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Composing A Creative Practice: Collaborative Methodologies and Sonic Self-Inquiry In The Expansion Of Form Through Song

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Composing A Creative Practice: Collaborative Methodologies and Sonic Self-  
Inquiry In The Expansion Of Form Through Song

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts

in

Music

by

Jordan Mae Morton

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Dresser, Chair  
Professor Sarah Hankins  
Professor Steven Schick

2018



The Thesis of Jordan Mae Morton as it is listed on UC San Diego Academic Records is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2018

I sit without thoughts by the log-road  
Hatching a new myth.

Gary Snyder

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## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Composing A Creative Practice: Collaborative Methodologies and Sonic Self-Inquiry  
In The Expansion Of Form Through Song

by

Jordan Mae Morton

Master of Arts in Music

University of California San Diego, 2018

Professor Mark Dresser, Chair

This thesis presents collaborative methodologies employed toward the expansion of my personal compositional forms. The work is organized in three parts: one creative project in dialogue with cross-adaptive processing techniques, one research and analysis paper exploring contemporary Norwegian music, and a culminating creative project exemplifying new long-form composition.

## Introduction

Developing a creative practice is a life-long process. The present volume illustrates a distinct, intensive phase of that process between 2016 and 2018 and its impact upon my artistic trajectory.

I came to UC San Diego as a performer-composer writing short song pieces for bass and voice. In discovering their expressive limitations, my new target became long-form composition. Rather than abandon my individualized sound world or the song paradigms through which it siphoned, I sought to expand, explode, decay, rearrange, and grow anew the forms it inhabited – in effect, redesign my own compositional architecture.

To this end, collaboration proved to be my most productive tactic. UC San Diego's localized community of composers, performers, scholars, and inventors afforded me the rare opportunity to examine, challenge, re-envision, test, and evaluate my work. Mindful collaboration became an invaluable research methodology. By actively reconfiguring my practice to interface with the complementary practices of kindred artists, my music grew exponentially in both form and content.

The results of these collaborative processes are presented here in three sections, organized according to their chronological realization. The first presents a sustained collaboration with Øyvind Brandtsegg, visiting professor from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, whose cross-adaptive processing software and research methodologies were uncommonly well suited to illuminate and challenge the unique polyphony of my practice. The second section presents an inquiry of current art music trends in Norway where experimental approaches to song beget new forms, and an analysis of the sonic and formal architecture of saxophonist Espen Reinertsen's 2015 release, *Forgafllingspop*.



The final section presents the musical and conceptual mechanisms of *Suite Myth*, an original long-form piece for improvising chamber ensemble, which encompasses much of my work from the past two years. I have been deeply changed by the process of realizing this piece. Developed in collaboration with percussionist Ben Rempel and violinist Nelson Moneo, and premiered during my master's recital on April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018, this piece marked a deep shift in my compositional goals and collaborative strategies. Although it represents the culmination of my graduate studies, I have since recognized the premiere as a first draft, and begun to envision future adaptations of the *Suite Myth* project.

With much gratitude for the contributions of my project collaborators, I also owe this expanded horizon to UCSD's collaborative learning environment. Many generous faculty members and fellow students fanned the flames of these projects with technical, theoretical, and creative exchange inherent to mentorships and seminar-style learning.

So much of the collaborative discourse at UC San Diego served to develop new and empowering language. Phillip Larson helped me to acquire impactful verbal imagery with which to direct the development of my voice. Tom Erbe initiated a functional vocabulary of studio recording techniques and amplified sound, indispensable in the pursuit of a more practical and thorough knowledge of their application. Through analyses of jazz compositional techniques, Anthony Davis gave me the words to describe what I've been chasing for two years – long-form composition through song.

Finally, with Jann Pasler's timely guidance, I was able to synthesize a personal language around my work. The requisite process of self-inquiry proved arduous. As my intuitive interior processes rose from the gut to the intellect, they demanded patient, compassionate detangling. It paid off. I move forward with a newfound sense of creative purpose, and an ability to communicate to others – and to myself – what it is that I'm passionate about.

My committee members, Sarah Hankins and Steven Schick, deliberately took time to understand and support my interests, and created spaces in the UCSD community for the presentation of my work. Whether in seminars or in personal conversation, they each contributed crucial insights to my practice by first, simply listening. Listening itself is a generative language, and its educational power cannot be underestimated. The contributions of my committee members give me a new sense of how language and scholarship can incite and intensify creativity, and vice versa.

In our work together over two years, Mark Dresser, my committee chair and teacher, has provided a compelling model for the lifelong development of my practice. His rigorous excavation of the instrument's intrinsic capabilities elevates the voice of double bass in new music, and enriches an international community of performers and composers alike – a path I hope to take in my own way. Mark has also given me powerful vocabulary with which to orient my work, hinging on the very concept of language itself. In thinking of the array of sounds I can produce as “vocabulary”, and of their collective existence as my personal “lexicon,” I am handed the conceptual tools to generate, understand, and communicate a complex, individualized sound world.

On a practical level, our work together sidestepped rigid technical archetypes to reveal vital fluidities. I now perceive the bass as a complex field of interchangeable processes. Rather than limiting the right hand to sound activation and the left hand to sound organization, a more dynamic relationship emerges between them. For example, the bow may locate, create and adjust pitch, the left hand may activate sound, and their spatial relationship may inverse. Both hands may release the spectral potential of the double bass through an intricate and portable latticework of harmonics. Indeed, the entire body is given responsibility and agency in all functions of sound production and organization. This break down of technical roles and barriers yields sonic outcomes

unique to each bass player, and serves as a direct and exciting prompt to populate my personal lexicon with richer sonic vocabulary.

Developing a personal language – whether linguistic or musical – and fostering dynamic, creative collaborations – whether in practice or discourse – constituted my work at UC San Diego, and equipped me to undertake a large-scale project of expanding musical form. Although it took until my graduate studies to realize it, I've actually been chasing this since a memorable day in Paris six years ago. With my bass, I had clambered up the steep, crooked streets of Montmartre to have tea with bassist and improviser Joëlle Léandre in her tiny apartment.

