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USING THE HURDY-GURDY TO CREATE  
ALTERNATE MUSICAL SCORES

By

James Christian Winters

B.A., University of Maine 2014

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts

(in Intermedia)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May 2020

Advisory Committee:

Owen F. Smith Director of MFA Program (Co-Chair) Advisor

Susan L. Smith, Assistant Director of MFA (Co-Chair) Advisor

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USING A HURDY-GURDY TO CREATE  
ALTERNATE MUSICAL SCORES

By James Winters

Thesis Advisors: Dr. Owen F. Smith and Dr. Susan L. Smith

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Fine Arts  
(in Intermedia)  
May 2020

The musical work which is described in much of this thesis involves an instrument from Hungary, one that was made for me, called a bass hurdy-gurdy. Professional artists and musicians participated in experiments in three-dimensional musical scoring. These experiments are recounted in detail, including improvisation, jazz, drone, found objects and, of course, extended techniques on the hurdy-gurdy. Whereas musical expression and education normally rely more on traditional ideals such as traditional notation, voice leading, song-form, technique, prestige, and nationalism, this research uses more unusual materials such as found objects, fragments of ideas, humor, unexpected scenes, even tree branches—giving this collection of works a Bohemian and ephemeral kind of sensibility. Musicians were then given a chance towards the end to offer text feedback, all of which is included in this written document. Also included here are my photographs, as well as links to how it sounded. Presented here are lesser-known methods of composition that will be thought of as: alternate musical scoring.

Keywords: hurdy-gurdy, 'pataphysics, jazz

## DEDICATION

To Julian Zoya Winters  
for his boundless and mindless humor,  
for his ideas, enthusiasm, noises, and sheer epic  
performances of sound poetry while driving around Maine.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my Grandmother Mary Rosa Ramsey who, when she passed on, left me the funds to buy a most unique musical instrument. My first hurdy-gurdy was bought from a monastery where they had had a flood and needed to sell things. Right from the start this instrument seemed metaphysical. This direction introduced me to the abstract, ephemeral world of drone music that has no equivalent-- its wheel and noises like something from another world.

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## 1. MUSICAL ART

“Not knowing is a form of knowing.”

Artist Teresita Fernandez

What is most important here is to understand the program that this study emanates from: the Intermedial MFA. This writing takes time to introduce a topic that is rich in abstraction and what can be thought if a shadows.

My own background begins with jazz, a defined idiom, yet it evolved towards art, a far more board term for creativity and exploration. The MFA degree, the degree which I am finishing up on here, is quite unique. The Master of Fine Arts--an Intermedial MFA-- is an unique degree that dates back to a very small number of students who became the first to earn a sort of precursor to today's MFA degree, something which took place historically in Iowa almost one hundred years ago. This important history began in the mid-1920s when the University of Iowa became the first university in the world to allow studio-artwork pieces to be accepted on an equal basis with the written thesis about that same work. Academic, and its theoretical underpinning, shifted historically by envisioning studio work and art history (books, lectures, and written exams) housed and combined within one department, embodied within one forming a unique, advanced, university degree--not just of thesis writing but writing and praxis (actual works of art and music). The earliest version of the MFA which took place in the 1920s was their Master's in Plastic and Graphic Arts. The MFA degree comes directly from this history and, back then, was awarded to just three students in 1940, about 14 years after the first

“Master’s in Plastic and Graphic Arts.” Previous to this time no advanced degree accepted work of art praxis as part of final exams and thesis.

One newspaper article from the year 2015 in the New York Times described roughly 200 colleges today that offer the MFA degree;  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of these MFA degrees are in writing—as opposed to musical art works or performance works. My particular program gave me strong ties to musical performance and Flux-thinking-- or in my case with an emphasis on free improvisation. My own MFA education emanates from this exact academic history rooted in the state of Iowa. Today, this may leave us today with around fifty or so colleges that grant this kind of degree with its emphasis aimed at various art media forms-- forms other than just creative writing. Most likely the number of MFA programs that are optimized for music is small. The MFA program here above Bangor, Maine is well suited for experimental musical scoring.

The MFA as a degree can be also characterized, especially early on, by stark openness to ideas or even ephemeral ideals. It was once characterized by the New York Times in 2015 as a ‘the degree students love to hate.’ I can sympathize with the idea inasmuch as the MFA can be deceptively difficult in that it requires a very independent spirit. I stumbled into a world (a mindset) where some confidence is essential. As an MFA candidate I needed to be part artist and part musician; part writer and part philosopher; part visionary and part technician; part teacher and part documentarian, part social scientist, part art historian and part child.

The question my research kept probing was whether or not music was just about the demonstration of a skill set. I just had to experiment and research music with noise, or would alternative methods of musical scoring be my focus? This was the question that was most important going into year two of my formal education. Here’s the question: how should I reconcile doing experimental music with my already-existing community of musicians?



Figure 1. Bricks & Mortar, the home of this MFA program in Maine

- The cardboard box

An epiphany in my scoring research with a work in which I composed entitled Duet With a Cardboard Box, and actual box!-- and I hoped I would persuade musicians--to persuade other musicians into joining me in the pursuit of reading object scores. I would incorporate this idea into my decision making and to turn my art into a kind of social experiment.

My son, nine years old at the time, provided his own perspective as I started bringing him with me to school. I made the fundamental decision to link my work to the idea of childlike wisdom, his wisdom. That is to say: what do we learn about how we as humans relate to each other if we engage in and take seriously free improvisation? Involving a young person in this research was one of my two greatest decisions. The other was to use the hurdy-gurdy.

We decided together that I needed a technique or process for simplifying my ideas and ideals. My desire soon became to describe all my abstract ideas (and postmodern art is filled with tangled ideas, sometimes better thought of as “art of the mind”) such as: Conceptualism,

Minimalism, the ideals of Dada (using humor), Futurism (commenting on society), and Absurdism (theatrics), aka Postmodernism. Obviously this might seem too esoteric at this point. After all, these are artist terms. I wanted my ideals to be describable in terms that even a child or lay person could understand. The ‘wisdom-of-a-child’ was the effect that I wanted, so there was one perfect solution. I decided to bring Julian to school with me and stimulate discussion with him as my distillation process.

The two of us, this adult/child collaboration, combined to make up a lyrical refrain that we’d sing together while traveling. These simple lyrics grounded us in humor; “Hey, hey, I’m an artist; can you spare me a dime? I am an artist, can you give me some time.” That’s profound in a certain way; it opens up the mind to a sort of humorous creativity.

This kind of approach to art gave us a sense of wonder and joy. Humor came onboard as well as a kind of added currency to what became my performance art evolution. There was risk as well as benefit to adding humor and performance to my art.

- The art of simplicity



Figure 2. The Wise Owl, Julian Winters

In Latin communication can be seen in three ways according to Oxford's two-volume Critical Improvisation Studies:

Subita Oratio – knowledge as sudden and extemporaneous expressions

Cognitatio – knowledge learned and guided by notes

Scriptura – knowledge written-out and formal

- My Inner Minimalist?

Though complex, philosophical books can be found/bought quickly on this exact topic, the very idea of noise and minimalism gave us both countless simple conversations; my son helped me to make simple ideas such as composing for ensemble and blending acting into my art. If there was any sense of social engineering deep down in my thinking, it was to stay within range of children as well as non-artists. This leads to an important point. There are very few fundamental ideas in art but one can seem to top all the rest. Who is your audience? I see now that non-artists were the people I had in mind not to ever exclude.

- Intermedia: the space between

An artist uses a different orientation quite than that of the musician. At one point I even came close to leaving the program due to the difficulty of ignoring rules. I regrouped, rebooted my subconscious, and began on a path of creating works of performance art that allowed for subtle humor. I still worked with musicians and placed them straight into my new world, a blended world of performances, theatrics, never-ending double entendre, noise, the 'pataphysical mode of imaginative thinking, and musical art.

This particular MFA sub-specialization is in musical composition and it is listed as Intermedial-- a key adjective. This is like saying "not there and not there." This affected me and led me for several years to focus on alternative scoring as a theme. My materials, instead of being tangible ones, or tactile ones such as paint, wood, clay, textiles or even sound as digital material (the keyboard, pieces of paper), turned out to include relationships and conversations linked to freely-improvised music. I aim for art that asks a question rather than music's more decisive organizational logic. My self-assigned challenge was to contemplate how musicians think in certain ways contrasted with how artists think in other kinds of ways. Music seems more based on comparative levels of skill as an essential rubric for evaluation. For example, I used an accordion and even discussed this with someone who, it seemed to me, a famous accordionist in the world, Pauline Oliveros. I brought an important question up to her during an evening when she was visiting campus; "I'm starting to play some accordion on my pieces, but I don't mention it to anyone else because I know so little about the accordion." I continued, "I play it sideways to the floor in an old barn, holding it with one foot." She described to me how starting out with expertise on an instrument is not a prerequisite. She stated emphatically that I was indeed playing the accordion-- in spite of my lack of training.



- Taxonomy of a musician

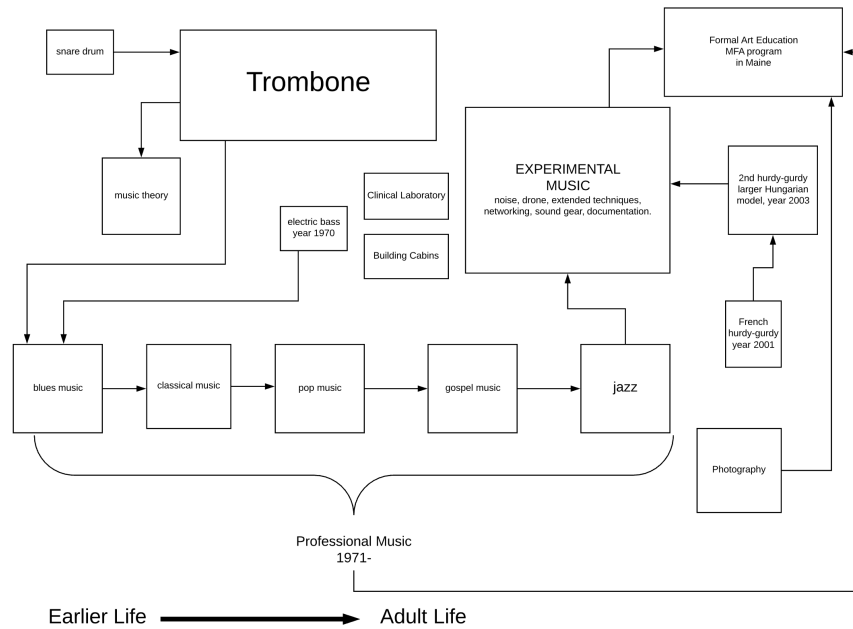


Figure 3 My Life in 2D, a pictogram of my life as a musician.

- Vocabulary

The following offers the reader a short list of terms that help in understanding this research.

Pataphysics: imaginary solutions to real-world questions

Fluxus: this terms refers to an art movement as well as a style of thinking or attitude. This kind of improvisational, somewhat theatrical sort of stylizing framed all of my thinking in this work.

It is not unreasonable to think flexing. The Fluxus Attitude is one marked by the flexibility of one's imagination. Fluxus is the formal term for an art movement beginning in the early 1960s.

Acousmatic: This idea refers to sound disallowing the normal sort of requirement for contextualization of a sound in terms its source. The idea of acousmatic is close to the clinical word: idiopathic: of-unknown-origin. Acousmatic describes a kind of attitude, too, where the moment is the central essence and the exact source of a sound is not required and often not even possible in acousmatic sound art.

Conceptualism: This refers to the concept of the work being the driving force that pushes the work forward. There is an old adage: the means justifies the end. Perhaps conceptualism is where the end is more important than the process or the material.

Extended Techniques: An extended technique on a musical instrument is a technique that is invented and/or nontraditional.

Idiom: The term idiom is essential in understanding the influence of John Cage when that is combined with an artist with a background in jazz. An idiom is a sort of predetermined or preconditioned musical response. The idiom refers to stylized responses such as the blues or any other kind of musical style.

Idiophone: This refers to the idea of a substance or the body of something that becomes a vibrating entity physically. A musical instrument, whether it be a box or branch or something in a junkyard, becomes a percussion instrument.

The Lirinky: This term refers to the Slavic, mendicant tradition where hurdy-gurdy players who appear decidedly sad and alone in historical art were most often blind and positioned to play religious songs for donations. A mendicant musician is what we today think of as a street musician.

Simultaneity: This keystone ideal was introduced by the artist John Cage (1912-1992) and applies to a staged work in which two or more “performances,” the quotes signifying more of a non-performance performance, which occur independently yet at the same time and on the same staging area thus leading to a collective and unforeseen effect as they occur together to create value. This effect can include recorded sound collages, such as will be seen in this thesis under Portfolio. A musical score can be text, almost like a culinary recipe.

Slack-string tuning: This phrase means that the strings of an instrument, in my case the bass hurdy-hurdy, are intentionally loosened in order to produce sounds that are not otherwise possible. In my case this refers to the hurdy-gurdy-- always in a slack-string tuning.

From the vintagenews.com, “The hurdy-gurdy is known in France as the vielle a roue or just vielle (this is fine in English), has a long history and has been played by everyone from blind beggars to the nobility. Some believe that the origins of the instrument go back to the 10th century (and) various types of musicians of the medieval times, including waits, minstrels, and troubadours. The English term ‘hurly burly’ is a derogatory freelance to the instrument’s music.”

## 2. THE HURDY-GURDY

- The preciousness of Cranky the gurdy

Behold a well-kept secret. Here is an instrument that has a sense of humor. In historical terms, the hurdy-gurdy is an old, even very old, drone instrument. Often it is perceived as having a dreamy or metaphysical quality, too. This particular instrument probably emanated from Europe and eastern Slavic areas, though it was so far back in time that experts are not quite sure. Where the hurdy-gurdy came to us prior to the year 1,000 CE is still a matter of speculation. This musical style was new to me as an artist twenty years ago and at odds with what I knew as a trombonist. The hurdy-gurdy is, more or less, a medieval, drone instrument. I own two of these, including my more recent bass hurdy-gurdy, one that was made for me in the year 2003.

The hurdy-gurdy, in contrast to most jazz, is a drone instrument. The intended effect of drone music is to be transported from tonal thinking into atonal thinking by using a drone instrument. All this was new to me and if I had not ever discovered and attended this program, I would not have understood at all.

My particular art should be loosely termed music. It was meant to seem too clunky, scratchy, and glitchy all from my second year onward, thus fueling an evolution towards becoming more art than music. Any gloss and shine in my work became no longer my hope after the first year. Instead I was informed (an artist term) by dirt, rain, and wind. One dramatic example of this was heard in *The Drag* (pg. 43) with its “object train” being dragged towards chaotic, cacophonous scratchy, walking art.

It seems to me that it could seem that way; I felt called towards dirt and solitude for a while. I set out to totally rethink my approach to music, even consider the ‘Old Cranky’ and its

dependence on drone tones in music-- normally so far within the A440 system. The hurdy-gurdy suggested to me the idea of drone and noise sandwiched together in one scratchy, musical package-- as opposed to drone counterpoint where the music is still there. The hurdy-gurdy (HG) has become an instrument-of-art and has played a significant part in the development of my artistic work. In this section, we will examine the hurdy-gurdy and talk about how I became involved in this from collecting to playing “songs,” my slackened-string performances (the word “song” actually has a narrow definition in music).

