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Research Article / Araştırma Makalesi

One Concept, Multiple Realizations A Case Study on Notation in Compositional Practice: *Dark Bright*

Bir Kavram, Çoklu Uygulamalar: Notasyon Kullanımı Üzerine Bir Ornek Uygulama Calısması: *Dark Bright*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how diverse modes of notation, grounded in a single germinal idea, can yield multiple, distinct musical outcomes. Through a practice-based approach, the study investigates how different iterations of a musical work can emerge by employing, suppressing, or accentuating compositional, improvisational, and transcriptional techniques. Rather than focusing on fixed forms, the study highlights the creation of musical atmospheres, spaces for exploration, and sound-based interaction, promoting a post-colonial approach to musical scores and notation that moves beyond Eurogenetic traditions. This approach encourages collective authorship and empathy within the process of musical generation. Each work employs a different approach to the communication of musical ideas to performers, with the choice of notational or scoring modality tailored to the specific circumstances of each piece. The resulting compositions, and conclusions based on comparing their outcomes, underscores the fluidity between composer and performer roles, reflecting on how shifting creative ownership can lead to more collaborative and transcultural music-making, while still allowing for a recognizable cohesion connecting the composition to its composer.

Keywords: Composition, improvisation, notation

ÖZ

Bu makale, tek bir temel müzikal fikirden yola çıkarak kullanılan notasyon biçiminin nasıl farklı ve özgün müzikal sonuçlar doğurabileceğini incelemektedir. Uygulama odaklı bir yaklaşım izleyerek ve bestecilik, doğaçlama ve transkripsiyon tekniklerinin farklı şekillerde kullanılması ve bilinçli bir şekilde öne çıkartılması veya göz ardı edilmesi gibi yöntemlerle bir müzik eserinin farklı versiyonlarının nasıl ortaya çıkabileceği araştırılmaktadır. Burada sabit formlara odaklanmak yerine, müzikal atmosferler, keşif alanları ve ses tabanlı etkileşimlerin gerçekleşmesi ön planda tutularak, müzikal partisyonlar ve notasyonlara ilişkin Avrupa-merkezli geleneklerin ötesine geçen ve müzikal üretim sürecinde kolektif yaratım ve empatiyi teşvik eden post-kolonyal bir yaklaşım savunulmaktadır. Süreçte ortaya çıkmış olan her bir eser müzikal fikirlerin icracılara aktarılması boyutunda da farklı bir yaklaşıma karşılık gelmektedir. Ayrıca eserlerde kullanılan notasyon biçimi her bir eserin kendi özel şartlarına uygun olarak belirlenmiştir. Ortaya çıkan müzik eserleri ve bunların karşılaştırılması ile elde edilen bulgular, bir yandan besteci ve icracı rollerinin arasındaki akışkanlığı vurgularken, bir yandan da—besteci ile beste arasında gözle görülür bir uyumun kaybolmamasına özen göstermek şartıyla—yaratıcı sorumluluğun dağılımındaki değişimin daha sıkı bir işbirliği barındıran ve kültürel geçişlere izin veren müziklerin icrasına tanıyacağı olanaklara işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bestelemek, doğaçlama, notasyon

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INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a practice-based research project exploring the development of four distinct compositions, all derived from a singular compositional concept, and sharing the title *Dark Bright*. One of the benefits of working in composition which incorporates a high degree of input from the performer through improvisation is that it can be highly adaptable to a variety of situations. A work may be open for interpretation by performers ranging from the professional to amateur, with varying degrees of comfort with notational complexity versus those who thrive with on-the-fly creative freedom. This adaptability can also be a drawback, in that the performance outcome may not be recognizable as belonging to the composer's concept. My intention here, which was not initially set up as an experiment, was to explore the viability of a work-concept through several iterations which incorporated various approaches to scoring. This unfolded over a two-year period, which overlapped with COVID-19 and the need to find new ways for collaborative musicking during periods of isolation as a result of enforced distance-learning and lockdown. Within the paper, each version of the work is attended to separately, with reflection on each part of the process. In the conclusion section, a more generalized look is taken at the project as a whole.

Each work employs a different approach to the communication of musical ideas to performers, with the choice of notational or scoring modality tailored to the specific circumstances of each piece. Improvisation plays a central role in all these works, functioning both as a performance technique and a compositional language. The decision to incorporate improvisation stems from two key motivations. First, it reflects a personal response to the intricate and often restrictive notational practices prevalent in contemporary Eurogenetic Art Music, informed by decades of experience as a performer in this field.[1] This shift towards improvisation facilitated a more organic form of musicianship, fostering deep listening and collaborative creativity. Within this project, the focus lies in the interplay between composition and improvisation, seeking to create empathetic musical environments where performers contribute directly to the outcome, generating spaces for collective sound-making. Ultimately, it is to be determined if this model for generating multiple versions of a work can succeed in creating performances which are recognizable as coming from the same material.

