

APPROACHES TO INTEGRATING IMPROVISATION
INTO NOTATED BIG BAND COMPOSITIONS

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Abstract

This research attempts to discover new guidance methods for jazz improvisers working within the context of a big band that provide greater thematic continuity than solos based purely on chord symbols.

After an introductory chapter, Chapter 2 examines the research context in terms of existing academic texts and the working practices of jazz composer, Graham Collier. Because of the lack of existing academic literature on this topic, in Chapter 3, an interview with Darcy James Argue and a survey of responses from 57 other currently-active jazz composers from around the world is analysed. The survey presents diverse views on the problem of thematically integrating the soloist into a big band, as well as suggesting a range of approaches and techniques for doing so.

In subsequent chapters, four new compositions for big band and soloist are introduced. Multiple recorded performances of each of the works with different professional soloists of varying age and musical backgrounds generated ten improvised solos based on thematic melodic motifs and a variety of pitch sets. These solos were then transcribed and analysed for motivic development.

The concluding chapter studies the hindrances to the development of thematic melodic material found in these solos and analyses the impact of these unusual guidance methods on the improvising soloist and the process of composing new work. The final section suggests future possible developments based on the findings and experience of conducting the research.

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- 4.4 *Bemba Variations* (2012) – soloist: Jon Herbert

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The idea for this research came to me around thirty years ago, and has been a preoccupation ever since. I distinctly remember sitting in the trombone section of a big band playing the second trombone part of a piece; after several minutes, the notes on my music suddenly changed into chord symbols, and I was expected to improvise a solo. There had been a tune and countermelodies happening in the music up to that point, but all that I had played were inner harmony parts and a few background figures – nothing tuneful or thematic. I wanted to continue the musical argument of the piece and to make my solo relevant to what had gone before, but I was not able to do this. All I had to go on was a shorthand description of the background chords that I was expected to improvise over - no melodic information at all. That feeling of frustration has stayed with me ever since and is the starting point for this research.

I was left wondering if it was possible to find a method of guiding the soloist in some way to help to make their improvisation an integral part of the piece rather than just an unrelated decoration. A new technique such as this would not be meant to replace the methods currently used in jazz but could exist as an additional device to deal with what I perceived as the problem. As an improviser in jazz rarely works in a vacuum and almost always improvises based on something, why not provide them, in some way, with thematic elements of the piece as a starting point for their improvisation?

All my training and instincts as a classically-trained composer told me that the improvised solo section should relate in some way to the rest of the piece: the written parts. The listener expects this connection between the playing of the soloist and the material played by the ensemble in classical music. Why is this not the case in jazz? Just because, in the big band piece, the soloist is improvising and will be expected to play something different every time, does not mean that this improvisation could not still be related to the thematic material of the piece? As I will touch on later, for contemporary audiences, big

band music has developed from a dance music into music for listening to. Could not the integration of written and improvised content also evolve?

Gunther Schuller, in his seminal article *Sonny Rollins and the Challenge of Thematic Improvisation* (1957), categorised jazz improvisation as consisting of “two broad and sometimes overlapping categories which have been called *paraphrase* and *chorus* improvisation” (italics in original). The former consists “mostly of an embellishment and ornamentation technique” and is common in early jazz soloing where the main melody tends to be the principal starting point for melodic improvisation. Schuller goes on to define the second type of improvising, by citing André Hodeir (1956): “Freed from all melodic and structural obligation, the chorus improvisation is a simple emanation inspired by a given chord sequence”. According to Schuller (1957), the fact that the soloist has “departed completely from a given theme or melody and is improvising freely on nothing but a chord structure” is said to be a feature of “most improvisation in the modern jazz era”.

From the view point of an academic writing in 1957, this ‘modern jazz era’ could also be defined as the bebop era, and beyond. This bebop style of improvisation, originally created in the 1940s, has come to form the backbone of the teaching of improvisation in most academic contexts, particularly since the style was codified by books such as David Baker’s *How to Play Bebop, vols. 1, 2 and 3* (1987). When present-day jazz education books or DVDs include a reference to the language or vocabulary of jazz in their title¹ they are usually referring to the musical features of bebop, particularly since the rise of the neo-conservative movement in American jazz, championed by musician/composer Wynton Marsalis and critic and academic, Stanley Crouch.

¹ Such as: Coker, J. (1991) *Elements of the Jazz Language: for the developing improviser*; Haerle, D. (1980) *The Jazz Language: a theory text for jazz composition and improvisation*; Steinel, M. (1995) *Building a Jazz Vocabulary: a resource for learning jazz improvisation*; Evans, B. (2012) *Bill Evans: the language of improvisation*. (DVD)

Because of the dominance of bebop-derived ideas, improvisation is usually taught as a process of improvising over a chord sequence, using the correct chord/scale relationships, rather than improvisation on a given melody. This is even true when the chord sequence is taken from a jazz standard. The melodic information is often ignored completely, in favour of explorations of chord substitutions, extensions, alterations and superimpositions. Therefore, the contemporary jazz soloist is most often confronted with just a sequence of chords from which to work. This is particularly the case in most big band solo situations, as the player only has their individual part, rather than a complete lead sheet, giving both the melody and chords. This would be the case in most small-band performances, and this situation gives the performer far more material to work with should they want to integrate the thematic material into their improvising.

Despite this, under the present system, an experienced jazz improviser can still deduce a vast amount of information from just a chord sequence notated in chord symbols. But, although it can supply a wealth of other information – harmonic, structural, stylistic and historical - the chord progression alone provides no clue to the melodic content of the composition.

In chapter one of volume three of *How to Play Bebop* (1987) David Baker introduces the concept of a contrafact, citing Patrick (1975) as his source. This is “a tune which is based on an extant set of chord changes” (Baker, 1987, p. 1). Baker goes on to list 48 new bebop tunes based on the chords of *I Got Rhythm* (known to jazz players as *rhythm changes*). If so many different tunes are possible over a given 32-bar chord sequence, the changes themselves cannot be providing any specific melodic guidance to the improviser.

Many early big band performances employ similar chord sequences; often a generic 12-bar blues sequence or a variation on the AABA form *rhythm changes* chord sequence. This set of changes is either repeated exactly throughout the piece, or the cycle may be broken by transitional passages and interludes, often introduced to facilitate modulations and changes of texture.

In many early big band performances, a string of solos is performed by different players but played over the same chord sequence. This phenomenon comes from an era (the late 1920s to early 1940s) when a big band was synonymous with a dance band. When playing for dancers, it was very useful to be able to stretch a performance as it was already in progress, by inserting extra solos on cue or extending an existing solo which was already in progress. The most famous example of this, although it did not occur in a formal dance band setting, was the Ellington band's legendary performance of *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue* at the third Newport Jazz Festival in 1956. Apparently, when Ellington's tenor saxophonist, Paul Gonsalves, started playing a solo over a 12-bar blues progression "a blonde woman in the crowd began dancing, and the audience went wild." (DeVeaux and Giddins, (2009, p. 220) As his intensity grew in response to the dancing Ellington kept the solo going. Eventually Gonsalves became exhausted after playing a "showboating 27-chorus solo, filled to the brim with blues clichés" that "brought the crowd to its feet". (Gioia, 1997, p. 195) In the middle of the performance, which was now over-running its allotted time, George Wein, the festival organiser, was "trying to stop the band, but the band refused to stop" (Shipton, 2007, p. 529) as it would have disrupted the dancing and the mood of the occasion.

This situation of playing for dancers may also be the start of the tradition of chorus improvisation as the soloist was expected to contribute, often at very short notice, in mid-performance, with little time to consider the melodic material of the main tune. The chief motivation was often simply to keep the dancers supplied with suitable dance music and on the dance floor, as the Ellington example demonstrates.

This practice carried on, in later years, as big band music was transformed from a dance accompaniment into music to listen to - both live (in concert performances) and in the form of recordings. As a result, many pieces – particularly those created over 12-bar blues sequences – are simply a string of unrelated solos containing improvisations that also bear no relation to the opening theme of the work, but all fit the basic harmonic framework of the

composition. An early example of this is *One O'Clock Jump* by Count Basie and his Orchestra recorded in 1937. (This is one of the musical examples on the CDs that accompany DeVeaux and Giddins (2009)) According to the listening guide (DeVeaux and Giddins, 2009, p. 207) this features a “string of solos”; piano, tenor saxophone, trombone, tenor saxophone, trumpet, piano, “accompanied by riffs” played by the rest of the band.

Today, in many published big band charts, it is common to find improvised solo sections marked “possible repeat for further solos” and the following section marked “cue to continue”. This open form allows the solo section to be repeated at will, and the performance to be stretched in duration as required, at the discretion of the bandleader. In fact, in this type of big band composition, it often seems to be entirely feasible to cut a solo out of one performance and drop it into another (of a different piece at the same tempo and in the same key) with no deleterious effect on the overall composition.

In later years, the title of these bands often developed from ‘big band’ into ‘jazz orchestra’ or ‘large jazz ensemble’. All are essentially the same line-up, and this instrumentation has now become standardised to a basic 17-piece group; a five-piece saxophone section (two altos, two tenors and a baritone), four trumpets, four trombones (three tenors and a bass) and a rhythm section (piano, guitar, bass and drums)². In contemporary big bands, many of the saxophone players are expected to double on other woodwind instruments, and the trumpets often double on flugelhorns. Extra percussionists may also augment the rhythm section, playing both tuned and un-tuned instruments, and additional (often orchestral) brass or woodwind players may expand the core line-up. Despite these developments, the essential texture of sections of woodwind and brass players accompanied by a rhythm section has remained unchanged throughout the history of the big band.

² For the sake of consistency, the term ‘big band’ will be used throughout this thesis to refer to this type of ensemble.

The genre can also be characterised by the presence of improvising soloists playing against contrasting notated background textures. These soloists are usually players from within the band who must change role instantly. Often with little or no time to prepare themselves, they jump from a background role in the written composition into the limelight as an improvising player for the length of the solo section, and then merge back into the notated ensemble texture. This was exactly the situation in the case of my initial problem, as described in the opening paragraph of this chapter. I was compelled to investigate possible answers to this problem, searching for a practical way to aid the improviser in contextualising their solo by integrating it into the thematic material of the composer's work.

This PhD is an attempt to investigate the problem frequently encountered by soloists in this big band situation through considering three main research questions:

- 1) Within the context of a jazz big band, how can a jazz improviser be guided to create music based on the thematic material of a composition, rather than purely on chord symbols?
- 2) What new guidance methods can be developed to attempt this?
- 3) What impact do these methods have on improvising soloists and the way that composers conceive their work?

To answer these questions, two principal research methods were used, apart from the study of existing literature discussed as part of the research context in Chapter 2. A survey of 57 currently active jazz composers from around the world was undertaken after studying the research context and discovering the lack of information on the specific issues under scrutiny. The results of this survey are analysed and discussed in Chapter 3. Four new works for big band were composed specifically to explore possible solutions to the problem of the relationship between the composed and improvised sections. These works were performed multiple times with different soloists, and the resultant recorded

improvisations were later transcribed and analysed. Each of these compositions is covered in its own chapter; *Colliers Way* in Chapter 4, *All Around the Wrekin* in Chapter 5, *Are We There Yet?* in Chapter 6, and *Bemba Variations* in Chapter 7. In the conclusion, I will draw together the results gleaned from the research and study of the analyses and how they addressed the initial questions. This chapter also comments on these results, discusses what new information may be learned from them, and goes on to suggest possible areas for further research.

As well as the core text, several supporting appendices have been submitted containing information on the jazz composers responding to the email questionnaire, the metrical analyses of jazz composer questionnaire replies, and the transcription of an interview with jazz composer Darcy James Argue. The portfolio comprises four new works for big band and soloist presented as scores, the video and audio recordings of multiple performances of these works, and the transcriptions and analyses of the improvised solos from the performances of these works.

Chapter 2 – Research Context

This chapter introduces the research context by examining the challenges inherent in researching into this field. I start by outlining the existing academic texts that relate to this area of research, and then introduce the compositional concepts and approach of Graham Collier. His work is placed in the context of British jazz of the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and is compared to the dominant current school of big band composition that is inspired by the works and teaching of Bob Brookmeyer. After comparing the contrasting working methods of these two jazz composers, the chapter goes on to demonstrate the gap in knowledge that this research intends to explore, as well as the strategies used to study this problem.

2.1 - The challenges inherent in research into jazz composition

It is essential to examine specific individual performances of a work when studying jazz composition. The score itself, like a film script, is merely a starting point for rehearsal, and changes to the written version are common both before and possibly during the performance. The written score only comes to life when it is performed, in much the same way as a film script makes far more sense when the team of expert filmmakers come together to bring it to life on the screen. As Graham Collier put it: “for the jazz composer, it is the act of performing that allows... things to happen” (Collier, 2009, p. 265).

Each performance of a jazz composition is unique and unrepeatable. This fact is a desirable and required aspect of jazz performance and by extension jazz composition. In the liner notes to Miles Davis’s *Kind of Blue* album, the jazz pianist and composer Bill Evans has compared this process to certain Japanese visual arts practices. In both art forms, the artist must:

allow the idea to express itself... in such a direct way that deliberation cannot interfere. This conviction that direct deed is the most meaningful reflection I believe has prompted the evolution of the extremely severe and unique discipline of the jazz or improvising musician (Evans, 1959).

At first sight, the two concepts – of improvising without deliberation and using new musical devices to thematically guide the soloist - seem to be contradictory. However, this situation of improvising without deliberation would only seem to be achievable at the end of a process of considerable intellectual study and thousands of hours of instrumental practice, usually involving playing over chord progressions outlined in chord symbols. Surely an element of muscle memory and the use of pre-rehearsed musical building blocks must be involved in the resulting improvisations, rather than pure unfettered spontaneous invention? If the process of improvisation is triggered by information in the form of chord symbols that then generate certain pre-prepared responses, there would seem to be no ethical problem in replacing the chord symbols with some other starting point for improvisation, and this catalyst could be based on the thematic material of the composition in question.

By including these unrepeatable, improvised sections within their notated compositions, the jazz composer willingly accepts that each performance will be different, and they allow the soloist(s) to breathe new life into the piece with every performance. The composer understands, indeed expects, that the soloist might depart from the predicted route at any time. The resulting differences, possibly very significant, between different versions of allegedly the same piece can cause problems for listeners unfamiliar with the jazz world.

Many other differences in compositional approach between Western classical practice and jazz practice became apparent during this research. Jazz composition almost always involves an element of improvisation. (There are examples of totally notated jazz compositions, but these are very rare.) Many jazz composers see this improvised element as the defining characteristic of jazz composition. The crucial challenge faced by composers working in this medium remains how to find the right balance between improvisation and composed structures. Lars Møller a Swedish jazz composer, regards this big band compositional problem as the collision between two different artistic and

cultural approaches; the Western orchestral format, that he describes as a “structured, disciplined” and “planned artistic and emotional experience” involving many people making a “non-individually expressive” contribution to a larger goal meets the “African, improvised, unplanned expression of the individual NOW!” (email Møller/Dorrell, 2015).

Another departure from standard Western classical music practice is the breakdown of the division of roles within the music. It is not unusual for some (or all) of the roles of composer, performer, conductor and bandleader to overlap and be held simultaneously by one person in a big band jazz performance situation. Many of the jazz composers questioned during this research were in this position.

The characteristics of jazz composition outlined above: the unrepeatability of a performance, and the significant differences between versions of the ‘same piece’, along with the inherently unpredictable nature of improvisation itself, combine to make this an awkward area to research. This situation may explain the relative lack of previous research into this field.

2.2 - Academic Texts

2.2.1 - Big Band Composition and Arranging Manuals

Many of the available academic books on jazz composition and arranging for big band take the form of “How to...” instruction manuals.³ It is worth noting that many of these books, such as Sussman and Abene (2012), cover both composition and arranging, and treat them as very similar processes. The works of Gil Evans clearly demonstrate this blurring of the two procedures in

³ The list of typical examples of this type of book includes: Sussman, R. and Abene, M. (2012) *Jazz: composition and arranging in the digital age*; Tomaro, M. and Wilson, J. (2009) *Instrumental Jazz Arranging: a comprehensive and practical guide*; Lowell, D. and Pullig, K. (2003) *Arranging for Large Jazz Ensemble*; Russo, W. (1961) *Composing for the Jazz Orchestra*.

jazz. Evans's 1958 recording *New Bottle, Old Wine* (subtitled *The Great Jazz Composers interpreted by Gil Evans and his Orchestra*) has been described as "an object lesson in arranging as recomposing" (Hicock, 2002, p. 96). Each of the old tunes is given a new personality but retains the "fundamental character of the originals" (Hicock, 2002, p. 96). He also juxtaposes stylistic idioms, often within a single tune, emphasising the different eras of jazz from which the source material is taken, but also casting them in a new light by using a contemporary style of writing.

One reason for the similarity of approaches given to composition and arranging is that most of the books assume that the starting point for the big band writing is the same: a lead sheet, giving the basic melody and chords. The source of this lead sheet, original or borrowed, is immaterial for the process of fleshing out the melody to produce a big band version. In most cases, the lead sheet will fall into the category of either a 32-bar song form or a 12-bar blues form. Based on these text books, the creation of a big band work from this core material uses the conventional big band arranging procedures familiar from the works of the swing era up to the mid-1980s. (Sammy Nestico's work for *The Count Basie Orchestra* is a frequently-cited technical and stylistic role model.)

This approach involves the creation of a stereotypical repeating chorus form made up of easily recognisable sections, usually of 4, 8, 12, 16 or 32 bars, usually labelled intro, head, solos, backings, section soli, interlude(s), shout chorus and ending (or outro). Such formal regularity, combined with a very prescriptive technique for close harmony melodic writing can lead to a very formulaic genre of music, potentially lacking in many individual compositional touches. Collier describes this approach, which has been taught to generations of Berklee students, in *The Birth of the Grey* section of chapter four of his final book, as "the starting point for much of today's generally dull big band writing" (Collier, 2008, p.67)

Most of these books include chapters on basic technical information about big band instruments and how to write for them. The orchestration, structural and textural suggestions in these manuals tend to be taken from commercial big

band arranging practice and for this reason lack originality and individuality. They do however create a very strong sense of the correct way to compose in this genre, along with a conservative vision of the possibilities inherent in big band music.

The final chapters of these books often contain sample big band charts that demonstrate the various devices studied earlier, but now seen in the context of a complete work. These model scores are usually generic examples but may also be written in a variety of historical styles from early jazz up to the style of Gil Evans as represented by his writing on the Miles Davis "*Sketches of Spain*" album of 1960. More contemporary examples of big band writing are very rare in these manuals.

No mention is made of any guidance for the improviser in this approach to big band writing apart from the use of chord symbols to outline the harmonic background.

2.2.2 - Jazz Composition books

Many jazz composition manuals are written as more general guides, rather than dealing with the specifics of big band composition⁴. These tend to cover topics such as scales, modes, chords, tensions on dominant chords, approach notes and other embellishments, melodic and harmonic considerations, blues and song form, arranging and formatting, metric modulation, jazz/rock fusion, episodic form, motivic composition and the creation of extended works. These may be covered in abstract or with specific information on composing for rhythm section and various numbers of frontline horns. In his book, *Jazz Arranging and Composing: a linear approach* (1986), Bill Dobbins gives, as examples throughout the book, 16 different versions of his medium fast bebop

⁴ The list of typical examples of this type of book includes: Dobbins, B. (1986) *Jazz Arranging and Composing: a linear approach*; Pease, T. (2003) *Jazz Composition: theory and practice*; Goldstein, G. (2015) *Jazz Composer's Companion*.

tune *Blues for Barry* ranging from a single line lead sheet giving just the melody and chord symbols to a full arrangement for rhythm section and five horns.

Again, no mention is made of any guidance for the improviser in these books, apart from the use of chord symbols to outline the harmonic background over which the soloists play.

2.2.3 - Jazz Theory books

Books on jazz theory⁵ either deal with the general theory of jazz harmony or cover more specific topics that form the basis of contemporary approaches to jazz harmony. Again, these tend to be more general textbooks rather than specifically big band writing manuals. For example, Levine (1995), as a general theory book, covers topics such as the function of chords in a jazz chord progression, harmonic clichés in jazz, the ii V I progression, the chord/scale relationships commonly used in jazz, blues progressions, and the *rhythm changes* chord progression.

The more specialised books cover topics such as techniques for the reharmonisation of existing jazz standard melodies (e.g. Felts (2002)), a catalogue of modern jazz chord voicings (e.g. Pease and Pullig (2001)), methods for categorising common harmonic progressions used in jazz (e.g. Cork (1990)) and the use of non-functional harmony in jazz (e.g. Naus (1998)). None of the theory books suggest alternative methods for guiding the soloist, but explain jazz harmony, as represented by chord symbols, in great depth.

⁵ Representative examples of the general jazz theory genre include: Levine, M. (1995) *The Jazz Theory Book*; Berkman, D. (2013) *The Jazz Harmony Book*; Mulholland, J. and Hohnacki, T. (2013) *The Berklee Book of Jazz Harmony*; Spitzer, P. (2001) *Jazz Theory – Complete*.

Some books cover these topics from the point of view of the player of a specific instrument. The most useful for big band composers are the manuals in jazz piano playing and basic jazz keyboard harmony⁶, as conventional left hand piano chord voicings are often copied exactly and used for the trombone or saxophone sections of a big band, particularly when accompanying an improvised solo or single melody instrument.

2.2.4 - Jazz Improvisation Manuals

Another category of books that provides useful information for the jazz composer is that of jazz improvisation guides or manuals.⁷ These provide detailed methods for learning how to improvise (usually over chord symbols) in a jazz situation. As most big band pieces contain sections where a soloist is expected to improvise, understanding the mechanics of this process is essential to the jazz composer.

These books have proliferated in recent years as a result in the rise of the jazz education industry since the 1960s, spearheaded in the USA by Jamey Aebersold. His primary focus is on supplying jazz backing tracks accompanied by chord sequences for practice purposes. In May 2017, his catalogue of play-along CDs and booklets had reached 133 volumes. His approach is based on each chord symbol in a specific context having a related scale to be used as

⁶ Representative examples of jazz piano manuals include: Levine, M. (1989) *The Jazz Piano Book*; Mehegan, J. (1960-84) *The Jazz Improvisation Series – Book 1: Tonal and Rhythmic Principles. Book 2: Jazz Rhythm and the Improvised Line. Book 3: Swing and Early Progressive Piano Styles. Book 4: Contemporary Piano Styles*; DeGreg, P. (1994) *Jazz Keyboard Harmony: a practical voicing method for all musicians*.

⁷ Representative examples of jazz improvisation manuals include: Crook, H. (1999) *Ready, Aim, Improvise: exploring the basics of jazz improvisation*; Crook, H. (1991) *How to Improvise: an approach to practicing improvisation*; Coker, J. (1980) *Complete Method for Improvisation: for all instruments*; Berg, S. (1998) *Jazz Improvisation: The Goal-Note Method: a comprehensive, programmed guide to jazz theory and improvisation*.

the starting point for improvisation. Very little other melodic material is suggested, apart from digital patterns to assist in the learning of these scales.

Several books have been written in reaction to the limitations of the Aebersold approach and cover other musical parameters apart from the basic chord/scale relationship. For example, Crook (1991) covers aspects such as the pacing of solos, the use of dynamics, and shaping a solo by controlling the instrumental range employed. Other books, such as Berg (1998), look at techniques for strongly outlining chord progressions with a single note instrument by having harmonically important goal-notes to aim for at each change of chord.

These books all fail to provide the soloist with stylistic melodic models for their improvisation. As a result, books which explore melodic material for jazz improvisers have arisen.

2.2.5 - Melodic Material: Jazz Vocabulary

Jazz has a very particular melodic vocabulary and many books have been written covering this topic.⁸ These may be general melodic material, for example Steinel (1995), or may be based on a historical style, such as Baker (1985), or on a specific technical area. These include the use of certain scales

⁸ Representative examples of jazz vocabulary books include: Steinel, M. (1995) *Building a Jazz Vocabulary: a resource for learning jazz improvisation*; Coker, J. (1991) *Elements of the Jazz Language: for the developing improviser*; Haerle, D. (1989) *The Jazz Sound: a guide to tune analysis and chord/scale choices for improvisation*; Baker, D. (1985) *How to Play Bebop series – Book 1. The Bebop Scales and other scales in common use – Book 2. Learning the Bebop Language: patterns, formulae and other linking materials – Book 3. Techniques for Learning and Utilising Bebop Tunes*; Galper, H. (2005) *Forward Motion – From Bach to Bebop: a corrective approach to jazz phrasing*; Bergonzi, J. (1992) *Vol. 1 – Melodic Structures: a step-by-step method for learning to play over changes*; Green, B. (1985) *Inside/Outside: a shortcut to jazz improvisation utilizing ii-V7 phrases and concepts*; Ricker, R. (1976) *Technique Development in Fourths for Jazz Improvisation*; Baker, D. N. (1980) *Modal and Contemporary Patterns*; Ricker, R. (1983) *Pentatonic Scales for Jazz Improvisations*; Campbell, G. (1988) *Expansions: a method for developing new material for improvisation*

(e.g. Baker (1980)), intervals (e.g. Ricker (1976)), or the use of advanced harmonic concepts to generate melodic ideas (e.g. Campbell (1988)).

All the improvisation and jazz vocabulary books cited above assume that the improviser is working over chord symbols in a conventional situation accompanied by a rhythm section comping in a stylistically appropriate manner. For example, in a swing setting, the bass player will be playing a walking bass line that outlines the chords, the drummer's ride cymbal will be playing a ten-to-ten rhythm pattern and the pianist will be defining the harmony with appropriate rootless voicings.

2.3 - Graham Collier

In parallel to the jazz composition and arranging textbooks outlined in section 2.2, other writers have taken a more individual approach. Graham Collier (1937-2011) was a British jazz composer and bass-player who studied at Berklee in the early 1960s. He returned to England in 1963, and went on to have a long career during which he showed little interest in composing big band music in "a stale outdated style which lacks depth" (Collier, 2009, pp. 121). From 1987-99 he set up and ran the Royal Academy of Music jazz degree course based on his own ideas rather than following American models. In 1999 he left this post to concentrate on composing his own music and running his own bands full-time, as well as teaching jazz workshops and giving lecture-recitals around the world.

Before studying the books that Collier wrote on his approach to jazz composition, it is beneficial to look at the context in which he lived and worked and outside influences upon his style, techniques and methods.

2.3.1 – Early Influences on Collier's compositional style

An important early influence on Collier, initially as a composer but also later as a jazz educator, was the trumpeter and composer Herb Pomeroy. Collier studied composition and played in various groups with him during his time at Berklee.

