



GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET
HÖGSKOLAN FÖR SCEN OCH MUSIK

VOCAL FREE IMPROVISATION

Discovering the sounds of the voice and how to use them in free improvisation

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Abstract

As a vocalist, Casey Moir wants more than to just express what is written on the page or that which the harmony allows. She wants to discover every aspect of her voice to see how she can express her musicality on a deeper, more personal level. Some of the questions that helped Casey start her journey are: Why is musical expression so important to her? Why improvise freely? What sounds can her voice make? Can she utilise these sounds in her music and how?

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ATTACHMENTS: CD ‘Sound Journal’

"Improvisation is the expression of the accumulated yearnings, dreams, and wisdom of the soul." - Yehudi Menuhin

At the start of the autumn 2010, I posed myself two seemingly simple, yet rather extensive and difficult to answer questions. The first was 'Why do I sing?' The second, 'Why free improvisation and how?'

My reflection over the first brought about one conclusion: Expression. My need to express is a driving force behind all of my vocal explorations. Yes, I love to sing and it makes me happy, and sad, and crazy at times. Yes, I love to stand in front of a crowd and reach my audience on a deeper level through words and interpretation and good delivery and skill. Yes, I also enjoy hearing the reactions and comments of people after a performance. But expression outweighs them all. We all have a voice and I believe we all have something unique to say and give but the approach we take is just as different and unique as how many different things there are to say. I have something individual to express. I have something unique to give. In knowing and understanding this, the question of 'Why?' became 'How?'

My thirst for expression, my curiosity and stubbornness to explore the many possibilities of my voice to their full extent, has lead me through the more traditional forms of improvisation and now also away from them to 'free improvisation'.

To describe 'Free improvisation' is no easy task. Each musician has an own interpretation and understanding of it. For me, free improvisation of the voice is the freedom to express 'in the moment' and 'the moment' itself in sound. As opposed to more traditional improvisation, the boundaries are not set by a sequence of chords and/or scales. The free improvisation draws on inner expression and also, knowledge of what the instrument (the voice) can achieve. It is a journey of raw emotion, truth, intuition, intimacy and musicality. It is sound (music) with intention and focus, reflection and freedom, uniqueness and depth. Free improvisation is my adult kindergarten. Here I can be absolutely 100% focused and serious and mature while at the same time, let loose in freedom, craziness and expression.

Two particular aspects have motivated me greatly in my exploration of the voice. The first is the need to understand my instrument, the voice, inside out. This includes mechanics just as well as sounds, range, techniques etc. The second is to learn how to use these elements musically.

METHOD

Exercises

I needed direction to start this more in depth exploration of my voice to enhance my knowledge (sound library) of what sounds and possibilities my voice has and can do. This direction I received in the form of practical exercises. The majority of them were given to me by my teacher Thomas Jäderlund. Others, I have designed myself.

There are endless parameters to work with within free improvisation. Some of these are, for example, rhythm, sound, phrasing, timing, space and dynamics. Knowing where to start and what to focus on can be quite daunting and confusing at first. The exercises I have worked with are based on short solo improvisations. The focus of each one is narrowed down to one or two simple aspects such as sound, a word, colour or emotion, a motive or even a boundary or frame in which to work within. This form of exercise allows for each aspect to be creatively and musically investigated thoroughly in a fully focused situation.

Reflection and Recordings

Reflection is another technique used in this exploration. The reflective process is one of listening, analysing, constructive criticism and development. To aid me in this, since the autumn of 2010, I have recorded in many of the above mentioned exercises as well as several concerts I have performed where free improvisation has been the major focus. These recordings are a documentation of my personal progress and a chance to gain some distance from initial emotions and thoughts surrounding the time when they were recorded. This distance allows for a more unbiased, and honest analysis of the recording.

These recordings have been an essential tool in my development as a musician. With them, I have been able to analyse my practise sessions and hear where things can be improved. It has also been interesting to hear how the practice sessions have helped in cultivating me to be a more mature, creative and focused vocal improviser even in concert situations.

