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### Structures for freedom

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# Structures for Freedom:

Graphic Scores and In-Performance Communication  
by Traditional Musicians

Lori Watson

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3. Approaching
4. Making
5. Playing
6. Observing
7. Finding
8. Sources

## 1. BEGINNING | introduction

I mean they're kind of vague **structures for freedom** . . . structures for listening (Mackenzie in Team A, 2008)

This exposition articulates tacit knowledge in processes associated with contemporary traditional music practice in Scotland. Using a case-study experiment and series of workshop performances recorded in 2008, I examine the processes, communication, and

performance strengths of four leading traditional and cross-genre creative musicians. In particular, examples of in-performance communication and collaboration emerge.

As both a scholar and a practising (traditional) musician I am particularly interested in the strengths traditional musicians can bring to creative practice. I identify both the traditional musician's use of learning and playing 'by ear' and the related in-performance communication and 'natural' improvisation observed in formal and informal ensemble performance as key strengths of the genre. Consequently, I'm interested in how the strengths might be utilised in composition. This includes constructing compositions that feature substantial improvisation elements, which the performers respond to in their own musical voices.

During two of four creative projects undertaken between 2005 and 2010, I focused on graphic scores as a means of creating new music and exploring perceived boundaries of traditional music. Initially, the purpose of my work with graphic scores was to contribute to the emerging canon of 'beyond-tune' composition and innovative creativity from traditional musicians in Scotland. I was actively seeking to innovate, in this case, using improvisation and devised structures. However, through exploring these early graphic scores with traditional musicians, it became clear that they exposed important knowledge about traditional music practice, as well as the process and products of innovating beyond it.

There is great scope for exposing the largely tacit knowledge in the traditional arts through a process of creating-documenting-reflecting. In this exposition, primary data is drawn from creative work and experiments that took place in 2008 and a doctoral thesis submitted in 2013, both unpublished. In particular, I reveal one of five workshops I conducted in 2008 (Team A of teams A–E) and one of three scores (Score II) explored in that workshop. I provide commentary and critical reflection for my composition, documentation, and discussion of the performers' musical and spoken responses in the workshop, and discussion of those in relation to the nature of contemporary traditional music practice.

For the traditional musicians in this study, I observed that their relationship to cultural and historical conventions was revealed as they negotiated the graphically notated, devised improvisations. This is similar to saxophonist, composer, and ethnomusicologist David Borgo's observation:

... as musical devices and relationships are negotiated within performances and within the community of improvisers, musicians offer important rhetorical commentary on desirable social organization, the politics of representation, the public function of art, and the possibilities for resistance to embedded cultural and historical constructions. (Borgo 2005: 35)

To summarise, the main aims of this work became to:

1. Create and develop innovative musical works for traditional musicians (and by a traditional musician)
2. Document the spoken and musical responses to these compositions in order to expose aspects of the nature of contemporary traditional music practice:
  - a. What the possibilities for graphic scores in traditional music could be
  - b. How the traditional musicians positioned themselves in relation to perceived boundaries
  - c. What performance, musical, or stylistic strengths the traditional musicians displayed

## 2. MEANING | context

In this section, I have provided definitions and brief discussion of key terms.

### Traditional music

Traditional music in Scotland includes locally-made music, whether of known authorship or not, and whether extant in written or recorded form or not, which has had a significant life in oral tradition. (Elliott, Collinson, and Duesenberry 2001)

As Elliott, Collinson, and Duesenberry suggest, the process of orality and oral/aural tradition is fundamental to the traditional arts in Scotland and includes ‘any music not transmitted in writing – that is music learned aurally, whether played or sung’ (McLucas 2013). However, Elliott, Collinson, and Duesenberry’s standard definition from *Grove Music Online* does not account for ‘living tradition’, traditional music as a creative genre, or the peripheral activity of traditional musicians, where we see expert application of traditional music knowledge without a significant life in oral tradition. Further definitions and readings on traditional music in Scotland can be found in Collinson (1966), Purser (2007), and McKerrell (2015), among others.

To distinguish between different meanings of the term, traditional/Traditional can be used, as can numbered terms: traditional<sup>1</sup>, traditional<sup>2</sup>, and so on.

For the purposes of this exposition, I use ‘traditional’ as an all-encompassing term representative of music created within the traditional (or folk) idiom, demonstrating the current, common conventions of form, structure, and style, including:

- music preserved and interpreted from historical tradition
- music of known as well as unknown authorship
- music that has passed into shared oral tradition
- music that is yet unshared (though usually documented in recording or notation)

Key social contexts for traditional music performance include ceilidhs, ceilidh dances, sessions, and variations on these: informal musical exchanges in houses, village halls, and more recently pubs and bars. The performance of traditional music often involves traditional dance, story, and other traditional practices.

## **Community, the new traditional school in Scotland, and beyond-tune composition**

Tim Rice identifies four kinds of community in 'Ethnomusicological Theory' (2010):

(1) communities defined geographically, such as nations, regions, cities, towns, and villages; (2) communities defined by ethnic, racial, religious, and kinship (family) groups; (3) communities formed around a shared style, affinity, taste, or practice such as punk rock, surfing, motorcycle racing, or Barbie Dolls (see Slobin 1993 for affinity groups(...)); and (4) communities organized as, or within, institutions, such as musical ensembles, schools and conservatories, recording and broadcast companies, places of worship, the military, prisons, and clubs and bars. (Rice 2010: 109)

The community for this research relates to Rice's community (3): a community of practice currently active in Scotland. Although institutions (4), both educational and commercial/commissioning, have played a role in its development.

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human reference: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school . . . (Wenger-Trayner 2015: 1)

The two key communities I refer to are innovating, composing traditional musicians and performers, and the wider traditional and folk music community they work within.

A key music context for the creative work discussed in this exposition is the beyond-tune compositional activity of traditional musicians in Scotland since the mid-1980s. An overview of this new area of artistic activity in Scotland is provided in my doctoral thesis, 'The New

Traditional School in Scotland: Innovation, Beyond-Tune Composition and a Traditional Musician's Creative Practice' (Watson 2013), and an article, currently in development, 'Beyond-Tune Composition: Introducing the New Traditional School in Scotland'.

My current working definition of a 'beyond-tune' composition is a musical composition:

- Created by a traditional musician (while living in Scotland, for the purposes of this research)
- Composed for music performance or listening (not scores created for radio, TV, film, or theatre)
- Composed for any instrumentation (or voice) but often with a traditional/folk element
- Approximately eight minutes or longer *or*, if shorter in length, innovating significantly from the conventions of traditional music (this could include free improvisation or technology-enhanced music)
- *Not* a conventional set of tunes or traditional/folk song (Watson 2021)

A similar mode of expression is used by Niall Vallely in his thesis 'Beyond the Tune: New Irish Music'. Vallely described this kind of composition from an Irish perspective as 'music that reaches beyond the boundaries of traditional dance music' (Vallely 2018: 26).

Scottish and Irish traditional musics have much in common including the form of common dance tune types such as reels, jigs, marches, polkas, strathspeys, and so on. The form of these is conventionally (there are exceptions) two measures of eight or sixteen bars each repeated, then the whole tune repeated. Tunes for dancing are usually organised in sets of three or more of the same tune type (again, there are exceptions), while tunes for listening are more likely to vary the tune type within the set (e.g., a strathspey, a jig, and reels played in succession).

I am currently expanding a database of beyond-tune and innovating compositions, composers, and performers in Scotland from 1976 to 2021. I hope that the database will form the basis of a digitally accessible resource as an output in 2024–25. To date, I have documented over 170 composers, 230 compositions, and 300 performers. Due to the significantly different or extended practice of these composing traditional musicians, I refer to them as 'new traditional composers' (NTCs). The performers are a mixture of traditional musicians, cross-genre musicians, and those from other musical genres. Through rehearsal and performance of these new works, the musicians are developing a unique set of skills; I therefore describe them as 'new traditional performers' (NTPs). I describe the community of practice including composers, performers, and creative works produced as the 'new traditional school' (NTS) in Scotland (Watson 2013).

Signs of this extended practice are also visible in creative work and scholarship in areas with musical traditions related to Scotland and Ireland: including in Celtic regions, Scandinavia, and to a lesser extent North America. Early and influential works from the 1960s to the

1990s include those by Seán Ó Riada (Cork), Shaun Davey (Belfast), Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin (Tipperary), Alan Stivell (Riom, though representing Breton music), Henning Somnero (Surnadal), and Edward McGuire and William Jackson (Glasgow).

While similarities can be identified in compositional practice, creative process, impetus, and attitude, the composers themselves have limited awareness of each other's works. The works and practice of these new traditional composers are, as yet, largely unacknowledged.

## Improvisation and graphic scores

The *Oxford Dictionary of Music* defines improvisation as

**improvisation** (extemporization)

A performance according to the inventive whim of the moment, i.e. without a written or printed score, and not from memory. It has been an important element in music through the centuries. (Kennedy, Kennedy, and Rutherford-Johnson 2013)

The same source defines graphic scores as 'Scores by 20th-cent. avant-garde composers that employ drawn visual analogues in order to convey the composer's intentions with regard to the required sounds and textures. Earliest examples incl.

Feldman's *Projections* 1950–1. Some graphic scores indicate distinct music parameters, as in examples by Feldman, Stockhausen, and Ligeti. Others deliberately omit any notational sign or music indication, seeking only to stimulate the performer's creativity. Examples by Bussotti, Earle Brown, and Cardew are often pictorially delightful if musically enigmatic' (Kennedy, Kennedy, and Rutherford-Johnson 2013).

Again, this research challenges accepted definitions. I combine a form of free improvisation recognisable to some traditional musicians in Scotland with graphic notation that provides a structure or map for performance. (I am obviously not a twentieth-century avant-garde composer.)

Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl wrote in 1974: 'All performers improvise to some extent' (1974: 19). Indeed, we all improvise in daily life: most interaction and conversation is improvised. I view the graphic scores presented here, and traditional music sessions, as a kind of musical conversation.

Improvisation, as a key characteristic of oral culture, is integral to some of the oldest musical traditions in the world. An example in Scotland is traditional ballad performance, with which I am familiar.

My practical understanding and use of improvisation were initiated in social music practice in sessions and rehearsals (and soundchecks). They were later informed by development opportunities delivered by the organisation [Distil](#). These included a workshop on free improvisation with Tim Garland and a participatory improvising workshop with composer Brian Irvine and other traditional musicians including the formation of a Distil Improvising Orchestra (sadly short-lived). In addition to improvisation in traditional music, I align my understanding and experience of improvisation and graphic scores with the approaches of Raymond MacDonald, George Burt, and the [Glasgow Improvisers' Orchestra](#), which has included musicians with a traditional music background: [GIO video](#) (GlasgowImprovisers 2013). John Cage's *Silence* (1968), *Notations* (1969), and *Scottish Circus* (1990) were strong influences on my own graphic scores, later informed and significantly developed by working with traditional musicians including the workshop described later in this exposition.

There are a number of traditional musicians in Scotland who have used improvisation as a significant part of their creative practice: the artists featured in this exposition ([Aidan O'Rourke](#), [Martin Green](#), [Catriona McKay](#), [Kevin Mackenzie](#)), [Adam Sutherland](#), [Mairi Campbell](#), and groups [Lau](#) and [India Alba](#). Improvisation groups, beyond those primarily connected with the jazz music community, have been in operation in Scotland including Scot Free. Improvisation has become a feature in the performances of popular traditional/folk bands such as [Dallahan](#).

Simon Thoumire, an innovator and high-profile exponent of traditional music, has often collaborated with jazz musicians in Scotland. Improvisation is an important part of Thoumire's performance and creative process. Thoumire describes his musical boundaries: 'Well my barriers are right at the free improvisation. . . . and there's nowhere left to go after that, to be honest' (Thoumire 2006a). Thoumire also spoke about traditional/folk musicians and improvisation: 'We all improvise. Even the ones who don't 'improvise', well they ornament anyway. We all do it' (Thoumire 2006b)

Improvisation, viewed as a continuum with composition, can be integral to traditional music practice: as part of the composition process, small variations made in repeated melodies, recovering from a 'mistake', and displays of expressive virtuosity.

Improvising music, it appears, is best envisioned as an artistic *forum* rather than an artistic *form*; a social and sonic space in which to explore various cooperative and conflicting interactive strategies. (Borgo 2005: 34–35)



### 3. APPROACHING | methodology

We should not say ‘Here is a theory that sheds light on artistic practice’, but ‘Here is art that invites us to think’. (Borgdorff 2012: 72)

This study has combined ethnographic and artistic approaches. It can be considered artistic research, as an investigation of a *new* area of practice. The practice-based approach is underpinned throughout by ethnomusicological methods, particularly fieldwork. My approach to ethnomusicological research has been informally called both ‘doorstep ethnomusicology’ and ‘insider ethnomusicology’ as I attempt to create, understand, and document tacit knowledge in traditional music practice within my own community of practice. This perhaps extends the ethnomusicological emic-etic interface (Nettl 2005: 228) into a highly reflexive (Barz and Cooley 2008; Etherington 2004) position as an artist/researcher who has emerged through the community being studied. Autoethnography (Freeman 2010; Ellis 1999) has been an important method of articulating my own experiential knowledge, which informs my writing.

As a scholar of traditional and folk music whose training included substantial fieldwork, folklore, and contextual study as well as live and studio performance, collaboration, and composition, the meeting point and productive connection between ethnomusicology and artistic research seem entirely appropriate. There are questions relating to the practice and creative processes of traditional arts that invite perspectives and approaches beyond those currently offered in ethnomusicology, including the questions outlined in this exposition (please see [1. BEGINNING](#)). Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl indicated in 2005 that music scholars ‘know very little about the way in which music comes about, especially in its innovative aspect, which is what they most admire’ (Nettl 2005: 27–28). Although practice-based/as/-led research and performance research are increasingly discussed in ethnomusicology (Ramnarine 2004; McKerrell 2021), artistic process and artistry – that is, the ideas and skills, and their implementation, of the traditional artist – require an approach and a community that centre the creative work and expose its tacit knowledge.

My research incorporates the new practice of innovative, beyond-tune composition by traditional musicians. I position this practice as central to my research: as method (my own creative process); as devised intervention (workshops with new traditional composers and performers); and as artefact for interrogation (scores, recordings, etc. for analysis).

Art practice – both the art object and the creative process – embodies situated, tacit knowledge that can be revealed and articulated by means of experimentation and interpretation. . . . Art practice qualifies as research if its purpose is to expand our

knowledge and understanding by conducting an original investigation in and through art objects and creative processes.  
(Borgdorff 2012: 71)

Fieldwork and the articulations it produced have also been one of the acts that bound members of the community together in a deeper understanding of themselves and their activities in relation to each other. The workshop presented here is an example of this. Fieldwork interviews and workshops have also forged and maintained vital connections between myself and my music, the tradition, and my evolving research.

The main inspirations for my graphic scores included my experiences of sessions (informal music exchanges) and traditional musician interaction, particularly with highly skilled professional or student traditional performers. In sessions populated by these practitioners, the use of improvisation is becoming a more highly developed practice – an intentional and expected part of the session. To me, this seems like a ‘natural’ rather than a ‘contrived’ progression. As these practitioners develop their arranging skills for performance beyond the musical forms associated with traditional dance, the sessions begin to reflect these new forms as well as the repertoire within them.

The series of three simple graphic scores presented here (Watson 2008), each exploring a different approach, were composed for four traditional musicians, or potentially a larger ensemble of four sections.

*Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians I: Conversation Piece*

*Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians II: Strathspey/Reel*

*Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians III: Jigs*

I have now carried out more than eight workshops and reflective performances with these scores and a variety of different traditional musicians. They have also been performed and recorded by international workshop groups in North America and Scandinavia. The tacit knowledge experienced during experiments with these three simple graphic scores, which I continue to articulate, informed the developing innovative practice of a substantial group of performers and composers. It also informed subsequent works of my own including *Eildon, Lowood I* (Watson 2014), and the more complex graphic score *As Water Wears the Rock* (Watson 2010).

## **Team A workshop**

The Team A workshop for the simple graphic scores featured four professional traditional musicians based in Scotland: Martin Green (accordion), Aidan O’Rourke (fiddle), Catriona McKay (Scottish harp), and Kevin MacKenzie (guitar).

In choosing musicians for Team A, I had four prerequisites:

- A developed and recognised understanding of traditional music (either through early music development or extensive apprenticeship)
- Experience of performing and creating new, innovative music compositions by new traditional composers (NTCs). (They might also be considered NTCs themselves.)
- Some improvisation ability
- Working musical relationships already established within the group

I was further able to assume that the musicians would be familiar with working 'by ear' and that some of them would also be competent readers of standard music notation. In particular, Martin Green prefers to work 'by ear' rather than from staff notation.

These musicians are recognised as leading professionals in the field and are popular performers. They are also colleagues and friends and I feel privileged to have had their enthusiastic participation in this project. Of the five workshops groups, Team A is the only group of professionals that I did not participate in as performer. I acted only as composer and observer in this workshop.

Members of Team A are also very familiar with each other through long-term association in the Scottish music scene. This is evident in the transcriptions as the musicians frequently joke, laugh, and finish each other's sentences (Team A 2008: 1–11). The transcription excerpts are available in section [5. PLAYING](#) of this exposition.

## 4. MAKING | composition

In 2008 I developed a series of three simple graphic scores: *Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians*. The pieces are highly collaborative, featuring improvisation within a defined structure. I present the scores here in the order of making. The second score, *Strathspey/Reel*, is the focus of this exposition and was devised first. After composition, I chose to adjust the order so that the freest score (*Conversation Piece*) comes first and the visual information in each score increases through the series, from simple lines in Score I to fragments of standard music notation in Score III.

### Aims and objectives

As composer, my primary aim for these simple graphic scores was to create space for the musicians' individual traditional styles and skills while providing a structure for performance as an ensemble. Graphic notation is potentially accessible to both readers and non-readers of standard staff notation. This is of interest because, from my experience, I have observed that a significant number of highly skilled and professional musicians in the traditional music sector work primarily 'by ear'.

Following on from previous projects, I also aimed to further explore playing with the familiar and constructed performance contexts: this time using gesture in the scores. Some informal discussion of movement as 'dancicality' in music performers, vis-à-vis musicality in dancers, has taken place in this field and I think this is an interesting area for future research.