Pomeroy was particularly influenced by Ellington's approach to orchestration and chord-voicing. In an online interview with Clifford Allen, Collier stated that "Herb taught me that people are important in music, not so much the notes you give them but using the way they play as individuals." (Allen, 2011)

Encouraged by Pomeroy, and despite this music being viewed by his contemporaries in the early 1960s as old-fashioned and irrelevant, Collier studied the work of Ellington closely, both during his student years at Berklee and in later life. Particularly interesting to Collier was Ellington's use of orchestral textures and fresh instrumental colours and combinations (which were possibly enhanced by Billy Strayhorn as part of his long collaboration with Ellington.) According to Heining, "what Collier took from Ellington was not just a 'what' but a 'how' and one that Collier realized needed always to be approached critically and self-critically" (Heining, 2018, p. 58). Ellington's compositional methods and approach (or 'how') and its influence on Collier will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In 1953 George Russell published his music theory book, the *Lydian Chromatic Theory of Tonal Organisation*. This proved to be a very influential collection of theoretical concepts amongst forward-looking jazz musicians in the mid to late 1950s. Joachim Berendt (1976, p. 357) described it as "the pathbreaker for Miles Davis' and John Coltrane's 'modality'", and Davis and Bill Evans employed these modal theories in writing the compositions and creating the improvisations on the Miles Davis album *Kind of Blue* (1959). As these concepts were still relatively new and current in the early 1960s, it should not be a surprise to realise that many of Collier's early works are also modal in their approach to melodic and harmonic material.

However, a major difference between the work of Russell and Collier is their contrasting approaches to and importance given to the rhythmic frameworks within which their pieces exist. Russell's "layering of rhythms like an African drum choir is a continent – and a hemisphere – away from Collier's use of rhythm" (Heining, 2009, p. 291)

The influence of Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* was supplemented by Collier's appreciation of the later, more experimental albums by the 1964-68 Miles Davis Quintet that included Herbie Hancock on piano, Ron Carter on bass, Wayne Shorter on saxophone and Tony Williams on drums. According to Heining (2018, p. 58) "Collier learnt from listening to Davis that less could often be more", both in terms of the amount of given material in a jazz composition, but also in terms of the textures employed to create a desired mood or feeling. This deliberate economy of means and use of space as a compositional technique will be discussed later in this chapter.

Gil Evans was another jazz composer who adopted these modal ideas and influenced Collier. The modal approach can be seen both in his earlier compositions for the Miles Davis album *Sketches of Spain* (1960), that feature Davis as the lone soloist in an augmented big band or jazz orchestra setting, and in his later, more rock-influenced album *Svengali* (1973) with his own band or orchestra. Collier was particularly impressed by Evans compositions such as *Saeta* from *Sketches of Spain*. This piece draws on flamenco and Spanish religious music, and is intended to tell the story of Christ's passion as traditionally sung by a woman during the processions of Holy Week. Evans "uses Davis as the improvising soloist to convey the same sense of piety and passion" (Heining, 2018, p. 59). Collier writes:

What we hear in "Saeta", as well as Arabic scales, fascinating textural backgrounds, and evocations of something "Spanish", is jazz composition being moved into new realms of possibilities... [with] different aims than the integration *within* accepted jazz traditions of what's written with what's improvised. [We hear] a composition in which composer and soloist combine to portray an idea *outside* jazz (Collier, 2009, p. 227; emphasis original).

Heining states that the "frequent Spanish tinges that one hears in Collier's music, often provided by the guitar of Ed Speight, drew upon Evans' love of those Arabic scales and 'evocations of something "Spanish"' (Heining, 2018, p. 60).

Collier also comments on the later Evans composition *Zee Zee* (that appears on the *Svengali* (1973) album), remarking that there is very little to the piece “on paper, or conceptually, but there is just enough for... great jazz performances to be created” (Collier, 2009, p. 259). This idea of leaving room for improvisation to happen is crucial to Collier’s compositional approach, and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Charles Mingus was another composer (or more accurately a bass-playing, band-leading composer) who provided a role-model for Collier. Mingus’s approach also involved the use of scales and modes, but was possibly even more influential in his experimental approach and willingness to stretch the conventions of the time. Examples of this approach include his creation of multi-movement suites (such as *The Black Saint and the Sinner Lady* (1963) which Collier described as “one of the most successful longer works in jazz” (Collier, 2009, p. 232), his use of passages with an accelerating pulse or no pulse, and his juxtaposition of extremely contrasting passages, such as following a gentle, lyrical written section with a loud, anarchic, free passage. Mingus was also responsible for revisiting and reworking earlier styles (particularly New Orleans jazz-based collective improvisation) and the compositions of earlier composers, particularly Ellington and Jelly Roll Morton. These were both ideas that were adopted by Collier in his own work.

Another influence on Collier was the early music of the Count Basie Band. He was inspired by “the idea that jazz could be created on the stand by musicians sympathetic to the leader’s aims” (Heining, 2018, p. 58) and “the way the Basie Band used background riffs” (Heining, 2018, p. 58) behind the soloist.

All the American composers mentioned above as informing the work of Collier share some characteristics. All of them regard jazz in general, and big band jazz in particular, as music for a listening audience rather than as background music for dancers, and all of them regard jazz as “an art form deserving of the same respect accorded to European art music but... according it its own distinctive set of musical values” (Heining, 2018, p. 58). While Collier was aware of American Free Jazz performed at a

formative time in his composing career (late 50s/early 60s) by Ornette Coleman, Archie Shepp and John Coltrane, these stylistic developments can be seen to have had more of an effect on some of the soloists in Collier's bands, rather than on Collier as a composer.

2.3.2 – Collier's place within the British jazz scene of the 1960s, 70s and 80s

In 1963 Collier returned to live and work in England. He joined a vibrant British jazz scene mostly based in London and unofficially centred around tenor saxophonist Ronnie Scott's jazz club which opened in 1959 in Soho. When the club moved premises to Frith Street in 1965, the original venue in Gerrard Street, which became known as 'The Old Place', became a venue for younger, experimental musicians who were just coming onto the scene. "The impact on the British scene was as critical as the opportunity to hear American players of the calibre that Scott [was] presenting [at the main club]" (Fordham, 1986, p. 148).

Throughout the 1950s "British jazz had started to become a distinct entity in its own right" (Heining, 2012, p. 92) with John (then Johnny) Dankworth, the Jazz Couriers with Ronnie Scott and Tubby Hayes, and the various Tony Kinsey and Tony Crombie groups establishing a reputation. According to the saxophonist Stan Sulzman quoted on Alyn Shipton's sleeve notes to Collier's *Down Another Road/Songs for my Father/Mosaics* reissue;

[It was] very much our music – nobody else was doing it... You didn't feel you were making a bad copy of an American record (Shipton, 2007).

Contemporaries of Collier on this British jazz scene include Chris McGregor, the bands *Soft Machine* and *Nucleus*, Mike Westbrook, Mike Gibbs, Alan Skidmore, John Taylor, Norma Winstone, Howard Riley, Mike Osbourne, John Surman, Joe Harriott, Stan Tracey, Neil Ardley, Barry Guy and Keith Tippett. This period also produced many significant albums of British jazz:

Joe Harriott *Free Form* (1960)

Stan Tracey Quartet *Under Milk Wood* (1965)

John Dankworth *The Zodiac Variations* (1965) and *The \$1,000,000 Collection* (1967)

Soft Machine *The Soft Machine* (1968)

Mike Westbrook's *Marching Song* (1969) and *Citadel/Room 315* (1975)

John Surman's *John Surman* (1969), *How Many Clouds* (1970), *Westering Home* (1972) and *Morning Glory* (1973)

Chris McGregor *Chris McGregor's Brotherhood of Breath* (1970)

Nucleus *Elastic Rock* (1970)

Mike Osborne's *Outback* (1970)

Alan Skidmore's *Once Upon a Time* (1970)

Surman–Barre Phillips–Stu Martin *The Trio* (1970) and *Conflagration* (1971)

Keith Tippett *Septober Energy* (1971)

Mike Gibbs's *Tanglewood '63* (1971) and *Just Ahead* (1972)

John Taylor's *Pause, and Think Again* (1971)

Norma Winstone's *Edge of Time* (1971)

Howard Riley's *Flight* (1971)

Surman/Warren *Tales of The Algonquin* (1971)

Barry Guy *Ode* (1972)

Stan Tracey Octet *Salisbury Suite* (1976)

Neil Ardley *Kaleidoscope of Rainbows* (1976)

In this period, the limited size of the British jazz scene meant that many musicians performed on several of these albums and worked with many different composers. For example, Malcolm Griffiths (trombone), Harry Beckett (trumpet) and Art Themen (saxophones) all played on both *Salisbury Suite* (1976) by Stan Tracey and *New Conditions* (1976) by Collier. According to Themen, “there’s strictly no comparison because Stan Tracey – to use that crude jazz expression – could swing like a shit-house door, whereas Graham [Collier] couldn’t swing to save his life” (Heining, 2018, p. 136). Saxophonist Chris Biscoe played with Collier, Mike Westbrook and George Russell. Asked what he saw as the differences between the three bandleader/composers, (in an email Biscoe/Heining, 2014) he responded:

[M]y first thought was that the main driving force behind Graham's writing was the integration of composition and collective improvisation, while Mike Westbrook's concerns centre more on orchestral colour, harmony and structure. George Russell's greatest strength, I suppose, was his extraordinary approach to rhythm (Heining, 2018, p. 251).

In hindsight, what is particularly interesting are the very individual solutions to the problem of jazz composition and the stylistic breadth of the music composed in this period, particularly when it was mostly performed by a relatively small pool of professional jazz players in Britain.

John Dankworth explored classical techniques and ideas in his big band suites. Each movement of *The Zodiac Variations* (1965) explored a different key and mode, and in *The \$1,000,000 Collection* (1967) he employed serial techniques. Keith Tippett on the album *September Energy* (1971) and Barry Guy on *Ode* (1972) explored "ways of using the language of free improvisation within semi-formal compositional structures" (Heining, 2018, p.120) when working with very large groups of musicians. Mike Westbrook in *Citadel/Room 315* (1975) utilised jazz/rock rhythms and the "rock colours available from electric piano, electric bass and guitar" (Heining, 2018, p. 119). (It is highly likely that both Westbrook and Collier borrowed these instrumental colours from Miles Davis's electric albums of the period.)

Stan Tracey on his *Salisbury Suite* (1976) refused to be drawn towards playing electric keyboards and remained loyal to his preferred acoustic piano. According to Heining;

The music on the first and final parts of *Salisbury Suite* – 'Peg-Leg Bates' and 'Miff' – is intensely rhythmic, driven by the pianist-composer's percussive approach to his instrument, and emotionally exhilarating. The middle section, 'Ballad for St. Ed', is, of course, a ballad and one characterized by Tracey's gruff romanticism. The music throughout is more clearly harmonic and, unlike [Collier's] *New Conditions*, never strays into atonality (Heining, 2018, p. 120).

With a different approach again, Neil Ardley on his album *Kaleidoscope of Rainbows* (1976) used Balinese scales “to create a rich, polyharmonic music full of possibilities for his musicians” (Heining, 2018, p. 120).

As well as the varied influences of the jazz composers mentioned above, Collier was living and working in a British music scene dominated by the experimentation and eclecticism of the Beatles and the blues-drenched music of the Rolling Stones. He also demonstrated the influence (either consciously or unconsciously) of Classical composers such as Ravel, Debussy, Messiaen and Boulez, and the English pastoral school represented by Finzi and Britten. The adoption of melodic material from the English folk music tradition can particularly be seen in compositions such as *Barley Mow* (1969).

Whilst, during his long career, Collier worked with a significant number of British musicians, not all the reactions to his music were positive. Art Themen is quoted as saying that playing Collier’s music was not “an absolutely gob-smacking experience, one of the best musical experiences I’ve ever done. I can’t say that” (Heining, 2018, p. 136). This opinion is echoed by saxophonists Stan Sulzmann and Pete Hurt (Heining, 2018, p. 136). In the early-80s, Collier rehearsed his music with a collective of young musicians in London. Again, the lack of rhythmic definition and drive in much of his music caused problems. Mike Mower and Eddie Parker were part of this collective and, in separate conversations with the author, both disparagingly described many of Collier’s pieces as dirges. Eventually the collective rebelled and started to rehearse independently of Collier, and many of the participants wrote new pieces of their own to try out and develop in rehearsal. Under the name *Loose Tubes*, they performed their first concert in London in 1984, and went on to become a major force in British big band jazz, until they disbanded in 1990. The band launched the careers of leading British jazz players; Django Bates, Iain Ballamy, Eddie Parker, Julian and Steve Argüelles, Mark Lockheart, Steve Berry, Tim Whithead and Ashley Slater.

2.3.3 – Collier’s work within a wider artistic context

Collier has always also been influenced by extra-musical ideas. In an online interview, he remarked that:

I’ve always been interested in looking at the other arts as well as reading... It informs you as an artist to look at other arts (Allen, 2011).

He was interested in literature, particularly the writing of Malcolm Lowry, David Markson and Richard Powers. Lowry’s novel *Under the Volcano* provided the basis for Collier’s suite *The Day of the Dead* (1977), and throughout his life he was inspired by Lowry’s work with its ‘alternately stormy and rhapsodic’ moods (Morton, 2011).

Collier’s long relationship with the writer and art critic John Gill “opened up a world of ideas” (Morton, 2011) particularly related to the visual arts. In an interview with Roger Dean, Collier commented that:

...the three saxophones improvising against the stab chords in *Hoarded Dreams*, with the chords being directed freely depending on what the improvisers are doing... I’ve always felt these are an inspiration from painting, particularly the splashes of colour... Like the Clyfford Still paintings where there are tiny splashes of red: that kind of thinking is important to me. That’s the thing which really survives from a painting (Dean, 1992, p. 173).

Many of Collier’s pieces are inspired by the work of painters such as Paul Klee and Jackson Pollock, although he tended to use phrases written about the art works rather than the pictures or the titles of the pictures themselves as the starting points for compositions. In an online interview, Collier remarked that “it’s often the title [of a composition] that comes first and sets the creative juices flowing” (Grundy, 2008).

Occasionally titles would be suggested by others. For example, the title of his epic suite *Directing 14 Jackson Pollocks* (2009) was suggested by a friend. This phrase was

also seized upon by Collier as the title of the final section of his book *The Jazz Composer* (2009) as it was also “a good working definition of the improvising composer’s job description” (Morton, 2011).

2.3.4 - Collier’s books on jazz composition

Collier wrote seven books on jazz (of which three covered his approach to jazz composition). These three books when considered as a complete body of work, but particularly taking into consideration the technical content of his first book, *Compositional Devices* (1975), amount to the nearest thing to a jazz equivalent of Messiaen’s book, *Technique de mon Langage Musical*. Together the books also make up a similarly rare example of a composer revealing the detailed workings of their compositional techniques and ideas in such an extended manner.

Collier’ first book, *Compositional Devices: volume one* (1975) is based on his LP *Songs for my Father* (1970) and includes scores of the seven songs; actually all instrumental pieces. On analysing his own suite, Collier discovered that all the songs are subconscious developments of a single motif. The book outlines his compositional techniques, and includes a chapter on the development of a melodic motif (this section is based on classical compositional ideas; Collier cites "*The Thematic Process in Music*" (Reti, 1951) as a strong influence). Other chapters cover harmony, orchestration, the expansion of small forms, and the various possible uses of improvisation within a composition.

Interaction: opening up the jazz ensemble (1995) was written when he was leading the Royal Academy of Music jazz course. Collier designed this book as a practical manual for jazz educators and bandleaders, with chapters that introduce workshop ideas. A CD by Royal Academy student jazz musicians performing a series of exercises based on Collier's compositions accompanies the book.

Collier's final book, *The Jazz Composer: moving music off the paper* (2009), is the summation of a long career in jazz. This multi-faceted work is partly a philosophical analysis of the situation of, and processes involved in, being a jazz composer; partly a polemic triggered by his dissatisfaction with the neoconservative climate of much of the contemporary jazz scene; and partly an analysis of his concepts, methods and techniques in practice.

Collier outlines these general principles with reference to *directing 14 Jackson Pollocks* - a double CD on the jazzcontinuum label, recorded in London in 2004 by *Graham Collier's Celebration Band*. Moreover, the book also refers to other recent recordings of new works and new performances of pieces written earlier in his long career, *The Third Colour* and *Winter Oranges*. This book also has a companion website - www.thejazzcomposer.com - which contains many other recorded musical examples of his works cited in the text.

Despite his many inroads into the revising and refreshing of compositional approaches to big band composition, nowhere in Collier's writing does he mention the subject of guiding an improviser in any way apart from chord symbols. However, in his final book, he commented that:

My unshakeable view, and I follow Ellington in this regard, is that a great part of the jazz composer's craft is choosing his soloists, who they are, and where they are asked to play. If you ignore that, you're not writing jazz. (Collier, 2009, p. 216)

The act of choosing the player for a specific solo is seen by him as a way of predicting the musical outcome, and this provides him with sufficient control of the solo section. However, he has also developed a multitude of techniques for blurring the boundaries between the written and improvised sections of a piece, often making it very difficult for the listener to tell exactly what is pre-composed and what is not.

2.3.5 - Collier's original ideas and approach to composition for big band

As part of his mission to “move music off the paper” Collier outlined three concepts which help the jazz composer to “move beyond the notes”. (2009, p. 286) These are:

Space: *somewhere in which incidents can happen*

Levels: *the technique of divided attention*

Jazz Form: *thinking of a better way* (2009, p.286)

2.3.5.1 - The concept of space

Collier further refined this concept by sub-dividing it into *improvisational space*, *compositional space*, *rhythmic space*, and *physical and aural space*.

Collier (2009, p. 291) cites Miles Davis, Paul Desmond, and Don Pullen as examples of jazz improvisers who allow *improvisational space* into their solos, and criticises many other players for their lack of space caused by too many notes and the way in which their improvisations “seem to crowd in and overwhelm the senses” (2009, p. 288). The term *improvisational space* is also used to describe the space in which the soloist is working; the metaphorical room in which the improviser lives, provided by the composer but newly decorated each time by the performer. From the soloist's point of view, Collier creates what the poet and art critic Frank O'Hara called somewhere “in which incidents can happen” (Collier, 2009, p. 287), and the improviser is usually allowed to create whatever events they feel are appropriate with little interference or guidance from the composer.

Collier defines *compositional space* by one of his many references to the visual arts:

I try to find a sound in the same way that a painter tries to find a colour... I go to a lot of trouble to find the *compositional space* that a motif inhabits in sound (Collier, 2009, p. 292).

This *compositional space*, created by the composer, may also be inhabited by the improvising soloist. If this is the situation, Collier is happy, working as only part of the creative team responsible for a performance, not to write out all the music when he feels this is not necessary. “One could *write* music like this, but why, when the performance moves the music off the page into a space created by the composer, and furnished by the musicians?” (Collier, 2009, p. 293). This attitude again reveals Collier’s openness to collaborating with the improviser (or real-time co-composer) rather than feeling the need to impose his will on the soloist.

The concept of *rhythmic space* is mostly concerned with the work of the rhythm section. In many conventional jazz performances:

there is little chance of space in the rhythm section because of the complex rhythmic interplay (if good) or the unrelenting density (if bad). Even a very good bebop rhythm section often feels closed, locked into a formula (Collier, 2009, p. 293).

Collier sees it as his duty to “loosen up the rhythm section” (Collier, 1995, p. 28): to free the rhythm section from the tyranny of preordained roles and, by doing this, allow the music the space to breathe, and for players to explore new rhythm section textures and colours.

Space can also be, or seem to be, a physical thing. Grouping instruments by range rather than by instrumental group can create this effect, or, in performance, the music can be made more immediately intelligible for the listener by physically separating the soloist or soloists from the backing group.

The aural separation of a very low line against a very high one can create a sense of space, or, to use the example that he cites, “a trumpet against a clarinet against a trombone” (Collier, 2009, p. 294) as used in a traditional early jazz group. He also mentions very recognisably individual jazz voices which seem to exist in their own *aural space* in the mix of sounds. Referring to

the 1970 Miles Davis album, he says, “Think of Bennie Maupin’s bass clarinet on *Bitches Brew*” (Collier, 2009, p. 295).

2.3.5.2 - The concept of compositional *levels*

Collier breaks down the concept of compositional levels within his pieces into three classifications: *supporting levels* (or *levels of common purpose*), *counterpoint* and *independent levels* (or *levels of divergent purpose*).

Supporting levels is the term that he uses to describe the situation of a prominent melody or improvised solo underpinned by an accompanying level – aurally or rhythmically different - played by the rhythm section or by an ensemble backgrounds. All the accompanying levels are designed to complement the main strands of melody or improvised solo, or, to put it another way, all the levels could be said to share a common purpose; to support the soloist, regardless of whether they are playing written or improvised material.

Counterpoint usually involves several equally prominent melodic voices interweaving, but this situation can also occur in an unaccompanied solo line where changes of register can imply several lines almost simultaneously. He states that “the line has moved away from the simple melody with one dimension, to something that can be seen from different angles” (Collier, 2009, p. 298).

The term that Collier uses to describe the situation when several contrasting elements happen at the same time is *independent levels*. This material may be freely introduced (and reintroduced) against the soloist, and re-attacked as directed, in a way that, far from supporting the soloist, purposely distracts the listener (and possibly the performer) and undermines the prominence of the solo line. As a result, the consciously divergent *independent levels* are designed to disrupt rather than support the soloist.

2.3.5.3 - The concept of *jazz form*

Collier was interested in getting away from the conventional approach of repeating chorus form in jazz by using several compositional techniques which allow the form of compositions for large jazz groups to alter and adapt to the needs of the moment while the piece is in progress. He was interested in “changing the shape of the piece on the stage, in front of the audience” (Singh, 2010). He saw this as another form of improvisation:

I want to find ways of making the actual structure of the composition change. This can be done on what can be called the micro-level, and the macro-level (Collier, 2009, p. 302).

Micro-level structural improvising is common in jazz, particularly in a live situation. In this case, the players spontaneously improvise with all the elements of the composition. These include; the length of an open form piece, or the overall number of choruses in the blues or standard song form, the length of improvised solos, at what point the backings come in, the creation of new backings, when the final melody statement appears, how this melody is paraphrased, and so on. In an online interview, Collier remarked that:

[Micro-level] structural improvisation is what happens at a Jam Session; where you don't say to somebody before you start, “You take 10 choruses” or whatever, but you allow someone to play for as long as they want, and then somebody else takes over, and the whole structure of the piece changes from performance to performance (Singh, 2010).

Macro-level structural improvising changes the form of the piece as a whole - often radically. The composer can write pieces in several movements, but cues from the soloist as part of a linking cadenza, or cues from the director, or from another member of the band, can determine the order of these movements during a performance. If the shortage of rehearsal time, or restrictions on performance time, forces a change of plan, the composer can quickly reshape compositions constructed using these methods, by using only some of the sections of the piece. “If the sections are flexible enough there is no reason

why they shouldn't be played more than once, with a different soloist or a different background" (Collier, 2009, p. 305).

Collier saw this flexible approach to form, and willingness to accept, or even to actively seek, radically different performances of the same piece as integral to the approach of a jazz composer:

It's a chicken and egg situation, because once you get these ideas, you start to write *for* these ideas, and start to write music that allows you to work these ideas out. I present a blueprint with sections A, B, C and D, but there's nothing to say that we have to play them in that order (Singh, 2010).

Performances of jazz compositions will, and should, differ in detail, but they need to be sufficiently related to be recognised as the same piece. To better explain this situation Collier borrows a metaphor, originally used by the jazz critic Charles Fox to describe very different performances of one of his pieces (*Aberdeen Angus*). Each performance "may be a different animal, but it still has the owner's name on its collar" (Collier, 2009, p. 308).

Collier's flexibility and openness to spontaneous changes and developments triggered by the improvisation of a specific soloist or group of improvisers in a unique performance reinforces the shared responsibility for the composition. All the participants; composer, conductor and performers influence the resulting performance. It becomes *their* performance, rather than solely the composer's work.

2.3.5.4 - The concept of *possible pictures*

In an earlier book, *Interaction: opening up the jazz ensemble (1995)*, Collier introduced the concept of *possible pictures*. (This is taken from a passage in Siegfried Lenz's novel *The German Lesson* where a young boy is trying to reassemble a painting cut into pieces by the artist who painted it, so that it would not be found and compromise his position in society). The concept is based on the idea that the picture may be reassembled from its constituent

parts in an infinite number of ways. He applied this to the performance of jazz compositions saying that versions of the same piece can, and should, be different every time.

Although there are good players and good performances, there is never a perfect result. The music demands a fresh look, a new picture to be painted each time (Collier, 1995, p.73).

Collier accepted the fact that this approach to composition meant that performances were, by their improvised nature, unrepeatable. When asked about this in an interview he quoted Miles Davis's famous comment: "Why do you want to repeat it? Didn't we do it right the first time?" (Jones, 2007). But in jazz, there is no such thing as a definitive, correct performance. All versions of the piece are valid, and, while some may be more pleasing than others, in the opinion of the listener, no version is wrong.

He was also very aware that his music relied on a group of sympathetic and committed musicians who were willing to work as a team. In an interview, he commented that: "As jazz musicians we need to recognise that it's a music made up (pun almost intended) by a group of individuals, who in their playing touch us in a magical way, but who, in the best groups, are able to put their egos aside and make themselves into a well-functioning group" (Grundy, 2008). Without jazz musicians, both soloists and ensemble players, to bring his pieces to life, no work of Collier's would exist.

2.3.5.5 - Collier's view of jazz as a collaborative art form

Collier's respect for, and trust in, the musicians that he worked with, and his acute awareness of the position of the composer in a jazz setting, is reflected by an answer in an online interview:

There's also the thing of leaving enough space (another lesson from Miles), so they can be themselves - trusting that they'll find the right

thing to do when the time comes instead of being over-prescriptive - and that approach works, if the music is loose enough (Jones, 2007).

According to Collier, jazz is almost always a collaborative art form. Using the analogy of film, he stated that there are four main roles - the writer, the star, the director and the extras. In large jazz group performance, the equivalents would be the composer, the soloist, the conductor and the band. The realisation that the role of the jazz composer is to be one of a team of musicians involved in creating each unique performance was central to his approach to composition. In his final book, *The Jazz Composer: moving music off the paper*, written after a lifetime of working as a jazz composer, he stated:

It is the act of composing that makes things start to happen. And, for the jazz composer, it is the act of performing that allows *more* things to happen. Things that are, in some way, inherent in the piece, inherent in what's written down or developed during rehearsals. When composing, my overriding idea is to try to make space for these things to happen, to write for *jazz* to happen, rather than writing to satisfy my own ego (Collier, 2009, p. 265 – italics in the original).

