-twists, taken from literature (Peter Carey's Oscar and Lucinda), cinema (Memento) and TV drama (Life on Mars).

Let's give this story a date. The Life on Mars reference helps: this was 2006-2007. I was living in Bristol, and busy at work on an album called "Animation", which I hoped would combine vivid musical invention with strong narrative scenarios. In those days, there were two of me — a composer and a lyricist — and they preferred to work in shifts. The composer was the one who answered whenever I was asked "what kind of music do you write?", to which the pithiest response was "experimental pop". My music definitely sprung from the pop tradition: I loved melody, my songs were divided up into clearly defined sections, and most were under three minutes long. At the same time, a growing enthusiasm for the wide range of experimental music played on BBC Radio 3's Late Junction and Mixing It, had given me a thirst for levels of harmonic and rhythmic unpredictability not normally associated with pop.

During the composer shifts (the composer always went first), my goal was clearly-defined if not exactly simple: I was trying to create music that was both accessible and constantly surprising. This entailed writing melodies on guitar or keyboard, building them up into full arrangements on the software programme Cakewalk (I used dummy lyrics for the vocal lines), and then reworking them time and time again, chiseling away until it felt like there wasn't a single extraneous note, chord or beat.

This took a long time, but the lyricist shift was much harder. The challenge was twofold. Firstly, the songs I was trying to fill with words were musically complex, often containing verses and choruses whose lengths varied with each restatement. Secondly, I was trying to fill them with beginnings, middles and ends, and I had very little time to play with. A good example would be one of the longest songs on the album, "Everything Fades", clocking in at just over 2 minutes:
https://soundcloud.com/tomwilsoncomposer/everything-fades/s-XRlJ1

As a boy Bill had no chums
Found them hard to make
Till the day he made me up
So he'd have a mate
And that
Felt great
Cause he did it with passion
Though he was shy
Boy he sure could imagine
Every day we spent outside
Playing in the sun
Times were bliss for Bill and me
But although my
Life had just
Begun
It was soon to get threatened
Everything fades
Everything fades
He moved schools and there he made new friends
He never acknowledged me in front
Of them

So
I guess
I'll go
I'm the bit of his brain that's
Destined to die
As kids grow up like trained rats

Bill
Look out
They may be your
Friends for today but
Everything fades
Everything fades

Since I wrote those lyrics on a computer that died long ago, I have no record of how many drafts it took, but my memory is of a cascade of micro-managed tweaks, with each word being forced to justify its presence several times a day. Essentially, I picked up the editors' knife I'd already used on the music, and plunged it into the lyrics. A few stray musical considerations came loose and fell into the resulting words — the repetition of the phrase "everything fades", for example, clarified the form by helping the listener hear that the music was also being repeated — but overall I was now thinking not of music but something entirely different: narrative.

Stories work by taking you on a journey. Occasionally it's a round trip, but for the most part, the goal is to engage you in the process of leading you far from where you started — characters undergo a series of changes, either internal or external, and you accompany them along the way. If the plot is gripping enough, you end up running, rushing ahead in a bid to find out what happens next.

What would a similar metaphor for the pop song look like? A person steps out of their house and goes to the shops. They return home. They go to the shops again. They take a walk in the park. They go to the shops again. Not a great story, but that's the classic pop song structure— verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, chorus — and its musical logic is impeccable. The repetition of the sections helps reinforce their character, allowing us to become attached to particular musical hooks: conversely, the practice of putting contrasting sections side by side prevents any one hook from becoming monotonous.

This sets pop's story apart from musical forms that operate more like traditional narrative. The classical sonata, for example, takes a few small musical ideas and develops them over the course of a piece, changing their character in the process. Whereas the pop song tends to leave its musical ideas intact, sustaining interest through contrast rather than evolution, and proceeding through jump cuts.

In 2016, nearly ten years on from our previous story, I was part way through a PhD in Composition at Royal Holloway, for which the largest element in my portfolio was a full-length album of songs. Musically, I was building on the synthesis of pop and experimentation that occupied me during "Animation". Lyrically, however, I had started to change my approach, resulting in songs like this one:
https://soundcloud.com/tomwilsoncomposer/tom-oc-wilson-the-wagon/s-bPLVC

Another stick to light
Sadly I'm not paid to push them
But if they call I'll bite
I don't need to quit I just need to do less of it
Though I'm having second thoughts

Since you left the scene
My life's been pretty lean
The wagon doesn't seem untenable
Now that you're on board

Just do the best you can
Bad bad times are bound to come that weren't part of the plan
Tearful nights outside friends with cigarettes in their hands
Passing them around like joints

Since you left the scene
My life's been pretty lean
The wagon doesn't seem so dreadful
Now that you're on board but
Even if I don't get on I
Hope you plan to stay the course

Once in a while you'll feel a phantom forming (April)
In between your fingertips
And then
Pick up a pen
Or failing that a toothpick (your make believe)
You might even put the end to your lips
Now and then
Fire without a flame

No need to fret
That's how it works
Some people need a patch
Some people need a goal
You need a tube to fill the U
Something to roll
Turkeying can take a toll
Cutting out at once
Trying to play the big man big man
Hours spent in front of the mirror
Trying not to hear
Buddy in your ear
Telling you to crack
Everybody's coming to see
The wagon as it passes
Be there and I'll give it a wave
And maybe then a smile to wish you well

Once in a while (April)
You'll feel a phantom forming
In between your fingertips
And then
Pick up a pen (reach for the pack)
Or failing that a toothpick (your make believe)
You might even put the end
To your lips
Now and then
Even though
It's not the same as smoke
Monday
Tuesday
Sing songs of struggle

What is this song about? The subject matter is wispy and diffuse, formed of thematic atoms that never fully coalesce. The words are addressed to someone trying to give up smoking, but the relationship between the addresser and addressee is never made specific, there are no named names, and the protagonist reveals very little about their own situation (although we can deduce from phrases such as "I don't need to quit" that they are, themselves, a smoker). If there's a story being told here, it's riddled with holes.

Quite the contrast to "Everything Fades". Back when I wrote *that* song, I had very little confidence in my aesthetic mastery of language, and as a result, I felt every song had to have a plotline, and a striking one at that: the story had to stand in for my ability to tell the story. This led me to some fairly unusual subject matter, such as the protagonist of "Everything Fades", an imaginary friend whose creator no longer believes in him. The lyrics outline the situation in utterly unambiguous terms, and there is a clear narrative trajectory – boy makes up boy, boy enjoys hanging out with boy, boy grows up, boy no longer believes in boy. A much clearer synopsis than the one for "The Wagon", a song in which we learn that: a) someone is trying to give up smoking b) the protagonist has noticed this fact.

What prompted the stray? Well, firstly, I became dissatisfied with how, in the kinds of songs I wrote for "Animation", the emotional oomph was always waiting on a plot twist. A partial list of spoilers would include: in "When She's Around" the protagonist has fallen for his friend's girlfriend; in "Marie" a charity shop worker is convicted of theft; and in "The Name Game" two parents incorrectly guess the sex of their child. Now you know that, perhaps you can listen to these songs without waiting for the big reveal, and that is precisely the point. In a novel, film or radio play, narrative expectation can be tremendously exciting, carrying the reader/watcher/listener along on a wave of needing to know. In a pop song, that isn't necessarily what you want, since, as mentioned before, its musical ideas aren't steps in a journey – they're ends in themselves alternated with other ends in themselves, so as to prevent any one end outstaying its welcome. The result is an exhilarating sense of being permanently suspended between the familiar and the unfamiliar: not only is the verse/chorus song form itself a constant tug of war between repetition and contrast, but the best examples of it are those whose melodies "lead the ear in a path which is both *pleasant* and to some degree *unexpected*." (Webb, 1998). This is the quality I look for in other people's songs, and as long ago as "Animation", I was trying to transmit this quality to others.

Unfortunately, the lyricist in me wanted to get in on the act, and insisted that the lyrics should be as surprising as the music. Of course, there's a time and place for unusual subject matter, and it is true that with so many pop songs being about the same few things — finding or losing love, feeling misunderstood — the occasional surprise can be refreshing. But it can also be exclusionary: in a strict sense, nobody but an imaginary friend could listen to "Everything Fades" and feel it is about them.

How and why that matters depends on how and why you listen to songs. Ian MacDonald's theory of "tripartite" audiences (MacDonald, 2003) suggests that there are three main reasons people choose to engage with pop music[1] — for the music, for the lyrics, or for lifestyle connotations — and that most people have a bias towards one over the others. Personally speaking, I feel I have a strong "music" bias, which means that I don't listen to songs hoping to hear something about my life, at least not in a descriptive sense. Rather, I engage with music because it *heightens* my life, and this process is anything but abstract – if you're a different kind of listener, you'll have to take my word for it when I say that the right note, at the right time, can be exquisitely moving.

1 Listening to music isn't always a conscious choice of course, and passive listening — whether in elevators, standing next to headphones or sitting in front of Youtube ads — accounts for a huge proportion of most people's listening time. In these instances, few people engage with what they are hearing as closely as they would have if they had *chosen* to hear it. The points I make in this article about listening habits are primarily concerned with voluntary, as opposed to passive, listening.

Yet as MacDonald acknowledges, having a music bias needn't entail being indifferent to words, and again, I can confirm this from personal experience. A beautifully crafted lyric helps me trust the intensity of feeling that the music brings out in me, by confirming that someone else (the lyricist) experiences things as strongly as I do. They don't need to be the same things: they just need to be at home in a pop song. I'm listening to The Rolling Stones. The singer is in love with Ruby Tuesday,[2] I'm in love with someone else, fine — as a seasoned pop fan I'm used to hearing love songs about people I've never met, so I know how to make being in love with Ruby Tuesday feel like the I'm-seeing-her-tomorrow butterflies that make me so receptive to the song's melody. But when the subject matter is patently unusual, it can actually *undermine* the music by snapping you out of it and leaving you wondering why the songwriter has chosen to write a song about *that,* rather than just sticking to what pop songs are about. With a bit of determination, you *could* take some transferable emotions from the lyrics to "Everything Fades" — the sense of abandonment for example — and project these onto your own feelings, so as to intensify the sensations produced by the music. Indeed, projection is a crucial part of most successful interactions with pop lyrics, since, for example, one cannot really see the world through Keith Richards' eyes unless one is Keith Richards. But the imaginative 3leaps required to do this with "Everything Fades" go far beyond what is usually required of a pop listener, since the song's sense of abandonment would need shearing of both a school setting and a non-existent narrator before it could be let into the paddock of adult experience.[3]

Curiously, I find that when the lyrics are more abstract, there isn't this problem of adjustment. The words to Dutch Uncles' "I Should Have Read", for example, are so opaque that I'm happy to let them sit in the corner doing their thing while I concentrate on the sublime music.[4] It's only when a song's subject matter is *easy to discern* — and defiantly un-pop-song-like — that it gets in the way of the listening.

So in 2016 I decided to wean myself off singing stories. My patch, in songs like "The Wagon", was to write responses to a prompt — in this case, a friend's cold turkey — and to try and make the resulting words function as sound, emphasising the phrasing of the melody through the perfect ordering of consonants and vowels. Disappointingly, this didn't actually save me time, since I simply switched from one line of intense scrutiny (is the story clear?) to another (does it scan?). But at least the resulting lyrics sang better – phrases like "sadly I'm not paid to push them" and "I don't need to quit I just need to do less of it" sound much more sprightly to me than "times were bliss for Bill and me".[5]

And perhaps even more importantly, unlike "Everything Fades", "The Wagon" doesn't announce its subject matter in chronologically ordered neon. If you miss any of the words in "Everything Fades", you've missed some of the story, and you might be tempted to stop paying attention to the music to avoid that happening. Whereas in "The Wagon", you can get on or off the lyrics at any point. There's no Ruby Tuesday to fall in

2 It is a mark of how good Mick Jagger's vocal performance on this song is that many people — myself included — have assumed that the sentiments expressed in the song are his, when in fact the lyrics were written by Keith Richards.

3 Of course, one other projection strategy for a song like "Everything Fades" would be to use it as a vehicle for remembering your own school days. Yet even if you had an imaginary friend as a child, your memories of that time would be those of the imaginer, not the imagined. Unless your imaginative faculties have since grown to encompass radically empathetic flights of fancy, you're stuck in the role of Bill, who, as an abandoner, offers little solace to the abandoned.

4 This is not to minimise the contribution of Dutch Uncles' lyricist (and vocalist) Duncan Wallis. His words always *sound* fantastic, and he has a real knack for images that, while never showing their subject-matter hand, invest the music with big emotional stakes. Whether or not his "like a hole is in my head, time is in my head" is the same as yours or mine, his sensitivity to language is part of what makes songs like "I Should Have Read" so affecting.

5 A songwriter friend of mine once correctly pointed out that the letter S takes longer to sing when placed at the end of a word, and that if not properly managed this can impede the flow of a line.

love with, but there are some thematic handholds, broad references to ideas about addiction, and friendship.[6] Depending on your own situation, these resonances might help you bed down into the mood of the music via emotional muscle memory — as with their nearest sensory equivalent, smell, pop songs have the power to re-ignite sensations buried too deeply to register as lost. That, or you might experience the lyrics as *part* of the music, words tickling your ears like popping candy. Is this song about you? Perhaps, but that's not a prerequisite for engaging with it: in fact, for now, let's leave about out of it.