Contemporary scores and notation

The nature of what constitutes a score and notation continues to shift over time. Beginning roughly in the 1940s, Eurogenetic music composers experimented greatly with musical language, which necessitated novel approaches to express those ideas through notation and score. Paulo de Assis (2013) offers a contemporary definition for notation, stating "'notation' can be seen as the totality of words, signs and symbols encountered on the road to a concrete performance of music" (p. 5). Building on this broad definition, de Assis aligns with Ferneyhough's (1983) three fundamental elements of notation: a score offers a *sound-picture* for the events it represents, it offers the essential *instructions* necessary for performance, and implies an ideology of its process of creation (p. 3). De Assis further qualifies his definition "every period of music history used not only the best possible, but also the most adequate notation for its own music (2013, p.7). These considerations permit a great deal of freedom in naming something as a musical score. Virginia Anderson (2013) adds that what is considered a score also refers to cultural distinctions: "A score (or notation or composition) is a score (or notation or composition) if the culture uses it as a score (or notation or composition)" (p. 136). This definition makes space for a variety of cultural contexts and traditional forms of knowledge which may be unknowable to one from outside the community. Taking this thought further, a score or notation is an entangled system that goes beyond composer and performer: it is context dependent and communicative. This is reflected by Yolande Harris (2013), who thinks of scores "more in terms of facilitating and articulating *relationship*; relationship between time and space, the visual and the sonic, one person and another" (p. 196). Further expanding the spectrum of notational possibilities, composer Sandeep Bhagwati (2013) positions notational practices along a continuum: this spectrum ranges from works that are intended to be context-independent and repeatable to those that are contingent and flexible, often incorporating elements of improvisation or indeterminacy (p. 170). This range is especially notable in transcultural works that are pursuing methods for connecting music of different cultures, and where the Eurological methodologies are not suitable. An open approach to notation and score is particularly practical in works where performer and composer are co-creators, as in works that incorporate improvisational musical language.

This evolving understanding of notation is exemplified in the work of composer-performer Pauline Oliveros, whose Sonic Meditations (1974) marked a significant shift from traditional Western music, challenging the necessity for standard notation and advocated prose instructions. This led to her development of "Deep Listening" discipline in

[1] The term 'Eurogenetic' was coined by ethnomusicologist Dr. Robert Reigle in 2004. It refers "...to music with one or all components originating in Europe, as a more precise and more neutral alternative to terms such as 'Western,' 'Eurocentric,' 'non-Eastern,' or 'pan-European'" (Reigle, 2014: p.234)

1980, which emphasized listening as an art form. In 1985, she established the Deep Listening Institute to advance these ideas. She distinguished between active listening and passive hearing, advocating for listening as a means to enhance creativity and reshape the composer-performer-audience dynamic. Oliveros likened her works based in Deep Listening practices as being “attention strategies” rather than scores. She developed this approach after observing that many musicians failed to truly listen during performances, resulting in a disconnect from both the environment and the audience (Oliveros, 2005, p. xvii). Her Deep Listening philosophy expanded the scope of experimental music, fostering a more collaborative, democratic experience, and encouraging deeper awareness of sound, environment, and consciousness. Throughout her career she employed a wide variety of scoring methods, including conventional staff notation, graphic notation, metaphors, prose, oral instruction, and recorded media, with different methodologies selected contingent upon the circumstances of their performance and could be adapted to suit the needs of the time, place, and participants.

Musical atmospheres: form and process in contemporary composition

The concept of form takes on a different meaning when analyzed outside common-practice musical parameters like organized harmony and rhythm. In improvisational works, form is intertwined with the unfolding process of creation. George Lewis (1996) suggests that form is a naturally occurring part of life, stating: ". . . both in our musical and in our human, everyday-life improvisations, we interact with our environment, navigating through time, place, and situation, both creating and discovering form. On the face of it, this interactive, form-giving process appears to take root and flower freely, in many kinds of music, both with and without preexisting rules and regulations" (p. 117). This perspective contrasts with the common-practice derived focus on a work’s final form, emphasizing instead that meaning emerges from the act of creation, especially in works involving improvisation and collaboration. Tim Ingold (2021) further supports this idea with his contemporary analysis, advocating "an ontology that assigns primacy to the processes of formation as against their final products, and to the flows and transformations of materials as against states of matter" (p. 210). This shift moves the focus away from the end result, placing importance on the processes, relationships, and interactions that bring a work to life.

In this context, form can be understood as generating an atmosphere. Musical atmosphere, like the meteorological, consists of internal interactions which have a collective impact. Just as weather affects a local population, a collaborative musical work influences both the performers and listeners. Friedlind Riedel (2020) offers two ways to consider musical atmosphere: first, by understanding how "music and sound are (made) environmental... and modulate spaces, collectives, situations, and relations" (p. 4). Secondly, she emphasizes that musical atmosphere fosters entanglement among multiple bodies, extending beyond the composer-performer relationship to include performers and listeners, creating "auditory experience as an acoustemology of atmospheric relations" (Riedel, 2020, p. 5). Harris M. Berger (2010) builds on this by suggesting that compositions in the imagination possess a limited autonomy from the composer, stating that "acknowledging the limited autonomy of entities in imagination does not deny the social and bodily ground of imagination; indeed, it allows us to better account for that grounding" (p. 11). This is particularly crucial for collaborative or improvisational works, where the composer is just one among many forces shaping the musical atmosphere.

When engaging with improvisational and comprovisational scores, communication becomes essential. This paper explores how different modes of notation combined with a single germinating idea can produce multiple, distinct musical outcomes. Each outcome is analyzed in terms of its creation and considered in the context of contemporary thoughts on notation, transcription, and musical communication. The intention is not to cover the entirety of modern notation but to offer insight into the author-composer’s perspective in a world of seemingly limitless musical possibilities. Ultimately, the aim is to show that what emerged was not a work defined by form, but rather a space for exploration—a musical atmosphere in which to sound.