Throughout his career, Collier was very insistent that jazz composition was an art in its own right and different from classical composition, or any other form of composition. As he commented during an online interview: "It is very different... The main thing about it is its ability to change all the time" (Singh, 2010).

2.3.5.6 - Improvisation as a textural device

Collier also developed a collection of compositional devices that employed improvisation in a way that blurred the edges of the divide between improvised and composed material.

These techniques include *shadowing*, which Collier first came across this idea in the music of Charles Mingus, who had himself derived it from the example of some early New Orleans jazz bands. Often a melody, or collection of motifs,

is designated to be played by one player the first time and then shadowed by various others the second time. “Each musician, while paying regard to what his colleagues are doing, is free to make a strong independent statement of the motif or melody, and while doing this may well inspire the others to play differently” (Collier, 2009, p.277).

Another development of the idea of using motifs to control a semi-improvised section is a technique that Collier calls *thickening*. Here players are asked to make their own choice of pitches while using the rhythm of the given motif. The resulting texture may gradually become more harmonically random and dissonant as the players diverge, gradually further and further, from the given motif on each repetition, creating a passage where the melodic figure gradually thickens in texture until in some cases it may overwhelm whatever else is happening at the time.

Collier may also combine the textural techniques outlined above into what he calls a *carpet of sound*. This device is a semi-improvised harmonic background behind a melody or improvised solo. The players may be asked to improvise their way through the chord progression, choosing their own note or notes, but not just playing a sustained long-note background. They are asked to make an individual textural contribution to the whole by re-attacking notes, and colouring and thickening them in an individual way. Players may also be given a melodic or rhythmic pattern and be asked to “make up something similar”, or they may receive various text instructions such as “sparse, rich, low patterns, high stabs” alongside normal dynamic markings in specific bars or areas of the music.

These textural devices allow all the members of the group to become involved with the spontaneous composition and development of the basic material; the backgrounds behind a soloist can now be as improvised as the solo itself. Collier is again allowing the players into the making of the piece and merely devises the initial framework within which they can create.

All the technical devices outlined above; *shadowing*, *thickening* and *carpets of sound*, rely on the performers alone to exercise taste and discipline. For example, it would be very easy for a phrase being gradually *thickened* on each repetition to dissolve into atonal chaos. There are many examples of these procedures in recordings of Collier's works where, in my opinion, the result is too dissonant, fragmented and chaotic. The band is too big to be allowed this much freedom. When a player cannot hear all the other players improvising in the group, how can the result be coherent?

2.3.5.7 - Collier's approach to notation and group organisation for large ensemble

Over the course of his career as a jazz composer, Collier developed a method of writing music that may be performed by any large group. Rather than writing a conventional full score and a set of parts, he gave every player a shorthand version of the score that he called "universal parts" (Collier, 2009, p.270). This part was transposed as appropriate for each instrument and often consisted of a single large page, containing all the information needed for the piece. It is then gradually decided, in rehearsal, exactly who does what, depending on the instrumentation and the individuals in the group that he was working with at the time.

This use of universal parts, in contrast to conventional individual parts, allows all the players to see all the thematic material used in the piece. As a result, any of the soloists in Collier's works are free to refer to the thematic material in their solos if they so wish. This technique solves the problem of the lack of information which caused the initial problem mentioned in the introduction to this thesis. However, the need to fit all the music for all players onto a single A3 page severely limits the complexity of written composition possible, so this is really only a partial solution.

According to Collier's big band compositional method, he disliked being restricted to the traditional sections of instruments. "I don't really like a traditional big band setup, and if I get one to work with, I tend to reorganise it,

set it up in sections of low, middle and high, and play around with that” (Allen, 2011). This breaks up the conventional sectional textures of brass versus reeds, and allows for more variety in blended textures and colours.

When studying Collier’s apparently simple scores one should be aware that what is written down is merely a starting point or a catalyst in the process of producing a performance. The music was notated relatively simply, knowing that the performers will, indeed are expected to, take liberties and develop the given ideas differently in each performance.

The music used is, in the main, incomplete in some way, written in a way that allows for – in some cases, demands— being developed, or, at the very least, coloured, by improvising. This individualisation by the performer of what is written, whether it is a full melody or a single note, a scale, or a chord progression, is arguably the most important strength for a jazz composer, and developing this line of thinking has been a strong part of my development (Collier, 2009, p.264-5).

This semi-notated approach was developed partly for purely musical reasons, as a compositional device, but also as a way to involve the players, with their individual strengths and musical interests, more fully in the creation of a unique and spontaneous version of the piece in question. In an online interview, Collier commented that:

I think it allows people to not only play the music that's written but also, in some of the backgrounds they're given, to create sounds. It alleviates boredom and allows the music to be different every time you do it, and I'm deliberately writing that way now. (Allen, 2011)

This willingness to see the performance of his compositions from the point of view of the players is typical of Collier and his modest view of the role of the composer as just one member of a team involved in the process of creating a performance.

2.3.6 - Collier's place in the wider world of contemporary big band jazz composition

In an interview conducted late in his life, Collier remarked that he was “not satisfied with what passes for jazz these days” (Allen, 2011). The predominant current trend in jazz education was to follow the American model by, as Collier put it, “locking itself into this box of requiring you to have bebop down and certain styles of arrangement down before you can do anything” (Allen, 2011). This was in direct contradiction to the more open-minded approach that he had developed when he ran the Royal Academy Jazz Course for ten years, and this institution was now reorganising and dismantling everything that he had put in place.

In an interview with his keyboard player and fellow composer, Roger Dean, Collier admitted that: “I’ve never been really interested in rhythm as such. Rhythm is a pulse-based thing: what improvisers do over it (the pulse) is what interests me” (Dean, 1992, p. 171). Rhythmic devices such as metric modulation, konoko rhythmic patterns derived from Indian music (promoted by musicians such as John McLaughlin), and writing and performing in unusual time-signatures became hot topics in jazz education in Europe. These features, along with the strong pulse of the bebop and bebop-influenced new jazz coming out of the London jazz scene, contrasted strongly with the weaker rhythmic content, but more developed textural aspects, of many of Collier’s pieces. His style was perceived as out-dated and old-fashioned in Britain. It is interesting to note that this opinion contrasts with his strong reputation on the continent, which led to many composition commissions for European big bands such as the Danish Radio Jazz Orchestra and Germany’s NDR Big Band.

Collier’s last book was very critical of the music of the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Band, which was later renamed The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. He described it as “the starting point of much of today’s generally dull big band writing” (Collier, 2009, p. 67). This band is based in New York, which, according to Stewart’s survey of the New York big band scene (2007, p. 10) is the home to the

greatest number of big bands (both rehearsal bands and repertory orchestras) of any city in the world. This concentration of big bands, jazz musicians and universities offering jazz performance and composition courses, has led to New York being the most popular place for contemporary students of jazz composition from around the world to study.

2.3.7 - Bob Brookmeyer and his school of big band jazz composition

The most influential jazz composition teacher, working at universities in both New York and New England until his death in 2011, was Bob Brookmeyer. He played the trombone in, and wrote for, both the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Band and the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, before setting up the New Art big band, which performed only his compositions. He also fulfilled many commissions for other, often state supported, big bands in Europe and the USA. His ideas have had a significant effect on current big band compositional practice and he taught, as students, many composers who are now well-known figures. These include Maria Schneider, Jim McNeely and Darcy James Argue.

Brookmeyer is often mentioned to this day by jazz composers from around the world (see the jazz composer survey in Chapter Three) as many of them studied at post-graduate level in the USA. Also, many of the jazz composition teachers currently working in American universities are former pupils of Brookmeyer, and his ideas and concepts live on in their teaching.

In recent years, Brookmeyer has also been the subject of several degree, masters and doctoral level theses, and Berklee College now runs a course on his compositional techniques as part of their jazz education syllabus. This has led to a situation where Brookmeyer's compositional ideas are a default position, or at least a starting point, for many contemporary jazz composers, and there has developed what can be labelled a Brookmeyer school of big band jazz composition.

As Brookmeyer is such an influential figure in contemporary big band writing around the world, it is valuable to look at some of the ideas and principles that

drove his compositional approach. It will also demonstrate how different Collier's ideas are from followers of this school of thought.

2.3.7.1 – Brookmeyer's ideas on big band jazz composition

Brookmeyer was, and his followers are, heavily influenced in approach, techniques and ideas by contemporary classical music. Indeed, in the 1980's Brookmeyer "almost quit jazz altogether to become a classical composer" (Ratliff, 2006). He became interested in what, in an acknowledgement of the level of dissonance commonly employed by classical composers of the time, he described as "music to make your teeth hurt" (Ratliff, 2006). He had previously been influenced by the music of Stravinsky, Debussy and Bartok, but now embraced the avant garde composers of the era, such as Ligeti, Berio, Boulez, Stockhausen and Morton Feldman, and their various musical languages. He also took composition lessons with the experimental composer Earle Brown, who proved to be a very supportive teacher.

Brookmeyer struggled "against the conventions of jazz, the aspects of composition or improvisation or performance he has come to call, with derision, 'rituals'" (Ratliff, 2008, p. 95). He was interested in "overturning the consensual hierarchies in jazz" (Ratliff, 2008, p. 95) such as the comparative importance of improvised solo sections and the written ensemble passages that accompanied them. Solos became "the background to the background" (Ratliff, 2008, p. 96). In a 2006 interview Brookmeyer commented that:

I realised that soloists were necessary to add decorations to the backgrounds, because the backgrounds were really swinging... That could be an idea from Kansas City; Basie's band had great backgrounds (Ratliff, 2008, p. 96).

As well as creating a role for the soloist that was secondary to the ensemble writing, Brookmeyer was keen to combat the practice of "just running through the changes" (Guerra, 2016, p. 118). He often surrounded the improviser with "long tones, chords and punches" to keep them "in the moment" (Ratliff, 2006).

He also advised fellow jazz composers to "keep your hand on him [the soloist], because he needs it" (Ratliff, 2006) and complained that "musicians will go on for hours and ruin a piece and make it boring; they have no idea how to play *from the piece*" (Ratliff, 2008, p. 99). This criticism, while reflecting on the lack of self-discipline and appropriateness of the playing of his featured players, also stresses his opinion of the primacy of the written composition over the improvised contribution of the soloist; his lack of trust in his soloists; and the resulting need to always attempt to keep the improviser under control.

Brookmeyer tended to introduce the core musical material slowly, in a way that was continually moving forward and developing, and very reminiscent of classical compositional practice. Because of these unusual methods (for jazz), his pieces tended to become longer and longer. This was, however, because of the extensive development of the melodic material rather than the inclusion of more and more lengthy improvisation sections. It was not even essential to include any improvisation sections at all in the structure, and when they did appear the piece had often already been in progress for close to five minutes. Many of his successful jazz compositions feature no improvisation; for example: *Ceremony*, *Lovely*, *The End* and *For Maria*. Brookmeyer regarded it as imperative to always "keep aware of the possibilities and to keep aware of the process in making those choices" (Guerra, 2016, p. 45-46) and avoid stock generic solutions to musical problems.

His first rule of composition became:

The first solo only happens when absolutely nothing else can happen. You don't write in a solo until you've completely exhausted what you have to say" (Ratliff, 2006).

The lengthy passage of music that occurs before the start of any solo "firmly establishes the mood, form, attitude and harmonic structure of each composition" (Guerra, 2016, p. 118) and has a strong influence on the soloist's improvisation. Brookmeyer will also engage the soloist compositionally in the piece by the melodically significant 'background' material – or is the soloist now

the background? - or the specifics of the musical situation in which the improviser works. For example, in *Seesaw*, the drummer John Hollenbeck is forced "into a 'conversation' with the saxophone section made up of irregular phrase lengths" (Guerra, 2016, p. 124). This avoids any possibility of a stereotypical big band drum solo, and keeps the soloist focussed and in the moment, and is another example of Brookmeyer "keeping his hand on" the soloist (Ratliff, 2006).

Apparently, this tendency to "hold the soloist's hands" at all times is not the product of "ego and selfishness" (Guerra, 2016, p. 128) but rather an attempt to allow the soloist to share in the creation of "an enjoyable and meaningful performance" (Guerra, 2016, p. 128). In a 2011 video documentary Brookmeyer stated that: "You give a musician freedom by helping him to play well" (ArtistsHouseMusic, 2011).

These concepts; compositional techniques derived from classical music, a dissonant musical language, long, slowly-evolving musical forms, the possible absence of improvised solos, surrounding the soloist with backgrounds, regarding the soloist as the background texture to a written passage, are all now commonly-used approaches embraced by many composers from within the Brookmeyer school.

2.3.7.2 - The role of the rhythm section in big band music of the Brookmeyer school

In a conventional jazz big band rhythm section, the players' role is to spontaneously support and interact with the improvising soloist whilst stating the pulse, rhythmic feel and harmonic background to the music. This is usually achieved by giving the performers music that is a mixture of specifically written sections, harmonic and rhythmic shorthand instructions, and cues to inform them of other events in the music, such as background figures or rhythmic hits. The instrumentalists are expected to improvise appropriate parts when required from the given guidelines. These passages often occur in solo sections, where the rhythm section and the soloist often form what is effectively a jazz quartet

or quintet within the full band, working with a level of improvisation and interplay that is common in small-band playing situations.

The hands-on approach of followers of Brookmeyer's compositional philosophy extends to the rhythm section. The piano parts are regarded as equal in importance with any of the other ensemble lines. As a result, they are often very precisely notated even when accompanying the soloist. This results in a lack of spontaneous interaction between the improviser and the pianist, as the keyboard player is no longer free to create a part in mid-performance by comping from chord symbols in the traditional way.

In a new departure, this interactive role now falls on the shoulders of the drummer, as this player is freer to react to the situation as it develops in performance. Brookmeyer was fortunate to work consistently with two excellent drummers – firstly Mel Lewis and later John Hollenbeck – and relied upon them to produce the dynamic highs and lows in his writing. The fact that Hollenbeck is a recognised jazz composer in his own right only added to his suitability for this role. The role of time-keeper – normally assigned to the bass player's walking lines – also now passed to the drummer, particularly in fast tempo pieces.

In Brookmeyer's later works, the bass player plays another entirely written line that clearly outlines the motion of the harmonic progression. The lack of passing notes that can confuse the harmony – as in a traditionally improvised walking bass line created from chord symbols - leads to a purity and clarity of sound, as often now only the root appears in the low register of the band. The lack of a stream of walking crotchets also helps to create a sense of flow and a constructive line in relation to the specific melodic and rhythmic situation of the moment.

Many of the ideas, techniques and concepts of rhythm section writing developed by Brookmeyer, and outlined above, have, because of his highly influential jazz composition teaching, become common practice amongst many

of the composers studied and interviewed during this research. This will be revealed in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

2.3.8 - Collier's opinion of the Brookmeyer school and other contemporary jazz composers

Where, through the teaching of generations of international students by followers of his school of thought, Brookmeyer's ideas have become the lingua franca of most contemporary jazz composers worldwide, Collier's music and ideas are now regarded as the product of an outsider figure.

Collier's final book (2009) is a very personal statement of his philosophy of jazz composition. The strong opinions contained within it are purely his own, and he has no established school of followers, either in the UK or abroad. Important figures in European jazz such as Alex von Schlippenbach, Barry Guy, Peter Kowald, Maarten Altena, Kenny Wheeler and Bruno Tomasso are not mentioned at all in the book, and Brookmeyer and his school are the subject of some very uncomplimentary remarks. Collier describes Brookmeyer's work as 'somewhat clinical... lacking in what Duke [Ellington] called 'a little dirt'' (2009, p. 123). He also describes Brookmeyer as having 'the mindset of a classical composer manqué' (2009, p. 123) and as lacking an individual musical language as he is 'so firmly rooted in the past' (2009, p. 124).

Collier does, however, mention his admiration for several contemporary composers and groups. These include Mark Harvey's Aardvark Orchestra, The Paul Cram Orchestra, Roberto Bonati, the Italian Instabile Orchestra, Paul Grabowsky, Christian Muhlbacher, Geir Lysne's Listening Band, Roberto Bonati's ParmaFrontiere Orchestra, Tom Cawley, Corey Mwamba, James Allsopp and Steve Harris and his group ZAUM, as well as others such as Carla Bley, Michael Mantler, and Evan Parker and the Globe Unity Orchestra. It is interesting to note that they are chosen as worthy of praise because they demonstrate "a different language, a much more contemporary language, a much more *individual* language" (Collier, 2009, p.124. original italics).

2.3.9 – The importance and legacy of Graham Collier’s work

The fundamental difference between Collier and the contemporary Brookmeyer school of jazz composition can be summarised by a difference in emphasis. Collier is a *jazz* composer, and Brookmeyer and his school are *jazz composers*.

For Collier, the jazz composer was one part of a larger team of artists who collaborate to create unique musical performances. He always demonstrated respect and trust in the musicians with whom he worked and valued very highly their contribution to the final performance. The soloist usually acts as a real-time co-composer, rather than being treated as simply another layer of texture. The score was merely a starting point from which the work was created - partly in rehearsal but chiefly in action on the band-stand – and he always wanted to, to quote the subtitle of his final book (2009), “move music off the paper”.

He had a very practical approach to performance and notation, using universal parts, and was very open to adapting or creating different versions of his pieces to suit the needs of a specific situation or line-up of players. The written element of the performance merely created a space or framework within which the soloist was free to perform jazz. Individual colouration and embellishment of given lines was valued, both by the soloist and in semi-improvised backings, and the inclusion of improvisation within a work was viewed as an essential element of the performance.

Despite his importance in the history of jazz education in Britain, Collier was never really a member of the establishment. He was essentially self-taught in the post-Berklee years when he developed his own characteristic style and methods. He worked in isolation, outside the academy, creating his own body of highly original work and describing his methods, ideas and approaches (and later, strong opinions) in an unprecedented series of books on jazz composition. According to Morton (2011), “his music has never become canonical... but has remained fresh, hard to pin down and resistant to generic pigeonholing”.

In the publicity material for his up-coming book on the life and works of Collier, Heining (2017) places him within the British jazz scene as:

... a contradictory figure falling between several different camps. He was never an out-and-out musical, cultural or political radical but rather an individualist continually forced to confront the contradictions in his own position – a musical outsider working within a marginalised area of cultural activity; a gay man operating in a very male area of the music business and within heterosexist culture in general; a man of working class origins stepping outside traditionally prescribed class boundaries; and a musician-composer seeking individual solutions to collective problems of aesthetic and ethical value.

It is in the individuality of his approach to the problem of composing for improvising jazz musicians, that the importance of Graham Collier lies. Whilst the resulting compositions often received a very mixed reception from audiences and players alike, they are very strongly and unmistakably the product of an original voice in jazz composition.

2.4 Conclusion

Following a review of academic texts and the books, approaches and compositional ideas of Graham Collier and his place within the wider context of the contemporary world of big band composition, research into the specific topic of guidance mechanisms for improvisers (apart from chord symbols) within big band notated compositions has demonstrated a gap in knowledge that this PhD intends to explore. Investigation of the academic texts has failed to find any evidence that the authors of these books perceive the use of only chord symbols to guide improvising soloists as a problem within jazz. However, as there has been little consultation, so far, with jazz composers on this specific topic, there is a severe lack of information on which to base this opinion. I remedied this by implementing an email questionnaire to as many contemporary big band composers as were willing to take part, asking

questions specifically designed to explore this area of knowledge. This survey will be covered in the next chapter.

Chapter 3 - Jazz Composer Survey

3.1 - Email Questionnaire and interview

Given the lack of academic literature relating to the exact topic of this dissertation, I conducted an email survey with 57 currently-active jazz composers. This was done with the aim of establishing how current jazz composers view their relationship with the improvising soloist in their work, and to assist in answering the research questions posed by this thesis.

The questions asked were:

1. Why do you include space for improvisation within your notated big band compositions?
2. What is the musical relationship between the notated and improvised sections of your compositions?
3. Describe the role of, and your expectations of, the soloist within the overall composition.
4. Describe any strategies (apart from chord symbols) that you use for 'controlling' or 'guiding' the soloist, either before or during the performance.
5. How much control do you feel that you, as the composer, should have over the improvising soloist?
6. Please give an example of one of your works where you feel that the written material and the improvised sections are strongly linked. Is a score available for this piece?

This questionnaire generated 57 sets of answers from jazz composers at various stages of their careers, originally from, and presently working in, locations all around the world. These responses varied from a few words in answer to each question to a response covering more than four pages of text. Most answers were around two pages long and written in English, but I translated a few from German and French.

In addition to the email questionnaire outlined above, I also added to the new literature by conducting an interview with jazz composer, Darcy James Argue. The catalyst for this 40-minute voice-only Skype interview, conducted on the 23rd April 2015, was a short list of questions sent to the subject in advance. These inquiries formed the backbone of the discussion, but several other follow-up questions were asked in response to the answers, either asking for clarification or to initiate a deeper investigation into the topic. Argue proved to be a very eloquent and articulate interviewee, and he provided long and useful answers to all the core questions and the follow-up points of enquiry.⁹ Many of Argue's opinions and ideas have been included in the discussion of the survey of jazz composers¹⁰ from around the world that follows.

The responses are categorised by topic and discussed in the following sections:

3.2.1 - The role of improvisation in jazz composition

3.2.2 - The role and responsibilities of the jazz composer

3.2.3 – The role and responsibilities of the improvising jazz soloist

3.2.4 - The jazz composer/soloist relationship

3.2.5 - Direction in rehearsal and performance

3.2.6 - Written control mechanisms for improvisation (other than chord symbols)

3.2 - Discussion of the questionnaire responses

⁹ The audio recording was transcribed as a 4,600-word document, that is included as an appendix to this dissertation.

¹⁰ The appendix also includes a table listing the participants in the survey, and including information on the main big bands with which they work, as well as their nationality and their present base (correct at the time of the questionnaire and interview in 2015).

The following discussion of the content of the responses is broken down into key areas, and includes supporting quotations from the composers on each point. In addition, the appendix of this thesis contains a metrical analysis of the responses to each question broken down by topics mentioned, and showing the frequency with which each point was mentioned. The popularity of answers has informed the structure of the following discussion, but an attempt has been made to also include interesting individual responses.

3.2.1 - The role of improvisation in jazz composition

This general topic was approached by the composers from a variety of standpoints, and several sub-topics emerged:

- 1) Whether improvisation was essential in a jazz composition.
- 2) The positive effect of improvisation on a composition.
- 3) The need for a strong reason to include an improvised section in the composition.
- 4) The need to integrate improvisation in the written composition.
- 5) The influence of the teaching of Bob Brookmeyer.

One of the main topics raised by the responses to the questionnaire was whether, to qualify as a jazz composition, a piece had to contain improvisation, or could it be fully-notated. Most composers stated that improvisation was an expected - and usually, a required - element within the genre of big band composition. The most concise and emphatic response was simply, “without improvisation, it isn’t jazz” (email Sullivan/Dorrell, 2015). Other composers, such as Neal Kirkwood (email Kirkwood/Dorrell, 2015) and Django Bates (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015), were less dogmatic and admitted that while it was possible to compose pieces without improvised elements, these were much less common within the big band repertoire.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, a few big band composers reported moving towards writing through-composed works often involving no improvisation at all. Ben Cottrell commented that some of his recent compositions and arrangements “include little to no room for improvisation”

(email Cottrell/Dorrell, 2015), while for Neumeister, his new pieces “have very little or no improv. Even the drum parts are completely notated” (email Neumeister/Dorrell, 2015). However, this approach seems to negate the sense of excitement and adventure inherent in working in the jazz genre. According to Django Bates many of his fully notated compositions “gradually fell out of the playlist. It seemed [that] the band, and I, didn’t want to begin a piece knowing exactly how it would proceed from start to finish” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015).

Many respondents commented on the positive qualities brought to their compositions by the inclusion of improvisation; spontaneity, unpredictability, freshness, energy and life, and the sense of each performance being a unique adventure. To reinforce this point, Miho Hazama commented that improvisation adds “colours/vibes” (email Hazama/Dorrell, 2015), and Django Bates described it as bringing the “magic of instant composition to my music” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015). According to Malte Schiller, “a good improviser can take the composition and even the whole band to a new level and can transform the written material ... into something I couldn’t have imagined” (email Schiller/Dorrell, 2015). Jack Cooper also remarked on the “positive, interesting and unpredictable influence” an improvising soloist can have on a piece (email Cooper/Dorrell, 2015), and Nathan Parker Smith candidly admitted that “the added benefit is that often ... the musicians play material that is far more interesting than I could ever write!” (email Parker Smith/Dorrell, 2015). The importance of this relationship, between the composer and the soloist, will be covered in more depth later in this chapter.

The improvised sections are also used to add a sense of complexity to a composition. Django Bates remarked that improvisers would often play music that was far too fast and rhythmically complicated to transcribe accurately, and, even if this was possible, no instrumentalist could read it and play it correctly at full speed. Therefore, improvisation could be used to add a texture that was not achievable by any other means. He would also intentionally devise passages for improvisation that are “challenging for the soloist, difficult to negotiate, and not always successful!” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015). These passages involved features such as asking the soloist to create solos over unusual and

complicated harmonic and rhythmic material. For example, this could be a repeating section of an irregular number of bars possibly including changing time signatures with complex chords or dissonant vertical structures changing at apparently random times. He specifically wanted these wilfully awkward improvised sections to bring “this kind of energy, involving struggle” to the music (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015). Bates's approach, of actively hindering the soloist, will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Møller asserts that improvisations are often responsible for “deepening the music[al] expression” of a piece of music (email Møller/Dorrell, 2015). He added that this depth and complexity was not present in much big band writing when compared to classical scores, but that this was intentional - as “space was left within the composition for complex layers of improvised sound contributed by both the soloist and the rhythm section” (email Møller/Dorrell, 2015). This viewpoint echoes Graham Collier's approach discussed in the previous chapter.

Jörn Marcussen-Wulff observed that “the music becomes much more intense, the more the musicians identify with the composition”, and that the improvisational contribution of the players increases their “involvement in, and commitment to, the performance” (email Marcussen-Wulff/Dorrell, 2015). This intensity may occur because so much of the performance depends on the input, both musical and emotional, of the players. The inclusion of improvised passages means that it is not just a case of reading and playing the notes accurately as marked in the sheet music. Each performance draws on the creative musical skills of a particular performer improvising in the moment.

Anna Webber gave the clearest and most precise answer to this question with her reasons for including improvisation in a big band composition:

- i) because I write for improvisers and, not only do they generally need to improvise to be happy, but also I (and others) like listening to them improvise.

ii) because I think that the effect of improvisation on a certain section of the piece will be stronger than the effect of a fully notated version of the same thing.

iii) because there is a specific compositional reason for it (i.e., glue between sections, or smoothing over a transition between sections; bringing the music to a different sort of climax than would have been achieved through written material; adding a textural element/support) (email Webber/Dorrell, 2015)

The need to have a logical musical reason for the existence of an improvised solo within the overall form of the piece was brought up by several composers.