References

MacDonald, Ian, *The People's Music* (London: Pimlico, 2003).
Webb, Jimmy, *Tunesmith: Inside the Art of Songwriting* (New York: Hyperion,1998).

Websites

https://misfitcity.org/2017/01/03/january-2017-upcoming-london-gigs-society-of-imaginary-friends-soiree-with-swifty-lazarre-millie-george-i-am-her-cian-binchy-nighmar-ascouski-6th-tom-o-c-wilson-and-bee/.

Discography

The Beatles, "Eleanor Rigby" from *Revolver* (Parlophone,1966)
Dutch Uncles, "I Should Have Read" from *O Shudder* (Memphis Industries, 2015).
Freeze Puppy, *Animation* (Pickled Egg Records, 2009).
Riessler, Michael, *Momentum Mobile* (Enja,1994).
The Rolling Stones, "Ruby Tuesday" from *Let's Spend The Night Together/Ruby Tuesday* (Decca, 1967).
Tom O.C Wilson, "The Wagon" from *Tell A Friend* (Pickled Egg Records, forthcoming).

Tom Wilson is a songwriter, composer and performer. Currently in the final stages of a PhD in Composition at Royal Holloway, University of London, his music combines the core aesthetic values of pop songwriting with compositional techniques not normally associated with pop music. He has released two albums on the independent record label Pickled Egg Records, and has had his music featured on BBC Radio 3 and BBC 6 Music. He leads his own ensemble, and recent live highlights include a headline set at London's Café Oto, a BBC Radio 3 concert at the Cube Microplex, Bristol, and the bi-annual concert series "Pop Composition" at the Windmill, Brixton. His work has won praise from, among others, Michael Finnissy, Devendra Banhart and Peter Brewis of Field Music.

http://www.tomocwilson.co.uk

6 Dann Chinn, writing in the blog Misfit City, has said that "The Wagon" is "ostensibly about quitting cigarettes; but as the lines and distractions unfold, it could as much be about quitting a person, or jabbing around the edges of artistic compulsion in search of the route to an aim." This hopefully illustrates the fact that the song is neither entirely abstract nor bound to a single subject.

Unbroken Chains: The fascination of psychedelia with bicycles and the long strange trips that ensued

Camila Asia

On August 26, 1966 Donovan released his third album, named after his July hit single "Sunshine Superman", triggering a blessed blend of singer-songwriter folk and psychedelic rock.

The Scottish artist was back from a successful tour in the USA - a professional and personal milestone. He had fallen in love with the sounds of the West Coast bands, with the philosophy of San Franciscan psychedelia, and he had made special friends. One of them was Cass Elliot, the Mama Cass of The Mamas & The Papas fame, who had introduced him to the wonders of Californian stoned adventures. Mama Cass is the addressee of *Sunshine Superman*'s ninth track, "The Fat Angel", a delighted and grateful celebration of psychedelic experiences. The Fat Angel flies high gently handing out happiness and magic - as Donovan sings, "he'll be so kind in consenting to blow your mind". It is interesting to notice how, while the lysergic neophyte understandably turns to an airplane, to "Translove Airways", to get *there* on time - "there" being the higher state of mind -, the Fat Angel's ride of choice is that of a silver bicycle: "he'll ride away on his silver bike".

The same bicycle has already appeared in *Sunshine Superman*; it has been mentioned on track n. 4, "Ferris Wheel", again as a vehicle for amusing trips: "a silver bicycle you shall ride, to bathe your mind in the quiet tide". "Fat Angel" makes the wink towards psychedelia even more patent when the "Translove Airways" of the refrain undergoes a rock transformation, as Donovan begins to sing "fly Jefferson Airplane, get you there on time". This praiseful mention was definitely appreciated by the San Franciscan band, so much that the song became a staple of their live performances. An inspired rendition of it was captured live at the Fillmore East in late November 1968 and included in the Airplane's first live album *Bless Its Pointed Little Head*, released in February 1969. But the good fortune of bicycles in psychedelic rock was not done with Donovan's imaginative lyrics. A way more famous bicycle was about to capture the attention of rock enthusiasts across the globe.

London-based band Tomorrow (formerly The In-Crowd) released their first and most successful single under their new name in May 1967. "My White Bicycle" is one of the most beloved obscure classics from the psychedelic era, strengthened by spacey sounds, a hypnotic refrain ("my white bicycle") that takes off after blurry verses, and beguiling guitar licks inspired by some of the band's favorites, like the ubiquitous Ravi Shankar. The bicycle here is a sort of safe haven, a perspective of bliss in the midst of meteorological and social indispositions. The druggy semblance of the lyrics seems to be a coincidence though, an outpouring of such atmospheric music: the actual subject of the song was the Provos, an anarchic movement from Holland that Tomorrow's friend Nigel Weymouth had met in Amsterdam and that had quite a lot in common with coetaneous hippies. Members of the Provos would promote their "everything should be free" belief by leaving free means of transport - bicycles, of course - around the city. Nevertheless, the trippy symbolism of the white bicycle is too enticing to be forgotten. "It was, on the other hand, a pretty druggy kind of song. […] This was definitely a record that challenged the establishment to ride the white bicycle" guitarist Steve Howe would tell music critic Jim DeRogatis. Tomorrow, beloved resident band at the UFO Club, the temple of psychedelic music in Swinging London, recorded "My White Bicycle" at Abbey Road Studios, while the Beatles were working on *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club*.

But the Beatles were not the only illustrious neighbors at Abbey Road, as another seminal album was being recorded in the same period. It was the debut LP for Pink Floyd - Tomorrow's predecessors at the UFO

Club. The physical proximity resulted in a musical one as well. It becomes evident when comparing *Sgt. Pepper's* to *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*: the closing track of Pink Floyd's record, in particular, reveals a strong Beatlesesque flavour. It is an idiosyncratic Syd Barrett composition entitled "Bike"*;* Barrett promises his unidentified lover all sorts of extravagant gifts: a cloak, a mouse, even a clan of gingerbread men, before getting lost into a "room full of musical tunes" that the band depicts through an opulence of sound effects. But the very first gift Barrett promises his lover, the one that opens and molds the song, is a bicycle. "I've got a bike, you can ride it if you like. It's got a basket, a bell that rings and things to make it look good. I'd give it to you if I could, but I borrowed it", he sings. Once again, two wheels can signify a whole, rollicking and attractive, world. In Barrett's composition, as in other songs of the era, they work as a fascinating odd key to a place of marvels that rock music - with its rooms "full of musical tunes", as "Bike" depicts - seems particularly eager to epitomize. In just three-four years, covering the brief yet fruitful psychedelic era, bicycles become a recurrent presence in rock songs: a handful of born pioneers, such as Donovan, or Tomorrow, or Pink Floyd, paves the way; many talented colleagues, sometimes illustrious, sometimes forgotten, nod enthusiastically.

American bicycles were getting higher and higher as well: in 1967 Colorado band The Higher Elevation, formerly known as The Monocles, released their single "The Diamond Mine"; the b-side was an effervescent psychedelic tune called "Crazy Bicycle". The lyrics are vivid and colorful, they celebrate imagination through a series of inventive and often synesthetic images. But every verse goes back to the crazy bicycle of the title, described flying on the ground over an increasing frenzy. Also in 1967 a song called "Bicycle" was included on Wisconsin band The Baroques' self-titled (and only) LP, a regional success. Once again, the hypnotic insistence on the word "bicycle" is the key element for the psychedelic flavour of the song.

Back in the UK, Kippington Lodge released "Lady on a Bicycle" on October 26, 1967 as b-side to their single "Shy Boy". What seems like a standard mid-Sixties love song at first - featuring memories of teenage love, longing for a lost girlfriend - turns out to be a quite mysterious piece of music. The girlfriend must actually be older than the narrator: she takes him to school and she makes the young boy feel cool and envied by everybody around him. She is always seen on her bicycle and what is most interesting about the song is that the true subject of the narrator's longing seems to be the bicycle itself. He wants the bicycle, "won't you please bring back your bicycle" he sings to his former lover whom he currently does not know anything about. He supposes she has moved on and moved away, remarking "it's my suspicion she had to get married and settle down". He almost suggests that settling down implied getting rid of the bicycle. And after the second and third refrain he loses himself in a reminiscent sigh that sounds like a mental chase for past delights.

The fascination of psychedelic rock with bicycles was not limited to song lyrics and titles. English quintet The Robb Storme Group developed into a psychedelic pop group and changed its name to Orange Bicycle. They released a fistful of moderately successful singles in the late Sixties - including "Sing This All Together" in 1968, with meaningful b-side "Take a Trip on an Orange Bicycle" - before recording their self-titled and only LP in 1970. In '68 Orange Bicycle performed at the Isle of Wight festival alongside Jefferson Airplane, The Crazy World of Arthur Brown, Pretty Things, The Move, Tyrannosaurus Rex and Fairport Convention. Another band simply called Bicycle also existed, and it was probably of American origins, as it is mentioned in a 1969 poster for a Family Dog concert in San Francisco.

Donovan had left quite a legacy for bicycles in airy folk rock tinged with psychedelia. Fellow singer-songwriter Ralph McTell would follow his lead in 1969 with the atmospheric ballad "Girl on a Bicycle" - third track of his third album *My Side of Your Window*. The bicycle depicted by McTell is once again a vehicle for surrealistic experiences, giving the little girl of the title transcendent features. The two wheels trigger the

whole metaphysical process: “wheels spin like they’re riding on air”, “and the wheels go round but the bike has stopped moving” he sings until all ends in mystery as “suddenly she is gone”. McTell wrote “Girl on a Bicycle” with Gary Petersen of Formerly Fat Harry, a short-lived British-American band which also recorded the song - later included in their 2009 collection of rarities *Goodbye For Good, The Lost Recordings*.

In 1970 another folk great would get groovier than usual thanks to a bicycle: Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn included in his self-titled debut album a fascinating tune called “Bicycle Trip”. What starts as an earthy musical portrait of bucolic beauties quickly reveals a more introspective depth. As Cockburn gently starts moaning, the song - still simply accompanied by an acoustic guitar - becomes rhapsodic, almost rambunctious. The bicycle ride is now crossing internal landscapes as well, offering fragmented pieces of truth to the enthusiastic rider: “you can just take so much of your own advice, who needs a king…”. It starts creating images, visions of a surrealistic quality: the everyday of “pigeons have a way of taking wing” stands next to the transcendental “bane of the Eternal Dancer”. Cockburn’s visionary recount accents the synesthetic vocation of trips once and for all, something that the contemporary renaissance of both poster art and album cover art was putting at the very center of its artistic ‘mission’.

Psychedelic visual art also seems to have embraced the mystery and charm of bicycles. Seminal British collective Hapshash and the Coloured Coat drew inspiration from Tomorrow’s “My White Bicycle” for a bewitching promotional poster realized in 1967 [See image 1]. It was even too bewitching, perhaps: the sultry figures drawn by artists Michael English and Nigel Weymouth were considered too provocative by EMI and had to be replaced. The second poster would then highlight the hallucinogenic overtones of the song even more [See image 2]. Bicycle oddities also fill up a quirky poster created by San Francisco master Victor Moscoso in October 1966. Emerging from a bright pink background, five winged riders are taking psychedelia to a delightful level of fantasy: the central character is a rooster on an unicycle, while on the upper left we are able to notice a bird going fast on - that’s for sure - a bicycle. There is a certain singularity to this kind of imagery in mid and late Sixties psychedelic posters, Moscoso’s in particular. And once again bicycles (and, in this case, the like) are meant to represent the vehicle of choice for an unexpected trip [See image 3]. Similarly, in 1968 English band Family chose for their debut album *Music in a Doll’s House*, their most overtly psychedelic LP, a back cover that is as bizarre as enigmatic. Here we can see a doll depicted in a fascinating cloudy photograph credited to Jac Remise - the eerie concept accentuated by a puzzling antique, an almost sinister tricycle that puts imaginative wheels in front one more time [See image 4].

The recurrence of such a singular theme - that of bicycles, in a decade as motor-powered as the Sixties - surely strikes as fascinating. It would also be tempting to venture that this insistence on the theme might be due to the environmental concerns of the hippie community. But while the hippies were undoubtedly pioneers of green lifestyle - presenting themselves as trailblazers in many fields, from organic and health foods to alternative energy - it seems like for the vast majority of people the question of air pollution was not a completely scrutinized question yet. Many songs have actually eulogized different kinds of ‘wheels on fire’ as emblematic of a generation’s lifestyle and goals. Just as rebellious bikers Wyatt and Billy (Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper) of *Easy Rider* glory embody one of the most iconic and unforgettable symbols of late Sixties aesthetic, motorcycles, with their implication of speed, wildness and frontier, are a constant of music of the era. Steppenwolf’s “Born to Be Wild” would be the obvious example, as its famous incipit - “Get your motor runnin’ / head out on the highway”- reminds. Psychedelic Peruvian band Laghonia included a similar song in their second and last album *Etcétera*, released in 1971. On “Speed Fever” they persuasively assert: “Is the symbol of your freedom/ Riding on your motocycle”. And while not interested in motorcycles, The Who’s 1971 song “Going Mobile” is quite explicit regarding priorities and concerns: “I don’t care about pollution/ I’m an air-conditioned gypsy”, author Pete Townshend sings.