Practice-based artistic research

This research project follows at qualitative model by looking at four iterations of the author’s composition, *Dark Bright*, as a case study. The research follows a practice-based artistic research paradigm, which means that that qualitative is viewed alongside the creative. The composer, as a research-practitioner engaged in this artistic practice moves through stages of research as it approaches its result, revising and transforming itself according to the collection of data, most usually in the form of experience and self-reflection.

Just how music composition fits into the research paradigm has been contested over time. John Croft (2015) made the argument that "Composition is not Research", citing the problems that arise from trying to generate research questions and criteria within the academic setting. His explanation of the problem was that research "*describes* the world" while

composition "*adds something*" to it (emphasis from original) (Croft, 2015, p.8). This represents a very limited view of the nature of both research and composition. It could be argued that research outcomes in the sciences, for example, are adding something to the world, such as medicine or technology. Conversely, music has often been used to describe the world - one only needs look to the long history of pastoral or soundscape compositions which set to reproduce the natural world through the sonic. Croft's statement that "the idea of composition as research is not only objectively false but inimical to genuine musical originality" reads as being out of touch with reality (Croft, 2015, p. 6).

As a response to Croft, Ian Pace (2015) penned an article in defense of composition: "Composition and Performance Can Be and Often Have Been, Research". He states a composer should "verbally articulate the questions, issues, aims and objectives, and stages of compositional activity, to open a window onto the process and offer the potential of use to others" (Pace, 2015, p. 67). The real issue, he believes, is not about accepting the output of practice-based research as such, but rather how equivalence is ascertained with other types of research (Pace, 2015, p. 69). This refers to how composition is viewed in comparison to other graduate-level areas of study; even if criteria is clearly stated by an institution, creative work will often present difficulties in adhering to them by the default nature of being a unique work. Going deeper, Anette Vandsø (2020) states that art has "epistemological potential", meaning that it can go beyond what is already known and open the door for unconsidered possible ways of knowing (p. 23).

This case study explores the evolving relationships between the composer, score, notation, performer, and outcome, examining how approaches to scoring and notation adapted to each iteration. Each version is identified with the title and a sequential number based on its order of creation. The first, *Dark Bright 1*, was conceived in May 2020 and immediately given as an audio score for *Dark Bright 2*. Versions 3 (transcribed) and 4 (reflective) came in 2021, with Version 4 being an improvised reflection by performers following the recording of Version 3. Each work will be considered individually in relation to its method of score and notation, and how this was determined by the context surrounding the performance situations.

Dark Bright 1

Dark Bright 1 was initially conceived as an audio score for what later became *Dark Bright 2*, though the decision to leave it as a stand-alone work came after its completion.[2] The compositional process followed a set of instructions that specified the instrument, playing techniques, a pitch collection, and a procedure for generating audio material. These elements were organized along a visual timeline, but no traditional musical notation was considered due to its original purpose as an audio score.

The inception of *Dark Bright 1* came about serendipitously when a friend left an electric guitar and e-bow at my home. As a non-guitarist, I found myself unable to play the instrument idiomatically, yet was intrigued by the sustained drones and timbral shifts produced by the e-bow. Following experimentation with recording layers into a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW), Ableton Live, the idea emerged to record a sonic backdrop that could be utilized in my university's Improvisation class. The goal was to craft a recorded audio track for members of the ensemble to perform with - one that was spacious enough to leave room for additional voices while also giving players time to acclimate to the sounds. A pitch collection of six notes was selected for this, based on their harmonic properties and the relationships they formed—primarily perfect fourths and fifths, which create an open, resonant space, alongside leading tones to introduce tension.

The six-note pitch collection reflected an intention to avoid conventional diatonic patterns in favor of a more flexible tonal framework. This manner of thinking stems from the author's work in Afrological performance practice using the Ghanaian xylophone, the *gyil*. The *gyil* is a pentatonic instrument with 14 wooden bars which often employs four-note scales. Performances are rhythmically vital, but the influential element here was the way that harmony ceases to operate according to Eurogenetic Classical music's practice. In this work, the idea to create a musical "skeleton" where all pitches were equally effective, was meant to alleviate some of the pressure that improvisers in the class might feel. By limiting the available pitches, all sounds within this framework could serve as powerful compositional tools. As Kofi Agawu (2016) remarks, "Pitches and intervallic sequences are meant to enable individuals and groups, not to disable them" (p. 207). This approach allowed performers the freedom to explore the material fully, without the constraints of traditional harmonic expectations.

In this work, pitch functioned more like a percussive or timbral element than as a harmonic foundation. Pitches are understood as compositional tools with broad interpretive latitude, akin to how one might think of a drum or cymbal,

[2] It can be beneficial to the reader to hear the works being discussed. link to performance of *Dark Bright 1*: https://youtu.be/4Hu26oJpeLQ

where variations are accepted as part of their identity. This approach grants performers significant interpretive agency, inviting them to shape the piece according to their personal playing techniques and timbral preferences.