According to Django Bates:

There has to be a strong thematic connection between the notated and improvised sections of my compositions. I am not convinced by a solo section that appears from nowhere and has an accompaniment consisting of [only] some chord symbols and some slashes showing where those chords should change (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015).

Several composers mentioned many techniques and musical devices for guiding the improviser as alternatives to these conventional chord symbols, and the suggested methods will be covered in depth later in this chapter.

Almost all the composers surveyed admitted to wanting to integrate the solo into the written material in some way. According to Griffith, the written and improvised sections "aim to be mutually exclusive yet interlocked in a seamless way" (email Griffith/Dorrell, 2015), and Mike Westbrook wanted the improvisation to be "an organic part of the whole composition, rather than something arbitrarily superimposed" (email Westbrook/Dorrell, 2015). Kyle Saulnier supported this opinion by commenting that the improvised sections are "compositional elements within the piece rather than features designed to float on top of it" (email Saulnier/Dorrell, 2015). Therefore, the details of the improvised solo section were the result of a lot of thought and consideration, according to many of the composers questioned. This account, by Christine Jensen, was typical:

The notated sections are my most prepared personal statements. While they are developed by me, I also work on the process of creating a form that allows the soloist to further interpret from my notated ideas in their improvised sections, thus adding their personal voice to the piece. If anything, I am working on creating an environment for them to expand their ideas through their high level of artistry in improvisation. (email Jensen/Dorrell, 2015)

Angela Morris sees the solo section as providing "a development section or serving the arc/story of the piece regarding tension and release of energy" (email Morris/Dorrell, 2015). This theme is reiterated by several other respondents, for example, Saltzman. He commented that the improvised sections must "continue the storyline, and serve the greater overall arc of the composition" (email Saltzman/Dorrell, 2015). Santhaus was more forthright, saying that the soloist should be "forced to relate to the arc of the piece and add his/her own voice to the story that I am trying to tell" (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015). This view that the improviser should continue the musical argument of the piece echoes the ideas of Bob Brookmeyer cited earlier.

In fact, Brookmeyer's opinions and compositional concepts seem to cast a long shadow over several of the respondents as many of them echoed his concept of the improvising soloist providing some "release" (Ratliff, 2008, p. 99) from the tension built up in the preceding notated sections. Also, the many occurrences of the terms 'arc' and 'storyline' when referring to the overall structure of the piece leads the author to suspect that this is another example of the lasting influence of his teaching and ideas. The clearest example of this connection was the response of Dave Rivello: "From my lessons with Brookmeyer, and to use his words - I view the soloist/improviser as a 'compositional continuance' and 'release'" (email Rivello/Dorrell, 2015). This teaching seems to be continuing 'at one remove' as several of the respondents to the questionnaire mentioned the influence of talks (either attended in person or viewed online on YouTube) by the renowned big band leader and composer, Maria Schneider. She is also an advocate of the storyline approach to structuring pieces, and was herself, for several years, a student of Brookmeyer.

To summarise the responses to this question: the overwhelming majority of composers questioned about the role of improvisation within big band jazz compositions saw improvisation as a positive addition to their compositions. However, the inclusion of improvisation within the composed structures does create the problem of integrating the soloists' contribution to create coherent pieces of music. The study of the various techniques adopted to guide the improviser to achieve this compositional coherence is at the heart of the research questions asked by this thesis.

3.2.2 - The role and responsibilities of the jazz composer

Again, responses covering this general topic can be broken down into the following sub-headings:

- 1) The need to leave space for improvisers to improvise.
- 2) The control exerted by the composition itself in setting the mood and musical agenda for the improviser.
- 3) The correct level and type of instructions given to assist the improviser.
- 4) The composer/bandleader's responsibility for the final performance.
- 5) The choice of soloist as a way of controlling the improvisation.
- 6) The correct level of composer control over the soloist.
- 7) The choice of suitable musicians for a regular band.
- 8) The advantages of working with familiar players.

A jazz composer must leave space for the improvising members of the group playing his or her music to improvise. To maintain a consistent and content line-up of players, particularly in a composer's ensemble, the jazz composer needs to be aware of this simple fact. Helge Sunde, the Norwegian composer and trombonist, reinforced this need to keep the improvisers in the band happy, based on personal experience, when he stated that "I have experienced myself playing in a large ensemble without having any solos: I quit the band..." (email Sunde/Dorrell, 2015). As Nathan Parker Smith put it: "I feel it is a trade that we work out ahead of time... 'If you play all my notes, you can play all of your

notes too” (email Parker Smith, 2015). Therefore, it is essential that the jazz composer leaves room for the soloists to contribute to his or her pieces.

Another control mechanism employed by the jazz composer is the simple act of writing the composition and thereby creating the context for any improvisation. Mike Holober stated that he had already taken significant control over the improviser by "suggesting [the] essence of the music" (email Holober/Dorrell, 2015). Matthias Reugg reiterated this position: "I do not need any [control], as the piece does that by itself" (email Reugg/Dorrell, 2015). If the written element of the composition clearly defines the mood and overall structure of the composition, the role of the soloist within it should be apparent, without the need for further explanation and guidance.

The jazz composers often mentioned this delicate balance between giving the improviser too many instructions and not giving him or her enough guidance. Several composers remarked on the need to allow room for each performance to be unique, and that they, as a result, are careful not to be too prescriptive in both their written instructions and instrumental writing. Elliott Hughes sees his role as a jazz composer as "giving just enough instructions so that they [the soloists] can be creative within those limitations, and therefore within the context of the music" (email Hughes/Dorrell, 2015). Hilario Duran agreed, stating that he likes to exert just enough control to make the soloist "play in the right way... because it helps his imagination to improvise... but I don't like to... pressure the soloist so much" (email Duran/Dorrell, 2015). Any overload of information and instructions can hamper an improviser's fluency and spontaneity.

This kind of unorthodox approach is possible when the composer and improviser have a long-established familiarity with each other's work. However, Anna Webber pointed out that, as a composer who does not lead her own regular big band, she is often in a position where she does not "have any trust established" with the soloists. "In a perfect world, I would trust every soloist and wouldn't need to give them (many) specific instructions as they would intuitively do exactly what I had envisioned." Unfortunately, in the real world, when writing

for big band, "there is too much at stake to allow the soloist to choose the direction your piece will go" (email Webber/Dorrell, 2015). In this situation, having control over the soloist is critical for the success of a piece.

This responsibility for the artistic success of the music is also relevant to musicians who do run their own ensembles. Ben Cottrell, the leader of the *Beats and Pieces Big Band*, reinforced this position: "As composer/bandleader you have ultimate responsibility for the performance as a whole and need to ensure that the performance represents your intentions" (email Cottrell/Dorrell, 2015). Gary Urwin, another composer/bandleader, felt that, as the composer whose "name is on the door" of the piece, he had the right "to step in and offer guidance... if something the soloist is doing is seriously denigrating... [the] composition" (email Urwin/Dorrell, 2015). He went on to say that the ideal amount of guidance was "very little" as, presumably, the performer would be demonstrating the soloing skills and individual improvisatory voice for which the composer/bandleader had originally hired them" (email Urwin/Dorrell, 2015).

The act of choosing the soloist was seen by many respondents as a vital part of controlling the content of the solo. Moreover, Chris Walden went as far as to say that the only control he has is in who he is going to "give the solo to - it has to be the right casting" (email Walden/Dorrell, 2015). Dave Slonaker stated that his control as a composer comes from "knowing the specific improviser I'm writing for and putting him/her in the right situation for my compositional ideas" (email Slonaker/Dorrell, 2015). This detailed knowledge and awareness of the soloist can lead to practical problems if an improvising member of the band leaves the group. Does it render a piece unusable if the specific soloist it was designed to feature is no longer available to play it?

This strategy of creating a musical platform for a soloist was commonly employed by the jazz composers. They selected a specific soloist to suit a particular solo section within a piece or to write a complete piece to feature the playing of an individual soloist – often a member of their regular band, who's playing they knew intimately. In this case, the soloist "is expected to be 100% him/herself" (email Halkosalmi/Dorrell, 2015). Christine Jensen described this

situation as follows: “I have the soloist in mind... including their personal sound, along with their heightened technique and jazz vocabulary, [and] that will influence the direction of the piece” (email Jensen/Dorrell, 2015). Again, this relies on the composer knowing the work of an improviser and how they are likely to react in different circumstances. All players have strengths and weaknesses and may have an aversion to a specific musical situation. For example, some players relish improvising within a modal, groove-based soloing framework, but others (particularly pianists, in my experience) need greater harmonic movement to feel comfortable and sufficiently stimulated to produce musically meaningful solos.

At the other extreme of this spectrum of soloist choice and guidance, Francois Jeanneau remarked that, for him, controlling or even choosing the soloist was not necessary:

I give them [my band] ‘free rein’ as I trust them... Often I do not even decide beforehand who will take a solo at a given moment of a composition. I let the musicians take care of this decision. It has never happened that no-one decides to solo (email Jeanneau/Dorrell, 2015).

As noted, the improvising members of the band are usually only too happy to be unleashed and given the opportunity to show off their skills.

The following reply, from Walter Simonsen, was typical of composers closer to Jeanneau's position: “I feel I should be able to set the scene for the soloist, but then get out of the way and let them create their own story within that scene” (email Simonsen/Dorrell, 2015). Mike Westbrook used the analogy of composing as architecture. His aim is to create “...a structure that is only complete when people move in to inhabit it” and to “create an environment for people to live in, and express themselves freely” (email Westbrook/Dorrell, 2015). A variety of metaphors were used by different composers to describe the creation of a section within the structure inside which improvisation was to happen. These included “a [motor racing] circuit or a playground” (email Miyajima/Dorrell, 2015) or “a frame for the solo” (email Holober/Dorrell, 2015)

or “a platform inside the composition where a musician could freely be at his/her best” (email Halkosalmi/Dorrell, 2015). Again, the composer is seen to be providing a service to the soloist by creating a suitable vehicle for their improvisation.

Many of the composers surveyed saw the choice of musicians to make up their regular ensemble as a crucial factor in controlling the music. Dave Rivello commented that he “hand-pick[s] all of his [band’s] members based on all of their musical ability (and personality) which includes their improvisational concept and style, and how that fits his vision” (email Rivello/Dorrell, 2015). This careful choice of players should provide the composer with sufficient control of the resulting improvised music.

As a result, according to Cottrell, if the soloist needs additional input from the composer, “it’s the fault of your composition or part preparation, or maybe just that you’ve hired the wrong musician to best represent your music” (email Cottrell/Dorrell, 2015). Kyle Saulnier echoed this statement: “If it doesn’t work, I [have] picked the wrong person, or [I] have written poorly” (email Saulnier/Dorrell, 2015). It is revealing that the jazz composers tend to shoulder the blame for any problems with a piece, rather than attempting to influence the improviser in some way, to sort out the issue. For at least some of the composers, it is up to them to either adapt their music to the musical needs and preferences of the improvisers or to choose to work with different musicians.

Because of this desire to work with familiar players, many of the respondents to the survey stressed the advantages of running their own groups, and therefore knowing the playing of the main soloists intimately. Allison Au provided the most comprehensive explanation: “By choosing and understanding the musical voices of the musicians with whom I work, I have the ability to control the texture and personality of the music, and have a say in the way the music can take shape” (email Au/Dorrell, 2015). Another way of putting this point is to explain that working regularly with the same players leads to “little need for discussion or instruction... [The composer] simply [has] to provide the context” (email Westbrook/Dorrell, 2015). This easy and comfortable working

relationship takes a long time to establish, and is particularly difficult to achieve for a big band in Britain in the current economic climate, given the lack of arts funding and overall support for jazz in the UK. As a result, many big bands only exist for a short time, based around a short-term project such as a new album and the related tour, or a star composer/performer's birthday celebration and related radio broadcast.

Despite the financial difficulties of trying to run a big band, many of the composers questioned have set up their own regular groups, because of the artistic need to establish these strong musical relationships with their performers. This situation allowed several composers to point out that they tailored their pieces "to fit their [soloists'] tonal personalities" (email Kirkwood/Dorrell, 2015). Richard DeRosa sees the process more of knowing "what style and mood you want and then assign someone as [the] soloist who will capture it in a natural way" (email DeRosa/Dorrell, 2015). Again, it seems to be one of the responsibilities of the jazz composer to accommodate a soloist's existing playing style within a suitable framework or to find a soloist more in keeping with their compositional concept of the piece or solo section in question.

3.2.3 – The role and responsibilities of the improvising jazz soloist

All the responses to this topic came from composers, but it should be remembered that most of these composers are also players (though not necessarily with their own big bands), and so also have a practical understanding of the role of improvising soloists.

The most typical response was that the improvising soloist was expected to "understand the idea of the piece" (email von Schlippenbach/Dorrell, 2015), or as Anna Webber succinctly put it, "to serve the composition!" (email Webber/Dorrell, 2015). This concept of the solo as an extension of, or reaction to, the written material was also mentioned by Florian Hoefner. He expects the soloist to adjust their playing to the "melodic and rhythmic environment [that]

the piece sets [up], and to interact with the rhythmic and melodic information that is generated by the rhythm section and horn backgrounds” (email Hoefner/Dorrell, 2015). Ed Neumeister was even more specific about this. In his opinion, the soloist's ideas should come “from inside the piece and be more connected to the piece than [to] their ego” (email Neumeister/Dorrell, 2015). Graham Collier, in an interview, mentioned that he chose players for his bands based, in part, on their willingness to perform the diverse roles required of them within his compositions:

You choose people that you think will be able to work with you as a band-leader, who won't mind being directed and have something to add to what you want to say... So you choose, maybe, a broader range of musicians who are not locked into a particular style, but have enough ability – acting ability, I call it sometimes – to put themselves into a role, that you're directing.” (Singh, 2010)

However, in the opinion of Mike Holober, and several other composers, the relationship between composer and improviser should be stronger than this. According to him “the soloist should be commenting on and working with the written material” (email Holober/Dorrell, 2015). This is really a symbiotic relationship where both parties need the other to achieve a successful artistic goal. In big band compositions, the soloists need the composers to create a suitable wider context for their improvisation, and the composers need the improvisers to respect the context within which they are performing. If this happens, artistically satisfying big band music is possible. If it does not happen, this outcome is highly unlikely.

3.2.4 - The jazz composer/soloist relationship

Discussion of this topic area can be broken down to the following sub-headings:

- 1) Collaboration between composer and improviser.
- 2) Views on Django Bates' approach.
- 3) The degree of composer control over the soloist.

4) Problems with the concept of composer guidance and solos in general.

Jazz is a collaborative medium and jazz composition is no exception to this rule. The situation was described by Dave Rivello as “an open conversation between the composer and the soloist” and implied that jazz composers enjoy the risks and surprises that this compositional approach includes (email Rivello/Dorrell, 2015). Matt Holman, who is also an improvising trumpeter and bandleader, went as far as to say:

[At] times, particularly with strong soloists, I am comfortable with a “whatever happens” approach. And in those cases, as [the] composer, I need to be OK with a possible realisation that doesn’t fit my [original] concept [for the piece] (email Holman/Dorrell, 2015).

To repeat the rhetorical question above: why be a jazz composer and write entirely notated music? The whole point of the medium is to take risks and create performances of the same piece that will be different from one another, and where the outcome is unknown - within certain parameters - at the start of the performance. The jazz composer must accept that the quality and success of individual performances may be variable.

Working together with the performers, and allowing space for the players to contribute creatively, by using their personal musical styles and instrumental voices, was another common theme in many of the replies. This approach was particularly clearly stated by Angela Morris:

The ideal of collaboration informs my work, and improvisation is one way to introduce collaboration where otherwise notation can be a somewhat dictatorial act. Also, calling attention to the players as improvisers acknowledges their contribution as co-creators of a piece. I believe realisation of notated music is always a collaboration between composer and player, but the balance shifts and the acknowledgement of the performer is greater in improvised music (email Morris/Dorrell, 2015).

Satoko Fujii agrees, suggesting that, in her opinion, “the best thing with jazz is getting the players’ individual voice - I don’t want to be a dictator, and I would

like to collaborate with the players to make music” (email Fujii/Dorrell, 2015). Most composers seemed to see the final performance as a balance between the ideas of the composer and the soloist. As Kaplan put it, his players tend to “play by the rules of the game I’ve laid out, but their personality still shines through” (email Kaplan/Dorrell, 2015). Many respondents stated that a composer should aim to create a context “so that the soloist sees him/herself as a collaborative, creative artist” (email Harvey/Dorrell, 2015). Many composers mentioned that it was important that the soloist should work within the context of the piece and avoid bringing “an agenda to a solo” (email Holober/Dorrell, 2015). Dave Rivello commented that there is certainly “a give and take” that is necessary, but in the end “the strength of the piece in its entirety should be the goal of both the composer and soloist” (email Rivello/Dorrell, 2015). Here again, the recurring theme of both parties collaborating to achieve a shared artistic goal makes an appearance.

Django Bates is an unusual case, in that he sees the relationship between the composer and soloist as more combative. According to him, the more control he tries to exert over the improvising soloist, “the more the soloist will fight back. This battle of wills is intense and positive” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015). In a piece with a free trumpet solo (where “no harmonic, melodic [or] rhythmic information is given”), Bates often cued several notated backing fragments “to interrupt the soloist, break his flow, change his direction” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015). Bates feels that this “was always welcomed by the soloist as something to feed on or fight against” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015). It would be interesting to know if the soloist shares this opinion. Soloing over a big band can be challenging at the best of times. However, this inside information does provide an interesting technical insight into how Bates achieves the very characteristic moods and textures that are a feature of his work.

Many composers expressed the wish to be as ‘hands off’ as possible in their guidance of the soloist. Joe Sullivan’s comment is typical of many opinions stated: “Generally, it is best to stay out of a soloist’s way as much as possible - after all, he/she has spent most of his/her waking hours learning how to improvise, just let them play” (email Sullivan/Dorrell, 2015). This respect for,

and willingness to work in tandem with, the soloist is common to many composers. According to Jim Saltzman, the level of intervention depends on the composition. "Sometimes you need to control the soloist, but there needs to be space to allow the soloist to do what they do best as well" (email Saltzman/Dorrell, 2015). Idan Santhaus echoed this opinion: "It varies and depends on what the piece calls for" (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015).

The deciding factor which triggered the need for more control also differed from composer to composer. For Lassnig, further control was necessary to achieve "a certain colour" in an improvised passage (email Lassnig/Dorrell, 2015). For Hoefner, more guidance was necessary if "a certain shape of solo was required to move the piece forward" (email Hoefner/Dorrell, 2015). Elliott Hughes (email Hughes/Dorrell, 2015) and Christine Jensen (email Jensen/Dorrell, 2015) seconded the idea of the composer occasionally being able to guide the shaping and pacing of the solo. Florian Hoefner summed up the situation with the statement that "as the composer, I should have all the control I need to achieve the desired effect in my piece" (email Hoefner/Dorrell, 2015). As noted above, this level of guidance will vary from piece to piece depending on the needs of the composer in each case, but most composers will be sensitive to the position of the soloist and leave enough room for their contribution to the composition.

Migiwa Miyajima disagreed with this whole concept of guidance, stating that "if you start trying to 'control' players, I think you'll lose the beauty of jazz" (email Miyajima/Dorrell, 2015). Several other replies agreed, indicating that the level of composer-intervention should be minimal, or even (and I quote this answer in full) "None" (email Walden/Dorrell, 2015).

For a few composers, the very concept of a solo, in the conventional jazz sense, was not appropriate for their compositions. For example, in the works of Ed Neumeister, these sections are often notated "ad-lib freely" rather than "solo", and often he adds "respond to the other players" as a performance instruction (email Neumeister/Dorrell, 2015). As Neumeister was a trombonist in the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra under the direction of Brookmeyer, I suspect

that his improvisation sections follow the model of Brookmeyer's late works by acting as another layer of compositional texture rather than as the musical foreground of the piece, as would be the case with most conventional jazz solos. This structural use of improvisation as an instrumental colour and texture may explain the unusual performance instructions.

The complexity of the symbiotic relationship between the composer and the performers, and the depth of understanding and knowledge of other party's contribution to the performance, is something that develops over time. For a composer who has an intimate knowledge of the soloists at his or her disposal, built up over a long period of working together, simply the act of choosing a soloist is an effective way of guiding the future lives of a composition in its various performances. This relies on the soloist playing in a way that is representative of their individual improvisational habits, and on them respecting and playing within the mood and character of the composition.

Where this composer/soloist relationship is not so intimate, other means of guiding the soloist are often employed. These may be conventional chord symbols or a variety of other strategies, the existence of which help to answer the first two of the research questions asked by this thesis.

3.2.5 - Direction in rehearsal and performance

This area of questioning raised the following sub-topics:

- 1) Rehearsal discussion of improvised solos.
- 2) Direction from the composer/conductor in mid-performance.

The need to discuss a solo at the rehearsal stage seemed to be regarded by many composers as a failure to make themselves sufficiently clear, either by instructions on the player's part or by the overall context of the music. Malte Schiller commented that "sometimes, but not often, I have to talk to the soloist to explain what I had in mind, but I try to set up things in a musical way as

clearly as possible” (email Schiller/Dorrell, 2015). A few composers (particularly those that worked with regular groups) stated that if they had to give too many directions to the soloist, they had probably chosen the wrong musician for that solo.

Another control technique commonly used by composers was to direct the soloist and the accompanying rhythm section or ensemble in performance. Alex von Schlippenbach suggested that this is the function and work of the conductor but that often "the conductor and composer... [are] one person" (email von Schlippenbach/Dorrell, 2015). For saxophonist/composer/conductor Ben Cottrell, these directions were mainly just "simple 'more' or 'less' signals if the intensity and energy level isn't where I feel it needs to be in the context of the piece" (email Cottrell/Dorrell, 2015). This use of gestures was also mentioned by conductor/composer Matt Holman, who has also used finger signals (1, 2, 3, etc.) as "cues for guiding or controlling the soloist" (email Holman/Dorrell, 2015).

Vinny Golia described the more elaborate examples of real-time guidance that he uses with his group, the *Vinny Golia Large Ensemble*, (which he also pointed out is not a conventional big band as it contained up to fifty players and many orchestral instruments):

I use cards which indicate which sections can be played behind the soloist, hand signals to shape the orchestra sections to accompany the soloist(s). I also have a chalkboard on which I can write spontaneous rhythmic figures or instructions to the section players (email Golia/Dorrell, 2015).

Walter Thompson uses another interesting technique for the live control of improvisation. He uses the "Soundpainting live composing sign language" as the basis for his compositions. This sign language was created by Thompson for "musicians, dancers, actors, poets, and visual artists working in the medium of structured improvisation" (Thompson, 2006, p. 2). The language comprises more than 750 gestures that are signed by the composer/conductor to "indicate the type of improvisation desired of the performers" (Thompson, 2006, p. 2).

A less precise, but a possibly more efficient method for encouraging the soloists to invest more energy into the performance, harks back to Charles Mingus's habit of haranguing his players on stage, in mid-performance. As Joe Sullivan succinctly put it, "I give them shit if they don't give it their all" (email Sullivan/Dorrell, 2015). There is a strong probability that the resulting improvisations are all about energy, volume and musical fireworks, and less about subtle motivic development of core melodic material.

The in-performance instructions and signals given by the director/composer mentioned above are further guidance methods which are relevant in the attempt to answer the research questions posed by this thesis.

3.2.6 - Written control mechanisms for improvisation (other than chord symbols)

Anna Webber's reply is representative of the various alternative approaches to giving harmonic information to the soloist that were suggested by several other composers. She "almost never give[s] chord changes, preferring instead to give cue notes or motifs or voicings" (email Webber/Dorrell, 2015).

Webber's reasons for employing these techniques are so that "the improvisations will necessarily be more connected to the content of the composition", and so that there will be less of a chance of the improviser "falling into habitual patterns that chord changes may induce" (email Webber/Dorrell, 2015). Idan Santhaus also listed this second point as one of his aims. He tries to "make sure that the soloist does not just play what he/she transcribed/practised at home the day before" (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015). This desire to avoid the situation of an improviser in a big band composition mechanically 'running the changes' is one of the initial motivations for this research, and lead to the formulation of the research questions posed by this thesis.

Angela Morris also used this compositional device of improvisation based on non-specific melodic and rhythmic motifs to create improvised textures in the ensemble writing of her composition, *Habitual* (see Figure 1).

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Guitar (Gtr.), Piano (Pno.), Bass, and Drums (Dr.). The score is in 3/4 time and covers measures 153 to 160. At the beginning of measure 153, there is a circled 'O' with the instruction 'On cue, tempo primo'. The guitar part is marked with 'continuous ♩'s on any pitch above middle C'. The piano part is marked with 'continuous ♩'s on any pitch above C3' and 'gradually become unpitched (percussive) and fade out'. The bass part is marked with 'continuous ♩'s on any sounds C. sim.' and 'gradually fade out'. The drums part is marked with 'sim.' and 'gradually fade out'. Dynamic markings include 'sim.' and 'ppp'. The score is reproduced by permission of Angela Morris.

Figure 1: Angela Morris, *Habitual* (2012), bb. 153-160: piano, bass and drums unpitched motifs (© Angela Morris. Reproduced by permission)

Other composers suggested stylistic improvisational models based on the playing of acclaimed soloists. For example, Schmoelzer used the instruction “sort of Eric Dolphy-style” to guide the improvising alto saxophone soloist (email Schmoelzer/Dorrell, 2015). This guidance strategy relies on the performer having an extensive knowledge of the history of improvisation on their instrument. On the other hand, this is an essential area of study for an experienced jazz artist, and if they do not understand the reference, there is a strong possibility that they are not the right person to take on the solo.

Westbrook (email Westbrook/Dorrell, 2015), Holober (email Holober/Dorrell, 2015), Hazama (email Hazama/Dorrell, 2015), Lassnig (email Lassnig/Dorrell, 2015), Sunde (email Sunde/Dorrell, 2015) and Hughes (email Hughes/Dorrell, 2015) all opted to give the player a scale as the basis for improvisation. This scale was either simply named (in the case of conventional scales or modes used in jazz) or written out (in the case of invented or unusual scales) (see Figure 2).

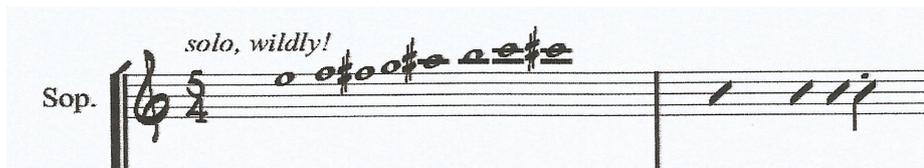


Figure 2: Nathan Parker Smith, *Dark Matter* (2014) bb. 33-34: soprano saxophone solo with Messiaen's mode 4 (© Nathan Parker Smith. Reproduced by permission)

In the example taken from the work of Maria Schneider (see Figure 3), she gives the soloist the option of improvising using the scale of B Phrygian or just the tonal centre of B (as signified by the scale of B Anything).