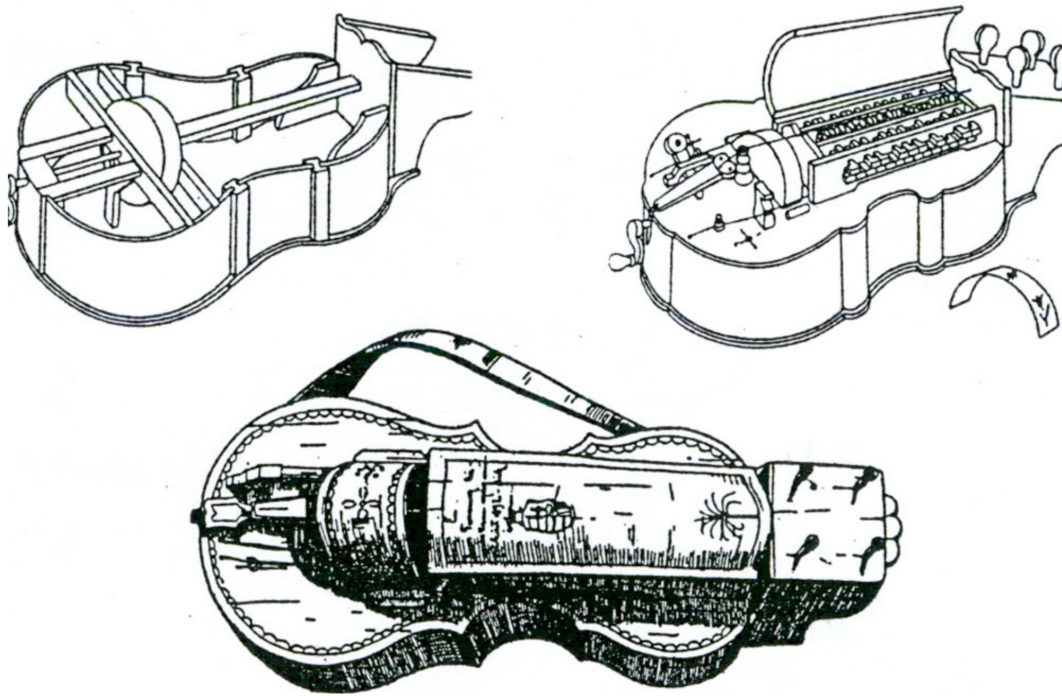


Figure 4. The Tekerőlant, courtesy of The American Hungarian Museum

My earliest awareness of avant-gardism goes back to 2001. This was the year my grandmother died. Mary Rosa Ramsey passed away (1910-1999) thus prompting an important decision to buy a French-styled hurdy-gurdy from a monastery in West Virginia. The connection we made was through eBay, a company that was actually new at the time. I started to explore and

educate myself which led to my interest in first ethnomusicology such as the great work of Alan Lomax. Then I became interested in the hurdy-gurdy. I collected dozens of hurdy-gurdy recordings and books-- all of them rare.

It was impossible to impress anyone. I was still thinking in terms of just craft and technique, not anything else such as art or a relationship. Yet, I loved this instrument for its design and ties to various European cultures. I positively fell in love or became obsessed with Old Cranky, with its scratchiness and the 'clicky noises' made by its wooden keys. I love the scratchy sound of old records, even old, radio static.

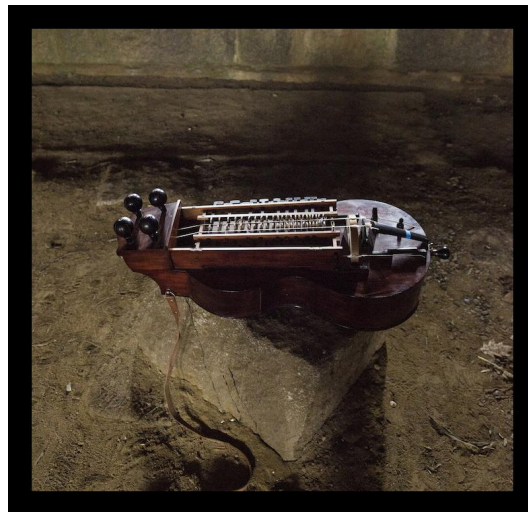


Figure 5. 'Old Cranky'

The country of Hungary is known for the hurdy-gurdy which is properly called there a tekerő or even the tekerőlant. My particular "bass" tekerőlant was made by Balazs Nagy ([http://folkinstrument.hu/index\\_en.htm](http://folkinstrument.hu/index_en.htm)) who lives in Budapest. This slightly more English word is tekerő, the shortened form of the Hungarian tekerőlant. My instrument was made in Budapest by a Hungarian luthier, faithful to local design, and built for me. In Hungary, this was an instrument made by farmers to play folk songs. I play a 'farm instrument' and I didn't even

know there was such a concept. This tekerő's design also resembles the Swedish and Polish *lira*. Having just four strings, my instrument has a close resemblance to the Ukrainian Lira, something which opens up other discussions that would also be very interesting and historical, a conversation about mendicants, community going back into Slavic history before WWII, Russia vs. the Ukraine... Mendicants were musicians that played on the street for pay (reference Natalie Kononenko PhD). To an historian this is all very important and exciting as an area of research.

- Ukrainian minstrels

Slavic lira players are termed Lirinky, at least historically this is the English language term (Kononenko). These were men who were blind, they formed into guilds in order to thrive as mendicants earning a living by playing music outdoors for money. In a broader sense, the hurdy-gurdy even goes back more than 1,000 years and in several European countries. Whether or not it reaches even farther into the Middle East or the Far East is still unanswered by musicologists. Yet in a very general sense two contrasting design styles exist and have strong historical folk-music roots in both France and Hungary. I own one of each of these two types or shapes. In Slavic regions the hurdy-gurdy also had strong ties to religious music, another fascinating part to the story of the hurdy-gurdy.

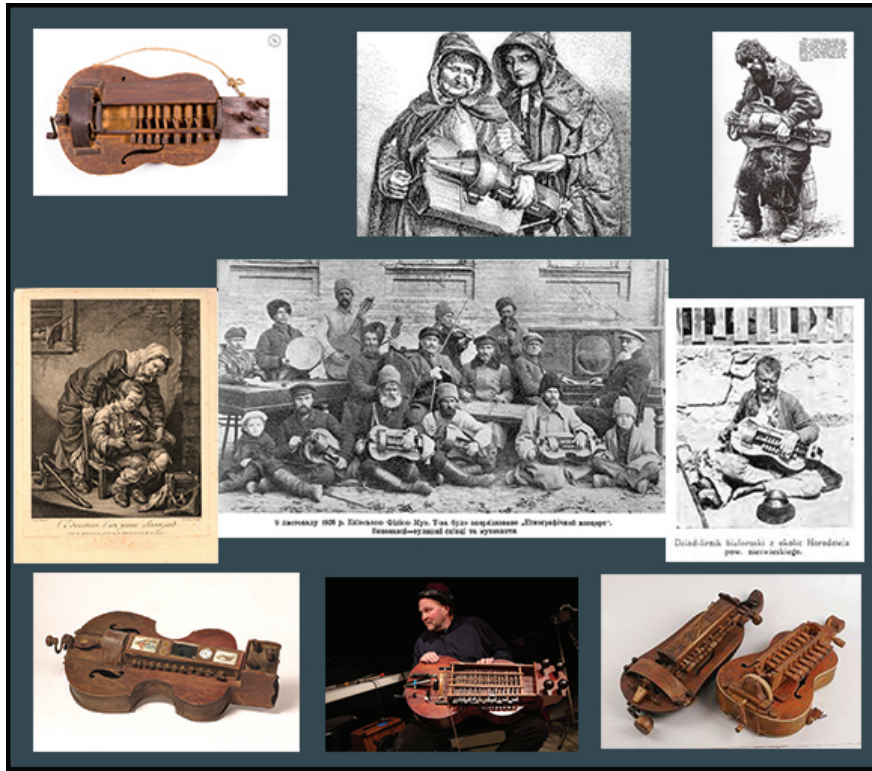


Figure 6. The Hurdy-Gurdy collaged

The idea of drone sound seemed to impart a hypnotic sort of spell and trance... Trance! This is formally known, at least within my artsy mindset, as an emotional subgenre, so to speak. In the collage (note: collage, not college) above, we see a collage derived from the web, eye candy as it were, showing us an array of mendicant hurdy-gurdy players. Such can become absolutely fascinating.. These non-sighted players seemed to be always men, but with a few exceptions-- all according to the source material and scholarly work that exists so far. Presumably this was the way the culture was set up (I think, sadly). Those above were the mendicants. Top center is an interesting British hurdy-hurdy mendicant (mendicant means performance for donations) known historically as ‘Old Sarah’ the hurdy-gurdy player-- the blind hurdy-gurdy player. Her image dates from the year 1851 (credit here to Tufts University for images at



top/center). These were not merely characters in a fictional story but real people, sadly poor.

This, in turn, leads to a discussion of stereotype.

Franz Schubert's Song Cycle: published in 1828, verse 24.

Just beyond the village  
stands a hurdy-gurdy man,  
and with numb fingers  
he plays as best he can.

Barefoot on the ice  
he totters to and fro,  
and his little plate  
has no reward to show.

No-one wants to listen,  
no-one takes a scan,  
and the dogs all growl  
around the aged man.

And he lets it happen,  
as it always will,  
grinds his hurdy-gurdy;  
it is never still.

(Franz Schubert, 1828)

Jumping forward to the year 1989, a sensational French musical performer named Valentin Clastrier (b. 1947) made his gloriously strange, scary noises on his French hurdy-gurdy-- heard on his first CD-- and that this scared me, terrorism in musical form. To even listen-- yet listening over and over-- is exactly what I fell into doing over and over. Remember the term trance. His name is Valentin Clastrier, decidedly exotic, a French musical artist. His work informs my idea about what can be done.

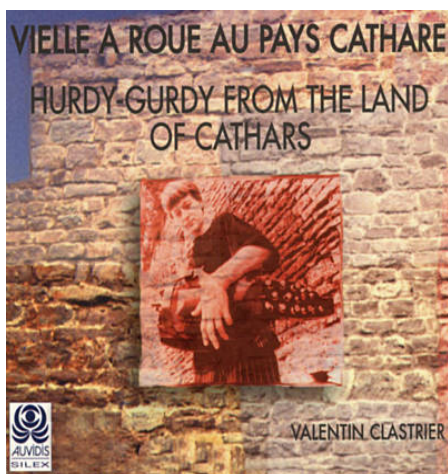


Figure 7. Valentin's Church at Cathars

The first hurdy-gurdy which was bought by this author was purchased in 2001. My Hungarian hurdy-gurdy, my tekerő, was made to my own specifications in the year 2003. Valentin Clastrier's 1997 musical work Heresy (pictured above) was an important influence on my thinking due to its blending of wooden, clicky sorts of wooden noises and jazz.

- Experimentation as Jazz

Jazz can be a mindset, an approach to research. Becoming an artist/musician can play for musicians solely in terms of their reaction to the idea of breaking rules. It is well established historically that by the early 20th century composers were questioning the ubiquitous gravity of tonality. My own education in art (age four in "artist years") has been addressed by alternative methods of musical scoring. My art is, of course, linked to jazz improvisation, but my background was rooted in well classical ways of thinking. Now we art in an artist mindset.

Experimentation necessitates the rejection of rules: the conventions and organizational methods that are central to the traditional values, methods, and ideas of music lead to a struggle;

this struggle is to find a justification for the experimentalism which then lead back to a need for validation from the very group that experimentation pushes back against. Translated into a more simple question, this means that I wanted to first violate the rules of music. This led to the study of art movements of the 20th century.

In envision my own art practice this way; I welcomed the ideas suggested by the art movement called Fluxus. This will never change. It was suggested by our own director from his own book on this subject: Fluxus is an attitude that connects art with the experience of looking up to the cultural elite (for more on this idea, see avant gardism and the Fluxus Project by Owen Smith, 2015). Next is a quote from a social scientist who considered himself a Fluxus artist, Allen Burkoff PhD: “Fluxus is more than Art. It's bigger than that. To confine it to being understood as being primarily a phenomenon in the realm of art is to let it die” (Burkoff). If I have described my idea adequately in these few words, my own inclination in favor of Fluxus thinking is that there is a mindset and art practice that emphasizes paradox. Why this idea has taken hold of me such that I can no longer come up with any creative, artistic idea unless it revolves around the idea of paradox is not yet clear. Is it pent-up anger or something from childhood, all this is not yet understood. It is at least possible that being obedient to the rules that we are taught can also hold us back. On the one hand, one sees virtue in being disciplined, yet on the other hand, it is very liberating to throw all rules aside just to see what might happen creatively.

The second chapter situates my art... Research is based more on the peculiar assemblage or juxtaposition of ideas rather than any thought of unification. The idea for me was (and continues to be) to see blind spots more clearly rather than to reinforce them. The following quote describes this quite eloquently:



Seemingly countless graphic-visualizations illustrate how mathematical music really is... Above we see just a few examples from other musicologists in order to make this point about music and numbers. One can see how complex music is... Tonality is basic to almost all music. John Cage was willing to leave this logic of tonality. John Cage stands in contrast to all other composers before him. Others before him more re-engineered music. Cage seemed to de-engineer music in order to examine its individual parts before putting it back together in different ways, without any of the imperative of tonality-based thinking.

## 2. INSPIRATIONS

- **John Cage** (Composer, pianist, music theorist)

Inspiration is important to write about and the one influence that is above all others is John Cage (1912-1992). In the documentary entitled “Into the Ocean,” where Mr. Cage can be understood as an: avant-garde classical composer. I always positioned myself as halfway between classical and jazz as a trombonist. John Cage set aside jazz, it seems in retrospect, in favor of more classical thinking. Yet he opened the door to ‘imaginary context’ to a musical work. I enjoy hearing him talk about his art more than anyone else. He can put things into perspective in ways that no one else can. It was as if he, not like anyone else, felt the music rather than engineered it. He called my attention to the experience of music, not just the construction of it. Experiencing Mr. Cage through videos-- hearing his voice, watching him reason through in real-time, contemplating his idea- all this gave me the confidence to set aside tonality. It was the same feeling as turning off a flashlight in the woods at night to see what would happen. It felt like becoming part of something rather than just looking at that same something-- namely music.

Ordinarily music is built entirely on a vivid sense of tonality, the cornerstone, the most important concept being that of the ‘tonal center’. The following collage-diagram hopefully shows how mathematical music can be. These are randomly selected diagrams from various images in a search into music theory. All of this deals with tonal centering, normally referred to as Tonality.

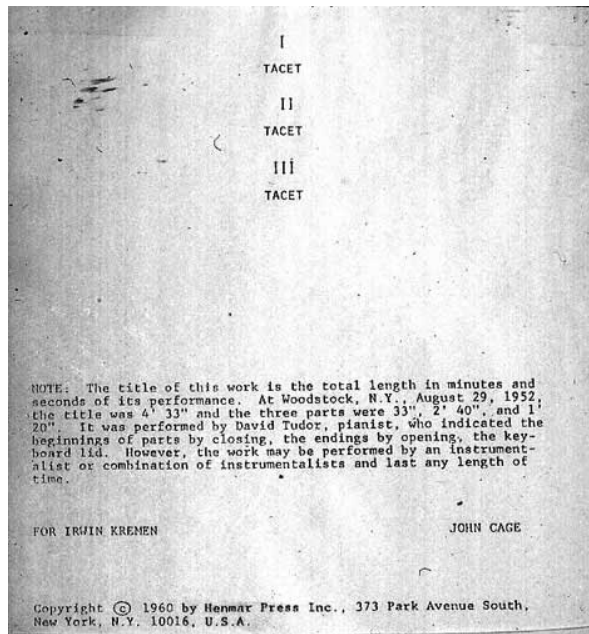


Figure 10. “Anything by Anyone by Cage.” This historical work was by John Cage and is a work known commonly as: *Silence*.

- **Charlotte Moorman** (Performance artist, cellist, producer)

Charlotte Moorman (1933-1991) was of a famed artistic genius intellect and cellist who had the second strongest influence upon my thinking after John Cage. She was not quite a member of Fluxus (a point of controversy, I think, the idea of “membership”) but that has a longer story illuminated in research work by historian Owen Smith. Somewhat different than Mr. Cage, her work introduced me to theatrics as well as Nam June Paik (1932-2006). Their intentional theatrics and subtle humor as a means of expression. A survey of the following historical figures from the 20th century illustrates their influence, as well.

