

University of Tasmania

‘Writing Wrong Right’:

An Investigation in Composing with Extended Techniques

An Exegesis Submitted to

Conservatorium of Music

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Music with Honours (or Bachelor of Music (Elite) with Honours)

Conservatorium of Music

by

Rhys Gray

Hobart, Tasmania

August 11, 2020

Contents

Illustrations

iii

Illustrations

Figures

Tables

Brief Background

In 2019, I completed my Honours exegesis at the University of Tasmania, titled ‘Harmonic Based Extended Techniques and their Compositional Applications’, a study of three extended techniques applicable to stringed instruments; half-harmonics, subharmonics, and multiphonics. I am interested in pursuing this line of research further, as I believe that there is still more to be learnt about the techniques that I have already covered, and that many other extended techniques lack the literature that composers can use to make informed decisions about their use. The purpose of this study will therefore be to explore extended techniques further, filling literature gaps and incorporating the techniques into my own artistic language.

Cellist and new music specialist John Addison has expressed an interest in developing his technique of ‘double touch’ harmonics with me, which he describes as ‘[...] where one engages two of the harmonic nodes on the same string in the same series simultaneously, which allows upper harmonics in the series that have never been stable nor dependable to become reliable and certain.’

His technical and theoretical knowledge will be useful in testing and conducting practical research on the techniques, with eminent composer Sofia Gubaidulina stating ‘I am convinced that we are dealing with a brilliant artistic personality here. It is to be expected that John Addison’s activities as an interpreter will have a vital influence on the next generation of musicians.’¹ As a spectralist composer, I am primarily concerned with extended techniques that make use of

1. Personal correspondance between John Addison and Sofia Gubaidulina.

microtonalities, exploit the harmonic series, and spatial acoustics. The recent shift of the Conservatorium of Music to the Hedberg provides an exciting opportunity to conduct research using the variable acoustic panels, and the ways that they can be used in site-specific works. The scope of my research would therefore be surrounding the treatment of these extended techniques; a holistic review of the techniques from the view of a composer and performers will shed light on the way that the techniques can best be produced.

As a composer, exploring subharmonics, multiphonics, double touch harmonics, and other extended techniques is particularly exciting, as they are fertile ground for new and unique sounds that can be used to develop my musical identity. I plan for the resultant thesis to be a practical document that composers and artists can use as a reference manual for the production and implementation of the techniques in their own practices.

Key Questions

- How are extended techniques used in current literature, and are there ways to improve their delivery and make them more accessible to composers, performers, and audiences?
- Are there extenuating circumstances that keep these techniques from entering mainstream literature, or are they simply still in their infancy?
- How have other artists used these techniques, and what can we learn from artists that have already incorporated them into their practice?

- How can I incorporate these extended techniques into my personal practice and develop a unique style with them?
- How well understood is the physical production, and are there ways we can improve production of the sound in a performance context?
- What variables impact the production of these techniques?
- What can we learn from the way that these techniques are physically produced?

Aims

- Develop my artistic voice and personal style through the incorporation of these extended techniques into my practice.
- Broaden the field of research by studying extended techniques that have not been extensively researched.
- Develop ways of communicating the best practices of techniques to increase their accessibility to others by formalising notation.
- The best practice of how to produce the techniques will be synthesised by understanding the physical properties of the techniques and how they are produced.

Methodology

Through interviews with players at varying stages of proficiency and familiarity with the techniques, I will be able to uncover the barriers to producing these techniques. Document analysis of existing resources and compositions will help

direct and support the line of enquiry. Autoethnography of my creative process will document the research process and clarify my intent.

Outcomes Of This Project, and Why It Is Relevant

This project will provide me with a better understanding of the mechanics and musical capabilities of the extended techniques. As these techniques currently have a deficit of literature, both instructive and artistic; there are few resources for people to learn from, and even fewer practical examples of how to implement the techniques in a musical context. My research will address this, filling the research gaps where identified. The outcome of my research into the technique of ‘double touch harmonics’, as developed by John Addison, is particularly relevant as it presents an exciting possibility for a new method of producing familiar harmonics. This will increase the number of available fingering positions of harmonics within existing compositions, as well as providing more colour options for performers to choose from. Through the documentation of my process in researching this technique, it will be catalogued and brought into the literature, facilitating further development. This is just one example of how my research into underexplored techniques will broaden the performative and compositional palette available to artists. The resultant thesis, ‘Writing Wrong Right: Composing With Extended Techniques’, will consequently be a practical document, suitable as a reference for artists interested in implementing extended techniques into their practice.

Outputs