After hearing a few of my earliest solo pieces, she rose from her seat at the dining room table and told me I must now certainly “stop to play Beethoven,” meaning that I should fully commit to my music. This was followed by a metaphorical reproach – that I must also begin to “build my own house,” not simply fill someone else’s house with my furniture. She then asked me what kind of tea I would like, and turned on her heel into the kitchen to make it, out of sight.

I put my instrument down and took a seat at the table to think. Suddenly Joëlle burst back into the doorway of the kitchen, locked eyes with mine, and roared “FREEDOM.” Her face held the intensity and anguish of the word for another few seconds before disappearing again to the preparation of tea.

To hear that from a fellow female artist left no small impression. I roar it to myself in the night.

I have taken a broad step in that direction here at UCSD, and go forward with a life-long personal process for artistic growth.

## Chapter 1 – Reconfiguring an Instrument System: Cross Adaptive Collaborations

### Introduction

In the spring of 2017, my practice was radically expanded through a series of collaborative performances and research sessions with visiting professor Øyvind Brandtsegg, the project leader of “Cross adaptive processing as musical intervention.” Run by the Music Technology department of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, this project “explores cross adaptive processing as a drastic intervention in the modes of communication between performing musicians.”<sup>1</sup>

As a solo performer, I activate two sound sources simultaneously: bass and voice. Designing their dynamic relationship forms the essence of my creative practice. Cross-adaptive processing drastically intervenes in that relationship. Working with these complex instruments systems challenged and rewired ingrained communicative circuits between my vocalizing and bass playing.

Øyvind’s research methodology usually relies on practical experimentation with two participants. Because of the polyphonic nature of my practice, we were able to test these processes between two sound sources controlled by a single participant, and our work together proved mutually illuminative. Øyvind’s research blog “Cross adaptive processing as musical intervention – Exploring radically new modes of musical interaction in live performance,” documents the depth and variety of our research sessions, describing and evaluating our processes, chosen technological parameters, and their musical implications. As a newcomer to music technology, the written and recorded documentation of our sessions helped me comprehend the collaboration’s

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<sup>1</sup> (Brandtsegg – <http://crossadaptive.hf.ntnu.no/>)

<sup>2</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Playing or being played – the devil is in the delays”)

<sup>3</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Convolution experiments with Jordan Morton”)

<sup>4</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Session in UCSD Studio A”)

<sup>5</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Session with Jordan Morton and Miller Puckette, April 2017”)

inner mechanisms. It also proved crucial in review, an indispensable reference as I assess our work together and envision future adaptations.

I would now like to offer a written counterpart from the performer's perspective, detailing how cross-adaptive processes permanently reconfigured my practice. I have great ambition to work with live processing and electro-acoustic techniques in future projects. This first fruitful collaboration opened the door to the performative implications of music technology while uncovering alternative modes of perceiving and sculpting my raw acoustic sound world. The recorded results are presented and discussed as snapshots of collaboration in progress. I hope that our sessions between February and May of 2017 represent the first of many collaborative research processes. Øyvind approached each session with the patience, open-mindedness, and scientific ingenuity of an artist at the cutting edge of his field.

### **The Idea of Instrument Systems**

From my first introduction to cross-adaptive processing, I was struck by its malleable, intuitive, and humanoid capabilities. This is a technology that can breathe. Rather than static settings, digital audio analysis and live processing techniques are used to develop fluid, interdependent, and interchangeable processing parameters between two sound sources – much like the parameters I've worked to develop between voice and bass.

Øyvind speaks of cross-adaptive parameters as "instrument systems" and reflects that "since the cross adaptive project involves designing relationships between performative actions and sonic responses, it is also about instrument design in a wide definition of the term."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> (Brandtsegg, "Playing or being played – the devil is in the delays")

Although I am using acoustic sound sources, my work is also, essentially, the design of relationships – between voice and bass, and various resonant and spectral layers within each. This collaboration helped me to perceive the complex “instrument system” that I design with my own practice. As a result, I was better able to perceive and connect with the “super-instrument” formed by the intersection of our two instrument systems. Although an individual player controlled each system, we were constantly adjusting and adapting to function together toward a multifaceted electro-acoustic terrain, sounding as a composite whole. These adjustments were crucial to my experience of cross-adaptive processes. To that effect, they truly did function as “intervention” – not between two separate individuals, but within the internal routing of my individual practice.

Our work together explored two very different cross-adaptive techniques. For each, I will provide a brief summary of its technical processes, followed by an analysis of its intersection with and imprint upon my practice.

### **Improvisation with Live Convolution**

Live Convolution is a cross-adaptive processing technique wherein one sound source provides an impulse response, or IR, and the other sound source “plays through” or triggers it. My first meeting with Øyvind on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 tested these roles as controlled by a single performer, and yielded new perspectives for us both.<sup>3</sup>

Live convolution has some sonic results in common with looping or overdubbing, but its processes are much more dynamic. For example, the reoccurrence of the recorded impulse response is intricately shaped by the sound that triggers it. If I provide a short vocal phrase as the IR, the way it reemerges and overlays in the sonic landscape is directly determined by the speed, duration, articulation, and timbre of the next sound I

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<sup>3</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Convolution experiments with Jordan Morton”)

make with the bass. In this way, I'm not only replaying my sound but also actively redesigning its spectral and temporal contour in real time.

Thus, multiple levels of sound creation and manipulation are mine to navigate and manage, with the ability to perform, layer, filter, and sculpt the sound using only my acoustic activity. It does not require a new physical relationship with a piece of hardware, or that I relinquish contact with my instrument to control software. Rather, it provides an intuitive, embodied way to build rich electro-acoustic textures and create resonating, polyphonic layers.