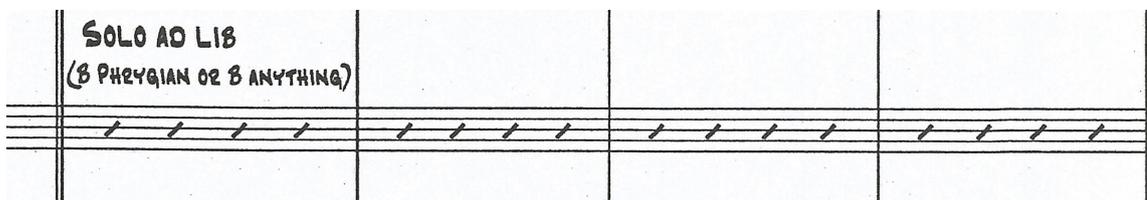


Figure 3: Maria Schneider, *Green Piece* (1987), bb. 107-110: tenor saxophone solo with given mode (or tonal centre) (© Maria Schneider. Reproduced by permission)

With music written in a harmonic language that is not definable with conventional chord symbols, another solution to the problem is to give the improviser the exact background voicings that accompany their solo. Alternatively, chord symbols that “include a question mark”, to imply that they are a loose approximation of the actual harmony, could be used to label these voicings (email Holoher/Dorrell, 2015). Other composers supplied “bass lines or piano reductions of the harmonic material” (email Korsrud/Dorrell, 2015). The example taken from the work of Angela Morris (Figure 4) gives a bass line for reference.

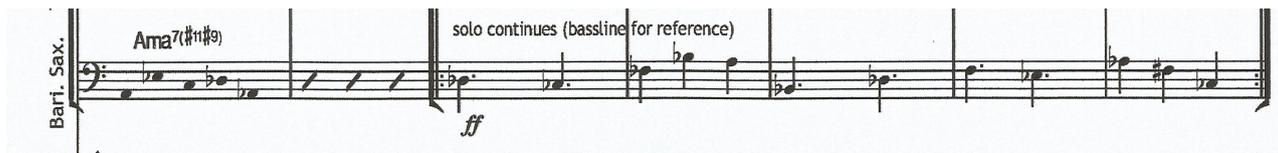


Figure 4: Angela Morris, *Habitual* (2012), bb. 242-248: baritone saxophone solo with bass line for reference (© Angela Morris. Reproduced by permission)

Other information given to soloists included the concept of pitch sets or “note patterns” (email Westbrook/Dorrell, 2015). Kirkwood (email Kirkwood/Dorrell, 2015), Francis (email Francis/Dorrell, 2015), Santhaus (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015), Griffith (email Griffith/Dorrell, 2015) and Hughes (email Hughes/Dorrell, 2015) also mentioned this strategy. These composers' opinions varied in the strictness with which they expected the improviser to use the pitch cells. Some implied that the cells should be employed strictly, ignoring any other pitches. Others stated that the cells were merely a starting point for the solo. A few of the composers questioned remarked that, although these cells were significant features of the composition up to that point, the soloist was “free to interpret [this information] as he or she wishes” (email Westbrook/Dorrell, 2015). Angela Morris put forward the idea that these pitch sets could be either the same notes as used in the supporting music or a “contrasting pitch set (creating a red solo against a green background)” (email Morris/Dorrell, 2015). Figure 5 combines pitch sets and unusual complex chord symbols – Edim(maj7), Bbmaj9(sus4), A(#11#9b9) and B9/C.



Figure 5: Angela Morris, *Habitual* (2012), bb. 234-241: baritone saxophone solo with given pitch sets (and unusual complex chord symbols) (©Angela Morris. Reproduced by permission)

Pitch sets may be used in a variety of ways to produce different results, as demonstrated by the three examples all taken from the work of Neal Kirkwood. Two alternative pitch sets may be given and the choice of which to use is left to the performer. Two players, each with two available sets of notes, gives four possible outcomes in terms of the combinations of pitch sets that could be employed in the performance of this excerpt (see Figure 6).

Improvise in tempo using these pitches 5

The image shows a musical score for Marimba (Mar.) and Piano (Pno.) with two alternative pitch sets. The score is divided into two sections by a vertical dashed line. The first section shows two pitch sets for the Marimba: one with notes G4, A4, B4, C5 and another with notes G4, A4, B4, C5. The Piano part has notes G3, A3, B3, C4. The second section shows two alternative pitch sets for the Marimba: one with notes G4, A4, B4, C5 and another with notes G4, A4, B4, C5. The Piano part has notes G3, A3, B3, C4. The score is written in treble and bass clefs for both instruments.

Figure 6: Neal Kirkwood, *Orphism* (2000), bar before Letter C: marimba and piano duo with alternative given pitch sets (© Neal Kirkwood. Reproduced by permission)

During *Interlude #1* the music moves from total freedom to a single pitch shared by both the marimba and piano improvisers. This is achieved by both performers moving from one pitch set to the next after a given length of time (see Figure 7).

Interlude #1

12

approximately 12 seconds (conductor cue each letter) 11 sec. (all durations approximate) improvise using these pitches

Mar. *Improvise freely*

Pno. *Improvise freely*



C. 10 sec. D. 9 sec.

Mar.

Pno.



E. 8 sec. F. 7 sec. G. 6 sec. H. 5 sec.

Mar.

Pno.

Figure 7: Neal Kirkwood, *Interlude #1* (2000), Letters A-H: marimba and piano improvised duo with given pitch sets and timings - gradually moving from complete freedom to a single pitch. (© Neal Kirkwood. Reproduced by permission)

The next example (Figure 8) moves in the opposite direction from notation to gradually more and more freedom. The piano left hand ostinato pattern continues throughout the passage. This is joined by the right hand playing a three-note pitch set freely. Then the marimba joins, initially improvising from a six-note pitch set, then finally improvising freely until the start of the next section is cued.

The image displays a musical score for a piano and marimba duo, labeled 'Letter D'. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the piano part with a repeating left-hand ostinato pattern in the bass clef. The right-hand part is marked with the instruction 'RH improvise using these pitches, any order or octave' and shows a three-note pitch set. The marimba part is marked with 'D' and shows a six-note pitch set. The second system shows the marimba part with the instruction 'Improvise using these pitches, any order or octave' and then 'open improvisation, conductor cue E.' The piano part continues with the same ostinato pattern. The score includes various musical notations such as clefs, notes, rests, and repeat signs.

Figure 8: Neal Kirkwood, *Orphism* (2000), Letter D: piano and marimba duo with given pitch sets (© Neal Kirkwood. Reproduced by permission)

A very widely-used technique for guiding soloists was to include written instructions on the part. These usually either described the overall mood or gave technical instructions, sometimes very specific and at other times more general, to help the soloist to organise and pace their solo. According to Idan

Santhaus, the number of possible written instructions is “endless”, but they are “very effective” (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015).

Examples of written instructions given by the respondents to the survey included:

- Build - or winding down (email Ballantyne/Dorrell, 2015).
- Aggressive - slow start - or noodle (email Simonsen/Dorrell, 2015).
- Start sparsely - or very active (email Nimmer/Dorrell, 2015).
- Start lyrically, build towards upper register screams by the third time, then wind down (email Saltzman/Dorrell, 2015).
- Start simply - start hot - stay in lower to middle registers - play in a wild and crazy fashion (email DeRosa/Dorrell, 2015).
- Go nuts here - or play over [the] lead trumpet (email Holman/Dorrell, 2015).
- Burning - sad - kick ass - or take your time (email Marcussen-Wulff/Dorrell, 2015).
- High register - low register - long notes - or build (email Hoefner/Dorrell, 2015).

Often these instructions on pacing demonstrate an awareness of the physical effort involved in lengthy soloing. In Figure 9, Darcy James Argue warns the trumpet soloist that a long and strenuous solo, colloquially known as a “long blow”, is coming up. Mace Francis, possibly in response to dealing with a familiar tenor saxophone soloist, warns the player not to “blow your top too early” in the solo (see Figure 10).

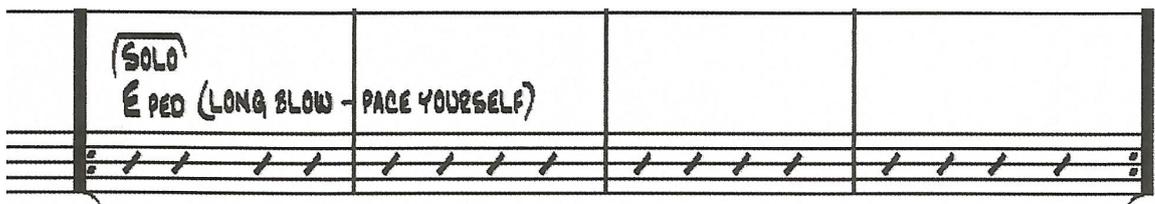


Figure 9: Darcy James Argue, *Transit* (2003), bb. 128-131: trumpet solo general pacing instructions (© Darcy James Argue. Reproduced by permission)

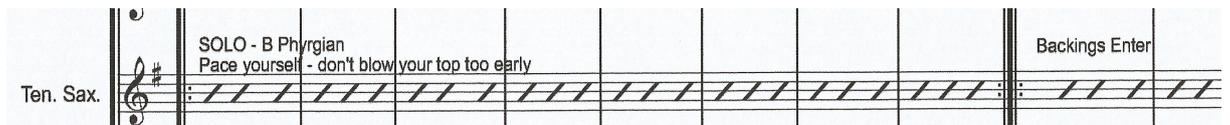


Figure 10: Mace Francis, *Little White Lie* (2010), bb. 213-222: tenor saxophone solo general pacing instructions (© Mace Francis. Reproduced by permission)

In contrast to these often very specific instructions, Russ Kaplan’s approach is very striking and dramatic – he even refers to his instructions as “theatrical notes” (email Kaplan/Dorrell, 2015). He will, for example, “tell the drummer to “tiptoe, so you don’t wake the baby”” or “tell the trumpet player to ‘make my nose bleed”” (email Kaplan/Dorrell, 2015).

Another control or guidance strategy suggested was to ask the soloist to improvise bearing in mind instructions regarding other parameters of the music. These included “dynamics” (mentioned by Kirkwood (email Kirkwood/Dorrell, 2015), Nimmer (email Nimmer/Dorrell, 2015)) and “articulation, [and] timbre” (email Hughes/Dorrell, 2015). In a piano cadenza (see Figure 11), Morris instructs the player how to play, what to play and how loudly to play, but gives no instructions regarding the pitches to be used.

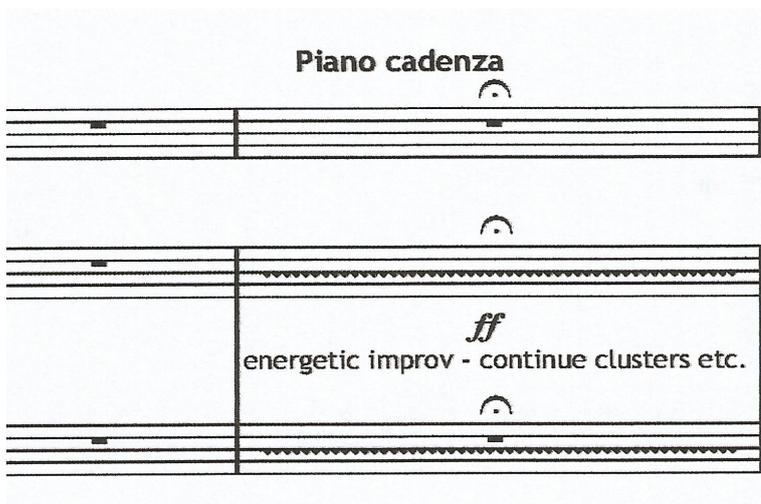


Figure 11: Angela Morris, *Habitual* (2012), bb.149-150: piano cadenza with dynamic, energy level and chord type given (© Angela Morris. Reproduced by permission.)

Harvey (email Harvey/Dorrell, 2015), Santhaus (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015) and Hughes (email Hughes/Dorrell, 2015) gave the soloist rhythmic or melodic fragments as a "seed" from which to allow the improvisation to grow and evolve. Some composers went as far as to write out the opening (and occasionally, the closing) phrase of the solo. According to Hans Lassnig, this helped to “show the soloist what colour or style I expect in that particular solo” (email Lassnig/Dorrell, 2015). John Korsrud employs the same tactic, as there is “no point [in] having an atonal abstract background if they are going to solo like Dexter Gordon” (email Korsrud/Dorrell, 2015).

At the start of the piano solo in *Perseverance* (see Figure 12), DeRosa combines several guidance strategies by notating the opening phrase of the solo over a given left-hand part. This then changes to an improvisation using the given scales (Ab Mixolydian and B Mixolydian) while the left-hand part continues to be notated. At the same time, the whole solo also has the text instruction: “Solo – float over tempo with sparse, ambient notes in upper register”.

The image shows a musical score for the piano solo in *Perseverance* by Richard DeRosa, measures 62-66. The score is written for four staves: Gtr. (Guitar), Pno. (Piano), Bass, and D. S. (Drum Set). The Gtr. staff is mostly empty. The Pno. staff begins with a melodic phrase in measure 62, marked with a '3' and a slur. Above the Pno. staff, the instruction "Solo - float over tempo with sparse, ambient notes in upper register" is written. Below the Pno. staff, the instruction "(pno. solo)" is written. The Bass staff begins with a bass line in measure 62, marked with "(pno. solo)". The D. S. staff shows a drum pattern in measure 62, marked with "(pno. solo)". The Pno. staff continues with a melodic line in measure 63, marked with "Ab Mixolydian". The Bass staff continues with a bass line in measure 63. The Pno. staff continues with a melodic line in measure 64, marked with "B Mixolydian". The Bass staff continues with a bass line in measure 64. The Pno. staff continues with a melodic line in measure 65, marked with "B Mixolydian". The Bass staff continues with a bass line in measure 65. The Pno. staff continues with a melodic line in measure 66, marked with "B Mixolydian". The Bass staff continues with a bass line in measure 66. The measure numbers 62, 63, 64, 65, and 66 are written below the D. S. staff.

Figure 12: Richard DeRosa, *Perseverance* (2011), bb. 62-66: piano solo with given opening phrase then given scales (© Richard DeRosa. Reproduced by permission)

According to Slonaker, “the most obvious way of “controlling” or “guiding” the soloist is in the way you compose or structure the music leading up to the solo, and in the way you write behind the soloist” (email Slonaker/Dorrell, 2015).

Many other composers seconded this statement. Elliot Deutsch also referred to the importance of the “supporting figures” and commented that:

The solo send-off will often set the tone for the entire solo. I can launch the soloist out of a screaming tutti section, forcing the soloist to play loudly. Or I can bring the band down in anticipation of a soft, introverted solo (email Deutsch/Dorrell, 2015).

Idan Santhaus preferred to exert some control over the soloist by controlling the rhythm section accompanying the solo. This tactic “let the soloist know the groove and/or atmosphere I am looking for” (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015). He also mentioned that if there is a written pattern for the rhythm section, the soloist “can’t expect them to respond to what he/she plays, but rather he/she has to respond (or ignore – which is a nice contrasting effect) the pattern” (email Santhaus/Dorrell, 2015).

Django Bates pointed out that the entire piece, before the solo starts, sets up the soloist, “creating a musical environment, and giving the soloist a reason to play; forcing a response from him or her” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015). He also remarked that the “written music that comes after the solo cannot be a response to the solo, but usually the soloist knows what’s coming next and helps to lead us to it in a sensitive and/or imaginative way” (email Bates/Dorrell, 2015).

Some composers “take the time to explain the [complete] story of their piece” (email Miyajima/Dorrell, 2015) and include “storyline cues” (email Harvey/Dorrell, 2015) on the soloist’s part, thereby allowing the performer to see their improvisation as their contribution to a larger ongoing narrative.

The use of backings, behind the improviser, derived from the main thematic material, is a commonly-used device. Jenna Cave’s comment was typical:

I usually have some backgrounds going on behind the soloist which are related to melodic or rhythmic material in proceeding sections; sometimes the connections are more obvious than others. I usually try to use these backgrounds to build the energy during the solo but also to lead naturally to what happens in the next section without a soloist (email Cave/Dorrell, 2015).

Several composers stressed the importance of informing the soloist “where backgrounds enter or where key points or hits in the backgrounds occur [to] help them... craft their solos” (email Parker Smith/Dorrell, 2015). In Figure 13, the soloist has both the chord symbols and the backing figures notated in small cue-sized notes to assist in the placement of melodic phrases.



Figure 13: Darcy James Argue, *Transit* (2003), bb. 176-183: flugelhorn solo with backing figures as cue notes (© Darcy James Argue. Reproduced by permission)

A recurring theme was the wish to include, on the player's sheet music, only “as much information to inform the soloist as ... is necessary” (email DeRosa/Dorrell, 2015). According to composer and saxophonist, Andy Ballantyne:

I’m always cautious about micro-managing the soloist. I think that composers who are not improvisers often have a hard time finding that balance. I try to think of what I would like to see on the page as a player; what would be helpful for me (email Ballantyne/Dorrell, 2015).

The final sentence of this quotation reinforces the overlap between the roles of composer and performer that is a feature of contemporary big band music.

The most extreme position in this debate about the correct level of instructions is to intentionally give the soloist no harmonic information. Hans Lassnig would sometimes “only write slashes, without chord symbols, to make the soloist open

their ears” (email Lassnig/Dorrell, 2015). This method was supported by John Korsrud, who declared that he would “rather that they use their ear, and not have me suggest tonalities, etc.” (email Korsrud/Dorrell, 2015). This high-risk strategy may be feasible if the player performing this solo is known to have an excellent ear (and possibly perfect pitch) – as was the case with one of the saxophone soloists who performed two of my original big band compositions which are studied in the following chapters – but otherwise seems to rely on the music existing in an abstract musical language where exact pitches may be secondary to parameters such as instrumental timbre, melodic gesture, texture and shape.

All the strategies outlined in this section help to answer the second research question: What new guidance methods can be developed to guide the improviser to create music based on the thematic material of a composition?

3.3 - Summary

Most of the composers who responded to the questionnaire shared my interest in making the improvised sections an integral part of the composition and in encouraging the soloist to link their improvisation to the written material in some way. Several alternatives to chord symbols were suggested but on closer inspection many of these were only used in limited musical situations. These tended to be at either extreme of the harmonic spectrum – either static modal or one-chord contexts or, at the opposite extreme, in either completely atonal or extremely extended tonal frameworks.

Often chord symbols were not used because the music could not be analysed satisfactorily in those terms. Either the resulting chord symbols would be so complicated and unusual as to be virtually meaningless to the soloist or the composer was simply not thinking in terms of anything remotely resembling conventional jazz harmony. Very approximate chord symbols or the use of given background voicings and bass-lines over which to solo was another

alternative solution. Some composers gave no guidance at all and simply relied on the improvisers ear to help them decide what to play.

The very idea of any kind of guidance method for improvisers was problematic to several of the composers, with common alternative solutions being to simply guide the soloist by the written context in which they were asked to improvise, or to guide the improvisation by choosing a specific soloist to play it. This act of casting a known improviser into the role of soloist was enough of a control mechanism for many composers.

To summarise, according to the survey, the main techniques used to guide an improvising soloist are: giving rhythmic and melodic motifs; suggesting a stylistic model (based on a well-known player's style); giving scales (either named or notated); giving approximate chord symbols (e.g. Gm7b9#11?); giving bass lines or voicings; suggesting pitch sets; giving written text instructions; giving a notated opening to the solo; using the written ensemble material just before the solo starts; using the written backings behind the solo; controlling the rhythm section (not the soloist); explaining the 'story of the solo'; giving just slashes with no chord symbols (forcing the soloist to play by ear); and the choice of a specific soloist.

3.4 - Conclusion

The questionnaire and interview covered in this chapter have produced a large body of original research from primary sources into the specific topics and research questions covered by this thesis. This has provided information on the existing methods (other than chord symbols) in use by a wide range of jazz composers today to thematically guide improvisers within big band compositions, and the motivations for using them. It has also revealed the contexts in which these methods are used, and the opinions and approaches to the topic of improvisation within composed structures held by a cross-section of jazz composers currently working around the world.

This background information will provide a context for the original big band works that make up the rest of this thesis. In the following chapters the various improvised solos occurring within each performance of each new piece will be analysed in terms of the relationship between the written and improvised material. Finally, a conclusion will sum up the new knowledge gained and its wider ramifications.

Chapter 4 – Colliers Way Suite

4.1 - Introduction

This chapter covers the first of four original compositions written to explore issues raised by the research questions behind this thesis.

The six-movement *Colliers Way Suite* (2013) is a practical exploration and development of Graham Collier's techniques for composing for big band and his ideas for integrating improvisation into a written framework. Each movement is considered here from two points of view - the written score and the realisation of the score in performance¹¹. Three different versions of the suite, or parts of the suite, were performed by different ensembles. This provides an interestingly varied perspective on both the music itself and the practical manifestations of Collier's compositional techniques for interweaving improvisation and notation as they occur in performance.

4.2 – The composition

As the suite was written specifically to explore and develop Collier's concepts and techniques, an agenda existed before a single note was composed. The overall form of a collection of thematically related, but disparate, pieces linked by improvised cadenzas was chosen in advance as it allowed the clearest exploration of Collier's ideas. Certain features of some movements are particularly Collier-esque, such as the opening vamp and horn voicings of *Brassknocker Basin* and the idea of an extended altered blues progression in *Jack and Jill*, but these are outweighed by the many harmonic and stylistic ideas that are characteristic of my previous work. The interest in fixed voicings

¹¹ This methodology is based on that used by saxophonist and composer Dave Liebman in his book *Lookout Farm: a case study of improvisation for small jazz group* (1978). This book, that was based upon his masters thesis, examines the evolution over time of several of his own compositions, from written score to particular recorded performances.

with shifting bass notes, overlapping cyclical phrases of different lengths, folk and Early music influences, and Latin/African grooves occur in many earlier works. None of these feature in Collier's output to any significant degree. In fact, for a bass-playing composer, he shows surprisingly little interest in defining rhythm section grooves at all throughout his oeuvre.

This piece is scored, in line with Collier's methods, for three unassigned 'horn' lines (high, middle and low) and a guide keyboard and bass part. These universal parts (suitably transposed) are given to all the players, and contain all the relevant information for each movement on a single or double page of A4 paper.

The title¹² (as well as being a reference to Collier's compositional techniques) refers to a newly-opened cycle path running along the course of the old Somerset Coal Canal. The canal was later superseded by a railway line following a similar route, linking Dundas (just outside Bath), Radstock and Frome. The name of each movement has some historical or mythical connection to a place on the route.

4.3 - Performances of the *Colliers Way Suite*

This suite was originally intended to be performed by a big band using the three 'horn' lines and skeleton rhythm section parts as a starting point to be fleshed out in rehearsal. The music was to be allocated to more specific players by dividing the band into low, middle and high instruments, and giving individual responsibility to various players for particular written and improvised sections, in the manner of Collier. The opportunity arose for a jazz sextet to make a recording and video of the complete work as part of a concert of undergraduate student works, and I readily accepted the opportunity for a professional performance of the work.

¹² The title of the suite is based on the name of the cycle path, Colliers Way, and does not include a possessive apostrophe.

The sextet is made up of a rhythm section - piano, bass and drums - and a saxophone player (tenor/soprano), a trumpet/flugelhorn player and a trombonist. This line-up is a microcosm of the full band as it contains one representative of each of the front-line sections of a conventional big band. The band's trumpet/flugelhorn player is Gethin Liddington, a star of the South-Wales Jazz Scene, and a very powerful, but also lyrical, player. The extremely fluent trombonist, Savio Pacini, and Mat Sibley (saxophones), a very expressive, lyrical and passionate player, both possess extensive jazz credentials. The rhythm section consists of Dale Hambridge (piano), Rob Brian (drums) and myself (double bass, and nominally the group's leader and organiser). As is quite common in Britain, where jazz education at degree level is a relatively recent phenomenon, all the members of the group (apart from the drummer) have also successfully completed degrees in classical music, as they are all of an age where there was little opportunity for formally studying jazz in Britain when they were in their late teens.

As well as this professional performance, an audio recording of an amateur performance by a twelve-piece group from the jazz workshop - Jazz Factory – was made of three movements from the suite and the reprise of the opening. The flexibility and adaptability of the piece to suit particular performance opportunities is an advantage of adopting Collier's methods and is, in itself, a compositional device worthy of note.

The Jazz Factory group consists of keen amateur players who attend a weekly two-hour community music project on a regular basis. The *Colliers Way Suite* formed the main material for a term of study, ending in a partial performance at the end-of-term concert. The lengthy rehearsal process involved in the development of this work allowed ample time to study many of Collier's techniques and concepts in action while working with amateur players. This provided an interesting contrast with the hastily assembled, but complete, professional performance, described above.

When the larger ensemble played the work (at Jazz Factory rehearsals and in performance) many of Collier's ideas and techniques for expanding the written

material could be explored. These devices were less prominent in the sextet performance, as many of them require a larger group of players than was available. However, the professional quality of the playing and the willingness of the players to experiment more than makes up for this minor deficiency.

Each performance¹³ is unique, and all the versions are, to employ Collier's concept, *possible pictures* inherent in the written material that happened to appear in a certain form in a specific performance. In ensemble jazz performances, the particular direction that a piece takes is often beyond the control of any individual and relies on the spontaneous interplay of the musicians and their willingness to 'go with the flow' in the moment. For the composer and performer alike, this is all part of the fun.

This chapter ends with a conclusion that examines the performances of the new work in terms of the initial research questions.

4.4 – Movements of the *Colliers Way Suite*

4.4.1 - *Brassknocker Basin* – the composition

The opening movement of the suite is built around the initial bass figure – the rhythmic repetition of a pedal D – and the accompanying chords of Dm7(sus4) and Eb/D, to create an 8-bar section (letter 'A'). This vamp creates an introduction over which the melodic material appears later in three-part harmony. This 'A' section recurs several times in the 'A-B-A-C-A-coda' form of the 'head', and the vamp forms the starting point for a string of open solos before the head reappears. This opening 'A' section is a conscious homage to Collier.

