About us

The Scottish Journal of Performance is an open access refereed journal which aims to promote and stimulate discussion, development and dissemination of original research, focusing both on performance in Scotland (contemporary and historical) and / or wider aspects of performance presented by scholars and reflective practitioners based at Scottish academic institutions.

Published bi-annually and run by doctoral students, the Scottish Journal of Performance welcomes submissions from both established and early career researchers and operates a peer review system ensuring presentation of quality research in performance.

Performance in this context encompasses a wide range of arts and entertainment and takes as central themes dance, drama, film, music and television. The Scottish Journal of Performance takes as a key focus the creation and execution of performance in various contexts, encouraging the adoption of a wide range of research methods and approaches.

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Editorial

KIRSTY KAY & BENJAMIN REDMAN

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Beyond topography: space and time in the creative imagination

‘Nations, like narratives’, writes Homi K. Bhabha in Nation and Narration, 'lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye'. As a theorist of post-colonialism, Bhabha was acutely aware of how society’s relationship with space and time is socially constructed, used by the powerful to manipulate, seized by the powerless to fight back.

Those edges of our own spatial reality are currently becoming blurred. With the politics of memory rocking the lives of citizens and their experience of public spaces from Palmyra to Charlottesville, we have become ever more aware of that which we think of as fixed and unchanging suddenly being a negotiation. That historical ‘truth’ is once more being argued over for political ends, it is the physical spaces in which these battles for meaning take place: statues and parks, border controls, our own and others’ bodies.

We may only hear in the media about the negative side of these social transformations, but in our uneven times it is often artists and performers who take the boldest steps to make real the topographies of our social imagination.

This sixth issue of the Scottish Journal of Performance celebrates these creative possibilities of meaning-making within the negotiation of space and time: Scotland a narrative of its own; its complex history, territorial uniqueness and the collective imagination constructing its own myths and horizons. This issue features practitioner reports from two inter-disciplinary, site-specific collaborative projects, alongside two articles: one that examines the ways in which site-specific theatre companies in Scotland responded to political processes from the 1990s onwards, and one re-framing the historical research
parameters of the highland bagpipe. Reviews of recently published books from performance studies are also presented: from the small-scale and intimate performance, through the use of improvisation in theatre, to a full-blown history of British theatre from 1965 to 2014. Music history is also reassessed with a book review concerning scholarship in the field of late-twentieth-century women composers.

By the latter half of the twentieth century, critical theory took a decisive turn towards the spatial: ‘Space still tends to be treated as fixed, dead, undialectical; time as richness, life, dialectic’, Edward Soja wrote in his seminal text *Postmodern Geographies* in 1989. The spatial turn is magnified even further as a creative possibility in the twenty-first century, where communities can be built online and digital worlds imagined and created, access to vast quantities of information and ideas can both de- and re-territorialise and historicise our social realities. These principles inform our papers for the issue.

In the first article of this issue, *Play between worlds: Inchcolm Project*, Mona Bozdog and Dayna Galloway report on the first stage of an applied collaborative research project in which theatre, music, and game design methods bring the world of a video game to life on Inchcolm Island in the Firth of Forth. Audience-participants were transported to the island and set free to explore for one hour with the help of a printed map and a Sonic Maps application on their phones, where audio files played when the participant stood at a particular location. The participants explored the physicality of the landscape and the island’s buildings, and discovered in-situ performers along the way. After an hour of individual exploration, the audience gathered at the abbey and were then guided to the Refectory where a projection of the game *Dear Esther* was set up. The authors describe the experience as ‘an interplay between two islands, one real and one virtual, and three experiential worlds, the world of the performance (*Dear Rachel*), the world of the game (*Dear Esther*) and Inchcolm Island, as a world in and of itself, its physical presence in constant tension with the visiting worlds’.

Cara Berger and Brianna Robertson-Kirkland report on *Burning the Circle*, a project that emerged from a collaboration between researchers in Archaeology, History, Music and Theatre Studies, and industry partners Northlight Heritage and National Trust for Scotland, which took place in 2014 on the Isle of Arran. Berger melds
practical research and critical theory to investigate contemporary, postdramatic theatre forms, while Robertson-Kirkland examines how historical vocal education can be used to inform the performance of historical works.

András Beck presents a paper that examines the work of Scottish site-specific companies and how they responded to Scotland’s political processes in the 1990s. In *Devolutionary sites: NVA, Grid Iron and Scottish site-specificity in the 1990s*, Beck gives an account of Angus Farquhar’s NVA and Ben Harrison’s Grid Iron, arguing that both companies have responded to political processes such as devolution through site-specific theatre—by finding alternative, more localised performance venues and building communities. He goes on to describe how they have had a lasting influence on the Scottish arts scene, inspiring new theatre companies such as Fire Exit, Poorboy and Highway Diner.

Andrew Bova presents his research into the choice of repertoire for piping competitions in his paper *Identifying canons in competitive light music for the great highland bagpipe, 1947–2015*. Bova suggests that there is inclusivity and exclusivity within acceptable repertoire for competitive solo piping, and posits the notion of the formation of a canon of tunes, featuring boundaries and rules, rather than a repertoire. He discusses ways in which canons of competitive bagpipe repertoire form, and through a detailed methodological comparison suggests that a better understanding of this process will allow practitioners in the competitive piping community to reflect on their musical and competitive decisions.

This issue also showcases a variety of new publications within performance studies, with a selection of reviews by scholars from across Scotland.

Flavia D’Avila reviews *Semiotics and pragmatics of stage improvisation*, by Domenico Pietropaolo, in which ‘improvisation as a compositional practice in the Commedia dell’Arte and related traditions from the Renaissance to the 21st century’ is analysed. Topics include historical accounts of the development of performance improvisation, semiotics, and the process of production.

A three-volume compendium of a history of British theatre companies spanning the era from 1965 to 2014 is reviewed by Ben Fletcher-Watson. In *British theatre companies: 1965–*
1979, edited by John Bull; *British theatre companies: 1980–1994*, edited by Graham Saunders; *British theatre companies: 1995–2014*, edited by Liz Tomlin, each period is examined in detail. The historical and cultural background to each period is explored, theatre companies are examined, and archival materials that shed light on the inner workings of funding bodies such as the Arts Council of Great Britain are revealed to give fresh insights to the history of British theatre.

The *kaleidoscope of women’s sounds in music of the late 20th and early 21st centuries*, by Kheng K. Koay is reviewed by Lucy Hollingworth. The book provides analysis of the work and lives of six women composers including Judith Weir and Chen Yi, and contributes to this important and developing area of scholarship.

Shona Mackay reviews a collection of essays on the life, teaching and practice of the acclaimed Glasgow based performer Adrian Howells. *It’s all allowed: the performances of Adrian Howells*, edited by Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson provides an intimate portrait of Howells, describing how he encouraged and inspired practitioners and audiences to risk themselves emotionally in order to more fully connect with others. The review concludes this edition of the journal, but the legacy of Howells will be explored more fully in the forthcoming special issue of this journal, *Art of Care*.

Bede Williams stood down as Co-editor after the publication of the last edition of *Scottish Journal of Performance* and has been replaced by Benjamin Redman (Royal Conservatoire of Scotland), we thank Bede for his hard work and send our good wishes.

We would also like to welcome Ben Fletcher-Watson and Bethany Whiteside to our editorial board, and thank outgoing members, Anna Birch and Sophia Lycouris for their input and support over the past few years.

We would like to thank the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland for their continued support, Anglia Ruskin University, the editorial team, advisory board, our peer reviewers, funders, and especially our authors.

**KIRSTY KAY & BENJAMIN REDMAN**  
Co-editors, *Scottish Journal of Performance*
PRACTITIONER REPORT:

Play between worlds: Inchcolm Project

MONA BOZDOG & DAYNA GALLOWAY

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Inchcolm Project was a proof of concept that aimed to make apparent the connections between video games and performance, and to blur the lines between physical and virtual worlds and bodies. In designing the two-hour experience on Inchcolm Island in the Firth of Forth we drew on both theatre and game design methods and brought the world of a video game, Dear Esther (The Chinese Room, 2012), to life on Inchcolm. What resulted was an interplay between two islands, one real and one virtual, and three experiential worlds, the world of the performance (Dear Rachel), the world of the game (Dear Esther) and Inchcolm Island, as a world in and of itself, its physical presence in constant tension with the visiting worlds.

Keywords: islands, video games, walking simulators, promenade performance, site-responsive design, game-responsive design, video game adaptations.

Games are growing, breaching into other spaces to define their own territory. Theatre is doing the same, snatching at its neighbours, testing its barriers. They make spaces of their own but the overlap is quietly growing. Standing in a room, whether in a game or a performance, you still search for story. You have the same desire to explore (McMullan, 2014).
Inchcolm Project was the first stage of an applied collaborative research project and was showcased as work in progress on 16 October 2016 on Inchcolm Island, in the Firth of Forth, for an invited audience of 50 guests (two consecutive runs), from both performing arts and game design backgrounds. The team consisted of Mona Bozdog (PhD researcher, writer, director), Kevin Murray (sound design), Ana Inés Jabares-Pita (set and costume design), Andrew Dyce and Craig Fairweather (We Throw Switches) who curated the gameplay installation, and Luci Holland, David Jamieson and Mantra Collective who arranged and performed live Jessica Curry’s soundtrack for Dear Esther. They were supported by Abby MacMillan and Adam Thayers on stage, production and technical management alongside a team of seven set and stage design assistants.

Inchcolm Project was a proof of concept that aimed to make apparent the connections between video games and performance, and to blur the lines between physical and virtual worlds and bodies. In designing the two-hour experience on Inchcolm Island in the Firth of Forth we drew on both theatre and game design methods and brought the world of a video game, Dear Esther (The Chinese Room, 2012), to life on Inchcolm. What resulted was an interplay between two islands, one real and one virtual, and three experiential worlds, the world of the performance (Dear Rachel), the world of the game (Dear Esther) and Inchcolm Island, as a world in and of itself, its physical presence in constant tension with the visiting worlds.

The live performance, Dear Rachel, was a direct response to the game, to the site and to island spaces: physical, symbolic and virtual, thus engaging with the three dimensions of site-specific work: ‘site-as-symbol, site-as-story-teller, site-as-structure’ (Wilkie, 2004, p. 69).
The Forth Belle lands on Inchcolm on a drizzly Sunday afternoon releasing 50 participants, ears muffled by headphones, maps in hand, Sonic Maps digital application running on their phones.
The boat slowly casts off. For the next two hours, the participants are stranded on the island. As they take their first steps on the island, steady but unknown ground under their feet, the twelfth-century abbey filling their view, they trigger the first audio file. The voice of a man (the narrator is voiced by Sandy Welch) starts confessing in their ears, nestling itself comfortably in between the rustling of the wind and the lapping of the waves.

Dear Rachel,

We have all found refuge on this island: kings and hermits, shepherds and soldiers, sinners and holy men.

We are all equally real and equally imagined.

This island, the abbey, those blocks up on the hill, they pose no threat to our imagination. They just put it on and wear it like a life-jacket.
Humans, gulls and ghosts have lived and died on this island.

We are the last in a long line of refugees: the walkers, stepping on the consecrated ground that burns our feet.

We have shunned the world and in so doing the world has shunned us back.

We walk the shores, the caves and the hills, broken like the waves that hold us.

There is no salvation here.

Only walls.

Mona Bozdog, Dear Rachel 2016

This is their first contact with the worlds of the performance and Inchcolm.

From here onwards they are free to explore the island with the help of the abstracted topography depicted on their maps, and the application running on their phones. The Sonic Maps application tracks the participants’ location and reveals the audio hotspots that are in their proximity as they approach them. It does not, however, offer a complete view of the island; thus, facilitating a non-linear experience through exploration, and a gradual sense of discovery.
These simple design constraints support the participants in choosing their own paths, leading to the unearthing of some of the 10 installations and 22 audio logs. The time for exploration is limited to an hour and they can play as they choose. They can rush to get all the audio files or they can stand still, listen and observe. The limited abilities of the software brought along this unexpected constraint. The audio would only play in the tagged area, moving out of the small circular area stopped the playing of the audio file. Nature added additional stakes: the tide and wind shifted and covered some of the audio files, the thickness of the abbey and tunnel walls destabilised the GPS, forcing the audience / players to stretch, reach out, hold onto, climb, crouch and wait. The environment was piercing through, forcing them to explore the boundaries of their physical prowess to discover and engage with the narrative. In return, the changing light, the clouds, the shadows, the rain, the wind, the sea were constant variables, which meant that the environment was constantly dynamic. The sound, atmosphere, lighting, mood and vistas were, at least partly, randomly generated.
Patterns emerged from the combination of the designed, the natural, and the human elements. The players / audience were constantly on the move, scattered around the island, standing still on edges and shores, looking out at sea, ghostly and silent, creating tableaux of unexpected encounters and emergent landscapes. They were an active part of the landscape, contributing to each other’s narratives. This echoes Jenkins’ call for game design as narrative architecture through forms of environmental storytelling that engage with the full array of the space’s abilities: evocative power, storytelling abilities, and potential for emerging narratives (2004, pp.118–130).

The audio was designed by Kevin Murray, as a layering of site-recorded sound, studio recorded voice-overs, and music from Jessica Curry’s award-winning soundtrack. Musicians from Mantra Collective were performing instrumental solos, on a loop, in set key locations around the island. The instrumental solos were isolated from the tracks Always and Ascension, which were later performed in their entirety by
the ensemble as the final part of the performance. The text takes its epistolary and fragmented form from *Dear Esther*, which makes similar use of location-triggered audio to stimulate exploration, and an intentionally lacunary narrative to sustain player engagement. *Dear Esther* marked the beginning of a new video game genre, the walking simulator. Walking simulators are first person exploration games, which place players in believable, often beautiful environments that require minimal levels of gaming expertise to experience and uncover the secrets of the rich narratives embedded in their objects, spaces and landscapes. The explorable, atmospheric spaces of walking simulators are varied in their visual aesthetics, though it is common for them to feature specifically composed music for establishing and supporting an intended narrative and mood. When compared to other games they have limited gameplay opportunities in terms of actions afforded to the player, as well as duration and dimension of the world. This arguably contributes to a more immersive narrative experience, as they can be played in one sitting and do not require navigation of menus or complicated control schemes, combinations of buttons, restarts or frequent interruptions from loading screens. They reward exploration by either an advancement in the narrative, new sensory pleasures (vistas, soundscapes), discovery and surprises (hidden areas, hints) or a sense of completion or closure. As with site-specific promenade performance, the experience of the player / audience is designed through an orchestration of the environment and its affordances. The motivation resides in the desire to explore the physical, sensory and narrative potential of the designed space. Dan Pinchbeck, the designer behind *Dear Esther*, has defined these as ‘experience vacuums’, by which he means replacing in-game stimulation with different types of experiences, experiences that require interpretative and emotional effort (2012). Vacuum space is not filled with boredom but with head space, Pinchbeck argues, and as such this space and time for thought, emotion and imagination needs to be designed into games. This is echoed
in Upton’s call for anticipatory play: ‘Instead of defining a play experience entirely by what the player is allowed to do, anticipatory play allows us to focus instead on what opportunities any play experience provides for elaborated analysis, contemplation, and reflection’ (Upton, 2015, p.76). Due to their dependency on environmental storytelling, walking simulators can offer valuable design lessons in guiding navigation seamlessly, stimulating the desire for exploration, building tension and anticipation, and engaging with the narrative potential of an environment in multiple and various ways. In designing Dear Rachel, we engaged with some of these game design heuristics directly.

The story of Dear Rachel responds to the game’s themes: dealing with guilt and loss, forgiveness and redemption, while simultaneously engaging with the wider ongoing debates surrounding refuge, safety and humanity. The man in Dear Esther is coping with the loss of his wife, Esther, to a tragic accident for which he feels responsible. The man in Dear Rachel is tormented by the images of a capsized boat, a mother and her infant child sinking under the weight of their fake life jackets.