Live convolution offers another dynamic feature. The current IR is always replaced by the next recorded IR. By requiring the performer to constantly recalibrate, working with their most recently produced sound, live convolution generates an improvisational immediacy and urgency. I found my attention drawn deeply into the present, stimulating a more intense listening presence and a more varied and spontaneous interplay between my two sound sources. In short, the immediacy of this parameter altered my improvisational flow. Paired with the rich and surprising timbral possibilities of the replayed IR, I began to hear smaller, more condensed units of sound as vibrant improvisational building blocks.

The roles assigned within live convolution can be inverted. We could design for the vocal IR to be played through the bass, or the bass IR played through the vocal. I gained a vital insight into my own practice from experimenting with both configurations, finding it much easier to lead with the bass, triggering vocal IR's with bass activity, rather than the other way around. This revealed a hierarchy in my creative practice of which I was not fully aware. Even though much of my writing up until that point used bass as accompaniment, with voice in the foreground, it became clear through live convolution that the primacy of my work rested in my relationship with the bass.

This realization had two effects. First, it prompted a deeper investigation into the shifting hierarchies of my acoustic instrument system. I began to play more to the instrumental strengths of my practice, searching for ways in which voice could fuse with and amplify the spectral phenomena of the double bass. Second, in our collaborative sessions, I began to experiment with new vocal palates, searching for a broader spectrum of sound to match the power and diversity of my bass playing in the context of live convolution.

Two improvised studio recordings exemplify this expanded vocal palate, new improvisational flow, and enhanced textural vocabulary. In “Live Convolver Take 1” voice provides the impulse response, which is then triggered by bass. I played around with articulation and duration, starting with short, sharp sounds, moving to more sustained sounds, and finally exploring different permutations of both. “Live Convolver Take 2” also functions with voice as the impulse response, providing more obvious melodic shapes and experimenting with their activation and layering. Both recordings demonstrate the possibilities for textural build when the right IR is rapidly triggered. The lingering layers of previous IRs may even overlap with new IRs if their recording and triggering is timed correctly.

By the time of these recordings on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017, I had begun to approach a more nuanced control of the parameters. This made it all the more fascinating to experience live convolution in duo with Miller Puckette, pioneering computer musician and designer of Max MSP, who joined me on guitar for two improvisational tracks on the same recording session. Because each performer controlled *either* the IR *or* its trigger, it was impractical to anticipate the results of my actions. In a context where each performer had some kind of responsibility for the resultant sound of their partner, a more external, soft-focus kind of improvisational flow seemed to work better.



There is a profound liberation inherent to live convolution. By removing the need to actively produce each sound in real time, I can essentially use less to create more without relying upon a completely disembodied sound source or autonomous electronic process. The power still rests in the physical motion of my hands and the activation of my vocal chords, and the rich field of electronic sounds lives and breathes in dialogue with my acoustic instrument system, operating as its extension. To an artist hoping to seamlessly create expansive, resonant, polyphonic sound worlds on stage, live convolution has proven a powerful ally.

### **Composing in Dialogue with Cross-Adaptive Modulation Mappings**

Our work continued with another cross-adaptive processing technique, wherein the action of one instrument modulates the processing of its output or the output of another instrument. This complex causal relationship of multiple inputs, outputs and their assigned affects is described as the “mapping” of cross-adaptive processes.

During our collaborations, Øyvind designed a set of mappings exploiting some of the most salient features of my bass and voice. In a literal sense, he built an instrument system intertwined with my own. Rather than feed it existing material, I decided to compose looser pieces and reconfigure existing fragments of pieces, hoping to more flexibly interact with his chosen mappings.

The results of this cross-adaptive compositional exercise were recorded during the same studio session on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017.<sup>4</sup> “I Confess” and “Backbeat Sketch” represent a compositional stage where the musical material is fluid and interchangeable, precluding the solidification of consistent text.

One of the most audible mappings employs the formant strength of my vocal, or how “pressed” the vocals sound at a given moment. A pressed vocal sound will activate

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<sup>4</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Session in UCSD Studio A”)

a granular tremolo in the bass, lending animation and excitement to support the vocal intensity. I intentionally exploited this mapping in “I Confess” moving from an airier vocal sound to a pressed sound to activate this tremolo accordingly to my expressive intention. A pronounced example of this effect happens at 0:24. Later in the piece, when this mapping was activated in passing, it proved less successful. It seems like a mapping best used to create a sustained and purposeful textural shift.

Another especially perceptible mapping occurs between the action and output of the bass, wherein its spectral flux determines its reverb. The noisier the bass becomes, the less reverb it is allowed. If, for example, I crunch the bow on the string, producing a noise totally devoid of stable pitch, any lingering reverb will be cut immediately, creating a sudden sonic vacuum.

Øyvind chose this effect to pair with a chopping bow technique, which I then used to build “Backbeat sketch.” The chop, a two-part technique popular amongst fiddlers, employs rapid alternations between melodic and rhythmic functions. Øyvind’s mapping between spectral flux and reverb accentuates the difference between these functions by allowing the melodic moments to resonate further, and the rhythmic crunches to cut that resonance, existing in a totally dry sonic space. Although other effects parameters sometimes sound in this dry space, a good example of it can be heard at 0:06 and 0:17.

There are five other mappings at work in these recordings. Some are more discernible than others. As a performer, I found this particular set of mappings fascinating and energizing. They are designed to contain enough subtlety and expressive variance to engage the ear for the duration of a piece, and to not “wear out.” However, this complexity can be challenging to connect with a composer, and perhaps as a listener. I had limited success in composing in true dialogue with these mappings, which might have been aided by more time to investigate and experiment with their processes.

However, lingering in this fluid, interchangeable compositional state had a lasting impact. After developing these pieces, my work gravitated toward more fluid forms, left space for improvisation, and allowed for more nuanced reflexes in performance. In fact, I later took a section of “I Confess” and deconstructed it even further, resulting in “Palm to Chest”, the fragmented ballad movement of *Suite Myth*.

Also, because change was blossoming so rapidly on so many levels within these modulation mappings, I learned to be much more attuned to it. Early on in our collaborations, a discussion between Øyvind, Miller Puckette and myself around the concept of ‘timbral polyphony’ lent perspective to this phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> The ear is constantly calibrating to the level of the music where it perceives change. Within the polyphonic harmonic motion of bass and voice, modulation mappings cause the ear to jump rapidly from level to level as the polyphonies of timbre also shift. Later, I explored the idea of perceptions of change on a more gradual incline within *Suite Myth*’s opening movement, “Fable.”

