THE NECKS – AN ACOUSTIC EXPERIMENT

RESEARCH DISSERTATION – Doctor of Creative Arts

University of Technology, Sydney

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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ABSTRACT

This submission for the Doctor of Creative Arts is in two parts.

The first part is a written, analytical discussion of the work of the ambient, minimalist, free improvising Australian trio, The Necks. Despite the emerging interest in the trio on an international scale, few formal academic writings have been compiled. The thesis adopts a research-led practice methodology and framework whereby research has informed both the thesis and creative work. Research methods employed include qualitative interviews with musicians as well as qualitative and quantitative musicological focus when dealing with textual and musical analyses of recorded material. I argue that The Necks' body of work is an acoustic experiment, situating it in terms of its hybrid nature. Whilst The Necks' musical tracks are a sonic experiment in their own right, their music does not constitute the totality of the individual members' output. I will show how the influences from other genres and musical styles when combined with the free improvising approach of The Necks create the acoustic experiment. The link with American minimalists, global and local performers and world music is considered. The theme of landscape, place and location is explored throughout the thesis. The relationship between the environment and The Necks' performances is significant, and often features in their album titles.

Included is a document (Appendix B) that contains transcriptions of their main musical themes relevant to the analyses of The Necks' body of work. These are specific examples from which various conclusions are derived in order to prove the theory that their work is usefully described as an acoustic experiment.

The second part of the Doctor of Creative Arts is the creative component. Chapter 8, 'Notes on the Creative Project *Places* CD', accompanies a compact disc (CD) audio recording which is an original body of work exploring contemporary improvising practices. I have composed and performed a set of piano pieces based on the theme of location, place and identity. This links with a section in the thesis, Chapter 6, 'Landscape Place Location – *Townsville*'. I have explored a number of ways the acoustic piano can create subtle shadings in tone colour. The solo piano works of Chris Abrahams have been a source of inspiration and I refer specifically to his album *Glow* (2001) in discussing the evolution of my own work. I have also been influenced by Debussy's tone colours, use of the pedal and his impressionistic solo

piano compositions. Asian music and the art of simplicity and clarity has been a contributing stylistic consideration. Repetition and minimalism are also explored in ways of creating new sound.

Thelonious Monk's bold, angular, percussive style and the music of free improvising jazz pianists such as Cecil Taylor, Carla and Paul Bley are other influences. Australian jazz pianists such as Mike Nock and Roger Frampton (my teachers) and the way colours, new sounds and new music are created in a contemporary Australian context are inspirational for this work.

INTRODUCTION

a) Aims of the thesis

Jazz has been described as the first world music (Clare 1995, p. 187). Like many art forms, new ways of approaching and performing jazz are constantly evolving. The music has been and continues to be an extraordinary adventure. The aim of this thesis is to prove that the body of work produced by the Australian free improvising group The Necks constitutes an acoustic experiment. The hybrid nature of their work, something which has not been discussed at length to date in a contemporary musicological sense, will be considered in this context. Their work is a particular experiment in certain contexts, but is not the total output of each of the individual members. All members of The Necks bring a wealth of diverse experiences through their work with a variety of other musicians and in working with other bands, hence the contribution to the hybrid nature of their work.

Structurally the thesis moves in a through line, beginning with Chapter 1 which contains biographical and stylistic information about the individual members of the group as well as a brief historical background to the beginnings of The Necks.

The thesis sequentially develops an argument that The Necks' music can usefully be considered as an experiment with the parameters of sound. Through a detailed analysis of The Necks' body of work, I will show how each of The Necks' albums explores various aspects of an acoustic experiment, and chart the progress and evolution of their work in these terms.

I reinforce this idea of their music as an acoustic experiment through referring to key writers on the subject globally and locally, drawing conclusions from these which both augment and support the thesis. The issues of free jazz, notating improvisation and repetition and minimalism are discussed in these terms. Acoustics play a particularly significant role in The Necks' work, as does the relationship between performer and audience.

The opinion of critics is central to the arts in general, and I refer to two concert reviews (one favourable and the other less so) in providing an added dimension to studying their work. These are considered in terms of their validity and perspective, and I comment on my own relationship to and opinion of them in considering further

analysis of their work. I have focused on only two contrasting Necks' reviews as it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to include every review of their work. This in itself is a huge undertaking and possibly lends itself to a future separate project.

The Necks' work has, in itself, informed the creative component of the DCA project, and in particular interviews with, and the music of, their keyboard player Chris Abrahams. When discussing aspects to do with my own work, specifically in Chapter 8, I draw on inspiration from The Necks in both analytical and aesthetic senses.

The thesis is framed in terms of research-led practice. I will show how the research has informed both the thesis and creative work. I also argue how and why I have chosen a research-led approach as opposed to other methods such as practice-led research whereby the creative work informs the thesis argument and creative work. I draw on the work of Roger Dean and Hazel Smith who have explored these areas extensively, as is evidenced in their book *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*. Practice-led research is a term developed by creative practitioners and an area of recent status within the university environment dealing with how creative practice can lead to research insights. Research-led practice suggests 'that scholarly research can lead to creative work' (Smith and Dean 2010 p. 7). Research-led practice, as with practice-led research, is a developing area, and is mainly conceptual and driven by critical and cultural theory.

b) Chapter overviews

Chapter 1, 'Background', is a precursor to the discussion of The Necks' body of work as an acoustic experiment, and provides a significant contextual basis in which to inform such a discussion. The Necks began in 1986 and the original modus operandi was a foil for all the other individual projects the members were working on, the initial intent being for the band to exist on more of a personal as opposed to professional level and not to perform publicly. Initially the focus was to create a collaborative process in which members 'seek their own expression' (Clare 1995, p. 147). In this way the diverse background experiences of each of the members contribute to the acoustic experiment idea, and it will be shown that a plethora of musical styles ranging from popular music, rock, jazz, electronica, world music and contemporary music traditions provide a hybrid, collective, cross-genre musical

outcome. This is hybridisation, and this musical diversity contributes to the difficulty in defining The Necks' music. Apart from the rich, profound breadth of experience drawn on by its players, there is still a common thread which runs throughout. This includes the narrative aspect of their work, the performance act and the influence of contemporary music traditions. It will be shown how The Necks explore not only an ongoing approach to new ways of performance but also an experimental direction in forging new communities of sound.

A 'unique ensemble syntax and sound' (Whiteoak 2004, p. 5) where musicians work together over a period of time and develop a specific rapport and musical direction is discussed further in this chapter. I argue that the notion of collective improvisation (a technique used in Dixieland bands from the early 20th century) has been revisited, reformatted and reworked to incorporate this aspect of traditional jazz in a contemporary setting.

Chapter 2, 'Global and Local – New Communities in Sound World Fusion Jazz and Free Jazz', begins with an informed discussion of free jazz in a global and local context. Improvising music, especially jazz, has often been at the forefront of creating new sound. This discussion is informed by world fusion jazz and free jazz. In order to fully understand the significance of The Necks, a discussion commences dealing with a global overview of related creative practices and practitioners, then moving to a consideration of local jazz developments. The relationship between free jazz groups on a world scale and the local free jazz, avant-garde Sydney-based scene is considered, with these aspects situating The Necks' work within this context. I focus on the similarities between The Necks' music and American minimalism (Charlemagne Palestine, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass) and jazz (Mal Waldron) and Australian contemporaries such as Clarion Fracture Zone (CFZ), The catholics, Wanderlust, Alister Spence, Jackie Orszaczky, Sandy Evans, Matt McMahon, Mark Simmonds, Phil Slater and Mike Nock.

Similarly, in moving from a global to a local perspective, I make reference to a number of relevant sources in relation to The Necks' work. These range from European and US writers such as Jacques Attali, Derek Bailey, David Borgo, Jeremy Gilbert and Christopher Small to Australian writers such as John Clare, Roger Dean, Tony Mitchell, John Shand, John Whiteoak and others.

Chapter 3, 'Methodology, Framework and Literature Review', deals with a discussion of the methodology and framework of the thesis, situating this in the context of a literature review based on influential readings. I outline the research-led approach in a case study of The Necks, incorporating empirical evidence based on both qualitative and quantitative research. In developing the preferred methodology and approach, I researched and read extensively on the topic of free jazz and world music, beginning with a global approach, then moving to the local Sydney-based jazz scene. A process of summarising and synthesis then followed, as well as an interview phase where a significant body of primary resource-based material was collected.

I take an organic approach to situating The Necks' work within contemporary free improvised music and a world music perspective. I refer to David Borgo's book *Sync or Swarm* as a major source of influence. The way Borgo uses connections with the scientific and natural world in discussing chaos theory, swarm intelligence, network dynamics and complexity theory is used to draw parallels with The Necks' music. Judy Lochhead's article 'Joan Tower's *Wings and Breakfast Rhythms I and II*: Some Thoughts on Form and Repetition' formed the basis of some thoughts on form and repetition in regard to The Necks, and presented some useful options for situating their work in this way. Repetition and minimalism are key factors inherent in their work and I refer to Schwarz's book *Minimalists* in discussing and applying certain aspects of his work. In researching musical analysis in general, I considered the approach of the German musicologist and composer Schenker, and whilst his entire work is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I nevertheless found his account of the laws of organic coherence useful, particularly his spatial (and graphic) representation of sound – that of foreground, middle ground and background perspective of sound and placement. I draw various parallels between his ideas on sound perspective and apply these in part to The Necks' work.

A section in Chapter 3 deals with the topic of 'Repetition and Minimalism – Stuck in the Groove or Evolving the Groove?' and discusses the significance of these two concepts as defining structural and stylistic parameters of The Necks' work. Specific aspects detailing meanings and connections with the concepts of repetition and minimalism are dealt with on pp. 68-69.

Chapter 4, ‘An Acoustic Experiment’, explores The Necks’ body of work (audio output), examining the acoustic experiment research question and charting the progress of this experiment since their first album in 1989, and how it has developed over the band’s 25 years together.

I then articulate the steps involved in setting up the acoustic experiment, positing it in terms of controls and variables, discussing the constant elements evident in their work and those which are more experimental. The specific context and meaning of the word ‘experiment’ is dealt with on p. 72. In summary I use the term ‘experiment’ to mean an innovative process involving trying new approaches and deal with this on a number on levels including behavioural and musicological, both in the ‘laboratory’ (studio) and ‘field’ (live) situations. The term ‘experimental’ music has been discussed in detail by Michael Nyman, John Cage and others. The musician and writer David Cope describes experimental music as that, ‘which represents a refusal to accept the status quo’ (Cope 1997, p. 222).

The methodological framework is situated in terms of an analytical apparatus which is central to each stage in the music of The Necks. I will demonstrate using research-led practice via the chronological analysis that, whilst there are similarities with American minimalism, their work is hybrid in nature. The research-led approach has facilitated a thorough and detailed foundation on which to base the acoustic experiment and inform my own creative work. This has been necessary in order to fully understand and argue the case for an acoustic experiment.

The analysis of The Necks’ work is based on original empirical research. This case study has involved much background reading and research (books, articles, emails, reviews, listening to their CDs and radio pieces, watching television and films for which they have composed soundtracks, live performances and integrated cross-genre performance art projects such as *Life After Wartime* and *Food Court*). In addition primary resource-based material includes two lengthy interviews with Chris Abrahams, articles I have compiled for various magazines such as *Music Forum* and my own documentation based on live concert situations. The direct transcription and analysis of main musical themes in The Necks’ work is used to reinforce various stages of the acoustic experiment and has been compiled as a point of reference and a pool of material on which to draw in order to prove the general argument.

The acoustic environment impacts on The Necks' music. Live albums take on a different persona from studio albums. In the live context the group is directly linked to where they perform and are influenced by place and location, something which is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 6. In live performances an added dimension of chance and acoustics are additional parameters impacting on the overall musical outcome. The issue of acoustics is discussed further in Chapter 7, 'Listening'. The studio albums are much more constructed, with multi-tracking and the addition of other instruments adding scope for experimenting with sound. The formulaic use of silence as part of the opening performance ritual is a foil for the subsequent build-up of the musical narrative progression. It is also linked to the way tension and release is highlighted as part of their performances.

Chapter 5, '*The Boys* – Film Music', looks at an analysis of the music written for Rowan Woods' film *The Boys*. Apart from their large body of work produced as CD albums, The Necks have been involved in a number of collaborative projects involving other media such as writing music for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC's) three-part television series *In The Mind of the Architect*, Episode 1, *Keeping the Faith*, Episode 2, *The Public Good*, which I refer to in Chapter 7, 'Listening', and Episode 3 *Corrugated Dreams*. Produced in 2000, the series comprises 3 x 55 minute programs which explore the diverse world of architects and their contemporary creations. The series explains the process of architecture and the various philosophical and relational connections with people. These collaborative projects often feature a connection with visual media such as the collaboration with Ross Gibson and Kate Richards on *Life After Wartime*, a suite of multimedia artworks based on black and white crime scene photographs post World War II. I describe the process of film composition adopted by The Necks in *The Boys* and the significant connection with place – whereby they draw inspiration directly from their surroundings. The link with minimalism is discussed in a holistic and overarching sense. There were clear directions from Woods in this area – the link with repetition and minimalism (heightened by the trademark use of minimalist pitch sets) here is strong (*The Boys* liner notes 1998). Whilst a large amount of material was recorded, less than 10 minutes of music is used in the film. I also discuss the use of extending the choice of sonic material, with the inclusion of Perth-based composer and biomedical research scientist Alan Lamb's innovative 'wire

music' – recordings of power lines over seven years under different temperatures (Alan Lamb website) – forming an integral part of the soundtrack.

Chapter 6, 'Landscape Place Location – *Townsville*', focuses on the musical act of performance in relation to the whole in terms of the external world and its social constraints and cultural identities. It is here that a consideration of the individual cognitive and aesthetic improvisatory aspects of The Necks' work will be discussed. This is a complex issue, and contextualises the music from their 14th album *Townsville*. Although drawing extensively on European, North American and Asian minimalist musical influences The Necks' music is distinctly Australian in many ways. The idea of repetition that slowly changes to become something else is a feature. In dealing with the concept of linking music with external influences, I will consider the question of whether there is there a direct link with the abstract through the music itself and more concrete programmatic aspects of landscape, place and location.

Chapter 7, 'Listening', deals with this concept in a broad sense, and I refer to a number of influential writings on the subject. These include the works of David Borgo (*Sync or Swarm*, 2005), John Szwed (*Jazz 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Jazz*, 2000), Pauline Oliveros (*Deep Listening*, 2005) and Christopher Small (*Musicking – The Meaning of Performance and Listening*, 1998).

I will also discuss the difference between live acoustics and the studio environment paralleling conclusions drawn from the effect of altering the acoustic space and manipulating it into non real-time through the use of multi-tracking. Using a review of an actual Necks' concert, I describe the active listening experience directly and as part of a first-hand account of their work. Discussed also is the concept of minimalist pieces demanding a new kind of listening.

The section 'Performer and Audience' examines the cause and effect in relation to performer and audience in the context of improvisation's 'responsiveness to its environment' (Bailey 1992, p. 44). Ways of listening and the effect and impact of repetition on the listener are considered.

In the section 'Reactions and Controversy – A Pain in the Neck or the Next Best Thing?' I deal with the issue of reactions to The Necks' music. It takes the form of a

comparison between two different concert reviews, one a negative review by American jazz critic John Litweiler and the other a favourable review by *The Guardian*'s John L. Walters. I then discuss Lloyd Swanton's (The Necks' bass player's) response to the harsh criticism by Litweiler. Whilst The Necks have built up a cult following both here and overseas, their music can polarise both general listeners and music critics.

Chapter 8, 'Notes on the Creative Project *Places* CD', deals with the issues of source, impact and the creation of ten short piano pieces I composed and recorded. It documents a creative interpretation of places I have visited and captured through a suite-like set of pieces. These are inspired by places and the Australian environment and a strong visual connection with landscape, place and location links directly with Chapter 6 in the thesis. There is a parallel with The Necks' work in a programmatic sense. The significance of place is central to The Necks, with the live and pre-recorded studio settings impacting in different ways on their musical output (as discussed in Chapter 3 and 4 of the thesis). Copies of the music for each piece are included, and are more of a structural scaffold or imprint as improvisation and free interpretation are encouraged in their live performance. Some are more literal in their representation, others include either repeated fragments based on semi-improvised motifs, while others feature entire sections of improvisation. Various techniques inherent in The Necks' music have proved a source of inspiration for the creative project. The use of repetition and minimalism, tremolos, glissandi, short motifs, blues-based riffs, extremes of register of the piano and the use of the sustain pedal are examples of this. There is some use of free improvisation and percussive use of plucked notes and chords using a plectrum on the inside of the piano. There is some use of pre-recorded multi-tracked sound effects (water, traffic noise, cars, and environmental sounds), as is evident in some of the Necks' work. These are used as reinforcement and to add colour and vibrancy to the overall sound. Borrowing from world music, Tibetan finger cymbals and chimes are also used to provide contrast and ambience.

In considering the research argument in terms of my own work, I draw comparisons with some of The Necks' characteristics, and specifically make reference to one of Chris Abrahams' solo piano CDs titled *Glow* (2001), discussing both philosophical and aesthetic choices in terms of the creative journey undertaken.