The compilation of these recording I call my ‘Sound Journal’. Excerpts from these recordings make up the content of the attached reference CD.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Through exercises, practice and performance, I have been able to practically apply the following techniques to deepen my explorative study of my voice and vocal free improvisation.

SOUNDS

Knowing what parameters there are to work with is the first step in discovering sounds. Vocalists have several variables to work with, for example the tongue, lips, jaw, soft palate, resonance chambers in the larynx, oral and nasal cavities, as well as more musical variables such as breathing, phrasing, rhythms, notes, words, tonality and A-tonality. Just being aware of these things creates a multitude of possibilities and a platform in which to start a vocal exploration on. Being open to discovery is the next step.

As a way of discovering my voice and testing my creativity and the differing physical aspects of my body, I decided to record short vocal exploration sessions with myself. I set up my H4-N Zoom recording device and without too much thought for what I was doing or how it sounded, I let it record all the sounds that spilled out of me. These recordings mark the beginning my own personal ‘sound library’.

Please listen to sound examples nr.1 and nr.2: ‘Sounds 1’ and ‘Sounds 2’
- both are recorded on November 1, 2010 at my home residence in Gothenburg

The utilisation of different techniques such as ‘Interpretation’ and ‘Contortion’, has resulted in a more comprehensive ‘improvisation toolbox’ in which to draw upon. Through personal interpretation of everyday sounds, and sounds made by others, as well as contortion (using and forming my mouth, lips, facial muscles, tongue and soft palate in ways never attempted by me before), together with good vocal technique, that makes sure the sounds are not harmful to my voice and future career, I am learning many new sounds and ways to fashion them. One example of this is the use of the in-breath just as much as the out. Restricting the openness of the larynx during an in-breath and adding tones and growling or creaky noises created by the vocal cords, gives many new affects and in utilising the in breath as well, there is no need for pauses. In other words, I can create a continuous flow of improvisational sounds as they are created on both the in and out-breaths. I will speak more about this in ‘Sounds: Breathing – inhale and exhale’ on page 12.

The challenge is to learn to choose which ones will be used at any particular time and decide how they will develop under the course of the improvisation. Technically some sounds are easier to use in combination, while others are to be used more sparingly and more as an effect. Screaming is one effect that requires large quantities of energy and power and is one that I use sparingly and with great care in regards to technique so as not to damage my voice.

The Tongue and Lips

The tongue plays a major role in fashioning sound. It can be raised, lowered, widened, flattened, forward or back in the oral cavity and the position it takes ultimately alters the sound and how and where sound resonates. The tongue shapes and forms most consonants, such as D, G, J, K, L, R, S, T and these can be used with or without added sound or notes. The tongue's position on consonants opens up a whole new world of percussive possibilities. By moving the tongue up and down at various intervals and breaking and dividing the air flow, which is otherwise more or less steady and constant, it can create rhythms.

The Lips can also achieve this rhythmical effect but its result is in a more closed and more explosive sound (like in B and P). They shape the consonants B, F, H, M, P, V which are formed by the contortion of the lips, sometimes in collaboration with the teeth. The lips together with the desired air quality (how the air sounds when it comes up through the vocal cords), and even saliva, can form sucking, strained breathing, airy, wind-like and static radio noises. These examples are just a small handful of the possible improvisational sounds where the lip formation plays a major role in the overall quality of the sound. Lips formations are almost always used in collaboration with other aspects, such as breathing and the tongue's position.

Please listen to sound example nr.3: 'Solo Improvisation – Consonants'

- recorded as part of my Solo Concert on April 13, 2011 in Ohlinsalen at Högskolan för Scen och Musik, Gothenburg

Manipulation

So far we have touched on the formation (manipulation) of the tongue and lips. Being able to manipulate a sound is imperative. Another example of manipulation can be found in 'split tones'. Split tones is a technique in which the vocal cords are manipulated to be able to produce several tones simultaneously, while the resonance chambers allow for more overtone rich sounds to resonate and the airflow is controlled and directed. It is difficult to learn and the actual physical analysis of how to achieve it complex to say the least but through listening to others and by testing different methods with small slight changes in positions within the larynx and oral cavity resonance chamber I have found a way that works for me without straining or hurting my vocal cords.