The fascination with old bicycles then seems to imply something else - something *higher*. In all the songs previously analyzed bicycles acquire a transcendental nature, a capability of going beyond factual reality. The act of riding, in general, is seen as a passing of normality; Boston band The Art of Lovin' explained it neatly in 1968 song "Take a Ride", a captivating invitation to sublime spins. "You may not be touching the ground/ Not necessarily true/ Your senses will all be unwound/ But what you'll be hearing is you", they reveal. Similar sensations are usually associated with lysergic adventures - it's the kind of phrasing that songs normally choose to depict LSD trips. It becomes more and more intriguing then to remember that a bicycle played quite a relevant role in what we could describe as the first day of psychedelic culture, the day LSD showed itself for the first time.

On April 19, 1943, Dr. Albert Hofmann ingested a solution of lysergic acid diethylamide, 250 micrograms of the ergot fungus derivative he had synthesized five years before. He couldn't imagine how powerful the effects of LSD-25, his "problem child", would have been and he couldn't anticipate the cultural revolution he was about to trigger. Sitting in his Basel lab, the 37 years old chemist started to perceive a strange vibration within himself and suddenly all the things around him started to respond: it felt like he was able to hear for the first time, able to really see colours like never before. This unexpected sensation quickly turned into panic, fear of the unknown, and so he started longing for home. He then decided to get back to the safe walls of his house and just like any other day he got on his bicycle to do so. What followed is the first LSD trip in history - a crazy ride through peaceful Switzerland nature suddenly transformed into a surreal transcendent new world. Dr. Hofmann later described his now legendary bicycle adventure using words that closely resemble those of the songs previously reviewed. It was the very first epiphany of LSD, and by chance the trip became even more memorable because of a bicycle.

Maybe that is what psychedelic rock has tried to imply over the years, mentioning all those mysterious pairs of wheels. Maybe the impossibility of properly conveying acid-powered sensations through common words was meant to be outwitted with a powerful symbol, an image that could encapsulate a rich meaningful story - an impish understanding among peers that would trick those who were alien to their counterculture. Maybe the trippy emblem of the bicycle became an enticing trope for psychedelic rock - so much so that it could end up ignoring the factual origins of the genre and its subculture. It has been already stated how the direct inspiration for Tomorrow's *My White Bicycle* was the Provos' initiative in Amsterdam. Tomorrow were not aware of Albert Hofmann's famous ride, guitarist Steve Howe told Jim DeRogatis. But a certain naivety is quite common in psychedelic rock language. After all, many bands (mostly from minor cities) would write about trips and lysergic visions without even having tried psychedelic drugs. They would "get the idea" from more experienced colleagues and make it their own. "By 1965 or '66, LSD was available in certain big-city communities, like Detroit, Chicago, L.A., and New York […]. But the suburban kids had no idea what it was. They were just singing about something that was in the air", Amboy Dukes singer John Drake revealed[7]. It is possible then that something similar happened with the use of bicycle related imagery. Some artists (and listeners) may have ignored the details of LSD's colorful story, but they undoubtedly got the message right. And that message looks reasonably enduring these days, as "bicycle day" is celebrated every year on April 19, and has been since the mid Eighties, among those who keep turning to transcendental wheels (either figurative or literal) hoping they will still be, as Donovan put it, so kind in consenting to blow their minds [See image 5].

References

DeRogatis, J. (2003). *Turn on your mind*. Milwaukee, WI: Hal Leonard.
Hofmann, Albert. LSD, My Problem Child ; And, Insights/outlooks. Oxford: Beckley Foundation, 2013. Print.
Klassen, Michael L. Hippie, Inc.: The Misunderstood Subculture That Changed the Way We Live and Generated Billions of Dollars in the Process. Sixoneseven Books, 2016.

Discography

The Art of Lovin', "Take a Ride", from *The Art of Lovin'* , 1968.
The Baroques, "Bicycle", from *The Baroques,* 1967.
Bruce Cockburn, "Bicycle Trip", from *Bruce Cockburn*, 1970.
Formerly Fat Harry, "Girl on a Bicycle", from *Goodbye For Good, The Lost Recordings*, 2009.
Donovan, "Fat Angel", from *Sunshine Superman,* 1966.
Donovan, "Ferris Wheel", from *Sunshine Superman,* 1966.
The Higher Elevation, "Crazy Bicycle", from the single *The Diamond Mine,* 1967.
Jefferson Airplane, "Fat Angel", from *Bless Its Pointed Little Head,* 1969.
Kippington Lodge, "Lady on a Bicycle", from the single *Shy Boy*, 1967.
Laghonia, "Speed Fever", from *Etcétera,* 1971.
Ralph McTell, "Girl on a Bicycle", from *My Side of Your Window,* 1969.
Orange Bicycle, "Take a Trip on an Orange Bicycle", from the single *Sing This All Together,* 1968.
Pink Floyd, "Bike", from *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn,* 1967.
Steppenwolf, "Born to be Wild", from *Steppenwolf*, 1968.
Tomorrow, "My White Bicycle", from *Tomorrow*, 1968.

The bicycle-themed tunes are available on the "Unbroken Chains" playlists:
Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/user/1167991953/playlist/7tWk82kbthvXG7qvcaz5FW

\

YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvHv9HNFExNubZfLimfSFiuRj063yNkGV

Images:

Image 1
Hapshash & the Colored Coat, “My White Bicycle” (original poster):
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O129163/my-white-bicycle-poster-english-michael/

Image 2
Hapshash & the Colored Coat, “My White Bicycle” (second version):
http://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2013/06/24/tomorrow2.jpg

Image 3
Victor Moscoso, FD-32:
https://www.classicposters.com/images/FD-32wm.jpg

Image 4
Family, *Music in a Doll’s House* back cover:
https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-x9rMikJnUl0/WNu6w_MNVRI/AAAAAAAAeSY/d1yHU09MKXE3vMnT4NfaWby-WEG16AMsYwCLcB/s1600/1aafamb.jpg

Image 5
Michael Divine, Bicycle Day poster (2014):
http://www.blazenfluff.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/poster.jpg

---

Camilla Aisa is a MA candidate at London South Bank University, where she is currently completing a Media Writing project on psychedelic rock and psychedelic visual arts. She is writing a book on the subject and she is the creator of the blog “Feed Your Head - psychedelic side trips”. Camilla graduated summa cum laude in Art History at Università degli Studi di Perugia with a thesis on psychedelic visual arts. She has written for different websites and social media pages, both for music artists and record companies. Camilla plays bass and she is an avid music researcher (and, above all, music lover), her favourite genres being psychedelic rock, English folk and modern-day all-female trios. She is an enthusiast of cinema and tv serial narratives and dabbles in photography.

camillaaisa@gmail.com
aisac@lsbu.ac.uk
www.psychedelicsidetrips.wordpress.com

SONG-PEACE-WAR-SINS-INDUSTRY-DISCONTENT-FAME-OBSCURITY

For Solo Voice

Daniel Fardon

~ To be freely interpreted ~

WORDS

Sing a sad song
Where there ain't nuthin' but happy
It's what Jesus would do
Yeah, yeah-yeah, yeah

Hate the sin not the sinner
Jump upon the peace train
In the heart of America

It's sad but true,
When the day that lies ahead of me
Bears heavy on my mind
Y'all can't blame it on the hip-hop
Everyone needs it baby

Fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame
Fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame
Fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame, fame

Discontent, you must leave
Got me looking
In the heart of America
Looking so crazy in love

Obscure as we are
Come on now peace train
Don't throw it all away

What's your name?
There's only our hair's breadth between us
You should feel ashamed
Cause they say I've done wrong
Blood on the floor

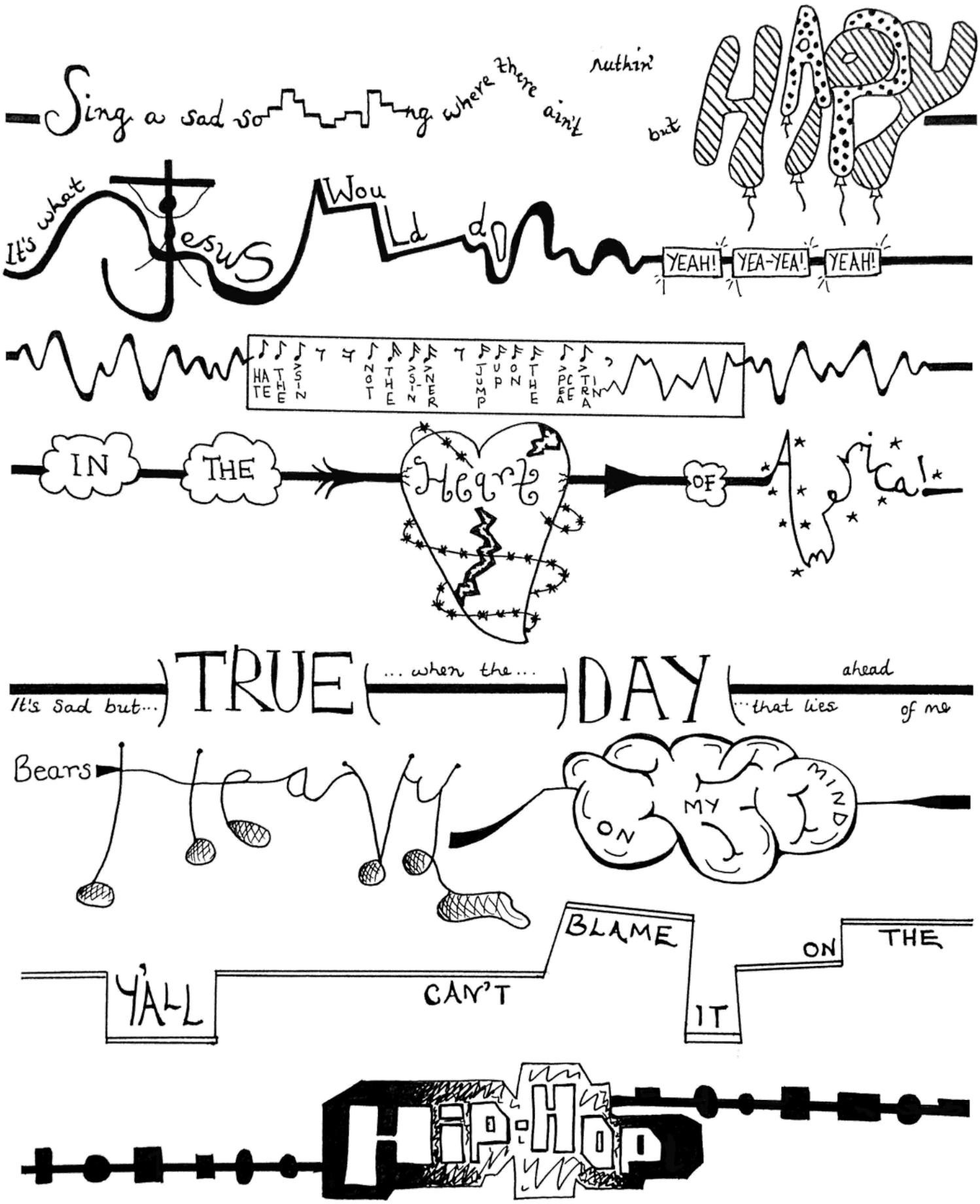
Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin
Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin
Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin, Sin

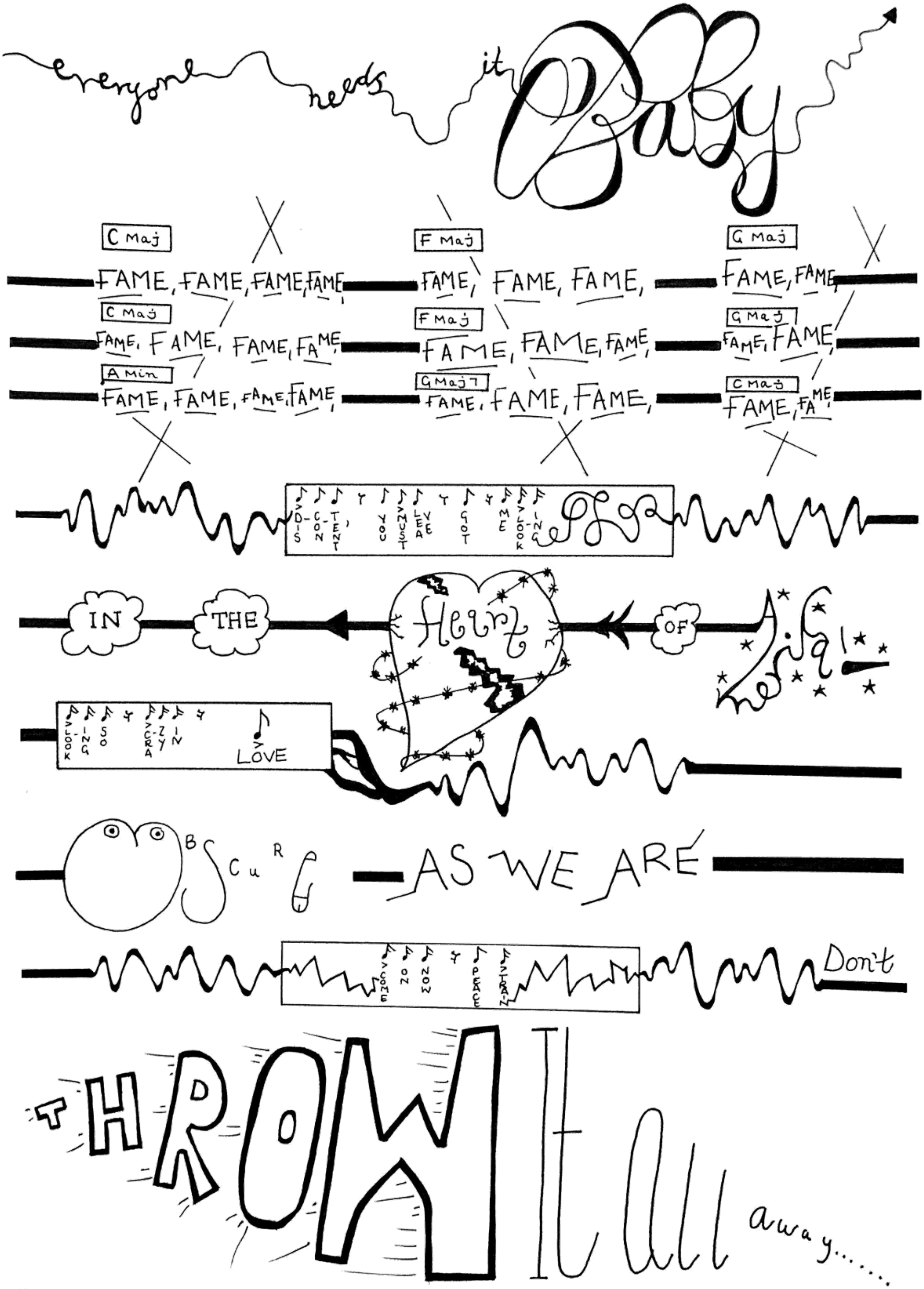
As sure as we be, a lovely day;
The reason I'm goin'; we're throwing it all away