The traumatic event is projected onto the environment, a violent disruption of the natural landscape. This event is visually represented through recurring colours, displaced and misplaced objects, unnatural assemblages of natural and man-made materials. In Dear Esther, the island is gradually coated in fluorescent green writing, paint, car parts, emergency-room paraphernalia, chemical symbols and ultrasounds alongside bird nests, broken eggs, feathers and bird bones.
In *Dear Rachel*, Inchcolm is overgrown with parasitical fluorescent orange rubber and tape, dinghies, buoyancy aids, barbed wire, metallic wind chimes, fishing nets, life jackets, wire birds alongside bark, feathers, egg shells, twigs, shells and sea weed.
Pearson discusses McLucas’s distinction between host and ghost, the ‘co-existence and overlay’ of the found, existent architecture of the site, and the temporary, purposely designed one brought to the site by the artists (2010, p.35). ‘The site itself became an active component in the creation of performative meaning, rather than a neutral space of exposition’ (Pearson, 2010, p.36). The relationship between them, be it of harmony or tension or both, was our playground. The site’s physical presence was a constant resource of creative constraints. The design concept had to be flexible enough to adapt to the constantly changing environment. Upton defines play as: ‘free movement within a system of constraints’ (2015, p.15) so perhaps a play-full design is a more accurate description. The numerous site visits allowed us to observe the spaces at different times of day, in different weather and light conditions and in different temperatures and levels of humidity. Some areas would flood after a wet spell, which meant that we had to be prepared to bring wood pallets to allow traversal. The walls of the tunnel would only hold the fluorescent tape if they were not moist, which meant that we had to know every nook and cranny of the walls so that we would be prepared to set up anchors. We had alternative locations for the musicians in case of rain to protect the performers, costumes and instruments. We needed to know our temperament in order to design the ghost.

We were limited by the three-hour window for set-up, and by the heritage status of the island. Access to the island is only possible by private tour operators, which is a costly endeavour for a large team. All the props, tools and costumes could only be brought on the day before the performance. All of these constraints shaped the design which increasingly became a direct response to the site and its physicality.
In terms of physical presences, the island in Dear Esther is also haunted. Elusive silhouettes can be seen in the distance, always out of reach. In designing the performance, I wanted to use the ghosts as an additional connector to the world of the game. Inchcolm, throughout its troubled history, has been inhabited by holy men, prisoners, soldiers, the unwanted, the sick and the dying. Its abbey was a pilgrimage destination and its consecrated soil a coveted burial ground. In response to the site’s history, the ghosts look for absolution, redemption and forgiveness. This is achieved through the performed and repetitive act of walking as penitence. It is the main mechanic of both the game and the performance, and, in addition to its purely functional purpose of progressing the narrative, it is also tied into the fiction. The ghosts on Inchcolm are the walkers, people who need to journey through their pasts to understand and forgive, and by making peace to find freedom from the island. The walkers are the audience / players, the two narrators, one performer and the five musicians. The musicians were performing instrumental solos from the video game’s soundtrack, composed by Jessica Curry and arranged by Luci Holland and David Jamieson. Anna Fraser (violin) was stationed at the battlement, Luci Holland (vocals) and Luisa Brown (violin) were stationed in the tunnel, Michael Ready (flute) was stationed in the Hermit’s cell, Atzi Muramatsu and Gracie Brill (cello) were stationed in the Abbot’s house and Douglas Kemp (accordion) was stationed near the Cloister. Using live music was another design choice. The game has non-diegetic, location-triggered music but diegetic sound. We opted for diegetic sound throughout. The environmental sound and music originated in the physical world and would constantly pierce through the non-diegetic, mediated, voiceover narration. The live music was also used as an additional buoy for guiding navigation, and the musicians could be heard before they could be seen. The musical puzzle was completed when they performed the tracks as an ensemble.
John Bruin was a silent performer as the distance and the sound of the waves would have drowned any musical instrument. He was stationed on a cliff edge, a tea party for one, only visible from the top of the staircase. The eeriness of the tableau was reinforced by the distance. He is out of reach, and in return he does not reach, see, or acknowledge others’ presence.

Dear Rachel,

I see them sometimes.

Shallow tormented eyes flickering in the immense solitude.

Their footsteps louder than thunder in the depths of stillness.
They begin their ascent here.

Looking for redemption in the heights.

The waves don’t offer them any solace.

And so, they climb.

Like moths drawn to the light.

They stand on the edge and look out over the sea.

Over the shore.

Over the borders.

And forests.

And fields.

They look out to unseen places.

They look back to long-gone times.

They look forward for homes left behind.

And then they scream.

...

22
There's nothing here but salt and sadness.

Mona Bozdog, *Dear Rachel*, 2016

After the performance, the audience gathered at the abbey. They were then guided to the Refectory where a projection of the game was set up.

The Refectory is a space for communion, for coming together and for sharing meals, stories and knowledge. It was an ideal space for gathering after the solitary experiences on the island.

*The horn cries*

*And an invisible hand pulls us to the abbey.*
High and higher, up the steps,

To the refectory.

Our cursed steps echoing in the walls.

And there we wait.

In the refectory, the holy men would share their bread.

We share their silence.

We share our guilt.

In this place of communion, we make our atonement.

Mona Bozdog, Dear Rachel, 2016

The arched wall created a three-dimensional illusion and the fissures and dents in the wall were distorting the graphics while at the same time adding texture to the projected image. We decided that we were not going to use a screen as we were more interested in the potential of this coming together of image and textures, and of what the site-specificity brought to the gameplay, than we were in preserving the graphic quality. We embraced the overlay of ‘ghost’ and ‘host’ (Pearson, 2010, p.35).

The game was played live by Craig Fairweather of We Throw Switches. Because of the limited time on the island, the playthrough was only of the two final chapters of the game. As the character climbs the aerial, jumps and takes flight
from the island, Luci Holland starts singing the last part of Ascension in unison with the game, and leads the participants to the Cloister where the orchestra are assembled.

They perform Always and Ascension from the game’s soundtrack, composed by Jessica Curry and arranged by Luci Holland and David Jamieson. The paper boats are there for the taking, for writing a guilty memory or heavy thought, and the participants are encouraged to release them into the sea. This is a direct reference to the game, where the letters to Esther were folded into paper boats and launched at sea which frees the character from the weight of the past and allows him to begin his final ascent and leave the island. The participants return in silence, the audio remains, like a mist that lingers on their foot-prints, on the grass and rocks, haunting the island, awaiting new walkers.

The game and the promenade performance share the same fictional island, and the two stories were perceived by most
of the participants as a continuation of one another. The two islands and three worlds coexist, overlap and tease each other, taking turns at being centre stage. In designing the journeys, installations and sounds, we played in between the worlds, the natural and the made, the fictional and the real, the physical and the virtual, elements constantly transgressing and trespassing. We played with perspectives, vistas and details, shadow and light, proximity and distance revealing natural materials bended into unnatural shapes, virtual objects materialising on the island, invisible traces made visible. Some environments were responding to audience movement, some to stillness, some were designed to be played with, some were designed to be observed, micro and macro playgrounds. We celebrated the contrasts, juxtapositions and layerings of environments and meaning, the bleedings, the piercings and the slippages. We blended design methods from both video games and site-specific promenade performance to create potential for journeys, discovery and encounters.
The project was a work in progress and a proof of concept, aiming to tease out the possibilities of applied interdisciplinary study in the fields of performance and game design. The recorded post-show feedback offers a promising starting point for progressing the research towards the second stage of development: designing a video game and a performance that are developed as a holistic experience, which perfectly complement each other, are part of the same storyworld, have narratives that unfold across both environments (physical and virtual) and capitalise on the unique abilities of both virtual and physical bodies.

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References


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**About the authors**

MONA BOZDOG is a theatre maker currently undertaking an applied PhD that focuses on the interdisciplinary study of video games and performance. The research draws on both fields to develop hybrid forms of storytelling that engage with the unique abilities of virtual and physical environments, bodies, and experiences.

DR DAYNA GALLOWAY is Head of Division of Games and Arts within the School of Arts, Media and Computer Games at Abertay University. Dayna’s research focuses on the structures, dynamics and aesthetics of video games, and in particular the emergence of new interactive forms and experimental game design practices.
PRACTITIONER REPORT:

The burning circle: (pre)history, performance and public engagement

CARA BERGER & BRIANNA E. ROBERTSON-KIRKLAND

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In recent years, there has been a change of culture in the academic environment: researchers are now strongly encouraged to collaborate across disciplines and develop strategies to engage non-specialist publics with the processes and results of their work. Often, artistic researchers are brought in to provide the ‘window dressing’ that allows other research disciplines to more effectively communicate their ‘hard data’. However, in Burning the Circle, a project that emerged from a collaboration between researchers in Archaeology, History, Music and Theatre Studies, and industry partners Northlight Heritage and National Trust for Scotland, emphasis was given to how artistic activities, in this case performance, produce formally specific insights through their particular medially and the modes of sensorial engagement they produce. In this article, we approach the event from our perspective as artist-scholars in performance-based disciplines to begin to consider how performance might play a more central and productive role in interdisciplinary public engagement events.

Keywords: historically informed performance (HIP), postdramatic theatre, heritage, ephemerality, public engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration.
In a climate where there is an increasing demand on researchers to develop strategies for engaging non-specialist publics with the processes and results of their work, it is important that we share and reflect upon our methods for doing so. This article sets out to document and discuss a public engagement event, *Burning the Circle* (BtC), that emerged from a collaboration between researchers in Archaeology (Kenneth Brophy), History (Hannah Baxter), Music (Brianna Robertson-Kirkland) and Theatre Studies (Cara Berger) at the University of Glasgow, and industry partners Northlight Heritage (Gavin MacGregor) and National Trust for Scotland (Corinna Goeckeritz). We approach the event from our perspective as artist-scholars in performance-based disciplines, meaning that we are primarily concerned with the ways of understanding and modes of knowledge-making particular to our medium.

In drawing attention to this, we hope to avoid the tendency, identified by Deirdre Heddon, for the skills of artistic researchers to be used ‘as a tool to engage, communicate, mediate, translate and / or enhance’ the research of other disciplines without creating new approaches to their own research area (2016, p.82). By emphasising what performance might specifically and uniquely disclose about our ways of understanding the past, and how it intersects with the concerns of our collaborators, we want to start thinking about how artistic research can become an equal partner in interdisciplinary public engagement events. This may be of particular importance to artistic researchers in universities in the United Kingdom contending with the ‘Knowledge Exchange and Impact Turn’ (Heddon, 2016, p.79), but we also hope that our findings are of interest to scholars beyond this particular context. Across our reflections, we acknowledge the variety of performative methods we employed and how they develop from our individual research which is both methodologically and thematically distinct: Robertson-Kirkland examines
historical vocal education and how to utilise these methods when singing historical works, while Berger melds practical research and critical theory to investigate contemporary, postdramatic theatre forms.

**Burning the Circle: starting points, contexts and performance**

*Burning the Circle 2014* took place over 27–28 September on the Isle of Arran, in and around the National Trust heritage site Brodick Castle. Bringing together performance-based public engagement and ‘soft’ experimental archaeology, the overarching goal was to playfully engage visitors with the island’s (pre)historic past, particularly its timber circles which have been linked by Brophy and Millican (2015) to the specific experience of and intervention into the landscapes of lowland Scotland by Neolithic communities. These landscapes would likely have been dominated by forests, which leads the authors to propose that trees would not have had a mere functional role in these communities but that they would have also provided a material basis upon which an ontology of ‘meaning, beliefs and values’ could grow (2015, p.314). Timber circles were then ‘built, not just from the trees in the forest, but their meaning as well’ (*ibid*). Though the exact nature of their meaning is lost, there is ample evidence to suggest that many circles were burnt at some stage in their lifecycle—an act that is presumed to have had a ritual, rather than merely practical function, due to the effort involved in such burnings.

Brophy, MacGregor and Goeckeritz explain in their 2015 article on *BtC* that these events might ‘offer a visceral sense of what Neolithic and Bronze Age ceremonies may have been like’ (n.p.) and are keen to frame them as a new educational tool. The *BtC* event we participated in was not an authentic reconstruction and re-staging: although the timber structure was based upon an excavated site on the
island at Machrie Moor and its construction was underpinned by design, it was nonetheless removed from its original location (see Brophy, 2016, pp.133-135). If the lived practices and value systems attached to timber circles are lost, performative reconstructions, no matter how well-informed by archaeological findings, are impossible.

Neither re-enactment nor historically informed performance (HIP), the performative elements of BtC nonetheless sought to produce an engagement with (pre)historical life by attempting to open up the spectators’ imaginative capacity to speculate on the past. To do so we decided to expand the scope of the timeframe considered, taking spectators on a journey from the island’s present to the increasingly distant and elusive past. At the same time, the performance resisted realist tendencies and narrativisation, instead presenting spectators with a ‘density of intensive moments’ (Lehmann, 2006, p.83) common to postdramatic theatre modes, by which we mean, following Lehmann, a specifically postdramatic approach to curating stage images in which ‘space, bodies, gestures, movements, postures, timbre, volume, tempo and the pitch of voices are torn from their familiar spatio-temporal continuum and [are] newly connected’ creating ‘a complex whole of associative spaces’ (Lehmann, 2006,p.110).
As demonstrated by the map above, the performance took spectators from a stretch of beach below Brodick Castle via the castle estate up a hill and to a field behind it, where the reconstructed timber circle had been erected. In doing so, spectators went on a passage from the sea to the sky, from dusk to nightfall and from the present to the past. Along the way they encountered various fragments of the island's past and present, including a performance of 'Queen Mary's Escape', also known as the 'Arran Boat Song', a folk song associated with the island; verbatim speech of islanders’ experiences of the landscape presented by live performers; an interpretation of a fairy tale that originated on the island in a patch of wood decorated with lights and coloured yarn; a performance of ‘Drømte Mig en Drøm’, a Viking song, in front of Brodick Castle which was illuminated by a video projection of seawater; and, finally, the burning of the timber circle. The walk was led by a silent 'shaman',...
performed by Brophy, dressed in partial costume. Reflecting on this performance, we will discuss and theorise the methods we used to explore how performance—when conceived as an affective structuring of an experience, rather than a mere creative packaging of information—can play a leading role in an interdisciplinary public engagement context.

From realist to postdramatic dramaturgies in heritage performance

Performance, an art of simulation, feigning, non-authenticity, seems squarely at odds with archaeology, a discipline that pursues ‘truth’ by means of ‘authentic’ remains. Instead of placing the two fields in opposition, however, our performance made use of the overlap between them: in archaeology, as in performance, an interpretative step is needed in order to make sense of the multitude of heterogeneous materials. Post-processual archaeologists, such as Michael Shanks, insist that we cannot assume that we have access to ‘any metaphysical category of the past “in-itself” as origin of meaning’, there is no ‘raw past’ that we can encounter without mediation (1992, p.45). Instead:

The archaeologist participates in the meaning the object has. Understanding involves mediating the meaning of the past with one’s own situation. Gadamer calls this a ‘fusion of horizons’. So the prejudice of the archaeologist’s social and personal situation is not a barrier but the medium of understanding the past (ibid.).

If, as Shanks suggests here, archaeological understanding can only appear in a fusion of horizons mediated through the present, we might start to see an affinity with performance. The particular temporality of performance, which is simultaneously of the present and ‘punctuated by, syncopated with, indeed charged by other moments, other
times’ as Rebecca Schneider writes, structurally resembles the archaeologist’s situation (2011, p.92). Moreover, archaeology, like performance, relies—as Shanks and theatre-maker Mike Pearson’s famous collaboration has already suggested⁴—on dramaturgy, on assembling data and sensoria in meaningful ways. What we were interested in exploring is how performance, as a particular medium—one that is always in and of time—might be able to produce what Schneider calls a ‘temporal leak’ (2011, p.10). In other words, we wanted to experiment with methods through which performance in the present might put us (tentatively, precariously, partially) in contact with the past. This meant asking: what kind of dramaturgy might suit this intention? How can the formal rendering of the event produce a critical understanding and engagement with (pre)historical heritage?