The analysis of many of Collier's compositions shows that he often supports a melodic line with an accompaniment pattern which may be harmonic, textural

¹³ All the recordings (video and audio) and the score of this new work are included in an appendix and portfolio with this thesis.

or built around a repeating bass figure. These harmonic patterns may outline a series of chords, two chords repeating, or simply one static chord or rhythm section vamp. The three-part harmonies in the 'horn' lines that explore quartal, sus2 or sus4 voicings in a modal context are also typical of Collier's writing.

The other sections (B, C, and the coda) develop the initial material in various ways. Letter 'B' juxtaposes wild, free collectively improvised sections with written passages – the improvisation providing a short, sharp splash of colour within a tightly structured section of music. This four-bar section of collective mayhem over the vamp provides just such a contrast to the surrounding tightly written material. Letter 'C' continues the rhythm of the initial bass figure, now on a pedal G, while the rising and falling, non-functional harmony, which is outlined by a single sustained 'horn' line, provides a contrast to the static D minor modal tonality of the 'A' section. The coda section provides a moment of rhythmic relaxation and harmonic escape with three unrelated sustained chords that retain elements of quartal and sus2 harmony over unrelated bass notes. These 'hanging chords' that break up the flow of the piece are a recurrent feature of my writing.

4.4.1.1 - *Brassknocker Basin* – in performance

The Sextet performance demonstrated the possibilities inherent in the piece by playing the 'A' section in a way that provided a contrast to the loose collective improvisation in letter 'B'. Both the solos – Mat Sibley (tenor sax) and Dale Hambridge (piano) – demonstrated the technique of consciously playing outside the implied D Phrygian tonality as a way of building tension in a static harmonic situation. The solos are both over a continuation for an indeterminate length of the opening rhythm section vamp. Rob Brian's adaptation of the basic material to the drum kit (as there is no specific drum part) and his support for the changes in mood helped the overall development of the given material by the rhythm section throughout the piece. The opening vamp pattern was clearly stated, hinted at, moved away from, and returned to, by various players, both in the rhythm section and the soloists, throughout the solos. These techniques helped to blur the distinction between written and improvised material. This

distinction is itself further confused by the inclusion of the short burst of group improvisation in letter 'B' in the middle of the notated head.

The Jazz Factory performance highlights some of the differences between professional and amateur performances. The soloing stays very close to the basic D Phrygian mode throughout. The sense of tension and release that are present in the professional performance is lacking, but the compositional technique of blurring the boundary between notation and improvisation is still very effective.

This technique, borrowed from Collier, has the effect of connecting the written and improvised material, and forces the performers to work within the limitations of the given material of the piece. As such, it is a guidance method that does not rely on chord symbols to impart information to the soloist or the band, as outlined in the research questions of this thesis.

4.4.2 - *Echoes of Wellow* – the composition

This piece consists of seven melodic phrases each played over a separate chord. These chords are notated both by chord symbols and a three-note voicing. This melody is played very freely twice, and on the second time, other players may 'shadow' the melody (see the Collier technique outlined in chapter two). The three-note voicings may also be played freely by other players, who are given the instructions: "Free choice of note [from within the written voicing]. Re-attack and colour [notes] at will". The piece ends with a final chord of Ebmaj7(b5) and a corresponding three-note voicing but no given final melodic phrase.

4.4.2.1 - *Echoes of Wellow* – in performance

In the sextet version of this suite, a freely improvised trombone cadenza links the end of the previous movement and the start of this movement. The tenor saxophonist, Mat Sibley, plays the melody very freely and demonstrates a musical concept frequently encouraged by Collier, that he labels 'individualisation' (Collier, 1975, p. 92). The player may colour the notes by

varying the tone, often by using adjacent notes to move, possibly by smearing the sound, into and out of the given notes. The notes can be re-attacked at will, while reacting to and working with – or against – the other players. The intentional lack of any specific articulation or dynamic markings allows the performer the freedom to play the melodic phrases in an individual and different way for each performance.

The use of a linking cadenza between movements and the individualisation of the melodic material spontaneously in performance are both techniques which help to integrate the written and improvised elements. The timbral colouring of the notes, pitch distortions and spontaneous decoration of the given material all help to make the written material sound as though it is being improvised in the moment. Conversely, a well-structured and executed linking cadenza can make an improvisation sound as though it is a notated, preconceived transitional passage between movements.

The second time through the seven melodic phrases the tenor saxophone leads and the muted trombone and open trumpet shadow each phrase loosely. All three players interact with each other often resulting in spontaneous imitation of phrasing and loosely canonic playing. The final chord symbol inspires a saxophone improvised flourish before settling into the sustained last chord.

The rhythm section interprets the chord symbols and voicings in different ways as the movement progresses. The piano plays the voicings and bass notes as tremolando chords the first time through and plays flowing arpeggio patterns on the repeat. The bass and drums react to the energy levels of the music by free bass lines outlining the chord tones and roots, while the drums and cymbals (played with mallets) create an unpredictable but sustained rhythmic backdrop to the three frontline players.

This wall of sound acted as a small-band substitute for the intended big band version where the horn players would have had a free choice of any of the given notes in the voicings to provide what Collier terms a 'carpet of sound'

(Collier, 1995, p. 66). This textural device provides a semi-improvised harmonic background behind a melody or improvised solo.

These techniques – both melodic and harmonic - were used as originally intended when the University Big Band rehearsed and performed this single movement in an unrecorded lunchtime concert at the University. However, the resulting effect was found to be unsatisfactory to both the performers and myself. Once the band grew beyond a certain size, the effect was simply chaotic. This situation may have improved with more rehearsal time and greater player self-discipline, but seems to be a common problem with large freely improvising ensembles. For example, some of the larger groups of Miles Davis's later period (mid-1960s to 1970s) also seem to suffer from the same problem. Once the group grows beyond a certain size, it becomes impossible to hear everything that is happening on stage, and the results become less a matter of controlled improvised contributions to a group sound and more of a chaotic ensemble texture.

These techniques, 'shadowing' and 'carpets of sound' (both borrowed from Collier) have the effect of connecting the written and improvised material, and forcing the performers to work within the limitations of the given material of the piece. Both are textural devices used to create a semi-improvised backgrounds or developments of a single line melody statement, rather than as devices to be employed by a soloist. Despite this, they do constitute guidance methods that do not rely on chord symbols to impart information to the band, as outlined in the research questions of this thesis.

4.4.3 - Foxcote – the composition

This movement of the suite consists of a repeated eight-bar 'A' section followed by a 'B' section of twelve bars and a four-bar 'C' section. The overall melodic and harmonic form of AABC is played over a repeated two-bar rhythmic vamp, reminiscent of Latin-jazz.

Throughout the piece, this accompaniment pattern is adapted to follow the chord changes while maintaining its overall shape. The only exception to this

rule is section 'C' which consists of three held chords. The melody line is voiced in close three-part harmony, often consisting of quartal, sus2 or sus4 voicings taken from the mode implied by the relevant chord symbols. The only exception to this rule happens briefly in bars 15-16, where the horn lines play contrapuntally. Letter 'A' apparently alternates between two chords, Em11 and Ebmaj7(#11), each held for four bars, although this is merely the same sus2 piano voicing, GAD, played over either an E-and-B or Eb-and-Bb, 'root and fifth' bass line.

Letter 'B' is more active harmonically, changing chord every two bars, and letter 'C' resolves the tension with three 'hanging' chords. The harmonic language is non-functional throughout, with chords chosen purely for their sound and colour, although often they are connected by shared common notes.

One of Collier's larger scale compositional techniques, as cited in *Compositional Devices* (1975), is the development of a single melodic motif or small group of motifs across the movements of a suite. This compositional procedure creates a connection between apparently disparate movements and has the effect of (possibly subconsciously) unifying a collection of otherwise unrelated pieces. In this suite, the melody of *Foxcote* is a development of the motifs of *Brassknocker Basin* (see Figure 14). One of my other compositional fingerprints, the 'hanging chords' of letter 'C' of *Foxcote*, is also an echo of the similar idea in the coda of *Brassknocker Basin*.

Brassknocker Basin: Letter 'A'

Foxcote: Letter 'A'

Brassknocker Basin: bars 5-8

Foxcote: Letter 'B'

The image displays two pairs of musical staves in 4/4 time. The first pair shows the 'Letter A' motif for 'Brassknocker Basin' (top staff) and 'Foxcote' (bottom staff). The second pair shows bars 5-8 of 'Brassknocker Basin' (top staff) and the 'Letter B' motif for 'Foxcote' (bottom staff). Brackets above the notes indicate shared melodic phrases between the two pieces.

Figure 14: Shared motivic material: *Brassknocker Basin* and *Foxcote*

4.4.3.1 - Foxcote – in performance

The sextet version of the suite includes an improvised bass cadenza linking *Echoes of Wellow* and *Foxcote*. This improvisation sets up the 'root and fifth' bass vamp of letter 'A' of *Foxcote*. The drums and piano then join the bass to play the vamp from section 'A' as an introduction to the movement. From this point on, the piece is played in a conventional small-band jazz manner, with a statement of the head – AABC – followed by flugelhorn and piano solos (each two choruses) and a restatement of the head.

Apart from the improvised bass cadenza which ends by quoting the repeated vamp from the first section of this movement as a cue for the rest of the band, this movement is relatively conventional in its use of the traditional head-solos-head structure common in small band jazz performance. Again, the improvised cadenza is a unifying compositional device for linking apparently disparate movements, although, as the musical example above starts to convey, the motivic connections between movements of this suite are many. However, these relationships are disguised by the varying tempos, grooves, and harmonic and formal structures used to support the related material.

4.4.4 - *Three Pocket Seedlings* – the composition

The fourth movement of the suite (when performed in full) consists of a 14-bar melody that is repeated three times ('ABC'). The melody consists of seven two-bar motifs, but no single horn player plays this tune in its entirety. Instead, the melody line is allocated, phrase by phrase, to the three instrumental parts in the sequence; high, middle, low, high, middle, low, and so on. As a result of the irregular number of phrases, each time the seven-phrase melody is repeated it starts with a different horn part – letter 'A' begins with the high instruments line, letter 'B' with the middle instruments line, and letter 'C' with the low instruments line.

The entire form then repeats ('ABC') but this time, each melodic motif is accompanied by 'improvised fills' in one of the other parts. The high line melody is always accompanied by low fills, the middle line melody by high fills and the low line melody by middle line fills, in strict rotation. This device has the effect of breaking up the repetitions of the melody and creating a chain of short, almost textural, improvisations rather than a string of conventional, longer solos. The result is almost kaleidoscopic, particularly when the melodic motifs are 'individualised' by each player in turn and the improvised fills are also full of interesting instrumental timbres. The distinction between written and improvised sections becomes even less clear as the movement progresses. This use of improvisation as an added colour and texture for the composition (rather than the main focus of interest) was a technique also employed by Bob Brookmeyer in several of his later compositions, such as *Make Me Smile* (1982), and was adopted by many other composers of his school.

A suggested major scale accompanies each chord symbol, but this addition to the part was designed to assist inexperienced improvisers and was added later for the *Jazz Factory* performance. Also, the chords are intentionally notated rather oddly as maj7(b5) chords rather than the more common maj7(#11). This unusual nomenclature is intended to hint at a voicing that again uses a sus2 voicing over a bass note. (For example, Fmaj7(b5) should be played as the voicing ABE (or Asus2) over an F.) This characteristic chordal colouration links

the harmony in this piece to many of the other movements of the suite: a sus2 or sus4 triad over a different bass note.

The links with other movements are not just harmonic, but also melodic. Figure 15 compares the melody line of *Three Pocket Seedlings* with that of *Echoes of Wellow*. Although *Echoes of Wellow* should be performed very freely, out of time, in contrast to the strict tempo of *Three Pocket Seedlings*, they are, on paper, almost identical. The very different harmonisations of effectively the same melody exaggerate the differences between these two movements. The following short score comparison shows the links and differences between the two movements more clearly.

Both pieces also finish with a held chord and improvised flourishes (see letter 'D' of *Three Pocket Seedlings*).

The image shows a musical score for two pieces: 'Three Pocket Seedlings' and 'Echoes of Wellow'. Both are in 4/4 time and consist of two staves each. The top staff of each piece contains the melody, and the bottom staff contains the accompaniment. Chord symbols are placed above the notes in the accompaniment staff.

'Three Pocket Seedlings'
Straight 8's ballad
Chords: Fmaj7(b5), Amaj7(b5)

'Echoes of Wellow'
Freely out of time
Chords: A^{7(sus4)}/E, C^{#m}7, F^{#m}/G, Gmaj7(b5), B^bmaj7(b5), E^bmaj7(b5), E^m7(b5), E^b6/9, D^bmaj7(b5)/G, E^m7(b5), etc..., E^b7(sus4)/D^b, Dmaj7(b5)

Figure 15: A comparison between *Three Pocket Seedlings* and *Echoes of Wellow*

4.4.4.1 - *Three Pocket Seedlings* – in performance

In the sextet performance of this suite, an improvised flugelhorn cadenza by Gethin Liddington links this piece to the previous movement. In the piece itself, the flugelhorn plays the top line, tenor saxophone the middle line and trombone the lowest line. The intensity and level of activity gradually build throughout the piece. At first, the piano becomes more florid in its accompaniment, and later in the second chorus the improvised fills interact with the 'individualised' interpretations of the tune and the supportive rhythm section accompaniment. Perhaps because of the growing complexity of the improvised piano part, towards the end, the pianist inadvertently skips a chord and as a result, lands on the final Fmaj7(b5) two bars before the rest of the band. These kinds of accidents frequently happen in live jazz performance, and it does not

substantially affect the mood or flow, as the next event is an improvised piano cadenza leading smoothly into the next movement.

The point of the piece is to depict this idea of gradual growth, and the texture of the movement is meant to become slowly busier and more colourful. In these terms, this particular performance by the Jazz Factory group was not a great success, with the players only sounding relaxed and confident as they eventually resolve, onto the final chord, over which they improvised flourishes.

Collier's technique of simultaneously mixing written material with short improvisations again has the effect of connecting the written and improvised material, and forcing the performers to work within the limitations of the given material of the piece. This textural use of improvisation and the blurring of boundaries between writing and improvisation could be seen as another guidance method to be used in jazz composition as outlined in the research questions of this thesis.

4.4.5 - *Jack and Jill* – the composition

This composition is essentially a 24-bar F minor blues in 3/4, but some of the harmonies are unexpected for a traditional blues progression. The shift in bar nine to the bVII7 chord (rather than to IVm7) is particularly unusual. The 'root and fifth' bass line and the related sustained piano chords in the head give this movement a very particular flavour. This part of the suite is also related to other pieces; the bass line is a development of the *Foxcote* bass line, and the melody line is a distant cousin of both the *Foxcote* and *Echoes of Wellow* themes. A backing figure in three-part close harmony accompanies the second rendition of this melody and reinforces the 'two-against-three' feel of parts of the melody.

The two-bar 'B' section is an occasional brief interlude played 'on cue' before and between solos. In rehearsal, it was decided that this section was unnecessary as it caused too much confusion to be worthwhile, and the piece worked well without it. As a result of this decision, the 'B' section was dropped

from the performance. Again, the practicality of the use of universal parts and a down-to-earth approach to jazz composition (possibly encouraged by the example of Collier) allowed me to make decisions such as this easily at this late stage.

4.4.5.1 - *Jack and Jill* – in performance

The piano cadenza before this movement eventually set up the written backing figure, and this was gradually picked up by both bass and drums. The sextet rhythm section then played their written parts for one complete chorus as an introduction – this was a happy unintentional accident that had not been rehearsed - before Mat Sibley joined them playing the head on soprano saxophone. The second time through the head the trombone and trumpet joined in playing the backing figures, each player spontaneously choosing one line from the three possible harmony lines. This almost aleatoric arrangement of the backing figures by the players, in mid-performance, is another Collier device, designed to keep each performance fresh and intentionally only semi-organised. It also has the added advantage of keeping the backing horn players more involved in the specific performance by giving them musical decisions to make in support of the other performers.

The piece continued with a string of three solos – soprano saxophone, trombone, and trumpet – each one consisting of four choruses of the form. The mood of the introduction returned at the start of each solo, and the ‘two-against-three’ rhythmic concept featured throughout the rhythm section playing of this movement.

After the trumpet solo, a chorus of the written rhythm section parts – possibly a spontaneous collective attempt to make the ‘mistake’ at the start of the movement sound intentional - introduces the final head and backing figures, on soprano saxophone and brass as before.

4.4.6 - Great Elm Powerhouse – the composition

This last movement allows the possibility of thematically unifying the suite by the band referring to many musical elements from earlier movements, but only as improvised backing figures for the central drum solo. This aggressive and disjointed passage is enclosed by a contrasting opening and closing section. The structure is almost minimalist in design as the texture is built up from many repeating, overlapping layers of music, some of these cycles being of different lengths. This section that bookends the central drum solo reflects three of my other interests; folk music, Early music and minimalism (although this may be actually an interest in African rhythmic structures as reflected in another research composition, *Bemba Variations*).

This rustic-sounding opening section is clearly in 3/4 and starts with a four-bar drum figure that repeats many times beneath the other parts as they gradually join in. The middle horn line (letter 'B') then enters playing an accompaniment figure that suggests a possible G Aeolian modal centre for this section. This three-bar figure also loops repeatedly, drifting in and out of phase, against the four-bar drum figure and the remaining lines as they enter one after another. These four remaining lines (letter 'C') are all seven bars long. Firstly, a modal melody is played by the high horn line. This tune is later joined by a countermelody in the low horns. (This low line is an inversion of the top line that also stays strictly within the basic mode.) The piano part then adds a series of two-note chords that start to hint at the harmonic framework, and this suspicion is finally confirmed when the bass enters playing a 'circle-of-fifths'-type sequence of root notes that confirm the actual D Phrygian tonality – the same as the opening *Brassknocker Basin* movement.

However the bass line never actually resolves onto the expected final D minor chord. Instead, a loud, discordant held 'chord/cluster' (letter 'D') signals the start of the central free drum solo section. Behind this solo, the rest of the band is at liberty to introduce any of the five cued backings whenever they feel it is appropriate. 'Cue 1,' for piano and bass, consists of three chords - Dsus4/G, E/G, and F/G – which are reminiscent of the Phrygian sound-world of

Brassknocker Basin. 'Cue 2' uses various melodic motifs taken from *Three Pocket Seedlings* which are intended to be superimposed freely in an unsynchronised way. 'Cue 3' resembles the rhythm of the bass figure in *Foxcote*. 'Cue 4' is the opening of the melody of *Jack and Jill* and is again intended to be played freely, out-of-time by the horns, and the final cue, 'Cue 5,' signals a collective free improvisation by the whole band. This technique of thematic material used as backing for the drum solo is yet another way of linking written and improvised material in an open flexible structure that can be varied easily according to the needs of a particular performance. As the five cues are all in free time, rather than in time with the improvising drummer, they can be seen as backings used to purposely hinder the soloist after the manner of Django Bates (2015) (as mentioned in his questionnaire reply in the previous chapter). They function to give the soloist something to fight against rather than to play along with. This technique works particularly well with a drum solo as the pitches used are secondary to the energy levels and textures created.

At the end of the drum solo, the drummer plays the rhythmic pattern of letter 'A' as a cue for the rest of the band to return to a recapitulation the entire first section (letters 'A', 'B' and 'C'). However, this time, the bass line does resolve onto the final D minor chord to finish the movement.

4.4.6.1 *Great Elm Powerhouse* – in performance

The sextet performance of this movement emerges out of the drum cadenza linking this piece with the previous section of the suite when the drummer plays the rhythm at 'A' on the snare drum (with the snares off). The tenor saxophone plays the accompaniment figure at letter 'B'. This passage is followed by the main tune on the trumpet, the countermelody on the trombone and the piano and bass lines, one after another. The bass line cues the letter 'D' discord and the start of the central drum solo.

The trombonist, Savio Pacini, cues the backing figures; Cue 2 and Cue 4 which dissolves into a free collective improvisation (Cue 5). As this free section fades out, Rob Brian plays the opening drum figure (letter 'A') which both re-

establishes the initial tempo and time signature and signals the recapitulation of sections 'B' and 'C.' This time, this section resolves onto a D minor chord to finish the movement.

In the Jazz Factory performance of the piece, the initial drum figure emerges directly out of the final chord of *Three Pocket Seedlings*, which is the previous movement of their shortened version of the suite. The accompaniment figure (letter 'B') is accurately played the first time but then the player loses track of the first beat of the bar, meaning that, from then onwards, this line is out of sync with the following lines of letter 'C.' The drum solo starts at letter 'D', emerging out of the discord, but is in strict time, with a strong pulse stated throughout the central solo section. The Jazz Factory group decided not to use the backing figures behind the drum solo, and, as a result, the drummer is unaccompanied until he cues the return of the head with the rhythm of letter 'A.' This time, the three-bar looping figure at letter 'B' is held in place accurately against the other lines of different lengths and eventually the piece resolves onto a D minor final chord.

This movement is intended to be made up of two very contrasting moods. Sections 'A,' 'B' and 'C' are meant to be played gently and in strict time, while the 'D' section is meant to be much louder, out-of-time, and much more anarchic, with the rest of the band playing against and across the free drum solo. The strict time drum solo and the lack of any backing figures played alongside the drum improvisation in the Jazz Factory version, lead there to be much less contrast between the two sections than originally intended.

The valley linking Great Elm and Mells, which is close to the line of the original railway line, was a quiet rural wooded valley which became the site of a water-powered early industrial revolution iron works and related industries. The valley has now reverted to its former state with nature taking back the long-abandoned factory buildings. This tripartite history of the area is the inspiration behind the movement, and the Jazz Factory performance of *Great Elm Powerhouse* fails to have sufficient contrast between the sections to depict these radical changes of atmosphere and environment clearly.

The various backing figures which may be spontaneously cued, in performance, in any order, depending on what is happening in the drum solo, have multiple functions. They support, hinder and/or provoke the soloist, and are therefore methods used to guide the development of the central solo in this movement, as outlined in the research questions of this thesis.

Compositionally, they serve to unify the suite by quoting fragments of the other movements within this final, consolidatory movement. The decision of the Jazz Factory group not to use them within their performance considerably alters the effect of, and *raison d'être*, of the movement.

4.4.7 - *Brassknocker Basin (recap)* – the composition

This movement is merely a recapitulation of the head of the first movement in its original form, consisting of 'A-B-A-C-A-coda'. This recurrence of the opening is intended to create a musically satisfying, cyclical form to the suite.

4.4.7.1 - *Brassknocker Basin (recap)* – in performance

Both the sextet and Jazz Factory performances of this movement started with the bass player playing the bass line of letter 'A' as the root note of the last chord of the previous movement. This bass line cued the rhythm sections to join in and then the full band to play the head as at the opening of both performances. The unresolved final chord of the coda ends both performances. In the Jazz Factory version, this chord is quite static, but in the sextet performance, the tenor saxophone, drums, and piano play a final flourish over this chord as it is held by the brass and double bass.

4.5 - Observations

The interpretation of performances of this new work and the success of the various compositional devices and techniques suggested by the work of Graham Collier is fundamentally subjective. The basic criteria that I used are whether these techniques can be considered to be a valuable contribution to

my compositional armoury or not. They will also be assessed regarding their usefulness in answering the research questions explored by this thesis.

The compositional techniques and concepts fall into two broad categories. These are, firstly, strategies to unify larger, multi-movement works and, secondly, techniques for blurring the boundaries between the written and improvised elements of these compositions. All the techniques together form a flexible and practical approach to jazz composition for large ensembles.

4.5.1 - Practical Approach

The sheer practicality of Collier's approach to composition was very striking, as demonstrated by his willingness to adapt his works depending on particular rehearsal or performance situations. By following his example, I organised three performances of my suite: a truncated version of the suite played by the Jazz Factory group in their 20-minute slot in the end-of-term concert, a single movement performed by the University Big Band in a lunchtime concert, and a professional performance of the entire suite by a sextet. That all of these versions of the same composition were equally valid as performances is a tribute to the flexibility and functionality of these compositional methods.

4.5.2 - Strategies for unifying movements of a suite

The motivic relationships between movements are, in my opinion, successful in unifying these otherwise unrelated pieces, but these techniques are not unique to Collier. Indeed, he openly acknowledges this by suggesting, in the Introduction to *Compositional Devices* (1975), that the budding jazz composer should study *The Thematic Process in Music* (1951) by Rudolph Reti. This book proposes the idea (often demonstrated in practice by Collier) that a composition should be constructed from a single (or small group of) thematic motifs. Josef Haydn, to name just one earlier composer, was an advocate of the same principle at least 150 years earlier.

This process may not always be entirely rational or conscious. Collier cites the example of his composition, *Songs for my Father (1970)* where all the instrumental 'songs' stemmed originally from one motif – the opening of *Song Three*. "I have been constantly surprised while researching for this book, how much of my writing can be traced back to this rule or that idea – which I had consciously forgotten or possibly had not even thought of!" (Collier, 1975, p.3). This is not a situation which is unique to Collier or even jazz composers in general. Rather, it can be generalised to cover composers in most genres, as repetition, development and organisation (at some level) is a requisite of most types of music.

4.5.3 - Strategies for the inclusion of improvisation in a notated composition

The techniques that relate more specifically to improvisation within a notated context are more mixed in terms of their success. Again, in my opinion, some proved to be very successful. For example, the improvised cadenzas linking the movements of the suite allowed the soloist's space to play freely in an unaccompanied setting, with the only limitation that they had to finish by introducing the following movement in some way. This performance situation permitted the audience to hear each player very clearly and also allowed the soloist free rein to demonstrate their unique sound and individual improvisational techniques unfettered by the rest of the ensemble. It also provided a welcome contrast to the weight of sound of the whole group while simultaneously both framing and also providing a structural link between the individual movements.

The solo cadenza became a feature of many of Collier's works and could be said to have become over-used in his compositions of the 1970s. It was in danger of becoming a lazy solution to the problem of linking diverse movements or sections within a larger form. However, Heining (2018) points out that it has a long pedigree in both opera and jazz, and that these two apparently separate genres are linked:

[The cadenza] works dramatically but is also a reminder that Louis Armstrong developed his remarkable technique and helped create the role of the soloist in jazz through listening to and accompanying operatic arias. There are, of course, other examples in jazz of the use of the cadenza. Sonny Rollins was a master and George Russell used it on occasions, for example with Bill Evans on *Jazz in the Space Age* and with Eric Dolphy on Monk's 'Round Midnight' from *Ezz-Thetics*. Matthias Ruegg uses it sometimes with the Vienna Art Orchestra, notably on the album *The Minimalism of Erik Satie* (1990). But no other musician or composer in jazz has used it so extensively, not only as a bridge between movements but as a dramatic device (Heining, 2018, p. 78).