- **Karl Stockhausen** (Composer, conductor)

Karl Stockhausen ( 1928-2007) is thought perhaps as a sort of mystical figure in musical art-- albeit controversial. It is suggested that Mr. Stockhausen was born in another star system, specifically a planet orbiting the nearby star, Sirius. It is described that he had some sort of intellectual connection to an outer space civilization.

Stockhausen haunts me even today. He has been described through all sorts of books and media, including The Guardian, October of 2005 about him. Stockhausen claimed to be from another star system. While I myself have not yet made any such claim (so far) the idea of moving towards metaphysical musical expression does seem relevant to my art. Similar to Alfred Jarry's approach to art, an early purveyor of absurdity in art, I support this approach to thinking.

Music itself depends on a suspension of disbelief. This is like saying that music does end with the music itself but leads to a second beginning where external factors matter, even to the point of being almost a part of the composition itself. I would agree and support this notion. Sound and score are two dimensions to music but there are others, too, and this seems to lead to an ontological discussion. Should music include myth and fiction? One may not be motivated in that direction but what if music heads there because of more artistic thinking? At the risk of being too simple, the word ontological refers to either relating subjects to each other or addressing metaphysics. The word metaphysics opens the door to a discussion of ideas that are not provable, for example, the ability to know something that is abstract; i.e., I felt led to "this or that," or conversely I did this or that... yet the reasoning might seem like a secret, so to speak. The more mathematical and scientific imperative, by contrast, implies that all reasoning and



knowledge must be talked about so that it can be analyzed. As an artist, I do not come anywhere close to that sort of dictate.

- **William Eggelston** (Photographer, found-object artist)

Mr. Eggelston (b. 1939.) greatly in informing my work, as did a few other photographers. Photography is very improvisational in nature.

The very notion of humor comes through my work in part and has come to play a role unexpectedly in shaping my own creatively as an artist/composer. My composing as an artist is process-based and leads to schemes or what can be termed event scores, an already established idea. While the idea of an artistic scheme or event is not as new as it was 50 years ago in art, an art happening remains innovative and current. An art scheme filled with improvisation remains avant-garde as proven by younger, jazz artists today. Improvisation, like the idea of intermedia, always was and always will be relevant.

- **Dick Higgins** (Key member of Fluxus, publisher and art theorist)

A founding Fluxus member Dick Higgins (1938-1998) wrote back in the mid 1960s:

”Does it not stand to reason, therefore, that having discovered the intermedia (which was, perhaps, only possible through approaching them by formal, even abstract means), the central problem is now not only the new formal one of learning to use them, but the new and more social one of what to use them for? Having discovered tools with an immediate impact, for what are we going to use them?” (Higgins, 1966).



Figure 9. Our Graduate Exhibition, poster design by MFA artist Virginia Valdez.

### 3. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

We, referring to my son and I, traveled and discussed various ideas surrounding art for hours, ideas that inevitably pushed my art forward. My son, only age ten at the beginning of this experience, came to my school to listen to lectures on art. We traveled to my music jobs and talked about all sorts of theoretical concepts that would apply to my art. These included minimalism, pointillism, noise, semiotics, spectacle, politics, and humor in art. More than anyone else, Julian was central to this creative process. Was my art aimed at independence, commercialism, or interdependence? These were the kinds of vital issues that needed to be talked about with someone and this person became that someone.

The following quote is one of my inspirations, William Egelston. His historic words help in explaining things. "I never really know beforehand (where things are leading) until I see it. It just happens all at once. I take a picture very quickly and instantly forget about it" (Egelston, n.d.).

My own research explored the possibility that trained musicians might read a three-dimensional object as a musical score. The postmodern artist realizes reverse-engineered orientation towards art. to the point where nothing is left of art but the fiction of the artist (Rosenburg, 12). Most often my art-- not as much in the beginning but now-- uses found objects. There will also be a discussion of invented, extended techniques on the hurdy-gurdy. I consider myself an art-musician.

Allmusic (AMG) is an online, music repository established in 1991 which features well-written, short essays about musical genres, currently with 30 million tracks, describes experimentalism and the avant-garde this way:

Avant-garde is a French phrase meaning "vanguard" or, literally, advance guard, and describes movements of individuals at the forefront of innovation and experimentation in their fields. Implicit in the term is the rejection of the status quo, a critique of popular convention and taste, and a striving for originality that can be intentionally provocative or alienating. There is a considerable academic debate about the origins of its application to the arts, but in popular understanding, it usually refers to anything that general audiences might consider outrageous. (AMG Music, 2019)

The scope of my work agrees with AMG's definition and is felt to be seen as postmodern. Often done alone and situated in central Maine in the United States, this research has been qualitative and started in the Spring of 2016 as part of this MFA program located north of Bangor, Maine. Leaning toward abstraction with a piece entitled Duet for Musician and Cardboard Box, my work took a sudden turn to involve peoples' reaction to fabricated, musical situations. Specifically, I would ask musicians and artists to try "reading" an object such as a stick, box, or tree branch. Right away, the phrase Object Score took hold in my heart as a brilliant idea, and these were ordinary objects and not works of art in any traditional sense-- though Mr. Duchamp would have probably smile.

#### 4. ENTIRE CATALOGUE

1. Not a Song (fall, 2015) (garden-hose piece)
2. Palindrome in A (fall of 2015) (150 bars, composed music flipped backward to total 300 bars)
3. Object Score Quartet (radiator, window, iron pipe, and hurdy-gurdy)
4. The Phantom Sound (distorted sound with hurdy-gurdy)
5. Grace Compare
6. Ensemble at Christmas (family performance, kazoo, telephone, toys, tools, telephone)
7. The Empty Room (hurdy-gurdy, playing the room literally, and strings)
8. Steps .z/k.
9. Z/K Lightbulb and Trombone (duet with light recorded as buzzing sound)
10.  $\pi f \Sigma \beta \mu \partial \approx \acute{\alpha} \pi \theta \Delta$  (asemic text, chance meaning)
11. Godbywe (lament, “goodbye” to a piano being thrown away)
12. Receiving Grace
13. Storm as I Am
14. Storm in Grey (with Joachim Mencil in Krakow, Poland, a virtual duet)
15. The End
16. Unknown Fear
17. Fear The Unknown
18. The Spider’s Lament: from the pataphysical: Spider’s House Band
19. Once Upon a Spider
20. Heaven to a Spider

21. The Past Is
22. The Imagined Past
23. Past As Now
24. Clothesline Pieces 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 (ensemble cast, theatrics, crowd-sourcing)
25. Them, That, This (scribble vocalizations by Duane Ingalls)
26. Bearing the Light (soundtrack from Ft. Knox, trumpet & conch shell, hurdy-gurdy)
27. A/G Gurdy Solo: harmonics
28. Duet for Gurdy and Piano (broken piano and hurdy-gurdy)
29. Ice in F Major
30. The Ending of Thought
31. Duet for Hurdy-Gurdy and Fort
32. Photo Fan Machine (machine noise with contact mic)
33. Alone, Antiphonal Gurdy Solo
34. Storm #17 for Anoush (soundtrack from a live mixed-media performance; a storm)
35. Life
36. Ghost
37. Gurdy in Blue
38. The Ephemeral Meaning of Silence (soft sounds, singing bowl, hurdy-gurdy and restaurant noise)
39. Art About Art Marries Music About Music and Have Their First Argument (spoken word)
40. Minus One

41. Dream Catching
42. 30°
43. November (an unfinished clarinet solo)
44. Punk Peep
45. Homeless: Duet with a Cardboard Box (trombone, electric guitar, hum, shouting, feedback)
46. The Fallen Leaf (the recorded audio-only version)
47. Confused and Alone
48. Music for a Stick (contra-alto clarinet and trombone)
49. Never (3/2) (music for left-handed piano)
50. Light, Gurdy, and Wind: a duet with wind

Quote: The artist who has left art behind or— what amounts to the same thing—who regards anything they make or does as art, is an expression of profound crisis that has overtaken the arts in our epoch. Painting, sculpture, drama, music, have all been undergoing a process of re-definition. The nature of art has become uncertain (Harold Rotenburg, 12).

- Art Process

This illustration proudly provides us with a glimpse of the program: “MFA-GOAT.”

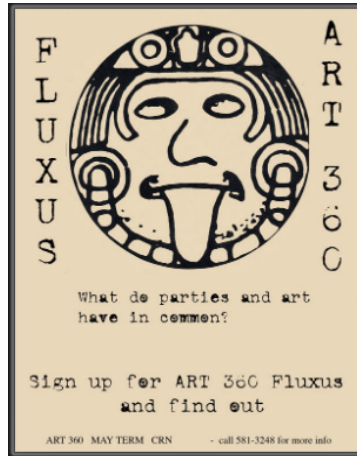


Figure 10. Art Flux-ucation

Paraphrased from a book: Questions of Cultural (or self) Identity:

“What is the aesthetic of a work of music? The quality of experience, not just an object. Identity is a process, not a thing. Music makes us experience ourselves, not just the world differently. We are a ‘self in progress.’ Self is something imagined, an imagined self-imagined as part of a particular social, physical, and material process. We imagine self-identity as a sense of a subjective in the collective” (Hall, Gay, 108).

At first I really had no idea how to organize or compose pieces like this, musical works worthy of inviting professional musicians to participate. I felt that object scoring would work but often said little in advance of what I was getting ready to do. I had the attitude to see what would happen. The surprise was essential to its success. The closest thing to a prerequisite theorem was that the more simple the object was, the more interesting my experiment would become. This idea led to my first choice for an experimental musical score involving, in this case, a dusty, old, cardboard box (which I saved).





Figure 11. My Duet with a Cardboard Box

This research did not necessitate attending any international festivals, nor did it involve traveling outside of Maine. Instead, my experiments centered around performance time which I organized locally. Test pieces involved professional musicians who would agree at my request (and often to my surprise) to freely donate their time and give my ideas a try. In the midst of roughly 30 original musical schemes, I was reading about musicology and became interested in alternative scoring as an artist, not just a musician or, perhaps, a conceptual musician. An essentialist search for self-identity hit early on with the idea of playing a duet with a cardboard box.

Out of fifty of my experimental-music pieces all of which I composed, about half of the works involved improvising to an object. Often this was a stick or tree branch. As for my studio, my creative work was largely done mainly alone and most often in my car. I came to think of my car as an art studio, also feeling that a car had a remarkable metaphoric quality as I traveled to music jobs. The contrast of ordinary music as compared to experimental ideas was sustaining. The car has become a means of wandering, a sort of nomadic wagon. Both the road and vehicle

become profoundly, I think, metaphorical. Often my best ideas came while traveling home late at night from a music job.

“When you start working, everybody is in your studio- the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas- all are there. However, as you continue painting (or musical composing), they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you are lucky, even you leave.” (Cage)

- Street photography’s influences

What does it mean to wander? It may mean the consideration of art as process. Here the desire was to convey music meaning from an artist evolution as a method for musical scoring. To wander can be described as an attitude, something akin to motion and stillness coalesced into one concept. An attitude was necessary, yet counterintuitive. As a photographer, I dwelled on imperfection that is so central to street photography. A quote by my favorite photographer, William Eggleston (born 1939), sums up this approach to art:

“A picture is what it is and I’ve never noticed that it helps to talk about them or answer specific questions about them, much less volunteer information in words. It wouldn’t make any sense to explain them. Kind of diminishes them. People always want to know when something was taken, where it was taken, and, God knows, why it was taken. It gets really ridiculous. I mean, they’re right there, whatever they are.” (Eggleston).

Street photography both inspired my artistic process and solidified my perspective towards wandering as ritual. The artist can dwell upon what is already there as a matter of chance and in

no way is this meant to discount craft, but what happens by chance that is so fascinating that it forever dominates my “artist brain.”

A certain amount of my time was spent in one junkyard in order to think differently and isolate some ideas. A friend of mine, Captain Danial LaPointe, owns a 275-yard property which is “home” to hundreds of old vehicles (inanimate souls) dating as far back as the 1930s-- a property entitled: Place of Peace. He made his property available to us. Of course this was nothing but “junk” so to speak, but right there at my feet were so many countless voices like ghosts. The junkyard gave me stories in absolutely every direction. Again and again I’d carry my camera, my tool for meditation, and think about that kind of wandering, the Zen of wandering, also of meditation when it comes to finding these kinds of ordinary objects. Object Scoring became my greatest idea and came from wandering the local junkyard, my Place of Peace.

In another quote from Mr. Eggelston, here is a line that may cause one to feel things so much more deeply. “I’ve always assumed that the abstract qualities of [my] photographs are obvious. For instance, I can turn them upside down and they’re still interesting to me as pictures” (Eggelston). Something like this points to more to the art of the material itself. Examples of method styles within my MFA education included free improvisation, chance operation, collage, décollage, found-objects, the use of humor, and, last but not least, the use of noise as a material.

## 5. THE PORTFOLIO

Stated twice, “Not knowing is a form of knowing.”

Artist Teresita Fernandez

Each work listed in his thesis will include the following five indices.

1. Place
2. Participants
3. Instruments
4. Method
5. Documentation

Each piece may be contemplated, liked or disliked, by way of any of these indices. It is not necessary to listen to the piece in order to have a response to it. Simply, my work is an art practice which is more than just music alone. Each method makes an artistic statement all by itself; each score offers an illustration and has artistic value all by itself. The hurdy-gurdy has value even in the absence of ever actually hearing it.

Not included here, is Duet with a Fountain. I also composed a set of seven works in musique concrète, a set of musical scores that were block prints by the artist Wade Warman. Other collaged, musical pieces featured rubber tires on a wet road and air-raid sirens. A couple of films were done that either looked at stark minimalism (a film of an empty hallway) or scribble (a short film entitled: Mugwump). I also wrote eighty or so blog posts during this same time that contemplated what is termed noise music. My notes indicate the following list of topics that were going through my mind-- here a list of nonsensical materials: scribble, free improvisation,

chaos, discontent, disillusionment, anarchy, punk, stress, graffiti, noise, machines, and the homeless.

This is a review of twenty musical works in annotated form. However, the real number of works that I did during this same time was closer to 60. In this location, I can have access to a few that are not included below. For example, Palindrome in A is saved there. Also in this location is found a set of seven block-print-as-score pieces done in collaboration with Wade Warman. The url for this segment of work is: <https://hurdygurdy14.wixsite.com/ungava>

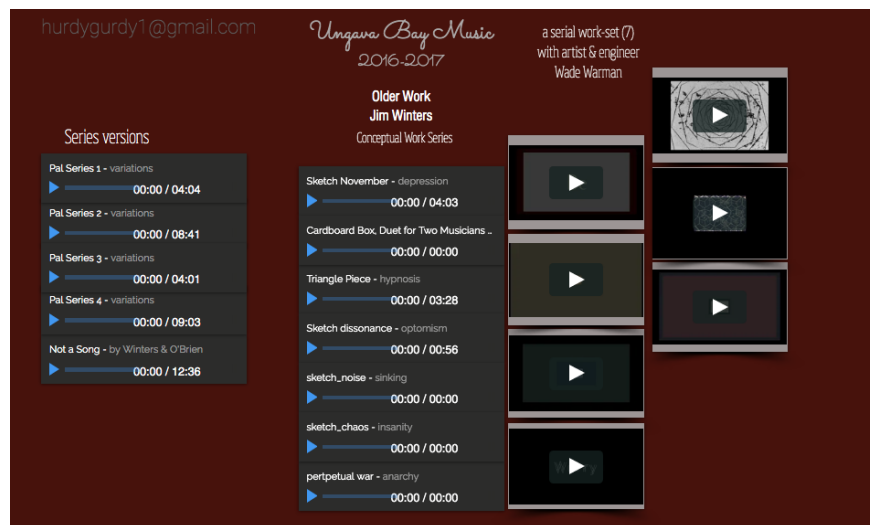


Figure 12. Collaged works

- Collaborators

The following individuals participated in my compositions during my time in school. These were for my compositions and I invited these individuals to help me at various times during this degree process:

1. Joe Hartel
2. Duane Ingalls

3. Julian Winters
4. Owen Smith
5. Stanley Levitsky
6. Beth Wiemann
7. Ross Gallagher
8. Daniel Colageo
9. Beau Lisy
10. Mark Tipton
11. Steve Norton
12. Derek Smith
13. Ryan Wilks
14. David Wilks
15. Duane Shimmel
16. Wells Gordon
17. Brad O'Brien
18. Amanda Quirling
19. Wade Warman

- My Rubric

The following induces or rubric is used to describe twenty projects.