Typically, though by no means exclusively, performances that engage with the material cultures of the past in heritage settings invest in authenticity and realist dramaturgy. Paul Johnson, for example, notes that postdramatic forms have largely been ignored in heritage performances (2012, p.54)⁵. Following Hans-Thies Lehmann, postdramatic theatre does away with the ‘dramatic paradigm’ (2006, p.31), that is, a focus on the narration of a fable through interpersonal dialogue. Johnson offers a series of binary terms to shed light on some of the tensions in heritage performance which also go some way in explaining the hesitation to adopt postdramatic forms. Two of these are particularly important in thinking about our project: fiction / history—which pertains to the danger that ‘careful consideration of competing sources can disappear, replaced with the particular certainty of performance’ (Johnson, 2012, p.59)— and risk / safety—which he identifies as a tension between the often-critiqued tendency to present a safe, ‘unitary interpretation’ of heritage on the one hand and performance as a ‘potentially unpredictable or unruly activity’ that pluralises and destabilises meaning on the other (2012,
p.55). This latter point might explain the hesitancy to adopt alternative performance modes in heritage contexts: many postdramatic and live art practices revel in polysemy and indirectness. If the goal is to tame meaning in order to project a particular reading or interpretation of the past, then these forms might push back against any such attempt.

An analogous situation is evident in the HIP practice, a movement prevalent in music performance, which typically concentrates its efforts on the use of period instruments while research into historically informed singing practices have been neglected. Whereas instruments provide physical evidence of past music activities and a tangible connection to the historic past, historical singing practices are much more elusive, only accessible through partial documentation such as notation, training practices and descriptions of the quality of individual voices, which were frequently subject to public expectation and changing popular fashions. Although research can assist a singer in negotiating decisions regarding ornamentation and to some extent lyrical expression, timbre and style are intertwined with individual practices. HIP frequently debates performance (particularly in early music) in a way that attempts to capture a better understanding of the past through the use of historical sources that inform performance decisions. Therefore, it might have been useful to consider a HIP approach when collecting, curating and interpreting archival materials. However, it frequently struggles to provide a clear methodological approach to interpreting incommunicable elements of performance. While, as Helen Thomas suggests “the words “performed on original instruments” came to all but stand as a marker for ensuring that a performance was “authentic” (2003, p.126) during the popularity of the early music movement of the 1970s and 80s, the voice has not attained such a status. Our use of unaccompanied vocal practices in the performance contrasts with the emphasis on ‘hard data’ associated with authentic instruments. The ephemerality of the voice, the
impossibility of pinning it down and capturing it fully through notation or description, resonates with the ‘unruliness’ of performance practices at large that we wanted to exploit.

A troubling and troubled relationship with authenticity and unitary interpretations of past cultural practices, then came to be a central concern in our development of the performance. In reflecting on our work, we would like to suggest that this uncertainty of interpretation, so typical for spectatorship in postdramatic performance practices, may be precisely what makes it attractive for performances dealing with prehistory since it can produce a mode of watching that is analogous to archaeological work. To unfold this idea, we will look at two strategies we used in the performance: unaccompanied vocal performance—exemplified here through an exegesis of two voice-led moments—and an attention to affect as a means for encouraging interpretative participation. Overall, we suggest that our performance departs from the pseudo-realist dramaturgical form often associated with heritage performance. By instead making use of the possibilities of postdramatic forms which in their ‘fragmentary and partial character... [renounce] unity and synthesis’ (Lehmann, p.57), we were able to create a complex encounter with the intertwining of the present and the past, of presence and absence which was fundamental for both archaeological and performance research while being aimed at a non-specialist public.

**Unaccompanied vocal performance: a tangible to an elusive history**

The performance began at the water’s edge, with the audience looking out to the horizon. A short introduction was read by Berger encouraging the audience to engage with the surrounding environment: the sand, the sea and
the dominating peak of Goat Fell, visible at the beginning stage of the walk, which would appear once again once as we reached our journey’s end. This was followed by a performance of the song ‘Queen Mary’s Escape’ by Robertson-Kirkland, during which she led the audience in a procession inland, away from the coast and up the hill towards Brodick Castle, juxtaposing the lyrical references of escaping the confines of an island-built historical castle across the water to the mainland. Since the legendary escape of Queen Mary is intertwined with Scottish history, the lyrical references alongside the physical space illustrated a journey through time, without specific verbal cues. Both the song and the story of ‘Queen Mary’s Escape’ represent a documented history, in which a physical source can be examined and analysed but is also part of an oral tradition where the account is retold and passed from person to person, musician to musician; interpreted and changed by each new voice. The song is part of Scotland’s present but is also strongly connected to the past, and as such it was included in the performance to represent the complexities of Scotland’s cultural relationship with notated and oral forms of transmission.

A HIP methodology was employed insofar as ‘a wealth of historical materials were consulted […] to create a performance that was vivid, energised, interesting, and compelling for a modern audience’, as pointed out by HIP researcher Martha Elliot (2006, p.3). The tune chosen for the performance ‘Queen Mary’s Escape’ is known as the ‘Arran Boat Song’ and is prominent in traditional music circles by a variety of names including the ‘Highland Boat Song’, the ‘Aran Boat Song’ as well as ‘Queen Mary’s Escape from Loch Leven’. We expected our audience to primarily be the island residents and one of the aims of the project was to encourage our public to feel connected to the work through finding songs that are directly linked to the island’s history". 
However, the relationship of the song to the island appears more one of tradition than historical fact. The first time this tune appears under the name the ‘Arran Boat Song’ is in *Kerr’s Merry Melodies* published in 1875, yet the melody was in use as early as the eighteenth century (Kerr, 1875). It appears in the *Scot’s Musical Museum* set to the text ‘The Banks of the Devon’ by Robert Burns and it was stated by the early nineteenth-century periodical *The Celtic Monthly: A Magazine for Highlanders*, that Burns married the popular Highland melody to his own text (Burns et al., 1787, p.165; Mackay, 1895, p.158). At this point, the melody which Burns collected was associated with the Highlands and it is unclear how it was linked in later years with the Isle of Arran.

Misspellings in the name complicated the origins of the melody further as noted by one of the contributors in the traditional music forum mudcat.org, who stated in November 1999:

The confusion comes with so many recordings with the tune of the Scottish Ballad (Queen Mary’s Escape) spelling it ‘The Aran Boat’ (as Irish). I now think it must be a case of people leaving out the ‘r’ and not realizing they are switching the location from Scotland to Ireland (1999).

The conversation within this forum was adamant that the origins were Scots and not from the Irish island of Aran. The close resemblance of Burns’s melody to current popularly played version of the ‘Arran Boat Song’ would suggest that at least from the eighteenth century onwards, the melody has been closely linked with Scotland.

With so many forms of the song in existence, a choice had to be made as to the version that would be performed during *B1C*. Though the text to Burns’s ‘The Banks of the Devon’ references an idyllic pastoral countryside, that could
represent the landscape of Arran, there are too many references to specific place names to effectively argue for its use within this context. The same could be said of ‘Queen Mary’s Escape’, the version of the song that was chosen for this performance. However, the lyrics performed on the night did not specifically reference Loch Leven, and still maintained the evocative legend of Mary’s escape across treacherous waters.

While a HIP approach was employed in the examination of archival materials to assist the decision making regarding melody and text, the use of historical instruments, which may have justified the historical nature of the materials performed, was quickly ruled out. The unaccompanied voice was chosen as the primary medium for performing all the songs in BtC, as it represents a closer link with prehistory. Music archaeologist Iain Morley points out that ‘musical capabilities are likely to have pre-dated the occurrences of instruments in the archaeological record by many years’ (2013, p.32). The use of unaccompanied voice is more closely connected with the prehistorical past, where the small amount of materials that exist can only be interpreted through a perceived understanding of use. The physical artefact (in this case, music notation) may provide some clues as to musical pitch and rhythm, but the embodiment, expression and timbre of the sound produced is subject to interpretation, largely determined by the past experiences of the performer.

Robertson-Kirkland’s singing voice has been greatly influenced by training in the Western classical style and as such has a recognisably cultivated sound. However, the pedagogy which her practice is a product of also has a complex oral / notated tradition. Similar to the interpretation of archaeological remains, vocal heritage and culture is influenced by the experiences of the individual—what is known about the past has been contaminated by the
experience of individuals and the culture which surrounds them. Any attempt at an authentic performance is an unachieviable goal since many of the performative aspects of song cannot be and have not been notated, and moreover each individual will have a different bodily sound. The unaccompanied voice then highlights the singer’s individual interpretation, the physical training regimes needed to produce sound, as well as the ephemerality of singing practices. Its use gestures towards the uncertainty of the past and differs from realist styles of heritage performance, which may include ‘authentic’ instruments as a way of projecting a stable, knowable approach to these practices.

This concern became increasingly pronounced as the performance moved further back in time towards ever more elusive historical periods. While it may have seemed more appropriate to perform an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century song such as ‘Queen Mary’s Escape’ in one of the island’s main tourist attractions such as Brodick Castle, we wished to address the many temporal layers of Arran’s cultural history within the performance. Though the inside of Brodick Castle is decorated in an early- to mid-nineteenth-century style typical of a heritage estate, its name reveals a much more diverse cultural past. The word Brodick is from the Old Norse Breiðvik meaning Broad Bay and it is known that Vikings resided on the island as early as the twelfth century (Campbell, 2013, p.122). Performing the Danish song, ‘Drømte Mig en Drøm’, one of the earliest secular songs dated from that period in front of the main tower house, specifically engaged with a history of the castle that is less discussed, particularly as there are limited written sources from that period on the island. It should be noted that it was not the internal decor of the castle that provided the appropriate historical ‘dressing’ for the song. Rather, the outside castle wall combined with the name of the castle and the song provided the historical context. The performance relied upon the audience’s own archaeological
ability to connect the various etymological strands to fully understand the moment.

The song, which can be translated as ‘I dreamed a dream’, is a Danish ballad originally written in runic notation and old Danish. It can be found on the last page of text in the Codex Runicus, a law book dating from around 1300 AD. The song in this format is only a fragment and there are multiple interpretations that span written history. It offered a connection to the history of Arran but also bridged history and prehistory. The lyrics have been debated, with some scholars suggesting that it is a romantic ballad and others interpreting it to be a song discussing equality in keeping with the rest of the book in which it was found (Wright, 2015, p.2). In our interpretation, it represented a tangible transition from a (partially) documented past to an even more elusive past, as well as a physical transition: the song was performed in front of Brodick Castle as the sun dipped below the horizon and was the final stop before the walk to the burning pyres.

**Public engagement as interpretative participation**

As these two performed moments demonstrate, the different stations of the walk did not aim to recreate historical events, rather they gathered together manifold traces of the island’s past and contemporary cultural practices, layering them, to create a kind of dense temporal palimpsest. This, together with the dramaturgical arc of the performance that took the audience from the present into the past, resulted from a desire to avoid ‘tidying up [the past]’ by ‘reducing it to a cause and effect logic’ (Johnson, 2012, p.63). The spectators were presented with fragments of the island’s near and distant past and called upon to make sense of the different pieces. They were led between these fragments by Brophy, dressed in shaman-like garb, remaining ceremonially silent and with little to frame the segments that would have made the connections between
them obvious. In this way BtC differed from more familiar forms of heritage performances that focus on dramatic (and often comic) narration of past events. The initial confusion of the spectators, who were perhaps expecting a more traditional style of performance, was palpable but soon turned into a contemplative attitude as they were led between the different moments. What we intended to effect was a mode of watching wherein spectators were asked to speculate on the significance of the different fragments, to interpret the remains they encountered and to come to terms with the uncertainty of any understanding arrived at; wrestling in other words with the challenges of both archaeology and performance.

The performance’s dramaturgy reflected the untidiness and anxiety of engaging with remains of the past by drawing attention to fragments and only partial appearances, prompting us to face the fact that in dealing with the past we need to maintain an awareness of gaps, absences, and non-knowledge. Simultaneously, such a dramaturgical form may stimulate in the spectator what Lehmann calls ‘synaesthesia’ that is typical of postdramatic theatres: a state wherein ‘the human sensory apparatus’ that ‘does not easily tolerate disconnectedness’ goes ‘wild’, becoming hyperactive in its ‘search for traces’ to make sense of the fragments (2006, p.84). Crucially, synaesthetic watching does not close the gaps or synthesise the fragments but is ‘accompanyed by a helpless focussing on perception of the things offered’ (ibid.). Such a fragmentary dramaturgy confronts the spectator with our compulsion towards the act of interpretation while at the same time foreclosing the possibility of an exhaustive and absolute interpretation of the past (as any connections made will inevitably remain subjective, temporary and contingent). It emulates the methods of post-processual archaeology which hinge on interpretative participation in knowledge-making.
We would like to suggest that the dramaturgical frame employed in the performative walk primed spectators for engaging with the elements of soft experimental archaeology in such creative and critical ways. A central underpinning of this strategy is the notion that materials used in cultural practices are not passive vehicles that are inscribed with meaning by humans but that, as Nicole Boivin suggests, material culture is ‘able to alter human thought and understanding by relating it directly to experience of the material world, the environment, the body, and the emotions’ (2015, p.283). From this point of view, objects and materials we engage with are co-creators of our understanding of the world. Equipped with some basic information about the cosmology surrounding prehistoric landscapes through a short talk delivered by MacGregor at the foot of the hill, spectators were invited to engage sensorially with the materials of Neolithic timber monuments and to use their own experience of the materials to speculate on how they might have contributed to particular ways of experiencing the world.

The final section of BtC involved setting alight the reconstructed Neolithic timber circle built by our collaborators on a field above Brodick estate at the foot of Arran’s highest peak, Goat Fell, overlooking Brodick Bay. The site, situated between water and sky, captured the landscape’s most prominent features. In the last vestiges of dusk, spectators followed the shaman-like figure drumming a simple beat and chanting up the hill. Arriving in near-total darkness they watched as helpers lit the timber poles as well as pyres filled with various materials. As the fire illuminated the landscape its material force and particular affective qualities came to the fore. The material encounter with the fire was intended to stimulate questions about the past practices being re-created in the audience. These might have included: since flames obscure sight, create illusions of movements and shapes as much as they illuminate and cut through the dark—what kind of view of the world, of what is
real and what is not, does a culture so intimately familiar with fire produce? How did fire’s dual nature, as both life-giving and life-consuming, feature in Neolithic cosmology? What kind of formations, ways of moving around a site, do timber circles inspire and what configurations of a community might they speak to?

By letting spectators experience a potential configuration of elements that are known to have been used in Neolithic ritual practices—circular structures, timber, fire—we intended to trial an experiential rather than primarily cognitive approach to engaging audiences with prehistory. The spectators were asked to adopt an archaeological mode of thinking through our use of a postdramatic dramaturgical framing of the event as a whole.
It must be acknowledged that our contemporary, twenty-first-century understanding of the materials—darkness, fire, wood, etc.—cannot be simply eclipsed or transcended. Importantly, animating the material fragments in performance allowed us to gesture towards the complex temporal modes involved in both archaeological research and in performance. Adrian Heathfield describes very precisely the strangeness of the time of performance, he writes: ‘the event is too full and seems too quick for you to know or contain it, which makes you feel like you were never fully there’ (2000, p.84). Performance then does not
allow us to arrive at the present moment, it confronts us with a constant sense of lagging behind, of not quite being able to grasp what is happening before us, of missing something. This temporal dissonance ultimately points towards one of the core difficulties that confronts archaeologists, namely that while archaeologists may be able to retrieve objects and things from the past: ‘[Archaeological evidence] exist[s] in the present, yet the world in which [these things] had meaning is gone. We give them meaning through an activity which is productive and interpretive. We produce the past in the present’ (Pearson and Thomas, 1994, p.144). Performance might then expose how archaeological remains (whether authentic or reconstructed as in our case) and our experience of them are always mediated through manifold temporal layers, deferring any access to an original meaning. In doing so, performance might highlight the interpretative work that goes into constructing the past.

