

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.

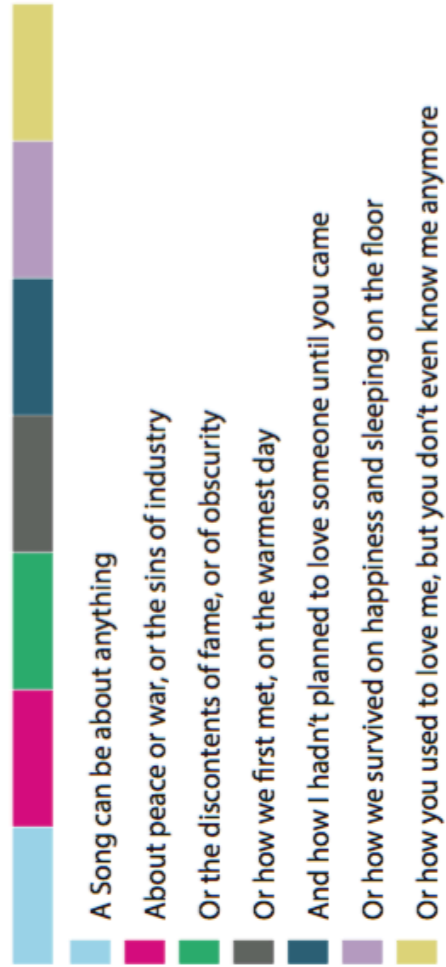
Guide to using the reference score

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

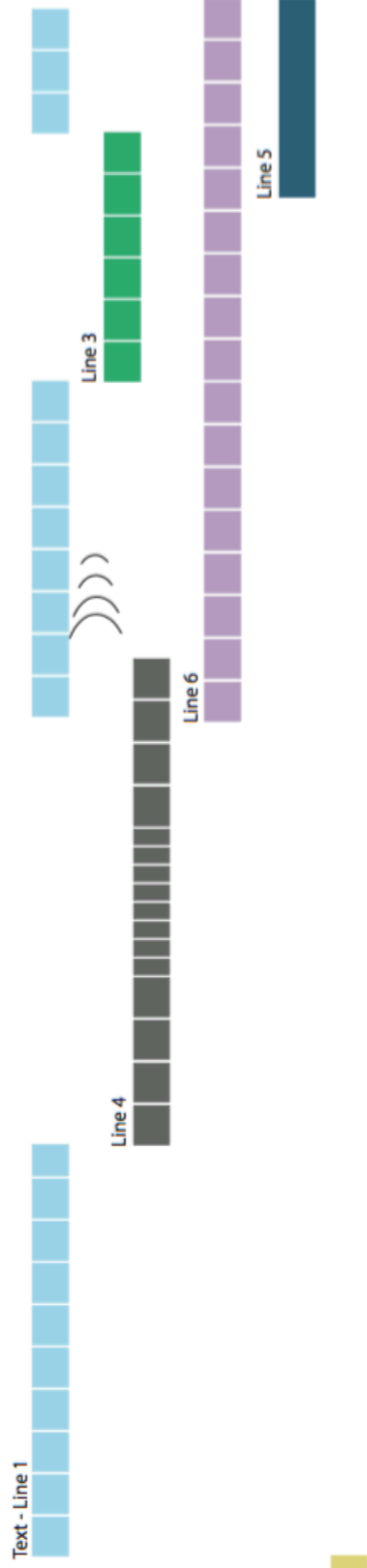
- Rhythmic Mimesis
- Melodic Mimesis
- Metric Super-imposition
- Building tension
- Releasing Tension
- Creating Background texture
- Implying Consistent Meter

- 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



Full Text



Mimesis
part 2

Or how we... first... met...
Or... the warm-est day...
Or... how we survived... on happy... days and sleeping on the floor...
Or... how you used to love... me but you don't even love me anymore...

And how I hadn't planned... to love someone un - til you came...
And how I hadn't planned... to love someone un - til you came...
Peace or war...
Or the sil-ence of in - dis - cre - pan - cy...
Or the sil-ence - tears of fame...
Or of ab - sence - ty...

03:36 04:12 07:28 08:40 09:12

Drumset

Chordal Synth layers

Bass Synth

v. low
bass note

(Indrawn Breath)

(Synth Strings)

Mimesis
part 3

Text - Line 1

Group Vocals

09:13

10:20

11:30

Vinyl popping

Line 2

Line 6

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 Cake-walk (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-XRIJ1>



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.