With these parameters in place, the recording of the piece began in a home studio using a laptop and Ableton Live. Being a non-guitarist, it was decided that each pitch group would be recorded as a separate track, retuning the guitar for each take to align with the chosen pitch set. Although the waveforms of the previous tracks were visible on the screen while recording, there was no monitoring or listening to the cumulative sound during this process. The visual representation on Ableton's interface functioned as a graphic score, providing a sense of the piece's dynamic flow and density without hearing it directly (Figure 1). A challenge that arises when creating individual lines in isolation, particularly through an improvised process, is the risk of overplaying or conversely leaving insufficient negative space. This issue parallels challenges described by Ekmektsoglou (2017), who notes that when independent materials are combined, "the result of their connection does not guarantee a macro-scale direction" (p. 28). To mitigate this, I remained conscious of space and silence while recording, ensuring that no individual line dominated the overall texture. The only alterations made post-recording were to enhance the sound and balance the volume levels. No further edits were made to the structure or content of the piece which helped maintain the integrity of an improvisational approach.

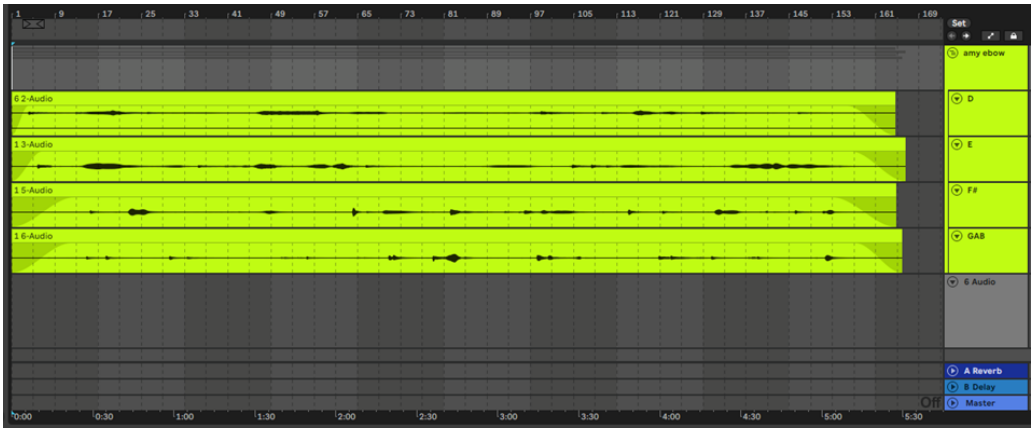

Figure 1. *Dark Bright 1* - Four individual tracks in Ableton session view

Although the initial intent was for *Dark Bright 1* to serve as a guide track for *Dark Bright 2*, the resulting work was compelling enough to stand alone as a fixed media piece. Nonetheless, it would also serve as the foundation for the next iteration of the composition.

Dark Bright 2

Dark Bright 2 was the actual realization of the original concept: a collaborative piece with the MIAM Improvisation Ensemble, guided by an audio score (*Dark Bright 1*).[3] This version incorporated concise performer instructions indicating the duration and pitch collection (Figure 2), along with additional verbal guidance provided during class regarding how the performers should record their material—an essential consideration given our unconventional workflow as an improvisation ensemble during this period.

The timing of this composition was significant, as it was created in 2020, two months into Istanbul's COVID-19 lockdowns. With our ensemble forced to move online along with the rest of our university courses, we were experimenting with developing comprovisational works that could be realized independently while in isolation. In this remote setting, the process was for a student composer to present a score or concept, which could range from written instructions for improvisation to visuals or metronomic information—essentially, whatever the composer deemed necessary. Each ensemble member would then record their individual part using whatever technology was available (whether a laptop, phone, or home studio setup), and these recordings would be sent back to the composer for assembly in a DAW, with only minimal editing allowed for sound quality or dynamic balance.

[3] Link to performance of Dark Bright 2: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_RlxPeBu0CM

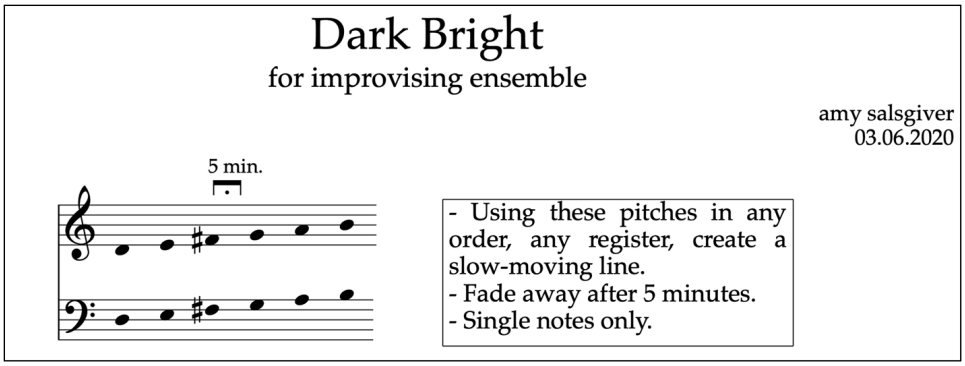

Figure 2. Performance instructions for *Dark Bright 2*

Dark Bright 2 was created with this system of remote collaboration in mind. Each performer was instructed to listen to the audio score (*Dark Bright 1*) once while recording their performance alongside it. The aim was to maintain the spontaneity of free improvisation. Additional verbal instructions were also given to encourage the performers to "visualize" the entire ensemble playing together, hoping this would lead them to leave space for the others, even though they could not hear each other while recording. Silence, especially in improvisation-based music, becomes even more challenging when performers must work in isolation. The goal was to balance ensemble cohesion with the individuality of each performer's expression: a real challenge with the constraint of not being able to hear each other.