Please listen to sound example nr.4: 'Split Tones'

- recorded on May 2, 2011 at my home residence in Gothenburg

BOUNDARIES

Having one constant or a boundary, allows the improvisation and the improviser to find a mutual direction, while still allowing for creative freedom. The development is focused. A story can be told and a journey can be travelled from the source to final destination. The application of these boundaries, give the possibility of direction, authenticity and meaning within an improvisation.

Boundaries can be many different things, both big and small details. They are not used to restrict but rather the opposite: to guide. Boundaries can be things like a pre-determined form, length of time, dynamic curve (bell curve), steady pulse, set rhythms, phrase cues, big hops/little hops (in terms of note intervals), tonal, a-tonal, sounds etc. They provide a basic foundation for an improvisation. The interpretation and use of any given boundary is open to the improvisers' interpretation.

Form

The boundary of 'form' means the improvisation has a form that is decided beforehand and which is followed during the execution of the piece. This boundary is evident in a piece called **Chaos** that was written by myself and pianist Naoko Sakata for our improvisational duo called MOCO. **Chaos** is a tune built upon a pre-determined form. The sounds that are used and chosen in the moment are open to interpretation. The form is as follows:

- A. Chaos starts with total chaos - high intensity, loud, active and A-tonal
- B. It moves into its opposite – peaceful, still and melodic
- C. it progresses into short note phrases, sounds and clicks
- D. it finishes in an improvisation with quickly alternating parts - where one part or person has a long note the other improvises freely over it and then the roles are exchanged so that the one who had the long note has a free improvisation and the other has instead, a long note.

The piece has been played and recorded on several occasions. Each time it is played, it takes on a new persona, a new feeling, one that is relevant for that particular moment in time, for that particular performance. The form does not change but the execution and interpretation of it allows space for spontaneity and musical creativity to express the moment.

Please listen sound example nr.5: 'Chaos'

- recorded on October 11, 2011 in Hellberg Studio at Högskolan för Scen och Musik together with Naoko Sakata on piano. Sound Technician: Johan Moir

Please listen sound example nr.6: 'Chaos'

- recorded on February 17, 2011 at Brötz Now jazz club in Gothenburg together with Naoko Sakata on piano using my H4-N Zoom recording device

Set Rhythm

Set Rhythms is a way to improvise when the rhythms are decided beforehand. What sounds and notes are used and how they will be articulated during the improvisation are chosen in the moment but the rhythm is non-changeable. Having set rhythms is very good training for variation of rhythms during an improvisation. Being able to have rhythmic versatility can make an improvisation more engaging.

I have taken two approaches to this technique. The first approach was more exercise based, reciting rhythmic poly-rhythms written by Per Anders Skytt. I would sit with the pages in front of me, set a tempo and recite the rhythms as they were on the page while improvising the different sounds and notes utilised for each hit.

Please refer to sound example nr.7: 'Polyrhythms'

- recorded on November 4, 2010 in a practice room at Högskolan för Scen och Musik, Gothenburg

The following picture is an example of a polyrhythm exercises.

POLYRHYTMETYD #1
3 mot 2 / 2 mot 3

Per Anders Skytt

This is a musical score for 'POLYRHYTMETYD #1' by Per Anders Skytt. The score is organized into 20 measures, each featuring a unique rhythmic pattern. The patterns are designed to be played on a single instrument or voice, showcasing complex polyrhythms between three and two beats. Measure numbers 1 through 20 are listed vertically on the left side of each staff. The patterns involve various note heads and rests, with brackets indicating specific rhythmic groupings such as 3:2 and 2:3 ratios. The score is intended for practice and improvisation, reflecting the techniques described in the accompanying text.