1. Location
2. Participants

3. Instrumentation
4. Materials
5. Score Classification
6. Photographs (figures)

This work took place during the timeframe of my MFA experience. Presented here are twenty musical works, all original compositions and the names of each of my pieces followed by the same list in its annotated form. My list is of twenty chosen musical works which are annotated here to round out this thesis and were composed by this author between the years 2016 and 2019. Here is my artist catalogue, my own rite of passage. This is about one half of my MFA praxis. As described early in this thesis, this work is, in effect, at the heart of my degree process, even as thesis material, as it were-- the thesis beyond just the words here.

- Artist catalogue annotated

1. The Drag
2. Clothesline Music
3. Never 3 ½
4. The Fallen Leaf
5. Heaven to a Spider
6. Music for a Stick
7. The Ending of Thought
8. The Circle
9. Overture for Footsteps
10. The Old Green Truck
11. The Empty Room
12. Musical Object Trouvé
13. Return to Black Mountain
14. The Ephemeral Meaning of Silence

15. Apahodian Gurdy
16. Art About Art Marries Music About Music Having Their First Argument
17. Storm #17
18. Them, Cassette, and Gurdy
19. Fear the Unknown
20. Duet for Musician and Cardboard Box



Here are twenty works composed and performed by this author, and presented here as research into alternate types of musical scoring.

1) **The Drag** (see figures 15, 16)

- Location: Bangor, Maine
- Solo, Duet, Trio... (people would join in as it was going on)
- Instrumentation: an assemblage of personal objects, rope, chain
- Score type: Tactile Score (musical, ground-score)

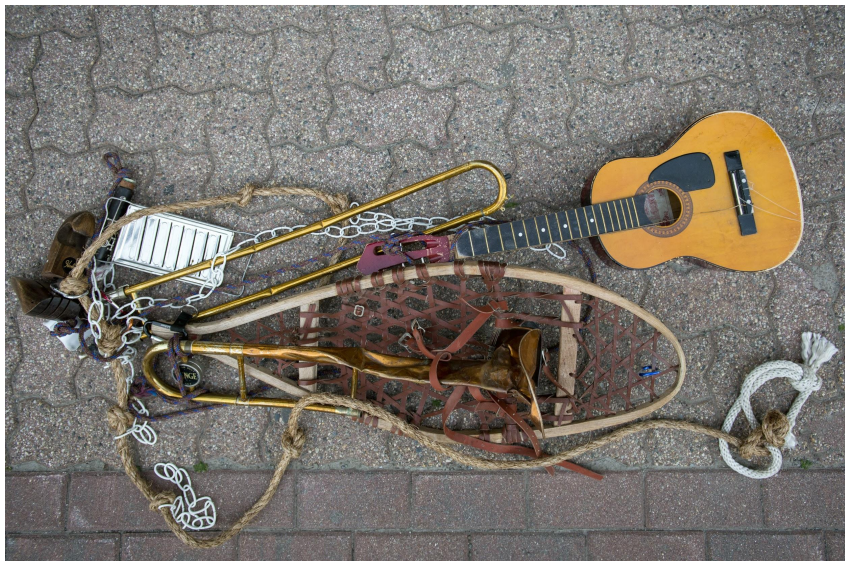


Figure 13. The Drag



Figure 14. Found objects: fry pan, old bra, orphaned clarinet, tuxedo jacket, bent trombone, rope, and chains.

The Drag was intended as a joyful, chaotic, cacophonous, scratchy, walking-based artwork. My plan for this work drag music/art was for what I called ground scoring. The rope will be done with sticks, clips, lovingly assembled; the rope is the instrument. The walker is the musician/artist The walk represents togetherness, talking, any struggle, burden, laughter, release, smiles, meeting strangers who have something to talk about. sound, walk, sharing, eating, not too much of a leader. Anyone can/should drop in to it. as little organizing as possible— a Happening.”

The Drag features what I called a **musical-drag-train** which, for me, was an autobiographical musical sculpture. The Drag had what I am calling a tactile score, meaning that the surface of the ground was intended to be the score. The tactile score is a score that translates the surface of the ground into a score all from a walking perspective.

This iteration of The Drag took place for me during the fall of 2017. This was documented in photos, one short video that was more formal, and on social media in a cell-phone video. The idea is to literally drag the past. In a work that spanned three months in weekly intervals, I used improvised walking along with ‘contextualized objects’ and each object had real, personal meaning with my wife’s bra as one example and part of my tuxedo, both dragging in the dirt or whatever other surface I encountered. The ground was the score; this was my plan. The various surfaces created the music sound variations along with the speed of the walking. This was the idea, though a piece that surely functioned on different levels. One level was for onlookers either stopped for a moment in disbelief or in one case strangers joined in. The design of the piece was to start the piece, then meet someone, then offer to buy a round of beers. My work blends varied types of methodologies. The piece seemed all at somewhat profound, yet at the same time prankish. A police officer asked, “who owns this? (pile of junk),” pointing to all the peculiar objects with hidden meanings that he had no idea of, and all tied together with ropes and a few chains. We continued to have our beer, as planned, with a visitor who happened to be on his own personal journey! We met while I was dragging. He, walking with his own autobiographical story in the form of a backpack, was walking around the United States. Randy Circlewalker was his actual name and he dragged along with us before all sitting together to talk. Each object in this drag train represented my burdens and private feelings.

Objects in the train referred to children and dreams.

- An old, broken clarinet from my son who, at that time, had suddenly moved out amidst various teenage struggles (my emotional metadata).
- An old bra was included at her request as a metaphor for our struggles, intimacy, and ultimate love.

- My bent trombone was one that I caused through an accident.
- A snowshoe represented our move to Maine after living down south.

film url: <https://vimeo.com/233353021>

2) **Clothesline Music** (see figures 17, 8, 19)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Art Ensemble (intended to be about a dozen, my community)
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy, two bass clarinets, upright bass, speaking chorus, a speech
- Score type: verbal instructions and visual cues

Wednesday, 26 April, 2017  
6pm - 6:30pm (one half hour)

Jim Winters and  
**Clothesline Piece Number One**

Experimental Music Recording session; viewing is open to the public.  
Interpretation #1, 6pm- a "cog-of-the-wheel" is to be a sort of spacial, musical scoring which occur physically; musicians positioning themselves in sequence will improvise sounds of their choosing in a programed sequence, chance operation.

This will occur around the noise/drone of: experimental hurdy-gurdy.

Interpretation #2, 6:20pm: pure **Object Scoring**.

A ten-foot, aged canvas as our musical score.

Members:

Wellington Gordon of NESCOM performs jazz bass with extended techniques.  
Two Ephemeral Reeds: IMRC's Steve Norton along with Director of Music Beth Wiemann.  
The Whispering Choir of Naysayers by Stash Lavitsky and Amanda Quirling.  
The Emissive Voice of Admonition performed by Owen Smith Ph.D.  
Acoustical-design engineer, musician, and Shofar artist Duane Shimmel.  
Inspiration, expression, and support by: Duane Ingalls and Ryan Wilks.  
Special thanks to Professor Nate Aldrich for his oversight.  
Photography & videography generously performed by Amy Olivia Pierce.  
Julian the Kid as timekeeper!  
Milo the dog as Milo the Dog.

Arrivals between 5:30pm - 6:00pm.

Viewers will stand & observe a one-time experimental-music event.  
Children, pets, and covered beverages are all welcomed.

Cost is free.

Location: IMRC on campus near the UMaine's rec. center.  
Innovative Media Research and Commercialization Center (IMRC)  
5785 Stewart Commons - University of Maine  
Questions? hurdygurdy1@gmail.com

Figure 15. Poster as a musical score

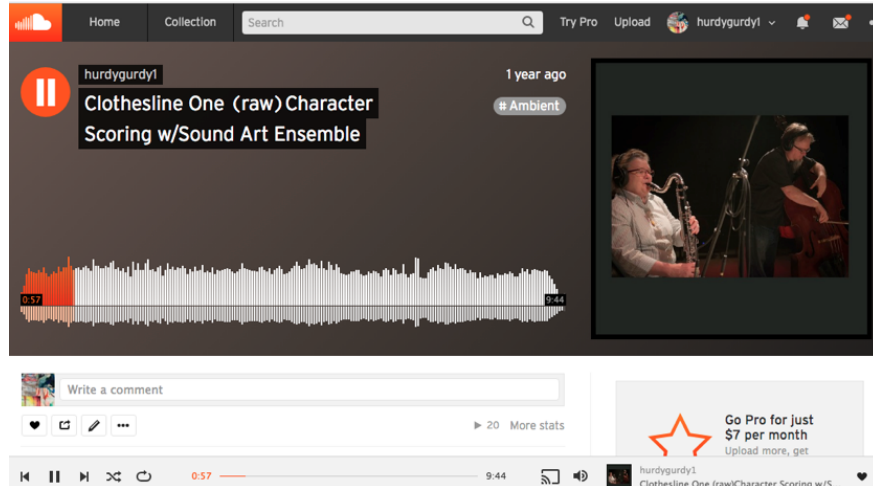


Figure 16. The Clothesline score



Figure 17. Canvas scoring with Dr. Owen Smith, Dr. Beth Wiemann.

Our ensemble consisted of Dr. Owen Smith, Dr. Beth Wiemann, Jim Winters, Wells Gordon, Ryan Wilks, Julian Winters, Stanley Levitsky, and Amanda Quirling. The Founder and Director of this MFA program, Dr. Owen Smith, agreed to assume a performative role which I dictated as **The Voice of Admonition**-- also referred to at first as The Emissive Voice of

Admonition. Wells Gordon played bowed, upright bass with extended techniques. Dr. Beth Wiemann and my close friend and remarkable musician Steve Norton, both performing on bass clarinets. The Choir of Naysayers was composed for artists Amanda Quirling and Stanley Levitsky. My role was to provide a sound-altered hurdy-gurdy aided by close friend and sound-engineering artist Ryan Wilks working together to produce a real-time, sound alteration. My son and inspiration Julian Winters conducted this piece using a light bulb: first on and then to the off position after ten minutes. Thus the group was” conducted by a lightbulb.”

Object Scoring prompted to an installation in the case of this piece which resulted in what seems to be grandiose contrivance of chaos and humor in this Clothesline Series, a series based on one recording session which made its debut with a bit of theatrics, invented characters, two department directors, along with a fictitious argument embedded within the work. This piece marked the beginning of overt humor as an art material, something which was never expected but turned out to be important to my approach to art.

Clothesline Music featured a fictitious group, our **Choir of Naysayers**. This was a risk for me as it was driven by a satirical comic force. This move towards parody included the idea of calling these naysayers a choir. If the budget could have provided them with choir robes, I would have wanted to do that, too. The Choir of Naysayers was asked to more or less act tipsy towards our most important leader, the Emissive Voice of Admonition. This work ended up being quite interesting in that the insults turned out to be poetic and punctuated with ‘raspberries’ and turkey calls-- gobble, gobble. The director with his ‘halo of headphones’ carried on oblivious to all humor as he continued to give a speech of great importance for ten minutes.

A dog was invited! I also scored a lightbulb to be switched on by my son to start things off. Thus, a child was the conductor. In retrospect, this piece was influenced by Charlie

Chaplin's 1921 film, *The Kid*. My own child would turn on a light and signal that our piece is underway. No words would be said, only the light switched on. The original idea was for a dog to be awoken by the sound of a shofar... Movement two was an exercise in reading aged fabric (three-years aged) as our score. 19' poles along with the embedded personal story of living for three years inside a soft-sided shelter; these were the canvas doors to our home.

There was a sustained inspiration coming from John Cage's composition *Musicircus*, possibly the most iconic idea ever run across within this research for combining self-expression, the chance operation, simultaneity. This is a strong sense of parody and irony in this kind of art, not merely entertainment but of spectacle, theatrics, and the naked expression of imagination in real time. This could be a move toward anarchy—the most common critique of all this near nonsense-- but more soulful, perhaps, and more optimistic.

*Musicircus* by Cage dated from 1967 and was described in a 2014 article in *The Guardian* as: "benign, glorious anarchy." In the year 1980, Cage spoke of this kind of idea in an interview, quoted again from the *Guardian* as: "resolving complexity through the notion of a *Musicircus*, of many things going on at once. (One) can have soft things going on at the same time as loud things and all you have to do to hear the soft things is to go closer... you can get rid of intention by multiplying intention."

This piece-- and often this has felt like it was the most inspired piece that ever did, certainly the largest one-- resonates on a few levels. For one thing, it included crowdsourcing, even though no one jumped at that idea; the raw files were made available to everyone involved. The recording was multi-tracked so that the piece would "not end when it was over." And it could sound different in an infinite number of ways, with crowdsourcing. One person might want to hear more bass, for example, or maybe the two bass clarinets would seem more



interesting to a wind player. Maybe different elements would seem different to the same person on different days.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/clothesline-one>

Video url: <https://vimeo.com/226055842>

3) Never 3 ½ (see figure 20)

- Location: DAW
- Solo (composed in a parking lot)
- Instrument: piano for left hand only
- Score Type: Traditional Notation



Figure 18. For Left Hand Only, notation score for left-handed piano.

This is a work is for left-hand-only piano: for just one-hand-only yet expressed in standard musical notation. This work featured sound that was layered using a DAW workstation and qwerty keys for input, a piece that was intended to be composed in a parking lot. My initial experiment was to imagine a point of contact between the more robot-like DAW (digital audio workstation) juxtaposed with very real people: “live composing” in a parking lot. The idea of

writing a mystical piece while people walked in and out of Walmart was the design of this piece. This side-by-side effect was the point of the piece.

My idea was to suggest limiting a musician's ability by taking away one hand, forcing them to wonder why. That curiosity, that emotion, was part of the intent of this work. I also limited myself by using the qwerty-keys only and composing in a Walmart parking lot. Whereas art always assumes that artists are fully able to perform their work unencumbered, there was a feeling of intrigue concerning people who are held back by their limitations. Sitting in a parking lot allowed for that vantage point.

I decided that I wanted to try composing in parking lots—which is exactly what I did here. This composition took place as people shopped.

The idea of “a withered hand” took hold in my mind through a musical piece in which a distant voice speaks of “the man with the withered hand” (Hans Richter). The idea of Never 3 1/2 was to be a reference to a lost mind, one no longer able to grasp ideas. My work was linked to an emotional shock experienced at one point along the way. The most poignant contemplation was the reordering time and my inability to think clearly. This work was about cognitive disorder or confusion.