The objectives for this series of simple scores were, principally, to:

- Explore a new creative direction
- Explore how the performers positioned themselves in relation to the scores and their perceptions of traditional music
- Explore musical dialogue and interaction, and in-performance communication
- Attempt to provide a vehicle through which both readers and non-readers of standard notation could be immediately creative together



Figure 1. Session in the Ben Nevis bar, Glasgow, from left to right: Unknown, unknown, Steve Forman, Aileen Reid, Ross Coupar and Luc McNally

*My hopes for these scores grew from a very open, slightly distanced, experiment and came to include key personal experiences of traditional music. Having literally stumbled upon my first graphic score on the floor of the then RSAMD [Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, now Royal Conservatoire of Scotland] I filed it away safely, wondering what it was and what it might possibly sound like. Years later, for this Creative Project, I tentatively began to explore notation forms through John Cage, and others, and imagined how these ideas might possibly be applied to traditional music and musicians – I'm still imagining.*

*On reflection though, these scores have come to embody two things of importance for me: the essence of what makes traditional music so important to me. It's not the music. In fact, it's the people and the traces of them bundled up in a shared and ever-morphing musical imprint, plus, my own urge to play with established ideas.*  
(Creative journal entry, Watson 2012)

## ***Pieces For Four Traditional Musicians II: Strathspey/Reel (Score II)***

Score II features the headings 'Strathspey' and then 'Reel' – both traditional tune forms. It is modelled on the common strathspey-to-reel structure used in traditional music and dance in Scotland for hundreds of years and so makes a special feature of a particularly idiosyncratic transition in Scottish traditional music. The move from 4/4 strathspey to 4/4 reel, often an exciting moment of pent-up, jagged rhythm taking flight into an energetic full-flow stream of melody, is a classic structure of tension and release. Variations are found in different contexts: the measured and consistent pulse of this transition when accompanying Scottish step dance, the leap in tempo of excited (pub) session players, and the disruption of the transition in modern concert arrangements by placing a 6/8 jig or a 7/8 composition between the strathspey and reel. An example: Alasdair Fraser plays *Highlands of Banffshire* (strathspey) into *The Merry Making* (reel) (Fraser and McManus 1999: 01:57–03:17).

Score II includes information such as tune form (this obviously has rhythmic implications) and the suggestion of a starting note or key signature. I consciously kept the notation as simple and approachable as possible. This was due to my increasing awareness, following an earlier creative project, that we don't yet have a body of new traditional performers with experience of experimental music, abstract concepts, and graphic scores. I was also aware that there would be a limit to how much visual information would be conducive to reading, understanding, and performing the score.

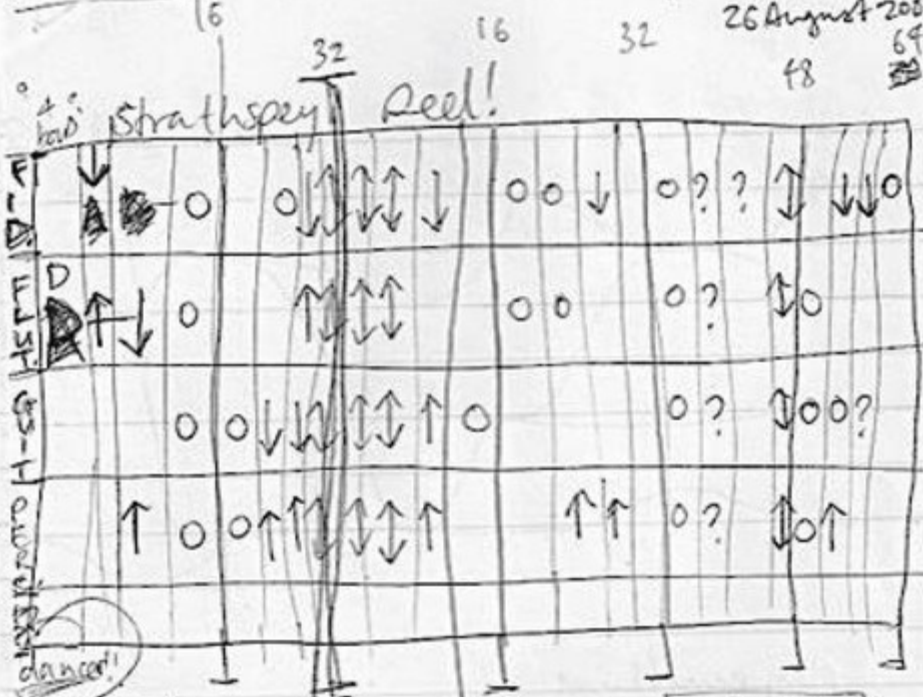
Aware that traditional musicians bring their own stylistic knowledge to performance, and because an objective of the scores was to encourage improvisation in the performers' own musical voices, I decided not to prescribe any ornamentation or specific stylistic details and therefore symbols for these were unnecessary. However, symbols to direct the musicians' interaction were required for Score II.

The intended function of the symbols in Score II is directing the interaction between the musicians: playing alone, responding to or playing 'with' other performers, and playing together as a group. Empty boxes could be read as silence.

chatterbox

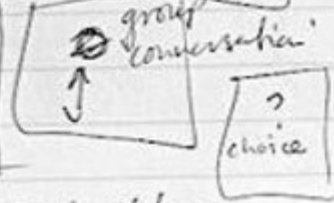
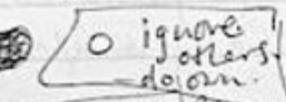
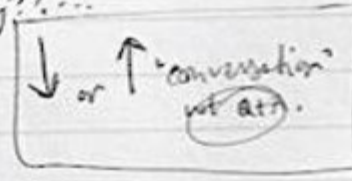
given starting key can modulate at any point.

26 August 2007.



Set tempo?

- assume it will happen anyway??...



→ recurring theme of energy build-up explosion... (fr. early session time study)

\* musicians must ~~be~~ have knowledge of keys, ~~the~~ ~~ways~~ to tune-types, styles, ornamentation, phrasing & willing to improvise.

Figure 2. Sketch for Score II

***Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians I: Conversation Piece (Score I)***



# Pieces For Four Traditional Musicians I: Conversation Piece

Lori Watson

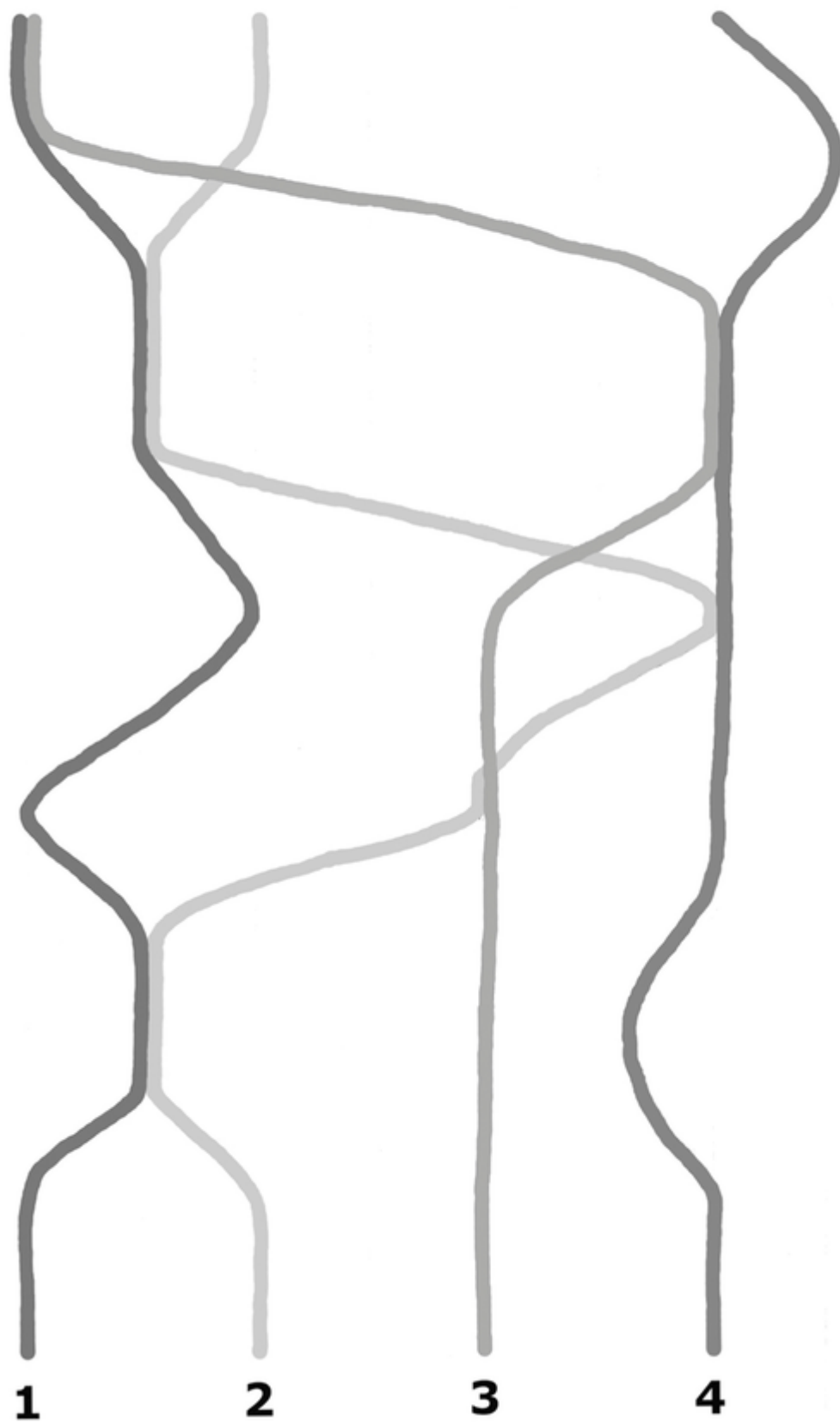


Figure 3. Score I 'final' version

Score I is the most 'open' score, it is essentially a simple musical map with four paths that meet and cross at various points. The composition of this piece is not random – its design sets out where I wanted the musical conversations to take place in the context of the piece as a whole, and the textures that could be created. However, unlike the other scores, these moments do not correlate with any established traditional music forms, so although the notation is simple, it presents particular issues for the players to negotiate in making a performance.






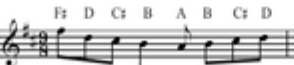
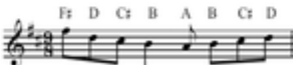
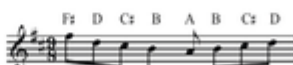
Scores II and III feature more overt use of traditional music aspects including traditional tune forms, actions associated with session behaviour, and melodic themes that would comfortably sit within the traditional idiom.