### **Expanding Existing Forms in Live Performance**

I write and perform in duo with drummer Kai Basanta, under the project name Creatures. On April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017, Øyvind joined us for a live set at The Loft, playing the electronic Marimba Lumina in addition to the cross-adaptive instrument systems. Our preliminary rehearsals had explored ways to adapt some of Creatures’ existing material for this trio, and helped us get a sense of our collective improvisational palate. The day of the show, we decided not to decide anything – to leave the set completely open for free improvisation, save for one pre-determined piece that would emerge in the final few minutes.

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<sup>5</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Session with Jordan Morton and Miller Puckette, April 2017”)

By then, having worked with Øyvind for over a month, I was very interested to see our collaborative processes as they manifested in an improvised live performance. Several reoccurring themes were expressed during this set, such as an expanded vocal palate, a more flexible, modular approach to form, and the application of live convolution techniques toward textural build.

The sheer energy and variety of sound spaces reached made this set a remarkable experience for Kai and I, as we had begun to explore possible ways of using live electronics on our own to expand our duo palate. Øyvind's Marimba Lumina added an extra dynamic voice to mix, and can be heard in between 17:00-21:00 driving an especially high-energy improvisation.

I also gained a new sense of the truly flexible potential of my compositions. Within the set, some of the material we had rehearsed arose naturally, including one of my pieces, "If I Knew." Between 28:30 and 33:30, this piece expresses itself in a much looser way than ever before, rising in and out of the fabric of the ensemble in disconnected improvisatory sections. This experience set the stage for some of my goals with Suite Myth one year later. An interesting instance of cross-adaptive processing occurred during this performance of "If I Knew", which had the effect of freezing my vocal, and later triggering a vocal IR in the snare drum, allowing Kai to build a rising cloud of vocals with his drumbeat starting at 33:30.

### **A Way Forward**

Our collaboration ended with Øyvind's return to Trondheim. I am still contemplating how cross-adaptive processing systems might be incorporated into future solo performances, and which adaptations might improve their interface with my practice.

It was exciting to intricately affect an electronic sound realm through purely acoustic action. However, without more finite control of the system, the resulting “super-instrument” of live convolution proved much too complex to manage toward an expressive end result. As Øyvind suggested,<sup>6</sup> the recording of the IR could be mediated with a foot pedal or metronomic trigger to maximize its performative potential. Once recorded, perhaps we could arrange a more flexible way to work with the IR. I would like to be able to extract and manipulate segments of the IR, and retain them in the mix beyond the moment the next IR is recorded. We might also custom design the cross-adaptive processing of an entire performance, choosing a progression of modulation mappings and live convolution settings that would help create varied sound worlds and a longer structure.

Adjustments like these would put more control in the hands of acoustic instrumentalists as they perform in dialogue with these technologies. Of course, as in any traditional ensemble, it is important to consider who has what kind of agency, when, and for what purpose. In this case, the ensemble in question consists of myself, the mechanisms of different cross-adaptive systems, and Øyvind, who may be adjusting and guiding their parameters in real time. No one player has complete autonomy, but different ensemble members may take the lead at different times. Working within this balance remains key to an inherently symbiotic research and performance process.

There are several ways in which I may continue to adapt to cross-adaptive systems. As a result of this project, I am driven to develop better miking techniques for the unique needs of my practice. Bowed bass may be an unwieldy beast to translate into digital terms, but there must be ways to capture and use its acoustic depth without thwarting the necessary isolation between voice and bass, which allows their signals to be in clear dialogue during cross-adaptive processes.

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<sup>6</sup> (Brandtsegg, “Convolution experiments with Jordan Morton”)

This project also revealed to me the creativity inherent to collaborative research. I am motivated by its promising results toward a more informed relationship with these technologies, in order to generate new ideas for their musical application. Working with cross-adaptive processing strikes me as similar to composing for the unique skills of a fellow instrumentalist. Through a personal, hands-on study of the programs used (Hadron Particle Synthesizer and Csound) I will continue to improve my compositional understanding of cross-adaptive processing, develop a language around it, and explore and experiment on my own in advance of the next opportunity to collaborate with Øyvind, its designer and virtuoso.

## Chapter 2 – Expanding Forms through Song: The Music of Espen Reinertsen

### Experimentation and Song in Norway

Right now, Norway is making some radically beautiful music. Experimental approaches to song beget new forms, the avant-garde combines readily with pop, folk, jazz and electronica, and many compelling composers embody their music in performance.

I resonate strongly with the work of my Norwegian contemporaries. A remarkable ingenuity emanates from recent albums by pianist Christian Wallumrød, vocalist and performance artist Jenny Hval, guitarist Kim Myhr, experimental vocalist and improviser Sofia Jernberg, and saxophonist Espen Reinertsen, to name a few. Their work leaps beyond the sum of its stylistic influences into totally uncharted territory, often incorporating the voice or vocal forms, and creating experimental oeuvres by using, not abandoning, the ubiquitous and accessible power of song. In an interview with Hubro Music, Kim Myhr and Jenny Hval discuss their motivation to “work with song forms from a very fragmented basis”, approaching melody from an intuitive, improvisatory space and maintaining vulnerability and emotional salience within an aesthetic of abstraction.<sup>7</sup>

This delicate balance of musical values, apparent in the work of other Norwegian artists, takes flight in their 2017 duo release *In The End His Voice Will Be The Sound Of Paper*, an album developed and recorded in collaboration with the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra (TJO). In fact, though working in diversified idioms, all five of the aforementioned artists have been commissioned to lead projects with the TJO.<sup>8</sup> Such collaborations with the country’s most renowned jazz ensemble reveal a creative

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<sup>7</sup> (Myhr and Hval)

<sup>8</sup> (Trondheim Jazz Orchestra)

lineage. Norway's flourishing, innovative balance of song and abstraction springs from its unique jazz tradition.