I conclude that the body of work produced by the Australian free improvising group The Necks may be usefully understood as an acoustic experiment. Historically The Necks was set up using a private mode of playing, the initial experiment with improvisation continuing to evolve over their 25 years together into a long-standing collaborative project. The individual musical experiences of The Necks' members contribute to the hybrid nature of their work, as do a diverse set of musical styles and world music. I chart the trajectory of the acoustic experiment through a detailed analysis of their body of work and draw on significant readings, both on a global and local scale, in order to prove this.

CHAPTER1 BACKGROUND

Photograph by Tim Williams – The Necks website

This chapter provides background information on which to contextualise The Necks' work. This has been drawn from a diverse array of sources ranging from less formal sources such as their website (biographical information, concert reviews, album reviews and the like) to more formal discussions of their work. Little formal academic writing has been undertaken on their work to date. However, those which do exist include a chapter based on a case study of The Necks in *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now, Popular Music in Australia,* by the Melbourne academic John Whiteoak, an article by Sydney academic Tony Mitchell (in *Screening the Past* 'Minimalist menace: The Necks score *The Boys*'), chapters in John Shand's book *Jazz The Australian Accent* and Sydney writer and critic John Clare's book *Bodgie Dada and the Cult of Cool*. The book by UK writer Richard Williams titled *The Blue Moment* also proved a valuable resource. Reviews of The Necks' work and various articles by the UK *Guardian* critic John Walters, an avid supporter, have provided a global context for considering their work. I have also included primary resources in the form of interviews conducted in conjunction with Tony Mitchell with Chris Abrahams. This material comprises both unpublished and published articles. Specific details are listed in the Bibliography.

The Necks have been described both in the studio and in live contexts as 'an acoustic experiment' (Smith 2007, p. 25). The band is one of Australia's leading improvising trios. The Necks are Chris Abrahams (piano), Lloyd Swanton (bass) and Tony Buck (drums). Their prolific output (collectively they have played on over 200 recordings) and fusion of jazz, ambient and world influences has established a cult following both here and overseas. The Necks' live music is totally improvised. They arrive onstage, use a brief moment of reflection in order to focus, start playing whereby one instrument states an initial idea and the others follow developing a spontaneous response. An hour later they have created their collaborative, intuitive abstract magic as a result of the interactive/reactive process. They have recorded sixteen albums, composed music for film and television and worked on various live, installation-based projects such as *Life After Wartime*, films and improvised accompaniment to the play *Food Court*.

Chris Abrahams came up with the name 'The Necks':

> It was just one of those things that came to me at a moment in time. 'The Benders' [previous band Chris was in] made an album called *E* before there was any kind of ecstasy thing and largely we liked it because it was such a functional, modest sort of letter. And similarly with The Necks. It's one of the more functional parts of the human body. It's quite modest. And it's something that in some ways lacks a kind of identity. It's between the head and the shoulders (Abrahams in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 11).

The Necks began in 1986 as a collaborative personal project between the three musicians. When the band formed they were adamant they weren't going to play in public. Rather, the experience was more an outlet from other projects they worked on as individuals:

> It was more like therapy for all the other things we were doing. But I guess we found a foolproof way of generating music and just thought we should try putting this in front of people. This way of playing was there from the start and we haven't changed it. We are constantly finding new things: ideas about time, about structure, about the sonic possibilities of the instruments we play. All these things come from a simple approach into which we can plug many different genres of music (Abrahams in Walters 2004, p. 4).

This is the strength of The Necks. They have created a method of performing that transcends style while retaining meaning and an uncompromising individuality in the process. Individually each member of The Necks brings a wide diversity of experience from other contexts into the group ranging from fairly conventional rock music to wild avant-garde.

The Necks' approach to playing jazz, rehearsing and recording is distinctive. They do not rehearse and they play together for comparatively short periods during the year. Also significant is the 'unique ensemble syntax and sound' (Whiteoak 2004, p. 5) where musicians work together over a period of time, develop a certain rapport and musical style and are able to anticipate each other's reactions.

The band has never spoken about what they want to do beyond an overview in terms of what they want to achieve in the future musically. Chris Abrahams (in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 4) explains:

> We're very much of this level. When we talk about music I think we tend to talk about it definitely in terms of what we've done or performed and what the piece did and if we really liked it we talk about it – in terms of it was very interesting when this happened etcetera. But in terms of achievement-based, goal-based we never have.

The collaborative, egalitarian approach to performance is summed up by Abrahams in the following way: 'There's a certain trust that has to be there. The fact that we don't rehearse what we play – if I didn't feel comfortable with the other two musicians I wouldn't want to do that' (Galbraith & Mitchell 2007, p. 27). Each of The Necks shares an equal partnership in the creative process and direction of the band:

> And I think also that everyone gets a third. There's a bit of a fight over who gets the 34%! We try and divvy that up – share it around. But everything is totally owned by us. Not like there's a songwriter, composer ... it's all there (Galbraith 2007, p. 15).

The notion of collective improvisation, a technique used in Dixieland bands from the early 20th century, has been revisited, reformatted and reworked to incorporate traditional jazz concepts in a contemporary setting. This is not an invention of the new, but in keeping with one of the most significant and valued aspects of improvisatory music, more a clever recycling and re-contextualisation of the known:

‘artistically varied repetition’ (Whiteoak 2004, p. 5), a term used in relation to contemporary art music such as the serial music of Schoenberg, Webern, Stockhausen and Babbitt.

Chris Abrahams

Chris Abrahams was born in Oamaru, New Zealand in 1961. A chance encounter with a borrowed piano led to the commencement of formal piano lessons at the age of eleven:

> The reason why there was a piano was friends of my parents were going overseas and they had an upright piano and they wanted to store it somewhere and we got it. And so probably due to my mother it ended up in my room. I do have a sister and she had lessons as well but she gave up after a couple of years. And it was probably because the piano was in my bedroom which I feel quite unfair about! She’s a successful librarian and perfectly happy not to be a jazz musician! (Galbraith 2007, p. 15)

His early influences include jazz greats such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington, and boogie woogie and stride piano greats such as Meade ‘Lux’ Lewis, Jimmy Yancey and Fats Waller. Bands such as Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and Frank Zappa’s The Mothers of Invention formed the basis of rock influences. Abrahams then went on to discover Miles Davis, Charles Mingus and pianists such as Thelonious Monk, Cecil Taylor and Mal Waldron. From the late 1970s Abrahams was ensconced in the live jazz scene in Sydney, listening to the likes of Judy Bailey, Roger Frampton, Phil Treloar, Bernie McGann and Joe Lane. Visiting international artists such as Abdullah Ibrahim and the Art Ensemble of Chicago and concerts at The Basement also left an impression.

Abrahams has built up an enviable solo career working with some of Australia’s finest rock bands. Whilst a student at the New South Wales (NSW) State Conservatorium of Music in 1982 he formed the ‘60s modern jazz outfit The Benders with Lloyd Swanton, Dale Barlow and Andrew Gander. The band released three albums – *E*, *False Laughter* and *Distance*. He never finished the course and describes himself as ‘not the best student’. It was performing live which formed the basis of his early formative learning environment. In 1985 he became a founding member of dance pop indie group The Sparklers with Melanie Oxley. This led to Chris collaborating with Melanie, writing songs and producing albums, throughout

the nineties. There are five releases with her: *Resisting Calm* (1990), *Welcome to Violet* (1992), *Coal* (1994), *Jerusalem Bay* (1998) and *Blood Oranges* (2003). In 1993 he expanded his rock credentials to include an overseas tour with Midnight Oil. He also worked with bands such as The Laughing Clowns, The Church and The Whitlams. He has worked with a number of leading Sydney jazz musicians such as Mark Simmonds and explored blues and funk with the legendary Jackie Orszaczky.

Abrahams released his first solo album *Piano* in 1984 and another album *Walk* in 1986. A third solo piano album *Glow* was released in 2001. This was followed by *Streaming* (2003) and *Thrown* (2004). *Play Scar* (2010) is an experimental electro-acoustic landscape which demonstrates the full scope of Abrahams' work as a musician and composer. It features an eclectic collection of keyboard instruments and electronics as its tonal palette, including Hammond organ, piano, church organ and electric guitar.

Chris has collaborated, in both recording and performance, with many contemporary improvising musicians including Burkhard Beins (a composer and percussionist from Berlin specialising in European free music), UK guitarist Mike Cooper and Anthony Pateras (a pianist and composer from Melbourne whose 'work is unified by the simultaneous investigation of the formalised, intuitive, electronic and acoustic' – Anthony Pateras website). Abrahams has been extensively involved in free improvisation, performing at Sydney festivals such as What is Music? And The Now Now. He has also been involved in projects performing and recording with extended violin improviser, writer and composer Jon Rose. *Artery* (2004) features Chris Abrahams (harpsichord, forte piano, positive organ and tuned in kernberger), Jon Rose (Vatilliotis violin and tenor violin), Clayton Thomas (contrabass and objects) and Clare Cooper (on one track playing prepared concert harp). The haunting *Stone Church* was recorded in May 2011, and features Abrahams (piano, analog synth), Kim Myhr (guitar, zither and percussion) and Jim Denley (wind instruments).

He also performs regularly in the improvising music scenes both in Australia and Europe. Abrahams has been voted best keyboardist in *Rolling Stone's Critic's Awards* several times.

Tony Buck

Buck is referred to on The Necks website as ‘one of Australia's most creative and adventurous exports, with vast experience across the globe. He has been involved in a highly diverse array of projects’.

Tony Buck was born in Sydney in 1962. As a six year-old, Buck’s parents inherited a toy drum kit and he played snare drum in marching bands at primary school. Buck’s relationship with jazz-rock fusion goes back to the age of sixteen or seventeen to membership of bands like Timeless (1979-81). He demonstrated an already remarkable understanding of the complex and fiery style of drummer Billy Cobham from The Mahavishnu Orchestra. He cites Miles Davis’s *Seven Steps to Heaven* as an early influence and at seventeen he enrolled in the Jazz Studies course at the NSW Conservatorium. Coltrane was an early influence, specifically *Interstellar Space* which Buck cites as something he had never experienced, a mystery, and he was in awe of the energy and communication. The free improvising Alex von Schlippenbach Trio from Germany also had a profound effect on Buck where he states: ‘I felt I understood nothing about how they played together like they did, but it definitely planted a seed that continues to grow’ (Shand 2009, p. 108).

Early influences included American virtuosos Tony Williams, Jack De Johnette and Billy Cobham. On the local front Phil Treloar, Louis Burdett and Alan Turnbull were inspirational. Buck claims he was lazy and did not make the most of his experience at the conservatorium. The main advantage was contact with like-minded people. Buck was such an advanced student Turnbull apparently stopped teaching him as a result. Unusually Buck plays a right-handed kit left-handed (he is more or less left-handed), possibly due to his early set-up of the kit. The advantage as a result is being able to shift from one hand to the other seamlessly, as well as accommodate additional sonic material such as temple blocks.

Buck was also a member of Great White Noise in the 1980s and worked with Sandy Evans’ Women and Children First (with violinist/violist Cleis Pearce and bassist Steve Elphick). He also worked with Dale Barlow (Wizards of Oz), Paul Grabowsky and Mark Simmonds. In 1991 he moved to Japan and co-founded the Australian/Japanese experimental post punk hardcore improvised noise outfit PERIL (an improvising group with a rock/noise focus) with Otomo Yoshihide and Kato

Hideki. Not ready to return to Australia, Buck moved to Amsterdam in 1994 and immersed himself in the European improvisation scene. Buck based himself in Berlin in 1997, which remains his current home in between frequent touring, and he finds the supportive arts community inspiring.

Buck's involvement with music in a number of globally diverse locations and his base in Berlin has contributed to the universality of The Necks' work. It has also assisted in gaining various contacts for touring Europe.

He has been involved in a diverse array of musical and installation projects. Buck has also toured with visiting international artists such as Vincent Herring, Clifford Jordan and Branford Marsalis. More recently he has been involved in the development of new 'virtual' MIDI controllers at STEIM in Amsterdam. Electronics, however, have not become a part of his work with The Necks. The main acoustic objective of The Necks is the blend, interaction, interpretation and response of three acoustic-based instruments.

He also performed with the Dutch anarcho-punk band The Ex. He cites acts as diverse as Bob Marley, composer Jerry Hunt, Brian Eno, Ministry, On-U-Sound projects like African Headcharge and even Glen Campbell as having been influences (Smith 2008, p. 64). The wide-ranging set of influences on The Necks are summed up by Buck (Whiteoak in Homan & Mitchell 2008, pp. 53-4): 'We were all listening to things like dub, soul, Afrobeat, gamelan ... and the trance, and groove and minimalist elements in those musics were a big influence'.

Lloyd Swanton

Lloyd Swanton was born in Sydney in 1960. He learnt classical piano before taking up the bass. At fourteen a friend had bought an electric guitar and Swanton agreed to get a bass guitar. His early knowledge of the bass was limited to the fact it had four strings, not six.

Swanton has always been an articulate member of the improvised music scene in Australia, and his deep understanding of and relationship with music on a more philosophical level is evident in his response to John Litweiler's 2009 review of The Necks (a full copy is printed in Appendix A).

His first recollection of jazz is a Duke Ellington record of his father's, and he became interested in jazz-rock in the 1970s with Billy Cobham's *Spectrum* and Jeff Beck's *Blow by Blow* particular favourites. Significant influences include Monk, Davis, Coltrane, Paul Chambers, Mingus and Charlie Haden.

Apart from The Necks, Swanton has performed with many well-known Australian musicians including: The Benders, Clarion Fracture Zone, Bernie McGann, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Vince Jones, Alpha Centauri Ensemble, the Mighty Reapers, the Seymour Group, the Alister Spence Trio, Gyan and Michael Leunig, Tim Finn, Stephen Cummings, Wendy Matthews, Paul Capsis, The Dynamic Hepnotics and the Phil Slater Quartet.

He formed his band The catholics in 1991. The band incorporated simple harmonic forms as well as world music influences, both of which are integral to The Necks' musical style. Swanton makes the point that jazz is always a hybrid music, which continues to incorporate and draw on music from other cultures:

> I like to think that through The catholics' music I've presented quite a number of possibilities in which styles can be respectfully borrowed from other cultures, and stand up as vehicles for strong jazz blowing ... In Australia these days musicians and those from other disciplines have far greater contact with each other than they did when I started The catholics, and I think we've played at least a small part in that shift. Our borrowing from other musical traditions has inevitably focused on dance rhythms, as they are so much a part of the fabric of world music, and I think in this way the music of The catholics is a re-connection with jazz of an earlier era, when it was primarily dance music (Shand 2009, p. 118).

Musicians Swanton gathered up to work with in this band included James Greening, Sandy Evans, Toby Hall and Samile Sithole (replaced by Fabian Hevia), Dave Brewer and Michael Rose. At times Waldo Fabian was included in the line-up as a second bassist. The catholics have released seven albums and received three ARIA Award nominations. The album *Simple* was nominated for the German Deutsche Shallplattenkritik Award (The Necks website).

The influence of world music, and specifically Indian music, has been significant. According to Swanton: 'I've been very interested in Indian classical music (and later Bollywood) ever since (high school)' (Shand 2009, p. 114).

Swanton's attitude towards jazz can be summed up in the following:

> Jazz is not just a swing feel on a ride cymbal. It's an attitude. Jazz musicians play in a variety of situations, and often enjoy them. Why not create a music that drew from all those areas of working experience, and then have creative fun with it? (Clare 1995, p. 184)

Swanton is a three-time winner of Best Bassist in the Australian Jazz and Blues Awards and appears on over ninety albums, including several ARIA Award winners. He has produced four ARIA Award winning albums by Bernie McGann. Over eighty of his compositions or co-compositions appear on record. He has composed several film and TV scores, including *The Beat Manifesto*, winner of an Australian Guild of Screen Composers Award for Best Short Film Soundtrack in 1995 (The Necks website).

In an interview, Chris Abrahams commented on whether there is a sense of bringing all this musical baggage when The Necks play together:

> I think so. You know it might be difficult to actually pinpoint it. We've all known each other and played together. Even though the band was formed in 1986 Lloyd and I played in a group between 1980 and 1985. Tony and I grew up in the same suburb. I first played with him when I was about seventeen so we kind of have quite a large shared musical relationship (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 8).

The Necks' music is distinctive and cross-genre. Most people regard the group as jazz – possibly due to the free improvised, acoustic-based piano trio label. But there are slippages into classical and minimalism, electronica, ambient and rock – and this diversity perhaps helps drive the group's longevity. The influence of world music is evident in references to African, Indian and Latin musics. In this way there are similarities between The Necks and the UK improvised collective Joseph Holbrooke in the 1960s led by Tony Oxley (percussion), Derek Bailey (guitar) and Gavin Bryars (bass):

> Oxley provided the connection and interest in what were then contemporary jazz developments – from Bill Evans through John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy to Albert Ayler – while Bryars' interest was in contemporary composers Messiaen, Boulez, Stockhausen, Cage and their followers. This combination of interests, enthusiasms, obsessions, which of course overlapped in all directions, led logically and organically

> to a situation where the only way to pool our efforts was through a freely improvised music (Bailey 1992, p. 86).

The Necks' work is a hybrid of many musical influences and genres. Overlapping in all directions, their work contains influences of rock, ambient, minimalist, jazz, world music and Western art music. Organic in its approach, (as will be shown in Chapter 4), it explores a free approach in both creating a distinctive process and overall sound.