### ***Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians III: Jigs (Score III)***

Score III includes four themes in jig form that are conventionally notated, with instructions provided to teach, by ear, the appropriate themes to any non-readers in the ensemble. This score is most obviously influenced by session playing. It includes gestures associated with a session (musicians entering, smoking, tapping feet) as well as aiming to create a floating effect of similar tunes overlapping and drifting in and out of synchronisation. This is to emulate the effect of several tunes happening at once either in the same session or in several sessions as might be found in a larger venue or festival event.

# Pieces For Four Traditional Musicians III: Jigs

Lori Watson

- 1**  improvise 15 bars | take a drink | repeat all.
- 2** 8 bar rest  improvise 15 bars | light a cigarette | improvise further 8 bars.
- 3**  improvise 15 bars | cross feet  uncross feet  tap foot audibly until end.
- 4** Take short walk  improvise 7 bars | 2 bar rest  improvise 3 bars | 2 bar rest  improvise 31 bars.

Each part has a time signature to use throughout the piece.

The sections of playing are 4, 8, 16 and 32 bars as dance tunes are.

When necessary 'roll a cigarette' or 'send a text' may be substituted for 'light a cigarette'.

Figure 4. Score III 'final' version

## 5. PLAYING | collaborative experiment

### Workshop approach and creative process

In the Team A workshop, which lasted approximately two and a half hours, the three original scores for *Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians* were explored in rotation through performance 'takes' interspersed with discussion. In total, Team A performed four takes of Scores I and II, and three takes of Score III.

Before discussing the Team A workshop and its outcomes, I include here the main objectives for intervention with these scores:

- Construct a forum in which readers and non-readers can be immediately creative
- Encourage 'own voice' or 'traditional voice' improvisation and expression
- Encourage musical dialogue between musicians
- Challenge performer and listener (and composer) perceptions of what traditional music can be

I wanted to give the players an opportunity to explore and interpret the scores for themselves without my input. This was to encourage the musicians to act as a group and observe their reaction to, and interpretation of, the scores. It was also to test the logic of the chosen visual information on the score and see what music would be produced from it. The initial performances/takes of all three scores sound markedly different from the post-discussion takes.

At first, the team approached the scores holistically as whole images, rather than playing the parts, although these were still represented in some ways. And I felt, both structurally, and in terms of the details in the scores, that the scores had not been fully performed in the initial attempts.

Following this, I explained how the scores came about and the reasoning behind some of the elements I had included. I described how I imagined aspects of the pieces might sound and answered some questions from the musicians.

Timeline for Team A workshop, highlighted sections have been included in this exposition:

**Team A workshop, 2 hours 30 minutes**

<b>Track</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Approximate length</b>
01	Introduction and initial discussion	01:50
01	Score I, take 1	04:22
01	Team A discussion	05:20
01	Score II, take 1	03:17
01	Team A discussion	07:46
01	Score III, take 1	02:50
02	Team A discussion	05:00
02	Composer Q&A	20:45
03	Score I, take 2	01:48
03	Discussion	02:54
03	Score I, take 3	02:20
04	Discussion	08:40
05	Score II, take 2	03:20
05	Discussion	08:14
06	Score II, take 3	02:31
06	Discussion	02:04
07	Score II, take 4	03:21
07 - 08	Discussion	05:12
08	Score III, take 2	01:33
09	Discussion	00:56
09	Score III, take 3	01:27
09	Discussion	02:04
10	Score III, take 4	03:43
11	Discussion and reflection	45:44

Figure 5. Team A workshop structure



Figure 6. Team A, from left to right: Martin Green (piano accordion), Aidan O'Rourke (fiddle), Catriona McKay (Scottish harp), Kevin Mackenzie (guitar)

**Piece For 4 Traditional Musicians II**

Lori Watson

	STRATHSPEY							REEL																
<b>1</b>		↓		○		○	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓		○	○	↓		○	?	?	↕		↓	↓	○
<b>2</b>	D	↑	↓	○			↑	↕	↕	↕			○	○			○	?		↕		○		
<b>3</b>				○	○	↓	↓	↕	↕	↕	↑	○					○	?		↕		○	○	?
<b>4</b>			↑	○	○	↑	↑	↕	↕	↕	↑			↑	↑		○	?		↕		○	↑	

Figure 7. Score II as presented in the workshop with Team A

This transcript features annotations in square brackets and bold, italic text. These annotations include my own interpretation of key themes, topics, and specific 'insider' information as a participant in the room. The bold, italic text relates to the analysis of the score performances for this exposition. Performer comments that I wish to highlight in this research are highlighted in yellow.

### **[Track 1]**

LW Will we have a go at no. II?

**[09:55]**

AO Oh. Hmm.

[reading score]

KM Are we just going?

MG Can I count the things and then go? Is that all right?

LW Well, feel free to discuss it if you want, just don't ask me.

***[Encourage discussion between performers]***

AO So, the strathspey bit's in eight sections.

MG And then in the reel bit.

AO It's in fifteen isn't it?

***[Interpretation problem – miscount]***

MG Is that what it is, but the first five are in a box and the next ten aren't.

AO Is that intentional?

***[Score problem]***

MG We can't ask Lori that. Oh, right well I'm wondering because it tapers, the line at the bottom is thin, let's assume that that's a . . .

AO Just a . . .

MG Thingy [an irregularity in the hand-drawn graphic].

AO Thing yeah.

MG Okay. I'm gonna be fucking loud in this one.

[laughing]

AO Can we discuss what we think the symbols mean or do you think just get on with it?



***[Discuss? No discussion]***

MG Will do one without discussing it and then do one with discussing it.

AO Right, okay.

MG The circle is an accordion solo, so is the arrow.

[laughing]

**[11:32]**

**[PLAY SCORE II – take 1]**

**[14:47]**

***[Performance problem – didn't reach the end again]***

AO I was nowhere near the end.

MG Neither was I.

CM No, neither was I. That's ok though.

[laughing]

MG That was the first time we all got a gap.

KM I was kind of there so I was doing the second one down.

MG I was before the fourth circles.

***[Performance problem – different tempos, different lengths]***

KM I've got those blank bits so I was kind of, I could be at the end.

CM Oh.

AO Oh I was a couple of sections before that but there was a gap.

MG I got to the first place where we've all got a gap and I thought that's remarkable but then I just didn't have the balls to come back in.

[laughing]

AO I was the same yeah, I was just about to lash back in.

MG And I've got tons of reels as well it's a shame [joking].

AO I was going to come in with Dinky's [*Dinky Dorian's* is a well-known reel].

[laughing]

***[Interpretation problem – Catriona read it like a piano score, not four parts. CM seems to pick and choose or opt in and out of score sections. Is this related to free improv experience with GIO?]***

CM I tell you what I did though, I didn't choose a line, I read it just like a whole thing.

MG Oh fair enough, like a piano score.

CM Yeah I just went along the four lines for the strathspey and then I just did the first line of the reel but I was intending to go the rest of the four lines.

AO I just picked a line again and . . .

MG I went for the top line.

AO I went for the second line.

KM Lateral that is.

LW Kev, how did you approach it?

***[Kev and Aidan both took no. 2***

***Interpretation – Kev tuned to drop D because of D in line 2's first box***

***Interpretation problem (symbols, need a key really or explanation)***

***Kev ignored some bits – opted in and out]***

KM Eh, well, I kind of very loosely interpreted line two as the . . . well I had a D at the start so I tuned my bottom string to drop D, which is literal. But then I kind of was thinking about directions and I was thinking about the circles as being like, kind of, like in a long, like using a chord and holding that and then but then I was kind of . . . I was kind of skirting around a bit and ignoring bits and I wasn't going at any particular tempo at all. So, I wasn't even picking bar measures or anything like that.

***[Communication/listening was impaired by the score and visual concentration: Aidan and Kev didn't realise they were playing the same part, I don't think Aidan noticed that Kev had started the score rather than checking his tuning or similar, Aidan thought he was starting]***

**[16:55]**

MG Did you count it quite literally? Yeah so did I.

AO And I kind of led with a D like a D chord thinking that if there's going to be any interaction at least people will know I'm on the second line.

MG Ah, you see?

KM That's why we were playing exactly the same chord.

AO We should get a band [Aidan and Kev are ex-bandmates].

[laughing]

**[Interpretation problem (symbols again)]**

AO And then eh, I don't know, it's kind of like to read the arrows as dynamics and then the circle as being more of a kind of rounded tune. Like a melodic line but then I got to the double arrows and I thought: 'can't be up and down at the same time'. So, I tried to be. Gave myself a headache.

[laughing]

AO And then I started thinking it looked a little bit like an anchor so I started playing a hornpipe.

[laughing]

**[17:58]**

KM The circle was a Mexican.

[laughing]

AO I wouldn't mind trying that one again.

MG How did you interpret your arrows and circles?

**[Reacted to the score depending on what the ensemble was doing, interpreted arrows as pitch and movement of music, and tried to hook in with other players at points]**

CM Me? Well, I interpreted them as I felt like interpreting according to what was going on around, going on or sometimes I chose like maybe a little melodic thing and then transfer it down the harp but if there was something interesting going on I maybe chose to hook in with somebody and then do something that was still moving like this arrow.

...

CM What about you?

**[Interpretation – Martin took the circles as the same kind of chord, right hand only]**

MG All the circles were the same in that they were all [plays dissonant chord] but that was pretty random, but they were all consistent.

AO So, the circle.

MG But when it was an arrow I played down in terms of pitch and when it was up and down, I played up and down.

AO And the circle was [the dissonant] chord [just demonstrated]?

MG Yeah, the circle had no left hand but I don't know why not but they were all the same.

**[Interpretation – tempo]**

AO And how did you feel if there was a kind of tempo set between Kev and I?