Once all the individual recordings from the ensemble members were received, they were assembled along with the guide track, *Dark Bright 1*, in a DAW (Figure 3). The initial plan had been to remove the original guide track (*Dark Bright 1*) after layering the ensemble's recordings, but at the ensemble's insistence, it was left intact. This decision by the group may have been influenced by the psychological impact of the lockdown; retaining the guide track gave a sense of togetherness, even though the performances were recorded in isolation.

The first audition of the piece took place in an online class via Zoom, where the ensemble was pleased with the result. Only minimal volume adjustments were made to balance the layers, and no edits were applied to the performance material itself. Later, EQ settings were fine-tuned in the mastering phase. A visual element was added for an online concert performance after the piece had been completed.

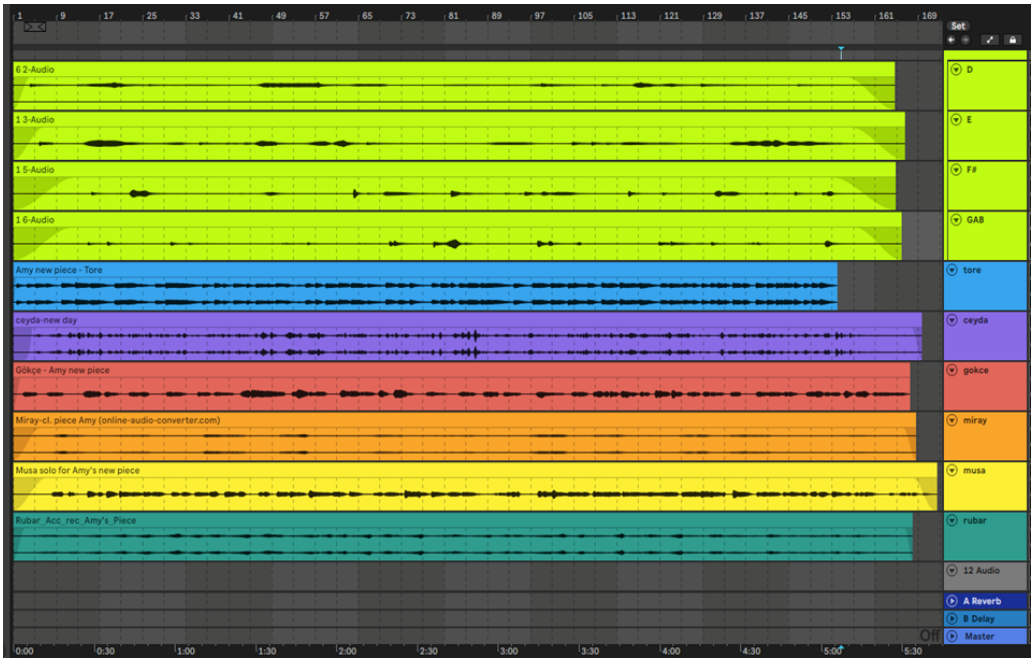

Figure 3. *Dark Bright 2* - combined ensemble tracks in Ableton's session view

Dark Bright 3

The third iteration of this piece, *Dark Bright 3* for chamber ensemble, returned to the original version in the form of a transcription and orchestration.[4] The idea for transcription arose in response to a reading by ethnomusicologist Michael Tenzen (2017), who, in calling for a re-evaluation of transcription's pedagogical value, suggests that transcription is one of the most salient tools for cultivating musicality in musicians of all abilities (p. 175). Tenzer goes a step further by arguing that transcription fosters empathy, allowing composers to step outside of their own egos and immerse themselves in a musical world beyond their own (Tenzer, 2017, p.178). While Tenzer's ideas specifically concern the transcription of others' music, they resonated with my teaching ethos and compositional approach, where improvisation was a platform for encouraging listening and fostering a deeper sense of agency in the community. With this in mind, the transcription process of *Dark Bright 1* began, engaging with it as a compositional exercise to explore the potential of transcription as a tool for re-imagining the original work.

The process began by dividing the original audio into manageable segments, approximately 20-30 seconds each, and used Ableton Live for playback while transcribing. Transcription and orchestration were handled simultaneously, writing first on paper and then transferring each section into the notation software Sibelius. The focus was on timbre, not pitch, therefor the step to create a piano reduction was skipped. The instrumentation was determined by the opportunity for collaboration between Hezarfen Ensemble and the MIAM Composition department, where selected student works would be recorded. The ensemble included violin, viola, cello, double bass, flute, clarinet, piano, and percussion, and these instruments were kept in mind throughout the process.