CHAPTER 2 GLOBAL AND LOCAL – NEW COMMUNITIES IN SOUND WORLD FUSION JAZZ AND FREE JAZZ

In order to both understand and contextualise The Necks' body of work, it is essential to situate it on both an international and local scale. Improvising music, especially jazz, has often been at the forefront of creating innovative sound and The Necks' acoustic experiment typifies this. Musicians such as Miles Davis, Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock, amongst others, experimented with electronic instruments resulting in new ways of creating tone colours and textures. The discussion and analysis of the work of The Necks is informed by world fusion jazz and free jazz. The world music influence is an important and complex one in discussing and analysing The Necks' work and impacts on a number of levels. In a literal and direct sense, the group is comprised of a globally diverse set of performers, with Buck based in Berlin therefore bringing musical baggage from this differing social and cultural environment. On another level, each member has explored a number of world music aspects and musical experiences with other musicians. World music influences can be seen through Abrahams' fascination with African American jazz, Buck's globetrotting exploits with a diverse range of Japanese, German and Dutch performers and Swanton's experience with Eastern and Indian music, as evidenced in his work with The catholics. Therefore there exists an interesting association with, and impact on, their music in both an individual and collective context.

This chapter deals with a number of significant performers who have a connectedness to and similarity with The Necks' music including American minimalists (Charlemagne Palestine, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich and Philip Glass), jazz musicians (Mal Waldron) and Australian contemporaries such as Clarion Fraction Zone (CFZ), The catholics, Wanderlust, Alister Spence, Jackie Orszaczky, Sandy Evans, Matt McMahon, Mark Simmonds, Phil Slater and Mike Nock. To include reference to every world music and free jazz performers is beyond the scope of a dissertation such as this, so I have included those I see as having the most direct link to The Necks on which to base a discussion i.e. those using world music elements in experimenting with sound.

Shifting from a global to a local point of view, I make reference to a number of relevant sources and unpack the various theories in relation to The Necks' work. European and US writers such as Jacques Attali, Derek Bailey, David Borgo, Jeremy Gilbert and Christopher Small amongst others, and Australian writers such as John Clare, Roger Dean, Tony Mitchell, Aline Scott-Maxwell, John Shand and John Whiteoak are considered.

JAZZ, IMPROVISING AND FREE JAZZ

The terms 'jazz', 'improvising' and 'free jazz' are fluid and abstract, and therefore present certain difficulties in attempting to formulate a definition. Nonetheless, in order to discuss and analyse The Necks' music, I begin with a discussion of these using as a basis a number of perspectives from leading jazz writers on both an international and local scale.

Jazz

Many definitions exist in relation to the term 'jazz' – in historical, cultural and political contexts – and I will briefly consider these as they relate to this chapter and The Necks' music. At the heart of jazz is improvisation, connected to concepts such as spontaneity and a certain random abstraction. The lack of notation and its impact versus preconceived notions of composition, has been well-documented in the work of many jazz writers, including that of Derek Bailey.

Historically, the roots of jazz lie in the West African diaspora whereby slaves were shipped to the Southern States of America in the mid-1800s:

> It is generally accepted among etymologists that the word 'jazz' is African although its exact tribal origin is unknown. It may well have come from Wolof – the language spoken by the coastal people of Senegal, Gambia and Guinea who were among those who acted as slave dealers – which is also the source of the word *hipicat,* meaning 'an aware person' ... it becomes increasingly harder to pinpoint an exact origin (Wilmer 1977, p. 22).

Whilst jazz has a certain relationship with defining The Necks' music, this is mainly due to their use of acoustic instruments, (piano, bass, drums) use of modes, use of certain rhythmic parameters such as swing beat and collective free improvisation. Jazz is only one aspect of the diverse sub-genres which make up the continuum that

is The Necks' music. In this context the definition of jazz is significant only as a contributor, not as an absolute entity in describing their work.

Improvising and improvisation

'To improvise is to join with the world, or meld with it' (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 311 in Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda, 2004 p. 118). As will be shown, The Necks both join with the world, in encapsulating many world influences, and meld with it to create a hybrid genre. The Necks' approach to improvising can be seen as encompassing a type of duality. Theirs involves the fusion of acoustic, spontaneous, reactive live performance based on free improvisation combined with the predetermined overdubbed electronic improvisation which creates another layer of aural stimulus. The subsequent impact of the addition of pre-recorded tracks, samples and sound effects on the meaning of improvisation is significant and further discussed in Chapter 4.

Chris Abrahams speaks of the difficulty in categorising and defining jazz and its relationship with The Necks' work:

> I've hopefully ceased to get really hung up on being categorised. To me it's totally human. You know if you don't have the music to play people you've got to actually try and describe it somehow. No one's ever going to describe it how it really is. I mean that's not to say the effort of describing it. Everyone can have a go at describing it but I don't mind really being categorised. Most people think of us still as a jazz band and that's the way it is. There's nothing really you can do about it (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 5).

In a socio-political context, Chernoff in his book *African Rhythm and African Sensibility* (cited in Fischlin & Heble (eds) 2004, p. 33) talks of the 'reciprocal responsibility' that marks the site of improvised performances in African music. In many ways The Necks parallel this:

> The stereotypical rhetoric used in relation to improvisational practices in jazz typically fails to address the sustained paradox of how expressive freedoms operate within set structures. Further, that same rhetoric largely disregards how the structure-freedom paradox, in fact, comments on issues of community formation and organisation that are consistently present in (and invoked by) improvised music.

Chernoff's point is reiterated in the context of the history of Australian improvisation described by John Whiteoak. Whiteoak (cited in Fischlin & Heble (eds) 2004, p. 33) argues: 'While improvisation is influenced by social context, it is also social gesture'.

The Necks' seek out new communities of sound using the influences of experimental art music, minimalism, jazz, improvised music in general, rock music, electronic music and world music as a basis.

Chris Abrahams outlines The Necks' connection with historical traditions of contemporary music stating that given certain parameters the history and evolution of modern music has influenced them. 'We sound improvised in the way most people would think improvised music sounds like. I don't think we're necessarily like improvisation in the European sense – in that way/genre' (Galbraith & Mitchell 2007, p. 5).

Bailey (1992, p. 107) cites some of the problems arising when attempting to define terms such as freely improvised music by claiming that 'a written description – any description – is, inevitably, a distortion, ossifying and delineating a process which was fluid and amorphous – and almost always empirical'. Nonetheless, without definition, analysis, too, remains difficult to undertake. There are many definitions put forward regarding improvisation and I will now discuss some of these in the light of how The Necks' music relates to them.

One of the most recognised is that put forward in *The Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* 5th Edition (*Grove V*) (ed. E. Blom) which defines improvisation as 'The art of thinking and performing simultaneously' (1954). In *The Other Side of Nowhere* (Fischlin & Heble (eds) 2004, p. 29) reference is made to Christopher Small's term 'musicking,' 'to accent the performative dimension of improvising: Small's point, indeed, is that music is not simply a thing, but rather an activity.' In the case of The Necks the performative dimension of improvising is collaborative.

In his chapter 'Improvisation and Popular Music' pp. 37-60 in *Sounds of Then, Sounds of Now, Popular Music in Australia* (Homan & Mitchell 2008), John Whiteoak prefers to use the term 'improvisatory practice' in a similar way. He makes the point that the definition of the process and term 'improvisation' needs

further clarification. He takes the view of general improvisatory music as opposed to a focused/loci/position solely in relation to jazz. Whiteoak suggests that the term 'improvisatory music' is more valuable as it encapsulates more fully the process of improvisation – the improvisatory act so to speak as opposed to simply the term 'improvisation' (Whiteoak cited in Homan & Mitchell 2008, p. 38).

Whiteoak's chapter begins with a quote from Derek Bailey's *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*: 'Improvisation enjoys the curious distinction of being both the most widely practiced of all musical activities and the least acknowledged and understood' (Bailey cited in Whiteoak in Homan & Mitchell 2008, p. 37). Whiteoak then raises the issue of problems arising in defining improvisation partly because it takes the rigid form of a noun and therefore begs a rigid definition. He also refers to Roger Dean's book *Creative Improvisation* quoting 'improvisation in music is the simultaneous conception and production of sound in performance' (Dean cited in Whiteoak in Homan & Mitchell (eds) 2008, p. 38). Dean's approach refers to 'spontaneous invention' and is aligned with the way The Necks improvise in a free, contemporary setting by repeating and then developing a number of single ideas.

Although there are valid connections between all of these views, both Dean and Whiteoak seem closest in describing the relationship between The Necks' approach to improvisation – Whiteoak's hypothesis of 'improvisatory practice' being a particularly applicable one. The Necks do not take a given theme *per se* and then develop it, but rather create individual lines/strands of improvisations which typically unravel in a linear rather than vertical manner.

Deleuze and Guattari write about the synonymity between 'music' and 'composition'. They speak about the process of music via composition. In this thesis I am not concerned with the connection between improvisation and composition, more about the method pertaining to the improvisatory practice as a performative process. Gilbert in *Deleuze and Music* (Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda 2004, p. 121) states: "Clearly, 'improvisation' – real-time composition-in-performance – is a practice which upsets the institutional hierarchy tension in music creation between the privilege of composition over performance – in this case improvisation i.e. music is something done by composers".

Free jazz

Historically the Free movement – from the late 1950s and '60s – is spearheaded by Ornette Coleman, Sun Ra, Cecil Taylor, John Coltrane and Albert Ayler. In his book *Sync or Swarm Improvising Music in a Complex Age* Borgo makes the statement that:

> The freer forms of improvisation lie perhaps closest to the ideal of a self-organising system. Their bottom-up style emphasises possibilities for adaptation and emergence; it accentuates creativity-in-time and the dynamics of internal change. The structures of improvisation can also continue to be extended in boundless ways (although the system may be circumscribed, at least in part, by the abilities, materials, and experiences of those who are participating) (Borgo 2005, p. 127).

Borgo makes a number of fascinating parallels and connections between hierarchical forms of 'swarm' intelligence in nature and this relationship with The Necks' work will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Similarly, rhizomatic is also a term with organic connections which can be applied to The Necks' work. In *Deleuze and Music* Jeremy Gilbert compares improvisation with hearing 'rhizomes':

> The (image of the) rhizome – meaning a network of stems, like grass or ferns, that are laterally connected, as opposed to 'hierarchical' root systems like trees – is used by Deleuze and Guattari to evoke a kind of polymorphous perversity of the body politic (Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 119).

In this way The Necks' approach to the spontaneous, free creation of music can be described as rhizomatic. The equal collaboration, the way the music is created in a linear context and the philosophical principles underlying their work are reciprocal as opposed to hierarchical – both in a literal and metaphorical sense. I refer now to John Whiteoak's take on 'free' music from his book *Playing Ad Lib: Improvisatory Music In Australia 1836-1970* (1999, p. xi) where he states: 'Free music is music free of contemporary boundaries'. I discuss The Necks' music in these terms of reference, taking into consideration both its operational concrete and fixed aspects and the more abstract philosophical variables which combine to produce The Necks' hybrid sound as an acoustic experiment. The fixed parameters include such aspects

as a set key, tonal centre, temporal aspects, defined structure and the use of conventional jazz trio acoustic instruments (piano, bass and drums).

The issue raised by Abrahams at the beginning of this chapter – 'no one is ever going to describe exactly how it is' – is also discussed by Derek Bailey in similar terms. Bailey gives an example in the way free music is categorised: as freely improvised music, variously called 'total improvisation', 'open improvisation', 'free music', or perhaps most often simply 'improvised music'. He claims these terms suffer from and enjoy the confused identity which free improvisation's resistance to labelling indicates. Freely improvised music, he states, is an activity which encompasses too many different kinds of players, too many different attitudes to music, too many different concepts of what improvisation is, even, for it all to be subsumed under one name. In this way I believe categorising The Necks' music has similar difficulties. Bailey also discusses the confusion arising which blurs the identification of free music in associating it with experimental music or with avant-garde music. Improvisers might conduct occasional experiments but very few, according to Bailey, consider their work to be experimental. Also the attitudes and precepts associated with the avant-garde have very little in common with those held by improvisers. There are innovations made, as one would expect, through improvisation, but the desire to stay ahead of the field is not common among improvisers. Bailey points to the lack of precision over its naming, which, he points out, if anything increases when we come to the thing itself:

> Diversity is its most common characteristic. Improvisation has no stylistic or idiomatic commitment. It has no prescribed idiomatic sound. The characteristics of freely improvised music are established only by the sonic-musical identity of the persons playing it (Bailey 1992, p. 83).

Whilst in part agreeing with these findings, I see The Necks' music as freely improvised but also innovative and, even though not always consciously so, experimental.

The relationship between known and unknown has always been a paradox in discussing jazz and improvisation. On the one hand, in order to recognise the art form that is jazz, one must view certain defining aspects to do with rhythm, pitch, expressiveness, instrumental combinations and structure i.e. the known. In this way

certain permutations of these variables combine to produce jazz. However for a piece to be classified as jazz the most obvious relationship is with improvisation – the unknown. It is the combination of these two opposing forces which identify a jazz performance as 'improvisatory practice'. Steve Lacy (Bailey 1992, p. 57) sums up the significance of forward thinking change and bridging the gap between known and unknown in *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music*. He speaks of being 'on the edge' – in between the known and the unknown – and having to keep pushing towards the unknown otherwise you die. He cites the example of changes which occurred in the '60s coming as a result of '50s jazz no longer being 'on the edge'.

There was, he argues, no mystery anymore and he refers to hard bop as mechanical – some form of gymnastics where well-known clichés and patterns were simply regurgitated and everyone was playing them.

In the chapter titled 'Improvised Music after 1950 Afrological and Eurological Perspectives' by George Lewis in *The Other Side of Nowhere: Jazz, Improvisation and Communities in Dialogue'*, Lewis gives an example of 'freedom music' by the drummer Elvin Jones:

> There's no such thing as freedom without some kind of control, at least self-control or self-discipline ... Coltrane did a lot of experimenting in that direction ... even though it gave an impression of freedom, it was basically a well thought out and highly disciplined piece of work (Lewis in Fischlin & Heble (eds) 2004, p. 153).

The bassist Ron Carter, on the same subject, maintains that 'you can play as free as you want, only you should have some kind of background to relate to this freedom. Otherwise you're putting yourself in a corner' (Lewis in Fischlin & Heble (eds) 2004, p. 154). As will be discussed further in Chapter 4, The Necks, whilst creating spontaneous performance whereby not only each piece is individual, also the relationship between its process and the term 'free' is individual. In line with discussion regarding free and its limitations (parameters), The Necks' improvisatory process involves freedom but is not always free. Albums which contain multi-tracked material mean that totally free improvisation is not achievable due to the fact that the known will always exist. The term 'free' in relation to this thesis is tempered by the unique double narrative aspect of their work – an improvised, linear aural

journey combined with other overdubbed electronic elements. The improvisation on a macro level is achieved through the choice of instruments and the placement of added sounds, which carry with them their own meaning.

Thus for the purposes of this thesis and discussion of The Necks' work, the term 'free' is extended to refer to not only the individual initial improvised-based recording experience of The Necks in either a live or studio context, but also the way the additional sound links with and overlaps the original sound base. Albums such as *Drive By* contain extensive overlaying of a number of overdubs which affect the temporal and philosophical aspects of the term 'free'.

In this way, the unknown must come out of the known. Chris Abrahams gives his slant on the known/unknown paradigm in the following:

> I think at the moment part of my philosophy about what I like to do in improvised music is I don't really trust my own primary judgment. I think I'm kind of, as an artist, slightly prone to a sort of sentimentality which I don't particularly like. And I find when I like to play I don't really want to know what I want to play and yet I want to play it. I want there to be a human element and don't want it to be totally aleatoric. I want there to be some kind of decision-making process but I'm going to go and complicate that in that there's some kind of juncture – gap – between my practice and my performance and what comes out of the instrument (Abrahams in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 6).

Paul Berliner's massive study of jazz thinking practices discusses the relationship between composer, performer, audience, music text and venue and compares the significant differences between classical 'art' music and jazz. He refers to ordered (and pre-ordered) aspects to do with the relationship between these forces in both art music and jazz, making reference to the improvisatory aspects of the latter in terms of 'degrees of unruliness'.

World music [1 See Glossary] and jazz

The Australian saxophonist Sandy Evans describes jazz as 'the first world music' (Clare 1995, p. 187). Its origins have their beginnings in the fusion of African roots with Americanism and music from other cultures which led to an expansion in both geographical as well as musical terms. West African mixed with Louisiana-based

French-speaking Creoles and Spanish influences in New Orleans in the early 1900s led to the creation of world music fusion.

Aline Scott-Maxwell makes the valid point that:

> In Australia, as elsewhere, the term 'world music' defies easy definition. The field of musical styles and genres to which it applies seems both too vast and too amorphous for it to be useful as a label or analytical category. Yet it is precisely the term's ability to embrace almost any (though not all) music that accounts for its widespread and eclectic use (Scott-Maxwell in Mitchell & Homan 2008, p. 73).

Scott-Maxwell goes on to provide an extensive and diverse list of examples ranging from African popular music, to a Chinese erhu player busking, to more hybrid conglomerations of a mix of ethnic styles. She posits the idea that the term 'world music' has come to be used in two broadly different ways. The first of these is by ethnomusicologists and music educators who, in a broad sense, use it to 'signify the music of all the world's nations and cultures, except, generally speaking, classical and mass-mediated popular music of our own Western culture' (Scott-Maxwell in Homan & Mitchell 2008, p. 74). The second of these refers to the popular music domain, and especially the music industry, whereby:

> Music that – from a musical perspective – is hybridised in that it combines elements of traditional music, especially lyrics in the vernacular, melodic and rhythmic materials and instruments, with elements of, usually, Western popular music, such as electric guitars, harmonics or popular song form. Much of this music is strongly rhythmic, hence the alternative term world beat (Scott-Maxwell in Homan & Mitchell 2008, p. 73).