In this way, our approach differed from traditional re-enactments which are often ‘neutered’ of affects (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, p.117). Divorced from their temporal-cultural context, reconstructions of cultural activities such as pyre burnings lack investment by participants since there are no real stakes. We might contend that the re-enactment turns rituals or similar cultural activities, which mean to effect something (marking of the passage of time, tiding over a spirit, etc.), into afformatives in Lehmann’s words: non-actions, ‘somehow nonperformative in the proximity of performance’ (2006, p.179). Rather than viewing this quality of non-doing and inauthenticity as a problem, we wanted to investigate the potential of imitation, copying, doubling. Contextualised through the preceding walking performance that resisted realist forms, instead engaging overtly in mediation and artifice, the pyre burning became less about a faithful reconstruction that would inevitably fail due to a lack of participant investment. Instead, it asked spectators to engage with the materials and
actions as remains and fragments that cannot tell the whole story but might project some of their force, significance, or affective charge into the present, allowing spectators to speculate via their contemporary experience about the past significance of these materials in a ‘fusion of horizons’.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, *BtC* drew on the specific potentials of performance—both musical and theatrical—to engage non-specialist audiences with Arran’s archaeological heritage and, perhaps more importantly, our ways of interpreting the remains of that heritage. Throughout the project, we were attentive to the particular epistemic possibilities of performance. That is, we were interested in how performance might inflect and trouble dominant ways of knowing by insisting on the ephemerality of cultural activities, upsetting any sense of definitive ‘knowability’ of the past, while also highlighting its ability to encounter the remains of the past in the present.

Such an approach conceives of performance as a way of thinking. It relies upon performance activities producing formally specific insights, their being as a medium and the modes of sensorial engagement they produce. To us this seems like a productive way of approaching the role of artist researchers in interdisciplinary public engagement activities, since it creates the conditions under which disciplinary knowledges and methods can meet and modify each other: in *BtC* spectators were encouraged not only to develop an understanding of the island’s archaeology but to also engage with such ‘performance thinking’.

However, our approach sits at odds with advice given by national bodies such as the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) who emphasise data collection via traditional methods such as feedback
questionnaires as a measure of success (n.d.). Live performance does not necessarily have clear quantitative or qualitative goals that can be formally obtained through traditional methods, though performance can have a lasting impact that changes the audience’s mode of thinking. If researchers want to design and deliver enjoyable, striking and—most importantly—effective public engagement activities, it is vital that we seek to understand what spectators make of our offers and for this reason we believe that more creative modes for capturing this are needed. This is especially the case for projects that, like ours, invest in the ability of creative practice to affect, provoke and stimulate spectators in unpredictable and open-ended ways. The next step for us then, planned as part of the next iteration of Burning the Circle in 2017, is to devise methods for capturing spectators’ experiences and theorising these in relation to our aims and aspirations.

Notes

1. In using this term we find RCUK’s list that public engagement might encompass: ‘generat[ing] public awareness’, ‘communicat[ing] research outcomes’ and ‘dissimilat[ing] knowledge’ (n.d., p.1) particularly useful.

2. This event was building on an existing collaboration between Brophy, MacGregor and Goeckeritz who had already staged the first BIC in 2013 in the same location. Baxter, Berger and Robertson-Kirkland joined after taking part in a public humanities workshop run by Brophy and MacGregor and as such, the location and time scale for the 2014 event were already fixed.

3. Experimental archaeology tests the viability of hypotheses developed from material remains by replicating behaviours of prehistoric communities. Here, the attempt was to record data on the kind of remains created by burning pyres to compare them to actual remains found elsewhere. As the parameters of the experiment were informal and ad hoc, Brophy and MacGregor suggest describing this as a ‘soft’ method as opposed to ‘hard’ science (Brophy and MacGregor, 2014).

4. In the 1990s theatre-maker and performance scholar Mike Pearson entered a sustained period of collaborative work with classicist Michael Shanks and archaeologist Julian Thomas. Much of the thinking and creative practice that emerged from this period is laid out in Pearson and Shanks’s book Theatre/Archaeology (2001). A central tenet of this work is that the two disciplines overlap in their
‘functioning as modes of cultural production, involving the recontextualisation of material rather than its reconstruction’ (p.xi). We build on this finding here, specifically rethinking it in light of the public engagement turn.

5. There are of course notable exceptions to this. See, for example: Smith (2013) as well as the works of NVA reviewed by Brophy (2006) and Berger (2016). However, to our best knowledge postdramatic forms in public engagement contexts specifically have not yet been discussed.

6. The NCCPE encourage researchers to ‘think about “communities of place”, targeting people by where they live, or “communities of interest”, where it is people’s interests, passions or other shared circumstances which help to focus the engagement’ (NCCPE, n.d.). This was also our approach here.

7. Robert Toft and John Potter both discuss the complexities of the history of vocal pedagogy (Toft, 2013; Potter, 2012).

8. The burning of clay pots, a chicken carcass and other materials were a feature of the soft experimental archaeology undertaken by Brophy and MacGregor.

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About the authors

CARA BERGER is a lecturer in Drama at University of Manchester. She has a background as a theatre-maker and has completed a
practice-as-research PhD (2014) that draws on *écriture féminine* to frame postdramatic theatre aesthetics in relation to feminist politics. Her research focuses on postdramatic theatre, practice research and critical theory.

BRIANNA E. ROBERTSON-KIRKLAND is a singer and researcher and recently completed her PhD research on the castrato singer Venanzio Rauzzini (1746–1810) and his students. She will continue her research on eighteenth-century music education in Sydney, Australia supported by the Ross Fund, and Chawton House, Southampton supported by the BSECS Visiting Fellowship award.
Devolutionary sites: NVA, Grid Iron and Scottish site-specificity in the 1990s

ANDRÁS BECK

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The aim of this article is to analyse the ways in which the productions of Scottish site-specific companies NVA and Grid Iron responded to the main political processes in Scotland in the 1990s, such as devolution. NVA’s initial engagement with post-industrial landscapes was motivated by political protest, but their later projects focused on technology and global connectivity through cross-media collaborations until the end of the decade, when they ventured to rural areas in their exploration of spirituality in the human-nature relationship. In all of their projects, site-specificity proved to be a convenient and highly innovative tool for creating a symbiosis between a site and the ethical concerns raised in it, whether economic, political, scientific or ecological. On the other hand, Grid Iron has been distinguished by its equal interest in new writing and site-specificity, thus contributing to the growing corpus of contemporary Scottish writing as well as engaging with identity politics.

Keywords: devolution, Scotland, site-specific theatre, Grid Iron, NVA

The decade of the 1990s saw the powerful and irreversible redefinition of Scotland. Between Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s resignation in 1990 and the beginning of the new millennium, the country acquired an additional, more local layer of decision-making in the form of a devolved Parliament (opened in 1999), and the series of major
changes that led to the (re-)estabishment of this institution also caused a seismic shift in Scottish identities. The key concepts of the age, such as community-building, locality, novelty, the re-evaluation of the past and the search for alternative solutions made a significant impact on all aspects of public life including the performing arts, a particularly dynamic field in the 1990s. Emerging playwrights David Greig and David Harrower would become a long-lasting influence on world drama with their work performed, translated and studied globally, but beyond the proscenium arch, a major legacy of the decade leading into the new millennium was site-specific performances becoming an organic constituent of the country’s theatre ecology. Besides evident institutional factors such as the shortage of small touring circuits (Wilkie, 2002), the mushrooming of site-specific practices provided ‘a conscious alternative to the dramatic dominance of London’ (Hodge and Turner, 2012, p.102), and they found resonance with the above-mentioned devolutionary key concepts. The aim of this article is to analyse how site-specific productions responded to them, particularly to community-building and locality.

I will turn to the country’s first theatre companies consistently dedicated to the field since the 1990s, namely NVA (founded in Glasgow in 1992) and Grid Iron (founded in Edinburgh in 1995). Even though these two companies’ understanding of site, performance and politics have been radically different since their early days, they are brought together here to reveal different, sometimes opposing aspects of the evolution of site-specific theatre in the 1990s, and to give an insight into the conceptual diversity of the sites of Scottish devolution.
Connecting and reconnecting: post-industrial, digital and rural landscapes in the NVA productions of the 1990s

Widely regarded as Scotland’s first performing company with an exclusively site-specific profile, NVA was founded in Glasgow in 1992 by Angus Farquhar (b.1961), and has remained a defining influence on the country’s arts scene ever since. As their webpage explains, ‘NVA is an acronym of *nationale vita activa*, expressing the Ancient Greek ideal of a lively democracy, where actions and words shared among a community of equals, bring new thinking into the world’ (NVA, n.d.). As seen from this manifesto encoded in their name, innovation, community-building and politics have been at the heart of NVA’s mission, and, as this section argues, site-specificity served as a natural and highly effective way of engaging with these concepts.

Fiona Wilkie explains that site-specificity entered theatre practice in the United Kingdom from other art forms such as sculpture in the second half of the 1980s; NVA conforms to this idea of creative exchange between artists from different contexts since the company grew out of Farquhar’s decade-long career as a member of the cult 1980s band Test Dept (2002, p.141). Founded in London in 1981, Test Dept produced experimental post-industrial music, often in collaboration, and with an explicitly anti-Thatcherite agenda. The search for unusual alternatives to traditional venues became their trademark. After their success with Brith Gof’s seminal *Gododdin* (1988) and their relaunching of the pre-Christian Beltane Festival on Edinburgh’s Calton Hill in the late 1980s, they were commissioned to produce a site-specific show for Glasgow’s City of Culture project in 1990, which resulted in *The Second Coming*. The work was staged at St Rollox Locomotive Works, a functioning locomotive yard in Glasgow, which Test Dept turned into a Thatcherite industrial theme park. The locomotive yard in *The Second Coming* connotes movement, power and connectivity, symbolising the climax of industrial Europe,
its future equally threatened by an emerging inhuman world order and massive industry closures. Mark Sinker emphasises this when recalling that ‘by the end the distant walls had melted into the world all round: as if soon-to-close Ravenscraig and soon-to-close Clydeside were simultaneously visible, along with the whole of the rest of a revived / recuperated Glasgow’ (1991, p.16). As a consequence, the found space of the locomotive yard becomes a multi-layered signifier in The Second Coming, since it is a strongly Glaswegian yet globally manifest landscape responding simultaneously to history, class and contemporary politics.

When discussing his devising methodology, this complex treatment of site is described by Farquhar as ‘finding locations, and then building up a more and more sophisticated response to locations in the sense of building the work itself around the history of what [was] found there, the people and the actual materials of each place’ (2014). This sensitivity to the diachronic and human dynamics of the places in which he has staged works started with The Second Coming, which he credits as his transition from music ‘to directing and doing more directly performance work’ (Farquhar, 2014).

NVA can be seen as Test Dept’s natural successor, even though it gradually developed different subject matter and lines of inquiry. The first NVA projects, Sabotage (1993) and Soundworks (1994), were less theatrical than Test Dept’s final productions as they invited a wide range of national and international artists representing a variety of disciplines in order to create a joint large-scale event. Soundworks blurred the borders between sculpture and sounds in a musical experience centred on objects. Farquhar describes the conceptual framework of NVA’s first phase as follows:
In the 1990s, very much was about what they would call cross-media and cross-border collaboration, that sense of drawing narratives from bringing together, say, film-makers, musicians, architects, scenographers, directors. We were creating these hybrid works, and again, the two areas of innovation were the choice of location and particularly in that period, I was interested in technical innovation (Farquhar, 2014).

Collaboration, location and technology are the key words he identifies for the company’s cross-media projects; Joanne Zerdy also highlights NVA’s ‘cross-disciplinary linkages between the performing and visual arts, humanities, and the physical and social sciences’ (2014, p.103).

These initial inquiries culminated in two truly global performances, Stormy Waters (1995) and Virtual World Orchestra (1996), both broadcast live worldwide on the Internet. Farquhar highlights that the essence of these shows was ‘pioneering connectivity’ as a result of his ‘belief in non-geographical community’, and they also celebrated a new sense of democracy since it was not media moguls but a small arts organisation in control of creating and transmitting images (2014). In Stormy Waters, more than fifty international and local artists set out to respond to Glasgow’s post-industrial landscapes, creating music and digital images to be projected on to shipyard buildings, recorded, and broadcast through Glasgow University’s website. More than just the broadcasting of the event, the virtual audience’s reception was also part of the project, as Farquhar puts it, ‘seeing how people from their own perspective might see a particular building or historic powerhouse that built the city’ (2014). As a result, Stormy Waters transported Glasgow’s historic buildings into a newly emergent, virtual reality transcending physicality and geography, thus creating an ephemeral but democratic site that could be accessed by early cybernauts all over Europe.
and beyond.

After temporarily transferring to the virtual sites of cyberspace, Farquhar felt uncomfortable with what he saw as simply ‘beta-testing new technology for American corporations’ and ‘being run by technology’, so in the final years of the 1990s a redefining shift occurred in NVA’s trajectory (2014). The company, previously engaged with the physical and political landscapes of post-industrial Britain and the new horizons of early digital culture, now found itself leaving the strongly urban context for Scotland’s natural environment in order to engage with its unexplored dramatic potential. This inquiry, however, was not without precedent, as Farquhar acknowledges that the success of the Beltane Festival on Calton Hill was crucial for the Scottish Arts Council when encouraging and commissioning NVA productions for rural settings, since ‘nobody else had this history of spiritual relationship to landscape’ (2014).

NVA’s major performances of this kind at the turn of the millennium, The Secret Sign (1998) and The Path (2000), invited urban audiences to rural environments, where the strategically devised elements of performance, soundscapes and lights juxtaposed with the majestic timelessness of Scotland’s geography, and urged people’s reconnection with the land through a strong spiritual experience. In The Secret Sign, audience members wearing hard hats descended a gorge in Stirlingshire at night, whereas, The Path merged pilgrimage, wandering and Tibetan philosophy in creating a walk through Glen Lyon, Perthshire; both projects were accompanied by lights, sounds and projections. The prominent spiritual dimension also brought with it ecological issues, since staging work with light and sound installations at protected natural settings, together with the increased human presence at these unspoilt locations, could potentially have a long-lasting negative effect on the sites. Farquhar explains that the
phrase 'how you make your work is as important as why' summarises NVA's chief ethical principle, and minimising the damage caused by footfall and generators became a 'set of creative challenges' to be resolved by innovative technology (2014). This ecological sensitivity is part of the novel relationship to nature that NVA explores in their environmental phase, inspired by a spirituality built on the pre-Christian notion of transcendence in flora, fauna and geology. Therefore, the encounters between audiences and natural locations in these productions promote a more organic place for humans in the biosphere, without recourse to particular neo-pagan or environmentalist clichés.

Even though The Secret Sign and The Path seem to exemplify an apparent detachment from their contemporary political context by transmitting a more universal message far from inhabited lands, they do reflect the changes Scotland was experiencing at the time of their staging. Farquhar's description of the mechanics of rural performance mirrors pro-devolutionary political discourse, as the decentralisation of power through empowering the local is the essence of both:

I was focusing for one or two years on working with small, local communities, establishing really strong contacts, involving people through employment in the work, and for me the important thing was that you weren't comparing yourself with the reality that was reflected through mainstream media around big cities. You felt you could do this work in really small places, and be the centre of your own world. The nice thing with the Internet is that you're able to circumvent some of those power relationships. Even though you're on a tiny island off the West coast of Scotland, you can really speak to a wide audience, the ideas can go out and transfer across the world (Farquhar, 2014).
As a result, NVA understood ‘site’ not as an isolated piece of land transformed for a production, but rather as an organic element in a broader framework. Connected to its immediate surroundings, and more importantly to the human dynamics of the area by numerous relationships, site becomes meaningful for the global community through the virtual presence of the project. This political agenda of empowering the local is not far from Test Dept’s agitprop a decade earlier, as it is fuelled by the same determination to catalyse positive social changes.

Farquhar’s projects have proved to have a long-lasting influence on the Scottish arts scene by promoting site-specificity over decades, first defining the concept to audiences and critics, and then redefining it on several occasions. Their initial engagement with post-industrial landscapes was motivated by political protest in order to represent working-class masculinity and the devastating effects of Thatcherite capitalism, whereas in the 1990s their projects began to focus increasingly on technology and global connectivity through cross-media collaborations. At the end of the decade, NVA started venturing into rural areas in their exploration of spirituality in the human-nature relationship and ecological issues. As seen from this brief timeline, ethical concerns, whether economic, political, scientific or ecological, have always been at the core of Farquhar’s projects, and site-specific aesthetics have proven to be a convenient and highly innovative tool for expressing and problematising them at the right place, thus creating a symbiosis between the place of performance and the questions raised in it.