***[Performance assumption based on common knowledge]***

MG I assumed there had to be a tempo, I took that strathspey and reel as like . . .

KM Yeah.

AO It had to be kind of metered.

MG Yeah. I kind of assumed that we would all play it that way. It would be fucking hard not to apart from anything else.

KM . . . I mean I kind of got into little riffs at times where it kind of went into some sort of tempo but.

**[19:46]**

***[Interpretation (symbols – question mark)]***

MG Did anyone get to a question mark?

AO No.

KM I got to a question mark.

CM Yeah.

MG And what did you choose?

KM I just wondered.

[laughing]

MG You sat and thought about something.

***[Interpretation – empty boxes]***

CM What about the empty spaces, the empty boxes?

AO I sat out.

MG Yeah, I did.

AO But that's . . .

. . .

CM What did you play?

***[Kev played empty boxes as pauses, not silences]***

KM Eh, I kind of used them as sort of like . . . some of them I used as like pauses where I would just hold a thing for a bit, but then because I wasn't really going at any sort of tempo it was kind of . . .

***[Interpretation (comparison to jam session, different roles played by musicians, leader to follow, etc.)]***

AO I was kind of thinking of it like we were having a kind of session like a jam and therefore there was a section where, you know when someone's playing a tune you don't really know where you could kind of jam along a wee bit but not really take the melody.

KM I guess the thing is because we didn't . . . because it's not discussed, any of these are valid. Is that the way you wanted it to be?

. . .

## [Track 2]

. . .

***[discuss choices in style and approach in Score II, related to identity in different contexts]***

MG I know what you mean though because I'm going to try and do an impression of a contemporary free musician. You know what I mean?

[laughing]

MG And that is unnatural.

LW Well what I'm interested in is traditional musicians improvising and sounding like themselves with traditional ornaments and phrasing.

AO So, what you were doing in the first take, you felt unnatural? [to Kevin]

MG I'm going to try and be Simon [Thoumire, concertina player mentioned in section [2. MEANING](#)] but an octave lower.

[laughing]

AO I've heard you, I don't think that's unnatural to you, I've heard you do that lots of times in front of public people.

MG I think what I mean specifically is dissonance, you know [plays some], something that comes out when you do these sorts of things that isn't part of traditional music.

KM Yeah, whereas I would say that free improvisation doesn't and in no way has to be dissonant. I think it can be tonal.

AO Aye absolutely.

KM But it's just a difference between improvising with . . . I mean total free tonality improvisation is one thing but I think we can improvise within a . . .

**[23:00]**

***[Martin is drawn to dissonance when there's less structure to follow, but also uses it in his regular concert set with band Lau]***

MG Yeah but it's just something that I personally feel I veer towards in anything that isn't structured harmonically.

KM But I mean in the stuff that you do with Lau [band [www.lau-music.co.uk](http://www.lau-music.co.uk)], sometimes you go off and you do . . .

MG That's mistakes.

[laughing]

. . .

**[Track 4]**

**[01:08]**

LW So, will we move on to the second one?

[Everyone's cold]

. . .

**[Discuss Score II]**

**[Key signature]**

LW So, this one. I didn't give you a key [for symbols]. The D, you can choose to ignore it if you like but I thought that would give you a [musical] key to play in.

MG Everyone?

LW It's up to you guys.

MG I took it specifically to mean not being D.

[laughing]

MG Because otherwise everyone would do it, know what I mean?

AO Love when I have a session with you, he's in E and F

[laughing]

LW And, eh, you miscounted the blocks [boxes] – there's eight and then sixteen. So, its meant to be a strathspey and

AO one, two, three, four, five, . . . sixteen!

MG Right.

AO Frick! So, it is.

LW Yeah and so it's like a timeline but there're no tempos, it's up to you guys.

MG So you expect, it's not obvious for me. Do you expect eight bars of strathspey?

AO No.

**[Planning length of boxes and thinking in terms of tunes]**

LW Or maybe each block [box] is two bars or . . .

MG Do you expect once through a strathspey and twice through a reel?

AO I was imagining like a four-bar, twice round a tune?

MG Yeah that's what I was thinking – four times, well not four times.

AO So it would be like . . .

MG We all stopped here anyway.

[laughing]

AO So it's like, I imagined it twice round a strathspey.

MG Twice through a strathspey.

AO Just one strathspey and then . . .

MG Four times round a reel.

AO Or two reels.

LW Yeah, well I'm not gonna disagree with that.

[laughing]

**[Lori explains what symbols mean.]**

LW So, it's parts. So, you would pick one and again it's communication so the arrows mean that you're listening to that other player and playing along with them.

MG Oh, I see.

**[03:13]**

KM Is the third . . . ?

[laughing] 'Aw' ['pennies dropping']

**[Questions about symbols, etc.]**

MG I thought that was dynamics!

[Aidan plays a phrase from *The Trumpet Hornpipe*, comedic]

KM So does that mean 2 and 4 are together and . . .

LW Yes, so if you've got nothing in your box you're not playing and the circle is everybody all together with the group

***[Unintentional misdirection: In this workshop I wrongly interpreted the circle as playing together, when you can see from the sketch in 4. MAKING that I had originally intended it to represent solo playing. This misdirection seemed to be understood by the performers and likely influenced Score II, takes 2, 3, and 4 towards more cohesive, ensemble playing. Take 1 occurred before the misdirection was given. I chose to reinstate the circle as solo playing in the 'final' score, providing a key on the score.]***

MG Okay.

LW You're meant to try and come together and play something that sounds like a strathspey [very loosely] that might be the same and when it's both ways it means that you're . . . like if you were 2 Martin . . . you would be playing with Aidan and Kev but not paying any attention to Catriona.

MG Now you've said that . . . I hadn't understood that. I thought the arrows . . . okay.

KM If you're number 4 and you're going both ways, are you going to 1 and 3?

AO To 1.

LW Yeah, and the question marks are kind of . . .

AO Danger zones.

LW Free cards.

CM What's that? So the arrows . . .

LW You choose which one to do.

CM The arrows . . . you're playing with the person that the arrow, the number that it's pointing to, the person beside you. Right ok.

MG Okay.

***[Lori explains some of the inspiration and the strathspey to reel change etc.]***

LW And in my mind when I wrote this, I had that, this is kind of, I suppose they're all sort of slightly inspired by session playing. But not necessarily pub session playing except the third one [score III], which obviously does have connotations. But it's that moment when you burst out of a strathspey into a reel and that kind of massive boost of energy that happens when everyone fires into the reel.

AO Mmhm.

LW I was thinking it would be great if I could get that in the piece.

AO Right. So . . .

LW Which is why everybody's . . . it's really busy at that point because obviously communication's really important so you all go into the reel, 'bang'.



***[Kev decides they need to decide tempo and the length of each measure/box]***

KM Know what I'm thinking? It's a tempo thing then and then we need to decide whether each section is one or two bars or . . . Do we?

MG Yeah.

LW As long as you're all playing with the same idea in mind then . . .

MG Well yeah what if we say, twice through a strathspey and two times through two different reels?

KM Okay.

LW So, four blocks [boxes] is the strathspey so you've got . . .

CM What does that one count as like? Four bars per box?

**[05:34]**

MG & LW Yeah.

CM Right and same with the reel.

MG Yeah but or half that or double that or whatever.

***[Catriona compares the piece more literally to listening habits in a session.]***

CM And you know because the arrows are saying communicate with that person but if you're playing in a session you're always never really playing, you're always for the common goal, so in lines 1 and 2 say deliberately play, do we then not deliberately?

MG There's no one else playing at that point is there? So, they just need to play with each other.

***[Aidan comments on session listening/interaction]***

***Kev suggests it might be because of the tune that they are locked into approximately the same thing]***

AO But even in a session you'll lock into, you know you can lock in to.

KM Yeah but the difference with a session is that you have a common theme which everybody locks into and that I think is the tune.

AO Yeah.

KM Whereas this . . .

AO There's no tune.

MG Ah.

LW We're not trying to recreate a session in this.

MG No, no but there's a certain . . .

LW It was just slightly inspired by that.

MG . . . feeling between strathspey and reel yeah.

KM Okay.

LW You can think of it as a bit of a fucked up session if you like.

KM A really, really, really drunk session.

LW In an alternative universe.

**[Decide on pulse and tempo]**

AO Okay so, what number and what's the pulse then if its four bars: 1 2 3 4 or a-1 2 3 4, 2 2 3 4? The second one? The faster pulse?

**[06:54]**

MG I dunno I would have the slower strathspey just for the . . ., but that's just, that's aesthetic. That's not . . .

AO A slower strathspey.

MG Yeah than a reel.

AO Yeah okay.

MG I don't know.

**[Parts/numbers]**

KM So, shall we go numbers? Consecutively again then?

MG Yeah.

LW Feel free to mark on the page by the way, scribble away if you want.

MG Pardon?

LW Feel free to mark on the page.

MG Thank you.

CM What was it 1, 2, 3, 4 (numbering people).

AO Or whatever is that . . .

MG yeah that's cool.

. . .

1 – KM

2 – MG

3 – AO

4 – CM

**[8:08]**

LW So . . .

CM Four bars per box.

MG Kev will count because he's 1.

***[Count in? No, Martin just start]***

KM I'll count and then not play at the start.

MG Oh right, it's just me, cool. Maybe it doesn't matter then.

...

**[Track 5]**

**[00:00]**

**[PLAY SCORE II – take 2]**

**[03:22]**

. . . (silence)

**[03:38]**

AO Do you get the PRS on this?

MG That was cool.

AO Yeah.

***[Approach and interpretation to symbols and interaction in Score II]***

MG There wasn't much difference in my approach between a double arrow and a circle.

AO How do you interact with someone who's not playing?

MG Oh is there, where does that happen?

AO Like my third arrow in the reel, I'm interacting with you.