World music, by definition, implies an international trend, and by world music I mean music which has been shaped universally by global influences, which takes into account the traditional, social and culturally specific music of a particular country. Originally intended as ethnic-specific music, globalisation has expanded the term world music to include hybrid sub-genres including world beat, world fusion and global fusion.

Robert E. Brown, an ethnomusicologist, is credited with the term 'world music' in the early 1960s. He developed various academic programs at Wesleyan University in

Connecticut whereby he invited a number of visiting performers from Asia and Africa and began a concert series of world music (Williams J, 2005). By the early 1970s The Art Ensemble of Chicago had begun using the term 'world music' (Clare 1995, p. 115). The music industry (in the UK, France, North America, Japan and Australia) took it on board in the 1980s using it to classify any form of non-Western music i.e. music which has previously included 'traditional', 'ethnic' or 'roots' music, particularly music from Africa, South America and Asia. It is a term with indeterminate boundaries – 'somebody else's music'.

Philip Bohlman (cited in Tenzer (ed.) 2006, p. 18) defines world music as:

> Something unpredictable and fundamentally shaped by encounter and creative misunderstanding between people making music at cultural interstices, a formulation that admits a Self/Other distinction rather than an East/West one, and extends to what is conventionally called Western New Music.

'I want to live the whole world of music,' the American composer Henry Cowell (1895-1965) famously remarked (Tenzer (ed.) 2006, p. 19). In pursuit of this, Clare cites the example of Cecil Taylor performing in Brisbane in 1993 and expressing great enthusiasm for the Australian musicians he heard (he stayed up all night listening to them play and talking to them). Taylor declared that jazz was no longer a black American form, or even an American form, but a world music (Clare 1995, p. 194).

In his book *Jazz The Australian Accent*, John Shand begins with a reference to jazz and its connectedness to world music: 'Jazz is now a globalised mesh of threads, with many countries concurrently enriching its tapestry with their unique local perspectives' (Shand 2009, p. ix). He also makes reference to post-bebop jazz developments being freely adaptable as a result of geographical diversity of performers. The subsequent impact on Australian jazz is significant. In discussing a number of Australian contemporary jazz musicians, Shand posits the question of whether or not there is an identifiable Australian jazz, or whether there is jazz made in Australia, and ultimately whether or not the distinction matters. He alludes to the difficulties associated with attempting to describe jazz which is typically Australian, mainly due to the abstract and fluid nature of the subject matter. He does, however, make reference to this country producing a number of 'extremely original

practitioners who have pursued their own nuances and developments in the music' (Shand 2009, p. 1).

Shand also makes the point that Australia has become a 'creative centre of jazz, rivalling the Scandinavian and Western European countries that have steadily diluted New York's pre-eminence over the last three decades' (Shand 2009, p. 2), despite Australia's hostile environment on a number of levels. The idea of geographical isolation (a link with this and The Necks' work is discussed in Chapter 6, 'Landscape Place Location – *Townsville*',) is significant, in that during the post-war years US records were scarce, with Australians adapting to this by evolving their own styles, some of which were highly original. Mike Nock (Shand 2009, p. 2) states: 'These people aren't trying to wave the national flag. They're just doing what they're doing, as a result of the environment. You might look at The Necks, or The catholics. They don't exist anywhere else.' Nock also goes on to say: 'This is a generalisation, but Australians tend to be fairly outgoing. It's a big country, it's a sunny country, and the music tends to be a bit like this'.

The very nature of isolation has meant that there has been a reduction in the number of Australian musicians who conform to, adhere to and imitate American models. A fusion of styles occurred, particularly in post-1960s jazz resulting in some highly original performers and bands emerging. The significance of freedom of exploration developing into a style and individual musical language has been part of the development of jazz groups in Australia during this time. Jazz is constantly evolving, absorbing external influences and expanding its horizons geographically.

Shand also makes the valid point that 'global jazz is a reality of which Australia is a part, and its validity requires no US imprimatur' (Shand 2009, p. 8). Australians embraced jazz emerging from the US at the beginning of the last century. An original voice began to emanate from musicians such as Graeme Bell and others in the late 1940s and '50s. The saxophonist Brian Brown has spoken extensively about the need for jazz musicians to seek their own expression, rather than play a role i.e. as saxophone player, trumpet player, or whatever. He is a strong believer that Australian musicians should 'strike out toward a form of expression that reflected their own environment, rather than striving toward American ideals' (Clare 1995, pp. 147-148). In fact the 1970s saw Australian jazz musicians beginning to develop

their own national identity, and one where they began to develop their own voice, not so much in terms of absorbing American idolatry and idioms but through exposure to a plethora of musical genres, including rock, world music, minimalist music, electronic and other types. Modern network technologies enable us to connect to the farthest reaches of the earth in an instant. Increased accessibility to recorded music and other musical styles, the impact of technology on recorded sound, the internet and high speed travel (bringing the outside world closer) has led to an environment in which musicians can easily absorb aspects of these musics into a fusion or hybrid form. This has continued to escalate through the 1980s and beyond. The Necks are one such group who epitomise the globalisation and fusion of a variety of musical styles.

"Jazz is no longer something that happens 'over there,' but something that surrounds them (within the constraints of performance opportunities)" (Shand 2009, p. 10). This has led to a certain freedom for performers to choose their own take on jazz, through an expanded opportunity in terms of listening, watching, reading about, being inspired, composing, performing and recording. In this way, a metamorphosis has taken place in the way the mainstream Afro-American jazz tradition has been globalised and Australian jazz performers have individualised their slant on its original intent.

World music and free improvising music

In his book *Sync or Swarm*, David Borgo argues that group creativity goes beyond the simplistic reductive realm of individual psychological processes, and explores a more systematic, network oriented approach. He claims that, until recently, the dominant scholarly approach to the nature of creativity in the arts and science has been that:

> Creativity is primarily an individual psychological process, and that the best way to investigate it is through thoughts, emotions, and motivations of those individuals who are already thought to be gifted or innovative. In the past several decades, however, researchers have begun to focus more attention on the historical and social factors that shape and define creativity, and on its role in everyday activities and learning situations (Borgo 2005, p. 183).

According to Borgo, this coincides with a with a more globalised and changing musical direction led by an eclectic group of contemporary jazz and classical musicians, and increasingly in other genres such as electronic, popular and world music traditions. In a free jazz approach, a panoply of musical styles and traditions are combined and 'at times seem unencumbered by any overt idiomatic constraints' (Borgo 2005, p. 3). He speaks of the devaluing of two of music's dominant signifiers as a result – quantised pitch and metered durations, or rather the distillation of these in favour of morphing these into micro-subtle timbral and temporal modifications – therefore augmenting the improvising, collective, spontaneous creativity in performance. As will be shown in the analysis-based discussion in Chapter 4, The Necks have explored this in their work. As part of the acoustic experiment, a number of performance techniques based on subtle microtones, polyrhythms, asynchronous aspects of rhythm and subtle nuances in timbre are evident.

Organic music

John Clare writes of the jazz avant-garde having a number of overlapping aims. His socio-political commentary in *Bodgie Dada and the Cult of Cool* (1995, p. 115) refers firstly to 'the remarriage of the jazz and rhythm and blues elements of Afro-American music'. He cites the connection that some black players felt between the isolation of jazz from the general stream of funk, soul and Afro-Latin music and the cause 'by white jazz purists with a bourgeois and possibly racist agenda'. There are echoes in a political sense of earlier back-to-Africa movements as well as the seeds of what became known as 'world music'. Clare makes the point that:

> In the 1960s, Ornette Coleman's partner Don Cherry began his world travels and coined the term 'organic music' for the syntheses he felt were emerging. A good deal of 'world music' had already begun in the jazz avant-garde of Europe, and of course Western pop music was beginning to have an effect on the music of non-Western countries. To his idiosyncratic pocket trumpet-playing, Cherry added effects on flute and various percussions, and exotic vocalisations (Clare 1995, p. 115).

Music fusion and new music

Aline Scott-Maxwell discusses fusion in the following:

> The term ‘fusion’, which is used widely in relation to hybridised world music, encompasses a continuum of musical practices and processes ranging from integration of contrasting musical systems or structures to the incorporation of single elements, such as a musical instrument or a scale (Homan & Mitchell 2008, p. 75).

Tenzer speaks of music fusion being ‘inexorable and something of an advance guard for actual genetic fusion’ and that ‘it is music’s nature to fuse, recombine, and proliferate like genes’ (Tenzer 2006, p. 17). There are parallels here with Borgo’s work, in relating the hierarchical aspects of music in scientific, organic terms, drawing on nature to link with the world of music. Tenzer also makes the point that ‘musicians and composers, witting or unwitting, acting independently or constrained by beliefs and institutions, are the matchmakers in these reproductive sonic trysts’ (Tenzer 2006, p. 17). This leads to music fusion, such as Cuban rumba, whereby ‘no human intolerance nor any reservations about propriety stopped Spanish melodies from eloping with West African rhythms to form rumba in racist, socially segregated, late-nineteenth-century Havana’ (Tenzer 2006, p. 17).

Tenzer refers to temporal aspects affecting the historical developments in fusion – comparing rumba’s courtship as centuries long as opposed to the more recent rapid pace of change of creating hybrid or fusion music today. In a colourful analogy, he compares the lengthy courtship of rumba with contemporary music fusions, which, he states are ‘often like quick and casual arrangements, mail order bride services, or Las Vegas honeymoons, any of which may or may not work out in the end’. Whilst this may be true of some contemporary transient music, The Necks have managed to overcome the problems mentioned by Tenzer. A 25 year acoustic experiment has yielded solid results, producing a large body of substantial evidence.

World fusion

As the term ‘world fusion’ implies, a blending, combining or mixing together of a melting pot of multicultural music and other genres such as electronic, jazz and rock leads to the emergence of this hybrid style.

As a result, there are increasing numbers of possibilities musically which combine to produce world fusion. There is some synonymy between world fusion, global fusion and world beat, and, as a sub-genre of popular music, imply universality in the more

general term ‘world music’. A number of sub-genres exist, too, in the world fusion category. The proliferation of jazz fusion was prevalent throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s, predominantly a blend of jazz and rock genres. The jazz-rock movement featured a number of key players who also explored aspects of world music. According to Shand:

> The jazz-rock movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, [was] spearheaded by Miles Davis, Weather Report, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Mike Nock and John McLaughlin – Soft Machine and others were already hard at work in Britain (Shand 2009, p. 6).

Other recent interesting world fusion creations can be seen in the work of the Indian-Canadian music producer Vikas Kohli with his hybrid of Bollywood and Canadian music (Vikas Kohli 2009). Ironically, in terms of an evolution of world fusion jazz, as John Shand (2009, p. 6) outlines, South Africa was one of the first countries to find its own voice, the traditional music of the Xhosa people proving a neat fit with jazz. Other musicians such as pianist, composer, flautist, saxophonist and cellist Abdullah Ibrahim (né Dollar Brand) left South Africa in the early 1960s to forge a career. ‘Similarly the Blue Notes – Chris McGregor, Dudu Pukwanna, Mongezi Feza, Nikele Moyake, Johnny Dyani and Louis Moholo – left South Africa in 1965, and exploded on the London scene the following year’ (Shand 2009, p. 7). In Norway, jazz developed a distinctly Nordic sound. ‘This was not a matter of nationalism or consciously seeking a different approach, so much as drawing on classical and folkloric elements, and expressing the language of jazz’ (Shand 2009, p. 7).

There are distinct parallels with cultural diversity in the hybrid nature of The Necks’ work. There is a significant interaction with different cultures and experiences in the context of fusion music and its connection with world music influences.

Global Performers – Connections with American minimalists and the avant-garde

I now turn my attention to a discussion of overseas performers who share a link and similarity with The Necks’ work. The influence of some early pioneers in jazz, such as John Coltrane and Miles Davis, has been acknowledged by Abrahams, Buck and

Swanton in direct terms as an inspiration for their own work. The Necks also parallel the ‘working with other groups as well as their own’ scenario as evidenced in the connection between Coltrane and Davis (Coltrane began playing tenor saxophone regularly with Miles Davis in 1955) and in the exploration of world music (for example Miles’s *Sketches of Spain* in 1959 and Coltrane’s experiments with Indian music).

Charlemagne Palestine – the avant garde

Charles Martin (Chaim Moshe Tzadik Palestine b. Brooklyn, NY, 1945, or 1947) is an American minimalist composer, performer and visual artist. Palestine is one of the great theatrical improvising performers whose work is characterised by a minimalist approach, unconventional and inventive sound sources and frequent use of place as an inspiration for his works. A contemporary of Philip Glass, Terry Riley, and Steve Reich, Palestine's compositions continued to be characterised by intense, ritualistic music and what he calls a challenge to Western audiences' expectations of what is beautiful and meaningful in music. Originally trained as a cantor, Palestine always performed his own works as soloist, often singing in the counter tenor register and using long tones with kohkan shifting vowels and overtones. Always cognizant of his relationship with the performance space, he often uses the total space in which to move through or perform repeated actions such as throwing himself onto his hands.

Palestine's ritualistic style and innovative performance art is manifested in the way he generally surrounds himself (and his piano) with stuffed animals, smokes large numbers of kretek (Indonesian clove cigarettes), and drinks cognac during his performance. His use of individual and at times novelty sounds is evident in some of his work. Early works were compositions for carillon and electronic drones, and he also performs as a vocalist. He is best known for his intensely performed piano works.

Strumming Music (1974) perhaps remains his best known work and features over 45 minutes of Palestine forcefully playing two notes in rapid alternation that slowly expand into clusters. Performed on a nine-foot Bösendorfer grand piano, the sustain pedal is depressed for the entire length of the work. The music swells and leads to

the detuning of the piano, and subsequently the overtones build and the listener can hear a variety of timbres rarely produced by the piano.

La Monte Young

Generally recognised as one of the first minimalist composers, La Monte Young (b. 1935) is an American experimental composer, musician and artist. He has explored the development of drone music, and his compositions stress elements of performance art and push the boundaries of the nature and definition of the word 'music'. In 1959 he encountered the music and writings of John Cage, and subsequently explored principles of indeterminacy in his compositions. He also began to expand his sonic horizons by incorporating non-traditional sounds, noises, and actions. Young is renowned for experimenting with a variety of small pitch sets which are exploited by extreme repetition. Examples of this minimalist manifesto are seen in *Compositions 1960* characterised in part by impossibly extreme instructions such as 'draw a straight line and follow it', another 'build a fire', one requesting the performer to 'release a butterfly into the room' and another to 'push a piano through a wall'. One of his pieces *The Four Dreams of China*, is based on four pitches, which he later gave as the frequency ratios: 36-35-32-24 (G, C, +C#, D), and set limits as to which may be combined with any other. Most of his pieces after this point are based on select pitches, played continuously, and a group of long-held pitches to be improvised upon. For *The Four Dreams of China* Young began to plan the *Dream House*, a light and sound installation where musicians would live and create music 24 hours a day. Andy Warhol attended the 1962 première of the static composition by La Monte Young called *Trio for Strings* and subsequently created his famous series of static films including *Kiss*, *Eat*, and *Sleep* (for which Young was initially commissioned to provide music).

Young considers *The Well-Tuned Piano* to be his key work. The piece is based on themes and improvisations for just in-tune solo piano and performances have exceeded six hours in length. It has been documented twice, the first on a five-CD set issued by Gramavision, then a later performance on a DVD on Young's own Just Dreams label. It remains one of the defining works of American musical minimalism and is strongly influenced by mathematical composition as well as Hindustani classical music practice.

Jazz is one of Young's main influences, and, together with Indian music, an important influence on the use of improvisation in his works. Discovering Indian music in 1957 on the campus of the UCLA, the influences of Ali Akbar Khan (sarod) and Chatur Lal (tabla) are particularly significant. He discovered the tambura, which he learned to play with Pandit Pran Nath. Other world music influences include Japanese music, especially Gagaku, and Pygmy music. Western art music influences include Béla Bartók, Igor Stravinsky, Perotin, Leonin, Claude Debussy and Organum, however the biggest impact on his compositions was the serialism of Arnold Schoenberg and Anton Webern. Contemporaries such as Brian Eno were similarly influenced by Young's use of repetition in music and often acknowledge his inspiration. La Monte Young has also performed and collaborated with Terry Riley.

Terry Riley

An American composer intrinsically associated with the minimalist school of Western classical music, Terrence Mitchell Riley, (b. 1935) is a pioneer of the movement. Riley was a pioneer in experimental work at the San Francisco Tape Music Centre working with Morton Subotnick, Steve Reich, Pauline Oliveros, and Ramon Sender. His influences include both jazz and Indian classical music and he cites his most influential teacher as Pandit Pran Nath (1918–1996), a master of Indian classical voice, who also taught La Monte Young. Riley travelled extensively to India to study tabla, tambura, and voice. John Cage and the quintessential groups of John Coltrane and Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, Bill Evans, and Gil Evans are other influences, demonstrating how he merged strands of Eastern music, the Western avant-garde, and jazz.