The second approach was to write a free improvised composition where set rhythms would be cued in and occur at random intervals during an otherwise free improvisation. The piece is called ‘Beat’. Some other boundaries have been utilised in this piece as well. For instance, notes or sounds chosen under the duration of the first rhythmic insertion are restricted to small movements – no big intervals or drastic dynamics. Under the second rhythmic insertion, the opposite is allowed. For those playing the rhythm, notes and sounds are chosen at random and are more a-tonal with larger interval leaps while the piano and bass create a sound platform of glissandos underneath this cacophony. The third insertion is more like the first with smaller and fewer interval movements that create random clusters.

Please see sound example nr.8: ‘Beat’

- recorded on May 22, 2011 as part of my graduation recital in Lindgrensalen at Högskolan för Scen och Musik together with Naoko Sakata on piano, Alfred Lorinius on Double Bass, Martin Öhman on Drums and Thomas Jäderlund on Alto Saxophone

The picture below shows the first of the three rhythmic insertions from the improvised composition called ‘Beat’

Beat.

RHYTHM NR.1

Casey Moir

SAX SOLO OVER

A musical score for 'The Star-Spangled Banner' in 4/4 time, treble clef, and G major. The score consists of five staves of music. Measures 12-15 are shown, featuring various note heads (x, asterisk, dot) and rests, with some notes having vertical stems and others horizontal stems.

Musical score for page 2, measures 3-6. The score consists of two staves. The top staff uses a treble clef and the bottom staff uses a bass clef. Measures 3-6 are shown, each starting with a fermata. Measure 3 has six eighth notes. Measure 4 has six eighth notes. Measure 5 has six eighth notes. Measure 6 has six eighth notes.

Musical staff 3, measures 1-4:

- Measure 1: Treble clef, key signature of one sharp. Notes: eighth note (rest), sixteenth note, eighth note, sixteenth note, eighth note (rest).
- Measure 2: Measures 2-4: Measures 2-4 are identical, each consisting of a single eighth note followed by a sixteenth note.

Reflection over ‘Set Rhythms’ has led me to see that I find the first approach to be too restricting. It does not always allow enough freedom to express as the entire improvisation has full focus on the exact rhythms notated. I have found it to be more intellectual than artistic creative and therefore it is much harder to allow a story to grow out of it organically or gain some wider perspective on the whole. Although narrow, it is a very good method to get the rhythms from the page and into the body so that they feel natural and can be drawn upon when wanted to be interpreted more freely.

The experience and feel for rhythms gained in approach number one aided me in writing the improvised composition mentioned in approach number two. I feel that under the duration of the free improvisation, the three written differing rhythmical insertions were a way to give the piece the space needed to develop organically while giving the group a mutual direction.

Colour/Words/Emotions

Having a word, colour or an emotion as an improvisational ‘theme’, is an easy way of engaging the mind and to be able to instantly relate. It is a way of capturing, for example, a thought, recollection or feeling that shapes the underlying foundation of the improvisation to come. The word, sentence or colour is open to interpretation and can be combined with other boundaries such as Pulse, Length Of Time, Phrases etc.

Being a vocalist, I am accustomed to working intimately with words, their meanings and within them making personal interpretations. I have found that the use of words allows me to connect, not just intellectually but also creatively, while giving an improvisation an artistic direction. The words and their delivery tell a story and for me, this is important.

Words are also vowels and consonants. I have explored the possibility of them not always being recited but used, for example, as percussive instruments, or legato phrases. This is achieved by disconnecting letters, manipulating the lips and resonance chambers in the mouth on the vowels to change their sound colour, and by expressing them through differing dynamics (crescendo and diminuendo) and elongating or shortening words depending on the natural organic flow in the piece.

Please refer to sound example nr.9: ‘The Soul Stands’ – by Casey Moir

- recorded as part of my Solo Concert on April 13, 2011 in Ohlinsalen at Högskolan för Scen och Musik, Gothenburg
- The first time the poem occurs, it is simply recited, while the second time through is a musical interpretation using the words
- Please turn to page 14 to read along with the poem

Words that create strong reactions, like ‘Fear’, can influence an improvisation too much by drawing on past experiences, situations and general associations. By this I mean that the body takes on a more influential role and plays out the word instead of the voice interpreting it musically, resulting in a more theatrical performance. This was definitely the case in my first handful of ‘word’ improvisation recordings. ‘Words’ were taken too literally or over dramatised.