MG What were you?

AO Number 3

LW Yeah

AO So I interacted with Martin who was not really doing anything, so I didn't really do much either.

[laughing]

LW Fair enough.

AO Well, I did some, just not as much.

LW But it creates kind of a build-up, because if you're [explains how each player influences the next player without interaction in that passage, which could create an interesting effect].

AO Right, yeah.

KM I did this twice as fast as I should have done.

. . .

MG Oh right, I got, okay I thought it was quite fast.

LW What did you do at the question marks?

MG Oh I went [plays trill].

AO I, eh just, it was open really to see what happens and [I] entered into it with an open mind.

**[05:04]**

***[Liked it]***

KM I thought there were some really good bits in that.

AO Yeah.

***[Performance – strathspey to reel transition could be more definite]***

LW I loved all of that I just think the move into the reel could have been a bit smoother.

MG Yeah, well I think we all . . .

. . .

AO That's what Pro Tools [audio editing software] is for though.

[laughing]

***[Performance – tempo difference]***

MG Did I start twice as fast as you thought I was gonna?

KM Eh mm, I don't know. I just got to the . . . I thought I was with you man.

[laughing]

LW Will we have a quick coffee and then . . . ?

AO That would be cool and then we've probably got about another forty minutes after that.

LW I'd quite like to get another run of that one and then try the third.

**[05:50, Break for coffee]**

[Catriona suggests trying Score I again as a slow piece and everyone agrees we should try to fit it in before finishing.]

**[05:58]**

[talk about phoning a taxi for Catriona etc.]

. . .

**[08:04]**

***[Suggest a cue for join between strathspey and reel]***

LW We're gonna go for piece two again [score II] and Catriona had suggested some sort of cue for the reel so that you're all aware of it.

CM Or if we all just cue.

AO There was a cue though wasn't there? There was a kind of like . . .

MG Oh well I certainly felt that.

LW I definitely saw you gesture to Martin but I don't think everyone picked up on it.

KM It should be alright, because if we all know the kind of tempo and the . . . it should be alright I think.

***[Change parts/numbers? Or do a similar version but more polished?]***

MG Will we keep the same parts or different parts? Do you want us to do a similar thing but tighter so that you've got like a decent recording of it?

LW Yeah, I'd quite like a decent recording of it [meaning a recording fairly representative of the score].

MG So, shall we do the same, do what we just did.

AO Would it not make sense for Kevin to be D, 2.

MG Yeah.

AO But then that's not the start of the tune then is it.

KM I think it worked all right like that, it's just that I was taking it too short.

**[09:00]**

***[Change tempo?]***

MG Will we do it a bit faster, the strathspey, or was that all right?

AO Too slow to do a schottische [a popular social dance especially in the Highlands of Scotland].

MG Were you trying?

AO Inside, gives me indigestion, internal schottische.

***[Discuss strathspey to reel changes as traditional musicians]***

CM Are we just going to go straight into the reel eh?

KM Yeah.

CM There's no . . .

MG Yeah.

AO Like a natural kind of . . . It usually just pulls back slightly before you . . .

MG Yeah but we should all be together playing the same 'tune' by that point anyway.

LW Yeah.

***[Change key? Or contrived?]***

MG Can we decide to change key or is that contrived?

LW I don't have any objection.

AO It's not generally the way of it, strathspey, the reel would be in the same key.

MG No, but the two reels.

AO Oh right, yeah, let's do that.

MG Or maybe someone should shout the key. That would be what would happen.

AO Can I have a pee? [meaning a pen]

LW Well, you've got a bar [box] of nothing.

MG Is the bar of nothing the last bar [box] or the first bar [box].

. . . [talking about trainers]

***[Score – heavy line, irregularity in score]***

AO That heavy barline after 5 really throws me.

MG No it is confusing, it is, strange innit.

AO Ignore [writing on page].

. . .

AO Yeah, someone shout a key.

MG Whoever shouts the key the loudest.

[laughing]

**[10:44]**

***[Mark the score at the point of 'reel change']***

KM What am I marking? Halfway through?

[performers mark point on page where they will change key]

CM If you want to mark halfway through just for the second reel.

AO I've already done it. Mmmm . . . Okay, lets do it.

***[Changing key? Might do.]***

CM So, is there a decision about changing key or?

MG I think someone might shout a key.

CM What numbers are we?

**[1 – KM**

**2 – MG**

**3 – AO**

**4 – CM]**

. . .

**[ENDS 11:52]**

**[Track 6]**

**[00:00]**

**[PLAY SCORE II – take 3]**

**[02:35]**

MG It was a little bit like *Bagpuss* [children's TV show with folk music theme tune] at the end, do you remember that?

[laughing]

**[Performance seemed too fast]**

AO That seemed to move too fast for me that time.

MG That was fast wasn't it?

AO So each section is like one do nee naw an do nee naw . . . second section.

CM Yeah, but it didn't quite happen right. Did it?

AO No, I think I maybe . . .

**[Performance problem – drifted but found way back]**

KM I think we got a little bit, we kind of went away a bit I think and when we came back . . . We seemed to kind of drift and then come back together. I think we all came back together when it went to all the circles.

AO But there should be a complete four bars of silence before the key change.

CM Shall we do it just from 4?

KM Em. Well, no, not from, oh from you?

**[Missed box of silence . . .]**

AO From everyone, there's a section where nobody plays.

KM Oh and did . . . ?

AO No.

[laughing]

**[Counting sections again]**

AO . . . It's like eight sections in, isn't it? So, it kind of feels weird because it's . . . it should be the four-bar build before the key change but it's actually not. Do you know what I mean?

KM How are we doing for time? Have we got time to do it once more?

AO Do it once more then we'll tackle the other one.

LW Yeah.

MG I didn't change anything because no one shouted a key.

AO Neither did I.

CM No.



AO I don't want to change key, I don't want to shout key [correcting himself]. I want someone else to change. I did it.

***[Decide to change key but not agree what it should be]***

KM Lets change key but nobody shout a key.

MG Yeah, great but you have to play a different key, yeah lovely. Everyone's gonna change to G. I can feel it.

[laughing]

KM I want to go to a sharp key.

AO Did you bring a capo?

[laughing]

KM Eh yeah but I'm using it.

**[ENDS 04:39]**

**[Track 7]**

**[00:00]**

**[PLAY SCORE II take 4]**

**[03:26]**

***[Performance problem – got lost again]***

AO I think I lost the place again.

MG No idea.

***[Check length of sections]***

KM So how, how many, what length is each section in the reel because I don't know.

CM 1 2 3 4, 2 2 3 4. That's what I thought it was but then.

KM Yeah, that's what I thought as well.

***[Check pulse]***

AO Because it's a kind of fast pulse isn't it?

KM Yeah, I think it went out again but . . .

CM Yeah.

AO I mean what do you want to do? Before Catriona has to go?

***[Decide to move on to Score III]***

**[Track 11]**

LW So last question, did you like the sounds that came out of it?

AO Yeah.

KM I did yeah.

MG Some of them yes.

KM I really liked number II and I really liked no. I after we played it a little bit. I thought when we first played it, everybody just went mbuchchchch [explosion sound] . . . but I thought later on . . . I thought the last time we did it especially was great.

MG But as a group I thought we got better.

KM Yeah, we did, becoming used to the way things were sounding.

MG So, yeah, I think the bits towards the end . . . The last couple of takes of II and the final take of I were particularly nice.

AO Same. (Team A 2008)

## **6. OBSERVING | analysis**

### **Observations and analysis of Team A workshop, Score II**

The performers immediately took a sense of space and energy from the score. Individual responses included assigning pitch and 'area' axes and imagining where the other musicians had situated themselves in the imagined space of the score.

With limited discussion and individual approaches rather than ensemble agreement, take 1 (of four) is fairly dissonant and utilises more free improvisation. With no direction other than the basic graphic table, and the previous performance of Score I, Team A created a cohesive performance that incorporated the basic elements of the score or piece: strathspey rhythms, reel phrases, a transition, playing individually (ignoring others), playing together (listening while playing and responding through playing) in various combinations, and a

clear beginning and well-judged ending. The well-judged ending makes musical sense but none of the performers had reached what they thought was the end of the score. These were their first comments:

AO I was nowhere near the end.

MG Neither was I.

CM No, neither was I. That's ok though.

[laughing]

...

KM I was kind of there so I was doing the second one down. (Team A 2008: 1)

After discussion between the group and some direction from me, the performances become tonal, more cohesive, and more representative of the information in the score, and therefore more representative of my intentions, as composer.

Unintentional misdirection: In this discussion between take 1 and take 2, I wrongly interpreted the circle as 'playing all together with the group', when you can see from the sketch in section [4. MAKING](#) that I originally intended it to represent solo playing. This misdirection seemed to be understood by the performers and likely influenced their performances in Score II, takes 2, 3, and 4, towards more cohesive, ensemble playing. However, take 1 occurred before the misdirection was given and it is perhaps most clear in that take that the performers display a preference for cohesive musical performance over the information in the score. I chose to reinstate the circle as solo playing in the 'final' score, providing a key for the symbols on the score, as seen in section [7. FINDING](#).

Take 2 was one of the most interesting performances from a research perspective. I provide here some analysis of that negotiation and performance:

Due to the deviations from the score, it becomes problematic to analyse or represent the performance in a linear fashion. However, taking the intended sections of musical form, I can expose the performance in smaller sections, providing a breakdown of what took place from my perspective as composer and workshop facilitator.