**The intimacies of theatre: the emergence and early productions of Grid Iron**

Farquhar recalls that from the last years of the 1990s onwards, he ceased to regard his NVA productions as site-specific theatre, since they gradually moved away from the
performing arts into a direction that he labels as public art, a hybrid multidisciplinary way of responding to sites with no dominant theatrical element (2014). At around this time, Grid Iron Theatre Company was founded in Edinburgh. As the company’s director Ben Harrison notes, at the time Grid Iron emerged, site-specific theatre ‘wasn’t new, Brith Gof, Neil Butler, Deborah Warner, a lot of artists had been doing it before [them] but when [Grid Iron] did it, it caught the imagination of the media somehow in a big way’ (2014). Harrison further lists two Scottish forerunners as influential for Grid Iron’s early phase: Gerry Mulgrew’s Communicado for their interest in European forms, joyous representations and ‘more exotic, innovative style,’ and NVA:

[NVA] were an influence but they also were not competition because of their interest in landscape, as we were more interested in urban topography and structures, whereas Angus [Farquhar] always tends to be more interested in landscapes and environment and less in text and character. We see it as a dance between the site on one hand and the text on the other. But it was encouraging that he was able to deliver those projects and there was clearly an audience who wanted to go into the countryside and prepared to be rather adventurous (Harrison, 2014).

A major difference between the two companies that Harrison highlights here is the quality of literariness, including elements such as text and character. While these form an indispensable part of Grid Iron’s productions, they have never been more than optional in Farquhar’s projects. As a consequence, Grid Iron has been distinguished by its equal interest in new writing and site-specific aesthetics, thus contributing to the growing corpus of contemporary Scottish writing as well as pioneering the methodology of staging work at found spaces.

This site-specific focus, according to Trish Reid, ‘has allowed
[Grid Iron] to engage creatively and influentially with the shifting dynamics of the contemporary Scottish theatre scene and with identity politics in Scotland in the aftermath of devolution’ (2013, p.178). It emerged as Harrison’s reaction against the proscenium arch and his resulting quest for a new, more meaningful experience for audiences and theatre-makers alike. He describes how, after his experience at the Edinburgh International Festival and Festival Fringe, he was ‘wondering why [they] didn’t use the extraordinary buildings of [the] city, both landscapes and topographies, both outside and inside’, drawing him to the already established but not yet mainstream aesthetics of site-specific theatre (2014). The politics of site-specificity further deepened his engagement with this movement, since, when staging at non-theatre venues, ‘you’re immediately and implicitly challenging all the structures that create [...] theatres’, especially in promenade work, which challenges the idea of the audience sitting passively, simply absorbing material similarly to a classroom or TV-room context (2014). Empowering the audience and transgressing traditional boundaries, then, became crucial in Grid Iron’s understanding of site-specific theatre. This relates back to the immediate historical background of the late 1990s when devolution reshaped power structures in the UK, and the Internet, as Harrison observes, ‘has made people feel, which is an illusion really, that they are more in control, particularly of culture’ (2014).

Grid Iron’s other pillar, the text, has been essential since their very first production, and unlike most of Scotland’s site-specific works, several of Grid Iron’s original playtexts have been published commercially (for example Decky Does a Bronco [2000] and Variety [2002], both written by Douglas Maxwell). Besides staging new writing commissions, the company has also adapted classics, created collages and devised productions involving the cast and crew members. The relationship between site and text, however, constitutes the dynamics of the productions, and
as Harrison explains, ‘[w]hen you get it right, this magic chemistry happens, where both the site and the text or the concept are much greater than they would be otherwise’ (2014). Therefore, the site serves as an interpretative framework for the text, which in return transforms the physicality of the place into an imaginary landscape, thus creating an ephemeral and intimate experience for audiences.

Grid Iron’s early projects, The Bloody Chamber (1997) and Gargantua (1998), achieved this chemistry by choosing private spaces (with access for ordinary citizens highly restricted), as the venue for texts with magical realist elements. The Bloody Chamber, an adaptation of Angela Carter’s novella by the same name based on Charles Perrault’s ‘Bluebeard’ was staged at Mary King’s Close beneath Edinburgh’s Royal Mile during the 1997 Festival Fringe. The dark, supposedly haunted chambers hidden next to one of the city’s busiest landmarks provided an intimate yet eerie space for the exploration of sexuality, repression and redemption through Carter’s magical realist classic. At the Fringe the following year, Gargantua examined the concepts of Carnival and Lent, translated as workdays and weekends into contemporary terms, partly devised using the actors’ personal stories about food and partly based on François Rabelais’s sixteenth-century The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel novels. The performances took place in an old bank building, itself connoting a strict work ethic and wealth accumulation, which Gargantua ironically transformed into a joyous theatre venue, juxtaposing hedonism and Calvinism, desire and austerity in the production.

The last Grid Iron shows of the decade, Monumental (1999) and Decky Does a Bronco (2000), demonstrate an organic development from the style and subject matter of the early pieces into a different aesthetic direction. Monumental,
scripted by Anita Sullivan, stages a Scottish teenager (Mel) guided through the city of Moscow’s past and present by Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky’s reanimated statue (Vlad). Sullivan dramatises the confusing co-presence of tsarist, Soviet and capitalist landmarks, juxtaposing the city’s current embracing of triumphant Western-style consumerism with the monuments of another world order turned into empty signifiers. For Sullivan, ‘the very position of Mayakovsky’s statue staring out defiantly at the Stalin Towers and McDonald’s’ was a moment of epiphany during her own tour of the city, leading to an understanding of how Moscow’s ‘political past was a living pulse, imbedded not just in the architecture but in how people think and feel’ (2014). The characters’ tour of the city parallels Walter Benjamin’s psychogeography, as the route they follow is defined with minuscule accuracy on the real map by constant references to street names and metro stations. Still, the physicality of the places is blurred by Mel and Vlad’s transcendence of time, travelling back and forth between the 1920s and the 1990s; much of Monumental’s dynamics rely on Vlad’s vivid personal recollection of the city in the 1920s, allowing Mel to penetrate the iconic spaces of the past and thus giving an active and productive role to memory.

Monumental’s interest in the physicality of the past and its plot of a young Westerner’s voyeuristic penetration into Russia’s landscapes of memory seemed to call for the play to be staged as a site-specific production, and Grid Iron chose Glasgow’s Citizens Theatre and the surrounding streets to stage it. Ben Harrison explains:

[t]he two reasons [they] did it there are because the Citizens Theatre has got a lot of statues in its foyer, and the play is very predicated on the idea of a statue coming to life, and also [they] felt the Gorbals housing estate would look like a Stalinist housing project (Harrison, 2014).
This recreation of historic and contemporary Moscow in Glasgow, also reinforced by the Clydeside’s important working-class heritage and the Gorbals’ functionalist architecture, resulted in an eclectic but mainly promenade production. After the scenes staged in the Citizens Theatre’s foyer, the bar, the scene-dock and stage, the cast and the audience were to advance to the adjacent streets where unexpectedly, local children from the housing estates awaited them. As Sullivan describes the experience,

The kids became an impromptu part of the show, a mob: ‘you can say what you like to the audience, but no touching and no spitting’. They were interested enough in what was happening to stick to those basic rules. And for the rest of the run, sometimes some of them would drop in, take part, make noise, disappear into the night. Or hang about and watch (Sullivan, 2014).

In Harrison’s opinion, the ‘promenade didn’t support the play [...], it was odd’. However, the experience of leaving the sealed, private spaces of the earlier performances and venturing into a public space with unexpected elements such as the Gorbals’ children proved to be fruitful for Grid Iron; when devising their subsequent productions, they were specifically looking for similarly public spaces (Harrison, 2014).

*Decky Does a Bronco*, written by Douglas Maxwell and premièred at Brodie Park in Paisley on 28 June 2000, is not only arguably Grid Iron’s most memorable production, but is a key event in the trajectory of Scottish site-specific theatre. The media attention around the production’s 2000 première was without precedent, as Harrison explains:

The papers were saying things like ‘this production revolutionises the idea of what makes a stage.’ It was a big paper, and quite a big
statement to make. These comments would not be made about our work now (Harrison, 2014).

The reason for this attention was the production’s perfectly achieved symbiosis between the outdoor space (a swing park) as site, and Maxwell’s daring multi-layered text responding to it, merging comedy and tragedy, and inviting its audiences’ own childhood memories to the performance in the first part while dramatising the aftermath of a child’s rape and murder in the second. The surviving children’s abrupt rite of passage to adulthood by this tragic loss of innocence is in sharp contrast not only to the more light-hearted first part and the memories it evokes from the audience, but also to the found space of a functioning swing park with real children playing in it, as Reid observes, creating ‘a kind of palimpsest of memory and nostalgia’ (2013, p.180).

The search for the adequate site took Grid Iron’s creative team across the West Coast of Scotland and the Isle of Skye, where Harrison had a defining moment of epiphany when interacting with local children, which he recalls as follows:

[As we left, a twelve-year-old girl called after us and said, ’Just remember, it’s our swing park!’ It was a very profound moment for me because we thought we got to seal the park for our audience, we can’t have those kids coming in and disrupting the play but she made us realise that of course it was their space, it was designed for them so then we kept it very open (Harrison, 2014).

As a result (and learning from Monumentals street scenes), the ownership of the site was designed to be democratic and inclusive, allowing daily life outside the performance to penetrate the show. This provided audiences with a double-sided referential framework since it lent a much higher
degree of realism to the experience, while the innocence of real children also stood in contrast to the horrifying fictional events discussed in the second act. Thus, the fluid borders of the site simultaneously served as an almost Brechtian distancing effect and a tool for audience immersion.

*Decky Does a Bronco*’s opening monologue celebrates the swing park as a landscape of childhood memory, acting ‘as a key in a lock for the memories of the audience. They are each in their own playground’ (Maxwell, 2013). The audience’s gaze is not directed at this point; they are left to immerse themselves in the site-specific experience. With this, Maxwell seeks to evoke and project the landscapes of individual audience members’ memories onto the found space, thus personalising the whole experience through the text-site relationship. The initial stage directions also describe a distancing element: the silhouette of the giant adult swings specifically created for the show, evoking gallows or Golgotha. This prominent element in the production design, ‘a huge scratchy alien spider’, looks even more threatening from the audience’s perspective as the very small seats placed in a circle around the swings created the illusion of shrinking (Maxwell, 2011, p.13). This is a reminder of the perception of the world lost while growing up, and a symbol for the characters’ abrupt rite of passage into adulthood, which prematurely deprives them of childhood innocence but will never permit their integration into adult society.

The critical and commercial success of *Decky Does a Bronco*, then, is the result of Grid Iron’s years of experimentation with sites and texts. The innovative and confident management of the found space’s properties, both practical and symbolic, reached a point where they fully matched the dynamics of Maxwell’s play. In this perfect chemistry, the physicality of the swing park was essential in establishing a memory play framework and immersion for
audiences, whereas the juxtaposition of nostalgic recollection and the tragedy of child abuse in the structure of the plot created diverse imaginary landscapes from the simple setting. Therefore, the production transcended the sum of its parts and it became an organic, intimate theatrical experience.

**Conclusion**

Growing out of Test Dept, Angus Farquhar’s NVA proved to have a long-lasting influence on the Scottish arts scene in spite of their cyclical redefinition of focus and methodology. Leaving their initial commitment to direct political struggle and agitprop behind, they turned to cross-media collaborations to pioneer global digital connectivity, but by the end of the 1990s, they abandoned cyberspace to explore the possibility of a spiritual reconnection with nature. Since then, their multidisciplinary approach to productions and installations has been much less theatrical, and Farquhar began to label their projects as public art instead of site-specific theatre. With Ben Harrison’s Grid Iron, a new and strongly theatrical response to sites emerged, partly as the company director’s reaction against the proscenium arch. In their quest for unusual venues and matching literary texts, they pioneered the symbiosis of contemporary Scottish writing and staging at public spaces, culminating in *Deeky Does a Bronco*, thus establishing a performance mode still identified by many as mainstream site-specificity, inspiring companies such as David Leddy’s Fire Exit, Poorboy or Highway Diner.

When analysing a later NVA production, *Half Life* (2007), Zerdy observes how Farquhar’s company ‘directs our attention not only to the politics layered into any representation [...] of the external world but also to the more-than-human entities whose presence, growth, and decay forge the conditions that make [...] Scotland tangible’ (2014, p.103). This political subtext and the sense of
tangibility she identifies in Half Life are even more powerful in the productions analysed in this article. From *The Second Coming*’s industrial yard to *Decky Does a Bronco*’s real children in the park, site-specificity in the 1990s responded to a rapidly changing new Scottish reality by finding alternative venues, building communities and projecting a possible, and, through site-specificity, a tangible political future for the country.

**Notes**

1. Joanne Tompkins explains that ‘site-specific performance was a significant form of theatre internationally in the 1990s’ so the empowerment of site-specificity in the decade cannot be regarded as a uniquely Scottish phenomenon (2012, p.6). However, as the article argues, Scotland’s political context of the 1990s, particularly devolution, fuelled the movement and contributed to its development in a unique way.

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About the author

ANDRÁS BECK holds a PhD in English Studies awarded in June 2015 by the University of Salamanca; his thesis analysed the transformation of theatre space in Scotland in the age of devolution. His research interests include Scottish and European drama, drama translation, performance studies and regional identity. András has presented research papers at various international conferences including the European Society for the Study of English and the Société Française d’Études Écossaises, and published articles on drama translation.
Identifying canons in competitive light music for the Great Highland Bagpipe, 1947–2015

ANDREW BOVA

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Competitions for players of the Scottish Great Highland Bagpipe are regarded by many pipers and enthusiasts as the pinnacle of the art form, though some pipers who participate in these competitions have identified a trend of repertoire stagnation within certain disciplines of competition. Focusing on the solo competitive 2/4 march, this article presents the premise and methodology used to study competitive solo and band piping. This article aims to present the groundwork for further research into canon formation within competitive piping by: identifying the methods by which musical canons are formed in genres outside bagpipe competitions; identifying how those methods may be compared and applied to the formation of canons of competitive bagpipe music; identifying the various canons of competitive bagpipe music between 1947 and 2015 by way of quantitative data collection and analysis; and comparing a canonical list of tunes against a list previously compiled by another scholar.

Keywords: Great Highland Bagpipe, canon formation, repertoire, competition, Ceòl Beag
The power wielded by the canon is enormous; its members are presumed best and thus most deserving of reiteration in performance, in scholarship, and in teaching (Marcia J. Citron).

Introduction

In his 2005 doctoral dissertation, *Scottish Competition Bagpipe Performance: Sound, Mode, and Aesthetics*, author Simon McKerrell identifies what he considers the contemporary canon of competition 2/4 marches¹ for the Great Highland Bagpipe². Using this as a metric against which to compare my own canonical research in competitive light music, I have extended the temporality of this canon from circa 2005 to a 69-year period from 1947 to 2015. This paper identifies evidence to support the notion that there exists canons of repertoire in competitive piping, wherein there is an inclusivity and exclusivity of which tunes may or may not be played within certain genres of piping competition, rather than accepting the all-inclusive repertoire of tunes composed within a certain genre for competition. The paper also explores the identity of musical canons and the factors present in the formation of musical canons, describes parameters as they pertain to my research, explains the methodology used in this study, and presents a comparison of my canonical list of 2/4 marches with McKerrell’s. Analysis of this data focuses on my quantitative repertoire data, but all original work presented in this article is also informed by autoethnographic work. Finally, I conclude that there exists an acceptable canon of tunes within some genres of solo bagpipe competition, and use this as evidence to support further study into canons within competitive piping, including the solo strathspey and reel; hornpipe and jig; band march, strathspey, and reel (MSR); and band medley. This further study should not only explore where canons are found within these genres of competitive piping, but how and why they form.
McKerrell’s dissertation presents evidence of an accepted repertoire within competitive piping, but also the boundaries for what is deemed acceptable and how those boundaries may be broken, thus introducing new tunes into the competitive canon of accepted music (McKerrell, 2005, pp.293–296). This evidence comes from conversations with leading pipers, including Willie McCallum, who describes 40 or 50 marches as being played regularly (2005, p.195). This notion of a limited, and somewhat restricted, repertoire is supported by written evidence found in an issue of Piping Times from 1996, wherein William Gilmour writes:

Over the years the list of competition 2/4 marches has remained surprisingly short. The late John Garroway reckoned it was very unlikely that any further new ones would ever be composed. ... In all forms of pipe music I am, what can be best described as a traditionalist. If it was good enough for Patrick Og, Angus MacKay, and Willie Ross, then it is more than good enough for me and I would not like to relax these rules for the 2/4 competition march established over the last 150 years to permit inferior tunes to enter the lists (Gilmour, 1996).