In the 1960s Riley pioneered the famous 'All-Night Concerts', where he performed mostly improvised music from evening until sunrise, using an old organ harmonium (complete with a vacuum cleaner motor blower) and tape-delayed saxophone. After long sessions of playing and when he finally wanted a break, he played back looped saxophone fragments recorded throughout the evening.

Riley's early musical pursuits were influenced by Stockhausen, however he changed direction after first encountering La Monte Young. In 1965-66 he performed in La Monte Young's Theatre of Eternal Music. *The String Quartet* (1960) was Riley's

first work in this new style; it was followed shortly after by a string trio, in which he first employed the repetitive short phrases for which he and minimalism are now known.

His music is usually based on improvising through a series of modal figures of different lengths, such as in *In C* (1964) and the *Keyboard Studies*. The first performance of *In C* was given by Steve Reich, Jon Gibson, Pauline Oliveros, and Morton Subotnick. Its form was an innovation consisting of 53 separate modules of roughly one measure apiece, each containing a different musical pattern but each, as the title implies, in the key of C. With one performer keeping a steady pulse of Cs on the piano to keep tempo, the others follow loose guidelines in randomly performing these musical modules, with the different musical modules progressively interlocking in various ways. The *Keyboard Studies* are similarly structured, a single-performer version of the same concept.

Another of Riley's seminal works is the overdubbed electronic album *A Rainbow in Curved Air* (recorded 1967, released 1969) which inspired many later developments in electronic music. Pete Townshend's synthesiser parts on The Who's *Won't Get Fooled Again* and *Baba O'Riley* are two such works. *A Rainbow in Curved Air* also had a significant impact on the development of ambient music (2) See Glossary and progressive rock and predated the electronic jazz fusion of Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock. It also influenced the establishment of the psychedelic rock group called 'Curved Air'.

Riley performs on multiple keyboard instruments, but his principal instrument is actually the acoustic piano. In 1995 Riley recorded the solo piano *Lisbon Concert*, improvising on his own works. Riley cites a number of jazz pianists as key influences including Art Tatum, Bud Powell, and Bill Evans, illustrating the central importance of jazz to his work.

Steve Reich

Together with La Monte Young, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass, Steve Reich (b. 1936) is an American composer pioneering minimalist music. Like Riley, his innovations include using tape loops to create phasing patterns (examples are his early compositions, *It's Gonna Rain* and *Come Out)*, and the use of simple, audible

processes to explore musical compositions (e.g. *Pendulum Music* and *Four Organs*). Characterised by the use of repetitive figures, slow harmonic rhythm and canons, Reich's work has been a major influence on contemporary music in a global context. His background includes study on drums, and Reich majored in composition and studied at Julliard. In 1958–1961, Reich worked with the San Francisco Tape Music Centre along with Pauline Oliveros, Ramon Sender, Morton Subotnick, and Terry Riley. He was involved with the premiere of Riley's *In C* and suggested the use of the eighth note pulse, which is now standard in performance of the piece.

In experimenting with tape loops in the '60s, Reich composed *It's Gonna Rain* in 1965, and uses a fragment of a sermon by a black Pentecostal street-preacher known as Brother Walter about the end of the world. The experiment transfers the last three words of the fragment, 'it's gonna rain!' to multiple tape loops which gradually move out of phase with one another.

Come Out (1966) is a 13 minute work based on a scenario whereby Daniel Hamm, one of the falsely accused Harlem Six, who was critically injured by police, and uses similarly manipulated recordings of a spoken lines – 'to let the bruise's blood come out to show them' and 'come out to show them'. Reich rerecorded the fragment 'come out to show them' on two channels, (initially played in unison). Quickly slipping out of sync, the gradual discrepancy widens and becomes a reverberation. Looped continuously, the two voices divide, splitting into four, then eight, continuing until the actual words are unintelligible. The result leaves a conglomeration of sound as the focus, the listener left only with a vague reference to the rhythmic and tonal speech patterns.

Reich's 1967 work *Piano Phase* for two pianos is his first attempt at using a phasing technique from recorded tape to live performance. The work explores subtly shifting temporal gradations producing tension and release in response to the resulting cyclic synchronicity and separatism. He also used the idea of phasing in his 1972 *Clapping Music* which operates on a similar principle. It also explores the concept of 'in-phase/out-of-phase'. Other works which deal with repetition and subtle rhythmic change include *Four Organs* (1970).

Like Young and Riley, Indian music is a significant influence on his work. In 1971, Reich embarked on a five-week trip to study music in Ghana, and also studied

Balinese gamelan. From his African experience, Reich drew inspiration for his 90-minute piece *Drumming*, composed for a nine-piece percussion ensemble with female voices and piccolo.

In a connection with world music, Reich's work took on a darker character in the 1980s with the introduction of historical themes as well as themes from his Jewish heritage. *Tehillim* (1981), Hebrew for *psalms*, is the first of Reich's works to draw explicitly on his Jewish background. The work is in four parts, and is scored for an ensemble of four women's voices (one high soprano, two lyric sopranos and one alto), piccolo, flute, oboe, English horn, two clarinets, six percussion (playing small tuned tambourines without jingles, clapping, maracas, marimba, vibraphone and crotales), two electronic organs, two violins, viola, cello and double bass, with amplified voices, strings, and winds.

Reich often cites Pérotin, J.S. Bach, Debussy, Bartók, and Stravinsky as composers he admires and jazz as a major part of the formation of his musical style. Two of his early jazz influences were Ella Fitzgerald and Alfred Deller, and John Coltrane's style, Kenny Clarke and Miles Davis also had an impact, as well as his visits to Ghana.

The rock band Sonic Youth introduced one of Reich's works *Pendulum Music* (1968) to audiences in the late 1990s. The work consists of the sound of several microphones swinging over the loudspeakers to which they are attached, producing feedback as they do so.

Philip Glass

One of the most influential contemporary musicians, Philip Glass (b. 1937) is an American minimalist composer. Shunning the minimalist label, Glass prefers to describe his music in terms of repetition and structure. He, like Steve Reich, attended the Juilliard School of Music where the keyboard became his main instrument. The additive style of Indian drumming which arose from his film work with Ravi Shankar and Alla Rakha, is an important influence on his work.

In 1967 Glass attended a performance of works by Steve Reich (including the ground-breaking minimalist piece *Piano Phase*), which left a deep impression on him and he eventually formed an ensemble with fellow ex-students Steve Reich, Jon

Gibson, and others, and began performing mainly in art galleries and studio lofts of SoHo. Glass explored further the minimalist technique and additive process in composing *1+1* and *Two Pages* (1969) and *Music in Contrary Motion* and *Music in Fifths* explored aspects of the interval of a 5th (open, sparse) repetition and minimalism. Following differences of opinion with Steve Reich in 1971, Glass formed the Philip Glass Ensemble while Reich formed Steve Reich and Musicians. He began to experiment with larger ensembles and longer pieces, culminating in the epic four-hour-long *Music in Twelve Parts* (1971–1974).

Glass's music often exhibits a strong connection with landscape, with the *Piano Concerto No. 2: After Lewis and Clark* (2004), composed for the pianist Paul Barnes celebrating the pioneers' trek across North America. The second movement features a connection with world music in the duet for piano and Native American flute. Aside from composing in the Western classical tradition, his music has connection with rock, ambient music, electronic music, and world music. Early admirers of his minimalism include musicians Brian Eno and David Bowie, with whom he has collaborated. A prolific film composer, world music connections can also be seen in *Koyaanisqatsi* (1982), *Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters* (1985, and *Kundun* (1997) about the Dalai Lama (receiving his first Academy Award nomination).

Malcolm (Mal) Waldron

Malcolm Earl Waldron (b. 1925 d. 2002, New York) was an American jazz and world music pianist and composer. Originally his roots were in the hard and post-bop of New York's club scene in the 1950s, however his style evolved more into free jazz. Thelonious Monk influenced his dissonant and distinctive style of playing, and he frequently worked with Charles Mingus from 1954 to 1956 and was Billie Holiday's regular accompanist from 1957 until her death in 1959. He also worked as a producer supervising recording sessions for Prestige Records, and *Soul Eyes* became perhaps his most widely recorded jazz standard.

Waldron had a style sometimes compared to Bud Powell and Monk, and is characterised by low register, thick, bass chords, his exploration of texture and frequent repetition of a single and simple motif instead of a more traditional linear and melodic improvisation. His solo style produced more of a wall of sound than a line of melody, which was in complete contrast to other performers of the time, and

he was considered more of an avant-gardist. He also developed a starker, more percussive approach characterised by repetitive motifs and drones. Waldron also had a connection with world music and rock, collaborating in 1973 with the German avant-garde rock band Embryo.

Connections with The Necks

In discussing the work of Steve Reich, John Adams commented: 'He didn't reinvent the wheel so much as he showed us a new way to ride' (Adams J, 1997). The connection between these musicians and The Necks can be seen in their acoustic experiment exploring the hypnotic process of slowly expanding sonic horizons. A significant number of musical parallels can be seen in comparing the work of these performers and composers and The Necks.

Charlemagne Palestine and his distinctive approach to improvising using minimalist characteristics including pitch patterns such as drones and two-note motifs serves as a basis for the anchoring pattern frequently used by both Swanton on bass and Abrahams on piano. The extreme use of repetition is common to both, and the use of an array of keyboard instruments such as organ, harmonium, portative organ, synthesiser, piano and Hammond organ is a characteristic feature of Abrahams' work. Exploring overtones and new ways of creating sounds on the piano is a common technique used by Abrahams (and one which I touch on in my own creative practice), as is the extreme, continuous use of the sustain pedal to create a wash of sound.

The Necks exhibit other elements which have been mentioned in the preceding section. From my research, I have noted these are prevalent in the following ways. The first of these is temporal exploration between the minimalists and The Necks. Lengthy pieces which make extensive use of repetition and minimalist characteristics are typical, such as Palestine's legendary *Strumming Music* and Young's *The Well-Tuned Piano* extending the boundaries of structure, which in itself has implications for audiences and ways of listening. Young's six-hour marathon is a case in point. The musicians discussed here and The Necks are all university educated, and demonstrate an informed approach to music making. Like the connection between the minimalists, such as Reich and Glass who both attended the Julliard School of Music, Abrahams, Buck and Swanton were all students of the

jazz course at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music in the 1980s. They also exhibit an awareness and understanding of music in a wide context i.e. world music and the influence of music from other cultures such as India, Africa and Asia, often fusing these elements in their own individual style. Experimenting with sound, specifically in the area of electronics and techniques such as looping and phasing and voice samples, are typical. As will be shown in Chapter 4, Tony Buck proposed the idea for *Silent Night* with the aim being to explore the challenge of creating a piece which had minimal musical development but which still "held the listener's attention due to this 'narrative' of movie samples we threaded through it" (Swanton in Mitchell 2005, p. 1). Their second album *Next* also makes extensive use of sampling. Just as Reich's *Come Out* explores extreme repetition, sampling and looping of voice samples, so does Track 4 'Next'. Techniques borrowed from Western art music and some forms of world music such as augmentation and gradually expanding pitch sets are common. The influence of Western art music – for example Pérotin, J. S. Bach, Debussy, Bartók and Stravinsky – is significant, with subtle reference often being made to rhythmic, melodic and textural aspects of these composers.

Jazz is a common thread running between the minimalists and The Necks. The influence of Coltrane, Miles Davis, Ella Fitzgerald and others is also evident. The concept of improvisation and its translation into a distilled, more fusion-oriented music is apparent, as is the use of jazz instrumentation, rhythmic and melodic idioms and a free approach. There is a link with rock music and musicians also, for example Brian Eno association with the minimalists and The Necks, the latter working collaboratively with Eno on the Luminous Festival in 2009 at the Sydney Opera House.

A connection with place and landscape, a theme explored in depth in Chapter 6, can frequently be found between the musicians discussed here and serves as an inspiration for composing, also evidenced by my own creative practice.

All these musicians have been involved with film music, the ambient, looping, repetition proving an appropriate sonic accompaniment to a variety of environments, and The Necks' soundtrack to *The Boys* is discussed in Chapter 5.

I have provided here only an outline of the many connections between the minimalists and The Necks, the purpose of which is to provide a focused summary in order to base a more detailed and analytical connection in Chapter 4, contextualising it in terms of an acoustic experiment.

PERFORMERS – LOCAL – AUSTRALIAN

Australians have always been at the forefront of experimenting with new sound and ways of performing. One of the pioneers is the pianist, composer of concert, jazz, and commercial music Don Banks (1923-1980). Beginning in the mid-1960s, he composed a number of works in the Third Stream style espoused by Gunther Schuller, mixing jazz and classical (concert-music idioms), and began a series of works using electronic music materials.

In the book *Bodgie Dada and the Cult of Cool*, John Clare states that:

> Banks remained a supporter of jazz and continued to write Third Stream music, in which jazz and European classical elements were consciously combined (in 1970, when he was back in Australia on a six-week tour, Banks and artist Ostoja-Kotkowski mounted in Canberra a multi media event called Synchrophon '72, which employed the Don Burrows Quintet, a chamber ensemble and singer and a complete electronic music studio with five synthesisers) (Clare 1995, p. 7).

Clare cites John Whiteoak's article in the Autumn 1994 issue of *Sounds Australian* describing several of Banks' compositions: "'What is immediately noticeable in these tracks is the overall sophistication of Banks' arrangements,' ... 'This is particularly so in the vertical and horizontal juxtaposition of jazz ambiguity and 'straight, non-jazz characteristics'" (Clare 1995, p. 7).

By the 1970s the influence of rock music, world music and electronica could be seen in the work of Australian jazz musicians. This led to the pursuit of a type of jazz hybrid music – or world fusion jazz. I will outline some of these examples and discuss The Necks' in the context of hybrid/fusion in detail in the next chapter. Latin jazz influences can be seen in the work of Don Burrows in 'Kings Cross Mambo' from *The First Fifty Years* (1944-65 Vol. 1), *Bonfa Burrows Brazil*, (with Luis Bonfa), 1979, *Brazilian Parrot*, 1980 and *A Night in Tunisia*, 1982.

The influence of rock and popular music can be seen in Judy Bailey's work from the 1970s. Her albums *Colours* released in 1976 and reissued in 2007 and *Solo* released in 1978 both feature jazz-infused versions of the Beatles tunes 'Eleanor Rigby', 'Michelle', 'Norwegian Wood', 'Yesterday' and 'Hey Jude'.

Charlie Munro – *Eastern Horizons* – 1967 – Phillips

One of the landmark recordings of Australian jazz which falls under the umbrella of a universal world music experiment is *Eastern Horizons* by the multi-reed player and cellist Charlie Munro, recorded on Phillips in 1967. A classic, it not only blends Eastern music, but also jazz and archetypal American music played by Australians. One of the pioneering examples of Australian jazz music absorbing world music influences, it represents a version of Eastern music played by Western musicians. It features Charlie Munro: bass clarinet, soprano sax, alto sax, tenor sax, flute, cello; Bob McIvor: trombone; Neville Whitehead: bass; and Mark Bowden: drums, vibraharp, marimba, and is a compelling work where Eastern time signatures, jazz improvisations and Western classical harmonies combine. The music is sometimes modal in structure, and occasionally freer in style, and always maintains a strong melodic and rhythmic identity. The musical interaction amongst the quartet members ascribes the typical formation of frontline and rhythm section on which to base solos and flights of musical ideas. The quartet members exude equal virtuosity, with Munro equally proficient on both reeds and cello. Inevitable comparisons have been made between John Coltrane's albums *Meditations* and *Ascension* (1966), Pharoah Sanders' *Karma* (Impulse!, 1969) and Alice Coltrane's Indo-centric recordings, however apart from the fact that all of these recordings draw inspiration from Eastern music, there are very few similarities between them. Whereas Sanders and Coltrane evoke meditating in a quiet, incense-fused temple, *Eastern Horizons* is more like a sonic journey travelling through exotic locations. The track listing includes: 'Islamic Suite'; 'Arch's Groove'; 'Malahari Raga'; 'David'; 'Japanese Love Song'; 'Minimum'; 'When I Look At You' and 'Raised Eyebrows'.

Of free improvisation, Australian jazz pianist Bobby Gebert said:

> Ornette Coleman, Coltrane, Sun Ra, Archie Schepp, Albert Ayler are free in that they have the great ability to exhaust the possibilities of a musical idea. Charlie Parker is free, but as with Coltrane, at all times there is the most beautiful form. He might take

> a minor thing and using a diminished scale, play it in such a way, that it will sound free to some ears (Clare 1995, p. 131).

In the 1970s a new school of jazz-rock fusion emerged in Australia and of these bands Crossfire was the most prominent. Whilst the blues, rather than jazz, were an integral part in the development of rock, the influence of jazz (specifically avant-garde jazz) is heard in the psychedelic and underground rock movements. John Clare describes this in the following:

> Lou Reed has declared that the Velvet Underground were 'trying to do what Ornette Coleman did, on electric instruments.' The influence of John Coltrane can be clearly heard in some of Traffic – e.g. 'The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys'. The Grateful Dead declared that they were not fit to tie Coltrane's bootlaces, and when Miles Davis appeared at the Filmore, they stood 'with our jaws hanging down around our navels'. Van Morrison used jazz bassist Richard Davis and drummer Connie Kay on his masterpiece 'Astral Weeks', and his singing at that time actually showed the influence of Pharoah Sanders' rare vocals. Much space could be given to the influence of jazz on rock, and the subsequent influence of rock on jazz, but the understandable emphasis at the time was on rock's youthful freshness and novelty (Clare 1995, p. 12).