Knowing this, I reflected around the voice and the body and what roles they have when it comes to improvisation, especially when words are involved. I have come to realise that the body and the voice are intricately and intimately connected. The voice needs the body just as the body needs the voice. A voice with an active body is an expressive voice that is more authentic and personal. Without this vital body-voice interaction, the voice is too easily flat, distanced and impersonal. As I am first and foremost a *vocal* improviser, I see the body as an accentuation of the vocal interpretation but it is not the interpreter. The voice is always the interpreter. This factor is key in getting the balance right so that the improvisation is musical and not theatrical.

Sound: Breathing – inhale and exhale

The ‘sound’ exercise is one of choosing a sound made by the voice and exploring and developing it under short improvisations. One sound I have explored thoroughly is breathing. The sound of breathing, combined with different rhythms and sound qualities, offers a realm of possibilities. The exhalation or out-breath is the most commonly used. When singing or even just speaking it is traditionally done on an out-breath. Normally the in-breaths are used as time to pause or prepare oneself for the next phrase or sentence sung or said. Through this deepened vocal exploration, I have discovered that the in-breath can be utilised and be equally as musically creative and sometimes even more engaging, than the in-breath.

The sounds of both the in and out-breath can be manipulated by the contortion of the lips/mouth/face and the size and shape of the resonance chambers in the throat, oral and nasal cavities. The sound produced depends on the position and shape of tongue and soft palate, the openness of the windpipe and by how the airflow is controlled, for example whether it is soft, hard, strong, airy, constant, or inconsistent and disjointed.

One example of how contortions affect the sound can be found in the addition of soundless vowels, to an in and/or out-breath. In this case, the airflow is constant and airy while at the same time the consonant H is sounded. Under the duration of the breath the tongue and jaw move around to form the positions of different vowels in the oral cavity. Each new vowel position creates a new sound. Something else I found interesting was that soundless vowels on the in-breath produce a different sound to the exact same vowel position on an out-breath.

One of the short improvisations performed at my solo concert on 13/4-2011, was based on the combination of the in and out-breaths together with rhythm and sound manipulation through the utilisation of different vowels.

Please refer to sound example nr.10: ‘Breathing – An interpretation of the heart’

- recorded as part of my Solo Concert on April 13, 2011 in Ohlinsalen at Högskolan för Scen och Musik, Gothenburg

SOLO CONCERT

As a part of my Bachelor of Improvisation, I have undertaken the course called Konstnärligfördjupning or Deepened Artistic Development. The course requires students to perform a 30min solo concert in their final term of the degree. I performed mine on April the 13th 2011 in the Ohlinsalen at Högskolan för Scen och Musik, Göteborg.

To challenge myself, I decided to do the whole concert a-cappella. This meant not accompanying myself on another instrument, nor using any effect pedals or pre-recorded music as backgrounds or guides. I wanted this concert to be 100% my voice and nothing else. I wanted the content to be a reflection of my deepened study of vocal free improvisation.

I chose a theme ‘Letters of the Heart’ for the entire concert. Everything performed, including lyrics/songs, improvisations and the poem, had to be intimately connected to the expression of things deep inside the heart - secrets, feelings, emotions, words never spoken, things hidden, yearnings, dreams and hopes. Together with the deepened knowledge of my voice which I have received from all the practice on previously mentioned techniques and exercises, the theme gave me a clear direction to work with during the entire concert.

To really make use of the space and natural acoustics within the concert venue, I set up four different ‘stations’ on the stage and placed a floor lamp at each. From piece to piece I would turn on the lamp corresponding to that particular station and perform the piece in its light. When finished, I would turn it off and go to the next station and so forth. This was a way for me to symbolically visualise my journey from room to room in my heart while musically interpreting that particular rooms’ content.