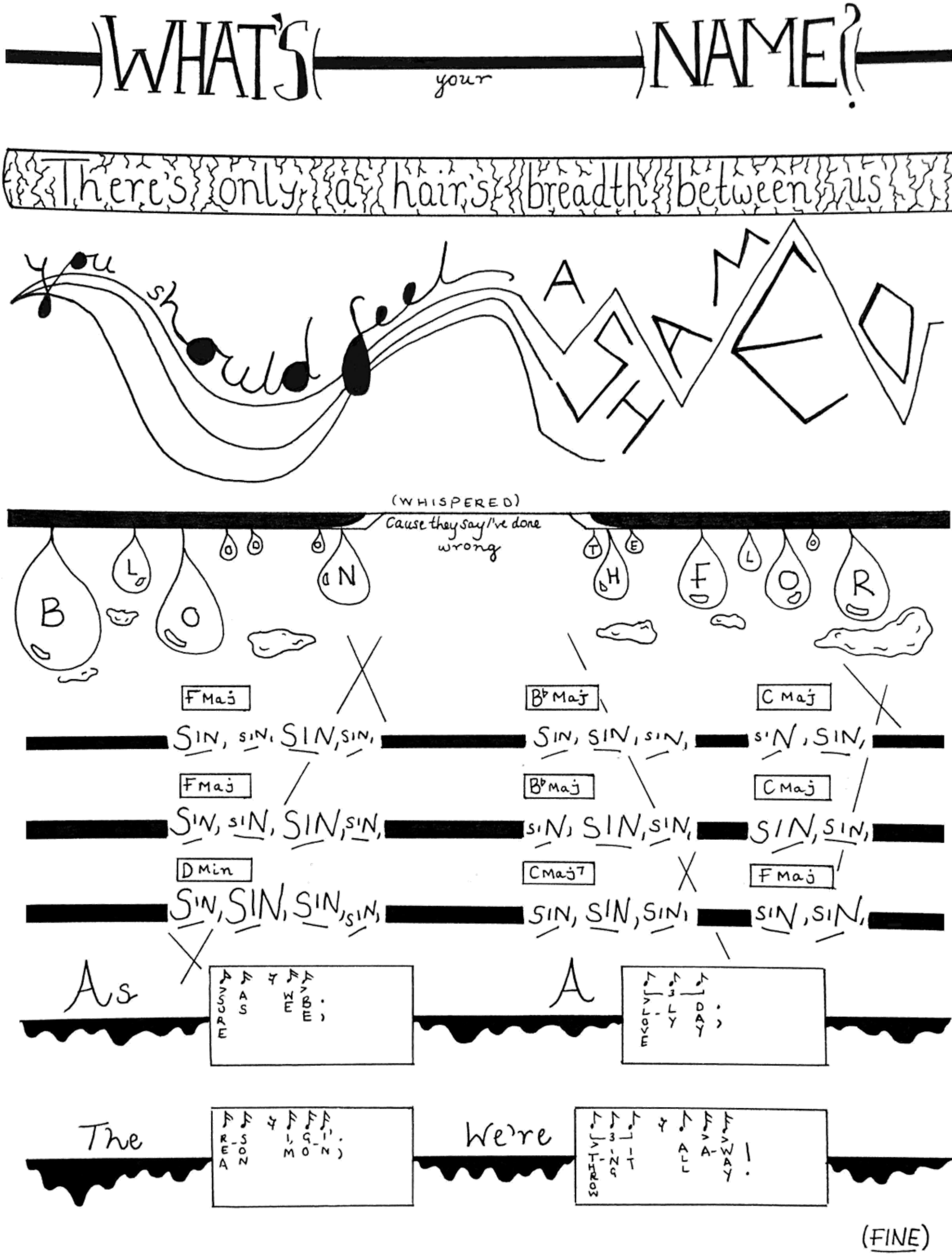
SONG/PEACE/WAR/SINS/INDUSTRY/DISCONTENT/FAME/OBSCURITY/DAY/LOVE/HAPPINESS/FLOOR

For Solo Voice

By Daniel Fardon




everyone needs it Baby
C Maj
FAME, FAME, FAME, FAME
F Maj
FAME, FAME, FAME,
G Maj
FAME, FAME,
C Maj
FAME, FAME, FAME, FAME
F Maj
FAME, FAME, FAME,
G Maj
FAME, FAME,
A Min
FAME, FAME, FAME, FAME,
G Maj 7
FAME, FAME, FAME,
C Maj
FAME, FAME,
IN THE Heart OF America!
LOVE
AS WE ARE
Don't
THROW It all away......


WHAT'S your NAME?
There's only a hair's breadth between us
you should feel
A S H A M E D
(WHISPERED)
Cause they say I've done wrong
B L O O D O N
T H E F L O O R
FMaj
SIN, sin, SIN, sin,
B♭Maj
SIN, SIN, sin,
CMaj
sin, SIN,
FMaj
SIN, sin, SIN, sin,
B♭Maj
sin, SIN, sin,
CMaj
SIN, sin,
DMin
SIN, SIN, SIN, sin,
CMaj7
SIN, SIN, SIN,
FMaj
SIN, SIN,
As
SURE AS WE BE;
A
LOVE-LY DAY;
The
REA-SON I, GI-MON;
We're
THROW-ING IT ALL A-WAY!
(FINE)

Daniel Fardon

I am a British Composer, currently studying for a PhD in Musical Composition at the University of Birmingham under the supervision of Michael Zev Gordon. As a graduate of the University of Cambridge, and the Birmingham Conservatoire, I previously studied under the tutelage of Richard Causton, Howard Skempton, and Errollyn Wallen, partaking in masterclasses with Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Judith Weir, Colin Matthews, and Mark-Anthony Turnage.

My current research explores how musical eclecticism is understood and manifested across new music platforms, with a specific focus on stylistic construction in concert music, and the historical evolution of the relationship between composer and performer. My latest paper (on Schnittke to Zorn) was published by the University of Southampton's Emergence Journal in Autumn 2016, and my new graphic setting of Shakespeare's 'When icicles hang by the wall' was published in the Birmingham Journal of Literature and Language (BJLL) in Summer 2017. I am currently the recipient of both The Sir Thomas White's Music Scholarship, and a University of Birmingham College of Arts and Law Doctoral Scholarship Award, which fully funds my study and research.

El Tren Fantasma: A Familiar Journey into Unknown Narratives

Fiamma Mozzetta

"Pensé en un mundo sin memoria, sin tiempo" [1]

J. L. Borges, El Inmortal

On Sunday morning I left home and flew back to London, where I now live. Then from Gatwick I took the Southern line for just one stop, heading towards East Croydon. The train was crowded as usual, packed with tired, clumsy, curious tourists' eyes, self-absorbed commuters, luggage everywhere: I stood up. As the train was leaving the station, a woman in her late thirties with two kids, a girl and a boy in the stroller, sat on the empty seat in front of me. Mom and daughter, both with long, beautiful brown and blond hair, respectively, started to sing this counting song, very popular in Spanish speaking countries, "laaa gaaaallina turuuuuleca, haa puesto un huevo, ha puesto dooos, haa pueesto trees…,"[2] and then started to play with mom pretending to be some old-time friend knocking on daughter's door, TOC TOC, "¿Quién es?", "Soy yo. ¿Me dejas entrar?".[3] I stood there, staring at them as if I knew them, smiling all the way through. Reaching the station, they stopped, called father, "Daaaad," who was lost in the crowd near the train doors, "Yes, sweetie," collected their belongings and we all got off. It was such an emotional moment for me, filled with joyous, melancholic nostalgia. They reminded me of my family, mother from Argentina and father from Italy, and of all the years spent travelling from place to place, growing up switching languages and customs. She reminded me of my mom as I recall her with my childhood eyes, same hair, same straw bag, same laid-back, slightly 'freak' attitude. And of all the times she sang that same song to us. But, most of all, that fifteen-minute journey reminded me of the way I felt when I first listened to Chris Watson's *El Tren Fantasma* (The Ghost Train) and how it accompanied me through overlapped and fragmented memories, either lived or acquired, of my early childhood and teenage years. It was as if, suddenly, I was on Watson's train.

Founding and former member of Cabaret Voltaire and The Hafler Trio, Chris Watson is a sound recordist who specialises in natural history, recording sounds of animals, environments, wildlife and locations. In 1999, he spent more than a month recording the sounds of a train journey for an episode of the BBC's travel documentary series *Great Railway Journeys*, and later used, edited and recombined the audio material he collected into ten tracks released in 2011 as *El Tren Fantasma*. The BBC episode was "Los Mochis to Veracruz," which was obviously set in Mexico and whose main aim was to document the people, the atmosphere and the landscape of the train journey, running from the Pacific Coast to the Gulf of Mexico. Since the train ceased to run shortly after, what interested Watson was to recreate the atmosphere of that train journey going beyond the historical project of documenting the real for future generations and delving, instead, into a new dimension in which the real fuses with the fictional: a recording of a specific time and place that is nevertheless able to capture a multiplicity of experiences, narratives and recollections. The record, inspired by the musique concrète work of French composer Pierre Schaeffer and by drawing on electronic musical techniques, tells the 'ghost' train journey combining the heavy, industrial and mechanical loops of the locomotive with the voices of passengers and workers, and the natural sounds of the environment. [4] Touching upon the issue of whether Watson's 'unmelodic' sounds should be considered as

1 Trans. I thought of a world without memory, without time.

2 Trans. La Gallina Turuleca has laid an egg, has laid two, has laid three.

3 Trans. Who's there? It's me, can I come in?

4 Listen, for example, to "Los Mochis," *Youtube Video*, 6:31. Posted by "Touchmusic33," 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGA2jYffWx0; also "El Divisadero," *Youtube Video*, 5:37. Posted by "Touchmusic33," 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDQZTXz2-7o.

music and be enjoyed by pop music fans, journalists wrote that the intrinsic beauty of Watson's manipulation of field recordings comes from the fact that he is able to give a sense of space in sound and create "an elaborate electro-acoustic collage," whereby the sounds of the railway "are heavily echoed and stretched until they turn into ambient drone music." The emerging and dissolving rhythms open the record up to a much more nuanced, complex and 'three dimensional' narrative of the train journey, which is able not only to transport the listeners into "a ghostly, auditory diorama," but is also able to carry them into the contrasting end points between the untouched bucolic landscape and the 'civilised' technologic environment. [5] In Watson's own words, furthermore, *El Tren Fantasma* serves almost as a personal mnemonic exercise in order to remember the feelings and the atmosphere associated with the place in which the recording was made. The act of recording itself along with the later manipulation and reconstruction of the audio material into compositions, he says, is a way to represent the identity of that specific place through its sounds and the layers of memory those sounds have ossified in the artist's mind. [6]

By contextualising these opinions and words in the wider academic literature on popular music and to let my personal experience resonate in the collective, it is worth pointing out that *El Tren Fantasma* certainly draws attention to those debates concerned with the relationship between popular music and time, including issues on nostalgia and memory, and to debates focused on the cultural, political and musicological implications of the intricate dialogue between the more recent past and the present. [7] The latter, to recall the arguments of previous contributors in issue one of *Riffs*, [8] has been widely categorised as an 'obsession' of our present time for whatever pop music style or attitude, recording technology or format, have been used in previous decades. Today's culture of retro, moreover, the increased interest in memory and the pervasive feeling of nostalgia, according to the 'hauntology' theoretical framework, [9] leaves the realm of pop music with nothing but 'ghostly' references to the past, ubiquitous faded traces of cultural memories into the present, a fetishism for the analogue in the digital era and a sheer melancholic and decadent state of mind through which music becomes a cultural and political device. A device used to resurge both personal memories and collective sensations, especially those coming from the more authentic and pure experiences of the childhood years. To be labelled as 'hauntological,' music must demonstrate "an existential orientation": [10] must be indeed haunted by the aesthetic presence of deconstructed ghosts, must be embedded into a consciousness that a linear historical narrative is no longer achievable and that temporality as such collapsed on itself. While being a ghost, but shying away from the demonic spectres of the Mexican past or possibly from Watson's idealised upbringing, *El Tren Fantasma* seems to provide a strong connection with the debates on the ways in which personal and collective memory is evoked, articulated and reconstructed through the emotional associations provided by the sounds themselves as well as the potentialities offered by recording technologies in shaping perceptions of time and space.