McKerrell also cites this evidence in his own dissertation as evidence of a canon of repertoire within competitive 2/4 march playing (McKerrell, 2005, pp.32–34). This idea that there is a list of acceptable tunes to play in competition is confirmed within my own research, for example by leading competitive piper Donald MacPhee, who, when asked about his own selection process for competitive light music, identified tunes that he described as ‘tried and tested’ as being the best for competitions. He also referenced competitors whom he respected, and their advice on what tunes he should and should not play in competition when he was starting out in senior competitions (MacPhee, 2017).
This evidence points to the idea that there is inclusivity and exclusivity concerning acceptable repertoire for competitive solo piping, which supports the notion of a canon of tunes, featuring boundaries and rules for inclusion, rather than a repertoire which features all tunes that have been written.

**Canon formation in non-piping musical genres**

The use of the term ‘canon’ has historically been applied to literature and text rather than music (Bohlman, 1988; Citron, 1990; Dowd et al., 2002; Kärjä, 2006). For example, Citron opens her article *Gender, Professionalism and the Musical Canon* by describing the function of canon in literature as ‘a basic tool in defining the scope of the discipline’ and that ‘works admitted to this prestigious group command deep respect and form the literary core perpetuated in English curricula’ (1990, p.102). Bohlman describes canon formation as ‘a dynamic link between text and context’ (1988, p.104). These authors’ insights into the benefits and methods of applying the idea of canon to music, alongside McKerrell’s inclusion of a canon of competitive 2/4 marches in his dissertation, sets the standard and proves that there is, in fact, usefulness in the identification and exploration of musical canons. However, the idea of musical canon is not new, as Citron points out that there is a historical difference in nomenclature for musicians: ‘For us “canon” is more or less equivalent with “standard repertoire”’ (1990, p.102). Citron’s article deals with classical music, and to that end the nomenclature will differ from that of traditional music, more specifically highland piping. That being said, there are multiple reasons the word ‘repertoire’ has entered the piping community’s nomenclature with increasing regularity—one being that pipers increasingly receive broader musical educations than in the past, within both piping and non-piping musical genres, and especially through university programmes, as well as collaborating ever more extensively with musicians of other genres.
These authors have also described how canons can be explained and defined. Citron describes a canon as ‘a loosely codified organism, broadly accepted, with some degree of flexibility on small exchanges or new members’ (1990, p.102). Antti-Ville Kärjä describes canon in a historical context, saying ‘...if history is about choosing those things that are worth telling, then canonization could be described as choosing those things that are worth repeating’ (2006, p.5). Citron agrees with this idea of repetition being central to the idea of the canon, describing the importance not only of an introductory performance, but of some following repetition of performance (1990, pp.107-108). Bohlman briefly addresses this idea, asking the question of whether or not canon is just a ‘flourish of popularity’ (1988, p.110), popularity indicating the aforementioned repetition. He also describes canon more akin to Citron, as a system of classification, specifically exploring the nature of inclusivity and exclusivity necessary when classifying traditions (Bohlman, 1988). Dowd et al. give an example of the notion of classification when discussing the difficulty for new classical composers to secure premieres for their work, saying ‘U.S. symphony orchestras tend to emphasize the familiar works of a few composers – the “classics”’ (2002, p.36). Here we see the classification and naming, whether conscious or unconscious, of a canon of music, ‘the classics’, as a collection of music which is both relatively small and well-known, as well as being the focus of repetition within performances. Dowd et al. consider the orchestral canon on a macro scale, then break that canon down into subcategories, arguably sub-canons, e.g. ‘the classics’. Studying previous scholarly use and understanding concerning the meaning of the word ‘canon’ defines the necessary homogeneity of interpretation moving forward.

Moving beyond definitions and interpretations, the question of how canons are formed should be asked in order to give definition and context to the processes by which canons come to exist. A consistent theme across the authors studied
for this paper is the influence of both internal and external factors on canon formation. According to Bohlman, ‘Folk music canons form as a result of the cultural choices of a community or group’ (1988, p.105). Internal choices reflect decisions of musical aesthetics and what the community considers to be culturally important, but also portrays external effects on the canon as internal decisions via the community’s decision to accept or reject these external effects. This is a clear acknowledgement that external factors can play a pivotal role in canon formation, although the community associated with the canon may likely claim power over these factors, regardless of whether that power is real or imagined. Kärjä describes external influences on popular music canon formation, including history and the effects of media, and describes canon formation in popular music as happening in the same way as Bohlman describes canon formation in folk music (Kärjä 2006). Citron explores the idea of internal and external forces on canon formation, exploring the issue of gender inequality in classical music (1990, p.103). She utilises the term coined by Lillian Robinson, a ‘counter canon’, and describes it as a canon of music composed entirely of works by women in opposition to the more mainstream canon of music composed largely by men. She goes on to describe a temporal nature to canon formation, including cultural norms and their effects. ‘Canon formation is complex and embraces a wide swathe of factors that rest on a dual chronological base: conditions and attitudes prevalent at the time of composition and those in force at present’ (1990, p.104). Finally, Dowd et al. (2002) describe the numerous factors which influence canon formation within classical music. These include financial constraints, the need to attract audiences, the introduction of the non-profit symphony orchestra by the social elite, and time constraints involved in musicians having to learn new material instead of material with which they are already familiar.

Bohlman adds another layer to his description of canon and
canon formation—caveats about the intentions and possible negative side-effects of canon formation. ‘Few successful classification schemes’, he writes, ‘can avoid paring away some extraneous material from the repertoires they order’ (1988, p.50). He describes the issue of a possible ‘reductionist movement’ wherein claims are made that a repertoire is only truly represented by a limited selection of tunes or text. When it comes to the canon of competitive light music in piping, I do not think these two issues apply, because we are observing an already heavily regulated genre of music due to the rules, traditions, and cultural factors involved. However, a question of the relationship between recurrence and inclusion in the canon, as referenced earlier through Kärjä’s idea of the relationship between repetition and canonisation deserves attention, and could possibly be considered an example of this paring down or reductionist action. He also warns that a classification system can essentially replace a tradition, stating that a ‘surrogate tradition is the most extreme and insidious product of canon formation’ (Bohlman 1988, p.50). Worthy of consideration is the idea that the competitive MSR, both solo and band, is an example of a surrogate tradition, in which a large repertoire of marches, strathspeys, and reels are cast aside in favour of competition style tunes, and this accepted repertoire is further reduced to tunes deemed acceptable for competition by the piping community, resulting in the competition canon.

Bohlman concludes with a poignant statement: ‘At some levels, the discourse of classification therefore serves only to perpetuate old canons; at others, it forges new canons’ (1988, p.51). An argument can certainly be made in relation to the first half of that statement; the identification of a canon of competitive tunes could easily be used to restrict the music performed in competitions via the argument that the canon is established and should not be altered. However, I would argue that this is a fallacy in that canons, as stated
above, are open to change, a point that I will return to in relation to the canon of competitive light music from 1947 to 2015. Bohman supports this notion that canons are not set in stone, but open to change, when he posits that 'because the social basis of a community is continuously in flux, the folk music canon is always in the process of forming and of responding creatively to new texts and changing contexts' (1988, p.104). It should be considered that the perpetuation of an old canon is not necessarily or inherently bad; the identification and perpetuation of a canon can help preserve that living canon for future generations. Bohman’s point that classification can forge new canons is perhaps more forward looking, hinting that the identification of boundaries can sometimes make breaking or moving away from those boundaries easier, and sometimes even enticing. The change and innovation involved therein can help cultures to grow, thrive, and in some instances even survive.

**Canon formation in competitive bagpipe light music**

The systems by which the formation of the competitive MSR canon occur, for both solo and bands, varies. In relation to the solo canon, McKerrell states: ‘I argue that this canon exists, firstly, because pipers are confident that the judges know these tunes and can judge when a piper has deviated from the accepted urtext, and secondly, because only certain tunes have the necessary modal traits that qualify them for competition' (2005, p.192). This succinctly states two of the most influential and important factors in competitive light music canon formation: adjudicator preference and tune construction. McKerrell goes into detail regarding competitive 2/4 march construction in his dissertation, and as such it will not be discussed in this paper.

Adjudicator preference is likely the most important factor in contemporary repertoire selection for competition, and is a
topic of conversation in the piping community, regularly featuring in publications and reviews of competitions. For example, Andrew Berthoff, of the online piping and drumming publication, *Pipes/Drums*, published a blog post addressing the perceived issue of pipe band adjudicators being closed-minded when it comes to repertoire selection. He also takes care to make the point that there are exceptions to this issue, but in calling them exceptions indicates that he believes this closed-mindedness is the case most of the time (Berthoff, 2016). While anecdotal evidence, it is indicative of a regular conversation in piping regarding the stagnation of competition MSRs, especially in pipe bands. The post was met with a modicum of opposition in the comments section, further indicating that this is an issue of consideration for pipers. McKerrell further supports the idea of adjudicator preference in his dissertation saying of his canon of competitive 2/4 marches: ‘One feature of this canon of tunes is age of composition, as the newer compositions tend not to be entered into the competitions for fear the judges will not know them’ (2005, pp.196-197).

Another factor, intertwined with adjudicator preference, but not overtly stated in McKerrell’s writing, is competitive drive. In the competition–performance paradigm of piping, the musical performance is not always the most important factor to the competitor. Sometimes, competitors play to win, and musical decisions become secondary to that goal.

Much as with symphony orchestras, where a number of conditions including fiscal constraints, time constraints and both audience and performer satisfaction, must be taken into account when considering canon formation, one must consider the multitude of conditions which affect the formation of the competitive canon of light music. Competitors often discuss adjudicator preference, but are not always faultless when it comes to the lack of change in
the competitive repertoire of tunes. When opportunities are presented for pipers to perform music outside their normal repertoire, the opportunities are not always seized. For example, the Duncan Johnstone Memorial Piping Competition, held at The National Piping Centre in Glasgow, features a jig competition where competitors are required to submit three jigs composed or arranged by Duncan Johnstone. Every year, a contingent of the competitors who sign up for this competition fail to learn the new music required to compete in this competition and subsequently withdraw. Another example of pipers not fully taking advantage of the opportunity to introduce new music was the introduction of the freestyle solo piping competitions in the Pipers and Pipe Band Society of Ontario in 2008. In this format, half of the jig competitions at highland games were replaced by a competition in which competitors were given a two- to four-minute time frame where they could perform a small medley of tunes. Some pipers opted to play a simple hornpipe and jig, although others did create short medleys which introduced repertoire unlikely to be heard in solo competition at that time. It is clear that musical construction and notions of tradition are not the only factors governing what repertoire enters the competition canon.

Methodology

The parameter of the music observed in this paper is that of competitive light music, both solos and bands, at the highest level, from 1947 to 2015. On the macro-scale, the mid-twentieth century was chosen as a start date because previous scholarly work on this topic ends during this period (e.g. Donaldson, 2000; Forrest 2009). On the micro-scale of choosing a specific starting point, 1947 marked the inauguration of the World Pipe Band Championships (henceforth referred to as the World Championships or World’s) by the then Scottish Pipe Band Association².

Solo repertoire has been drawn from the most prestigious
solo piping light music competitions: The Argyllshire Gathering at Oban (henceforth referred to as Oban); The Northern Meeting at Inverness (Inverness); The Glenfiddich Piping Championship, formerly the Grant’s Championship (Glenfiddich); and the Uist and Barra Professional Piping Competition (Uist and Barra). For band competitions, nearly all data has been gathered from the Grade 1 World Pipe Band Championships, with a relatively small amount gathered from the Cowal Highland Games to supplement the data available regarding the World’s. These competitions are regarded in the piping community as elite contests, to which entry is restricted to those who have earned the privilege to compete. I have opted to solely research light music, omitting piobaireachd, the classical music of the bagpipe, from my work. The canonical, cultural, and historical issues involved differ so greatly from those of light music to merit separate study. Although my broader research involves the solo strathspey and reel, hornpipe and jig, as well as band MSRs and medleys, this paper focuses on the competitive solo 2/4 march both as a comparative study with Simon McKerrell’s work, and as support for further research into competitive piping canons.

This article’s consideration of the competitive canon begins with an already published canonical list of competitive tunes from McKerrell’s 2005 dissertation. After discovering evidence, both written and conversationally, that there was indeed a canon of acceptable repertoire for this genre, he compiled a list of tunes from his own experience as a competitor. Through discussions, attendance at competitions, and the published list of premier grade light music played at the Argyllshire Gathering in 2003, the list was expanded. He withdrew tunes from the list, especially pipe band-style tunes, which are either less suited to solo piping or simply not played in solo competitions. It results in what he describes as his ‘estimation of the current canon of 2/4 competition marches’—a total of 64 march tunes (McKerrell, 2005, pp.30–34, 192–197).
The method by which I created my list of 2/4 marches shared some similarities, but also featured a number of differences. Much like McKerrell, I collected data from published lists of repertoire for competition. However, the vast majority of my data came from the *Piping Times*, having inspected every edition for competition results and reviews, especially those results and reviews which contained repertoire data. Additional data was collected in an effort to fill in the data gaps found in the *Piping Times*, using sources including recordings of competitions, such as Glenfiddich CDs, archived live streams, and The World Pipe Band Championships recording series, both vinyl and CD. Articles in *Piping Times* that analysed repertoire from competitions were also used, along with results and repertoire data found from more recent years in online result postings, such as those from the website *Pipes/Drums*. I also updated my list by attending competitions and through conversation evidence, although I found that conversation evidence regarding repertoire submission did not always align with the collected qualitative data. A discussion of quantitative facts regarding canon and perception of canon by the competitive piping community is too extensive for this article, and will have to wait for discussion in a later publication. In essence, McKerrell and I worked our lists in reverse of each other; he began with qualitative data and refined it using quantitative data, whereas I began with quantitative data and refined it using qualitative data.

One of the key differences in our lists is the temporal aspect of the data. McKerrell explicitly states that his list reflects the canon current at the time of study; in other words, a canon of 2/4 competition marches circa 2005. In stark contrast to this, my list reflects the longer time period of 1947 to 2015. As a result, my data is not only presented as a whole, but is also broken into time periods: 1947–1969, 1970–1990, and 1990–2015. This breakdown allows an examination of the development of the canon over time, and aids in comparing and contrasting various time frames in
competitive piping history. Through the comparative analysis of these time periods it becomes possible to witness Bohlman’s aforementioned notion of a ‘flourish of popularity’ in that tunes do not normally remain static in their popularity, but become more or less popular over time (Bohlman, 1988, p.110).

In spite of a strong alignment between my list of tunes and McKerrell’s, there are some potential pitfalls in the method by which I have collected my data which should be addressed for clarity, as well as the explanation of the reasoning and justification for their usage. In my repertoire data there are a number of gaps, sometimes stretching multiple years, where no repertoire information is available, despite consulting numerous sources. Frequently, competitive results are listed, but with no repertoire data attached. While these data gaps might be viewed as a flaw in my research, the repetition of tunes when data is available indicates that the core canon of music is not changing much, if at all. Additionally, recorded results presented without repertoire data, reveal an important part of the piping community’s culture, in that the community is sometimes more concerned with competitive results than music. It also, in reference to the canon, indicates a possible predictability of repertoire being performed.

As mentioned, the majority of my repertoire data comes from the results of competitions, meaning it does not always reflect music that was submitted but not chosen by the judges, or music that did not make the prize list. To that end, an argument could be made that my canonical list is more a canon of successful tunes than of a limited repertoire. However, my data contains examples of full lists of tunes submitted by competitors in various competitions, which align with data collected from results. Additionally, in reference to Bohlman’s idea of a possible reductionist approach in the paring away of repertoire, I have opted not
to remove any tunes, no matter how infrequently they appear in my data, from the lists provided. This gives the best representation of the change in repertoire popularity over the three periods, allowing for the observance of tunes going from unpopular to popular, such as *The Braes of Castle Grant*, which goes from the least popular march group during the period 1947 to 1969, to being the most popular tune during the period 1970 to 1990.

