

## 2015 hcmf// Bailey profile

The author of probably *the* seminal text on musical improvisation, *Improvisation; its Nature and Practice in Music*, Derek Bailey (1930-2005) was a technically astonishing and unremittingly inventive guitarist, whose research into the technical possibilities of his instrument was relentless, uncompromising and inspiring. But if Bailey's influence on modern guitarists and the evolution of his instrument is significant, it is his 40-year involvement with the creation, evolution and documentation of what has become known as Improvised Music that is his most valuable legacy to the artistic world. In a period of astonishingly intense musical development in the second half of the 1960s, Bailey and other adventurous British musicians (including Tony Oxley, Evan Parker, Barry Guy, Paul Rutherford, John Stevens, Trevor Watts and AMM) developed a style of ensemble improvising that was revolutionary and widely influential, carefully extricating itself from the hierarchical associations of free jazz, the aleatoric/happening environments of Black Mountain experimentalism and the drone- or riff-based explorations of psychedelic rock.

Subsequently Derek Bailey conspicuously (and sometimes controversially) rejected all methods of organisation or determination of sounds in time, with the exception of "through the powers of improvisation". In single-mindedly so doing he acquired a reputation as an ascetic, a purist and an evangelising apostle of improvisation; but Bailey's rejection of the comfortable, the predictable and the gratifying was neither high-minded asceticism, nor a Yorkshireman's awkward bloody-mindedness. For him, the solution to the problem of developing a constantly renewing aesthetic for musical dialogue was the (almost) consistent rejection of habitual playing circumstances, familiar groupings, regular collaborators, mutually agreed principles and other accommodations to so-called 'successful' music-making.

In view all this, the amount of notated music Bailey composed in the late 60s may come as a surprise, although the existence of these pieces was not a secret. Bailey rarely discussed this material, but he never destroyed or publicly repudiated it, merely losing interest in it. The mature Bailey found the whole rigmarole of pre-determining music in advance of performance ridiculously time-consuming and hugely over-rated; the 'powers of improvisation' had rendered composition irrelevant. Doubtless, Bailey would have expressed wry incomprehension as to why anyone would be interested in these old scribbles, pitying the folly of those who are so attached to the past and its fetishistic totems. He may well have improvised an Appleyard rant about the matter - but I hope he would not have refused to let people hear this music. *Ping*, for example, is a genuinely intriguing composition, clearly costing Bailey a great deal of effort, and which deserves to be heard after almost 50 years in a small suitcase.

However, let's be very clear; playing these pieces does not represent an 'outing' of Derek Bailey as a closet composer, nor is it an attempt to re-balance the focus of Derek's life and work away from free improvisation by one iota. It is simply an opportunity to understand in a little more detail one tiny part of the career of an extraordinary musician, a vital musical philosopher and a man of rare principle.

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## 2015 hcmf// programme notes

20<sup>th</sup> November 2015

### **Ensemble Anomaly**

*Diego Castro Magaš & Alex Ward: electric guitars*

### **Karlheinz Stockhausen (1928-2007, Germany); realised Derek Bailey (1930-2005, UK)**

Plus-Minus [world premiere of this realisation] 20' (c. 1967-69)

The cryptic, hyper-complex yet somehow open-ended nature of Stockhausen's 'recipe' score of 1963 has attracted many adventurous musicians, with several of them relishing the opportunity to use Stockhausen's template to mould distinctively personal material of their own. Bailey's interest in Stockhausen's work at this time is evidenced by several entries in his notebooks, and this realisation must have seemed like an interesting way for Bailey to structure the very personal guitar language he was in the process of developing, without allowing his own aesthetic preferences to predominate. This performance is of one possible completion of Bailey's unfinished realization (see note).

*archival note:* Bailey prepared a final version of 2x1 pages (53 moments) of the 2x7 pages notated by Stockhausen; according to Stockhausen's instructions this would be sufficient to represent a realisation of the piece, but it is clear from Bailey's notes that he anticipated realising at least one other page to provide a second 'layer'. Unfortunately, very little (if any) material for Bailey's second page is still extant, so I have used a certain amount of creative leeway to construct a performable two-layer version of the Bailey realisation. However, all material used in this version is from Derek Bailey's own hand; the first guitar part is exactly as he prepared it; the second guitar part has been constructed from a mix of (probable) sketches for the second guitar part, and the initial 'translation' notes that Bailey made when working from Stockhausen's score.

*thanks:* Particular thanks for enabling the public performance of this material must go to Karen Brookman-Bailey, who has generously allowed me unfettered access to Derek Bailey's personal archive.