Norwegian jazz seems to have reached a level of cross-genre experimentation, formal expansion and aesthetic innovation in unique dialogue with Norwegian culture, including its traditional folk songs and hymns. The intersection of folk and jazz is a phenomenon across Scandinavia. One need only look to Sweden's beloved 1964 album *Jazz På Svenska*, which translates to "Jazz in Swedish" for a collection of traditional folk songs reinterpreted in jazz duo that took listeners of the era by storm.<sup>9</sup> However, as compared with the creative music scenes in Sweden, Norway's jazz scene today expresses a unique stylistic diversification. Individuality, experimentation and genre-fluidity take overwhelming precedence over presenting a canonized version of American jazz traditions, resulting in a high density of art music that truly confounds genre. What other factors and motivations are at play, generating such a hybridized scene?

Tracing the presence of key individuals and institutions may prove enlightening. American jazz pianist George Russell lived and worked in Scandinavia in the mid 1960s and early 1970s, just as jazz was taking hold across the region. His cadre of young collaborators and protégés in Norway, such as guitarist Terje Rypdal, drummer Jon Christianson, bassist Arild Andersen, and saxophonist Jan Garbarek, contained the first generation of Norwegian improvisers.<sup>10</sup>

After so many close collaborations, these prominent Norwegian artists must have espoused some of Russell's cross-genre third-stream values. If it is any indication, they are sometimes described by younger musical generations as "folk hearts with bebop chops."<sup>11</sup> Rypdal, Christianson, Andersen and Garbarek went on to form the house band of the internationally renowned record label ECM, which held the majority of its recording

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<sup>9</sup> (Hauknes)

<sup>10</sup> (Rudland)

<sup>11</sup> (Porter)



sessions in Norway's capitol city of Oslo. Later releasing title after title as bandleaders, their resonant, melancholic aesthetic, referred to affectionately as "mountain jazz", characterized an entire generation of Norwegian music. Subsequent generations moved toward a more cosmopolitan sound, with new labels such as Sofa and Hubro championing improvised music and building a scene centered in Oslo<sup>12</sup> – although you can still "hear the mountains in the background."

A look at national economic and legislative activity may reveal another fortuitously timed factor. Due to the discovery of massive coastal oil reserves in the 1970s, Norway now boasts the largest sovereign wealth fund in the world.<sup>13</sup> Once the rural little brother of Scandinavia, now most of its five million inhabitants "consider art and culture too important to be left entirely to the markets,"<sup>14</sup> enacting consistent public arts funding. In fact, it seems that the ample funding opportunities actually favor projects that push the gamut, perhaps in the spirit of the continued development of a national cultural heritage. Has valuing artistic advancement over selling power set the stage for such an unabashedly adventurous music scene in Norway? Innovation, far from being the romanticized triumph of a struggling artist, does come with a budget. Coupled with the social security of a welfare state, it's no stretch to imagine that generous funding for the arts alleviates the pressure to sell in favor of the pressure to experiment.

We may discover a third musical influence in Norway's beloved wilderness. Despite urbanization, industrialization, and a centralized social democratic government, the Norwegian people retain a markedly decentralized spirit, a persistent individualism and a proud communion with their natural environment. Historically a land of fisherman and farmers, Norway's population remains more widely distributed throughout its fiercely beautiful landscape than that of its Nordic neighbors, and the open-air life, or *friluftsliv*,

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<sup>12</sup> (Reinertsen and Lonning)

<sup>13</sup> (Booth, 181)

<sup>14</sup> (Mercer)

still holds tremendous social and cultural value.<sup>15</sup> Amidst an often pristine clarity and simplicity, something wild seems to linger in Norway's musical DNA. If we can hear it in the sweeping romanticism of Edvard Grieg, why not in the strange, plaintive minimalism of Christian Wallumrød, or the banshee calisthenics of Sofia Jernberg's voice?

In the attempt to understand a distant cultural phenomenon, research has its limits. My investigation of Norway's musical values and lineage serves only to illuminate a source of personal inspiration, and not to substantiate theories of cultural anthropology or environmental determinism. The contemporary music of Norway emerges from a multifaceted scene, in which I hope to someday participate. Until then, I can take solace in the beautiful albums that it produces – including those of saxophonist and producer Espen Reinertsen, whose solo project's first album, *Forgaflingspop*, has been my constant companion since its 2015 release.

*Forgaflingspop* is the kind of album so intricately inlaid with sound and movement that there are new moments to discover after the hundredth listen. Reinertsen is single-handedly responsible for every phase of this work, from the composing, arranging, performing, and programming of synthesizers, to the recording, engineering, and post-production process, with refined chops as a lyricist, vocalist, and songwriter.

Describing these albums as side-projects, Reinertsen fore-fronts his professional affiliations as a saxophonist in the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra and his experimental horn duo with Eivind Lonning, Streifenjunko. However, some of the music on *Forgaflingspop* has appeared in larger ensemble format arranged for the TJO, and as earlier fragments within a 2007 jazz quartet album release. Reinertsen's personal repertoire seems to translate across boundaries of ensemble and finds its fully actualized form in produced solo albums, exhibiting that elusive balance of song and abstraction.

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<sup>15</sup> (Booth, 177)

Although you can hear Reinertsen's jazz influences in the horn arrangements and harmonies, *Forgaflingspop* does not present as a jazz album. These are whimsical pop songs, undoubtedly fragmented, expanded, and rarified by the artist's instrumental emphasis and technological prowess. Rather than speculate as to their intended musical style, I will only note that their subject matter underlies a primary influence. In the lyrical content of both *Forgaflingspop* and its follow up, *Nattsyntese* (2017), Reinertsen deals poetically with the natural world. Connecting the pump of blood around the head to the "cold soup of electrons" of an autumn evening, or the human character to its primal foil ("Which animal are you when the light goes?")<sup>16</sup> the text of these pieces conspires with haunting melodies and carefully chosen production, seeming to invoke the paradoxical expanse and intimacy of a wild habitat. I truly feel that I can hear the mountains in the background, though I may be predisposed. I first encountered Reinertsen's music while on tour in the blue crystalline summer of British Columbia, listening to *Forgaflingspop* with an obsessive curiosity while ferrying between mountainous islands jutting out from the Pacific Ocean.