A decision was made early on to ignore the subtle fluctuations of intonation in the original recording that were a result of the performance skills from an amateur guitarist. Although the Hezarfen Ensemble performers were more than capable of handling microtonal nuances, specific intonation was not a compositional priority. In fact, the original version's slightly out-of-tune guitar and preference for distorted sounds reflected the compositional intention to treat pitch within a wide margin of tolerance. Connecting again to studies of *gyil* music, Agawu's (2016) notion of "fuzziness" in intonation was adopted, where imprecision is not a lack of control but rather an aesthetic choice that embodies flexibility and openness (p. 207). In *Dark Bright 3*, this concept guided choices such as the use of natural harmonics in the strings and multi-phonics in the woodwinds, as the performers were encouraged to allow their instruments to resonate naturally without worrying about precise tuning relationships. Timbre, rather than pitch, became the central concern, and the interaction of open harmonies and tight dissonances, combined with varying tone colors, shaped the atmosphere of the transcription.

Noise artifacts from the original version—such as accidental guitar string strikes or the sound of placing the e-bow on the guitar's body—were embraced as compositional features. These "happy accidents" became integral to the transcription, turning what might be considered extraneous sounds into musical material. This can be referred to as a transcriptionally-informed composition, where transcription influences the incorporation of elements that might otherwise be overlooked. It underscores the capacity of transcription to reveal new possibilities for composers, exposing sounds that may not typically be perceived as musical material.

Both transcription and comprovisation share similar goals: they present musical material that allows for interpretive freedom. In this case, the transcription was not an analytical exercise aimed at reproducing a single rendition for ethnomusicological study, but a dynamic process that allowed the score to evolve as a living document. Comprovisation and transcription both exist in a state of becoming, with their true essence emerging in performance rather than as static written scores. As composers, choices must be made about how to represent the vitality of the music being transcribed. Through transcription, improvisational potential can be cultivated, even within the framework of a Eurogenetic notational score. Transcription, when approached this way, is a vibrant, living practice that can open up possibilities for collaboration and spontaneity. It can either be a snapshot frozen in time or a window onto an ever-changing landscape that retains its core identity.

However, notation became a point of frustration within this project. While the process of orchestrating and exploring new timbres was enjoyable, attempting to fit everything into a musical staff notation rubric felt stifling. Unlike the improvisatory nature of the previous iterations, *Dark Bright 3* required a conductor to relay its more precise instructions, limiting the performers' ability to trust their own judgment and ears in the moment. Though some moments of indeterminacy in the score allowed for moments of freedom in the composition, for example via non-stemmed note heads indicating flexibility in placement in time (Figure 4), these attempts were ultimately ineffective. In hindsight, it

[4] Link to performance of *Dark Bright 3*: https://youtu.be/uY_cXDZ33kA

would have been better to fully commit to one notational approach—either utilizing free-notation devices throughout or adhering to a fully notated, unambiguous score.

The work was recorded at the MIAM studio in a single take, with no edits made to the performance material. While the recording captured the overall atmosphere intended, the rigid structure of traditional notation contrasted with the initial vision of the piece as a fluid, comprovisational work.

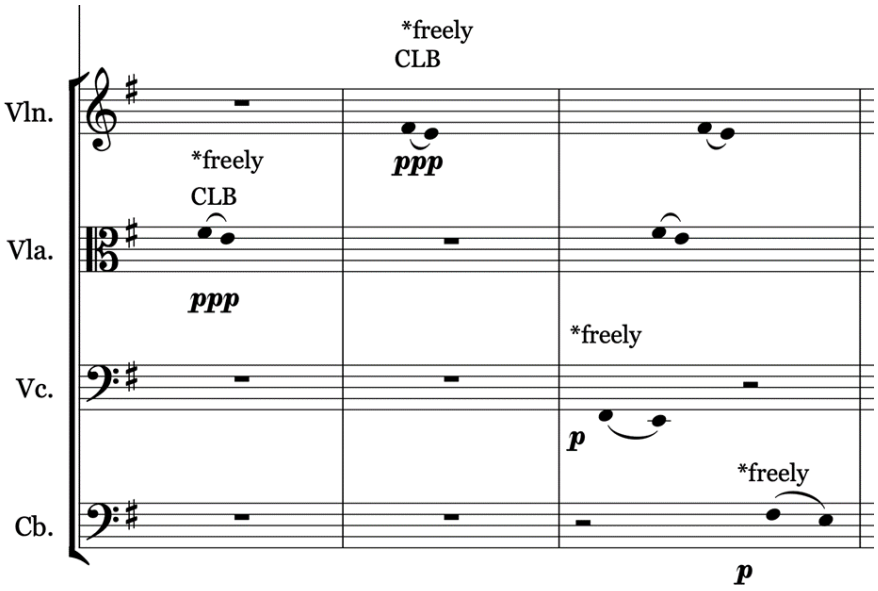

Figure 4. Improvisational elements in *Dark Bright 3*

Dark Bright 4

While spending time in the recording studio with meeting the specific notational demands of *Dark Bright 3*, there was something missing which was not related to the performance. The performances were excellent and the result was compositionally satisfying, however the collaborative engagement of the previous versions was noticeably absent. The thought arose about how this same ensemble, Hezarfen, who have been together for over 10 years and which excels at reading complex notation, might respond to an improvisational framework. This led me to reconsider Pauline Oliveros's (2005) Deep Listening practice, which encourages performers to engage in "ways of listening and responding in consideration of oneself, others, and the environment", a practice which had been instrumental in uniting the musicians of the MIAM Improvisation Ensemble (p.29). *Dark Bright 4* draws inspiration from this discipline, shifting away from detailed notation towards what I called a reflective improvisation.[5]