What surprised me, as I listened to *El Tren Fantasma*, was the immediate, intense sense of familiarity and mystical reality elicited by the soothing rhythmic and mechanical patterns of the railway, by the resonance

5 "TO:42 - Chris Watson El Tren Fantasma." Reviews. *touchmusic.org.uk*.

6 "Sounds Outside: The Art of Field Recording," *Ableton.com*, June 2016.

7 I am thinking of works such as Simon Reynolds, *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*, (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011), in which the use of the past and the construction of musical memories in today's culture is often considered as a purely nostalgic and commodity-driven practice. Further accounts, such as Caroline Bithell, "The Past in Music: Introduction," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15, no.1 (2006), have analysed such dialogue through a more historical framework, addressing questions on cultural memory, heritage and tradition.

8 I am referring to David Kane, "Bob Dylan: Nobility, Lyrics and Ghosts," *Riffs Journal* 1, no.1 (Feb. 2017), where Kane draws attention to the 'retrospective' discourse and the notion of hauntology.

9 See Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writing on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, (Winchester: Zero Books, 2014); Reynolds, *Retromania*, 311-361; Adam Harper, "Hauntology: The Past Inside The Present," *rougesfoam.blogspot.co.uk*, 27 October 2009.

10 Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life,* 21.

of the bell ringing, human voices muffled by the absorbing, disturbing and deep noises of the brakes and horn, the tweeting nature passing by in the background, a cacophony of sounds of the insects, of the chickens, and by the chaos of people moving and talking, by the hurry of the *anunciante,* by the combination of Spanish and English. A suspended sonic dimension, an echo of a familiar, distant place. 'El Divisadero' got me hooked: I could see mom singing Mercedes Sosa's 'Duerme Negrito' to my siblings and me, her record collection of Latin American folk music, the summers grandma spent with us in Italy cooking *empanadas* and *budín de pan*, the pizza with mortadella we used to eat at lunch time, laying on the grass, after having walked for hours in the mountains near dad's hometown. I saw the videos, that my parents recently showed us, of my siblings unwrapping their Christmas gifts, when I was 9-months old and we were living in Argentina, and I saw the pictures, together with my parents' stories, of the trip we made to Chile that same year, the six of us and my aunt, in a white brand-new 1993 Lada station-wagon: Córdoba, San Luis, Mendoza, the Cordillera and Aconcagua, Valparaíso, finally Viña del mar. This intense sense of familiarity and tranquillity, the feelings associated with the vividness of these recollections and the obfuscation of the mediated memories, and the strong sense of nostalgia, came perhaps not only from Watson's ability in narrativizing the train journey, but also from the specific circumstances in which I listened to the record: in my early twenties, living in a new country and, for the first time, by myself. Writing on the emotional potentialities of sound, language and the human voice, writer and broadcaster Seán Street argues that memory and nostalgia in a young audience are articulated "by the recollection of the safe world of early childhood," against the complexities associated with the process of becoming an adult, recollection that can be built upon personal images either 'imagined' or 'accurate.' With a specific emphasis on the communicative power of the radio and the practices of field recording, Street writes that sound and speech are crucial in the construction of a personal cultural and mnemonic identity, regardless of distances in time and space, and that although they remain ephemeral their 'physical representation' – and therefore the technological repeatability that allows the human capacity of remembering – should stand as an instance of a preserved sonic past.[11]

Young adults and seniors, José van Dijck similarly explains, respond differently to recorded music, for while the former are able to recall specific events, the latter refer generically to past moods and ambiences. The verbal process by which parents' and older siblings' cultural and musical memories are told to children, moreover, often makes it more difficult for young adults to distinguish between actual, lived personal memories and acquired, mediated ones. However, although the act of remembrance differs with age and changes accordingly to the circumstances of the present time, recording technologies, recorded sounds and the materiality of music, more broadly, are nonetheless influential in the processes of evocation and reconstruction of memory narratives, whether individual or collective, and remain responsible for materialising these memories into a historical, nostalgic feeling. Coining the term 'techno-stalgia,' van Dijck writes that "media technologies and objects are often deployed as metaphors, expressing a cultural desire for personal memory to function *like* an archive or storage facility," and draws a line between the widespread, more recent appeal for past popular music technologies, referring to it as mere commercial retro culture, and the somewhat more passionate involvement in the (re)enactment process. Such a process, certainly, being embedded in a technological metaphor, is not able to portray an exact representation of the original context and sound, but serves as an allusive, referential manifestation of what the past 'sounded' like.[12] Furthermore, it must be said that these imprecise, blurred visions of the past characterise also the commodified aspect of today's retro culture, whose main appeal comes from the 'nostalgia aesthetic' which is made possible and reinforced by digital audio techniques – the hope of better times offered by digitisation in making a new record sound old: 'the phonograph effect,' as Mark Katz would put it – pop music memora-

11 Seán Street, *The Memory of Sound: Preserving the Sonic Past*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), 31-37 and 83.

12 José Van Dijck, "Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no.5 (2006): 357-374.

bilia and marketing strategies, towards the search of a more 'authentic' sonic past-ness.[13]

Recalling Watson's words on the act of remembering a specific place through its sounds and the thoughts on Watson's digital manipulation in creating depth in sound, it might be said that a listening experience of *El Tren Fantasma* can be described as a response to the new perceptions of space and time in the technological, highly mediated cultural environment of our age. Considering the record as a postmodern cultural artefact and reflecting on the listener's awareness that what they are listening to is the sound of a journey already turned into collective history, the ten tracks could be analysed within the discourse on the aesthetic characteristics of what has been referred to as the new phase of the 'time-space compression.'[14] It might be, indeed, that both the fluidity through which the listeners' mind moves in time and space, either real or fictional, and the evocative sense of familiarity that surrounds the record, point to the need for a more secure sense of place and time, a 'romanticized escapism,' against the confused and conflictual changes of today's immaterial spatial-temporal global relations.[15] Although being worried by the 'disappearance of space' and by its increased commercialisation, which suffocates any Situationist-like practice of the *dérive* – the creative, fluid association between the mind and the city – David Toop acknowledges the importance of music and ordinary sounds in the representation and experience of an urban environment. In his investigation of the relationship between time, space and sound, Toop illustrates, through some instances of soundscape compositions and field recordings, how a musical narrative, that "can be a story without closure, a story without beginning or end or surface development," is often completely guided by the sounds being recorded and how sounds themselves become, in turn, essential in the formation, evocation and fixation of memories and meanings.[16] The sounds of *El Tren Fantasma* have transported me into a familiar place, where personal memories passed by, and a distant one, where the story of the real train journey was told; particularly: they have been crucial in the recollection of past narratives and equally important in the formation of new ones as was the case with that Sunday morning in London. Far from looking for temporal and spatial security, nonetheless, the 'unmelodic' patterns of the railway and that fluidity of the listeners' minds can easily be perceived as an attempt to increase the loose and disorientating effect, to consciously mediate the sense of time and space, to enhance the mysterious, the unpredictable: "the way in which a harmonically complex layer or reference allows us to 'rest our ears' so that the mind can travel without undue focus or purpose (in other words, daydream or relax)."[17]

13 Christina Baade and Paul Aitken, "Still 'In the Mood': The Nostalgia Aesthetic in a Digital World," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 20, no. 4 (2008): 370-371; See also Andy Bennett and Susanne Janssen, "Popular Music, Cultural Memory, and Heritage," *Popular Music and Society* 39, n.1 (2016): 1-7.

14 David Harvey, "The Experience of Space and Time." In *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990), 308-323.

15 Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place." In *Space, Place and Gender*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

16 David Toop, *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence and Memory*, (London: Serpent's Tail, 2004), 117.

17 Ibid., 54.

References

Baade, Christina and Paul Aitken. “Still ‘In the Mood’: The Nostalgia Aesthetic in a Digital World.” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 20, no. 4 (2008): 370-371.

Bennett, Andy and Susanne Janssen, “Popular Music, Cultural Memory, and Heritage,” *Popular Music and Society* 39, n.1 (2016): 1-7.

Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writing on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2014.

Harper, Adam. “Hauntology: The Past Inside The Present.” rougesfoam.blogspot.co.uk, 27 October 2009.

Harvey, David. “The Experience of Space and Time.” In *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990.

Massey, Doreen. “A Global Sense of Place.” In *Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

Reynolds, Simon. *Retromania: Pop Culture’s Addiction to Its Own Past*. New York: Faber and Faber, 2011.

Van Dijck, José. “Record and Hold: Popular Music between Personal and Collective Memory.” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 23, no.5 (2006): 357-374.

“Sounds Outside: The Art of Field Recording,” *Ableton.com*, June 2016.

Street, Seán. *The Memory of Sound: Preserving the Sonic Past*. New York: Routledge, 2014.

Toop, David. *Haunted Weather: Music, Silence and Memory*. London: Serpent’s Tail, 2004.

“TO:42 - Chris Watson El Tren Fantasma.” Reviews. *touchmusic.org.uk*.

Fiamma Mozzetta is a MA student at Goldsmiths, University of London in Popular Music Research. She is currently working on her dissertation researching at the intersection between historical consciousness and popular music, focusing on individual and collective memory, nostalgia, and on the role of collecting and archiving in the construction of musical narratives and heritage.

fiammamozzetta@gmail.com

Bone Machine (1992): What the hell is Tom Waits singing about?

Adriano Tedde

Introduction

I grew up in Italy listening to American and British music. My first musical bliss was watching the televised Simon and Garfunkel concert from Central Park, New York in 1981. It brought sheer pleasure into my household for what was a rare moment of family unity around a music event. It was the revelation on which I founded my music religion. At the age of six, I established a strict rock'n'roll cult built on one main precept: songs must be sung in English and English only. Little did it matter that I wasn't able to speak that language for several years to come. What did matter was that those foreign syllables sounded musical and turned the singing voice into a beautiful instrument in the mix. As for their meaning, the songs I was exposed to always made sense thanks to little translations of titles or some verses provided by older siblings and friends. More importantly, I always felt that the true message in a song was contained in its rhythm, and in the intensity and the impetus of its sound.

In 1992 at the age of sixteen, and after years of collecting vinyl records, I got my first compact disc: *Bone Machine* by Tom Waits. I remember the state of trepidation I was in when I inserted the little disc that cost the equivalent of three vinyl LPs. Clanging sticks, a subtle guitar riff – *is it coming from a broken amplifier?*– a sinister whisper, and then a growl and heavy drums. That was the sonic train that hit me in the first minute or so of the opening track, "Earth Died Screaming". Trepidation quickly turned into consternation and, as the record went on, dismay and disappointment. I didn't give up easily, though. One by one, I listened to all the 16 tracks until the end, without skipping one second. Exhausted by the experience, I was wondering: "What the hell have I just been through? Is this real music?" Had it not been Friday night, I would have returned the record straight away to get a more reassuring Uncle Tupelo or Jayhawks sound. Luckily, I was forced to keep it with me the whole weekend long, and as a frightened child lured by a horror movie he's not supposed to watch, I kept coming back to it over those 48 hours.

A song can be about anything, sings Dan Wilson, but what in the world were these songs about? As usual, the foreign language didn't help much in detecting meaning, but this time I couldn't get the message even from the sound. Before I could get an idea of what Tom Waits was singing about, I had to overcome the unexpected obstacle of understanding a way of making and presenting songs that was unknown to me until then. It took me several trials, commitment and perseverance but in the end those tunes got through my thick head. That was my initiation to a new way of understanding music, the gateway to my adulthood in the realm of pop song, and to a long-lasting veneration for a daring songwriter.

"Gone fishing": The songwriting process

Bone Machine arrived at a time when I had developed some understanding of the rules upon which pop and rock songs are built. I had finally grasped the basic norms that regulate how a rhythm section, with its drums beats and bass lines, interacts with guitars and keyboards, and how a singer forms the melody against the chords of the song and the backing vocals add texture with harmonies. It was clear to me that even the most complex of experimental rock songs spawned from the infinite combinations of these fundamental rules. And if rules are made to confer certitude in one's existence, then my new CD shattered what I thought was

imperative and permanent.

There was no trace of the definite structure that I took for granted in popular music. I told myself if you didn't like these songs at first it's because they are wearing a different dress to the ones you are used to. And in some cases they are not wearing a dress at all: they are naked, stripped to the bone. The melody is exposed in all its simplicity, barely supported by a rudimentary and, sometimes, odd instrumentation. Once I figured out that these songs, too, rotated around a simple chord progression, I could finally pin this music down and match it with some of the cardinal points of my music upbringing. I started to hear James Brown in "Such a Scream", Neil Young & Crazy Horse in "Going Out West", The Pogues in "I Don't Wanna Grow Up", Ennio Morricone and his Western film scores in "Black Wings", and with a stretch of the imagination, The Kinks in "All Stripped Down" and the Rolling Stones in the incomprehensible noise of "Let Me Get Up On It". But if none of those were evident at first hearing, I realized, it was because the singer was not preoccupied with bland reproduction of canons and was looking for something else when crafting a song.