### **Weaving Long Form from Song Form – An analysis of "Forgaflingspop"**

*Forgaflingspop* is an album built upon the marriage of musical dichotomies. The cold perfection of programmed synth meets the anomalies of acoustic warmth. Lush harmonies collapse into unassuming atonality, or move against a dissonant, unyielding pedal tone. Sung melodies are set within swells of bizarre electro-acoustic textural landscapes grounded in extended saxophone techniques. Precisely sculpted horn solis emerge from an ethereal space. The listener is caught somewhere between intimacy and expanse, song form and song destruction. Jazz, pop, folk, free improvisation, and

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<sup>16</sup> (Reinertsen, Booklet, *Forgaflingspop*)

electronica bleed in and out of focus, but somehow, this album transcends the diverse musical ecosystems it invokes, reaching a whimsically graceful coherence.

After several hundred deep listens, I've come to realize that such coherence lies in the artist's attention to form. By alternating expanded songs with experimental instrumental tracks or sections, allowing them to flow together, overlap, and intertwine, *Forgaflingspop* unfolds as long-form work rather than as a collection of separate songs. The two penultimate tracks – “Biofobi,” a song, and “Forgaflingspop,” an instrumental,<sup>17</sup> provide an excellent example of this seamless connection and will be the focus of my analysis.

If “Biofobi” were to be stripped down to the movement of melody and harmony in the vocal sections, it would be a very simple song. It is comprised of two contrasting melodies, A and B, organized AABAB. The experimental arrangement and fragmentation of these formal elements is what turns this simple yet beautiful song into an extended piece, preparing and inviting us into even more abstract territory in the instrumental material that follows. Its open, oxygenated song form begins with thirty seconds of a mellow, sustained cluster chord from layered trumpets. Building downward from the highest pitch, it then subsides note by note, lingering on its last and lowest pitch before ceasing. There is a momentary silence.

The first section of song enters suddenly, in a key center that feels completely unrelated to any perceived harmonic gravity within the cluster chord, and with contrasting timbres. A1 is comprised of sixteen bars of sung melody with a rolling, contrapuntal synth accompaniment, and an inner structure of a-a'-b-b'. After the first stanza of vocal material, the harmonies of a-a' are repeated under a long, languid trumpet solo.

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<sup>17</sup> (Reinertsen, *Forgaflingspop*)

Lest anyone think the opening cluster chord was an anomaly, this trumpet solo settles upon a more widely spaced but still fairly dissonant three-note chord. When A2 begins, this dissonant chord sustains through the first eight bars, stubbornly and unmistakably present. Later on, another more dissonant trumpet cluster chord sustains through the beginning of A3. Clearly, these cluster chords are an integral part of the arrangement. Growing progressively more dissonant, their stark tension draws the ear through repetitions of the mellow A-section melody. We lean in, anticipating the release.

The transition from song to purely instrumental forces is especially effective. A few bars into B2, the vocal melody becomes overgrown with a rising choir of horns. Starting as counter-melody, it soon becomes the primary focus. A lifting saxophone line invokes the entrance of other horns, bass clarinet enters a few seconds later, and the horn section takes the foreground full-force. Vocals fade. The synth and programmed drums, present since their entrance in A1, drop out. The horn soli forges on unaccompanied. Powerful and complex, it becomes a bridge between the fragmented song material of “Biofobi” and a section that functions as a kind of outro, starting with the re-entry of the programmed drums. In these two minutes before “Biofobi” seamlessly transitions into “Forgaflingspop”, what we have is essentially a horn section trading fours with a single saxophone rocking out on pointillistic extended techniques. Slap-tongue, multiphonics, and the close-miked snapping and popping of keys prove to be a poignant response to a lush horn soli.

This sets the stage for an even more unusual band in the next track. With no hiccup in the beat, “Forgaflingspop” opens with electro-pop synth bursts, followed by three minutes of utter dissolve. The track begins to pull apart through polyrhythmic synth drum comping, odd timbral pairings, strange beat-making via extended saxophone techniques, the interspersed fluttering and dying of pop-synth, and microtonal bending of

the entire pitch material of the track. It ends abruptly, leaving us to quickly collect our ears.

In a few silent seconds time, the album's final track begins – clearly a song, hymn-like, with pump organ and quaint vocals. After traversing a fragmented electro-extended-technique-landscape, this familiar song-space spun from acoustic material sinks into the ears very differently.

Indeed, Reinertsen tends to achieve a strangely viable symbiosis between the acoustic and electronic elements of his music. For example, the first entrance of the programmed drums in “Biofobi” is jarring and arresting due to their unabashedly digital sound. As the track builds, the improvisatory feel of the actual rhythms marries this sound to the rest of the track. Later on, these synth drums even seem to be comping in response to harmonized jazz horn figures. Those horn figures are, in turn, executed with the cool rhythmic precision one might expect of a synthesizer. Many similar examples of electro-acoustic cohabitation show that the pairings work because each adopts some characteristics of the other.

Another common theme is the carefully navigated relationship between dissonance and consonance. Reinertsen has no qualms pitting a dense cluster chord against a sweet, consonant melody, which it is meant to enhance and amplify, not negate. In other tracks, this kind of curated harmonic relationship occurs between entire textural layers of the music. I have encountered similar navigations between consonant and dissonant material in the work of other Norwegian artists, such as bassist and composer Håkon Thelin, and Christian Wallumrød, a colleague of Reinertsen. These qualities give rise to an oddly beautiful tension, the likes of which I seek in my own writing.