<https://soundcloud.com/james-winters-525579275/never-3>

4) **The Fallen Leaf** (see figures 21, 22)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Trio (plus the audience colliding upon us)
- Instrumentation: (2) hurdy-gurdys, mechanical toothbrush, bass drum, celesta, leaf, sink
- Score type: Spontaneous Action (ideas while walking together)

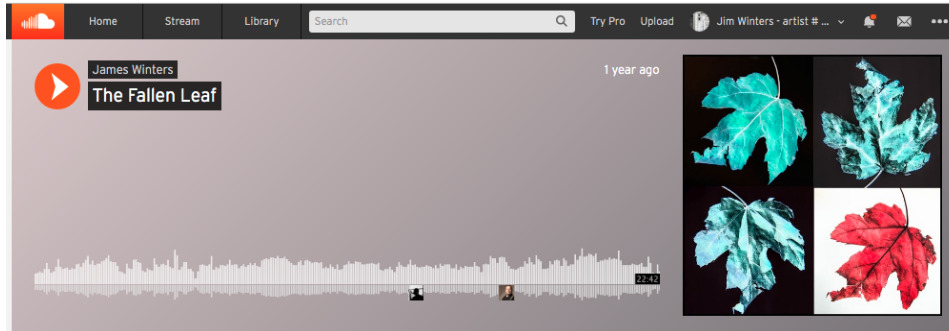


Figure 19. Toothbrush, sink, leaf, bass drum, hurdy-gurdy, celesta and bass gurdy



Figure 20. The DAW, an alternate point of view

We walked together and found a leaf... Our guest on this day, this once in a lifetime experience, was to compose with the musicologist Luciano Chessa. He was our guest for one day as part of my MFA experience. This free improvisation work would involve, it turned out, a found leaf: a leaf that would dance atop Luciano's bass drum. Our collaboration with this guest was recorded by Jim Winters in this live, musical piece entitled The Fallen Leaf. Our trio did an improvised performance on a bass drum, toothbrush, celesta, two hurdy-gurdys, a blank, white painter's canvas, and one, a steel kitchen sink. While walking with Luciano, he picked up a leaf as we talked about music and the piece the three of us would do, suggesting to me the phrase:

walking score. I named the piece, photographed, supplied two gurdys, and a painter's canvas. A four-way view of one single leaf became my idea: to venerate a leaf or, at least, the picking up of this one leaf. In my imagination, I was co-composing with a musicologist and the leaf was influencing the mood of the piece we would do.

My aesthetic was to be whimsical; a cluttered, poetic scene that defied logic was the main theme. There was the juxtaposition of a leaf and classical keyboard, the celesta; the bass drum and a toothbrush, two hurdy-gurdys, and some light "musical chairs" as Luciano insisted upon with our room-aesthetic of 'chairs collided into our group and saturated in red light' (see also <http://www.composers21.com/compdocs/chessal.htm>).

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/james-winters-525579275/proto-1c>

5) **Heaven to a Spider** (see figures 23, 24)

- Location: Bucksport, Maine
- Solo (with dirt and insects)
- Instrument: solo hurdy-gurdy
- Score type: 'Pataphysical

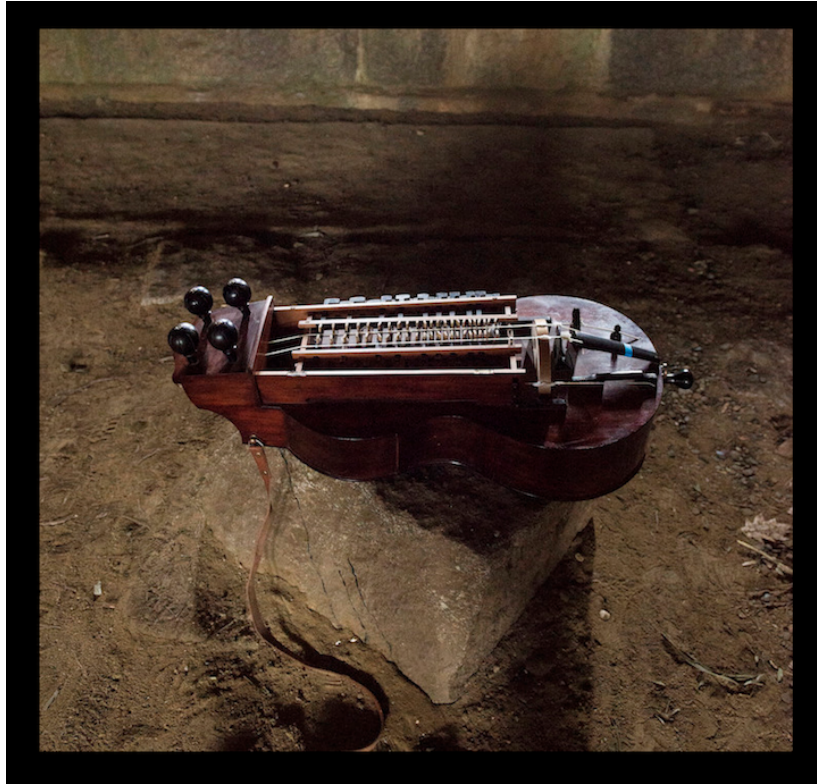


Figure 21. 'The Spider's House Band'

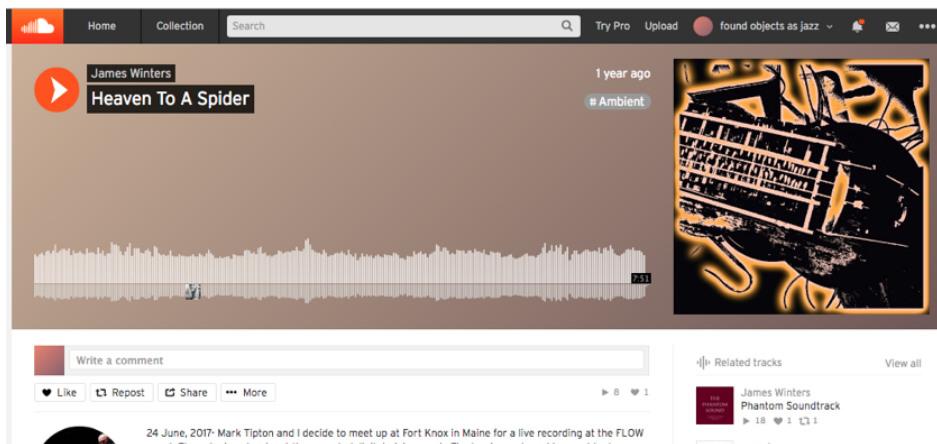


Figure 22. Heaven to a Spider with Mark Tipton on conch shell & trumpet

The significance of Heaven to a Spider was that I broke free of reality-- into what seemed to me to be 'pataphysical. 'Pataphysics as a point of study has become so very important

to me, and is increasing in this way. At this point, fiction became acceptable as part of my music. There was a missing element: people. The location was an abandoned fort. I had invited a most remarkable experimental musician to join me, and there was no audience.

Our duet was site-specific, a work between two musicians employed hurdy-gurdy, trumpet, and conch shell all as one more musical and contextual experiment. Music for Spiders was a series set of musical works all recorded live for an imaginary audience-- for spiders. "A rather 'pataphysical concert for a resident audience of spiders" used imaginary elements. This was, indeed, the first time ever using imaginary elements within a musical composition.

This musical set was done as four pieces performed and recorded for spiders and their loved ones (a spider's younglings are called spiderlings). As a "pataphysical flight of fancy" occurring months before ever knowing about Alfred Jarry, this set of our pieces became thought of as Music for Spiders— very lucky spiders with their own duo playing to their "spidery family dinners." Proudly, the two of us formed their "house band." Can music have imaginary elements? This idea would come up again and again.

<https://soundcloud.com/james-winters-525579275/heaven-to-a-spider>

6) **Music for a Stick** (see figures 25, 26)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Duet
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy and Contra-Alto Clarinet.
- Score type: verbal instructions or "blind additive," aka *Cadavre Exquis*



Figure 23. 'Gurdy and Stick'

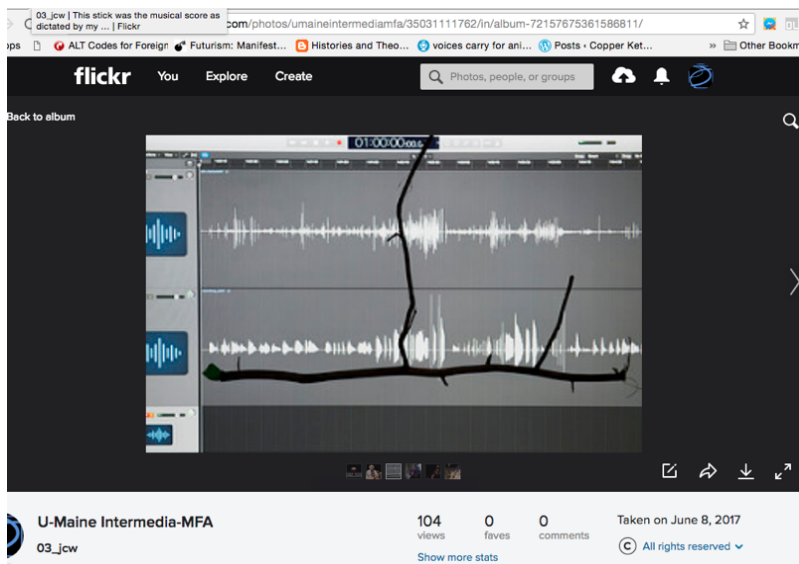


Figure 24. Stick on Screen with Steve Norton on contra-alto clarinet

Additive (this scoring method) is my own phrase and is similar to the historical idea in visual art which is termed the 'exquisite corpse.'

The idea of nature was towards nagging at the consciousness in a further effort to compose until the idea of using a stick as a score came to mind. Not only would we use a stick, I decided to tell the other musician exactly what to do to find a stick. By this time, Fluxus work of

the 1960s was influencing my thinking more and more. Reasonable choices were fast becoming a thing of the past.

Cadavre Exquis scoring along with with Text Scoring combine with a found stick as our score in this scoring exploration. “Another musician will choose the stick and we will then record on two different days, with no knowledge of the other’s results, and using the stick as our score.” All this was my experiment to try and use text as a sort of script. Once again, it is not suggested that no one has ever tried this in history, but a rite of passage for an art music student was to for me to try a script as a musical score. Seen here is the exact stick along with my sound file-- and I do still have the stick. The idea that I struggled with here was that of asking, can a musician simply find a score? Ethically, are all musical scores made as graphical objects, or can we “find a score” by walking outside? What also came out in this piece was an unexpected love for sticks and branches. Instead of wood being the thing musical instruments are made out of, why not “ask” of a stick or tree branch to become seen as the score itself. We, the two of us, were asked to read and interpret this stick as a score. I save all these object scores...

<https://soundcloud.com/james-winters-525579275/stick-remix>

7) **The Ending of Thought** (see figure 27)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Solo (done in a furnace room)
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy
- Score type: Geometric Score



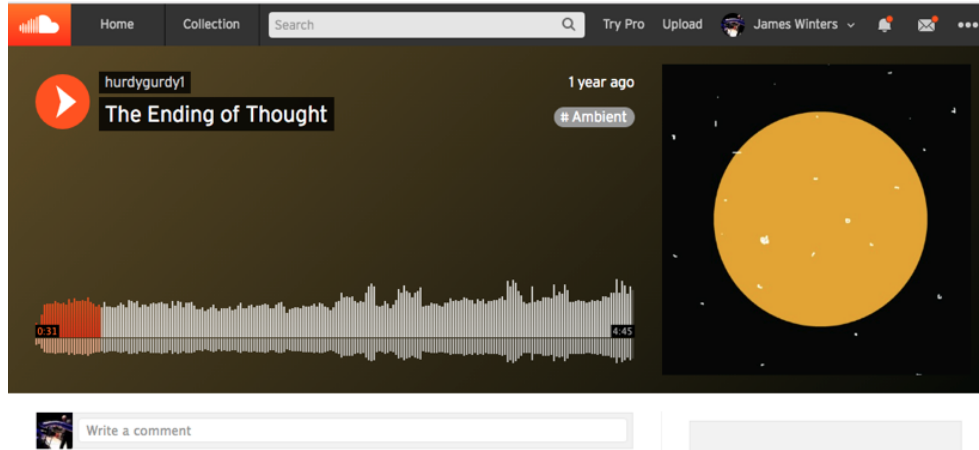


Figure 25. Geometric Scoring and ‘The Ending of Thought’

This is my idea for a method called: Geometric Scoring. This was my idea to use color-field art to depict musical activity. My idea was to use a circle and square in yellow & black as color fields to be presented graphically as a two-dimensional, graphical score (seen above). Once more, certain parts would be “missing.” How does color translate over to musical decision making?

This piece was read musically as foreground and background and turned out to sound like humming. With a defined foreground and background, its longer and shorter sounds, the work almost approaches the point of being frightening when listened to on headphones. The title, needless to say, was again fixated on the idea of not being able to think.

Specular noises, or what has come to be thought of as decorative musical elements, all indicated by small irregular specks or tiny squares. This was one of my few 2D graphic scores and was the moment of wondering about what could be accomplished using geometric shapes, something that I would use geometrics or geometric scoring. Once long ago this composer had the honor of meeting the historical, color-field artist Kenneth Noland. Mr. Noland became the inspiration for this kind of scoring, the aesthetic of plain circles and fields of color.

<https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/the-ending-of-thought>

8) **The Circle** (see figures 28, 29, 30)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Duet
- Instruments: hurdy-gurdy and bass clarinet.
- Score type: variable: both Text and Graphical Scores.

**The Circle**  
a six minute play  
by James Winters

Standing player with any musical instrument that can be played while walking  
Seated player with any musical instrument that plays well from the seated position  
One chair  
One music stand  
One light  
One musical score in the form of a program handed out each audience member as they arrive

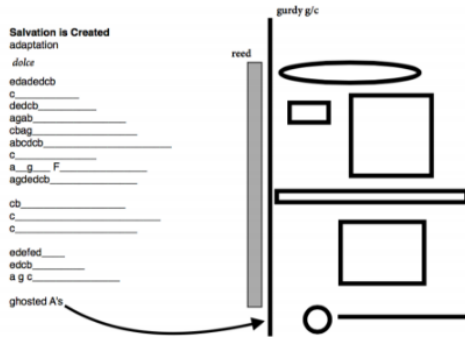
Curtain.

1. A single spotlight appears and stays, focused as a round circle on an empty stage within which there is one musician, Seated Player tied to a chair.
2. There are 17 musical phrases or bars, all for Standing Player always outside of the circle of light.
3. Roughly 20 seconds for each bar and the notes are dictated by the musical score.
4. Seated Player seems defeated or ill, and has a music stand.
5. Musical notes inside of these 20 second events range from one to eight—walking quite slow, for example, musical notes may take up 20 seconds is seconds for one note. So, the notes are like whole notes, not really much faster than that.
6. Seated Player begins. Following soon, Standing Player anxiously and slowly walks just outside the circle— maybe borrowing programs, nervously gesturing towards Seated Player. (The program is the musical score.)
7. Upon completion of walking the circle and playing, Standing Player lies down as if to die and may play a final note or two in that position.
8. The play ends and Seated Player has never even looked up.
9. Simulating death, the stage goes to black, seated player stops moving, and dies.

Footnote: The central essence that's non negotiable in this play is that Seated Player is unreachable. Any amount of creativity can be applied to all other aspects.

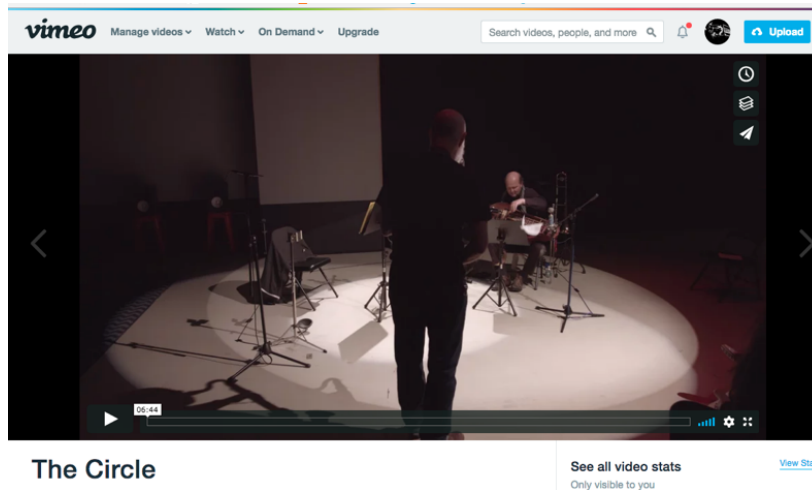
Figure 26. The text musical, an event score

Information outside of the circle cannot get in, nor can it make sense. Neither side makes any attempt to abandon its own language. Neither side has the slightest clue what the other is saying. Yet they would if they would stop "communicating".



