

on the score of (for the reason of) Juliana Hodkinson's *some reasons for hesitating* (1999)

written for Montréal's Nouvel Ensemble Moderne
first performance: Adelaide Festival, March 2000

score n.

a written or printed piece of concerted music, in which all the vocal or instrumental parts are noted on a series of staves one under the other

some reasons for hesitating consists of fifteen hand-written parts, for flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, keyboard, percussion, 2 violins, viola, cello and contrabass, respectively. There is no score. In this collection of booklets, with its sixty-one pages of sparse staves, only two pages are identical for each instrumental part: a sheet of 'notes on chronography and the coordination of parts', and a more closely typed sheet of 'notes to the musicians'. As an inclusive address to the readers of different musical lines, these two pages substitute for the composer's orderly collation and standardisation of parts. Yet they do so only provisionally, as Hodkinson's text both anticipates and embarrasses any desire for a score. The introductory 'notes' begin:

The performance of this ensemble piece is the result of a jigsaw-like process of fitting parts together. But without the guidance of a complete picture; there is no common pulse, no score, no conductor.

And in the concluding paragraph these principles are affirmed once more:

It is a major point that the relatively large ensemble plays without conductor and that there is no score – i.e. a performance demands the highest degree of mutual attentiveness and communication between musicians, and there is no absolute compositional control over the vertical coordination. This practice displaces the interest from music's ideal representation in the score to music as an event and unique experiential opportunity.

To withhold 'the score' from the piece's formal motives and devices is to challenge the conventions of ensemble rehearsal and performance, yet this simple gesture also frustrates certain approaches to the music's archiving and close study.

score v.t/i.
gain (points etc.) in a game or competition

Musicology of the western classical tradition has long emphasised the score as a pre-eminent ‘source’ for its specialist narratives. Especially in their written and published form, canonical music history and music criticism have continued to elaborate the score as perhaps the richest reserve of reliable, reproducible ‘evidence’. So often framed by the presumed ‘fact’ of the authentic manuscript or the definitive edition, such writing frequently treats these as sufficient in themselves to ‘establish’ both cause and meaning for a piece’s effects. Thus the score has remained an important justification for musicological discourse, and a most suitable, tidy supplement to it. In broad terms, then, the score has allowed musicology’s verbal representations to compete with musical notation and performance for persuasive appeal. A scored instrumental composition is easily spoken for, recast via a series of epithets as something complete, thoroughly intelligible, and finally recuperable to prose.

Hodkinson’s considered refusal to provide a score for *some reasons for hesitating* throws such ordinary procedures of musicological writing into confusion: what will constitute a writer’s proper, quotable ‘source’, for summing up, for example, the relation of parts to the ‘whole work’? What will suffice as comprehensive proof of the writer’s interpretation? Literally, what will serve as the pre-text for evaluating a concert performance?

So far, there is no particular ‘source’ from which to consider *some reasons for hesitating* that is not insistently partial, even fragmentary. In addition to the musician’s booklets there is simply an audio recording, produced in the Elder Hall at Adelaide University on the occasion of the first performance. Of course in some sense such a ‘live recording’—made in public and unrevised—vouches for ‘music as an event and unique experiential opportunity’. But inevitably, the blunt ear of this recording can *only listen* to the performers’ ‘mutual attentiveness and communication’ on the concert platform. That is, insofar as the absence of a score and a conductor *condition* the duration, succession, and simultaneity of sounds that make up the piece in performance, the recording of course suppresses these circumstances. It *only listens* for all the mannerisms and glances brought about by the musicians’ stark interdependence in and across the space of the stage. This choreography of gestures and prompts is accentuated and validated by Hodkinson’s musical writing: it will always be a crucial aspect of what may and may not be heard in this piece. But on the recording, the shifting detail, the indeterminacy and unexpectedness of the music can have no affinity with these important

theatrical indications. And so the DAT unwinding is bound to heighten that desire for a score, that presumptuous, literate wish to inventory and ascribe the various sounds, and verbalise their passing.