Even folk merged with jazz, whereby the traditional jazz scene overlapped to some degree with the emerging folk scene. Perhaps the best known of these artists was Paul Marks who would sing the blues with a trad band.

Clare also comments on the link between free improvisation and the independent film makers and artists who held underground concerts in Sydney in Paddington Town Hall and the Greek Community Theatre in Oxford St in the 1960s. Experimental filmmaker Albie Thoms stated:

> We had musicians like Sangster, Tully, the Id who were prepared to improvise, and what they played was affected by our lightshows – what we were screening, what we were projecting on the walls, and so on – and we were inspired by their music. We saw the light shows as an extension of jazz improvisation. Jazz was an inspiration – the idea of jazz rather than the music itself necessarily (Clare 1995, p. 122).

One of the key free improvising groups of the 1970s and '80s was undoubtedly the Jazz Co-op, formed by pianist, saxophonist and composer Roger Frampton,

drummer Phil Treloar and bassist Jack Thorncraft. By the time multi-reed player Howie Smith (University of Illinois) began teaching in the Jazz Course at Sydney Conservatorium he had become a member of the Jazz Co-op. Frampton was also a member of the free improvisation group Teletopa. Like Frampton, Phil Treloar (b. 1946, Sydney) began an exploration of free, polyrhythmic & textural music – in particular drumming inspired by American avant-gardists Sonny Murray and Rashied Ali – as well as pursuing the issues surrounding the intersection between notated music-composition and improvisation. 'Collective Autonomy' is a term coined by Treloar in 1987, to describe his endeavour in this field of work. Fundamental in this has been composition and performance-development projects, with these at times involving electronic media. Treloar continues to work on collaborations, which prove to be crucial in the evolution of his work, and his important work with many world music performers including his study in New York, with renowned jazz drummer, Billy Hart, 1980; in Delhi, India, at Gandharva Mahavidyalaya with the Khayal vocalist, Madhup Mudgalaya, 1984; and in Colombo, Sri Lanka, at the Institute of Aesthetic Studies, with Piasara Silpadipathi, 1984. Treloar's explorations in sound and world music influences are not unlike those of Tony Buck. Treloar made himself a tuned percussion tree from circular saw discs with the teeth cut off. This stood to one side of his drum kit. He also expanded timbral aspects of the kit by using a gong played with cello bow.

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN JAZZ – AN EXPERIMENT WITH SOUND

Australia has a history of players exploring new communities in producing sound. This exploration has continued with contemporary jazz musicians and bands such as Clarion Fraction Zone (CFZ), The catholics, Wanderlust, Alister Spence and others.

Clarion Fracture Zone (CFZ)

Clarion Fracture Zone was formed in 1988 by saxophonists Sandy Evans and Tony Gorman (who moved to Sydney from Scotland) and joined forces with pianist Alister Spence to form a jazz quintet. The early stages of the band featured drummer Andrew Dickeson and bassist Steve Elphick and drummers Louis Burdett and Tony Buck played with the band in 1992. After 1993 the other members were Lloyd Swanton (double bass) and Toby Hall (drums). The group was noted for its

adventurous compositions whereby practically every aspect of contemporary jazz was embraced, which included evocative melodic pieces as well as complex works of a spiritual nature.

The catholics

Lloyd Swanton formed The catholics in 1991, with a view to extending the horizons of jazz to take heed of the variety of situations and enjoy playing music that drew on a variety of musics, having creative fun with it. Their personnel includes Sandy Evans (saxophones), James Greening (trombone and pocket trumpet), Jonathan Pease (guitar), Bruce Reid (slide guitars), Hamish Stuart (drums), and Fabian Hevia (percussion). A variety of eclectic world music influences suffuse their beautifully crafted pieces, such as dance strains from African, Caribbean, Latin and Eastern influences. The hybrid nature of their work is created by combining jazz with the catchiness of pop music and infectious dance rhythms of the world. Swanton's virtuosity, imagination and inventiveness steer the course for the group to extend the parameters of jazz into a truly world music experience.

One of The catholics well-known works is *The Wheel* which implies an Indian scale, bolero-type rhythm and seeks to explore impressionist harmonies in the improvised solos.

Certain similarities emerge with The Necks' music. John Clare describes the music as:

> Harmonically simple but quite detailed in its rhythmic and instrumental changes. Swanton calls it jazz with world music influences ... In 'Australasia' a seductive 'swaying palms' effect is enlivened by across-the-beat pangs and exclamations from guitars, congas, drum kit and electric bass while saxophone, trombone and double bass glide gracefully down the centre (Clare 1995, p. 184).

Wanderlust

Epitomising the meaning of the word Wanderlust, (a strong desire for or impulse to wander or travel and explore the world – the term originates from the German words *wandern* (to hike) and *Lust* (desire)) this group was formed in 1991. Another world-influenced band, it features even greater diversity. This innovative group combines jazz improvisation with the diverse rhythms and melodies of global music – exotic

sounds – to forge a sonic journey into world music territory. Influenced by Brazilian and West African music, the members are some of the most highly regarded Australian jazz players. Led by Miroslav Bukovsky (trumpet), the original line-up comprised Bukovksy, James Greening (trombone), Carl Orr (guitar), Alister Spence (piano, keyboards), Adam Armstrong (bass) and Fabian Hevia (drums, percussion). There are similarities also between The Necks and Wanderlust in that both groups often use places as an inspiration and album titles e.g. Wanderlust's fourth album *Full Bronte* (2001) – a reference to a Sydney beachside suburb named Bronte, where the group would congregate at a local cafe, and *When in Rome* (2008), a live recording produced in Rome at the Villa Celimontana featuring Joe Tawadros guesting on oud.

Alister Spence

Alister Spence (b. 1955) is one of Australia's most innovative and creative pianists who epitomises the essence of creating an individual, distinctive style. Recently he has devoted his energy to composing and performing with his trio – The Alister Spence Trio – with Lloyd Swanton (The Necks) on double bass and Toby Hall (Mike Nock Trio) drums and glockenspiel. This celebrated group has recorded four CDs of Alister's original music: *Three is a Circle* in 2000 (released in Japan in January 2003, on the Earth Spirit Label), *Flux* in 2003, *Mercury* in 2006 and *fit* in 2009, all on Rufus Records, distributed in Australia by Universal Music. The group's fifth recording, a double CD titled *Far Flung*, was released in 2012.

Spence has toured widely and in 2009 toured in Europe and the UK, performing at the Vilnius Jazz Festival and club dates with (amongst others) Joseph Williamson (Tobias Delius Quartet) and Tony Buck (The Necks). In June 2009, Brian Eno invited the Trio to support Jon Hassell in the Luminous Festival at the Sydney Opera House. Spence co-led the internationally acclaimed group Clarion Fracture Zone and is a founding member of Wanderlust and a longstanding member The Australian Art Orchestra (AAO).

Jackie Orszaczky

Jackie Orszaczky (1948-2008) was born in Budapest Hungary. He originally studied classical piano and violin, then switched to bass guitar. Orszaczky's musical

ventures are not unlike those of The Necks due to his involvement in a variety of musical genres and with a variety of performers. He was an important rock artist by his early twenties in Hungary, influencing a generation of young musicians and commanding crowds of 30 000 people at his annual Budapest concerts. The early '70s saw him writing and experimenting with unusual instrumentation, particularly in the area of larger ensembles. He formed the jazz-fusion group Syrius and toured Australia for ten months in 1970-71, recording an album in Melbourne which was released both in Australia and Hungary. He then returned to Australia to work here with local experimental group Bakery in 1974.

He released his first solo (jazz) album *Beramiada* in 1975 and was in high demand as a performer, session bassist and arranger in a variety of musical settings ranging from pop, country, rock to jazz. The Australian 'queen of pop', Marcia Hines, head-hunted Orszaczky to work as her musical director in the mid-70s, working in the African-American soul and rhythm and blues music tradition. From this liaison he went on to create some of the most innovative soul and blues music Australia has ever heard. He orchestrated and arranged all the material for Hines' live concerts during the mid-70s to 1980 with the Marcia Hines *Live Across Australia* album selling over 200 000 copies.

Apart from his stellar career with Hines, he also searched for new ways of expression and creating sound. In the '80s he re-evaluated the position of a serious rock and jazz musician, creating experimental groups such as a trio with guitarist Peter O'Mara who is now well-established in the jazz scene in Germany and bands such as Bland Frenzy, The Alphabetics and The Astonished Boyfriends. Other groups he performed with include The Grandmasters, with partner Tina Harrod; Jump Back Jack; The Orszaczky Budget Orchestra; and the Jackie Orszaczky Band. He continued his orchestration and arranging pursuits well into the 1990s and 2000s, working with rock and pop groups The Whitlams, You Am I, Hoodoo Gurus, Tim Finn, Savage Garden, Grinspoon and Leonardo's Bride.

He was involved in a number of innovative collaborative projects such as the Gravity season of concerts, which combined his music and Jump Back Jack with the choreography and dancing of Stephen Page (b. 1965), the first choreographer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent to achieve major national and

international recognition (Sydney Dance Company), his brother Russell Page (Aboriginal Islander Dance Theatre) and Michael Hennessy (Sydney Dance Company). The next live project was Godmothers. The vision was for an organ trio (Hammond, bass, drums) with great vocal harmonies carrying the tunes. This featured vocalists Lily Dior and Monique Morrell, and drums, plus Jack's bass and vocals and built a huge following around venues in Sydney. There was a strong connection with Abrahams working extensively with The Godmothers on Hammond organ: 'Yeah – I mean I still have a Hammond and I used to play a lot with Jackie Orszaczky – that's the time I was playing a lot' (Galbraith & Mitchell, 2005).

The connection with The Necks intensified in the 90s when an enigmatic and mystifying ensemble was performing on Wednesday nights in the Round Midnight Club in Sydney. Named 'The Gray Suits' it featured Jackie on bass and vocals, Carl Orr guitar, Tony Buck on drums and Chris Abrahams on piano. The group explored the art of deconstructing jazz, pop, and easy listening, playing everything from Duane Eddy surf guitar tunes to James Brown, jazz standards and the worst of Oz Rock (Australian 'pub rock' of the 1980s), the supreme irony being that rarely have such brilliant musicians been heard to perform so woefully.

Linking world music and fusion, the Hungarian Rapsadists project saw Orszaczky exploring his Hungarian folk music roots, complete with rap-style vocals in Hungarian and the authentic tradition of the 'working men's choir'. He took this in an experimental direction by incorporating live edge-of-the seat sampling technology. Two discs have been recorded with this material: the self-titled Hungarian Rapsadists 45rpm EP and the CD, 100% (the latter released on Hungaroton only).

His foray into experimenting with instrument-making in the early 1990s saw him develop the 'piccolo' bass, a high-tuned bass guitar with light gauge bass strings pitched either at D, G, C, F or E, A, D, G. This instrument became his signature in the later years.

Sandy Evans

Sandy Evans is one of Australia's leading saxophonists and composers and a foremost exponent of improvisation and new music. A graduate of the NSW State

Conservatorium of Music's jazz studies program, Sandy has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Inaugural Bell Award For Australian Jazz Musician of The Year 2003, a Young Australian Creative Fellowship, APRA Award for Jazz Composition of the Year, two Mo Awards and three ARIA Awards and an Order of Australia (OAM) in 2010.

Her group Women and Children First, formed during the 1980s, remains one of the most innovative and original, and undertook an ambitious seven-month bus tour around the entire country. A stint in Scotland saw her perform with the saxophone quartet SAXTC, the rhythm and blues band Tam White and The Dexters.

Sandy leads a number of Sydney's innovative improvised groups including The Sandy Evans Trio, co-leads the internationally acclaimed Clarion Fracture Zone and is a member of groups including the Australian Art Orchestra, Ten Part Invention, The catholics, austraLYSIS, Kim Sanders and Friends and the saxophone quartet SNAP. Well-known for her interest in world music, she has a passion for Indian classical music as evidenced in her study of Carnatic music with Guru Mani and B.V. Balasai in Chenai in 2009. She also collaborates with Sydney-based Indian musicians Sarangan Sriranganathan and Bobby Singh on a regular basis. Sandy has also explored the music of other cultures through her collaboration with percussionist Tony Lewis and koto player Satsuki Odamura, and as co-leader of the world music trio Waratah. An example of Waratah's indigenous connection is through the 60 minute musical production Dharawal Dreaming which incorporates storytelling based on Dharawal Aboriginal creation stories and music created and performed by Waratah. It is a celebration of Australian contemporary music, indigenous music and story-telling and native flora which explores Dhawawal culture.

The album *Koto Dreaming* is a collaboration between Japanese koto player Satsuki Odamura and Australian artists such as Ross Edwards, Caroline Szeto, Anthony Briggs and Lindsay Pollak, with the trio Waratah providing the accompaniment. A collection of inventive and distinctive Australian multicultural compositions for koto, it explores non-traditional and innovative sounds and compositions for the instrument. She is also a member of the Bulgarian folk-jazz group MARA!

Other innovative projects include a 60 minute extended jazz composition *When The Sky Cries Rainbows* for The Sandy Evans trio and special guests Phil Slater trumpet, James Greening trombone and Alister Spence piano. She also performed Ross Edwards' Dawn Mantras on the roof of the Sydney Opera House during the dawn of the new millennium.

There are a number of connections with The Necks. These include working with Lloyd Swanton in The catholics, the influence of world music on their music and the connection with collaborative projects.

Matt McMahon

Matt McMahon is a Sydney-based pianist, keyboardist and composer. He began classical piano lessons when he was seven, developing a keen interest in jazz in his teens. Key influences were recordings of Miles Davis and Weather Report and live performances by such Australian greats as Mike Nock, Bernie McGann and Paul Grabowsky. He is a graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in jazz studies where he studied with Mike Nock and Roger Frampton, followed by studies in New York. After about fifteen years on the scene he released his first solo album, *Paths and Streams*. It was one of the half-dozen best releases of 2006. A second album *Ellipsis*, with his trio Jonathan Brown (bass) and Simon Barker (drums) playing mostly his pieces, was to follow.

He is the recipient of a number of awards including the National Jazz award at the 1999 Wangaratta Festival of Jazz and the Freedman Jazz Fellowship for 2005. He leads his own groups and co-leads Band of Five Names with Phil Slater and Simon Barker with whom he has recorded two albums.

Linking with the idea of the space in which the performance experience takes place being an integral part of landscape place and location (as explored in Chapter 6 and Chapter 8 the creative project), Matt has recently been involved in innovative projects such as the Cockatoo Island music residency program 'Cockatoo Calling'. Following a successful series of concerts 'Places and Spaces' in 2010, the series has evolved to allow a range of musicians to explore creative development on the island including a series of free concerts and low cost ticketed performances. On Saturday 3 March 2012 Matt McMahon, Jonathon Brown and Simon Barker, three of

Sydney's finest jazz musicians, took inspiration from the echoing warehouse space of Building 15 to perform in a two-hour concert.

Mark Simmonds

Mark Simmonds (b. 1955) was born in Christchurch, New Zealand and moved to Australia when he was ten years old. A tenor saxophonist, composer, and leader of the group The Freeboppers, he was prominent in the Australian jazz scene between the 1970s-90s. He also worked with many other groups such as soul, funk group The Dynamic Hepnotics (1985–1986), Jackie Orszaczky's Jump Back Jack, and also contemporary music groups such as Phil Treloar's Feeling to Thought, PipeLine and The Umbrellas. In addition to these, the Australian Rock database lists Simmonds as a member of Caboose, Hi-Revving Tongues, Drain, Corroboree, Chris Turner Band, Silver Studs, Keys Orchestra, Moonlight, Ol' 55, Bentley's Boogie Band, and Renee Geyer Band. Simmond's post-Coltrane saxophonist with a huge sound, he performed with his own group The Freeboppers, often alongside many of Australia's most adventurous musicians. Simmons has collaborated with some of Australia's leading jazz musicians including Chris Abrahams (piano), Tony Buck (drums) and Bobby Gebert (piano).

In 1979 Simmonds (on tenor saxophone) formed the Australian Art Ensemble with Bobby Gebert (piano) and Phil Treloar (drums). The group only performed twice but did record. In a review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), jazz writer and critic John Shand describes the experience in terms of:

> The power that exploded in that three-hour session became legendary, thanks to a widely circulated, poor-quality bootleg, in the absence of an official release. Now this recording has been meticulously remastered from a cassette dub and appears as volume two of Treloar's Of Other Narratives retrospective (Shand 2012).

Phil Slater

Phil Slater is a Sydney-based trumpeter and composer, and the leader or co-leader of several bands including the Phil Slater Quartet and Band of Five Names. He currently teaches at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music within the jazz department. He has been the recipient of numerous awards including the Music Council of Australia Freedman Fellowship in 2002, the TAC/Wangaratta Jazz

Festival National Jazz Award in 2003 and the Bell Award for Australian Jazz Musician of the Year in 2004 and Australian Contemporary Jazz Ensemble of the Year, and the Limelight Award for Outstanding Achievement in Australian Jazz.