*"Darkness and discarded memories; noise. Nature, fear, the shadowy areas within my mind; noise. The heart beats, wind kicks up, and night falls. Enter noise. Questions that seem to have have no answer creeping back. All this is noise, noise that keeps me awake. Noise, that meaningless information."*

Figure 27. Graphical scoring



The Circle

See all video stats  
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Figure 28. An absurdist musical

The idea in this piece of mine was aimed at one more attempt at altering the role of the musical composer depicting a disoriented state of mind, with underpinnings of isolation as a steady theme, so as to redefine composition. Player #2 (seen as silhouette in the photo above) is Steve Norton who was instructed via the text score that he must not enter the circle. His character has a sound mind, while the character inside the circle does not. This was the central

theme. Artist Theresa Fernandez stated very wisely that not knowing is a form of knowing. These works continue in the pursuit of music with imaginary elements. There was also a graphical score and text or script score. There was a peculiar demand for person #2 to play, but not quite, a melody similar, or not, to Salvation is Created, a 1912 classical work by composer Pavel Chesnokov. It was a continuation of the idea of confusion as an art material to ask the musician to either play or not, the classical work. In fact, the notes were suggested in text form and with no hint of rhythm whatsoever. To make matters worse, or better, the person on the inside, referred to as Musician #1, was required to ignore Musician #2 “no matter what,” (the point of the play) both musically and physically. Musician #2 in black, was told to play walking around the circle but forbidden to enter into the circle.

Film url: <https://vimeo.com/261471836>

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/user-144924856/the-circle>

9) **Overture for Footsteps** (see figures 31, 32, 33)

- Location: Lord Hall, Orono, Maine
- Art ensemble performs inside of an art gallery.
- Instrument: trombone, contra-alto clarinet, soprano clarinet, upright bass, guitar, trumpet, dance, and bowed-sink quartet
- Score type: Verbal Instructions



Figure 29. 'Five by Three'

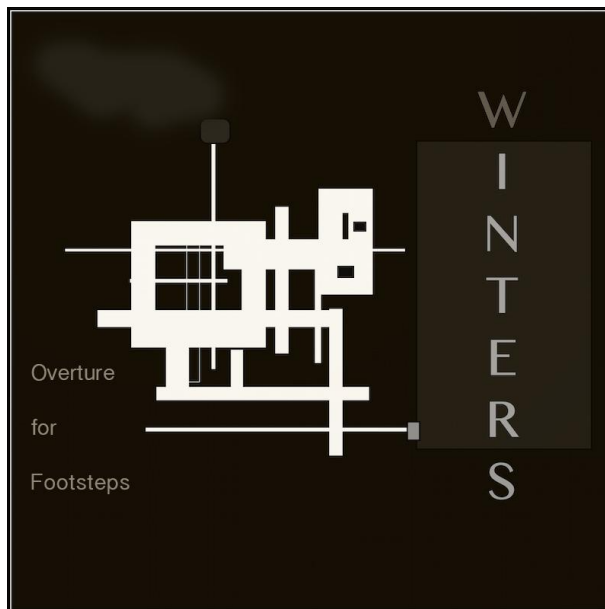


Figure 30. 'Part Monster / Part Machine'

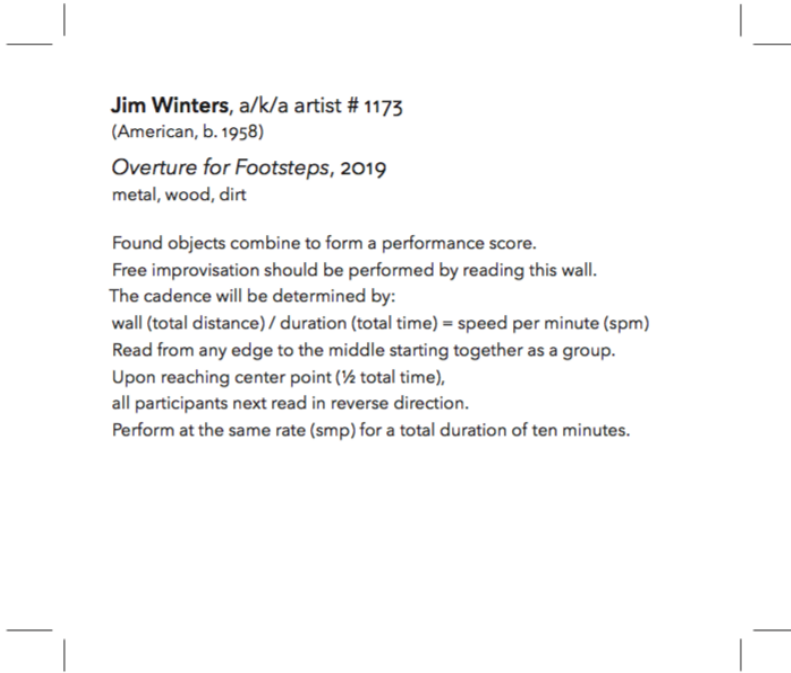


Figure 31. Wall score

A surrealist-film version segment of the time-based gallery art was issued as two small films, each about 55 seconds in length. This art gallery performance was in partial support of my MFA degree. This capstone work was called: *Overture for Footsteps* (May 2019).

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/user-144924856/overture-for-footsteps>

10) **The Old Green Truck** (see figure 34)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Solo most respectfully: a musical and metaphysical duet with a truck
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy, trombone, and footsteps
- Score type: Modified-Free Expression, Total Free Improvisation



Figure 32. 'The Old Green Truck'

During the period of time from Oct-Nov, 2017 and as a series of small, exploratory pieces lead to the fetishizing of an old truck, sounds included the hurdy-gurdy, trombone, footsteps in leaves, and humming.

This work of mine was done in series, always alone, and done at sunset. If I recall correctly it was around 6 pm this time of year and took place mostly during October and November. Several musical works were done. One work was performed in the dark in the junkyard playing the trombone into the back of the truck that I imagined as an acoustical chamber; spirits coalesced and I was scared. I appreciated this possible metaphysical experience using the truck's driver's seat, even cleaning with a dry rag (pretend cleaning). Music was made by humming and swishing leaves. On another occasion I tried filming myself teaching how to read rust. I formed ideas about the direction of a read. The white line seen here was a kind of staff (a single line) with musical events read from the two rust spots seen to my left as I sat there.



I explored extensively sounds that were indigenous to the truck, such as the squeak of springs inside the seat, the door handle, even the hollow sound of the floor. I was looking for sonic connections to my past, thinking that this past would be revealed to me over time. I wanted to explore, again, the idea of art with no audience. The trees and cold sky were an audience.

An unspeakable Sound

Film url: <https://vimeo.com/239950823>

11) **The Empty Room** (see figure 35, 36)

- Location: Bangor, Maine
- Solo (playing all instruments)
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy, trombone, windows, iron pipe, radiator
- Score type: Cadavre Exquis

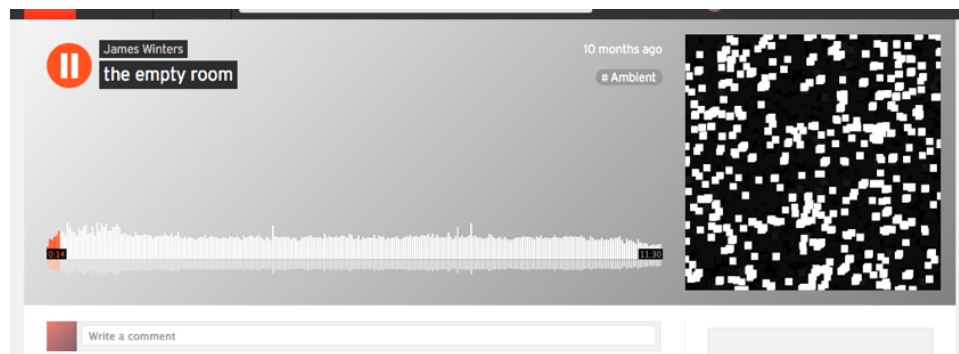


Figure 33. 'The Empty Room'



The Empty Room

Figure 34. Trombone, hurdy-gurdy, radiator, iron pipe, and window

Once again my muse was along the lines of dreams, memories, echoes, and ideas which are shrouded in mystery more than understood consciously. Not knowing means as much as knowing-- a form of knowing. To take away part of something increases its interest. The Empty Room explores the idea of questions that must never be answered. Filmic composing was the aesthetic of this work, similar to the last one on this list.

*Musique Concrète* – Often with a French pronunciation (myzik kɔ̃.kʁɛt) means concrete music or a type of music composition that utilizes recorded sound as concrete or raw material. This exploits acousmatic listening, meaning sound identities can often be intentionally obscured or appear unconnected to their source cause (Wiki Commons).

My idea was to experiment with a hybrid style of praxis: intermedial. “There should be a distinct 1950’s feeling to this,” I thought to myself, “since the room looked like it had not seen much of anything except dust in decades.” I thought of odd sounds such as what one of the old radiators can produce. Then, the idea of playing the room took hold. As usual, the easy matrix or substrate to the music could be the hurdy-gurdy. Towards the end, the hurdy-gurdy sounds like people singing distantly and late at night, or, even, a siren heard from an alleyway. The urban, midnight feeling was part of the building. The question of how to turn a room into a musical instrument was manifest in this piece.

The radiator/iron-pipe aesthetic was inspired by industrial art and musical-noise genres. My performance piece was named for the abandoned room across from our art studio. Old wiring, shadows, cobwebs, dust and ghosts all combined around the sound of the hurdy-gurdy. Previous to this work, there was a series of work termed *The Old Green Truck*. This work involved the idea of something that is abandoned still being worthy of attention and contemplation. With a stick to an old window, my hurdy-gurdy, DAW software-strings and an old room perceived as a poetic example of abandonment, this idea of envisioning an abandoned room as both musical score and instrument all lead to a sound work and film.

Playing the building objects with a stick—the stick was almost becoming a recurrent theme. A collection of sticks started to take shape. Two, simultaneous processes were central to this experiment. One was to take the room itself into a call and response affair in order to project a musical quality to abandonment. The title, along with the onset of dusk each early evening, the weather, and shadows, engaging the imagination to think of sound.

Film: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHS5H1n0w2I>

Sound: <https://soundcloud.com/james-winters-525579275/the-empty-room>

12) Musical Objet Trouvé (see figures 37, 38)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Quartet Ensemble
- Instruments: trumpet, tenor sax, trombone, contra-alto clarinet, and baritone sax
- Score type: verbal instructions

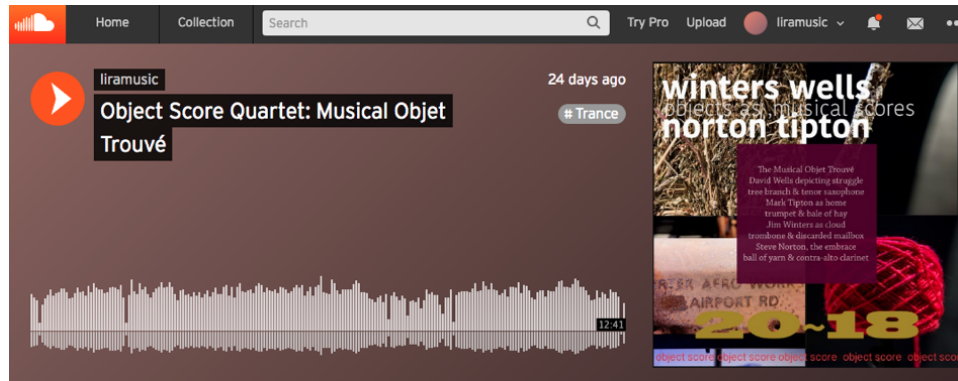


Figure 35. Musical Objet Trouvé



Figure 36. Bale of hay, rusty mailbox, ball of yarn, and tree branch

A set of four object scores set the stage for a musical quartet with four respective objects all as musical scores or parts: 1) ball of yarn, 2) bale of hay, 3) a rusty, old mailbox, and 4) a found tree-branch. This is music was produced using (4) found-objects, each to be read as parts along with an ensemble quartet of four trained musicians. Four objects as scores were carefully chosen.

Here, my piece featured four jazz musicians in total with four scores. These scores were: a ball of red yarn, a mailbox with history saved from a burn pile, a fresh bale of hay, and a suspended tree branch. Skilled, jazz musicians were given a prompt on how to read these objects as their musical parts. The instruments were trombone, tenor saxophone, trumpet, and contra-alto clarinet.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/user-144924856/object-score-quartet-musical-objet-trouve>

13) **Return to Black Mountain** (see figure 39)

- Location: Orono, Maine, and Black Mountain, North Carolina
- Duet but at separate times and places
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy and spoken word
- Score type: Cadavre Exquis

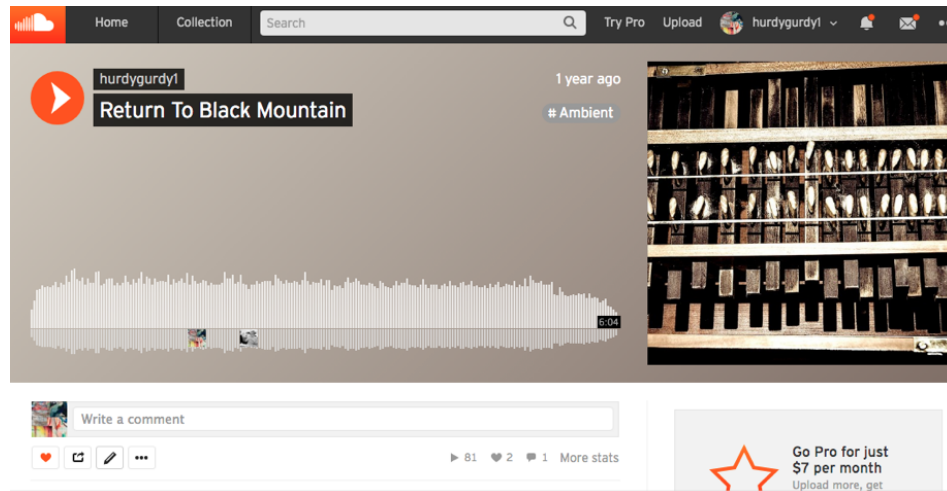


Figure 37. 'Return to Black Mountain'

In a work that was site-specific, played by Derek Smith during his trip to Black Mountain College, North Carolina, this recorded solo on hurdy-gurdy was given away as a gift to Derek Smith. This was a work in this fashion of blind additive or cadavre-exquis process, a work that was done without knowing what the other person would do.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/return-to-black-mountain>

14) The Ephemeral Meaning of Silence (see figure 40)

- Location: Bangor, Maine
- Duet
- Instruments: canvas, Tibetan bowl
- Score type: Character Score

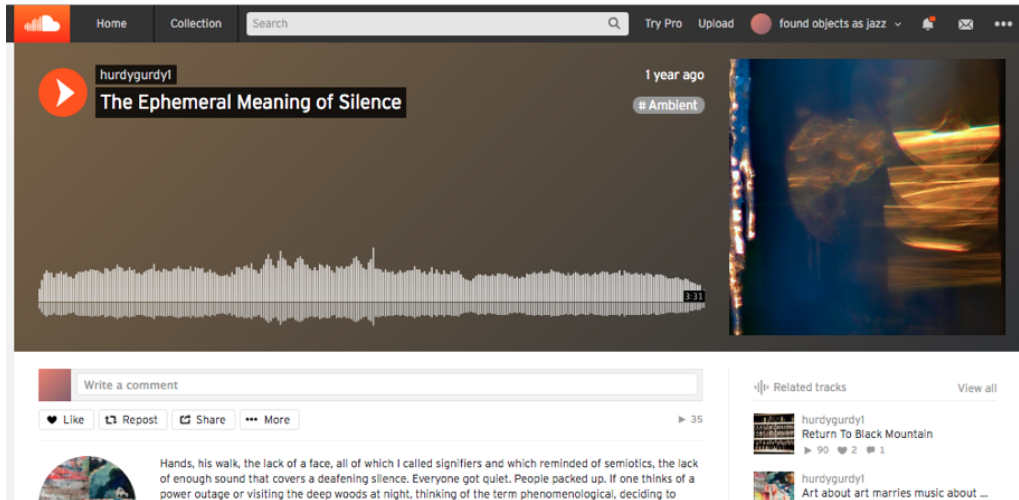


Figure 38. ‘The Silent Artist Doing an Invisible Painting’

This work is a live, site-specific musical piece with restaurant noises, a singing bowl, and the Silent Artist doing an Invisible Painting-- a sonic scene richly-‘pataphysical.