Two main elements revealed what was at stake here: silence and noise. There are gaps, cracks, blank spaces in the music, as well as external audio interferences generated by people or things around the recording space. All these are present throughout the record, as the artist did not remove them from the final mix. I knew Tom Waits was an accomplished musician, a skilled piano player who previously recorded what sounded like sophisticated jazzy music to my ear. Someone like him, with decades of experience could not possibly overlook those silences and the noises. Indeed, he wanted them in there. But why?

I arrived at the conclusion that these recordings reproduce the instant in which the musician is capturing a living item, in other words, the song as it is meant to sound. It is not a matter of recording 'live' music. In fact, the recordings took place over several sessions and different sonic approaches (Jacobs 2006: 195-201; Hoskyns 2009: 388-397). Rather, it all has to do with the songwriting process. What ends up in the album is the closest possible version to what the songwriter hears in his head. When a version that captures the vision of the artist is caught on tape, it's a final take, even when it contains what is normally regarded as a recording flaw.

This process is the effect of the general idea that songs pre-exist their actual composition. They live among us and are waiting for the songwriter to make them viable for others. Tom Waits embraced this philosophy late in his artistic life, notably when he reinvented his music in the mid-1980s. As Barney Hoskyns writes in his unauthorized biography of Waits, the singer has lived his life in reverse, dedicating his early years to playing old people's music before opening up to instinctive and raw music in his middle-age (Hoskyns 2009: 275-6). If he spent most of the 1970s writing songs as a methodical disciple of reputable professional composers like Hoagy Carmichael, George Gershwin, and Harold Arlen, in his forties he masterminded his own music by transgressing the customs of songwriting. He switched from rigour to intuition.

In a series of interviews given at the time of the album's release, the musician described the songwriting process with hunting and fishing metaphors. (Maher 2011: 209-238). When out fishing for songs, "[songwriters] gotta be real quiet sometimes if [they] wanna catch the big ones". Rather than being an original creator of songs, an *auteur*, for Waits the songwriter is a human antenna, a conductor or a portal that allows songs to live in him or near him and transmits them to the outside. In an interview granted to the *New York Times Style Magazine* this year, Waits reiterated this concept by saying that "music is emotional, once you transcend the equipment […] I like the idea that there are things coming in through the window and through you and then down to the piano and out the window on the other side. If you want to catch songs you gotta start thinking

like one, and making yourself an interesting place for them to land like birds or insects". On other occasions, Waits described the songwriter as a voodoo master of ceremony, a butcher or a mad doctor, someone who reassembles pieces of songs together into a Frankenstein creature. "I like breaking songs, […] I like songs with scars on them – when I listen to them I just see all the scars". And so do we, when *Bone Machine* reproduces the noise of helicopters flying by, humans coughing, chattering, snuffling noses, and the strident sound of fingers moving up and down the strings of a guitar.

Once I figured out that this man was a song-hunter whose main intention was to present the true essence of his compositions without music-studio embellishments, the tracks of the album became easier to listen to. But the question remained. What were the songs of *Bone Machine* about? With my limited knowledge of English, as usual, I turned to the rhythm, and the quality of the sound to find an answer.

"A Spanish iron cross": The sound-aesthetics.

There is a certain hypnotic quality in *Bone Machine* (Jacobs 2006: 163), a primordial sound that bothers the ear at first but invites the listener to explore the songs that carry it. It is a dangerous, addictive and sinister sound that has the power to attract, notwithstanding its immediate unfriendly character, including its silences and noises.

The album was the first collection of new songs by Tom Waits since the release of *Franks Wild Years* (1987), the record that closed an ideal trilogy that began with *Swordfishtrombones* (1983) and continued with *Rain Dogs* (1985). Compared to them, *Bone Machine* doesn't have the European and theatrical tinge that linked their songs. However, the wish to push sonic boundaries into new territories is inherited from the trilogy and makes the album the ideal successor to the sound experimentation inaugurated in the previous decade.

The trilogy defined what Luc Sante calls the 'line B' of Waits' music production – 'line A' being his 1970s piano driven compositions that fused the tradition of Tin Pan Alley with beatnik spoken metrics (Sante 1999: 69). 'Line B' is the result of the confluence of the new song-writing philosophy, a new approach in arrangements and new disparate influences, from rock music (Captain Beefheart), to German Operetta (Kurt Weill), and American avant-garde (Harry Partch). Waits opened his music to the sound of heavy drumming and unusual acoustic instruments such as the pump organ, the glass harmonica, the bullhorn or the bass marimba. More importantly, he allowed his musical explorations to include the use of objects that are not necessarily music instruments: sticks, chairs dragged across the floor, broken abandoned tools, metal machinery. "I think something is gonna come out of this garbage world we're living in, where […] the things that used to really work are sitting out there like big dinosaur carcasses, rusting. Something's gonna have to be made out of it that has some value. What can we do? Bury it and live on it?" So he said in 1992, declaring his Luddite attitude toward aseptic computerized recording innovations and his desire to produce sounds in the most immediate and natural forms (Hoskyns 2009: 307).

Novelist Paul Auster says that writing is a physical experience with a tactile quality. While he writes his books by hand, the author reads his compositions for the first time as the words come out of the pen held by his fingers (Hutchisson 2013: 132-134). Similarly, Waits said, "I like having music going through my fingers" (Richardson 1992: 60). This physicality is reflected in the percussive nature of most of the tracks of *Bone Machine* and the inclusion of the 'conundrum', a made-up instrument described at times as a Spanish iron cross or a Chinese torture device (Jacobs 2006: 165), which the singer bashes with a hammer in a sort of therapeutic

discharge of rage (Hoskyns 2009: 387).

The driving rhythmic component of the songs is emphasized by the subtle employment of a very limited number of instruments for most songs. Guitar and double bass are present in almost every song. A piano appears in “Dirt in the Ground”, “Whistle Down The Wind” and “A Little Rain”, alongside horns, in the first, and a violin and an accordion in the second. Every note is maintained to the essential, there is no room for virtuoso playing or solos, just bare accompaniment. It is a very measured arrangement that has nothing to do with the simplicity and immediacy of novice musicians, like one finds in the early Velvet Underground or later in punk music. Rather, only experienced musicians can attain such a level of control and subtlety in delivering a song. To quote Sante again, Waits can count on a group of loyal supporting musicians that can produce any sort of texture: “tell them ‘Christmas in the sewers of Budapest after the Martian invasion of 1962’ and they’re there” (Sante 1999: 69).

If the sound-aesthetic of the preceding trilogy was surrealism, the aesthetic in *Bone Machine* is musical minimalism. A form that allows the silences mentioned in the previous section to add rather than detract from the music. Take for example the bass line in “Murder in the Red Barn”, played by Larry Taylor who carefully avoids some notes, momentarily disappearing while the obsessive notes of a banjo insist on the main line of the song. Or the whispered saxophones of “Dirt in the Ground” that fade away at the end of the refrain. Or, again, the electric guitar riff of “Such a Scream” that drops every now and again, without following an apparent structure, as if the guitarist is taking a quick break to drink or smoke. All these ploys can be referred to as the ‘hair in the gate’, an expression borrowed from the world of movies that Waits likes to use. It indicates hairs or objects that get in the way of a film projector and appear on screen (Hoskyns 2009: 349). It is an imperfection that makes the work of art more interesting and for a moment the audience’s attention is taken away from the main narrative (Jacobs 2006: 168).

Listening to this music, the movies of Jim Jarmusch come to mind as its visual correspondent. The filmmaker’s essential dialogues and long silences allow the viewer to concentrate on long shots of desolate urban landscape. These don’t add much to the plot but are suggestive of the general atmosphere of the world the characters live in. A personal friend since the first half of the 1980s, Jarmusch is the director who gave Waits his first major role in a movie with *Down By Law* (1986) and also directed the video of “I Don’t Wanna Grow Up” from *Bone Machine*

YouTube link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo4Y0TxW41g

Taken to its extreme, Waits' minimalism is best represented by the 1986 live rendition of "Walking Spanish", a rhythm'n'blues track from *Rain Dogs* that he is able to deliver on stage with the sole accompaniment of a hammer rhythmically beating on an anvil

YouTube link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-O87GJjrv0

In *Bone Machine*, this minimalist approach to music with its stripped down melodies and rhythm had an astounding effect on a 16-year-old ear with little knowledge of English, suggesting dark stories from the underground. I didn't know exactly what these stories told, but the sound was telling me that the singer was not celebrating love. I also knew that the singer wasn't sad or desperate. He might have been angry and disgusted with something, but his voice didn't betray grief or anguish.

Indeed, it was the singer's unmistakable voice that revealed much of the meaning of these songs. Waits in *Bone Machine* engages with the whole range of his vocal skills (Christiansen 2015: 82). The whispered low tones of "Black Wings" and "Earth Died Screaming" announce sinister happenings. The high pitch of "Jesus Gonna Be Here" suggests a call out or a proclamation. The sharp tone of "Murder In The Red Barn" and "In The Colosseum" convey a sour message. The man singing at the top of his voice in "Going Out West" and "Such A Scream" hints at delinquent, possibly sexual, misconduct. The falsetto of "All Stripped Down" and "Dirt in The Ground" keeps you on the alert as if something is about to break. And the peaceful yet throaty tone of the slower songs –"Little Rain", "Who Are You", "Whistle Down The Wind"– points at nostalgia and loss.

"Just like they say in the Bible": A big hope.

Most of the intuitions about the songs' meaning that took shape from the sound were finally confirmed as years went by and as both my English and interest in song lyrics improved. The impression that something sinister was told in the lines of the songs was attested to by the fact that many tracks deal with death. However, the feeling that the singer is not depressed was also supported by the fact that the subject of death is raised with a grotesque and biblical tone that generates a fantastic, entertaining effect. The stories in the album are not an intimate confession of some personal troubled thought, but pure fiction.

The theme of death is strong, particularly in the tunes Waits co-wrote with his wife Kathleen Brennan. Asked what his wife brings to the lyrics of his songs, Waits answered "a whip and a chair. The Bible. The Book of

Revelations." (Maher 2011: 213). That explains the description of the apocalypse in "The Earth Died Screaming" or lines like "*Thou shalt not covet thy neighbours house / Or covet thy neighbours wife"* in "Murder in the Red Barn", and "*Now Cain slew Abel / He killed him with a stone / The sky cracked open / And the thunder groaned*" in "Dirt in the Ground".

The references to the Bible connect Waits to a rural old-time America that was almost absent in previous works and would reappear significantly in later albums. In the bigger picture of the singer's body of works, *Bone Machine* is then another building block of the great unifying storyline of a marginalised America, an underworld of outcasts, forgotten people and lowlifes that began with his debut, *Closing Time* (1973).

Writing about the promise of American life, Greil Marcus said that Americans "hardly know how to talk about the resentment and fear that lies beneath the promise" (Marcus, 1975: 20). Waits has embraced resentment and fear and built his stories upon the failed promise of the American Dream. Even if his works rarely contain an explicit political message, a recurring depiction of social alienation is the carrier of a critique that encourages his audiences to ponder over enduring problems like class, poverty, disparity, lack of social justice. His lyrics somehow display the incoherence and inequality of a society built upon the promise of happiness for all.

The America told in his works is an unsung America, a literary 'Other America' that has its origins in the celebration of the common man and his everyday life inaugurated in the nineteenth century by Emerson and Whitman. Despite the injustices and its frightening dark side, the country that is sung in the works of Waits is progressive, open to diversity, inclusive and protective of the weak. It is a place where invisible people have a voice and are animated by one grand American spirit of hope. Hope in Waits' music is strong in tracks that draw inspiration from black music genres that offered musicians an escape from their material world and a bridge to an emphatic imagined human or transcendent audience. Music is the very source of hope for the hopeless in America, even for the down-and-outs of Tom Waits. *Bone Machine*, despite its dark tones, is no exception to that, especially thanks to the quasi-religious fervour unexpectedly present in a collaboration with Keith Richards: "That Feel", the last song of the album which is "a testament to endurance of the spirit and the indestructible worth of one's humanity" (Hoskyns 2009: 394).

"How the hell did we get here so soon": Twenty-five years on.

Listening to *Bone Machine* today, trying to reminisce feelings of a quarter-century ago, makes me realise that from the initial shock to the finding of a hopeful meaning, the road was long. What took place in between the original exposure to a message of death and its later replacement by human hopefulness is the story of personal growth and change that comes with aging. At sixteen, the dark side of the music that Steen Christiansen classifies as "Gothic" (Christiansen 2015: 73) exercised its charm on me. The wickedness in Waits' voice was the fertile ground for images of skulls, decomposed bodies, demonic creatures, and all other feral visions on which the masculinity of many teenagers rests upon. At the age of forty-one, I retain little interest for the spooky dimension, mostly because I now believe that tangible human experience has much more to offer than the fantastic. Yet, *Bone Machine* hasn't lost its appeal for me. It still resonates as a source of inspirational music and has not been relegated, like several others, to the category of a mere teenage developmental milestone.