A third undeniable character of Reinertsen's music is the integrity of its sonic design. Time again, these tracks reach a densely layered and intensely contrapuntal

space, enabled by the meticulous arrangement of timbres, frequencies, and spacing. Each element, whether instrumental, vocal, or electronic, has been carefully placed within the frequency spectrum and spatial field of the mix. Though certainly a matter of production, this extreme clarity is fundamentally conceived in the arrangements themselves. Each sound chosen facilitates the sonic definition of another. No one instrument clouds its counterpart. Their distinction actually aids in creating fascinating new timbral blends, such as that between low reeds and synthesizer, or extended horn techniques and programmed drums. The resulting sonic landscape registers as an intricately lucid puzzle, inviting the ear to easily engage on multiple levels.

Though my music differs from Reinertsens', I have found value and inspiration in the organizational structures and aesthetic coherence of his work. *Forgaflingspop* has never ceased to capture my ear. In attempting to enact these structural and aesthetic elements in my own work, I hope to celebrate and esteem that which I've found enduringly compelling as a listener.

### Chapter 3 – Suite Myth: Origins, Collaborative Methodologies, and Reflections

This project represents the culmination of two years of work in collaboration with the musical communities at UC San Diego and the Banff Centre for the Arts. *Suite Myth*, a 30-minute piece for violin, voice, bass and percussion, tells postmodern myths of the female divine through a porous anthology of song, sound sculpture, free improvisation, noise, and hymn.

Its premiere on April 3rd, 2018 initiated a period of critical reflection. Did the outcomes of this project meet the personal goals I had delineated for my degree? How might this piece change with future adaptations, and what remained fundamental to its realization? An intensive review process revealed the many successes of *Suite Myth*, some of which came as a surprise. Its development and performance established effective personal and collaborative methodologies, and set new goals. It also fulfilled goals of which I had been entirely unaware. Indeed, the process of realizing and reviewing this project exhumed the deepest motivations driving my work, and gave me clarity, direction and purpose at an important transitional moment in my career. In its ongoing analysis, refinement, and adaptation, I have gained valuable insights into the origins, inner workings, and collaborative methodologies of my practice, as well as begun to plan for the future of this piece.

#### Origins

*Suite Myth* opens with one tense, languorous line. Sung slowly, it emerges from the pulsing harmonics of the bass:

“Fable    they found it    they found it    trembling in the ruins of a hymn.”



I grew up singing hymns with a Presbyterian congregation in a vast stone sanctuary, our voices enveloped in the resonance of a massive pipe organ. In my secular adult life, a creative practice began to form around this cherished sonic imprint. The bowed bass became my resonant organ, and my voice the congregation. Much of my lyrical writing emerged as an invocation, lamentation, or prayer, and my instrumental technique evolved to experiment with varied, resonant timbres, hunting for a ringing symbiosis to fill my moveable sanctuary. Resonant polyphony became my spiritual practice, and home.

Some years into my career, I became aware of a lingering imbalance. A thoroughly male sense of the divine poses problems for a distinctly female artistic practice. Even Catholicism reveres the figure of a divine mother. As a formative lens, Protestantism left me much to re-envision and reclaim. Combined with the predominantly male outlooks and attitudes of my professional circles, my creative voice began to feel increasingly depleted.

Since moving to California, I have found a new and welcome creative lens in the female divine of cross-cultural mythological traditions. *Suite Myth* represents a first round of subconscious self-reckoning in communion with these multidimensional archetypes, restructuring internal channels of faith and gender, and unlocking urgent and gendered topics that lie nascent in my writing. I feel I finally have the keys to deal with the psychology of being entered; the consequences of generative and destructive power; the tension between self-sacrifice and self-preservation; and the war waged over and upon the female body and psyche.

In breaching these topics, I prefer to use mythical narratives as a springboard for my own hyperactive and highly metaphorical imagination. *Suite Myth* thus encompasses ancient stories reshaped and reborn, folkloric tales constructed anew, and fragments of my own personal mythology. It is my hope that in “hatching a new myth” my work may

resonate with contemporary audiences while honoring the quintessentially flexible, functional nature of myth itself.

In addition, the richly varied narrative structures of myth demand the expansion of song form I have long sought. These stories could not be told in a series of 3-minute verse-chorus-verse-chorus episodes. I found they could only move and breathe through longer form. In its April 3<sup>rd</sup> premiere, this longer form manifested as seven connected movements drawing upon every structural strategy in my playbook, new or old, intentional or subliminal. *Suite Myth* employs distended blues form, continuous altered melodies extracted from fiddle traditions, the ruminative simplicity of Jürg Frey, and a sonic cubism unique to my experience of Butch Morris' conduction techniques.<sup>18</sup> It pulls apart my own song-forms to welcome sculpted group improvisation, and overlays vocal and instrumental segments on a macro and micro level. At every turn, the ear is guided by the play of tension between consonance and dissonance, and in the opening movement, the gradual build of timbral polyphony is called upon as a structural force.

Curiously, in review, the pacing of *Suite Myth* resembles that of a church service. In a new context, I have fashioned an overture (Fable) and an opening story (The Hare) punctuated by a brief collective spoken response and interlude for silent reflection. A second story follows, recitative-like (In Which Lilith Ditches The Garden of Eden) which disintegrates into the fragments of a hymn (Palm to Chest). This hymn begins, literally, with the words "I confess" and slowly pieces itself back together into a defiant and vulnerable statement of desire. After a recapitulatory interlude assembled from previous musical motifs, the suite closes with a high-energy contrapuntal piece (Compromise) reminiscent of the organ postludes that would burst forth at the close of a service.

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<sup>18</sup> Since 2014, I have participated in approximately 30 total hours of conduction ensemble rehearsals and performances at the Banff Centre for the Arts and The Stone under the leadership of Tyshawn Sorey, who has continued to develop and customize the conducting techniques pioneered by Butch Morris.

After the premiere, it took months of reflection to grasp these correlations, despite a telling clue I planted in the program notes: “The hymns of my youth are forever lurking in my musical dark room. I design for their decay, and enjoy the process.” Much more than hymn lurks in that darkroom. In fact, every element of my most formative sound source, from its melodic structure, timbre, and instrumentation, to its pacing, organization and function, has emerged in this project. The imprint of a longer sonic form has existed all along. In listening back, the realization floored me. That imprint, rejected for so long and at work subconsciously, can now be used and embraced in full, guided by the empowering force I have discovered in myth.