**The canon of the solo competition 2/4 march**

My list of 2/4 marches contains a total of 74 tunes. It is logical that my list would be larger than McKerrell’s, given the extended time period of my study. Of importance, though, is the similarity between our two lists; 56 tunes appear on both lists. In other words, only eight tunes appear in McKerrell’s list that do not appear in mine, and 18 tunes appear in my list which do not appear in his. Of the tunes which appear in McKerrell’s list but not my own, some are debatable as to whether they should be included, due to their nature of being played more by bands than by soloists. These include *The Clan MacRae Society* and *The Conundrum*. Similarly, the tunes *Donald Cameron* and *Balmoral Highlanders* both appear in my list but are tunes more often heard played by bands rather than soloists. However, they do appear in the repertoire data, so have been left in. Interestingly, *Balmoral Highlanders*, typically a band tune, did feature somewhat prominently as a solo tune from 1970 to 1990, but clearly fell out of favour with soloists as it does not appear in my data after that6.

An example of the temporal effect on the data comes from the appearance of the tune *David Ross* in my list, but not McKerrell’s. *David Ross* is an obvious tune to include in a list of competition 2/4 marches today, but knowing that McKerrell’s list was published in 2005 it makes sense that *David Ross* would not be included. The tune only appears in my data twice, once in 1999 when Roddy MacLeod, MBE,
took 3rd place at the Inverness Former Winners MSR, and most notably in 2007, when Alasdair Gillies won the Oban Former Winners MSR playing the tune.

Below are the three lists containing what I argue to be representative of the canon of the solo competition 2/4 march during the three periods I have identified in my research.
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<th>March Repertoire from 1947 to 1969</th>
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<td>Tune</td>
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<td>74th’s Farewell to Edinburgh</td>
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<td>Abercairney Highlanders</td>
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<td>Bonnie Anne</td>
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<td>The Argyllshire Gathering</td>
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<td>Dugald MacColl's Farewell to France</td>
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<td>March Repertoire from 1991 to 2015</td>
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<td>Edinburgh City Police Pipe Band</td>
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Given the similarities between McKerrell’s and my own methodology and data, I posit that my canonical lists of tunes for the solo march, strathspey, and reel as well as the band march, strathspey, and reel are representative of the canon from 1947 to 2015. My data for the solo hornpipe and jig is far less comprehensive than that of the solo MSR, likely a function of the MSR being held in higher esteem than the hornpipe and jig competitions, and therefore subject to more thorough attention amongst commentators and competition record keepers. A parallel may be drawn between the disparity in repertoire information between the hornpipe and jig and MSR, and the MSR and piobaireachd. Piobaireachd is generally regarded as the pinnacle of solo piping above the MSR, and so may receive more attention on that basis. However, it could also be that recording piobaireachd repertoire is easier as there is only one tune to record instead of three, or possibly six, as is the case with an MSR. With regards to the hornpipe and jig, the repertoire indicates more change and introduction of new music than in the MSR, indicating a far more fluid repertoire of tunes. This fluidity of repertoire could be another reason for the disparity in repertoire information between the hornpipe and jig and MSR, in that there is a greater chance that the person recording the repertoire would be less likely to know the tunes being performed. To that end, my list of hornpipe and jig repertoire is both considerably smaller and more fluid, thus I cannot call my list of tunes for this genre a canon. Likewise, in the pipe band medley competition, the regular introduction of new music, albeit in an established format and with far better documentation than the solo hornpipe and jig, leads me to believe that a canon of repertoire for this genre is far more fluid and difficult to classify.

**Conclusion**

Within solo MSR competition for the Great Highland Bagpipe, there exists a canon of acceptable repertoire that
can be performed. This canon is a living tradition, which on occasion allows entry of new music into its ranks, but more heavily features a rotation of tune popularity within itself. By extending the temporality of previous research it is possible to not only create a more holistic view of the canon of repertoire in various genres of competitive piping, but to observe an ebb and flow of tune popularity within the canon. Further analysis of the repertoire is necessary to understand not only what was played but why it was played, involving further exploration of interview data in conjunction with quantitative repertoire data to create a more holistic approach to the analysis of trends in competitive piping from 1947 to 2015. Additionally, this analysis should extend to the solo strathspey and reel and hornpipe and jig, as well as the band MSR and medley, followed by a comparative study of these various genres. Detailed study of the data presented within this article, as well as the solo strathspey and reel, solo hornpipe and jig, band MSR, and band medley will be published in my final PhD dissertation.

Notes

1. Competition 2/4 marches are highly ornamented marches written in 2/4 time, comprised of four to eight eight-bar repeated sections, used in piping competitions.

2. The Great Highland Bagpipe is a type of bagpipe native to Scotland, primarily associated with the Gaelic-speaking Highlands and Islands region to Scotland’s north and west.

3. This replaced the Cowal Highland Gathering, which served as the World Championships stretching back to 1906, as the official World Championships. To be clear, the Cowal Gathering continued after 1947, and continues as a prestigious competition to this day, but no longer hosts the world title. For the purposes of keeping this research concise I have opted solely to research pipe bands during the era of the modern iteration of the World Pipe Band Championships beginning in 1947.

4. An argument could be made that the Uist and Barra is not of the same competitive standing as the first three competitions listed, and that if it is included so also should other invitational competitions. The Uist and Barra was included due to its standing as a premier invitational competition, its inclusion of a hornpipe and jig
competition, the ability for competitors to submit tunes of their own choice with no repertoire restrictions other than those of normal competitions, and most importantly an abundance of repertoire information available from this competition.

5. For more information on the differences between band and solo 2/4 march construction see McKerrell’s dissertation (2005, pp.227-232).

References


**Acknowledgements**

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**About the author**

ANDREW BOVA holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts and a Master of Music degree in Scottish bag piping, both awarded by Carnegie Mellon University. He currently attends the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland as a PhD candidate researching competitive piping from 1947 to 2015, with a particular interest in the ideas of convention, change, and innovation. In the context of his research, Andrew is a participant observer, being both a solo competitor and member of Shotts and Dykehead Caledonia Pipe Band.
Book review: *Semiotics and pragmatics of stage improvisation*, by Domenico Pietropaolo

FLAVIA D'AVILA

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Bloomsbury’s recent release, *Semiotics and Pragmatics of Stage Improvisation* by Domenico Pietropaolo is a peculiarly structured volume due to the absence of introductory and concluding chapters. The purpose of the material is stated on the back cover as analysing ‘improvisation as a compositional practice in the Commedia dell’Arte and related traditions from the Renaissance to the 21st century’. The acknowledgements page contains an explanation that some of the chapters were part of separate, longer essays, which accounts for the unusual structure and slightly disjointed flow of the work as a whole.

Divided into seven chapters, only one of which is dedicated to semiotics and two to pragmatics (the remaining chapters are on imagination, biomechanics, syntax and dramaturgy), the volume is nonetheless a coherent historical account of the development of Commedia, which clearly places improvisation at the centre of that art form. Pietropaolo argues passionately that improvisation in the Commedia context was a skill whose acquisition and refinement required great talent, intense training, and an extensive physical and textual performance vocabulary.
The first chapter works as a straightforward historical account of the development of Commedia from the late Middle Ages to the late eighteenth century, with an interesting section explaining how the performing arts were professionalised as a response to socioeconomic changes in Europe from the emergence of capitalist economics. Although this may not have been within the scope of the book, Pietropaolo seems to miss an opportunity for further comment here by comparing this shift with current operational trends in the performing arts industry. The description of ‘skilled performers who offered their labour on a par with other productive activities in the new market economy and who strove to rise to a position of dominance in the developing entertainment industry’ (p.4) may also be an apt depiction of contemporary performer movements in the United Kingdom’s theatre industry (perhaps minus the word ‘developing’). Since Pietropaolo himself suggests in the same chapter that it could be useful for a scholar to write about the history of improvisation ‘regressively, starting with the present and proceeding rearward’ (p.3), it is odd that he does not seem to seize this opportunity himself.

Further sections within this chapter concentrate on the interesting distinction between productive and reproductive imagination as tools for improvisation; the former meaning the creation of completely new material, and the latter, calling to memory material that had already been received or performed previously and re-arranging it. This section also focuses on providing the reader with a clear understanding of Commedia scenarios while emphasising the distinction between these and complete scripted plays, a notion Pietropaolo reinforces throughout the entire book.

The second chapter focuses on the pragmatics of derision in Commedia, introducing greater detail about stock
characters and what they represented, the first hint of semiotics applied to this analysis. Most of this chapter, however, simply continues the historical narrative through the Enlightenment, albeit including the intriguing rivalry between writers Carlo Gozzi and Carlo Goldoni, who used their respective pieces to try to save (in Gozzi’s case) or to destroy (in Goldoni’s case) Commedia altogether.

Chapter 3 is the only one exclusively dedicated to semiotics, and would perhaps work better if combined with chapter 5, which focuses on biomechanics. Although Pietropaolo’s analysis should be understood as an attempt to study performance text by using language and thought processes outside more formal, text-based scholarship, his application of semiotics is rather fragile. Pietropaolo scrutinises some scenes from famous, documented Commedia performances and writes at length about the actors’ use of their body and costumes, but rather than expanding on the representation of all these symbols, indexes and icons, his attempts at interpretative analysis are often frustrated by his desire to be truthful to an accurate, descriptive reconstruction of these performances.

Perhaps, understandably, the chapter containing an analysis that best approaches the formalist linguistics Pietropaolo has chosen as his method is chapter 4, focused on syntax. While explaining how improvisation works as a compositional tool, the concepts of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations are introduced to demonstrate how signs govern each other and how these can be used in dialogue situations. This all too brief chapter concludes with a slightly unclear section on a Markovian model of improvisation, which presupposes the reader’s knowledge of Markovian chains.

Chapters 6 and 7 are more focused on the text and process of production, including sections on the concertatore (an
early form of dramaturg / director figure) and *lazzi* (improvised sections inserted at various points throughout a text). They conclude with a lengthy analysis of Gozzi’s *Turandot* and an interesting take on the challenge of translating Commedia pieces to other languages and cultures, suggesting that the skill of the translator must necessarily exceed the linguistic to also encompass knowledge of stagecraft if the translated script is meant to be performed.

Overall, Domenico Pietropaolo’s volume will be disappointing to the reader with a keen interest in semiotics, as it is nowhere near as thorough on the subject as the work of Elaine Aston and George Savona (1991) or Keir Elam (2002), all important theatre semioticians who do not merit a single reference in Pietropaolo’s book. In fact, linguistics semioticians such as Charles Sanders Peirce and Roland Barthes are also absent from the book, with Roman Jakobson and Ferdinand de Saussure getting only one mention each. The back cover information and title are slightly equivocal as well, since the volume focuses almost exclusively on Commedia dell’Arte, only superficially touching on other types of improvisation, with one section dedicated to pantomime and frequent comparisons to improvisation in dance and music. As far as more contemporary uses of improvisation, there is an all too brief commentary on Dario Fo’s work and some criticism of improvisational trends in post-Stanislavskian theatre in North America.

Nevertheless, this is a valuable piece of work for readers with an interest in the Commedia dell’Arte tradition, particularly an avid interest in what we know of the descriptive detail of performance improvisation, and would be a relevant addition to the toolkit of scholars and practitioners alike.
References


About the review author

FLAVIA D’AVILA trained in theatre directing at Queen Margaret University in Scotland and at the Odin Teatre in Denmark, and in linguistics at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul in Brazil. She is currently undertaking her PhD at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, researching syncretic theatre. As the artistic director of Edinburgh-based company Fronteiras Theatre Lab, Flavia specialises in devised, multilingual theatre and new writing.
Book review: British theatre companies: from fringe to mainstream, edited by Graham Saunders and John Bull

BEN FLETCHER-WATSON

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This monumental trilogy, running to more than 950 pages, offers significant new insights into the history of alternative and fringe theatre in the UK from 1965 to 2014. The volumes’ individual editors, John Bull, Graham Saunders and Liz Tomlin, have achieved this not through the well-established process of focusing on plays and players, but by delving instead into the minutiae of specific companies, using previously underexplored archival material to build a picture of the people who make art and perhaps most unusually, those who fund them.

The recent cataloguing of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) archives, currently held at the Victoria and Albert
Museum in London, provides access to a remarkable trove of documentation, including ‘information about funding decisions, touring schedules, future production plans, minutes of company meetings, manifestos, correspondence and internal memos, accounts of internal General Council, Drama Panel and associated committee meetings... [and] Show Reports’ (v1, p.xii). Names have now been appended to previously anonymous internal papers such as Show Reports and even scribbled marginalia, with the likes of Jude Kelly and Ian Brown popping up as assessors early in their careers. Simultaneously, letters, manifestos and programme notes from luminaries such as Simon McBurney give an insight into the formative years of a swathe of leading companies.

Much of this quoted correspondence rails against what is seen as faceless bureaucracy, asserting (or perhaps establishing) the hackneyed narrative of visionary artists impeded in their quest to make great art by penny-pinching philistines clinging to John Maynard Keynes’s coattails. But these volumes make clear the immense reserves of knowledge, passion and desire to support challenging theatre that have always been present within the nation’s cultural funders, as well as spotlighting the frequency with which poachers turn gamekeepers.

John Bull notes in his scene-setting essay in volume 1 that ‘Archival resources may appear to record a historical past with “cool objectivity” but in fact they offer an indexical and always partial representation of that past, thereby setting terms for the analytic scrutiny of that representation and the potential “links” connecting past and present’ (v1, p.137). There is perhaps less ‘cool objectivity’ presented here, and more fire and fury. Nonetheless, the wise decision to open up the case studies within each volume to a range of drama scholars does indeed foreground the ‘partial representation’ of theatre history, emphasising at every turn that these
histories were and are contested by everyone involved, from administrators to artists, from researchers to reviewers. UK theatre between 1965 and 2014 is rightly presented as fissiparous, in keeping with the enormous cultural shifts in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Each text opens with a brief historical and cultural background of the period, focusing on large-scale social movements and events. A brief history of the earliest days of the Arts Council, from 1940s Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, via Keynes’s chairmanship and the Festival of Britain, might have been useful for some readers. In particular, the role of Keynes as spiritual sculptor of the organisation seems key to understanding the attitudes of what could be termed ‘Keynes’s children’ in the early 1960s. For example, Claire Cochrane has highlighted the legacy of his BBC Home Service talk of 1945, noting that ‘Keynes’ vision of the artist “individual and free, undisciplined, unregimented”, walking “where the breath of the spirit blows him” is unashamedly romantic, apparently brushing aside the economic engine of the free spirit’ (2011, p.149). It may be provocative to corral artists as varied as Pip Simmons, John McGrath and Roland Muldoon into a category as simplistic as ‘Keynes’s children’, but the tensions inherent in all three volumes seem to emerge at least in part from the ‘economic engine’ / ‘free spirit’ dichotomy. The 1960s were about revolution on the stage as well as the streets, a point adroitly sketched by Bull in his linking of the May 1968 Événements to theatrical experimentation. Who better then to rebel against than the Right Honourable The Lord Keynes, dead for 20 years but haunting the Arts Council still? Obsessed with theatre as bricks and mortar, famously partial in his funding decisions (Sadler’s Wells and the Royal Opera House received enormous subsidy previously directed towards touring companies) and London-centric to a fault, Keynes was ‘notoriously unwilling to devolve responsibility... and, with the desire for prestige increasingly becoming his focus,
London came ever more to be seen as the natural focus of endeavour’ (Rebellato, 1999, p.46). As such, the many Marxist collectives touring to far-flung rural communities in clapped-out vans must seem in direct opposition to the patrician excesses of the 1940s and 50s.