While reading the following description entailing the order of songs, what they represent and what techniques they used, please listen to sound example nr.11: ‘Solo Concert’

- recorded on April 13, 2011 in Ohlinsalen at Högskolan för Scen och Musik, Gothenburg

The concert started with the tune ‘What Reason’ by Ornette Coleman. It is a rubato ballad with simple yet moving lyrics about love. The improvisation was formed out of the simplicity, yet depth, portrayed in the lyrics and reflected the tonality of the piece.

The following two pieces were short improvisations. The first, I gave the boundary of sound: Breathing. This improvisation was an interpretation of the ever changing pace of the heart. The second was also given the boundary of sound but this time the sounds were ‘Whispers and Growls’. This was my interpretation of the secret yearnings, joy and fears that only the heart knows.

The following piece was ‘A poem of the soul’, a poem written by me for this concert.

A Poem of the Soul

*The soul stands
Time can not maim its existence
This body will decay
From dust to dust it will fade*

Intricately they are bound and woven

*When the body hurts, so too the soul
When the soul is wounded, the body grieves*

Yet separate are they in their ways

*The body is the house
The soul, it is life*

..... and death

The words were a reflection of the deep meditation of the heart around life and death. The first time through the poem, it was recited. The second time through the words and their meanings, both individually and in connection to their corresponding sentence as well as the overall mood of the poem, were interpreted in improvisation.

Two short improvisations followed. The first was an interpretation of the moods of the heart. The approach was a combination of disjointed and staccato A-tonal notes with large and random interval leaps that progressed into a-tonal glissandos, gliding smoothly up and down between these random notes. Dynamically, the tempo, volume and frequency of notes were varied and open to interpretation. The intention was to show that the moods of the heart are always in transition, never stagnant or still for long and very varied. The second improvisation was an exploration of words never spoken and things hidden in the heart. Here I wanted to utilise consonants and the many different possibilities of pronouncing them and giving them life through the contortion and use of the lips and tongue in combination with rhythm.

The finale was a rubato ballad written by Ornette Coleman called ‘Lonely Woman’. The lyrics, the verses written by Radka Toneff and the bridge written by me, describe a deep sense of loneliness and a longing to be heard, noticed and seen. These emotions and words were the inspiration of the improvisation. Even though the words were eventually dropped, and sounds replaced them, the feeling and overall mood remained.

REFLECTIONS

Testing my voice in every which way to see how it can be manipulated, contorted and used to make sounds and create improvisations has been a very fun, challenging and rewarding journey. I better understand the current limitations of my voice. I have learnt many new sounds, such as the in-breath and split tones, as well as techniques to help me develop ideas in improvisations, and create music.

Having now many more sound, rhythmic, and framework boundaries to use in improvisation, I have noticed that other issues have surfaced. One of the hardest things for me has been getting the balance right. Knowing when I should use what sounds and for how long, before progressing to the next stage of development, or when to leave an idea or framework for something else that the ‘moment’ requires, is an art form I am yet to master. I have, however, been aided by two techniques that have set me on the right path so that maybe one day I will master this skill. These two techniques are ‘recordings’ and ‘limitations’.

The recordings made of my practice sessions and concerts have become an invaluable tool for me in this process of exploration. I have noticed many things about my voice and myself that I never knew before or knew about but had never really understood the consequences of. One example of this is that I discovered am hasty an impatient. I like to move on quickly from idea to idea and do everything at once. I have never before given myself the time or space to develop and idea and explore it fully.

The exercises that I received from Thomas Jäderlund have created ‘limitations’ for me. These limitations have enabled me to focus fully on one or two ideas at a time. I have learnt to appreciate the small details and changes, and understand more how they develop and give fluidity and purpose to the overall improvisation. When I sing a typical song with lyrics, melody and standard form, the focus and direction come more naturally. In the words I can find purpose which enables me to interpret them personally. I have never thought before to apply this direction in improvisation. My need to express needs direction and meaning. This has been a wonderful discovery.