The short 'splash' of improvised colour and anarchy introduced into a tightly written section by a free collective improvisation passage, such as at letter 'B' of *Brassknocker Basin* was also a very successful device. The surprise created by the effect of the instant return of the precisely notated playing from the collective mayhem was also particularly pleasing. This technique was like the textural use of short sections of improvisation against written melodic lines in *Three Pocket Seedlings*. Both these methods demonstrate, in my opinion, successful alternatives to the conventional improvised jazz solo, where often only the rhythm section tends to accompany often lengthy improvisations.

The backings cued at the performer's discretion, such as those behind the drum solo in *Great Elm Powerhouse*, were effective texturally and did involve the non-soloists in creating the music and in taking important structural decisions. The free choice of harmony lines for the backings in *Jack and Jill* was similarly effective, but in practice, it proved difficult to prevent the players pre-planning their choice of lines and simply repeating what had happened successfully in rehearsal. This destroyed the idea of spontaneous decision-making in performance which was the point of the compositional device.

Collier's 'shadowing' technique proved effective in the sextet performance of *Echoes of Wellow*. However, in the Jazz Factory and University Big Band versions of the piece, the effect proved to be quite shambolic. This fairly chaotic situation also happened when attempting to rehearse the background

voicings in *Echoes of Wellow* in the manner of the textural effect that Collier labelled 'carpets of sound'. Comments have been made previously on the problems caused by the excessive size of the improvising ensemble, but mention should also be made of the resistance to attempting anything out-of-the-ordinary that was encountered, from both amateur jazz musicians and also, more surprisingly, classical music degree students studying jazz. The need for a jazz composer to work with sympathetic and open-minded musicians is a recurring theme of this research. Many of the amateur and student performers either vetoed attempting any of the improvised textural effects in performance after several rehearsal attempts, or played the effects in performance, but, in rehearsal, voiced an extreme dislike of the overall discordant free jazz effect.

The shadowing technique has been successfully used by both Mingus and Collier in several of their medium-sized groups, so it is possible that the issue is not the compositional technique but the size of the group attempting to use it. I had no problem with the level of dissonance of resulting music, possibly because I come from a generation more used to listening to free jazz and discordant twentieth-century classical music. I simply found the effect too blurred, and that the random merging of the individual lines weakened the clarity of the musical ideas too much for my taste. For any other composers wishing to employ these techniques, it is a matter of personal taste and tolerance of the lack of pitch control. However, the general principle behind many of Collier's ideas – that of blurring the boundaries between written and unwritten music – is fascinating, and is a concept that I (and I hope other composers) will explore in future jazz compositions.

4.6 - Conclusion

This chapter developed Collier's ideas and techniques introduced in chapter two, and the *Colliers Way Suite* was written as a practical exploration of these ideas in an original work. The main thrust of Collier's approach is to find new ways to blur the boundary between the written and improvised elements of his compositions. His catalogue of new methods does not include any techniques specifically designed to guide or control the soloist or to direct them towards

the development of a thematic, melodic motif for any extended period of improvisation. A possible reason for this is that Collier, in common with many other jazz musicians, did not seem to regard this issue as a problem to be solved. He makes no reference to it in any of his books. Because of this, his techniques, while interesting in general, fail to address the question: Is it possible to guide a jazz improviser to create music based on the thematic material of a composition, rather than on chord symbols?

The following three chapters consider new compositions written specifically to focus on this research problem.

Chapter 5 - All around the Wrekin

5.1 – Introduction

This chapter deals with the original composition *All Around the Wrekin* (2011) and analyses two performances of the piece. Both the solos will be analysed individually and will then be compared in the conclusion to the chapter.

A methodology developed from the ideas of Jan LaRue (1992) is used to transcribe and analyse the improvised solos played by trumpeters Nick Malcolm and Mike Daniels. Four melodic motifs (taken from the thematic material of the composition) and a pentatonic scale provide the soloists with a starting point for their improvisations. The soloists receive no harmonic information at any point in the piece, but further short text instructions provide some guidance to the soloist as the piece unfolds. The piece also contains an unaccompanied cadenza which provides the opportunity to examine the development of melodic ideas by the soloists in an improvising situation free from external distraction.

The starting point for the composition was the decision to give the soloist a pentatonic scale; a single scale that fits over several different conventional chords. The soloists would not be given a chord chart for the solo sections, and would be forced to rely on the given scale as a starting point for improvisation. This was a conscious attempt to explore the research questions of this thesis, and the decision to adopt this method had a profound effect on the composition of the piece.

Each pairing of the given scale and background chord gives a different relationship between the two elements and, as a result, varying degrees of dissonance. This allows the soloist to stay within one scale but still play comfortably over a chord sequence without knowing what it is. This situation becomes intentionally less comfortable for the soloist later in the piece, because the relationship between scale and chord becomes increasingly dissonant. The player is encouraged to introduce other pitches as required as

the solo develops, until, just before the cadenza, the harmony is entirely atonal and chromatic. This unusual basis for improvisation, from the soloists point of view, had a radical effect on their improvisations and the processes behind creating it. The lack of chord symbols meant that the soloists could not rely on their conventional chord-based patterns but had to rely on their ears and trust the composer to create a suitable background. As the thematic motifs were to be developed in the improvised sections, it was essential that both sections were based on pentatonic material. Thus, the setting for improvisation determined the basis of the overall composition in this case, and had a profound effect on the processes employed by both the composer and the improvising player. This situation starts to address the issues outlined in the research questions posed by this thesis.

5.2 - The Composition

This piece was written to feature a solo trumpet player playing both with and against the rest of the ensemble. Both parties state and develop thematic material, in the manner of a classical concerto. As an experiment, an attempt was made to use the conventional form of a concerto first movement as the starting point for a big band jazz work. This variation on traditional sonata form has a double exposition section, firstly played by the ensemble and then loosely repeated by the soloist; followed then by the expected development section, cadenza, and recapitulation of the thematic material: This formal structure is unusual compared to the forms traditionally used in big band composition. Using this concerto structure as a basis for analysis, and referring to rehearsal letters, the overall form of this composition breaks down as follows (see Figure 16)

Exposition 1 - band opening, 'A', 'B'		
	Transitional material	'C', 'D'
Exposition 2 – solo trumpet 'E', 'F', 'G'		
	Transitional material	'H'
Development Section – band and soloist 'I', 'J', 'K', 'L', 'M'		
	Unaccompanied Trumpet Cadenza – open length 'N'	
	Transitional material	'O' (played on cue)
Recapitulation section – band and soloist 'P', 'Q'		

Figure 16: A chart of the form of *All Around the Wrekin* referring to the rehearsal letters and overall structural elements of classical concerto form.

In the double exposition section, the first subject of the concerto form is the opening 3/4 melody, played by the saxophones. This melody contrasts with the second subject; the 6/8 melody played by the big band trumpets at letter 'B'. The solo trumpet then restates the first subject at letter 'E', and the second subject at letter 'F', and then during the development section there is interplay between the improviser and backings based on thematic material. The unaccompanied cadenza leads to the recapitulation section where the previously contrasted first and second subject material is brought together into a unified resolution.

Throughout the composition there is a tension between triple and duple pulses. They are often heard either simultaneously, as a two–against-three rhythmic device or, as the basis of the metric modulations between sections (e.g. letter 'F'). This device of metric modulation and the simultaneous superimposition of

different meters is the subject of much exploration and experiment in contemporary jazz circles.

5.3 - Guidance for the improvising trumpet soloist

As I had decided, at an early stage of composition, that pentatonic scales would be used as the basis for both main themes, the improvising soloist is also given a single scale (G minor pentatonic) as a starting point and asked to combine this with various melodic motifs (taken from the main themes) as the basis for improvisation. These four motifs are marked with brackets at letter 'E', letter 'F', and at bars 120-122 in the solo trumpet part.

In the improvised solo section (starting at letter I) the G minor pentatonic scale is consonant with all the accompanying chords. Initially, the soloist is instructed: "*solo – G minor pentatonic – based on the given motives – decoration optional*". From this point onwards the original pentatonic scale gradually starts to sound more dissonant against the accompanying chords, as the solo progresses through letters 'J' and 'K'. As a result, the soloist is given permission to "*gradually introduce other pentatonic scales – melodic shapes developed from the given motives*" as their ear suggests. From this point onwards, the harmony becomes more unpredictable, both regarding the chords used and the pacing of these chords. At letter 'K' the soloist is instructed: "*Motives gradually become more fragmented and dissonant.*" By letter 'L' the harmony is changing every bar in a way that is intentionally too fast and too unpredictable for the soloist to react to in time. Also, the backing figures, all loosely based on the thematic material, that were first introduced at letter 'J' now begin to clash harmonically and rhythmically with each other in a pile-up of dissonant layers. The soloist is instructed: "*Solo is gradually overwhelmed by the band – harmonically free and chaotic.*" This gradual build-up of an increasingly dissonant texture leads to the very loud and dissonant cluster at letter 'N', that signals the start of the unaccompanied trumpet cadenza. The combination of gradually more discordant harmonies, the gradual increase in harmonic rhythm, and the build-up of background textures and overall

volume is all intended to push the soloist into a predictable solo arc. The predicted outcome is a solo that starts in a relaxed manner and gradually becomes more fragmented and dissonant as the background becomes less predictable, both rhythmically and harmonically, for the soloist. Instrumental lines accompanying the soloist enter one after another until the backing becomes chaotic and overwhelmingly loud, drowning out the soloist. The climax of this section – the discordant fortissimo cluster - approaches (at letter ‘N’) and sets up the opening of the unaccompanied cadenza.

During this cadenza and the eventual return of the band, signalled by a solo tenor saxophone melody and pianissimo cymbal rhythms, the soloist has the following three instructions:

- *Long open cadenza – harmonically free but developing the given material.*
- *Continue the cadenza against two quiet saxophone phrases – return to G minor pentatonic scale.*
- *Gradually fade out during and after the second saxophone phrase.*

Then, after further notated material, the soloist is instructed to play “*quiet fills – fade to nothing*” against the final saxophones and vibraphone sustained chord. The soloist is given no harmonic information, just the instructions to play pianissimo with a final diminuendo. This final understated flourish allows the soloist to release any residual energy and tension against the last chord.

5.3.1 – Before the recording sessions

Before the recording sessions, both the soloists¹⁴ received their trumpet part and an accompanying note (the opening paragraph is quoted below) introducing the piece and the concept behind the research in advance, with the assumption that they would read it before the recording session:

¹⁴ The trumpet soloists – Nick Malcom and Mike Daniels – are introduced in the appendix to this thesis.

The idea behind this piece is to try and integrate the solo improvisation with the written parts. The bracketed phrases should provide the starting point for your solo.

5.4 – The recording sessions

The University Big Band accompanied the soloists, under my direction. Nick Malcolm and Mike Daniels recorded their studio sessions just over two weeks apart. Malcolm also performed the piece as a guest performer in the annual Bath Spa University Big Band Concert a few months later. In total, five versions of this composition were filmed; two studio takes by each soloist and a live version by Malcolm. Each soloist then chose the version that they were happiest with and that they felt achieved the research objective most successfully. These takes were then transcribed and analysed.¹⁵

5.5 - Analysis of Nick Malcolm's Solo

5.5.1 – Overview of motivic development within the solo

The given motif 4P provides the starting point for much of the material used in the solo, and it reoccurs several times throughout the improvisation. An example of the improviser's extended development of this idea is the first section of the cadenza. Overall, the solo demonstrates the logical development of melodic ideas. There are 21 separate secondary motifs, but each tends to be a logical consequence of what has come before and each of these ideas is itself developed by Malcolm before he moves on to introduce a new motif.

¹⁵ The full score and transcriptions of each solo referred to in the analyses appear in the appendices to this thesis. Analysis of the solos in terms of other parameters as included in LaRue's full methodology are also included in the appendices. There is also a more detailed analysis of the motivic development in each solo.

While occasionally other phrases seem to be triadic or pentatonic in nature, they act as a way of keeping up the momentum of the solo and strongly outline a harmonic area in the solo line that contrasts to the background harmony. Moreover, these phrases also act as new motivic material which is also developed, between more obviously melodic passages.

Finally, three sections of the solo seem to incorporate material which exists purely for the energy and momentum that it introduces. The exact pitches used are secondary. These very fast phrases occur 8-11 bars after letter 'J', at the opening of the cadenza (as the trumpet emerges from the loud discord), and just before letter 'O' (as the tenor saxophone re-enters at the end of the cadenza).

In line with Malcolm's interest in extended techniques, motifs containing pitches and sounds outside the scope of conventional trumpet playing are also developed. The ending of the piece is a good example of this.

5.6 - Analysis of Mike Daniels' solo

5.6.1 – Overview of motivic development within the solo

Apart from the sustained manipulation of the 2P motif in the cadenza, this solo demonstrates little long-term development of the given motifs. The solo does feature the use of many varied scalic patterns in the bebop-like long chains of quavers. The withholding of the chord symbols proved to be a significant problem to Daniels, as his style relies on these harmonic markers for his lines to make sense. Without them, there is, in my opinion, a feeling of uncertainty and aimlessness to some of the lines.

In an informal chat, as equipment and instruments were being packed away after the recording, I mentioned how impressive it was that his cadenza was built using just one of the given phrases. Daniel's reply was along the lines of: "Oh! Are there other motifs that I'm supposed to be using?" This highlights the

need to check that the task is fully understood by the soloist, and this topic is covered in more detail in the following section.

5.7 – Summary

Both soloists started with four given phrases on which to base their solos, but both chose to focus on just one phrase for most of their solos, although possibly for different reasons. It is unwise to generalise from such a small sample, but it is interesting to speculate that improvising without chord symbols provides enough of a problem without having to worry about trying to remember to incorporate several given melodic motifs. This is particularly true when, as in this case, the music is based on audible, but un-named, harmonies. Was the desire to try to work out the background chords too distracting from the task of developing melodic motifs?

In the cadenza sections, both soloists develop material in a logical way, without the distraction of background harmonies. Both cadenzas make sense in the context of their individual solos, but the difference in the raw material developed in each cadenza perfectly illustrates the differing styles of the two soloists.

Malcolm is a player who usually plays lines that have a clear internal logic. In a more conventional setting, this logic may consist of clearly outlining the given chords, or an alternative, substitute set of chords against the rhythm section harmony, or of a line based on intervallic structures (often fourths or tritones). His flexible and contemporary approach to rhythm in jazz provides another building block for creative solo development.

He is also a frequent player of free jazz and is, therefore, used to developing a melodic idea to give a solo some sense of logical structure in the unclear harmonic landscape of a group free improvisation. This situation is not unlike that facing him in playing this piece, where he is given no prior harmonic

information. As a result, in my opinion, this skill-set, and his previous performing background, helped him to cope well with the difficulties provided by this challenging piece.

As for Daniels's parting question: this suggests that I should check that the performers understand exactly what I am asking them to do and that they have thoroughly read any pre-recording communication. This inquiry should always happen before any recording takes place, no matter how clear the objective seems to be to me and whatever efforts I have already made to clarify the situation for the performers.

5.8 – Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has introduced one possible approach to testing the research hypothesis and has produced two very different improvisations on the same piece. The use of given melodic motifs taken from the written sections of the composition prior to the solo section gave the improvisations a sense of unity with the written composition, at least for the start of each solo. Both soloists tended to use a stream-of-consciousness approach to the development of the given material, leading to them drifting away from the initial thematic focus of the solo as the time went on. Malcolm was the more conscientious of the two improvisers in returning to the given motifs at several points throughout his solo.

The musical device of the 'pentatonic scale against various chords' was developed to attempt to answer the questions posed by this research. It impacted the methods of both the composer and soloists by forcing them to create music in an unusual way. The processes adopted by both parties were very different to their normal working methods, and took everyone involved into new areas that would probably not have been explored outside this research project.

The process of recording these performances has also highlighted the care that must be taken in explaining the task clearly to all the improvisers. Because of the problems encountered with this recording session, a different, more careful explanation process was used in later recording sessions.

The device of the 'pentatonic scale against various chords' is repeated in the next piece (the topic of the next chapter), but this time the soloist is free to choose their own motifs (from earlier within the composition) as a basis for their improvisation. This process will alleviate the problem of trying to retain several given motifs, and will allow the soloists to choose motifs that they regard as being worthy of, and suitable for, further development.

Chapter 6 - Are We There Yet?

6.1 – Introduction

This chapter discusses four soloist's improvisations as part of the new composition *Are We There Yet?* (2012). This piece features the band's first tenor saxophone player; a role that is traditionally one of the main soloists in a conventional big band. The piece is also in line with conventional big band practice because the soloist is drawn from within the ranks of the group rather than being an external, guest performer.

The saxophone soloist is given a five-note pitch set and is asked to freely choose motifs from earlier in the piece as the starting point for improvisation. This situation contrasts with *All Around the Wrekin*, where the soloist was not a member of the band and had motifs imposed by the composer. The soloist is again not given any harmonic information throughout the entire piece. This chapter comprises an introduction to the composition, the guidance given to the soloist, and an outline of the recording process. Then each of the performances is discussed, in turn, using an analytical methodology derived from Jan LaRue (1992).¹⁶

6.2 - The composition

A lengthy motorway journey was part of the inspiration for the piece, and the unwavering 4/4 funk groove used reflects the relentlessness of such a trip. The rhythm section establishes this mood in the eight-bar introduction. Other introductory features which recur later in the piece are; the see-sawing, two-note, palm-muted guitar pattern of the opening bars and the 'car-horn' trumpet chord in bars 4 and 8.

¹⁶ The full score and transcriptions of each solo referred to in the analyses appear in the appendices to this thesis. Analysis of the solos in terms of other parameters as included in LaRue's full methodology (1992) are also included in the appendices.

The piece has no 'big tune' as such, instead a group of smaller motifs makes up the melodic content of the piece. These motifs are intentionally written to be easily assimilated aurally and remembered by the soloist. At rehearsal letters 'A' and 'B', various groups from within the band play these phrases in a mosaic of interlocking ideas. These four groups consist of the combined alto and tenor saxophones, the four trumpets, the three tenor trombones, and the baritone saxophone and bass trombone working together to reinforce portions of the written bass guitar line. Apart from the pianist, who creates a keyboard part from the given chord symbols for much of the time, the rest of the rhythm section play entirely notated parts for the majority of this composition. The outline of the overall form of the piece is as follows (see Figure 17):

		'Introduction' 8 bars rhythm section and 'car horn' chord
'A'	20 bars	melodic mosaic of motifs
'B'	20 bars	chord progression as letter 'A' and a similar mosaic texture
		'C' 4 bars interlude – just piano discord & drums
'D'	16 bars	polyphonic texture and a different drum groove
		'E' 8 bars interlude – piano discord, drums & guitar riff
'F'	20 bars	tenor saxophone solo starts, chords as letter 'A'
'G'	20 bars	solo continues, backing figures, chords as letter 'A'
		'H' 8 bars interlude – just piano discord & drums
		'I' 8 bars rhythm section new chords, guitar riff
'J'	8 bars	references to letter 'D' polyphonic motifs over first groove
'K'	20 bars	as letter 'B'
		'L' 4 bars ending: piano discord & broken drums
		Tutti final chord

Figure 17: A chart of the form of *Are We There Yet?* referring to rehearsal letters.

6.3 - Guidance for the improvising saxophone soloist

This piece was planned to mimic a conventional big band jazz performance, where the improviser is, at first, part of the ensemble and then emerges as a soloist later in the piece, only to rejoin the ensemble after the improvised section. No particular melodic motifs were suggested to the soloist to provide a basis for their solo. This lack of guidance reflects the lack of melodic information given to a soloist in most big band playing situations.

They were also provided with the group of notes A, C, D, F, and G (in concert pitch) to use for as much of their solo as they felt appropriate. This group of notes could have been introduced as F, G, A, C, and D (or F major pentatonic scale) or D, F, G, A, and C (or D minor pentatonic scale) but the decision was made to avoid these easily recognisable forms. This form of presentation was intentionally chosen in an attempt to prevent the pre-rehearsed playing of public domain¹⁷ pentatonic melodic patterns. These appear in many of the widely-used books on jazz improvisation and the 'language of jazz' whenever major or minor pentatonic scales are discussed.

This group of notes – A, C, D, F, and G – fits against all the chords used in the solo section – Dm7, Dm11, D7#9, Bm7b5, Gm11, Am7(sus4) and Bbmaj7. However, any one of these notes has a different relationship to each of the chords mentioned. The relationship to the background chord significantly changes the 'flavour' of a note if the soloist sustains it across a shift in the underlying harmony. (See Figure 18 for details)

¹⁷ This term is used by David Baker (1987) to refer to phrases that are in common usage by many players, regardless of their instrument. These may be pentatonic, whole tone or diminished patterns.

	Dm7	Dm11	D7#9	Bm7b5	Gm11	Am7sus4	Bbmaj7
A	5th	5th	5th	7th	9th	root	maj7th
C	7th	7th	7th	b9th	11th	3rd	9th
D	root	root	root	3rd	5th	sus4th	3rd
F	3rd	3rd	#9th	b5th	7th	b6th	5th
G	11th	11th	11th	b6th	root	7th	6th

Figure 18: The relationship between the given pitches and the harmony in *Are We There Yet?*

At the end of the solo, the player¹⁸ is asked to run up to a sustained high note, but no pitch is specified.

6.4 - The recording process

Simon Marsh recorded complete performances of *Are We There Yet?* and *Bemba Variations*. A week later, in a shared recording session, one full version of *Are We There Yet?* featuring Mike Mower as the soloist, and two partial versions, (from letter 'C' to letter 'J') with Aimee Sheppard and Jon Herbert as soloists, were recorded.

All the saxophone soloists were in the room at all times, so although they had not played the entire piece, they had heard it several times by the time they came to record it. They also heard each other's versions of the solo section, but as they are such radically different improvisers (and also taking my previous knowledge of their playing styles into account), this seems to have had little (if any) effect on their performances. In fact, in my opinion, the players have produced even more personal versions, as a result of hearing each other play.

¹⁸ The four saxophone soloists – Jon Herbert, Simon Marsh, Mike Mower and Aimee Sheppard - who took part in this research are introduced in the appendix.

All the soloists were gathered together before the first recording of the piece and the objectives of limiting the solo to the given pitch set and using melodic motifs from earlier in the piece as a starting point for development explained.

Overall, this was not an ideal recording situation but was the best that could be achieved in the circumstances.

6.5 - Analysis of Simon Marsh's solo

6.5.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

The soloist borrows the melodic motifs 1P and 2P from the band parts heard earlier in the piece. Marsh then develops each of these in a logical way that holds the listener's interest until he becomes fascinated by playing around with a limited pitch set in the phrases labelled 1S and 2S.

From bar 32 onwards, the motivic development of given material becomes less crucial than the build-up of tension and energy moving towards the final high note. Although there is little motivic connection between the phrases here, many of them contain the internal repetition and development of ideas at the micro level. This feature is particularly audible in the cases of 3S and 7S.

Towards the end of the solo, the pitch content becomes much less important than the build-up of speed. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the so-called 'energy' phrases, where the notes are played so rapidly that exact transcription becomes impossible. The melody line is perceived as 'waves of sound' rather than individual notes, in a way that is reminiscent of Coltrane's 'sheets of sound' playing.

6.5.2 - Summary

This improvisation starts with material heard by the soloist earlier in the composition and Marsh develops it using the suggested pentatonic scale. This material is later abandoned in a conscious effort to increase the intensity of the solo as it builds up to the concluding sustained high note. The level of control (both in terms of instrumental sound and control of the content of the solo) over

the course of the improvisation is impressive, and the soloist did everything that was asked of him.

6.6 - Analysis of Mike Mower's solo

6.6.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

Very few of the melodic motifs developed in this improvisation seems to derive from the previously heard written material. Exceptions to this are phrases using the opening scotch-snap rhythm (labelled 1P) and the cadential phrase (marked 2P).

Melodic ideas that recur in the solo include embellished single pitches (bars 13 -14) or pairs of notes (bars 18-19 and bar 36). These pairs of pitches could also be interpreted as the chromatic decoration or colouration of a single note (A flat colouring the more consonant A natural, and E embellishing the note F). The use of a 'fall' to blur the end of pitches within a phrase is something that happens throughout a short section of the improvisation (bars 15 to 20) and also in the overtly 'bluesy' phrase leading into letter 'G'.

In the second half of the solo, these ideas are dropped to be replaced by many phrases that rise and fall in waves of sound. These melodic motifs often outline broken chords or scales but tend to stay in the closely related harmonic areas of D minor and Bb major, with some chromatic decoration. This settled harmonic centre is firmly contradicted by the deliberately 'outside' phrase (in bars 32-33) mentioned above.

In bars 41-42, a kind of 'dominant pedal' occurs as the music settles onto the note A. This acts as a point of rest, before the final build-up of energy and momentum. Eventually, this leads to the altissimo high C at letter 'H'. The tension is then dissipated by the repetition of this pitch in four octaves as the melody line falls to the bottom register of the instrument.

6.6.2 - Summary

This solo is a catalogue of improvisational devices traditionally used in a modal jazz context. It develops short-term ideas created within the improvisation, but,

as these ideas are self-referential, it fails to connect with the preceding written material after the first eight bars.

6.7 - Analysis of Aimee Sheppard's solo

6.7.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

The opening uses the Scotch-snap rhythm (1P) that derives from the earlier melodic material of the piece. From this point onwards, most of the solo consists of Dm pentatonic and D Dorian patterns. Sheppard repeats certain note groups throughout the improvisation in different rhythmic guises (1S and 2S). This repetition may be intentional, or it may, more likely, consist pre-rehearsed micro-patterns that happen to fall comfortably under the fingers and are the result of muscle memory rather than conscious motivic development.

However, she consciously constructs the rising line leading to the final high D by several repetitions of the same rhythmic cell (3S).

6.7.2 – Summary

This transcription reflects Sheppard's experience as an improviser working with DJ's in a context of spontaneous improvisation. In this situation, she tends to fall back on pre-rehearsed pentatonic patterns while maintaining the groove of the backing dance tracks and adding an extra layer of instrumental colour to the music. This solo is very successful in these terms.

Apart from the opening, this improvisation makes little reference to the previous melodic material of the composition.

6.8 - Analysis of Jon Herbert's solo

6.8.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

The opening of this solo borrows the repeated crotchets from the piano part heard just before the start of the improvisation. This single note C expands to become the CGA pitch set, and this limited group of notes is coloured by 'lipping' the C's down towards the lower notes.

Herbert often plays phrases made up of limited groups of notes that grow and unfold in unpredictable ways. The full Dm pentatonic scale first appears in bar 16. From then onwards it tends to occur as a rising figure throughout the solo. This scalic figure may be a development of the ascending semiquaver line in the phrase marked 1S.

6.8.2 - Summary

This solo is very inventive given a very limited initial melodic palette. It is almost minimalist in the refusal to add in extra pitches outside the suggested pentatonic scale. The improvisation is unpredictable but has an internal logic that is very controlled and intentional. All of the melodic ideas come from within the solo itself. The only reference to the initial, written portion of the composition comes in the form of a repeated crotchet at the start of the solo.