Often the commingled hums, clattering, popping and chiming audible on the recording confound clear identification with particular instruments. This is more a function of Hodkinson's instrumental writing than of the audio recording or playing technology. *some reasons for hesitating* elicits a collaborative choreography between instrumentalists, but the individual parts also call for extended techniques, and these constantly subdue the instruments' usual sonorities. Strange timbral fingerings are specified for the oboe and bassoon players; assorted small objects are added to other parts, like pencils and glass guitar-slides in the violins, and table-tennis balls in the keyboard part. For each instrumentalist to render her or his part is by itself a somewhat delicate procedure: it involves a great deal of adjusting and straining, muting and un-muting, with the extended techniques tending to produce entries that falter, and sounds that are variable and 'impure'. Visually and aurally, the style of such playing is likely to be intense, but hardly grand or commanding. Furthermore, every precarious articulation is surrounded by waiting; a waiting through notated rests and long pauses that also needs to be a supple listening and watchfulness for cues. Consequently, whether in rehearsal or performance, this music must remain fissured through with the musicians' corporeal *efforts at coherence*. The audio recording makes it possible to recover this fissuring, this distinctive brittleness, yet makes it liable to be forgotten.

So much contingency in the realisation of parts and ensemble undermines the notion that triumphant fluency must be an attribute of performance; that indeed fluency is a key reason for concert performance, and for composing music. Beyond merely excluding a score, *some reasons for hesitating* works against expectations of self-evident continuity and coherence by the content of its parts, and thus the piece works against a closed narrative, an integrated description. Pursued as an accumulation of booklets and as an audio recording, if not as an irreversible performance experience, it will not answer to any verbal representation that purports to be other than open-ended, partial, and allusive—that is, in a sense, hesitant.

score n.
line or mark cut into something

In her typed foreword to the musicians, Hodkinson projects *some reasons for hesitating* as an 'opportunity' for the musicians to engage the space left by the absence of a score, stressing their

responsibility to disperse the role of an absent conductor amongst themselves. By authorising the players' work on the piece as 'a creative act', Hodkinson is self-authorising a retreat from the image of the composer as exalted 'creator' of what will be heard. If the piece comprises an unfolding of 'processes ... [which] will, in sounding, demonstrate subtle yet rich discrepancies between minds performing the same or similar actions', then as an 'expression', it cannot pretend to have an exclusive, or 'pure' origin in one person.

For music history in the biographical mode, the score has commonly served to invoke such an origin, construed as the capacious 'Book', in which the 'voice' of the composer 'speaks' most convincingly. From this trope, it follows that an ensemble performance is chiefly a type of *commemorative* undertaking, a ritual of re-iterating a content that is more or less effectively *dictated* by the name, the will, the autonomous and romantic figure of the composer.

By contrast, the various part-books of *some reasons for hesitating* register a resistance to this myth: gathered together, they represent a kind of authorial silence from Hodkinson, into which that discourse on complete 'self-expression' recedes. This silence is suggested as one of alertness to performance's potential for generating different orientations between the roles of composer and musicians.

Even so, the instrumental parts do concede more space to authorial 'scoring' than Hodkinson's foreword would seem to acknowledge. In the oboe part-book for instance, every stave represents approximately 30 seconds of music; across four pages of music, each stave designated 'oboe' has above it a smaller stave, designated 'cues'. As quotations from other parts, the cues are always extremely selective, and they have a sketchy, sometimes cramped appearance. They amount to just a few notes below a scrawled instrument name, with some description added, like 'piano (pedal bang)', 'double bass (*πιζζ*)', or the more ample 'vln. (+ trumpet, percussion, cello)' at the 4' 00" marking. The other part-books include similar, disjointed signs of 'something else to listen for', arrayed or pinched between seconds-markings. In a reading complicit with Hodkinson's stated intentions for the piece, any cue is merely a little inducement to that 'mutual attentiveness and communication' between players in performance.

But these superscriptions can also be read as something more contradictory, for they face the musicians with specific, if uneasy traces of a composerly *guarantee* that the piece *truly has been fixed* with

an abiding, interior unity and coherence. If these vestiges of a closed score were to be omitted, or erased, would the possibilities for musicianly appropriation and ‘creation’ proliferate *too much*? And proliferate too much *for whom*? For the ensemble of players; for the composer; for an audience; for a musicologist?

Another interpolation: about *some reasons for hesitating* it may now be possible to write that the piece is a *strategy* for both disguising and affirming (as yet) ineradicable, institutionalised desires for a score—desires that have long ago conflated *the-score-as-idea* with *the-score-as-object*.

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