21<sup>st</sup> November 2015

### **Ensemble Anomaly**

*Trevor Watts: soprano saxophone*

*Joe Connolly: clarinet*

*Robert Jarvis: tenor trombone*

*Hannah Marshall: 'cello*

*Alex Ward: electric guitar*

*Chris Burn: piano*

*Simon H. Fell: double bass, direction*

*Mark Sanders: percussion*

*Paul Kirk: tenor horn*

*Harrison Collins: euphonium*

*James Wood: bass clarinet*

*Jonathan Feasey: Eb bass*

*James Ure: BBb bass*

*Franc Chamberlain: speaker*

### **John Stevens (1940-1994, UK)**

Beckett (Sam) 6' (1985)

*Beckett (Sam)* is taken from Stevens' 1985 collection *Search and Reflect*, which brought together pieces he had devised for use within Community Music projects, or as starting points for his work with improvising ensembles. Like many scores for improvisers (and/or untrained musicians), this is a text score; but unlike many such scores, Stevens' pieces often contain concise, clear and concrete ideas which – assuming good will from the performers – usually result in strongly characterised musical outcomes. *Beckett (Sam)* is about breath (or the lack of it), and doubtless knowingly alludes to Beckett's extraordinary 1969 stage work *Breath*.

### **Paul Rutherford (1940-2007, UK)**

Quasi-Mode III [world premiere of new version] 15' (1980)

The third version of *Quasi-Mode* was prepared in 1980, for an appearance by The London Jazz Composers' Orchestra on BBC Radio 3's *Music In Our Time*. A virtuoso trombonist and euphonium player, Rutherford had a life-long fascination with the permutation of modes and note sequences, and this piece is an excellent example of his exploration of such material. The original score is for 18 musicians; this new version (12 players) includes all the

notated material, with slightly reduced instrumentation. I'm particularly excited that one of tonight's performers, Trevor Watts, also participated in the premiere of the original version in 1980.

**Lol Coxhill (1932-2012, UK) arr. Christopher Hobbs (1950, UK)**

Lol's Tunes 4' (1977)

When Christopher Hobbs took over the musical directorship of Welfare State International from Lol Coxhill in 1977, he 'inherited' several compositions Coxhill had prepared for WSI. Hobbs was sufficiently taken by these two melodies that he prepared (and published) arrangements of these pieces (albeit without consulting Coxhill himself, a point which was initially to generate some tension between the two men). Although the compositions are clearly Coxhill, the inexpressive, uncomfortable and occasionally perverse arrangements are definitely Hobbs' work, with both men reflecting their lifelong interests in the process. A small treasure unearthed in the British Music Collection.

**Derek Bailey (1930–2005, UK)**

No. 22 [Ping] [world premiere] 30' (c. 1967-69)

This substantial notated work sees Bailey adopting another externally-imposed structuring device in an attempt to disrupt the habitual or comfortable responses of both composer and performers (cf *Plus-Minus*). The structure is a transliteration of Samuel Beckett's *Ping*; Beckett's English version of the text was published in 1967, and it's probable that Bailey started work on this setting shortly thereafter. With a through-composed nucleus of over 300 bars, the piece is a remarkably single-minded exploration of a systematic structural experiment, making no concessions to instrumental practicality - written for a trio of legendary improvisers: Evan Parker, Paul Rutherford and Bailey himself.

*thanks:* I have many people to thank for making this concert possible; in addition to all the performers, the hcmf// team and the Music Dept. of the University of Huddersfield, my particular thanks must go to Karen Brookman-Bailey, Barry Guy & Maya Homburger, Ulrike Coxhill-Scholz, Christopher Hobbs & Virginia Anderson, Sound and Music, The British Music Collection, Dominic Lash, Evan Parker and Philip Thomas.

21<sup>st</sup> November 2015

***Ensemble Anomaly***

*Diego Castro Magaš: classical guitar*

*Alex Ward: electric guitar*

**Derek Bailey (1930-2005, UK)**

No. 10 [Five Pieces for Guitar] [world premiere] 10' (c. 1966-67)

Nos. 18-20 [Three Pieces for Guitar] 6' (c. 1967)

No. 23 [Bits] [world premiere] 4' (c. 1967)

Unsurprisingly, Derek Bailey's archive contains several compositions for solo guitar. Although he recorded some of these at home in 1966 and 1967, only one instance of Bailey performing such compositions in public has so far been identified – a performance of Nos. 18-20 in Northampton in December 1972.

In the course of these three sets of pieces, Bailey leaves behind his early influences and gradually incorporates a language which directly reflects the discoveries he was making through improvisation. (Bailey's own recordings of these pieces generally include extemporised interjections, although these are not specified in the score; this option has been retained for today's performance.)

The No. 10 pieces are generally Webernian in scale, but with a surprising lushness of harmony, and sporadic references to the guitar's flamenco heritage. (This is perhaps the nearest Bailey comes to writing 'repertoire' pieces; Diego will play these pieces on the classical guitar, rather than the amplified instrument normally associated with Bailey.)

In the 18-20 set Bailey's compositional language has hardened into a more acerbic serialism, and these pieces have a harmonic tautness which gives them something of the intensity that Bailey admired in Webern. Bailey was now starting to lose interest in playing these pieces 'straight'; by 1967 he was usually using such compositions as starting points for improvisations. (Nevertheless, his fair copy of the 18-20 score presents a self-contained composed suite, without improvisation.)

By No. 23 Bailey's scores are tending to become sequences of notated gestures, each of which may provide raw material for extemporised development, rather than a fixed work in themselves. However, this is not to suggest that his interest in abstract structural questions had receded; although the score of No. 23 is not strictly serial, it uses several varied repetitions of an extended tone row, with the third of its three sections being a (slightly modified) retrograde of the opening section.

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