The editors admit that ‘with hindsight, the first two volumes could perhaps have been retitled English Theatre Companies... [as] the archive resembles more of a Domesday Book on English theatre’ (v1, p.x). Although 7:84 (in both its English and Scottish incarnations) and Suspect Culture are the only non-English companies examined in detail, many companies are placed squarely in their European or international contexts, often as prophets without honour in their own country. For example, Kate Dorney shows how Pip Simmons Theatre Group’s residency at Toneelraad embedded their desire to ‘destabilize the audience’s complacency’ (v1, p.209), in particular in the seminal An Die Musik. Similarly, Michael Fry points out that ‘although many of the actors were European, many of the early plays [by Complicite] were principally about the obsessions of the British’ (v2, p.165). Britishness is repeatedly contrasted with European identities, with Peter Brook figured as an exemplar of the Channel-hopper. Given current circumstances, it is fascinating to consider the relative ease with which artists in the 60s and 70s decamped to the continent when funding decisions went against them.

In a series stuffed with gems, the fairest approach may be selecting a highlight from each volume. In the first, the standout chapter is David Pattie’s delightful history of the two 7:84 companies (one in England, one in Scotland, but tethered together via the mighty John McGrath). As Pattie provocatively queries, ‘How could theatre act as a rehearsal for and analysis of change if the theatrical environment produced and promoted stasis?’ (v1, p.253). Indeed, this could be the central question of the entire volume, if not the
trilogy. For McGrath, this meant abandoning the ‘conservative, commercial’ London scene in favour of audiences ‘at the sharp end of political and cultural struggle’ (v1, p.253), or more comically, ‘a bad night in Bootle’ (v1, p.272). Patti deftly unpicks a tangled skein of scripts, funding bids and committee minutes to accentuate the legacies of the two 7:84 companies: in his view, ‘a particular way of creating theatre... new touring circuits... [and] a particularly Scottish form of engaged theatre’ (v1, p.273). It is fascinating to note the shift from the first tour of The Cheviot, The Stag and the Black, Black Oil in 1973, which toured to tiny venues like Kyleakin Village Hall on Skye, to the 2015/16 revival by Dundee Rep, which only toured to large venues in the five cities of Dundee, Edinburgh, Inverness, Aberdeen and Glasgow. 7:84’s greatest work now sits on Scotland’s grandest stages, but whether this is because they changed the country’s theatrical landscape or because the establishment embraced them (or both) remains an open question.

Sara Freeman provides the highlight of volume 2 with her revisionist take on Gay Sweatshop. She takes issue with Catherine Itzin, Helen Freshwater and Stephen Greer, as she claims their ‘treatment of Sweatshop obsessively returns to the story of the company’s origin’ (v2, p.142). By contrast, Freeman rejects the memorialising of earlier scholars, placing the group in a fresh context as a set of practitioners, where its ‘artistry and attempts at institutionalization matter as much to the gay movement as its agitation and political formulations’ (v2, p.144). In this light, the much-discussed cuts in funding in 1981 and again in 1991 (the second usually ascribed to the impact of Section 28) can be seen as part of a wider flux in the ecology of alternative theatre; in particular, Freeman’s examination of the company’s administrative structure makes clear that the internal responses to loss of funding were arguably of greater importance than the cuts themselves. As with many companies appearing in these pages, quasi-Marxist
collectivism gave way to ‘artistic directors, a board of directors, official job descriptions and new office space’ (v2, p.155)—all the bells and whistles required by an Arts Council that sought to remake theatrical structures in its own hierarchical image.

In the third volume, a true embarrassment of riches, it is harder still to choose a single highlight. For example, Duška Radosavljević’s chapter on Kneehigh combines keen critical analysis of key productions with a thoroughly convincing case for the company’s (and especially Emma Rice’s) ‘democratization of the cultural capital’ (v3, p.175). Similarly, Maria Chatzichristodoulou brilliantly explains the appeal of Blast Theory by situating them as ludic and inventive virtuosos whose ‘engagement with popular culture is key to [their] success’ (v3, p.252). But the standout chapter for Scottish readers must be Clare Wallace’s contribution on Suspect Culture, which not only builds on Dan Rebellato and Graham Eatough’s superb The Suspect Culture Book (2013), but also offers a more nuanced reading of the company’s work than many commentators have achieved. It is unquestionable that David Greig, as the major playwright within the group, has received the majority of critical scrutiny to date, and his contributions to Suspect Culture and Scottish theatre more widely seem to justify this imbalance. For Wallace, however, it is Eatough and Rebellato, along with later collaborators such as Simon Bent and Graeae’s Jenny Sealey, who deserve reappraisal. She skillfully exposes issues of process and attribution which illuminate the company’s history once again.

There are a few minor issues with each volume. John Bull’s spirited contribution suffers from sloppy copy-editing, such as misquoting Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech, getting the date of Ted Heath’s departure as Conservative leader wrong by a decade, and repeatedly referring to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as the ‘Fringe Festival’. Graham
Saunders makes fewer errors, but nonetheless mangles the names of many key figures, including ‘Ian McKellan’, ‘Liz Lochead’ and the extremely unfortunate ‘Marcello Evaristo’—a mistake made all the more egregious by its placement in his section on women’s theatre. However, these are small quibbles when placed alongside the trilogy’s many successes.

Particularly when read alongside Anna Rosser Upchurch’s *The Origins of the Arts Council Movement: Philanthropy and Policy* (2016), these texts provide an unparalleled insight into the development of the Arts Council of Great Britain and its successors. As the Arts Council archives open up, it is to be hoped that new volumes might fill in the remaining gaps (most notably the relationship between England’s Arts Council and its largest recipients of funding for theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre). Nonetheless, as series editors, Bull and Saunders have already produced a remarkable achievement: an accessible, lively, informative and illuminating study spanning half a century of British theatre.

**References**


**About the review author**

DR BEN FLETCHER-WATSON manages the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh. He holds a
PhD in drama from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the University of St Andrews. His research interests include theatre for young audiences, relaxed performance and digital technologies in performance. He has published widely in journals including Youth Theatre Journal and Research in Drama Education. He is an ASSITEJ Next Generation Artist.
Book review: *The kaleidoscope of women’s sounds in music of the late 20th and early 21st centuries*, by Kheng K. Koay

LUCY HOLLINGWORTH

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Scholarship in the field of women composers has come a long way since Jane Bowers and Judith Tick’s anthology *Women Making Music*, published in 1987. The work of Karin Pendle, Ellie Hisama, Sophie Fuller, Denise von Glahn and Rhiannon Mathias, to mention just a few, has opened doors into a better understanding of the lives, works and genius of several generations of overlooked composers, who faced discrimination because of their gender rather than their creative talents.

Kheng K. Koay’s *The Kaleidoscope of Women’s Sounds in Music of the Late 20th and Early 21st Centuries* adds another volume to this hugely important developing field. She has selected six women composers whose works have been recorded and published, and examined their lives, works and the reception of their work through their own words and those of others, and through the analysis of a particular post-1980 piece by each composer. She lays out her intentions very clearly at the start.
Thus this book contributes to an understanding of musical language of late 20th century women composers. It gives an insight into the creative acts of the selected composers, aiming to provide valuable information to those who perform their music, to young musicians learning and trying to understand their music, and to the listener-reader seeking a wider knowledge of contemporary music by women composers (p.xv).

The first chapter, ‘Women Composers and Modern Society’, describes the difficulties women composers have had in pursuing successful careers in the twentieth century, and through reference to existing scholarship in this area, examines steps that have been taken to change this situation by both individuals and music organisations. Here, Koay includes a considerable amount of biographical information about the six composers. However, some of the material appears to be misplaced, as the second chapter, ‘Creativity, Reception to and Background of the Composers’, consists partly of short biographies, and therefore includes a great deal of information recycled from Chapter 1. While there is some very interesting material about each of the composers laid out here, such as Chen Yi’s experience of the Cultural Revolution in China and its effect on her subsequent music, as a whole, this part of the book seems rather fragmented and poorly laid out as well as repetitious.

In the ‘Introduction’ we are informed that what will follow is not a comparative analysis (p.viii), however, the remainder of the book consists of three chapters in which Koay pairs off the composers and discusses their music with reference to three different approaches. For example, in Chapter 3, ‘Bold Sound Colors and Space’, Koay examines Sofia Gubaidulina’s Quaternion and Joan Tower’s In Memory. Koay writes brief analyses of the two works in which she draws attention to the use of binary opposition in each. Although she does not deal with the two works point by
point, I reached the end of the chapter feeling that the works had been compared. The same can be said of Chapter 4, ‘Straddling Classical and American Vernacular Idioms’, which examines the combining of classical and popular culture in Ellen Taaffe Zwilich’s *Millennium Fantasy* and Libby Larsen’s *Four on the Floor*, and of Chapter 5, ‘The Cross-Over and National Influences’, which investigates the use of national and traditional elements in Chen’s *Ba Yin* and Judith Weir’s *Distance and Enchantment*. The writing draws out common themes and ways of using structure, technique and culture very effectively, and the similarities and differences between the ways the composers have worked is very evident from the discussions of their pieces.

Of particular note in these last three chapters is the discussion of Gubaidulina’s use of quarter tones and of the way Chen has created the sounds of traditional Chinese instruments using modern Western ones. The analyses are rather difficult to engage with fully, because Koay sets up interesting arguments and then suddenly drops them without having worked out the ideas completely, in order to move on.

There is some unevenness in the text, for example in the discussion of tonality in *Four on the Floor*, where Koay seems to contradict herself (pp.142–144), and a slight laziness with some of the analysis, such as her assumption that short passages of repetition necessarily imply a connection with minimalism. Koay also feels the need to explain the same things again when she revisits an issue. I think that a shorter book, more tautly organised, would have worked just as well.

Despite these issues, the book does fill in some gaps in the story of these women composers and their music, and the analyses are generally well devised. For the performer, there is a lot of useful information about the composers’
lives, the ways they conceived their work, and the stylistic and technical challenges that these pieces present.

In the ‘Introduction’, Koay makes a very big claim regarding the uniqueness of this book.

There are some significant factors that make this present book quite different from others. It not only provides the biographies of the composers, but also their perspectives on music, the reception of their music, the involvement of women composers in modern society, and an analysis of their compositions (p.xii).

If this was so then it would have been a great achievement indeed, however, one only has to think of books like Hisama’s Gendering Musical Modernism (2001) and Mathias’s Lutyens, Maconchy, Williams and Twentieth-Century British Music (2012) to realise that this concept has already been conceived and put into print by other musicologists. What Koay does provide the reader with is a useful new text looking at composers whose work deserves to be better known.

References


About the review author

LUCY HOLLINGWORTH is a composer, musicologist and writer currently studying for a PhD at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. She has a Master's degree in Composition from Edinburgh University. Her research area is autoethnography and women composers and she is preparing a creative portfolio and a dissertation. Recent performances include, *What The Living Do* performed by Sinae Lee, and a music theatre piece *The Poetess*, premiered at RCS in 2016. She previously worked as an IT lecturer and web designer and is the Web Editor of the *Scottish Journal of Performance*. 
Book review: *It’s all allowed: the performances of Adrian Howells*, edited by Deirdre Heddon and Dominic Johnson

SHONA MACKAY

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Adrian Howells is internationally renowned as a key figure in the field of one-to-one and intimate performance. ‘It’s all allowed’ was one of his frequently cited mantras, used to inspire, include, encourage and push boundaries, and it is a fitting title for the first book dedicated to his work and memory. Formed of 22 short essays from contributors including close friends, collaborators and fellow practitioners, this book provides a detailed, intimate look at Howells’s life, work, and practice, enhanced by extensive photo documentation that appears throughout.

Alongside multiple-perspective, in-depth descriptions of Howells’s works, subjects discussed within this text include performer / participant vulnerability, ethics, duty of care, consent, boundaries and authenticity, all of which are key components to be considered in the field of intimate performance practice. What is an ‘intimate public’? What are the challenges faced by the performer and also by the participant? Can any one intimate performance be truly authentic if it is repeated many times over the course of a day or longer, and how can the artist remain fully present?
Speaking of his first notions on the subject of one-to-one work, Howells stated that he wanted to create ‘an interaction that might be emotionally and psychologically beneficial, both for me and for an audience participant’ (p.102). This was the seed from which the rest of his nurturing, cathartic and holistic practice would grow, first as Adrienne, focusing on confessional, conversational processes in works including Adrienne’s Living Room (2001) and Adrienne’s Dirty Laundry Experience (2003), before later exploring a more contemplative, reflective and, at times, silent practice. In this sense it is difficult not to conjure up thoughts of Buddhist philosophies regarding the notion of simply being and being present. Speaking of his work Held (2006), Howells stated he had unexpectedly discovered that ‘confessional information can be communicated non-verbally. Two bodies in close, physical and touching proximity have the potential to engage in an often self-revelatory, but silent, conversation’ (p.188). Whether spoken or unspoken, the desire to connect and communicate in the form of ‘accelerated friendship’ remained an important concept in his work throughout this shifting, self-reflective process.

One of the main points which struck me throughout this text was the attention to detail in his performance and the duty of care Howells had for his audience participants and the lengths to which he would go to ensure that conditions were exactly as he needed them to be. In her chapter, ‘Duty of care: producing Adrian Howells’, Jackie Wylie (former Artistic Director of The Arches, Glasgow) described Howells as ‘a perfectionist when it came to the aesthetics of each work’ (p.256) before mentioning sourcing towels that had just the right level of softness for The Pleasure of Being: Washing/Feeding/Holding, or a particular colour of balloon required for Won’t Somebody Dance With Me? This could easily be seen as overly pedantic or demanding, but in the greater context of this book it is clear that it was for the benefit of Howells’s audience-participants more than
anything else. Everything was carefully considered and had its place and purpose.

In his essay ‘The Pedagogy of Adrian Howells’, Robert Walton discusses the workshops Howells gave where he continued to explore the ethical implications of intimate, one-to-one practice. He states that

by 2011, [the workshops] always included discussion of:

1. Ethical considerations with one-to-one and intimate work
2. Empowering audience-participants
3. The idea of pre and postperformance care
4. Questions of how much/what information is given in pre-performance publicity materials (p.225).

These points prompt discussion which is beneficial not only in intimate theatre, but in all forms of artistic practice and they are further discussed in many of the book’s chapters. However, what I find most interesting is the third point. As many other contributors to this text point out, the pre- and post-performance care sadly may not have extended to Howells himself. In Dominic Johnson’s chapter, ‘Held: an interview with Adrian Howells’, Howells admits that some performances, in particular May I Have the Pleasure...? (2011), had a psychologically detrimental effect on him. Later, Helen Iball’s chapter ‘Towards an ethics of intimate audiences’ acknowledges this lack of provision for self-care:
...there is not equivalency in terms of support for Howells as there is for professionals in one-to-one occupations such as therapy or counselling, particularly in terms of strategies of closure, self-support, professionally accredited supervision and support mechanisms that could be called upon if needed (p.193).

Although Iball mentions this in relation to Howells, it feels relevant for all artists working in this way and is a topic that affords much greater attention. It would be interesting to know how many practitioners do actively develop a support mechanism / network to ensure their own health and wellbeing are tended to.

My one small criticism of the book is the structure and repetition of some details. On a number of occasions I realised that I had previously read the same information, without understanding why the details had been reproduced again. Had I not read the book from beginning to end perhaps the repetition would not have been a problem, but I'm sad to say that it did prove somewhat frustrating. In all other aspects, however, I could find no faults.

It is evident that Howells cared deeply about people. He had the ability to profoundly affect those he came into contact with and his work led the way for a new generation of artists inspired by his practice. In an age where our communication and interaction is so deeply influenced by social media and technology, we can learn a lot from Howells’s approach in order to truly engage with other people on a physical, emotional and human level. I approached this text as a practitioner wishing to explore and enhance my knowledge of one-to-one intimate work, and in this sense I found it very inspiring. I would highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in this area of performance, but it is similarly suitable for more experienced practitioners wishing to gain new insights into
Howells's work. *It’s All Allowed* is for everyone.

**About the review author**

SHONA MACKAY is a Glasgow-based composer and mixed-media artist, currently undertaking a PhD at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Her practice-based research explores her own use of autobiographical material in composition, including themes of connection, communication and identity. She is interested in the use of music alongside visual and performative elements and has recently been exploring work involving installation and interactive formats.