6.9 – Conclusion

This chapter has considered four solos as part of performances of the new work *Are We There Yet?* This composition was written specifically to permit the exploration of the questions posed by this research. It repeats the device of the ‘pentatonic scale against various chords’ explored in the previous piece, but here the soloist is permitted to choose their own motivic starting points for the solo from the given part. This tactic was adopted to allow each soloist to choose material which they considered to be suitable, rather than having motivic material forced upon them by the composer. Another difference is that the soloist is here a member of the ensemble rather than a ‘guest’ player. Both these points are intended to more closely reflect common practice in the big band world.

The lack of chord symbols given to the soloists forced them to work in an unusual way – either following the given pentatonic scale, or in the case of Marsh (who has perfect pitch) having the option of playing the backing chords exactly. He chose not to adopt this strategy and stayed, for most of the solo, within the constraints of the given scale.

The decision to provide the soloist with just a pentatonic scale rather than chord symbols had a profound effect on the harmonic language of this piece, as every chord used had to have a relationship to the given scale. The closeness of this relationship and the resulting level of dissonance was a determining factor in the harmonic sequences employed in this composition.

Only one of the four improvisations analysed, Marsh's solo, develops the motivic material taken from earlier in the piece with any consistency. Even here the second half of the solo veers away from this material as it builds up momentum.

This failure to develop material from earlier in the piece may be the case for a variety of reasons:

- Motivic development is not a skill that is commonly worked on by jazz improvisers. Far more energy is put into playing over particular chord symbols or groups of chords, such as ii – V – I progressions.
- The building of momentum over the course of a solo to create a satisfying solo arc, or the maintaining of the funk groove, is a higher priority, than motivic development.
- If the soloist approaches the solo with a repertoire of technical devices that they wish to demonstrate, this agenda prevents the solo connecting with the specific material of the piece.
- The solos often have a stream of consciousness internal logic that is self-referential, rather than utilising material from the previous, written sections of the piece.
- The music may simply not be memorable enough to generate motifs to be used by the soloists.
- Possibly the soloists had failed to understand my explanation of the task, despite my checking that everyone was clear about what I was asking them to do, and asking if there were any questions.

In the next chapter, which deals with the new composition *Bemba Variations*, the soloist will be placed in the situation of improvising 'answers' to musical

'questions' posed by the band. This piece will investigate whether this call-and-response framework, with its much more frequent interventions from the composer, will encourage the soloist to stay within the motivic universe of the particular piece without introducing new material. The piece will also include an unaccompanied cadenza to reopen the question of whether improvisation without distraction is easier to maintain on a course of motivic development.

Chapter 7 – Bemba Variations

7.1 – Introduction

This chapter considers four recorded improvisations played as part of performances of the new work, *Bemba Variations* (2012). In this piece, the soloist is asked to improvise ‘answers’ to musical ‘questions’ posed by the band in a call-and-response setting. This musical device (which goes right back to the roots of jazz, and far beyond) was chosen to investigate whether this setting will encourage the soloist to react to the given material, and therefore develop the motivic content of the piece, rather than introducing new unconnected melodic ideas.

Later in the composition, the saxophone player continues the improvisation in the form of an unaccompanied cadenza, before being rejoined by the band and eventually fading out and merging into the overall sound of the ensemble. This section again explores improvisation without the distraction of other players, and the effect of this on the motivic development of solos.

This chapter starts with an introduction to the new composition and the instructions given to the soloists; each of the performances¹⁹ is then discussed in turn using an analytical methodology derived from Jan LaRue (1992).

7.2 – The composition

Apart from the final cadence, the composition of this piece avoids using the pitches A, C, Eb or F#, and this helps to create the unusual harmonies that appear in the piece. The reasons for this choice of pitch material will be explained later in the chapter under the heading of guidance for the saxophone soloists.

¹⁹ The full score and transcriptions of each solo referred to in the analyses appear in the appendices to this thesis. Analysis of the solos in terms of other parameters as included in LaRue’s full methodology are also included in the appendices.

The other starting point for the piece was the discovery of a 12-beat West African bell pattern in the book *Pure Rhythm* (2005) by Adam Rudolph (p. 43-45). The basic Ewe bell pattern, which Rudolph notated as follows:

X	O	X	O	X	X	O	X	O	X	O	X
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Figure 19: Basic Ewe bell pattern used in *Bemba Variations*
(X = a note, O = a rest)

This rhythm pattern is ambiguous and can be played as either a 12/8 or a 3/2 rhythm, depending on the underlying accents. It can also be displaced to start elsewhere in the 12-beat bar, creating a myriad of other, related patterns, that many musicians (particularly from the Aka and Yoruba tribes) play in Central and West Africa. These various 'shifted' patterns included one named 'Bemba,' also from Central Africa (Rudolph, 2005, pp. 43) that provided the title of the composition. The resulting grid of related 12-beat rhythms, with their ambiguous triple or quadruple meter pulse, generated much of the rhythmic material that appears in this composition.

The piece opens with a slow 4/2 chorale-like passage that unfolds slowly until reaching the extended high E in bar 8. The chorale then progresses in a loosely retrograde version of the opening, resolving onto a low E at letter 'A'. This also marks a metric modulation to a faster 3/2 groove. The bassline states a pitched version of the 12-beat pattern mentioned above.

The other thematic melody lines introduced above the strong bassline throughout sections 'B' and 'C' create a polyrhythmic, hocket-based texture. A 12-quaver melodic pattern makes its first appearance, acting as a kind of pitched 'pseudo-drum fill' marking significant points in the music. These lead the listener into letters 'C' and 'D'. The pulse briefly modulates from 3/2 to 12/8 for four bars, only to return to 3/2, and the original bassline at letter 'E'. The 12-

quaver melody again acts as a rhythmic fill into letter 'F' and signals a return to the opening slow chorale-like texture.

This change in momentum also marks the start of the tenor saxophone solo. Rather than being an extended improvisation, this takes the form of a 'call and response' passage, with written calls played by the band (based on earlier thematic material) answered by improvised saxophone responses. Throughout this section, the momentum builds as the soloist is gradually overwhelmed by the band, getting less and less time and space to respond. The culmination of this solo section is the fortissimo, very dissonant cluster-chord at letter 'H', and this leads into an unaccompanied open-length, freely improvised cadenza by the soloist.

At letter 'I' the conductor cues the band back in, and the soloist gradually fades into the chorale-like texture of the background. After a slow version of the 12-quaver (now 12-crotchet) melody, the music relaxes slightly into a polytonal ending that resolves the unstable pitch material into four simple triads that die away gradually to finish the piece.

7.3 - Guidance for the improvising saxophone soloist

On the tenor 1 part, the saxophone soloist is asked to "improvise answers to the trumpet phrases – "avoid notes" D, F, G#, B." (In concert pitch, these are the notes C, Eb, F# and A.) There are several reasons for choosing this format for the soloist's instructions: Firstly, the concept of 'avoid notes' is well-known to improvisers from many jazz theory and improvisation instruction books, particularly those by Jamie Aebersold; secondly, this instruction does not present the remaining, 'permitted' notes in an easily recognisable form.

These notes can form the D diminished scale: D, E, F, G, Ab, Bb, B, C#. This scale can also be inverted to form the F, Ab and B diminished scales. Another permutation of the pitch set is the E 8-note dominant scale: E, F, G, Ab, Bb, B, C#, D. This scale can also be inverted to form the G, Bb, and C# 8-note dominant scales.

These scales have many associated melodic patterns that appear in several jazz improvisation tuition books. These are known, and used, by all experienced jazz improvisers. A selection of the most commonly used in a bebop setting are listed by Baker as “26 public domain diminished patterns” (1987, Vol. 1. p. 45-46). Because I disguised the pitch content of the composition by naming the notes to avoid rather than the notes to play, none of the soloists employed any of these pre-rehearsed, commonly-used patterns in their improvisations.

Incidentally, the four 8-note dominant scales generated from the pitch set are conventionally used to improvise over 7(b9) dominant chords. The permitted notes therefore simultaneously imply the chords of E7(b9), G7(b9), Bb7(b9) and Db7(b9). In *Bemba Variations*, these four implied 7(b9) dominant chords are all resolved to their respective tonic chords to provide the final four triads thus creating a logical, but polytonal, resolution to the composition.

7.4 - The recording process

The recording took place in the same sessions and under the same circumstances as the recording of *Are We There Yet?* The details of this process were outlined in the previous chapter, and were identical in this case except that in the shared recording session for this piece; Aimee Sheppard played first, Mike Mower second and Jon Herbert last. Simon Marsh recorded his version at a separate session held in the previous week.

7.5 - Analysis of Simon Marsh's solo

7.5.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

Marsh's perfect pitch and speed of reaction allow him to echo the band's 'calls' precisely, but his answers are rarely direct copies. More often, his responses tend to be developments (in some way) of the melodic motifs played by the

band. For example; they may be rhythmically augmented (bars 83-4) or diminished (bar 86) versions of the original phrase.

The opening three phrases played at letter 'F', which provide much of the raw pitch material for the band's following antecedent phrases in this call-and-response section, also provide much of the inspiration for Marsh's improvised answers. The first long-note motif 1P is echoed twice by Marsh in his syncopated reply. This phrase also includes the motifs 1S - scalic (diminished scale) - and 2S - angular (diminished arpeggio) – which both appear twice. These could be said to be the catalysts for almost all the following scalic and angular melodic material.

As can be seen, by a cursory glance at the transcription, the Gdim7 arpeggio and G 8-note dominant scale provide two consistent melodic pitch sets from which all the material is constructed. Marsh uses other parameters, such as varied phrase lengths, dynamics, tone colours and instrumental registers, to provide a satisfying emotional arc for the solo.

The second half of the cadenza settles on repeated Bb's decorated by the Bb to C# 'smear.' This melodic pedal point dissolves into a gently flowing line based on a diminished arpeggio to end the improvisation.

7.5.2 - Summary

There are subtle cause-and-effect relationships between the phrases played by the band and the saxophone responses throughout this improvisation. It is almost as though Marsh is playing around with the possibilities offered by the written phrases, and bounces them back to the band in a developed form. He achieves this by altering the original rhythm and pitches; stretching, compressing, extending, or warping out of shape, all or part of the motif, to create an unpredictable but logical answering phrase.

Marsh works closely within the melodic and harmonic constraints of this composition. As a result, many of his phrases consist of diminished arpeggios

or the notes of these arpeggios connected by other notes to form the various diminished scales outlined in the introduction. This contrast between angular, arpeggio-derived material and smoother, scalar melodies provides much of the interest in the solo, created in a harmonic situation that is essentially static. The use of repeated elements, such as the 'smear' phrase and the pedal Bb in the cadenza, give the solo a logic and unity that demonstrates Marsh's control of structure and pacing in an improvised solo.

7.6 - Analysis of Aimee Sheppard's solo

7.6.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

Opening phrase (1P.1) mirrors the pacing and contour of 1P, but at a different pitch. Sheppard then repeats and extends this melodic motif (1P.2) to reveal the first appearance of the Ab/A clash, possibly derived from the D blues scale. The second improvised response (starting in bar 13) and labelled as 1S could also be interpreted as a development of the falling phrase at the end of the first answering phrase (bar 8).

Throughout the solo, several of the responses employ the technique of bouncing back the rhythm or contour of the initial phrase, rather than the exact phrase itself. (Sheppard does not possess perfect pitch.) This feature occurs in bars 19, 34, and 38.

The climax of the solo is the build-up into the very distorted long notes, just before letter 'H'. This is literally the high point of the solo as the high E is the top note of the standard range of the instrument, and this note only occurs at this significant position in the improvisation.

The descending G-flat major scale, just after letter 'H', dispels the tension built-up previously and creates a blank harmonic canvas on which to construct the cadenza. The cadenza makes much of the alternation between B-flat and B-natural as a melodic pitch centre, and this passage unfolds naturally and

logically with much repetition and development of earlier material. There is another crescendo and diminuendo as the unaccompanied melodic arc rises to high D and then gradually falls back into the lowest register. The improvisation ends as a single phrase (8S) which matches the pacing of the accompaniment then develops into several variations of itself; finally the band gradually envelops the quiet low notes of the soloist.

7.6.2 – Summary

The consistent use of diminished arpeggios and scales (particularly Ddim7 and D diminished scale) unifies the improvisation, but none of the clichéd ‘public domain’ diminished patterns appear. This situation could be open to two interpretations: either Sheppard is intentionally avoiding these clichés, or she is not familiar with these traditional patterns as they are not often particularly useful when improvising over the harmonic sequences of electronic dance music produced by DJs, and are therefore, not part of her musical language.

Two harmonic devices are apparent at several points within the improvisation; chromatic notes a semitone below the notes of a Ddim7 or Dm arpeggio decorating the basic chord, and the use of two alternating triads (D diminished and E minor) to provide melodic material. The dichotomy between A flat and A natural gives the D bluesy sound that is a feature of parts of the solo.

As has been pointed out, Sheppard makes occasional use of ‘avoid’ notes (particularly A natural), but these seem to be either part of intentionally blues-tinged phrases, chromatic passing notes or simply accidental slips made in the heat of the moment.

As, in all her improvised answers, she employs very similar rhythmic patterns to the band’s questions, and both parties share the same harmonic raw material, the solo sounds very integrated into the piece. This similar material gives the listener the feeling that the solo is a direct response to a specific musical situation, and is a result of concentrated and close listening.

7.7 - Analysis of Mike Mower's solo

7.7.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

It is particularly telling that the analysis of this solo does not contain a single phrase labelled 'P'. In other words, none of the improvisation seems to develop material from the given (or 'primary') ensemble phrases. The questions and answers do not have a logical relationship in terms of the development of motivic material. The improvisation may have a kind of 'emotional logic' that can be felt by some listeners, but this effect is outside the scope of this analytical methodology.

The improvisation is more of a stream of consciousness. There is, however, an internal logic and structure within this instinctive flow of music; many of the earlier improvised responses demonstrate internal repetition and the development of ideas. For example, in the answering phrases labelled 2S, 3S and 4S, inversions or extensions follow the first motif (labelled 2S1, 2S1.1, 3S1, 3S1.1, 4S1 and 4S2). Also, the rising motif of a tone followed by a semitone links all three of these phrases (2S, 3S and 4S). This pattern of intervals is absent from any of the band's melodic material (the various forms of 1P and 2P) that was intended to act as a catalyst for the soloist's responses.

The idea of repeated staccato notes recurs throughout the improvisation and overflows from the call-and-response section into the unaccompanied cadenza. This cadenza feels quite perfunctory and short; I was not ready to bring the band back in at letter 'I', as I was expecting Mower to play a longer cadenza. The solo then finishes with a long quiet run fading into the background, again unconnected to anything played by either the band or earlier material from within the solo.

7.7.2 – Summary

In an email questionnaire about his responses to, and feelings about, the recording experience, he stated that: "[a] more detailed chord chart could be advantageous...", and also described his improvisation as "...a spontaneous

solo using ears only”. Interestingly, he also revealed his dislike of spontaneous, unprepared improvisation in the statement: “Generally playing with big bands, though, it's always advantageous to have a few rehearsals or gigs before recording it blind, so it felt like a bit of a test...”

7.8 - Analysis of Jon Herbert's solo

7.8.1 - Analysis of the motivic development within the solo

Apart from the opening, little of Herbert's improvisation develops material first stated by the band. Most of his responses are moving in note lengths that are quicker than those in the calls, often twice as fast, and, as a result the improvisation appears to take on a life of its own dictated by the need to maintain this speed and momentum.

Within the improvised lines, there are short sections where Herbert repeats and develops a melodic figure, such as bars 96-97, the phrases labelled 2S to 2S7 in the cadenza, and the concluding motifs 3S and 3S1. This process of building longer lines from the development of smaller fragments is a common device in most jazz improvisation and does little to integrate the solo with the written material.

7.8.2 – Summary

As stated above, the solo employs many bebop-derived phrases, or fragments of phrases, such as those marked in bars 80 and 84. The use of the diminished scale and its near relative, the 8-note dominant scale, is also characteristic of bebop stylists, as is the chromatic embellishment of static harmony (CESH) implied in the final section of the cadenza. The use of fast flurries of notes and double-timing is yet another bebop mannerism.

However, this archaic style is counteracted by the use of pitch sets which defy definition in terms of conventional chord symbols. The phrases in bars 65-68

and 71-72 would be very stylistically out-of-place in a bebop context. The next phrase (bars 75-76) also appears to be in a very contemporary style, but even here the ghost of some type of C chord moving to a G-flat major7 chord remains. (This tritone relationship between chords is at the heart of much bebop harmony). Later in the solo, the use of alternating pairs of triads (in bars 96-97) and alternating pairs of sus chords (in the cadenza) draws on the musical language of contemporary saxophonists such as (the late) Mike Brecker and Bob Mintzer. This poly-chordal technique clearly counteracts any earlier references to harmonic and melodic devices from the mid-1940s.

Herbert is an unpredictable and quirky soloist who plays with great fluency and passion. However, as an attempt to integrate the improvisation into the pre-composed material, this performance is not a success.

7.9 - Conclusion

This chapter examined four improvisations that formed part of recorded performances of *Bemba Variations*. The piece set up two improvisatory situations: a call-and-response passage and an unaccompanied cadenza, and is based throughout on a group of 8 notes which may be interpreted in a variety of ways. The soloists are not given any chord symbols on which to base their improvisations, and the scale is presented in a purposely confusing manner. They are instructed to avoid a group of four notes, but are not told directly what notes they are allowed to play. This strategy is adopted to prevent the soloist immediately falling back on pre-rehearsed diminished scale or 8-note dominant scale patterns as soon as they interpreted the scale in its written form.

The piece also differs from previous attempts to explore the research questions posed by this research by not giving the improvisers motivic material in written form. Instead, they are asked to take part in a call-and-response passage where they only hear the 'question' that they are 'answering', rather than having it in notated form.

In this unusual situation, apart from Marsh, the soloists struggled to make their improvised 'answers' relate consistently to the 'questions' posed by the band. In hindsight, this process may have been hindered by the unusual tonality of the piece. This process, or a variation on it – swapping fours – is common in small band performances of jazz standards. However, in that case, the harmonic background is both tonal and known to the soloists. As a result, the speed of recognition of phrases that form the basis for repetition and development, in a kind of spontaneous one-upmanship, is much more straightforward, instantaneous and instinctive.

One of the players did not seem to be attempting to play any direct responses at all, being more involved in creating a solo which the soloist later described in a post-recording interview as “dangerous and edgy”. A possible explanation is that this may have been a result of my unclear explanation of the task at hand.

The cadenzas were more successful in developing motivic material, but by this point in the piece, all the development was of ideas created by the players earlier in their solos rather than of the given material. Also, two of the cadenzas were quite perfunctory, and gave the impression of the soloists giving up early rather than embracing the improvisatory opportunity.

The driving force behind the composition of this work was the need to find a body of harmonic material that the soloist would be able to improvise over whilst just employing one group of notes. The resulting exploration of the eight pitches produced music unlike anything that I have written before. The use of the African-derived rhythmic ideas, however, is something that I have explored in earlier compositions, and it provided a useful way to unify the unusual harmony.

As this was the final study of new work written for this research, the next chapter will provide an overall conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

8.1 – Introduction

This thesis set out to answer the following Research Questions:

- a) Within the context of a jazz big band, how can a jazz improviser be guided to create music based on the thematic material of a composition, rather than purely on chord symbols?
- b) What new guidance methods can be developed to attempt this?
- c) What impact do these methods have on improvising soloists and the way that composers conceive their work?

8.2 – Guidance methods

8.2.1 – Melodic motifs and pitch sets

Melodic motifs have been used as a guidance method by other jazz composers, but in contexts that were very different from those where I attempted to use them.

Graham Collier employed them in a static harmonic context in Part Three of *One by One the Cow Goes By* (Collier, 1995, p. 93). Here, two saxophones (or all five saxophones on the repeat of this section) play the given motifs freely, but against the static background of a Cm11 chord lasting for the whole movement. The improvisations are also a series of out-of-time pauses against the sustained brass texture. Angela Morris also uses melodic motifs (see fig. 1 in section 3.2.6) but these are unpitched note stems occurring in a very dissonant and atonal context.

I used melodic motifs in a tonal context and in music with a strong sense of pulse. To prevent the use of pre-rehearsed patterns, I withheld the harmonic information from the soloist. Instead they were either given a scale, a pitch set

or a collection of notes to avoid, as well as motivic material, as the starting point for their improvisation.

In *All Around the Wrekin* the soloist was also given four melodic motifs. In *Are We There Yet?* the soloist chose their own motivic material from the earlier sections of the composition. In *Bemba Variations*, the soloist engaged in call and response passages with the ensemble, and was therefore given motivic material by ear.

This use of motifs and pitch sets of various types as starting points for improvisation in the context of a tonal harmonic background (that was not revealed to the player) presented a problem to the improviser. At least some of their efforts were directed towards trying to determine the chords over which they were working, and this proved a distraction from the task of developing the melodic ideas present in the composition. (The only exception to this was the case of the soloist with perfect pitch.) This situation is not such a problem in the atonal or very loosely tonal environments found in the works of some other contemporary big band composers.

8.3 - Hindrances to the soloists' development of melodic material

The relatively small number of improvisations recorded and transcribed (ten solos by six performers) in this research does not provide a large enough sample to make it possible to draw completely definitive conclusions. However, based on the available findings, I conclude that it is theoretically possible to guide jazz improvisers to create music based on the thematic material of a composition. However, this success may be limited by several factors:

8.3.1 – Improvised Accompaniment

In the given big band situation (apart from during any cadenzas), the improviser is not playing in an unaccompanied vacuum and is prone to being distracted by the playing of the rest of the band (particularly the rhythm section). This written

or improvised 'comping' may lead the soloist to stray from his or her intended course of developing the given motivic material. As jazz is a collaborative performance, in hindsight, only giving the soloist the melodic motifs may have been a mistake; perhaps if the rhythm section also had this information they could have assisted the soloist to stay on course.

In the various cadenzas studied, the soloists did demonstrate considerable powers of focussed development of melodic material; often more than in the accompanied sections of the pieces. These cadenzas appeared towards the end of the improvisations and the original motivic material had usually been replaced by new material by this point in the stream-of-consciousness unfolding of the solos.

8.3.2 – The pressure of the recording situation

The experimental situation employed by this research – players improvising in an unusual way, without chord symbols, in a semi-public situation, while being filmed and recorded, and knowing that the resulting performance would later be transcribed, analysed and studied – may just have placed the soloists under too much pressure to succeed. As a result, in some cases, they may have fallen back onto tried-and-tested techniques to create a conventionally successful improvisation rather than concentrating on the goals of the research.

8.3.3 – Lack of training in long-term development of given motifs

The practice routines of jazz musicians and jazz training courses, in general, tend to stress the importance of the ability to invent musical ideas based on the chord tones or the various scales or modes associated with a chord symbol (given its specific harmonic context) rather than melodic development. As a result, the long-term development of thematic ideas is not a skill honed by most jazz improvisers. Most of the solos analysed in this study did demonstrate the short-term concentration on a melodic idea. Often this motif would then evolve into a new idea, which the improviser explored for a while until the next melodic

'object of interest' appeared, and so on. Therefore most of the solos had an ongoing, unfolding structure that demonstrated an internal (and self-referential) logic. However, because of the use of this approach, the initial thematic material tended to drift 'out of view' quite early on in most of the improvisations.

The two most successful soloists in adapting to the unusual way of working required by this research happened to be the two musicians most well-versed and educated in contemporary jazz practice and improvisation techniques.

8.3.4 – The conventional rhythmic level of jazz improvisation

Also, as a broad generalisation, most jazz soloing takes place in quavers (given a crotchet pulse). This difference in fundamental rhythmic level differentiates the heads of most jazz standards from the improvisations upon them. In the *Real Book*, most standards are notated (but never played) in crotchets and minims, but most solos tend to involve note values twice that tempo. Soloists tend to think and play in these faster note values. This stylistic habit seems to make many improvisers uncomfortable playing long notes as part of their improvisations. If the core motifs upon which they were basing their improvisations involved many longer notes, this could explain why they were soon abandoned in favour of shorter note values.

8.3.5 – Sympathetic attitude and lack of agenda

The improviser needs to be sympathetic to the concept of exploring these radical approaches, and be willing to suppress their ego and normal working methods (and to risk their reputation) as a jazz soloist to attempt to achieve the goals of this research. They also need to approach the solo without a preconceived agenda. This openness to alternative ideas was only apparent in some of the soloists taking part in this research.

8.3.6 – The wrong soloist for a specific solo

Improvisation is, by its very nature, an unpredictable activity. It could be the case that another performance of the piece by the same soloist would have given a different result. However, having heard two or three improvisations by each of the trumpet soloists on *All Around the Wrekin*, each soloist had a personal approach to the piece that did not change fundamentally between takes.

In fact, based on my previous knowledge of their playing, all the soloists improvised in a way that was entirely in character with their usual style of playing in other situations. This observation reinforces the point made by many of the jazz composers interviewed; that each improviser has a ‘trademark’ style, sound and approach. Given this situation, the analogy used to describe the act of choosing the ‘right’ soloist, that of casting a particular actor in a role to achieve a predicted outcome, is very accurate.

Also, the act of choosing the soloist is clearly part of the jazz composition process, as (within certain broad parameters) the composer can predict what is likely to happen in the improvised sections of a composition. Several of the combinations of soloist and composition in these recordings are not pairings that I would have chosen outside of this research situation.

8.4 – The impact of these methods on the composition of new works

As a composer, the need to construct the entire work around the unusual requirements of the soloists in this research proved to be quite limiting. On the other hand, these limitations proved to be stimulating and forced me to write music that I would not have written otherwise. The challenge of constructing a work around a single pentatonic or diminished/8-note dominant scale was an interesting problem, particularly when the piece needed variety and a strong structure to be successful.

Also, the practical application of Collier's ideas proved very enlightening, and provided many new techniques for my compositional armoury. The use of all the technical skills and methods that I have learned during this research will probably find a place in my future works, as appropriate, but probably on a smaller scale, for sections of a work, rather than for the entire composition.

8.5 – Final thoughts

This research set out to answer a specific problem that came out of a frustration with the conventional methods of guiding jazz soloists. The techniques I used were partially successful and improved the integration of the soloist in some instances in the new compositions. Although I have not created a completely successful solution to this problem, the failures and the reasons behind them provide many ideas for future research. The survey of jazz composers has also brought to light many interesting compositional techniques and ideas that I intend to explore in future compositions. It demonstrates the need for more work to be done on developing ways to integrate the soloist into big band compositions as this seems to be a concern for a number of other composers.

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