Practicing more motive and idea construction and development has been frustrating at times but it has conditioned my musical ear to be more aware and in tune of the need for it. As a listener myself at times, I’ve noticed that patience in construction and music makes it easier to evolve together with an improvisation, and to absorb and form an own interpretation of it. As a musician I realise that this patience results in a more logical, consequential experience that a listener can get caught up in and be a part of.

Patience and I have never really had a good relationship before. I like getting things done, and getting them done effectively. I am slowly learning that music is not a job to get done. It is art in the making that requires not only patience, but reflection, thought, meaningful deliverance and intuition, as well as skill, practice, technique and discipline.

During one of our instrumental lessons, Thomas Jäderlund said ‘a listener often has more patience than the musician’. In our discussions over this comment he explained that as musicians we can be so into making things new and exciting that we jump from idea to idea so that there ends up being no cohesion in the improvisation on a whole. For a listener this is tiring. An audience is there to listen. They have set aside that time, that moment, to listen and they are patient in their listening. They want to hear the development. They want to hear how something progresses. They want to be drawn in. They want to follow the story, however conventional or non-conventional it is.

This little comment has really made me think and re-evaluate my methods of approach in improvisation. I have realised that I do not need to busy myself trying to make something interesting or think that the improvisations development needs to happen quickly so that it doesn’t become boring for me or the listener. Such thoughts and actions are not beneficial for me, the audience or the improvisation.

Through my practice I have become a little more patient and more intuitively aware of the moment and of timing, space and its affect. My solo concert reflects this well. The general direction and focus of all the individual pieces and the overall form of the concert – the order in which each piece would occur - had been decided beforehand. However, how they would be shaped, developed and how the many different parameters open to them would be interpreted during the performance were left up to improvisation. Despite initially being very nervous, both beforehand and even during the first moments of the first song, I had a peace and calm about me and the performance. I was acutely aware of space, the moment, and the need to be patient with ideas and develop them organically. I felt that each word, sound and improvisation was intentional and purposefully sounded. I have never felt this utter peace during a performance before.

During this exploration, I have learnt that it is in the small changes and details that the bigger ones are made. Small changes made in patient reverence to the improvisation and oneself allow the musician (performer) to reveal the wholeness, piece by piece. I understand that an improvisation needs to tell its story and that this occurs through development, that there are many things, such as variation and diversity of sounds, dynamics and rhythms, that can be utilised to enrich an improvisation, and that in all this there needs to be an honesty and truth that authenticate its delivery.

FINAL WORDS

Under the course of compiling information and writing this study I have discovered other tangents and questions that I would one day like to analyse more closely. I have plans to continue recording my sounds to make a more detailed sound journal for personal use, reflection and development. I wish to interview some vocal artists, active in this field, to understand their perspectives around vocal improvisation, how they have learnt what they can and have gotten where they are today, as well as inquire as to why they have chosen to make this personal vocal explorative journey.

I have, under my own journey started to ‘compose’ free compositions, like the one called ‘Beat’ that I mentioned in Set Rhythms (page 10). I believe it is more to be about setting up parameters in which to work within than composing every little detail and note but I still call it composing. I am intrigued by the thought of investigating further this technique of written composition in relation to free improvisation. I would also like to explore how to use sounds and improvisational techniques in larger ensembles and to examine what role I would have as an improviser, musician and even band leader in such situations.

This years’ journey and study of vocal free improvisation has allowed me to come to know my voice on a much deeper level. It has been a journey of much frustration, tedious practice, discipline, questions, discovery, heightened appreciation, patience, curiosity and joy. I am learning to utilise the many new aspects of my voice, such as stretching, manipulating, bending, gliding, creating moods, capturing the moment, and shaping improvisations. As a result, my musicality is flourishing and I am excited about continuing this journey of discovery.

One invaluable lesson that I’ve learnt, that I believe is worth mentioning again, is me realising that I need direction in some way shape or form when voicing my music. This knowledge has helped me to focus my time, energy and musicality and direct my purpose through sound. Just simply knowing this is not enough though. I understand that putting these things into practice is a lesson that will take me a lifetime to master. This is only the start of my journey. Where it ends, not even I know.