The album has remained at the back of my mind as a fundamental piece of my own musical education. It has

been a point of reference to which I return as my music information gradually advances. The record initially taught me important lessons in what song-writing can be and how beautiful a song can sound when delivered with essential arrangements. It later unfolded pictures of a forgotten, marginal America that seemed to come from a Lead Belly or a Harry McClintock song or a photograph by Robert Frank, the artist that according to Jack Kerouac “sucked a sad poem right out of America onto film”. Waits was able to catch a similar sad poem onto tape that is at the same time a celebration of life and of a man’s willingness to live on.

Discovering pieces of this history of American culture helped me navigate through those difficult songs and understand where they originated. Every bending note of the album traces back to the epic of the blues and makes a timeless American masterpiece out of *Bone Machine*, one that still contains enigmas in the interstices of its noises and silences whose solutions I will never grow tired of looking for.

References

Christiansen S. (2015), "'The earth died screaming': Tom Waits' Bone Machine", in Botting F., Spooner C. (ed.) *Monstrous media/spectral subjects. Imaging Gothic from the nineteenth century to the present*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 73-85.

Frank R. (2008), *The Americans / photographs by Robert Frank; introduction by Jack Kerouac*, Göttingen: Steidl.

Hoskyns B. (2009), *Lowside of the Road: A Life of Tom Waits,* New York: Broadway Books.

Hutchisson J. M. (ed.) (2013), *Conversations with Paul Auster*, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.

Jacobs J. (2006), *Wild Years: The Music and Myth of Tom Waits*, Toronto: ECW Press.

Maher P. (2011), *Tom Waits on Tom Waits: Interviews and Encounters (Musicians in Their Own Words),* Chicago: Chicago Review Press.

Marcus G. (1975), *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock'n'Roll,* New York: Plume.

Mason W., "Three Iconic Musicians on Artistic Creation – And Its Importance Now" in the *New York Times Style Magazine,* 1 March 2017. www.nytimes.com/2017/03/01/t-magazine/beck-tom-waits-kendrick-lamar.html

Montandon M. (ed.) (2005), *Innocent When You Dream: The Tom Waits Reader,* New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.

Richardson D., "Composer, Musician, Performer, Actor – Tom Waits Is A Renaissance Man Whose Musique Noir Captures The Sound Of The Dark Age" in *PULSE!*, September 1992, 58-61.

Sante L., "Sewers of Budapest", *The Village Voice,* 18 May 1999, 69.

Silverton P., "The Lie in Waits", the *Observer*, 23 November 1992.

Waits T., Brennan K. (1992) "Dirt In The Ground", *Bone Machine*, Island.

Waits T., Brennan K. (1992) "Murder In The Red Barn", *Bone Machine*, Island.

Adriano Tedde is a PhD candidate at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. He is working on a thesis titled *Another America in the works of Paul Auster, Jim Jarmusch and Tom Waits*. He holds a bachelor degree in Political Sciences and a master's degree in International Affairs. After having worked as a diplomat for twelve years, he has shifted his attention from World's politics to American studies. A self-taught musician and songwriter, he grew up with an admiration for American culture, and a particular passion for the blues and folk traditions.

adriano.tedde@griffithuni.edu.au
Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia
School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science
Affiliation: Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research

How can you sing a song if you have no voice? Disabled musicians, activism, technology, and the authenticity of creativity

Leon Clowes

How can you sing a song if you have no voice? For many disabled people, prior to the advancements in technology in the 1980s, music making was limited at best and impossible for many. Consequently, the convergence of activism with the music technology revolution over the past thirty years has played a fundamental role in the creative development of disabled musicians. One of the key arts organisations working in this field is *Drake Music*, a national organisation that specialises in music making with disabled people using technology. As a non-disabled former musician-turned-charity-administrator, my fundraising career began by first working at *Drake Music* in the mid-1990s. I later returned as a freelancer in the early 2000s, and earlier this year I began working again at *Drake Music*.

Having returned for the third time over a twenty-year period, the changes in society and technology have had an enormous impact on the work that we do. For this article, the basis for reflection is a two-page manifesto 'Music gives disability a byte', published in the January 1987 issue of the *New Scientist* and written by the charity's founder Adèle Drake with Jim Grant. The words of Adèle Drake, and sound artist Duncan Chapman are also included, emerging from our conversations in December 2015. Through this piece I hope to raise questions central to key notions of voice, authenticity, the musician, and musical creation in relation to the use of technology by disabled musicians. Each will be provided in bold, in an attempt to 'Get Loud'.

Start Me Up

Technology affords the opportunity for creative expression for a disabled musician. But, as Chapman reflects:

> *There are issues of authenticity … and* ***how is it authentically somebody's voice?*** *… It's really apparent when you're working with someone for whom communication is difficult – if it takes somebody five minutes to get every word out – then actually communication takes a long time – then* ***how do I know it's an authentic voice?*** *It's very easy with technology to set up your computer so when you push a button all the music plays. So* ***how do I know it's me?*** *And* ***what's that got to do with me anyway?***

If a song can be about anything, disabled musicians using the palette of technology are extending different forms and expressions of creativity that were not previously possible. The 'voice' of a non-verbal musician can instead be via music, noise, and sound.

Many thanks to the New Scientist for granting permission to use images from 'Music gives disability a byte', an article by Adèle Drake and Jim Grant. The images were taken by Pete Addis, the magazine's staff photographer at the time.

Pragmatic research has considered specifically designed music programmes, and comprehensive guidance exists for music therapists applying technology in their practice. This laudable work advances knowledge of practical interventions, but **what are disabled musicians creating with these tools and why is this important for others to hear and understand?**

> *Those members of society with less social power, those on the margins of society, have fewer opportunities to present their chosen identities and are more susceptible to the identities ascribed to them by others.*
> Watts and Ridley (2006, p. 101)

Ripat and Woodgate (2011) note an absence of knowledge on the intersection of the cultural identities of individuals who use assistive technologies, and so make a call for further research. Additionally, there is a paucity of information on the if and how technology has authentically transformed the creative voices of non-verbal disabled artists through sound and music over the last thirty years. Within this piece, I hope to raise important questions on the nature of creativity which are easily overlooked by many of us who take our own capacity to create for granted. In asking **'what would *your* social and cultural experience be like if you found yourself with barriers to "being creative"?'**, I offer examples from a small group of individuals who have responded to this problem using activism and technology.

Sound and Vision: Communication of Creativity

> *If children cannot communicate, then no one can understand what they think.*
> Drake and Grant (1987, p. 37)

In much of the dominant academic discourse around music and creativity, the emphasis falls on competency and training, be that in a practical sense (as described by Gardner 1993) or a socio-cultural one (Hesmondhalgh 2013; Negus and Pickering 2002). However, the important point here, as highlighted in the quote by Drake and Grant above, is that heavily implied in this dominant discourse is the often-unspoken fact that when an individual is excluded from ways of thinking and talking about creativity, very often they are also excluded from creativity itself.

> *Thus, while every normal individual is exposed to natural language primarily through listening to others speak, humans can encounter music through many channels.*
> Gardner (1993, p. 119)

This resonates with my own observations of a music workshop in a South London residential home in the mid-1990s where the *Drake Music* workshop leader invited the adult participants to bring in recordings of their favourite music. From this group session, it was clear that the workshop participants, who had been living in residential settings for most or all of their lives had only been exposed to a limited number of audio-cassettes from within their own microcosms. This was a stark contrast from my educational, social, and cultural experiences, in which listening to the radio, watching television, reading music weeklies, having piano lessons, studying music at university, and frequenting record shops were interconnected components of my own musical experience and education.

While my personal cultural journey was mostly of my own volition, the major difference was that I had the choice to take this route. It would have taken any one of the workshop participants an enormous amount of self-determination to have anything like the exposure I had to popular music and cultural life in my teens and mid-twenties. The participants were keen attenders who clearly enjoyed the weekly *Drake Music* workshops, but it was clear to me that they had also experienced what was, to me, a poverty of cultural enrichment.

In the 2006 evaluation of the practice of *Drake Music*, Watts and Ridley claim that:

> *we learn to construct our own identities and shape our own images of ourselves. The music that we listen to and make play a significant role in these processes.*
> (p. 101)

Therefore, our taste and knowledge of music can be central in defining who we are, who we want to be and how we wish to define our place in the world. For the people living in the residential home workshop I describe, the outlets the individuals had been limited and their choices restricted by their circumstances.

For some disabled people, communication itself is vital to day-to-day survival. Adèle reflected on how many disabled people have their privacy constantly invaded by others to achieve the functional necessities of feeding, bathing and toileting. She said that 'you end up having intimate conversations that you would never normally have.' Exploring this through sound, with one non-verbal pupil of *Drake Music*, the first sounds he created via a synthesizer were evocative of gunfire and a motor bike accelerating. As Adèle explained, the young man wanted to 'make an impact'.

I would also assert that this was the young man experiencing having a voice for the first time. Technology allowed him to be loud, and he wanted to shout with his first words.

Talking 'Bout (M)iGeneration: Accessibility as Activism

> *Action affects the world.*
> Drake and Grant (1987, p. 39)

Even as recently as the 1980s, many disabled people had to lead institutionalized lives, or, if they lived independently with their families, my own experience was that there were limited life choices open to them. My birth-mother Sandra's physical condition deteriorated because of multiple sclerosis (MS). Sandra barely left the house except for a few family occasions. Adèle Drake's twin sister was also diagnosed with MS at forty, perhaps one motivator for us both becoming involved in this cultural world.

Although the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities only came into force in 2006, activists and Disability Studies academics have challenged the language used to refer to disabled people and the contextualisation of the issues that they face daily. By replacing the 'medical' model of disability (focussing on a specific disability or the disabilities of individuals) with the 'social' model (how society presents barriers for individuals), an attitudinal shift takes place. It is society that causes disabling barriers.

Activists such as Disabled People Against the Cuts have taken to the streets to protest, speak out and be visible; most notably in the face of recent government cuts, as scrutinized by Jamie Kelsey-Fry in an online New Internationalist magazine article in 2011 .[1] It could be argued that, in an artistic sense, the very act of being a disabled musician is a form of activism. The disabled musician has both the challenge and opportunity of pre-conceived or no expectations from audiences who have had no prior exposure to disabled creatives (Watts and Ridley, 2006, p. 102).

The arts sector infrastructure and practice of community and disability arts evolved in the UK during the latter part of the twentieth century. Prior to the likes of *Drake Music*, *Graeae Theatre Company*, *Heart n Soul*, *Candoco Dance Company*, *Share Music*, and *The Orpheus Centre* emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, arts organisations for whom the specific delivery of arts practice for, by and with disabled people (the catch-all moniker becoming 'disability arts') was a relatively new concept.

Up until this point, music provision was almost exclusively 'for' rather than 'led by' disabled people. The role of music was to heal or soothe: either the clinical intervention of music therapy, or the less formalised adoption of music in care settings. Music as therapy.

> *There always has been a huge continuum between what is therapy and what is education. And it goes on, all the time. So, of course, if you play music, it's both therapeutic and educational in the sense that you learn to distinguish things if you're listening.*
> Adèle Drake

As Adèle muses, there is overlap between music therapy and music education, but **is this as true for us all as it is for a disabled musician?**

> *I get quite political.* ***Are we trying to 'normalise' people by making 'normal' music?*** *I prefer the edges. Now we have sound art, this has made things more mainstream.* Duncan Chapman

Duncan Chapman demonstrates his philosophy through his practice. He presented music created by children with severe, profound and multiple learning disabilities at Wigmore Hall in 2011 as part of a collection of pieces presented by numerous mainstream schools. As a deliberate act, Chapman ensured that the disabled children were the only class delivering their music via live electronics. Their sound was blisteringly loud against all the other school groups who played acoustic instruments. Chapman's rationale was that, 'the kids on the bus from the special school … you don't meet them in normal life so they were the loudest.' Chapman's idea was to explore 'hidden worlds' and to 'make the invisible visible', presenting the mainstream audience with a world they might not otherwise see. These children are not to be pitied, they are shouting. The collision of loud noise and sound is a call to action, forcing the audience to open their eyes, possibly for the first time.

1 Please see https://newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2016/11/01/disabled-people-lead-the-fight-against-austerity/

Chapman's intentional use of electronic sounds transform the disabled schoolchildren's musical voices into disruptive shouting. In considering this, I was struck by the parallels with the words displayed in a framed picture that hangs in the *Drake Music* office. They are taken from a 2009 poem 'Get Loud' by US poet Ruth Harrigan, who draws on her observations of a young boy who is a wheelchair user. These words crystallize the fundamental need for human expression, balanced with the frustration of the struggle of continually remaining unheard or misunderstood:

> *Get loud*
> *or whisper.*
> *Your voice*
> *Your choice*
> *Shout*
> *One word*
> *Or whisper*
> *Words*
> *Others strain to hear*
> *Let them lean down*
> *Toward your wheelchair*
> *Their head touching yours*
> *Their breath on your cheek*
> *Asking*
> *What did you say?*
> *Then*
> *Get loud!*[2]

The concept of communication and expression is challenged and questioned through art. In 'The Non-Normative Speaking Clock',[3] sound artist Gemma Nash applies her lived experience to examine the implicit dominance of social construction about the way we communicate with one another. She draws a parallel to debates about body fascism;[4] and through this piece, she is highlighting the politics of normativity in speech and communication. In collaboration with technologist Lewis Sykes, Nash reframes the iconic speaking clock's precision and function by positioning her voice within its familiar context.