For this iteration, the performers were asked individually to reflect on their experience recording *Dark Bright 3* before being led into the studio one at a time to record while listening to the original material, *Dark Bright 1*. One small addition was made to the original audio: a count-in to coordinate the beginning of the piece. Written instructions (Figure 5) were placed in the studio, as well as given by the composer immediately before each recording. Players were asked to consider themselves as part of a larger, collective "meta-instrument", and to imagine their counterparts were playing with them. The pitch collection was reminded, with the added instruction to insert the pitch C# one time at any moment in their improvisation. Then the performers were individually left in the recording room, with headphones on, to capture their reflective improvisation. A strict no-peeking policy was enforced, and any performer who attempted to sneak into the control room to listen was quickly relocated to the break room. Once all the individual recordings were completed, we came together to listen to the composite performance as an ensemble.

The atmosphere during this session was notably warmer and friendlier. As the performers listened back to the recording, they smiled and remarked on how certain passages distinctly embodied each musician's personality. In some ways, this process echoed *Dark Bright 2*, as each performer was recorded in isolation while following the original audio score. However, the narrative power of *Dark Bright 4* was more pronounced, likely because the performers had spent

[5] Link to performance of *Dark Bright 4*: https://youtu.be/Ddy27x9e7BY

several hours engaging with the composed version *Dark Bright 3* immediately prior and were now deeply immersed in the work's ethos.

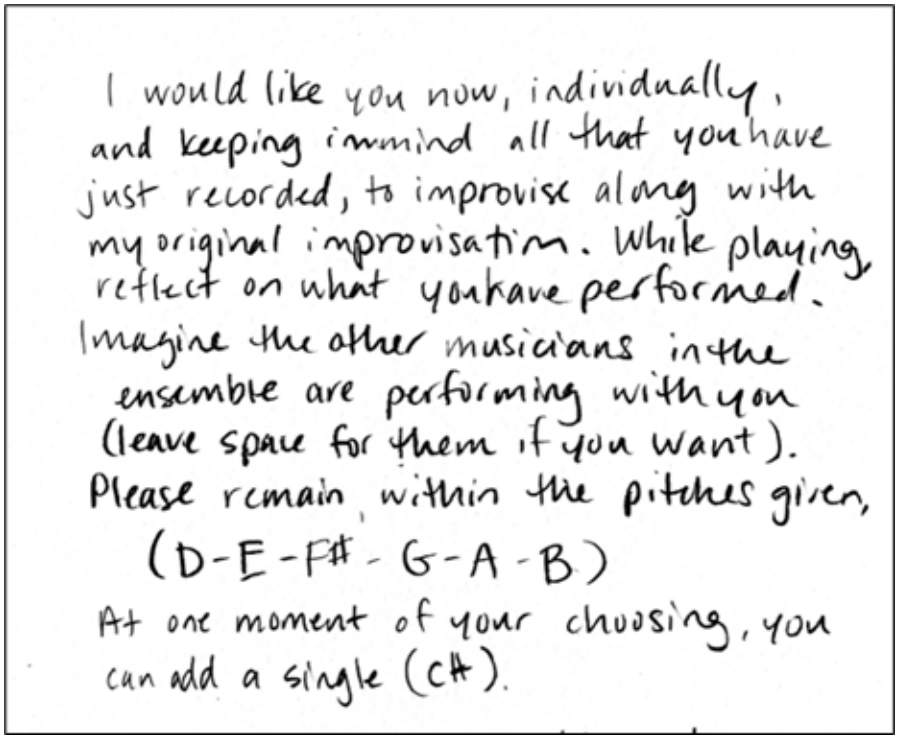
I would like you now, individually, and keeping in mind all that you have just recorded, to improvise along with my original improvisation. While playing, reflect on what you have performed. Imagine the other musicians in the ensemble are performing with you (leave space for them if you want). Please remain within the pitches given, (D-E-F♯-G-A-B) At one moment of your choosing, you can add a single (C♯).

Figure 5. From the hand-written instructions for *Dark Bright 4*

As a composer, the only element which was not satisfying was the absence of silence, which once again proved elusive. There remains a shared struggle among many musicians with the challenge of navigating empty spaces in improvisation, a tendency to fill the void rather than embrace it. Nevertheless, *Dark Bright 4* allowed the performers more room to explore this tension, creating a reflective and nuanced dialogue between presence and absence in sound.

CONCLUSIONS

"Practitioners, I contend, are wanderers, wayfarers, whose skill lies in their ability to find the grain of the world's becoming and to follow its course while bending it to their evolving purpose" (Ingold 2021, p. 211). These words from Tim Ingold encapsulate my perspective on the dynamic role of both composer and performer in comprovisational works, particularly within the context of socio-cultural relations. In collaborative performance, the ear embarks on many detours, and the ability to listen and interact becomes a vital skill that allows participants to trust in the process.