With this piece, I have achieved a malleable, long-form vessel for my creative practice, ready to manifest in evolving versions and instrumentations throughout my career. This, combined with a new understanding of its conceptual origins, is the greatest triumph of this project, and of my time at UC San Diego.

### **Collaborative Methodologies**

Much of the music of *Suite Myth* first evolved as solo material for bass and voice. However, the challenge of creating beyond my comfort zone revolutionized my compositional processes and exposed fundamental elements of my practice. Ultimately, I owe the success of this project to the patience and expertise of percussionist Ben Rempel and violinist Nelson Moneo, who guided my collaborative and compositional processes at many stages, and joined me for its premiere. Our collaborative methods made for an expanded palate and a flexibility of arrangement key to envisioning and creating longer form. With their help, I was able to draft early versions of the material, design for timbral cohesion and clarity, and develop processes in arrangement and performance that played to their strengths, allowing for a fluid relationship between composed material and improvisation.

In the year leading up to the premiere, each of my collaborators contributed to preliminary stages of the project's development. The music that was to become "In Which Lilith Ditches the Garden of Eden" was first pieced together and performed with Ben Rempel in April 2017. Playing drum set, bowing crotales, and DJing white noise with a dusty radio knob, Ben's extreme versatility and improvisational voice animated my music in an unforgettable way, and gave me an early sense of arrangement possibilities. "Compromise" and "Palm to Chest" were written specifically for Nelson's unique tone color, technical prowess, and bold improvisational capabilities, and were completed and performed in two days at the Banff Centre in July of 2017. As the conceptual elements of *Suite Myth* developed simultaneously with these formative collaborations, it seemed a natural choice to bring Ben and Nelson together for the full-length rendition.

The ensemble's sonic design – one of the most pressing challenges – was aided greatly by collaborative processes. My solo sound world has a wide frequency spread and a delicate balance between voice and bass. Past attempts to augment my work in ensemble settings often obscured or entirely obliterated its essential balance. This time, in a bid for sonic clarity, I scheduled individual sessions with each of my collaborators, employing an exhaustive trial and error to find the instruments, timbres, and combinations that best served each movement as it had originated. For violin, which I often used in homophony with the bass and voice, this meant choosing certain note placements for their timbral blend rather than technical function, and starkly contrasting supportive and soloistic roles in the arrangements.

For percussion, replete with endless and overwhelming timbral possibilities, this proved more challenging. I sought a versatile set up that could extend and complement specific sonic properties of my solo sound without interfering with its essential frequencies, and that could fill varying roles of groove, texture, color, and harmony. Utilizing bass drum on the lowest spectrum, metallic percussive sounds on the high

spectrum, and clear, bell-like pitched material such as vibraphone in the midrange, we managed to carve a space for the bowed bass. Within this set up, each movement was allotted different sound sets, striking the right balance between pitched and non-pitched material. Through practical experimentation, we were able to find and designate specific instruments to specific moments, right down to a trio of almglocken tuned in quarter tones around a dissonant cluster of bass harmonics.

Once the sounds were chosen, their flexible yet precise assembly became an exciting puzzle. My ensemble members, like myself, are adept free improvisers versed in jazz traditions, but firmly rooted in a classical tradition. Within an essential improvisational spontaneity, how might we navigate the necessary precision of arrangement and sonic clarity? Taking advantage of our collective strengths required a wide variety of arrangement techniques, both collaborative and compositional. I found it best to provide the raw materials of each arrangement, and, guided by my vision of its formal architecture, allow us to piece them together as a group.

This process relied on the development of unique scores, notations, and charts that provided the exact right amount of information, and no more. For example, the chart for “Fable” outlined its form and build, and delineated pitch collections rather than chord changes. The assignment of specific pitches was decided in rehearsal according to their timbral blend. In “Palm to Chest” voice, bass, and violin moved as one unit, smearing dissonant chords in and out of a loosely designed percussion texture, but the pacing of those chords was determined ad libitum. The score designated the pitch material of each chord, but spaced them freely on the page and incorporated elements of graphic notation for the percussion part and violin solo. “Interlude 2” was a simple graph, extracting and arranging motifs from earlier movements with written instructions, drawn gestures, and numbers. In review, I noticed that I had devised a notated version of some of the functions of conduction, normally controlled with hand signals. In a

contrasting example, the violin part of “Compromise” was comprised of notated melodic sixteenth note cells, with which I asked Nelson to improvise continuous melody. He thus controlled the tempo, pacing, and intensity of the movement, as well as the points of harmonic shift, determined by his movement to each subsequent cell.

Some of the arrangements were extremely loose or purely verbal, relying upon my delivery of the material and the spontaneity contributed by my ensemble members. For “The Hare” they received only the text as a score, and a loose verbal instruction as to the timbre and gestural character of the desired improvisational language. In the first interlude after “The Hare,” there was no score at all. For a juxtaposition of extremes, I chose a gentle bass drum rumble and dry string tremolos under the bridge to co-exist in a thirty-second moment of repose.

### **The Immediate Next Step**

The resources and collaborative opportunities within the UCSD community enabled this project from start to finish, and were truly instrumental in drafting a new creative template for my work.

I now challenge myself to re-embodiment that template as a soloist. *Suite Myth* in solo form will internalize these new insights and methodologies gained from its initial ensemble rendition, and prepare me for widening circles of project leadership. It will also demand a personal new level of performative intention and sustained presence. Sharing these stories in a concert-length solo piece is not for the faint of heart. In recognition of the broadened horizons it might require, I have begun to write new material, research my own improvisational languages, and investigate the potential of performance art, theater, and live electronics to further animate this piece. With the artistic momentum generated at UCSD, I will catch my own rising creative currents, and continue to build my own house – a free and intentional space, open to all those curious enough to enter.

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