He has performed and recorded with a diverse range of artists including Nigel Kennedy, Lou Reed, DIG, Missy Higgins, Vince Jones, Bernie McGann, Archie Roach, Pnau, David Bridie, Katie Noonan, You am I, Mike Nock, Terumasa Hino, Bobby Previte, Guru Karaikudi Mani, Bae Il Dong, The Sleepy Jackson and Jim Black.

In 2002 Phil released *Strobe Coma Virgo* – his debut recording as leader – to critical acclaim, and has released three Band of Five Names recordings. His latest recording is *The Thousands* by the Phil Slater Quartet featuring pianist Matt McMahon, with bassist Lloyd Swanton a long-term member of the group, and drummer Simon Barker.

The Australian Art Orchestra (AAO)

The AAO website reads: 'Reaching new horizons in contemporary music' and that 'one of the primary aims of the Australian Art Orchestra has been to create situations allowing for a free and open exchange of musical and dramatic ideas between different cultures and traditions'.

One such exchange is *Into the Fire*. The project is a collaboration between Guru Karaikudi Mani, one of the greatest exponents of the complexities of Carnatic music. From its inception in 1996, *Into the Fire* has been performed throughout India, Europe, Australia and Asia, sharing the experience of music, percussion and dance. The fusion of the South Indian Carnatic tradition and the Western jazz tradition explores the rhythmic intricacies and improvising practices that reside at the core of both and the work is performed both on South Indian and Western instruments.

The AAO features some of Australia's leading jazz musicians including Phil Slater, Scott Tinkler, Eugene Ball, James Greening, Adrian Sherriff, Lachlan Davidson, Sandy Evans, Elliott Dalgleish, Tony Hicks, Paul Cutlan, Erkki Veltheim, Carl Dewhurst, Stephen Magnusson, Alister Spence, Philip Rex, Niko Schauble, Simon Barker, Alex Pertout, Vanessa Tomlinson, Benjamin Wilfred, David Wilfred, Daniel Wilfred, Wesley Wilfred, John O'Donnell and Paul Grabowsky.

The AAO has produced some innovative cross-cultural exchanges. Two of these include *Crossing Roper Bar* and *Soak/The Hollow Air*.

Crossing Roper Bar

Crossing Roper Bar is a collaboration of equal exchange between knowledge through a dialogue centred on music. Established in 2005, it is a series of regular exchanges between the Young Wagilak Group from Ngukurr in Arnhem Land and the AAO.

In combining past and contemporary idioms, the project celebrates the aspects of country, ceremony and the transformative power of music in its capacity to build lasting bridges across cultures, time and space. It forms strong links with the Roper River, a magnificent waterway flowing from Mataranka, 100 kms south of Katherine, and out across the land of the Mangarayi and Yungman people. As the gathering point for outlying peoples of the Wagilak, Ngalmi, Murrungun, Nunthirrbala, Mungurra, Lalara and Wurramurra nations, who come together under the name Yugul Mangi, Ngukurr serves as an ideal place to discover Aboriginal music. The manikay (song cycles) of the Yolŋu of South East Arhnem Land represent one of the oldest musical traditions on the planet. A close association between the song men of Ngukurr and the AAO creates a contemporary rendering of these precious cultural artefacts.

Soak/The Hollow Air

Another innovative work, composed by Alister Spence, is *Soak,* a live music and film experience. It features Spence on piano and laptop, Slater on trumpet and laptop and Greg White laptop. Originally performed at the Auckland Town Hall in 2007, the Australian premiere features a collaboration curated by Slater between members of the AAO and shakuhachi player Riley Lee. The added visual component is manipulated by film artist Louise Curham in real time using multiple projectors and screens, creating an aural and visual experience which combines diverse musical genres and incorporates elements of ambient music, electronica, contemporary art music, jazz and rock. It is not unlike a Necks experience in that it is an extended work, ambient and unfolds gradually using an eclectic group of influences ranging from artists such as Arvo Pärt, Henryk Górecki, Brian Eno, Radiohead, Dust

Brothers and Miles Davis. Described on the AAO website as ‘a fluid organism that is constantly evolving through a many-layered palette of sound’, the work explores the various tonal shading and timbral nuances of the respective instruments. Technological aspects are also explored through the incorporation of sound projection and real time digital manipulation using the visual programming language MAX/MSP (3) See Glossary.

Mike Nock

New Zealand-born jazz pianist, composer and bandleader Mike Nock (b. 1940, Christchurch) is one of the acknowledged masters of jazz in Australasia. He spent his formative years in Ngaruawahia and Nelson before gravitating to Wellington to start a playing career by the time he was 16. He came from that era of self-taught players who would take any gig going just to be near a piano. Nock came to Australia from New Zealand in the late 1950s where he quickly established himself as a musician in demand in Sydney and Melbourne jazz clubs and nightclubs and as a member of the highly regarded Three-Out Trio. After his first recordings in Australia for EMI with the Three-Out Trio in 1960-61, he then went to England and worked in top London jazz establishments before taking up a scholarship to study at Berklee in the United States. Nock spent the following 25 years in the US, working with a diverse group of legendary musicians including Dionne Warwick, Coleman Hawkins, Lionel Hampton, Yusef Lateef, Michael Brecker and others, establishing his leadership credentials through many critically acclaimed recordings. During 1968-1970 he was involved with fusion, leading the electronic jazz-rock group The Fourth Way, which became widely known and influenced many American bands.

In 1983 he hosted his own series on TVNZ *Nock On Jazz* and in 1993 was the subject of a TVNZ documentary by Geoffrey Cawthorn titled *Mike Nock – A Jazz Film*. It flows between Nock’s childhood New Zealand, his career in New York and his present life in Sydney, his music forming an expressive soundtrack. From 1996 to 2001 he was music director of the label Naxos/Jazz, overseeing the production of more than 60 acclaimed jazz CDs from around the world. His biography, written by New Zealand musician, academic and writer Norman Meehan, titled *Serious Fun; The Music and Life of Mike Nock* (VUP) was published in 2010.

Although known primarily as a jazz performer and composer, Nock's music has been performed and recorded by many classical and jazz musicians such as the Cleveland Chamber Orchestra (USA), The New Zealand Piano Quartet, Dunedin Civic Orchestra (NZ), UMO Jazz Orchestra (Finland), The Australian Chamber Orchestra, Synergy, Ensemble 24 and Melbourne Windpower among many others. He has also made several international tours with his group.

Nock's prolific output includes over 30 albums. Recent CD releases include leading Australian pianist Michael Kieran-Harvey performing the piano music of Mike Nock on *In the Time of Sakura* (Move MO 3314) and *The Mothership Plays the Music of Mike Nock* (Jazzgroove JGR 030) by Sydney's Jazzgroove Orchestra. His latest release, *Hear and Know*, (December 2011), brings together Nock's trio from *An Accumulation of Subtleties* (FWM, 2010), taking advantage of the same chemistry that has been evolving since Nock first met the Waples brothers (James Waples drums and Ben Waples double bass) a decade earlier at the Sydney Conservatorium. The instrumentation is expanded to include Karl Laskowski on tenor saxophone and 20 year-old recipient of the James Morrison award 2011 Ken Allars on trumpet. There are parallels here with the music of Polish trumpeter, composer and improviser Tomasz Stanko and a '21st century reinvention of the legendary works of Gil Evans for Miles Davis's famous quintet of 1963 to 1965' (Mike Nock website).

Nock has a deep connection with landscape and place, as seen in his CD *Ondas* recorded in 1981 at Talent Studios in Oslo, Norway. It features Nock on piano and percussion, Eddie Gomez, bass and Jon Christensen, drums. The CD features landscape-inspired tracks, including 'Land of the Long White Cloud'.

He has also explored projects which combine traditional Maori music with contemporary genres. In 2003 Nock collaborated with performer Richard Nunns in a musical exchange fusing indigenous Maori musical instruments with live jazz.

Nock has been a member of the jazz faculty at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music since 1986, and is well-known for mentoring young musicians, many of whom have joined his band at some point. It would be difficult to find a jazz musician in either Australia or New Zealand who has accumulated the depth of international experience he has.

This chapter has taken an informed look at the music of a number of US and local performers whose work shares many similarities with those of The Necks. In linking this with the more detailed analysis which follows, I make reference to Michael Tenzer who makes the point that:

> We are all creatures of culture and ideology, but there is a moment in analysis at which we must curtail our penchants for modernist universalism, postmodern irony, or other language-based responses in order to confront music as elementally as possible. We submit that analysis is a path to musical awareness and better musicianship. Our purpose is to make the diverse systems of musical thought under consideration available for creative musicians looking for an informed basis on which to assimilate, model, or borrow from world musics (Tenzer 2006, p. 5).

From informed research and discussion, I conclude that The Necks can be termed 'free jazz fusionists', and are inspired by world music. Tenzer speaks of looking or moving around the world for guiding ideas, and in listening then becoming aware of our affinities. This case is further strengthened and discussed in the subsequent analysis-based chapter. I interpret and analyse The Necks' body of work in this global and holistic musical sense and in the process discern which features are relevant and which are not.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY, FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter 3 is based on a discussion of the methodology and preferred analytical models adopted, situated in terms of significant and influential readings and resources. These in turn inform the development of a framework, whereby I demonstrate in Chapter 4 how the band has evolved over the past 25 years and produced sixteen albums – twelve live and four studio albums.

Methodology

As previously mentioned, little academic writing and analysis has been undertaken on The Necks' body of work. In considering a preferred methodology and analytical framework, I researched a number of relevant publications. The first was the book titled *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* edited by Hazel Smith and Roger Dean written in 2009. The book deals with a number of significant issues to do with creative work, its relationship (although not solely) within the university environment and to research practices. A relatively recent development over the past two decades, creative practice raises awareness of the diverse knowledge base it can both convey to and inform the creative process. Creative work within universities is now sometimes referred as practice-led research, practice-based research, creative research or practice as research.

Creative practice has a bi-directional, reciprocal focus as its basis and deals with the relationship between research and creative practice. By using this method, practice can result in research insights. The creative 'object' informs research resulting in a capacity to document and theorise insights in this way.

The book consists of chapters by practitioners from different disciplines including creative writing, music, dance, the visual arts, media arts and film who give examples of both practice-led research and research-led practice via a theoretical essay. Whilst the individual chapters are written by experts in their fields and provide a useful interdisciplinary context on which to base a discussion, these tended to be presented as separate entities and lacked a common language. Predicated on the idea that the humanities have heavily prioritised theory, criticism and historical investigation over arts practice, the two main arguments (often overlapping and interlinked) are, according to Smith and Dean, that creative work in itself is a form

of research and generates detectable research outputs and that creative practice – the training and specialised knowledge that creative practitioners have and the process they engage in when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research.

In dealing with the issue of practice-led research the question 'what is knowledge, what is research and how can we understand the creative process?' arises. This is a huge area, and one beyond the scope of this thesis, however one which I did consider in terms of my own creative work, that of The Necks and its connection to music in general. I extensively researched and compiled readings on jazz and world music in a global context followed by those with an Australian focus. Due to little formal academic writing on the subject of The Necks, much of the research in this area occurred in the form of interview material, reviews and book chapters from John Shand's book *Jazz The Australian Accent*. I formulated my own analysis through a detailed listening experience and researching background material relating to their body of work. The subsequent synthesis of the information gathered was followed by the process of adopting a broad perspective, then a more comprehensive look at how this group creates music (the process) and how it is received (the listening experience). Due to the comparatively large body of work The Necks have produced and the inherent nature of it, any in-depth treatment of individual works in a musicological sense is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Rather, the analysis I have undertaken is in the context of showing the evolution of their work as an acoustic experiment. It is interesting to note that discussion of their work to date by others is highly descriptive rather than analytical.

In this way the intention of this project is to contribute to the body of work on contemporary Australian jazz. To date this is relatively small, and writings on contemporary Australian jazz scant. Writings by John Clare, John Whiteoak, Bruce Johnson and John Shand form the basis of such a repository, and it is essential that, despite jazz being a minority musical art form, it nonetheless continues to form part of the documentation of music in Australia in general. Apart from taking inspiration from and having a deep respect for the writers mentioned above, others such as Andrew Bisset's book *Black Roots, White Flowers* and the documentation undertaken by the late Jack Mitchell in cataloguing every recording ever produced in Australia are fine examples demonstrating a unswerving passion for contributing to

such jazz research in this country. It is the intention of this research project that the music of The Necks is presented as an accurate account of their work, as is applying inherent values such as truth and honesty in doing justice to one of Australia's leading free improvising exponents.

Bearing this in mind, on the other hand, research-led practice, as the term suggests, relies on more of a theoretical framework as an antecedent to the production of the creative work, with research forming the basis of creative practice. The point is made that practice-led research and research-led practice are not separate processes, but are woven into an iterative cyclic web. My research method is predominantly research-based, however contains some aspects whereby a degree of reflexive, practice-led research informed the thesis and creative work. 'For an artwork itself to be a form of research, it needs to contain knowledge which is new and that can be transferred to other contexts, with little further explanation, elaboration or codification, even if this transferral involves a degree of transformation' (Smith & Dean 2009, p. 7).

In considering the most appropriate methodological approach, whilst the practice-led option had advantages in terms of creative work containing a body of knowledge, I preferred research-led practice as it tends to be driven by critical and cultural theory. Because I situate the thesis and its foundation within a socio-historical paradigm which is reliant on widely informed research prior to undertaking the thesis and creative work, I chose to adopt a more research-based approach. I also use both qualitative and quantitative research on which to base the hypothesis that The Necks are an acoustic experiment. The way I approach the analysis is via a chronological, sequential method well-suited to a theoretical apparatus based on theory and socio-historical investigation. I also link this to the previous chapter in terms of situating The Necks' music in a research-based paradigm i.e. in the context of the work of other musicians, both in a global and local sense. Performative research, which is distinct from both qualitative and quantitative research, is a term developed by Haseman (2006). This new research paradigm generated by practice-led research, argues that 'an artwork embodies research findings which are symbolically expressed, even while not conveyed through numbers or words (which are themselves symbols)' (Haseman in Smith & Dean 2009, p. 6).

Analytical Framework

When I originally began to formulate ideas and an analytical apparatus, it was based on a chronological approach – both in terms of listening to each album and in attempting to formulate some kind of quantitative, empirically-based overview. Once the step of listening to The Necks' body of work had been undertaken, I spent considerable time in synthesising the way their work constitutes an acoustic experiment. I chose to follow an analytical model whereby in order to demonstrate this hypothesis, the experiment was pursued in terms of constants – those aspects common to their work – and variables – those aspects which showed differences and therefore development in the evolving of their work. The collaborative relational aspect of their work is further discussed in this section of the thesis.

One of the significant issues facing improvised music – and particularly free improvised music – is the issue of spontaneity. This is music of the moment in terms of live performances and re-enacted music in studio recordings which contain the addition of multi-tracked samples and electronica. The difficulty in discussing live performance is once the moment has passed so has the real time experience of it. There is no score or tangible referent. Even in recorded sound the music assumes a different post-real-time performance identity.

I now turn to a discussion regarding analytical models visited as part of my research, and outline those aspects which form the basis of my analytical approach/paradigm.

Literature Review – some influential readings

David Borgo is a saxophonist, ethnomusicologist and Associate Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego. His book *Sync or Swarm* uses a wide range of interdisciplinary considerations in linking the areas of contemporary music and contemporary science. Described in the book are topics ranging from the origins of life to the unpredictable dynamics of political and social groups. At the forefront is free jazz group improvisation, discussed in terms of complexity, chaos and embodiment.

In his connection with music and science, Borgo puts forward the idea that:

> Modern science has traditionally sought to take complex systems apart in order to discover their fundamental parts; for instance, to discover the smallest building blocks of matter, or more recently the makeup of the human genome (Borgo 2005, p. xvii).

He brings up the important point, and one which I applied to my own analysis, that reductionism, whilst being enormously successful in attempting to explain how complex things are made up of lots of simpler things, cannot, by itself, answer important questions such as how things interact in complex ways to inform striking similarities of form, function and behaviour. This was something I grappled with in undertaking this project. Whilst each of The Necks has his own individual projects, influences and set of experiences, it is the holistic collaborative aspect of their work which is discussed here. The initial planning phase of the analysis did, however, involve the art of deconstruction, and I follow Borgo's lead taking this a step further to gain an 'understanding how things come together; how diverse systems display collective behaviours that are not predictable in terms of the dynamics of their component parts' (Borgo 2005, p. xvii).

In establishing the validity of the hypothesis that The Necks' music is an acoustic experiment, I also found Borgo's account of chaos enlightening, and one he can think of as no better definition of improvised music. He cites M. Mitchell Waldrop's *The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* as:

> The edge of chaos is where new ideas ... are forever nibbling away at the edges of the status quo, and where even the most entrenched old guard will eventually be overthrown ... The edge of chaos is the constantly shifting battle zone between stagnation and anarchy, the one place where a complex system can be spontaneous, adaptive and alive (Borgo 2005, p. xvii).

Chaos, according to Borgo, is 'a creative force, a dynamic form of orderly disorder' (Borgo 2005, p. 83). He refers to the work of John Briggs and F. David Peat in stating: 'To be a creator required operating in a shadowy boundary line between order and chaos'.