Strathspey

Reel

**1**  
KM

**2**  
MG

**3**  
AO

**4**  
CM

		↓		○		○	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓		○	○	↓		○	?	?	↕	↓	↓		○
<b>D</b>	↑	↓	○			↑	↕	↕	↕	↕			○	○			○	?		↕		○		
			○	○	↓	↓	↕	↕	↕	↑	○					○	?		↕		○	○	?	
		↑	○	○	↑	↑	↕	↕	↕	↑			↑	↑		○	?		↕		↑			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	

<b>Strathspey A</b>	
1	<b>00:01</b> MG begins 16 beats/crotchets, 4 bars per box Plays improvised strathspey riff in D(ish) KM comes in early – counting 8 beats per box
2	<b>00:09</b> KM stops when he should interact with MG
3	<b>00:16</b> CM entry
4	<b>00:24</b> AO entry

<b>Strathspey B</b>	
5	<b>00:31</b> MG plays through this box, should be AO and CM
6	<b>00:39</b> As expected (AO and CM plus KM)
7	<b>00:47</b> Only CM and AO play (everyone should be in)
8	<b>00:54</b> Only CM and AO again (everyone should be in)
x	<b>01:02</b> Play an extra box – everyone builds up towards reel

<b>Reel 1 A</b>	
9	<b>01:10</b> AO leads, dictates tempo with improvised melodic section, others fill in rhythmic parts Still counting 16 beats per box.
10	<b>01:19</b> Team grow in volume as they follow AO's playing
11	<b>01:28</b> Team pedal an offbeat rhythm to complete group section
12	<b>(01:36)</b> This box is not played AO moves to major to take his solo

<b>Reel 1 B</b>	
13	<b>01:36</b> MG plays over what would be AO's solo and AO backs off almost immediately and shifts to stab chords to smooth over
14	<b>01:45</b> CM takes her entry (beautifully clear statement on harp) a box early in response to MG's early entry but MG stops. Only 8 beats played here.
15	<b>01:50</b> Only 8 beats of CM and KM quietly
16	<b>01:54</b> Silence (foot taps) for 16 beats, CM marks half-way with quiet strum (harp) KM indicates build up to new section with single note (D)



<b>Reel 2 A</b>	
17	<b>02:03</b> Everyone in together loudly – visual cues helped here (eye contact, nods etc.) Same melodic phrase as first reel from AO
18	<b>02:12</b> Rhythmic parts, melody out, harp more prominent.
19	<b>02:20</b> KM solo
20	<b>02:30</b> Everyone in same melodic phrase plus variations, countermelody etc.

Reel 2 B	
21	<b>02:38</b> Pedal into new section
22	<b>02:47</b> AO improvises melody section with KM accompanying (flat picking)
23	<b>02:56</b> AO uses rhythmic bowing to fade out in his '?' box KM stays in very quietly
24	<b>03:04</b> KM solo to finish <b>03:13</b>

Figure 8. Score II, Take 2 analysis. (If viewing on a mobile device, turn the screen to horizontal view to access the controls on the audio clips.)

Team A identified Score II as one strathspey and two reels, which allowed them to gauge the overall shape of the piece. However, there was some difference in how the musicians counted the number of beats – whether eight or sixteen – in each ‘box’, which led to the performers being separated in performance.

Discussion leading to take 2:

AO So it's like, I imagined it twice round a strathspey.

MG Twice through a strathspey.

AO Just one strathspey and then . . .

MG Four times round a reel.

AO Or two reels.

LW Yeah, well I'm not gonna disagree with that. (Team A 2008: 4)

The musicians supported each other's performance and musical intentions. Take 2 provides a clear example of this. As the musicians approach box 12, the last box of Reel 1A into Reel 1B, AO (O'Rourke – fiddle) builds up to launch into his solo section and moves to the major key. But MG (Green – accordion) enters early at the same point with a strong motif. AO almost immediately alters his playing from what would have been sixteen beats (four bars) of his own choice of solo playing to a series of rhythmic 'stabs'/chords that respond to and complement what MG is playing.

The ensemble used clear cue points within *Strathspey/Reel*, such as 'solo' and silence moments, to navigate through the score, while a slightly darker line or mark on the page (the score has been tidied up now) disrupted their reading of the score. This can be heard in the recordings and was also mentioned in the workshop discussion:

AO So the strathspey bit's in eight sections.

MG And then in the reel bit.

AO It's in fifteen isn't it?

MG Is that what it is, but the first five are in a box and the next ten aren't.

AO Is that intentional?

MG We can't ask Lori that. Oh, right well I'm wondering because it tapers, the line at the bottom is thin, let's assume that that's a . . .

AO Just a . . .

MG Thingy [irregularity in the hand-drawn graphic].

AO Thing yeah. (Team A 2008: 1)

KM I think we got a little bit, we kind of went away a bit I think and when we came back . . . We seemed to kind of drift and then come back together. I think we all came back together when it went to the all the circles.

AO But there should be a complete four bars of silence before the key change. (Team A 2008: 6)

They also used definite cue points within the score to perform a 'piece' from it. The silence mentioned above and seen in box 16 of the score (last box of Reel 1B) was an important cue point that allowed them to regroup. Team A emerged from the silence with so much

confidence that this moment (Reel 1 into Reel 2) began to overshadow the moment of transition from strathspey to reel. Whereas, I had anticipated the strathspey–reel transition as the key moment in the score – hence all the interaction symbols at that point.

We can see (and hear) from this analysis that the performers played over the box lines in order to disengage from or build into whatever musical statement they were making. An example of this is the wandering accordion line from box 4 into box 5 as MG continues into Strathspey B rather than stopping.

In other takes, performers also played into boxes of silence in order to complete a musical statement or because they were engaged with the other performers ‘in the moment’ and chose not to abandon that.

CM Me? Well, I interpreted them as I felt like interpreting according to what was going on around, going on or sometimes I chose like maybe a little melodic thing and then transfer it down the harp but if there was something interesting going on I maybe chose to hook in with somebody and then do something that was still moving like this arrow. (Team A 2008: 1)

In informal, familiar terms: when they go wrong, Trad musicians ‘wing it’ until they find their feet again. A fairly standard practice that relies on excellent ear and communication skills, confidence in your musicality, and very fast judgement and reaction to what is happening around you. (Watson 2013: 144)

As the composer/deviser of the scores, I hoped the traditional musicians would bring to their performance of these scores the kind of knowledge that they would bring to the skeletal notation in a tune book. And this was the case to a large extent. (The scores could also be performed with traditional melodies, though none of my workshop participants chose to do this.) There was discussion of conventions in traditional music as the musicians interpreted the score and a desire not to sound ‘contrived’:

MG Can we decide to change key or is that contrived?

LW I don’t have any objection.

AO It’s not generally the way of it, strathspey, the reel would be in the same key.

MG No, but the two reels.

AO Oh right, yeah, let’s do that.

MG Or maybe someone should shout the key. That would be what would happen. (Team A 2008: 5)

One of the most important observations has been the desire of these traditional musicians for a cohesive musical event. While engaging with the score, each other, and their own musical and stylistic preferences, the musicians consistently chose to prioritise a performance that made musical sense – that seemed complete or had a recognisable shape or that simply felt good. This was echoed through the other workshops and in my own playing too.

## **7. FINDING | conclusions**

### ***Pieces for Four Traditional Musicians I, II, and III***

These are the final recordings and scores that emerged from the workshop with Team A, as played by Martin Green (piano accordion), Catriona McKay (Scottish harp), Aidan O'Rourke (fiddle), and Kevin Mackenzie (guitar).

**Pieces For Four Traditional Musicians I:  
Conversation Piece**  
Lori Watson

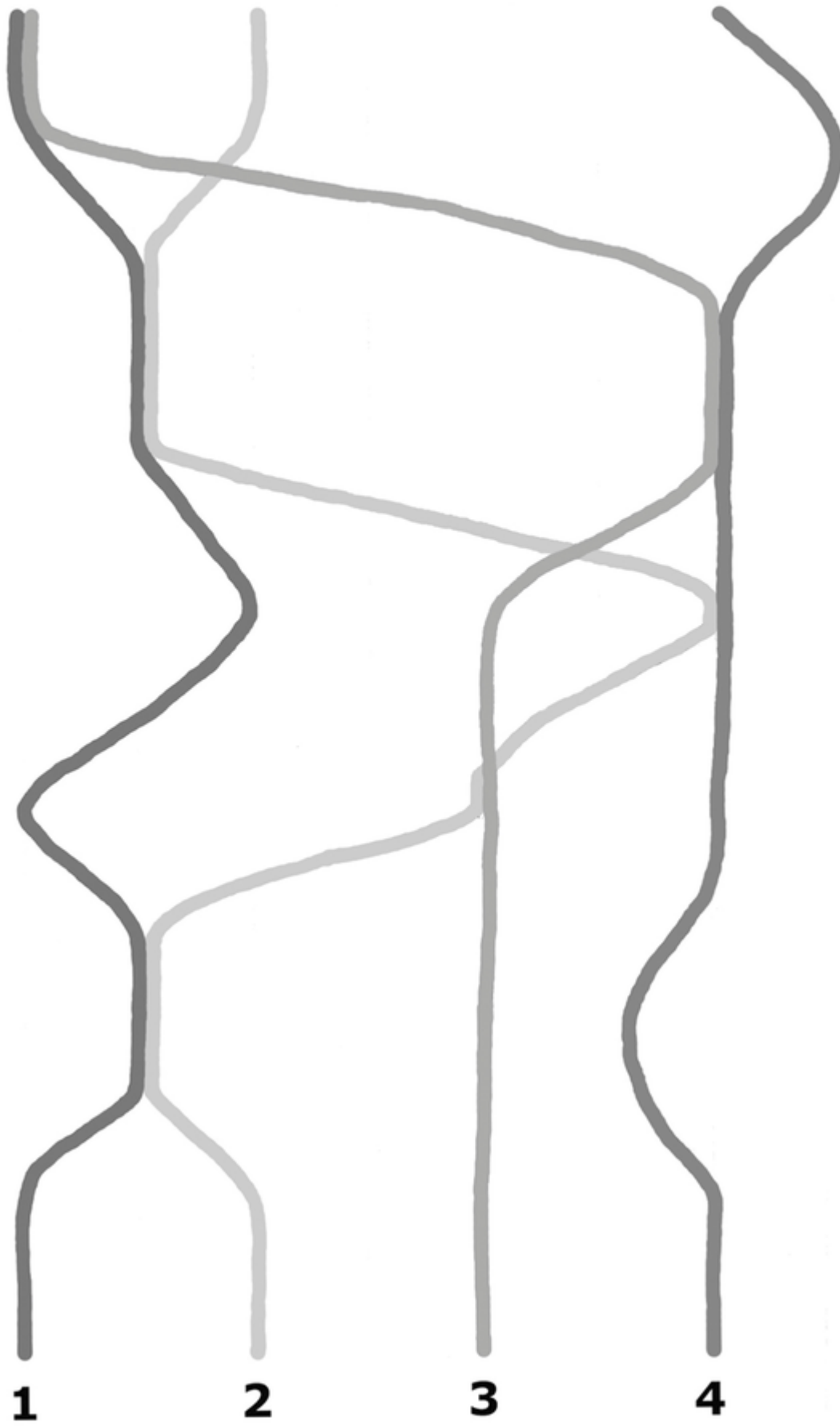


Figure 9. Score I, 'final' version (colour version also available)