If disabled people's activism is 'Getting Loud' to ensure that hidden voices are heard, **how are digital technologies helping to amplify previously hidden voices?**

The Times They Are A-Changin': Technology as Transformative

> *MIDI and computers have provided professional musicians with the freedom that word processors brought to writers.*
> Drake and Grant (1987, p. 37)

In parallel to the societal shifts influenced by disabled activism, technological advancement has been the actor to facilitate the cultural evolution. Technology has engineered a shift in the possibilities for all creatives, but it has brought about nothing less than a revolution for disabled musicians. In the *New Scientist* article, one of the predictions made was that the ability to save and edit music would offer disabled musicians hitherto unprecedented opportunities in creative participation. Conversely, the disadvantages are that the process of music making would, in some ways, become too easy, or offer a bewildering amount of choices.

2 Many thanks to the Ruth Harrigan for granting permission to use this extract from her poem 'Get Loud' which is taken from her collection 'That Woman in the Wheelchair and other poems'

3 Please see https://vimeo.com/199530781

4 Please see http://www.drakemusic.org/blog/gemma-nash/can-we-communicate-beyond-words/

After completing her postgraduate diploma at the Institute of Education, the then school teacher Adèle Drake went on to establish *Drake Music Project* (named in memory of two of her daughters) with the mission to provide disabled children and adults with opportunities to make and learn about music via computers and technology. Drake pinpoints the adoption of switches in assistive technology as a milestone:

> *With my sister becoming ill, I knew she could draw the curtains or open the door with an electronic door, and that people could control an electric switch so a light would go around a computer screen with holes for 'I want a cup of tea'. The technology was there but not yet on a computer screen.*
> Adèle Drake

During the mid-1980s, the research unit at Charlton Park School in Greenwich focussed on the potential applications of computers and switches for disabled learners. Word processors offered writers the facility to save data, and more crucially, to edit. Inspired by this technological innovation, Adèle began to run music lessons at the school using a donated BBC computer and Yamaha keyboard. In the world of hand-held devices with instant music apps, this kind of practice sounds quirky and quaint today, but it was both experimental and innovative for the time.

The *GarageBand* app[5] is explicitly named by Chapman as a contemporary example of swiftly offering impressive music making results in a classroom, and the touch and ease of use of an iPad is accessible for many in both mainstream and special educational needs settings. *GarageBand* utilizes predetermined sounds, and allows the user to record audio and to import external sounds and samples, and so the creation of generic music is straightforward. The iPad itself is a good example of technology built for other purposes but disabled composer and conductor James Rose and musician and workshop leader Ben Sellers set out to go beyond this, and reposition iPads in the minds of educators as expressive and creative musical instruments.[6]

However, the relative ease of use of *GarageBand* does have the potential to discourage the learner from exploration of unfamiliar sounds and structures, and from the discipline of practicing and learning technique of an instrument. Chapman proposes that instead, technology should extend the potentials of music and sound art:

> *One has to work harder in a way … to find a way of making the sound itself …* ***Why would I want to make my computer sound like a piano when I can use a piano?*** *… I think people over-egg the amount of change … The basic acts of listening, perceiving and connecting are still the same.*
> Duncan Chapman

In contrast to the immediacy of GarageBand is Dr Tim Anderson's *E-Scape*.[7] While developing the embryonic computer music programme at York University, Dr Anderson became involved in *Drake Music* in the early 1990s, and his academic project developed into a switch-operated programme aiming to suit the needs of disabled composers so they can create without the aid of others.

E-Scape is a compositional and performance music system designed to suit the requirements of the broadest range of disabled musicians who use switches and eye gaze technologies, but the user journey is initially complex and does not provide immediate rewards. The programme's development presents an endless pattern of complexities for iterations. On the one hand, with the programme being designed around an individual's needs and requests, this programme is centred on the person learning to play and compose with the programme. However, because *E-Scape* is created to level the musical playing field for people who can only use switches, no-one will ever have a 'quick win' using the programme in the same way as is possible

5 Please see https://www.apple.com/uk/ios/garageband/

6 Please see http://www.drakemusic.org/blog/james-rose/from-theory-to-feely/

7 Please see http://www.inclusivemusic.org.uk/e-scape/

with *GarageBand*. A great deal of time must first be spent on familiarization of the programme by the user. However, the advantage here is that *E-Scape* is a programme that conceptually presents infinite iterations, potentially bespoke to any disabled musician.

Technological advancements have made sound production free to everyone. As disabled musician Lyn Levett explained in an email to me, 'software has taken over from hardware'. The portability this offers means she is now able to compose at any time and in most places, rather than in a specific location at a prearranged time when the necessary technology and a facilitator is available to operate it. There are many positives to the creative possibilities that this portability allows for people with disabilities.

However, one downside to the democracy of sound production is the potential of the musician having too much choice. Chapman spoke of how the cost of studio hire in the 1980s ensured a limited number of takes, and, to a certain extent, the avoidance of over-production. This is important in the context of the disabled musician's voice because all creatives using technology face an endless choice of sound possibilities, whereas the use of limited resources may better encourage discipline within practice.

The activism of co-creation is the route to what Chapman describes as 'giving people a voice' and with technology as a facilitator, the opportunities are open to 'create music with the sounds that really belong' to individuals and communities. Technology – both generalist and specialist – far exceeds Drake and Grant's 1987 prediction of the removal of barriers to music making. It has become the musical voice and expression for many disabled and non-disabled musicians.

What will the future hold thirty years from today?

When I asked my interviewees this question, the responses varied greatly. Adèle Drake's longstanding dream is a virtual online orchestra so that a real-time ensemble could include players from Australia to Argentina. Duncan Chapman enthuses about the recycling or upcycling of technologies, and the potential of new sound palettes that this presents. What strikes me is that the variance and landscape of music makers today involves technologists, coders, sound artists. The concept of what constitutes creativity in music has been stretched and expanded alongside technological advancement and societal shifts brought about by activism. This can only be set to continue. Therefore, the palette for a disabled musician's creative communication is increasingly rich and nuanced.

At *Drake Music* today, a central ambition is that all music technology should be made fully accessible as a matter of course, rather than be an add on, or an extension of, existing technologies. The charity observes the social model of disability rather than the medical one, and so *Drake Music*'s Research & Development programme brings disabled musicians together with technologists and makers to create bespoke instruments. Our overarching artistic programme seeks to ask **what is music**, and **how do we define what makes a musician?** There is a real opportunity here; disabled musicians may be faced with low or no expectations from music consumers, but equally, they can be unfettered with these preconceptions. They have a blank canvas and this rich technicolour palette. There are no rules, and little need to create any new ones. As instruments can now be tailored to each individual, potentially, we can all have a unique musical voice.

By bringing together activism and technology with creativity, the disabled musician can now be centre stage. It was not a singular actor that made tomorrow's world possible today, but rather a convergence of politics, resources, and co-creation through which cumulative change was possible and happened. Given the rate of technological advancement, the world of possibilities for disabled and non-disabled musicians may well be even further removed what we could possibly conceive today. And we can hope that the questions asked and the answers given will too be different.

To all the disabled musicians and activists, I say: 'Get Loud', Stay Loud, Be Heard.

References

Drake, A. and Grant, J. (1987) Music gives disability a byte. *New Scientist,* pp. 37-38.
Gardner, H. (1993) Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences. London: Fontana Press.
Hesmondhalgh, D. (2013) Why Music Matters. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.
Negus, K. and Pickering, M. (2002) 'Creativity and musical experience', in D. Hesmondhalgh and K. Negus (eds), *Popular Music Studies*, pp. 65-83, London: Arnold.
Ripat, J. and Woodgate, R. (2011) The intersection of culture, disability and assistive technology. *Disability and Rehabilitation: Assistive Technology*, 6:2, pp. 87-96.
Watts, M. and Ridley, B. (2006) Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Drake Music Project: A Capability Perspective of Dis/ability and Musical Identities. *Taboo,* Fall-Winter, pp. 99-107.

Leon Clowes completed his MA in Music (Popular Music Research) at Goldsmiths in 2016. Currently a part-time student at University of Huddersfield, his PhD focus is 'Burt Bacharach's (Un)easy Listening: A Model for Musicians from the Middlebrow of Popular Music'. This Riffs article is Leon's first published piece of academic writing, and in 2018 he has two two book chapters due for publication.

Leon is the Development Manager for arts charity *Drake Music*, and he has worked and volunteered in the arts, health and social welfare sectors as a fundraiser and project manager, most notably for the Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester and London Film School. Leon is also a Winston Churchill Fellow, having completed a very personal piece of research into families like his own that are affected by kinship care across eight states in the United States in 2012.

Aotearoa -

Picturing the lyrics of the land

Lyrics: Minuit
Curator: Katie Rochow

And if the past's a distant land

Maybe there is no rhyme or reason

And if we salvage what we can

You and me

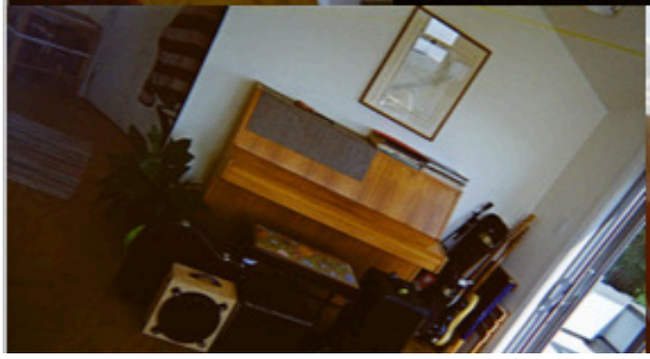










And yes, it's true we're very young
And we have sticks and stones and bruises.

Can we undo what has been done?
Is this the way destiny chooses?

You and me
You and me
You and me











We are a New Zealand

A New Zealand

You and me

With thanks to Minuit for the loan of their lyrics.

Katie Rochow recently completed her PhD dissertation, *Sensing the City – Mapping the Beat. A Rhythmanalysis of music-making in Wellington and Copenhagen,* at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Katie is currently a teaching assistant at the School of English and Media Studies at Massey University in Wellington. With specific expertise in visual ethnography - particularly photo-elicitation and mental mapping - her research interests are focused on place-making, affectivity, embodiment and cultural production in the city.

www.katierochow.com

Riffs

Experimental writing on popular music

Riffs: Experimental writing on popular music is an emerging and exciting postgraduate journal based at and funded by the Birmingham Centre for Media and Cultural Research (BCMCR), Birmingham City University. Launched in February 2017, *Riffs* provides a platform for the publication of experimental pieces on popular music. Contributions to each issue are made available through the journal website (www.riffsjournal.org) and a limited edition print-run.

Riffs has a strong DIY and experimental ethos that aims to push the boundaries of academic research, communication, and publishing in the area of popular music research. The editorial board at *Riffs* is keen to develop a creative and experimental space for publication that includes an online forum for thinking through the ways in which we analyse, understand, and communicate.

As one of the largest centres for popular music research, Birmingham City University offers a wealth of global networks and potential readership. Our editorial team and research community expand our reach further, with active participation in a range of international research networks including IASPM, MeCCSA, the Jazz Research Network, and the AHRC. Through these connections, we aim to develop an international and active readership of postgraduate researchers and academics at all stages of their career.

If you would like to purchase advertising space in *Riffs*, please contact info@riffsjournal.org

Contributor Guidelines

Riffs: Experimental research on Popular Music welcomes pieces from all disciplines. Each issue will be based on a prompt, but responses can vary dependent upon the contributor's interest and experience. As the journal title suggests, we are most interested in pieces that take an experimental approach to the consideration of popular music. For examples of previous interpretations, please visit our journal website.

All contributions published by *Riffs* will be considered by the whole editorial panel, and edited by two specialist editors before publication.

Word Limit: 2,000-4,000 (excluding references)
Please do not submit full dissertations or theses. All contributions should respond to the prompt and take an experimental approach to undertaking and/or communicating research on popular music. We also welcome shorter written pieces, audio, and visual pieces to include photo essays.

Abstract: Please provide an informal, blog-style abstract (under 300 words) and a profile picture. This abstract will be hosted on our journal website and social media platforms. As ever, links to external websites and the use of images, audio and video clips are also welcome.

Format: Please email submissions as attachments to the editorial contact given below. All articles should be provided as a .doc or .docx file. All images and web-ready audio or video clips should also be emailed as separate files, or through a file-sharing platform such as WeTransfer or Dropbox.

Bio: Please include a short (up to 300 words) bio with your name, institutional affiliation (if appropriate), email address, current research stage, and other useful/interesting information, positioned at the end of your piece.

References: If you refer to other publications within your piece, please list these in a 'References' section at the end. All clear formats of referencing are acceptable. Discographies and weblinks can also be detailed at the end of your contribution.

Submission: Abstracts for our bi-annual prompts should be emailed to info@riffsjournal.org

Please note: *Riffs* shall be entitled to first use of the contribution in all the journal's different forms, but the author remains the copyright owner and can republish their contribution without seeking the journal's permission. *Riffs* reserve the right to decline to publish contributions, if they are submitted after the agreed deadline and without the assigned editor being informed (and agreeing to) a new submission date.

Riffs

Experimental writing on popular music

Issue 1 Volume 2: October 2017
ISSN 2513-8537

Articles

Photo Essays

BIRMINGHAM CITY University