There was an homage to John Cage’s “Silence” yet in no way would it be limited to ambient noise alone. The entire scene, a crowded restaurant impregnated with nonsense, cards, affects crowd-members, musical tones, and ‘performative pantomime’. This was a piece that hit upon improvisation and collaboration. The idea of a silent artist doing an invisible painting was mine.

The entire work was thrown out by the restaurant.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/jw-stas>

15) Apahodian Gurdy (see figure 41)

- Location: Portland, Maine
- Solo work: in a wooden cage
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy, kitchen sink, paint, and canvas

- Score type: Character Scoring (solo)



Figure 39. Apahodian Gurdy: the wooden-caged gurdyist

In the musical work a live painting was performed while we played! This work (see above) was performed by Maine artist and painter Rush Brown. The painting was performed live-- painted live as the artist played the hurdy-gurdy in a wooden cage. Our musical duet was composed of live hurdy-gurdy and kitchen sink. The steel sink was brought in for this occasion. This same sink was also used in performance with Luciano Chessa.

(<http://www.composers21.com/compdocs/chessal.htm>).

Other musical artistry was performed this day including improvised jazz to an abstract film. Our gurdy/sink trio (gurdy, sink, and painter) lasted for 21 minutes. Our guest painter was a Maine visual artist Rush Brown (<https://rushbrown.format.com/>).

Our percussionist playing sink was Beau Lisy on the tenor kitchen sink

(<http://www.marktiptonmusic.com/>).

<https://soundcloud.com/user-144924856/apahodian-gurdy>



16) Art About Art Marries Music About Music (see figure 42)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Solo, multi-track
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy and altered sound fragment
- Score type: Musique Concrete



Figure 40. 'Art About Art'

“Art About Art Marries Music About Music Having Their First Argument” was an idea that presented itself as a subcategory of this author’s work. The Sound Collage means that unidentifiable or acousmatic sounds were layered and altered freely into a layered sound work. Other works like this were done that are not included in this list. Of those not included here, these involved car tires, rain, chickens, archaic recordings, a drill, a steam plant, hinges, propane tanks, a projector fan, the sound of a lightbulb, AM-radio announcements, and air-raid sirens. This work was one of two where an argument was the theme of the piece. The other example was in the Clothesline series.

The original, full title of this work was “Art About Art Marries Music About Music and Have Their First Argument.” This work, as well as others, explored fragments of ideas in a

musically collaged sort of way as an effect creatively. Different sound fragments struggle for space. This idea of a turf war also inspired Clothesline Scoring. All of this was emotionally sensitive work. Objects and ideas each had a story to tell and I was enabling that voice to be heard.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/art-about-itself-marries-music-about-itself-and-then-get-into-their-first-big-argument>

17) **Storm #17** (see figure 43)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Solo
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy and video
- Score type: Filmic Scoring (a film as the actual musical score)

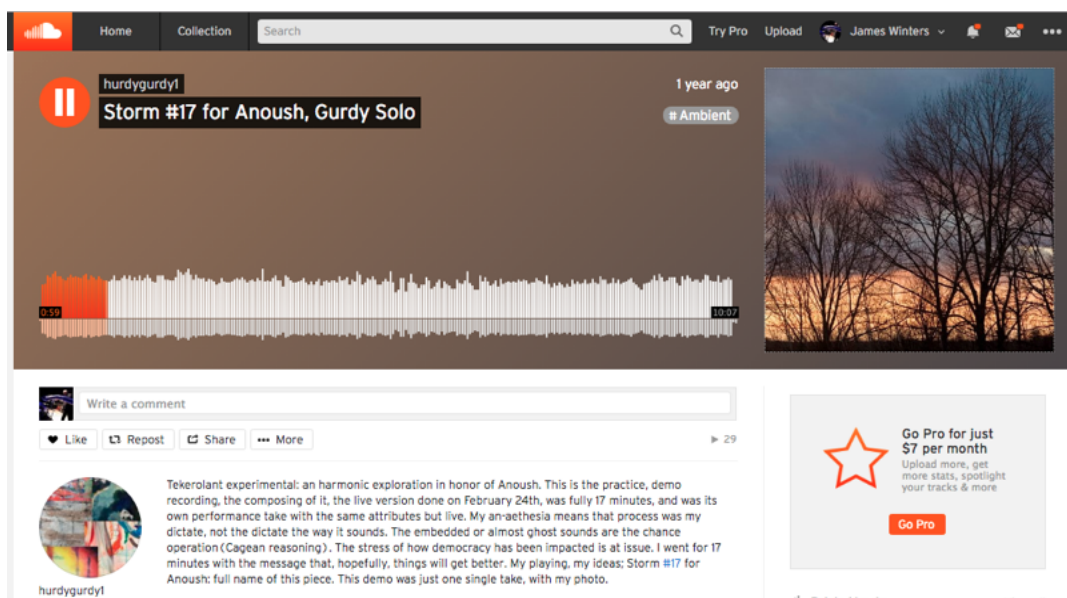


Figure 41. Weather as a musical score

Intrigue. Adventure. These welcomed moods occurred as a result of the weather. Once more I engaged my mind in the direction of reification. The storm was real but transient. The

challenge to play a solo piece scared me. Doing a feature number on the hurdy-gurdy scared me a bit. Using a film as a score scared me. Finally, the event itself was about racial conflict and that seemed intangible to me.

My surprise element was a video-taped snowstorm as my musical score. Like all of my work, on the one hand, it made sense to me and on the other, it felt a little bit crazy. Then, the next idea was to call this Storm #17 as the camera overheated at 17 minutes and thereby giving me the name Storm #17. The inspiration for this piece was a snowstorm that occurred a few days before the concert was to take place.

This piece was the first live improvisation for me on the hurdy-gurdy. No one, including myself, “had any clue” as to what was next, aka inner terror. What might seem benign in retrospect was not the least bit benign at that time. An original photo of a sunrise seemed perfect in order to suggest the gestation of a storm—a sonic manifesto using the hurdy-gurdy—a moment of conception for this kind of larger hurdy-gurdy performance with slackened strings. If war was declared on music for this artist, this was that moment. Our visiting artist Eugene Chadbourn had left a very great influence on my heart and mind with respect to my art (<http://eugenechadbourne.com/>).

Extended techniques (in this case “howling”) on the hurdy-gurdy along with a video as the score addressed various problems that had to be solved. I had reached a point of frustration with modernism. In the performance with Eugene Chadbourn, I tore up a lunch bag performativity as another improvised solo after taking an improvised trombone solo at a live event. Experiences like this redefined for me music as art. I no longer had to please the audience musically. I no longer had to make sense on stage or be understood by those watching in musical terms. It was now time for me to take a different approach.

Once again the same problem presents itself regarding measures, metronome, beats, bars, and songform, all ways of measuring time, not minutes and seconds. The room had no clock and I lost my watch. The film was made into a timekeeping device. When the film ended the piece would be over.

The score was of falling snow punctuated or controlled by gusts of wind. It was within this piece that the idea came to mind to envision a musical foreground and background, an idea which marked another very important breakthrough.

A major breakthrough had been achieved by playing the hurdy-gurdy with mostly extended techniques.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/storm>

18) **Them** (see figure 44)

- Locations: Machias and Orono, Maine
- Duet (but apart from each other)
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy, mouth noise, and sound poetry
- Score type: Verbal instructions and Cassette Tape



Figure 42. Gurdy and cassette tape with Duane Ingalls

This work was a continuation of the blind-additive method style of composing music. I had asked Duane Ingalls if he would create some sound for a duet in which neither of us knew what the other's sound was. Duane would use a cassette tape. I went the opposite way and used the DAW platform to process a cassette sound. It turns out that he was wandering and making noises with his voice. In retrospect, it seems as interesting as anything I ever did. I was almost overwhelmed by its soulfulness.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/them>

19) **Fear The Unknown** (see figure 45)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Solo/two instruments
- Instrument: hurdy-gurdy and trombone
- Score type: Cadavre-Exquis



Figure 43. 'Into the Unknown'

The success of this piece was not guaranteed. Instead of asking others to join me, I had two goals in mind. One was to simply play the trombone (which I knew how to do) but the other was to “play” the accordion. That last statement should have an exclamation point. How could I

be so audacious as to want to “play” the accordion? I had one, yes, but I knew absolutely nothing at all. Furthermore, I had no desire to play it in any classical way. Are we even allowed to do this? What I did was to put it sideways and place my left foot in the arm strap. With it anchored to the floor, I could make the instrument seem to hyperventilate. I was able to grab cluster chords with one hand and make it sound out of breath with the other. Then the other interesting point was that it was a duet for one person. It is all just me and no one else.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/james-winters-525579275/fear-of-the-unknown>

20) **Duet for Musician and a Cardboard Box** (see figure 46)

- Location: Orono, Maine
- Duet: or trio if we include (and we should) the cardboard box
- Instruments: hurdy-gurdy and electric guitar
- Score type: Verbal Instructions



Figure 44. ‘Duet With a Cardboard Box’ with Joe Hartel

Here is the work that started me on the road to, take your pick, either anarchy or egalitarianism, or satire. Here is where I decided not to do art but face-off with art in a kind of staring contest. With almost no clue if I would be making a fool of myself, I invited my good friend guitarist Joe Hartel to make a trip in to join me in a bit of “academic shenanigans.” It was

almost as if this wasn't music but something else. Furthermore, I had no idea what that something else was. I had been thinking and feeling inspired by about surrealist videos of Martin Arnold (b. 1959), as well as cubism in general.

- Guitar begins (on cue from the box)
- The other member joins in to improvise for about two minutes.
- Yelling single words randomly.
- Guitar plays a power chord (E major).
- We rest/stop in order to think/then continue.
- We then continued on and "refusing to end."
- Guitar attempts to end again while a refusal to end may alternatively be expressed
- Guitar plays a chord and uses feedback to "force" the ending of the work.

I had some sort of a notion to do artwork about hysteria or possibly insanity. I wondered what it would be like if the left brain, the executive side of the brain was not there, hypothetically. I wasn't thinking of actual injury in this piece, but of ideas such as myth, fear, panic, dreams, and bending or slowing down my sense of time. What if the human brain could slow time? What would it be like if thoughts went by in slow motion? One can begin to see what is meant here by asking: is this music? Is it sound by two musicians using musical instruments, yet it might seem like something else. I actually felt extremely out on a limb and felt that Joe was one of the few people who could understand a little bit. Was I losing my own mind? I did not want to do what I call program music, which is simply music about something, I wanted the music to be a substrate so that we were acting out a sort of mental breakdown. As already

pointed out, I was feeding off of Martin Arnold's films. I also went through a period of obsession with a suspense film called Shutter Island. I would listen over and over to the music from that film. I was gazing past a threshold of some sort between sanity and a lack of the same.

Sound url: <https://soundcloud.com/hurdygurdy1/homeless-101>



## 6. IDIOMS

There is a curious psychological effect called the Rashomon effect, something which refers to the surprising range and variation in how different people can experience and describe the same experience in wildly-different ways. In criminal investigations, the typical context of this term, this effect is problematic. In art, it is the opposite. This term was derived historically from an old movie. Rashomon a film, a 1950 film from Japan. Later this was coined as a psychological effect. In an academic context, "the naming of an epistemological framework—or ways of thinking, knowing, and remembering—(is) required for understanding complex and ambiguous situations. Epistemology is an edge of the cliff whereby the question is asked: "What makes justified beliefs justified?" (wiki commons).

The 'Narrative Paradigm Theory' suggests that people don't make decisions or experience the world in terms of a rationalist evaluation of facts. Rather, the ways in which people explain and/or justify their behavior, whether past or future, has more to do with telling a credible story than it does with producing evidence or constructing a logical argument (paraphrased from the blog: Otherwise, 2016).

Articulating boundaries, a thing others describe the emotional effect as a way of describing the experienced event, in my case "staged" as music. Some refer to humor in describing their experience. Others feel the need to see things in terms of how it is engineered. I ground my own response to jazz improvisation, only here with no boundaries, a method bluntly referred to as free improvisation. Others might anchor to a sense of rhythm. Others are more comfortable talking about minimalism and trance. Some will describe my art in terms of spectacle. While some musicians think more classically, more of a right vs. wrong sort of

mindset, and others are more comfortable with jazz, more thinking of self-expression and technique as a way to evaluate and understand abstraction.

Jazz and classical musicians alike were led to feel easy-going and comfortable with open-ended improvisation. The more open the discussion, the more “everything” (the experience) might begin to seem discomfiting to someone who uses rules to ground thinking. It is likely that the more extroverted, loud, or “upper case” music may contain moments of open-ended excitement. It seems possible that multiple, diverse impressions will be seen if the participants are surveyed afterward. The outgoing, free improviser might be thought of as “not caring enough” about the need for discipline in “real music.” Musicians who are committed to discipline, as all of us are trained to be, might give the false impression that the more free members are not as worthy of respect if they are chaotic improvisers.

There are other conclusions that might be possible. It is an overlooked aspect of experimental music that certain kinds of musicians and artists who might do better or worse with certain kinds of spatial and aural set-ups or ‘spacialized layouts.’ My research is not conclusive on this point, but the suspicion has been that softer, work blends well with closer proximity and the ability to look at the other person. For edgier (louder) modes of expression, it seemed that things could have been more spread out laterally or side-by-side. This theory would lead the composer to envision certain dictating of event sequencing for each kind of piece. In experimental music, the configuration might be in a circle vs. in one line. Our recording session was a vastly different sort of discussion, a conversation about audio.

It was presumption, I think, that in my work that simple instructions would give way to a more extroverted kind of result. An example of a simple instruction would be, “play anything” of “don’t even listen to what I am doing.” These amounted to, in my opinion, exciting or very

extroverted sorts of score instruction. For a softer, more disciplined, nuanced musical piece, my instructions might as well have been far more complex and multi-layered. I may have tended to have equal satisfaction with both kinds of composition models.

The prompt went out to my collaborators, all those who agreed to perform in my musical pieces. There will undoubtedly be high levels of subjectivity, yet I was pleased to see that exact effect. The instructions in each work were not all that clear. A prompt went like this: “Has experiencing my particular work left you thinking of either a quote or interesting idea about art that reminds you of this music and seems worth mentioning, considering over and over, and submitting for inclusion in my thesis?”