# Pieces For Four Traditional Musicians II: Strathspey/Reel

Lori Watson

	Strathspey							Reel																	
1		↓		○		○	↓	↕	↕	↕	↓		○	○	↓		○	?	?	↕	↓	↓		○	
2	D	↑	↓	○			↑	↕	↕	↕	↕		○	○			○	?		↕	○				
3				○	○	↓	↓	↕	↕	↕	↑	○					○	?		↕	○	○	?		
4		↑		○	○	↑	↑	↕	↕	↕	↑			↑	↑		○	?		↕	↑				

○ Play 'solo' not with others

? Own choice

← Play with musician on this side

↕ Play with musicians on both sides



Figure 10. Score II, 'final' version, with key

## Pieces For Four Traditional Musicians III: Jigs

Lori Watson

1  improvise 15 bars | take a drink | repeat all.

2 8 bar rest  improvise 15 bars | light a cigarette | improvise further 8 bars.

3  improvise 15 bars | cross feet  uncross feet  tap foot audibly until end.

4 Take short walk  improvise 7 bars | 2 bar rest  improvise 3 bars | 2 bar rest  improvise 31 bars.

Each part has a time signature to use throughout the piece.

The sections of playing are 4, 8, 16 and 32 bars as dance tunes are.

When necessary 'roll a cigarette' or 'send a text' may be substituted for 'light a cigarette'.

Figure 11. Score III, 'final' version

## Summary of findings

### *1. Create and develop innovative musical works for traditional musicians (and by a traditional musician)*

My artistic aims were successfully realised in these simple graphic scores. In particular, I learned a large amount about notation and NTP approaches when workshopping the scores, which I then applied to the later works. I toyed with the idea that these irregularities should be part of the scores, in the way that human interaction is full of irregularity; but, of course, that is built on complex understandings developed over time. I was interested in how the scores were received as a whole and what the team thought of the music they produced:

LW So last question, did you like the sounds that came out of it?

AO Yeah.

KM I did yeah.

MG Some of them yes.

KM I really liked number II and I really liked no. I after we played it a little bit. I thought when we first played it, everybody just went mbuchchchch [explosion sound] . . . but I thought later on . . . I thought the last time we did it especially was great.

MG But as a group I thought we got better.

KM Yeah, we did, becoming used to the way things were sounding.

MG So, yeah, I think the bits towards the end . . . The last couple of takes of II and the final take of I were particularly nice.

AO Same. (Team A 2008: 11)

In Score II, the moment of transition from strathspey to reel also reflects a sort of organised freedom, a liminal moment, neither one place or another – these moments particularly resonate with me as opportunities for the strengths of traditional performers to be realised. If performed at standard tempos it is very difficult to include all the detail in this score without rehearsal and learning or knowing the score. Score II seems to exemplify the old/new, conventional/innovative dichotomy and it produced both interesting and revealing results in the Team A workshop.

### *2. Document the spoken and musical responses to these compositions in order to expose aspects of the nature of contemporary traditional music practice:*

a. What the possibilities for graphic scores in traditional music could be:

- Whether viewed as 'noise', 'golden noise', or 'structures for listening', the creative practitioners involved in the study and I have been artistically excited by these works. And they have led to adjustments and additions in existing approaches to our creative practice(s).
- I see graphic scores, improvisation, and experiments with notation more generally as 'modes of innovation' with rich creative potential.

b. How the traditional musicians positioned themselves in relation to perceived boundaries:

- Team A were very quick to move beyond conventional, idiomatic sounds when confronted with the graphic scores.
- Clearly these traditional musicians are very comfortable with innovation and interested in expanding their practice.
- The performers and fieldwork participants in this study seem to position themselves as moving between the core and outer periphery of traditional music and in some cases venturing significantly beyond it.
- Creatively challenging, experimental music is increasingly becoming an accepted and 'normal' part of a professional or student traditional musician's activity in Scotland.
- Pro-active innovation is not only an accepted part of our practice but a desired part – as can be seen in the numbers and scope of the new works being attempted (Watson, Lori. [in development]. *New Traditional School: Database of New Works 1976–2021*. Edinburgh: School of Scottish Studies Archives).

c. What performance, musical, or stylistic strengths the traditional musicians displayed:

- Interaction and in-performance communication are key strengths for skilled traditional musicians who will seemingly instinctively make musical choices in performance in response to the sounds and gestures around them.
- Improvised invention was delivered with ease using short, repeated melodic and chordal motifs, and drawing on the conventions of tune form, rhythmic pattern, and ensemble playing.
- Small-scale variations, including phrasing and ornamentation, were used expressively throughout the improvisations.

In this exposition, a set of graphic scores for and by traditional musicians, and the workshop recordings made as they interpreted them, exposed important aspects of contemporary traditional music practice. These include idiomatic knowledge such as the relationship

between two tune types, where a change of key is conventionally appropriate, and aspects of tempo. Other aspects of contemporary practice included a willingness to explore new ideas, the ability to change musical 'voice', the desire not to sound contrived, and the ability to communicate closely in performance, adapt to unexpected events almost immediately, and achieve a coherent performance from a range of information, not just what is on the page. These indicate a number of strengths that traditional musicians can bring to contemporary practice, an area for further exploration.

### **Can we call this traditional music?**

A key issue arising from this enquiry is where this music might be situated: Is it still related to traditional music? Clearly, these creative experiments are moving into quite abstract territory, as does some of Thoumire's work. Thoumire thought that the new works associated with the new traditional school fit into existing categories of musical activity e.g. contemporary music (Thoumire 2011 and 2006b), but I'm not so sure. Or, at least, I'm not sure how long those categories can realistically contain the emerging, developing practitioners.

An audience member in Cape Breton, Canada, asked, 'So what makes it, in your mind, traditional?' My reaction at the time was, 'I don't think at any point I said that was traditional music. The point is that it is music coming from traditional musicians.' (Watson, 2008a)

This is important in relation to these scores because they are so dependent on the (new) traditional performer to create a piece/performance out of them. I have experienced quite a wide range of reaction to this music, as you might expect. With responses from 'It's not even music, it's just noises' to 'golden noise', meaning sounds that you would not compose or perhaps conceive of in advance but that emerge in performance. Surely, this is one of the most attractive points of improvisation and experimental practice. My own sense of this is that yes, this is related to traditional music, key idiomatic aspects are embedded here, and it is now part of the practice of traditional musicians in Scotland.

### **Concluding remarks**

There is a music as discourse taking place in contemporary traditional music. Musician/composers share new ideas and provocations through composition, collaboration, and performance.

For some time now, traditional arts have been seeking parity with other arts. Although there are encouraging signs of this across the globe, traditional arts are, in one sense, disadvantaged by the lack of explicit knowledge available. The complex skills and knowledges

are still learned primarily through participation rather than more didactic methods. Fear of standardisation is frequently expressed in discussions around this.

Traditional music studies can embrace artistic research as a means of articulating and understanding the wealth and variety of tacit knowledge that is precious in oral/traditional culture as well as developing new, innovative forms of traditional music. Prioritising the strengths from within traditional music practices, rather than relying on cross-genre, cross-cultural, cross-media collaboration, could be a fruitful means of advancement.

Seen as part of the wider activity of the new traditional school in Scotland, the experimental music-making in this exposition highlights the process of adopting newness while being mindful of past and current convention, much of which is important professionally, socially, and personally. In this relatively unfamiliar task, and having set out to engage with the scores without discussion, these musicians created something musical, expressive, engaging, and meaningful, an immediate musical work that demonstrated complex interaction as a group. To conclude, 'here is art that invites us to think' (Borgdorff 2012: 72) about interpretation, convention, community, innovation, and the nature and development of traditional music practice via simple 'structures for freedom . . . structures for listening' (Mackenzie in Team A 2008).

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## Figures

Figure 1 - Traditional music session, copyright: Ben Nevis Bar

Figure 2 - Sketch for Score II, copyright: Lori Watson



Figure 3 - Score I *Conversation Piece*, copyright: Lori Watson

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Figure 6 - Team A workshop, copyright: Lori Watson

Figure 7 - Score II, workshop version, copyright: Lori Watson

Figure 8 - Score II, Take 2 analysis, copyright: Lori Watson

Figure 9 - Score I *Conversation Piece*, copyright: Lori Watson

Figure 10 - Score II *Strathspey/Reel*, copyright: Lori Watson

Figure 11 - Score III *Jigs*, copyright: Lori Watson

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