Listening back on the works, my reactions are more emotional than critical, according to the circumstances of each recording.[6] As most of the performances are improvised, it requires a different style of listening - one that is not focused on the traditional element of score accuracy according to pitch and rhythm. What I hear is a melding of the personalities of the composer with the individual performers within the composition's concept. Overall, the recordings maintain cohesion through their atmosphere - that is they share a sense of sameness. Their tempi and pitch content are controlled by the composer's instructions, whether written, spoken, or through the audio score. *Dark Bright 3*, the fully notated version, feels the most abstract and the most constrained. I believe the improvised versions all had an internalized organicism to their approaches to gesture, as each gesture was a personal choice by the individual performer rather than an instruction by the composer. However there are moments, for example around 2:00 in *Dark Bright 3*, where the ensemble has dynamic swells which connect it more closely to the improvised versions of *Dark Bright 1* and *2*.

The most direct commentary can be made between *Dark Bright 2*, with MIAM Improvisation Ensemble, and *Dark Bright 4*, the reflective version of Hezarfen Ensemble. Both were recorded with each performer in isolation, and using the original track (*Dark Bright 1*). *Dark Bright 4* benefits from being a studio production with quality microphones,

[6] Link to comparison of four excerpts here: https://youtu.be/zevNVy1V3dw?si=IIjHULLewHvGKHkr

sound isolation, and a professional mixing. I suspect that by including the instruction "While playing, reflect on what you have performed" (as shown above in Figure 5), it created a pervasive sense of nostalgia which is apparent in the performance. It is also possible that this sense of nostalgia is in the mind of the composer, as I have a deeper connection with the entirety of the process as well as a long-standing relationship with Hezarfen Ensemble.

Given the opportunity for further research, I would like to conceive of a version using a graphic score. Here, I believe a group of improvising musicians may feel limited by trying to follow a timeline. This is suggested to me by observing the outcomes of exercises and comprovisations which used timing devices or timelines with the MIAM Improvisation Ensemble. One question that arises with a graphic score is how to indicate pitch - and if I would like to attempt a version without pitch, or a version where the performing ensemble chose a pitch collection. It would also be interesting to interview performers for their after-thoughts, however this is where the demands of preparing a performance conflict the weight of research. Often there is much activity around rehearsal and recording or performing - editing scores, solving problems, organizing equipment, space, and musicians' time - that the tasks of research fall to the wayside. This could be solved by better planning - and going forward I know now that a questionnaire would be very beneficial to have prepared in advance. Experience always leads to better planning and methodology in aspects of music production as well as in research.

Ultimately, I have come to realize on a deeper level that score and notation are merely tools designed to serve the particularities of each situation. Each context demands its own mode of representation. The initial concept of a work begins within the composer, but it is also inherently situated beyond them, in a social and interactive space. Composer İlhan Mimaroğlu illustrates this point well, saying "Notated music is music only to the degree a blueprint is a building or a screenplay a motion picture" (in Cage, 1974, p. 273). My compositional ideas, therefore, possess limited autonomy; they only achieve completion when they interact with the performers for whom they are intended. This mereological approach to music-making—where no single, predetermined outcome exists—replaces fixed forms with a more fluid musical atmosphere. Rather than a pre-defined harmonic structure, there is an open space for sound to unfold, which resonates with Riedel's notion of "atmospheric relations." Riedel (2020) suggests that music is not a collection of related experiences but a relation in itself (p. 4). Similarly, Tere Vaden and Juha Torvinen (2020) frame atmosphere as a way of recognizing meaning in place of form: "Atmospheric experience is ecological since it highlights the mutual interconnectedness of all being" (p. 51).

On a broader philosophical level, this compositional approach gestures towards Jeremy Woodruff's (2020) vision of "composing Sociality." In this vision, the composer becomes an integral member of a sounding musical community—something more profound than a performing ensemble—that participates in generating the work. In an ideal scenario, the composer's individual role is subordinated to the collective, and all potential outcomes are embraced, regardless of their aesthetic alignment with the composer's personal preferences. Perhaps a future iteration of such works could involve even fewer instructions from the composer, approaching the ideals of a truly social experiment in musical communication (Woodruff, 2020, p. 48).

Improvisation, in this sense, emerges as a versatile compositional tool. It allows for the exploration of ideas, the serendipitous emergence of musical outcomes, and the creation of listening-based works. Most importantly, it offers a way for composers to transcend their own inclinations, opening up new possibilities for sonic discovery. Improvisation also keeps music practitioners—composers, performers, and listeners alike—on a path of continual learning, as they expand and refine their sonic palettes. Score and notation, therefore, become just one part of the larger equation for new modes of sounding, functioning as platforms for empathy and connection among all participants in the musical experience. Whether between composer and performer, transcriber and original material, or composer and audience, this connective tissue underscores the relational nature of music.

This practice-based research project has solidified for me the value of improvisation, particularly in contexts that extend beyond professional stage settings, welcoming amateurs and musicians from diverse backgrounds. Dylan Robinson (2020) calls on composers, artists, curators, and musicians to explore post-colonial approaches to listening (p. 72). By rebalancing the roles of composer and performer through works that employ improvisation, and by moving away from traditional tropes of harmony and form, we can gradually shift away from the Eurogenetic ideals of the 18th and 19th centuries towards a post-colonialist approach to musical scores and notation. Put another way, improvisation enables collective authorship within a creative ecology (Bhagwati, 2018, p. 123). By sharing musical space through comprovisational works, we are not just creating sound, but fostering a musical practice that embodies empathy, social awareness, and an evolving sense of community.

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Link to videos of performances mentioned in this paper:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLONpiYPCrP7EgPPGsZnRJbpvMJ8RqChBr

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