## 7. ANONYMIZED RESPONSES

### Response 1. Baked-In Preferences

The idea of using non-standard scores in open-form music is one that now has a fairly long tradition, although different groups of performers will emphasize different parts of that tradition when interpreting those scores (graphs, instructions, visual art, etc.) My own preferences lean towards the whole group having some similar set of interpretive ideas to play within, which can lead to a greater-than-the-sum-of-the-parts result. My experiences with Jim's work were from the other end of the spectrum, with each individual's interpretation of the score having priority in the result, which for me is a less interesting sound than Jim's solo experimental playing (on the hurdy-gurdy, etc.). But that's no doubt part of my baked-in preferences for more structure all around and a focus within that structure on specific sounds.

### Response 2. Suffering and Humor

From observing, and collaborating, with James Winters during his unique ImRc research & presentation, I applaud firstly his unusual & steadfast Orientation (perspective, processing, performance - 3 p 's !) .... Secondly, I 'd point to his instinctive physicality in relation to sound-and-silence (Audacity?) Thirdly, lastly, but not necessarily least, one must admire his Emotive thematic style (perhaps this is a balancing of Suffering and Humor ? , and seasoned with a refreshing honesty!).

### Response 3. Soliloquies

I envisioned eight unique soliloquies floating and dancing within a shared space (the live performers) - sometimes static and other times corybantic, amidst an enchanted forest of would-be Ozian characters - the metal sinks (the Tin Man), the remnants of a piano (the Cowardly Lion), the tree branch (the Scarecrow!), all working together and struggling against each other towards the cumulative manifestation of an introspective journey towards becoming... (Dorothy).

### Response 4. Beyond Improvisation

His jazzed-out, avant-garde, improvisational approach to art has continued to get me excited in our collaborative efforts. Jim's an interesting artist and I continue to work with him.

Broken "mind-glass" stabs the brain like a halo. Musical prophecy. He says nothing as his thoughts unwind. Don't bother washing this. He whispered, Don't bother tolerating it. Don't bother tolerating it! He Screamed: Let it in. Hahaha, he says as a bit of saliva escapes his lips. We perceive it differently. It's in the air now beyond my control.

It's a wiggle-wiggle and a tap tap beyond improv. beyond jazzy. It's a couple of humans tapping into a cosmic vibe! Excited/terrified. Jim is the type of artist who rides loose and fast, (then) explains his ideas. A mistake forms and he goes to work!!! Then we take care to rein in the madness 50%. The Duel takes place.

Guitar in my hand and Trombone in his. "With a Cardboard Box as our target: Find the composition. It's right in front of you." Is it the shade of brown? Or the dimensions? You choose a staccato guitar riff, emotions of anxiety, come through as I tried to describe the intersections... of lines present within the Box. When I think of Jim, a certain Francis Bacon painting comes to mind (from 1976, a Portrait of Michel Leiris).

It takes more movements to operate these intricate spells created by the object. The whole body moves and then the question is of how much?

A source conversation takes place in the pipes of his trombone between myself and Winters' but also in his muscles, his expression shares his experiences. The cardboard box becomes something altogether different (a) unique style of thinking typical of Winters. I think his Emotive Themes are clearly stated in this piece.

Added footnotes: Corybantic means wild or frenzied. This indicates to me that spectacle is a part of what was perceived in our work. The other word that I did not immediately recognize from the above is "Ozian." This is tied to the Wizard of Oz but, to me, also opens up to the idea of fantasy or a fantasy or dream world that in some sense might separate off, but not separate in a bad way, more like a welcomed dream.

#### Response 4. Love is Better than Hate

Love is better than hate.

Life is better than death.

We laugh, we cry.

We live, we die.

No one's perfect.

Nothing is perfect but we all love each other

and we are all alive.

We all laugh and we all are perfect.

#### Response 5. Autumnal Melancholy

An Unspeakable Sound is a brief poem of sound and autumnal melancholy. An older man lavishes care on an even older delivery van long past its prime. The sun is setting, the leaves have fallen, the palette is dominated by the faded dark-green of the truck body. He wipes down windows and surfaces which will never be clean while humming to himself as the sun begins to disappear. The truck will not move again... but who is to say it is not deserving of the attention?

#### Response 6. Jim Winters as I see it

Beyond average—a cacophonous sounding. Harsh discordance of sound; dissonance: a cacophony of hoots, cackles, and wails. a discordant and meaningless mixture of sounds: the cacophony produced by a city's traffic at midday: a silent night broken only by the sound a horn blanketed in fog.

Winters' work appears simplistic in its activity. Within its explanation "compositions of music created by chance of found objects or objects of meaning-laid-to-rest to speak. A seamless

concordance with the practices of John Cage– Chance Operations would “seem” a haphazard process, but these are structures-- sometimes a series of strict rules that remove choice from the artist. Choice is what most artists value most. If you let go of choice, what remains in your artworks? His work is intermedial, for him to say here’s some stuff and I am going to hang it, drag it, toss it, and smash it. I am going to embrace it and love it. I am going to see what others cannot and make sounds that are new yet old and deep yet shallow. Meaning and no meaning. I am going to use old world tools and new world attitudes to communicate what others cannot even conceive. I am going to play something melodious yet let it build upon itself like a cumulative chain, a cacophonous sounding as the preliminary before the next course of action– yet structured as it lies down in action within new and historic structures of word and sound.

A struggle to put into words his efforts lead to something fresh. His meanderings so lovingly shared, the delicacies and triumphant blasting created from his vision. Discovery and understanding of these experiences are couched in tradition, although his work is without borders. In a name: “Tikki Tikki Tembo No Sarimbo Hari Kari Bushkie Perry Pem Do Hai Kai Pom Pom Nikki No Meeno Dom Barako.” If you recognize this name born from children’s literature, you may be rest assured it is in harmony with his music of cacophony which is endlessly active. In this name are all the words needed to understand the natural genius in Winters’ efforts.



## 8. ENDNOTES

Stated thrice, “Not knowing is a form of knowing.”

Artist Teresita Fernandez

I played on all my pieces and this might be self-limiting in the scope of my work. I tended to not work with a grand piano since one was not available to me at school. While I am not a pianist, these factors limited the range of my ideas. My work aims for the human imagination in musical composition. Rather than technological frontiers as grounding-- for example the physical properties of sound or binary coding languages-- my work is informed by sociological methods old movies, perhaps individualism in general, bleakness in art, and the idealized kinds musical minimalism within the 20th century; i.e., artist and accordionist Pauline Oliveros, founder of Deep Listening. <https://www.deeplistening.org/>

- A few limitations of this research?

I am slowly becoming deaf combined with constant phantom noises, cognitive dysfunction. I am able to hear 60% of what was being said. I have this disability, though people hardly understand this, generally speaking. I wanted to teach myself to write about art since my art was conceptual, yet felt weak at writing. There was some evidence that I had a certain degree of undiagnosed dyslexia. My feelings were liable to be hurt along the way. This had to be expected. Disabilities such as these can look like laziness to people on the outside. I wanted to compose staged works yet I had no help in that way, so I felt some discomfort learning about a

few of the principles of theater. I decided to learn theater lighting and photography everything I could in that room. I decided to use an old, folk, drone instrument rather than the more modern DAW platform (digital sound generator). This took courage. There was one other student musician in my program, so it seemed that there was little hope of writing music for a group of student musicians. We had no such group. I had to accept that and work around it... old music, fragments of speeches, tree branches, bells, sirens, nuts & bolts, sinks, propane tanks, announcements as artist material, engine noises, extreme weather, and more all layered and combined with my drone sounds on the hurdy-gurdy. I used an old laptop along with mostly YouTube audio tracks and curated to Soundcloud as well as Vimeo. I wanted to not spend money if possible. What mattered the most to that experimentation is that none of it makes any sense. That was the spirit that seemed to be required in order to give rise to new ideas.

My methods were created through my own personal creative responses. Blind Additive, Geometric Scoring, Canvas Scoring, Situational Scoring, Text Scoring, and Object Scoring, these were all terms that I used to navigate these multiple avenues of research. For example Blind Additive was from Steve Norton's work and the historical art game exquisite corpse-- the *cadavre exquis*.

I needed the freedom to land upon alternative methods for composing music. That was my mission. It would be disingenuous to say that none of these methods existed before, but they were all new to me, thought of without looking anything up. My methods tended to have names that I thought of each time. My music was to be understood as conceptual in nature, meaning that it required imaginary engagement as essential to evaluating the essence of my work's artistic and musical merit. Why doesn't fiction or impressionism seem to occur in music?

My portfolio was not done in order to simply make music, exact theory that was in my mind previously. I saw myself more within 'nomadic thinking' a hodgepodge of ideas fueled by one note. I would think of a method and then act on one thought. I thought to myself that it might even be counterproductive to hear the work when it is finished. I was not that concerned with a finished product and even considered saving and publishing only fragmented segments of pieces rather than the entire piece. I often thought about cubism as well as something called positive disintegration. I felt ideas needed to fall apart in order to live. Art evolves.

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## APPENDICES

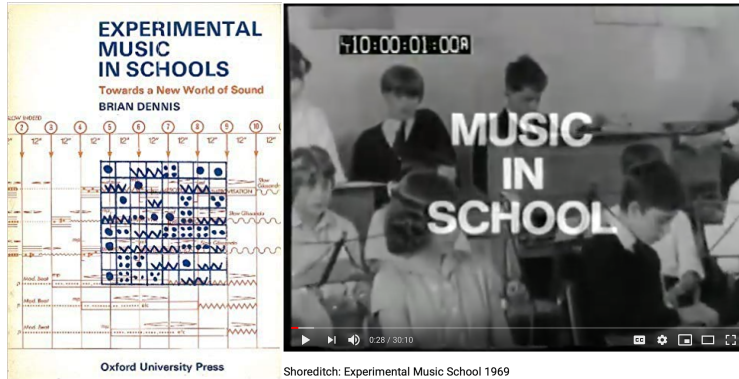
### 1) Appendix A. Gruppo Di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza

From 1967-1969, Gruppo Di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza produced innovative free expressions that featured material elements such as bass instruments and snare drum. Their lead composer played trumpet and was a film composer with respect to late 20th century improvisation—perhaps a sort of gold standard much in contrast to John Zorn’s more formed work style. As of 2018, there is a closely-related book in English. Their group leader was a great film composer of the twentieth century.



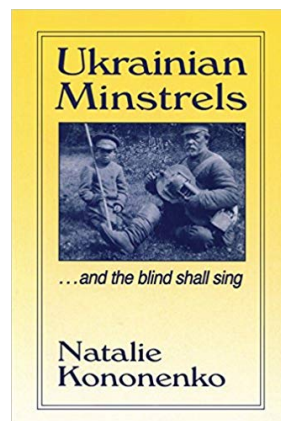
### 2) Appendix B. The Shoreditch Experimental Music School

Here is divine inspirational in the form of a groundbreaking school program created by British educator Brian Dennis (1941-1998). Dating from 1969, his work is about education and is aimed at children and experimentalism. In 2006 a film was made describing retrospectively this experimental-music-school for children. Brian Dennis wrote two books (and I own both). The film is available to watch for free online and essential to consider.



### 3) Appendix C. And the Blind Shall Sing

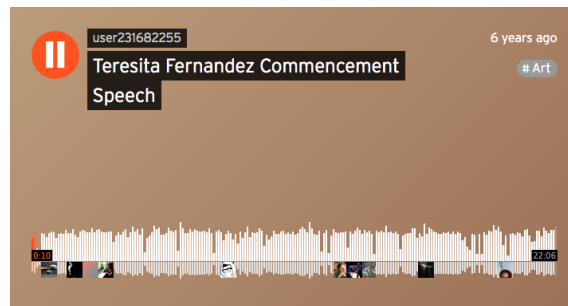
This next work was done by the Ukrainian ethnomusicologist Dr. Natalie Kononenko. Dr. Kononenko currently serves as an academic researcher in Alberta, Canada. I proudly own two copies of her 'Ukrainian Minstrals' (minstrals), one signed as a gift from the author. This is their story, the historical story of mendicant musicians, folk songs, and an astonishing community of blind hurdy-gurdy players—her research into some of their principles of nomadic wandering with music.



4) Appendix D. Teresita Fernandez speech (audio file)

Here this commencement speech that meant more to me throughout the years of my MFA experience than any other speech. The very first quote in this thesis comes from this source. “Not knowing is a form of knowing” is a quote by artist Teresita Fernandez: b. 1968, Cuban, MacArthur Grant and presidential appointee to the US Commission of Fine Arts.

<https://soundcloud.com/user231682255/teresitaspeech>



5) Appendix E. Oxford's Critical Improvisation Studies, Vol. 1 & 2

Here is the” single greatest investment for anyone” who plans to study free-improvisation in the deepest of ways. This comes as a two-volume set for a total investment, at the time of this writing, of \$250. This set is well worth the price as a lifetime investment. In four years of research no other written resource equaled this two-volume set as a reference volume on the topic of improvisation.

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF  
**CRITICAL  
IMPROVISATION  
STUDIES**

VOLUME 1

Edited by  
GEORGE E. LEWIS  
and  
BENJAMIN PIEKUT

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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INTRODUCTION  
*On Critical Improvisation Studies*

GEORGE E. LEWIS AND BENJAMIN PIEKUT

Cultural historian Andreas Huyssen has perceptively observed that Fluxus, an art movement that focused improvisation as a key element, was "an avant-garde born out of the spirit of music. . . . [I]n the first time in the twentieth century, music played the leading part in an avant-garde movement that encompassed a variety of artistic media and strategies."<sup>1</sup> We would like to venture that critical improvisation studies was born out of a similar spirit: music scholars and practitioner-scholars have taken important leadership roles in the field. Reflecting the pre-eminant position of music in discussions of improvisation in performance, critical improvisation studies draws substantially from musical experience. In his essay for this Handbook, ethnomusicologist Iliezo Netté, one of the pioneers of twentieth-century scholarship on improvisation, found it "surprising that the word 'improvisation' for any of its synonyms appears rarely, if ever, in the early literature of ethnomusicology, and the concept is virtually untouched by the early scholars in this field." While acknowledging that music historians had been interested in improvisation since at least the late nineteenth century, Netté cites the work of Hungarian scholar Krácsi Ferenc as "the first attempt to synthesize the various kinds of improvisation in Western art music on a single concept."<sup>2</sup>

Around the 1970s, ethnomusicologists began producing detailed case studies of musical improvisation, concentrating on jazz, Hindustani and Carnatic classical music, and Iranian (Persian) music—a particular focus of Netté's that formed the basis for his important article, "Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach."<sup>3</sup> Since the mid-1970s and moving into the 1980s, historical musicology's increasing interest in improvisation has gone hand in hand with the field's turn to cultural history, popular music studies, and the investigation of experimental music scenes, as expressed by the term "new musicology." William Kinderman's work on Beethoven, Armin Reichert and Kenneth Hamilton's work on European Romanticism (a topic Dana Goswami extends in this Handbook), John Rink's work in music theory on Heinrich Schenker; the work of Anna Maria Baena Berger, Julia Cummings, Peter Schubert, and Handbook contributor

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## BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

James Christian Winters (b. 1958, Manhasset, Long Island, New York) started studying classical snare drum at the age of nine. Jim's father had been part of Benny Goodman's band in New York City shortly before that. His father was trombonist Alfred Christian Winters who grew up in Queens. His mother, Yvonne Decima Row, was raised in Brooklyn. During Jim's childhood years, his mother was pursuing a degree configuration blending art history blending with criminal justice.

By age ten Jim switched to the tenor trombone. At age twelve he started to work professionally and then felt drawn to the study of music theory. His mentor was the New York famed New York City studio trombonist Charlie Small (1927-2017).

His early pursuit of a university education came late in life beginning at the age of fifty years old. His bachelor's degree was in PAX or peace studies and Native American Studies. The love of storytelling and photography was certainly an inspiration towards this kind of artistic research and ongoing, devoted study of alternate musical scoring methods.