Borgo writes of the world of science being traditionally one of regularity and predictability and that whilst the world external to the laboratory seldom behaves as

orderly as those held up to nature, that 'chaos was thought to be the result of a complexity that in theory could be stripped down to its orderly underpinnings' (Borgo 2005, p. 84). A new mirror, however, has been constructed by contemporary scientists to hold up to nature: a turbulent one – how simple systems can demonstrate complex behaviours. Complexity theory is the other side of the turbulent mirror whereby:

> Researchers are attempting to understand how order can emerge out of chaos: how extremely complex systems can spontaneously give birth to delicate forms and structures. Put another way, chaos theory deals with systems that rapidly become highly disordered and unmanageable, while complexity theory deals with highly inter-connected systems that may, at certain times and under certain conditions, self-organise in a way that produces emergent forms of order. These emergent forms cannot be deduced from the equations describing a dynamical system but can describe the patterns arriving from the evolution of such systems in time (Borgo 2005, p. 84).

In many ways The Necks' work is an embodiment of the complexity theory. The vast and diverse set of musical experiences brought to the group through individual connections with other musicians and musical styles is filtered down to a relatively simple process whereby they start with silence on stage, one starts with a repeated riff, the piece evolves over a period of an hour or so, often reaching a climax. Within this framework, however, I will demonstrate how their work has evolved over the past 25 years as an acoustic experiment. Similarly, they are all virtuoso musicians, however notwithstanding this, their work is not characterised/defined as such, with simple patterns repeated extensively forming the basis of their work. Occasionally Abrahams may let fly with a flamboyant and impressive cadenza providing a complete contrast (this is particularly evident in live recordings), however the defining characteristic is that of a group of musicians (highly complex system) 'spontaneously giving birth to delicate forms and structures'.

> Like the word 'chaos', 'free' improvisation has produced its fair share of semantic confusion. But although it may imply randomness to some, it too can be about relatively simple iterative and interactive processes that create a complex musical tapestry and a type of emergent order (Borgo 2005, p. 84).

There is increasing complexity and intricacy in the networks that link individuals, cultures and nations. This connection with increasing globalisation and the networks of complexity is discussed previously whereby The Necks' work is not discussed in isolation, but rather posited in terms of its relationship with both local jazz performers and the minimalists. Borgo also raises the point that as a result of this new age there is a distinct need for a framework whereby:

> With this new age comes an increased need to understand the nature and behaviour of complex systems in the physical, social, and humanistic sciences. As opposed to systems that may simply be complicated, complex systems are highly interconnected and through this array of influences and interactions they demonstrate possibilities for adaptation and emergence. In other words, complex systems are those that exhibit neither too much nor too little order. Their dynamics are hard to predict but not entirely random. In short, they offer the possibility of surprise. Complex systems tend to adapt and even self-organise in a decentralised, bottom-up fashion (Borgo 2005, p. 4).

Interestingly Borgo has taken an innovative step in visually realising musical performance i.e. measuring musical sound. Instead of using transcriptions, which he claims not only 'reduce the immense sonic detail of music to discreet and linear representations in the form of notes, rhythms, dynamic and articulation markings, etc.' (Borgo 2005, p. 90), he uses fractals to graphically represent sound in the way a computer program like Pro Tools represents sound. He also states that the complexity of the music means transcription 'would not only be near-impossible, but also arguably a fruitless task as well' (Borgo 2005, p. 90). His analysis is of various works by Evan Parker, Derek Bailey, Peter Brötzmann, The Art Ensemble of Chicago and Sam Rivers. Whilst respecting the views of Borgo and Derek Bailey in criticising the use of transcription in improvised work i.e. music which is not notated, I use transcriptions of The Necks' music as a referent and to graphically enhance the notion of the acoustic experiment. There is no ideal way to represent improvised music after the fact, so I have used transcription cautiously as evidence to advance the acoustic experiment cause.

Another perspective on the chaos theory is given by Jeremy Gilbert in 'Chapter 6 Becoming Music: The Rhizomatic Moment of Improvisation' in *Deleuze and Music*:

> Manuel DeLanda, a writer who attempts to build theoretical bridges between Deleuze and Guattari and chaos theory, believes that the frontier between order and chaos is where 'magic' happens. This would seem to be true in music, judging by the combination of groove and improvisation, repetition and randomness, in Can, Miles Davis and techno (Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004 p. 119).

In terms of The Necks' work, the juxtaposition between inherent simplicity and chaos *is* where magic happens. The convergence of sound and the way individual parts work collaboratively acts as the pinnacle of acoustic experiment idea.

Another interesting sonic dimension relating to The Necks' music is the aspect of surprise which plays with our sense of order and disorder. It is, according to Borgo, neither predictable nor unpredictable in entirety. He makes the interesting point that 'randomness does not produce a sense of surprise, but rather confusion, dismay, or disinterest' (Borgo 2005, p. 1) and that the methods and findings of the new sciences of surprise are useful in illuminating the dynamics and aesthetics of musical improvisation.

How we understand the dynamics of the natural world and our own place within it is described in terms of improvisation and its related techniques, relationships, and interactions shedding light on how we understand these dynamics. The crisis of representation which was prevalent during last century and emerged across many academic creative disciplines saw an abandonment of the idea of 'absolute' or 'privileged' vantage points from which observations, judgements and analysis can be made, an increasing shift by artists, scholars and scientists from 'an overriding concern with isolated objects to the changing relationships between those objects: a shift from structures to structuring and from content to context' (Borgo 2005, p. 2). The social sciences including history, language and culture were repositioned from having independent meaning and objective status to:

> currents of thought, patterns of behaviour, and malleable social and personal constructions. Heady words like post-structuralism and cultural post-modernism were invoked to describe the increasing awareness among scholars of the ethnocentric aspects of static and totalising investigations (Borgo 2005, p. 2).

Swarm intelligence

In his chapter titled 'Sync *and* Swarm' (2005, p. 144) Borgo deals with the topic of swarm intelligence (SI), drawing parallels with hives of bees, flocks of birds spontaneously taking flight in harmony and the notion of the group dynamic.

In discussing swarm intelligence, he refers to the effects of positive and negative feedback as a key component relating to improvised music and musicians. Positive feedback occurs in a variety of guises, and includes musicians developing their own ideas from a seed or germ, working together to support the ideas of others and, what he also terms 'the evolving ensemble sound' (Borgo 2005, p. 144). He speaks in terms of 'recruiting' others to support or sustain their own developments, or choosing to 'reinforce' the creative directions of others instead. The aspect of choice in The Necks' work is a fascinating area, both in terms of conscious and subconscious decision-making.

Negative feedback in improvisation operates in terms of keeping things interesting, as seen in the following:

> By intentionally looking elsewhere for new ideas or new musical areas to explore, individuals can either signal transitions away from ensemble moments that have lingered too long or seem to be going nowhere (the feelings of saturation and exhaustion), or they can productively layer divergent sonic qualities and musical ideas together or provoke others to boost their own creativity (through a competitive element). Negative feedback helps to maintain a balance in the evolving improvisation so that one idea does not continue to amplify indefinitely (although a more static approach can produce interesting results as well) (Borgo 2005, p. 144).

The significance of unexpected occurrences, such as randomness or error, facilitates source material and inspiration for musicians to explore new sonic territory, music techniques, and interactive strategies. These can, in turn, affect the group's interaction, overall musical development and form. There are parallels here also regarding an important issue relating to The Necks' music – that of familiarity – whereby musicians who work together over a long period of time may become too familiar in terms of musical language, interaction and output.

The holistic, overarching aspect of interaction in improvised music for both performers and listeners is, in an aesthetic and affective sense, to remain sensitive to the gestures and processes circulating on an individual and collective level. Whilst the intercommunication between members of a group and the subsequent freedom afforded differs between a swarm of bees and the collective sonic experience, there is, nonetheless, an interesting connection between that observed in nature and that of a group of musicians.

Network dynamics

The connection with The Necks' work on a collaborative level with that of the natural world is again highlighted in the following: "One of the hallmarks of ecological thinking is to regard systems as 'wholes made up of wholes'" (Borgo 2005, p. 10). The notion of an interconnected nature whereby individual components are able to both maintain their own internal structure and evolve over time draws significant parallels with The Necks' music. The crux of the network theory is seen in the following:

> To envision an improvising ensemble as the simple addition of individuals also misses the dynamic, interactive, and emergent qualities of performance. Finally, to examine a group or an individual in isolation of historical, cultural, and social contingencies and opportunities ignores the richness of network dynamics (Borgo 2005, p. 10).

I believe I address the issue of network dynamics (in Chapter 4), convincingly situating The Necks' music in both a global and local context (in Chapter 2), and demonstrate their work within this framework as an acoustic experiment.

Relationships

Christopher Small's book *Musicking* is a source of inspiration in terms of writing about the meanings of performing and listening, a fundamental part of both being relationships – whether they occur between a group of performers or between performers and audience. He makes the point that the book is not so much about music (noun) as in the enactment of music in a broad sense – about people, as they listen and compose (and even dance in some cultures) and the way this is carried out. Therefore it is not so much about *music* as people *musicking.* The term 'musicking',

according to Small, does not appear in any English dictionary, however he speaks of it being 'too useful a conceptual tool to lie unused. It is the present participle, or gerund, of the verb *to music*' (Small 1998, p. 9). He speaks of the term 'musicking' roughly equating to 'to perform' or 'to make music', however his larger ambitions for this neglected verb are seen in the definition: 'To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing' (Small 1998, p. 9). Small then makes two significant points in relation to *musicking*. The first is the holistic view he takes that:

> To pay attention in any way to a musical performance, including a recorded performance, even Muzak in an elevator, is music. The second is related but needs to be stated separately: the verb *to music* is not concerned with valuation. It is *de*scriptive, not *pre*scriptive. It covers all participation in a musical performance, whether it takes place actively or passively, whether we like the way it happens or whether we do not, whether we consider it interesting or boring, constructive or destructive, sympathetic or antipathetic (Small 1998, p. 9).

Rhythm

The Ecstasy of Complexity

In considering the sonic-affective qualities typical of highly improvised music, Jeremy Gilbert uses Simon Reynolds' key examples referring to it as both 'cosmic' and 'rhizomatic'. Reynolds, a unique voice as a writer combining journalism and cultural theory, made use of terminologies drawn from *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987) in describing the rave during the 1990s as "a 'desiring machine' aimed at the collective articulation of a body without organs" (Jordan 1995; Reynolds 1998: 411; Poschardt 1998: 328, 381-3; Eshun 1998; Gilbert and Pearson 1999: 118; Hement 2000 in Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda).

In the subsequent reference to the sonic developments of Miles Davis on albums such as *Bitches Brew* and *On the Corner*, Gilbert speaks not only in terms of 'a disciplined looseness [which] animates a soundscape (4) See Glossary of startling fluidity', (Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda 2004, p. 122) but also the 'deterritorialising electrified sound, liberating it from its role as a mere conduit for brute sonic force and opening up a new musical assemblage, a new field of cross-

generic techno-sonic possibilities altogether' (Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda 2004, p. 122). It is interesting to note the fact that initially jazz purists regarded this type of music – i.e. fusion – to be a form of heresy.

Assemblage

Assemblage and rhythm

The Necks approach rhythm in a variety of innovative ways. Whilst there is an inherent simplicity in the minimalist motifs and rhythmic feels utilised, it is the way in which these interact that create a variety of contrasting temporal intensities. This aspect of their work is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. Similarly, an example on an individual level is Buck's frequent use of supra minimalist rhythms such as a simple two-beat tap on a ride cymbal or basic rock beat – the master of understatement. The polar opposite is seen in his occasional explosive tirades of virtuosic complexity epitomising the edge of chaos.

A formative and influential reading is the chapter titled Chapter 7, 'Rhythmic Assesmblage and Event' by Phil Turetsky in *Deleuze and Music* (Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004). It uses as its basis the concept of 'rhythm inserting time into ethics' (Turetsky in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 140), referencing the connection between the Maori haka and rhythmic assemblage. Evident in this cultural display is the juxtaposition between arrythmicity (irregularity) and synchronicity. Through a colourful analogy, Turetsky considers the inconsistency of basic human movement – that there is not a consistent pattern when feet strike the ground:

> The rhythm of the feet repeated and multiplied while remaining in place produces growth and density. Rhythmic repetition attracts more participants so the mass tends to grow and condense. In addition to, and often in place of, an increase in number comes an increase in intensity (Turetsky in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 140).

The Necks make considerable use of repetition, including rhythmic repetition, the effect of which leads to an increase in intensity. The synergy created by the sum total of individuals making up the whole is captured in the following:

> Each body part links with others of its kind constructing an aggregate which moves independently in accord with its own rhythm. A haka comes to act as a single individual 'as if the whole body of performers were actuated by one impulse' directed towards a single goal (Canetti 1984: 31-4 in Turetsky in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 140).

Turetsky speaks of the haka producing a unity which is able to 'protect itself from internal dissolution' (Turetsky in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 141), as that, however, of an individual, not imposed by some external order, but produced and assembled from within. Equality, he says, occurs as a result of temporal distribution, as seen in the haka – 'assembled by the linkage of body parts through the rhythmic distribution' (Turetsky in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 141). Spatial and temporal issues of movement and rest are defined by differing speeds and rhythmic syntheses.

In a link with the work of Judy Lochhead, which is discussed later in this chapter, there are similarities in the way relationships with form in terms of past recurrence, association, restatement and return are conceived. Under the subheading of 'The Synthesis of the Living Present' Turetsky makes the point, not unlike Borgo, that:

> Elements that get organised in a rhythmic assemblage usually occur independently of one another until they become rhythmically organised. There need be no particular material or casual connections inherent in these elements as long as they become coincident (Turetsky in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 144).

This is particularly applicable to the work of The Necks, in that whilst a definable pulse and meter is evident, it is the way temporal aspects are subtly manipulated within and between each of the individual parts which leads to them being 'rhythmically organised'.

Turetsky refers to temporal relationships in linking past in the context of a former present, and each future an expected present, and that 'these past and future moments combine as dimensions of an extended or living present constituted by the contraction of the moments which connects them' (Turetsky in Buchanan & Swiboda (eds) 2004, p. 145).

The assemblage and instrumentation

Synchronising intention and action is a significant aspect of improvising music. In maintaining an acute awareness of and sensitivity in connecting with the evolving group dynamics, synchronicity occurs not only through sounds but via a complex array of behavioural intent such as energy, focus, intent and inspiration. Borgo describes this as a swarm-like quality whereby during the most complex, dense passages of collective improvisation individual parts may seemingly move in different directions yet the musical collective purpose contributes to the overall musical whole which develops with the collective purpose.

Gilbert makes the point that the assemblage, or the specific arrangement of force which generates them, in turn does in fact have some bearing on the forms of affect which they can generate. Gilbert (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 341 in Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda 2004, p. 122) sees orchestration and instrumentation as performing a number of disparate functions. It can bring sound forces together, separate them, gather or disperse them.

> Deleuze and Guattari argue that within 'modern music' by placing all its components in continuous variation, music itself becomes a superlinear system, a rhizome instead of a tree, and enters the service of a virtual cosmic continuum of which even holes, silences, ruptures and breaks are a part (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 95 in Gilbert in Buchanan & Swiboda 2004, p. 122).

Form

I now turn to two readings which have informed both my perception and understanding of how form relates to the music of The Necks.

The first of these pertains to the spatial aspect of form in the way the continuous flow of music is divided into sections, whether consciously or unconsciously, each possessing different qualities. Borgo refers to this as *qualia*. It is a term used in both science and philosophy. In a philosophical context it is used to describe the phenomenological units of experience, including their qualitative 'feel'. In music, however, qualia differ from that of the philosophers in not being atomic, nor discrete. 'Rather, they have complex internal structure, consisting of other qualia. For instance, the qualia that appear in music can range from whole performances,

through sections and phrases, down to fragments of tones and sounds' (Borgo 2005, p. 66).

The significance of perception is an essential part of interpreting and applying the concept of qualia in relation to both structural aspects of performance and the act of listening. According to Borgo, the nature of musical qualia are created as part of the process of perception and do not exist independently. 'Qualia have different *saliences*, which indicate their relative significance; these can change over time' (Borgo 2005, p. 66). They are also hierachically organised, with some qualia appearing as parts of others. 'Most qualia have an internal structure consisting of subqualia. Foreground and background are determined by the structural organisation of qualia; they are not predetermined' (Borgo 2005, p. 66).

As is seen in the subsequent analysis of The Necks' music, the lengthy unravelling of the performance over time and the qualia aspect of their work is significant. As will be shown in the acoustic experiment, although their trademark is for pieces which are approximately an hour in length, they do experiment with a number of shorter pieces which make up the whole. This has implications for discussing the way repetition is used as well as perceived thematic development and the way form is dealt with.

The second is Judy Lochhead's article titled 'Joan Tower's *Wings and Breakfast Rhythms I and II*: Some Thoughts on Form and Repetition'. A key issue in discussing The Necks' work is that of form, and indeed its connection with repetition. This has informed both the thesis and creative component. A New York academic, theorist and musicologist, Lochhead has written extensively on a number of subjects including the phenomenological investigation of temporal structures in recent music, postmodern music and postmodern thought. The article deals with repetition and its significant role in the delineation of formal contours, using the example of Joan Tower's *Wings and Breakfast Rhythms I and II* on which to situate an insightful discussion. She makes the point that the study of form has fallen from grace, and looks at how, in contemporary analysis and theory, it seems 'valuable to consider how some recent authors conceive and depict form and formal processes'. Lochhead uses a fairly traditional definition of the word 'form' – as the 'constructive or organising element of music'. Both order and arrangement play a key part in the

way the parts are organised. Perhaps the most obvious connection in relation to form and The Necks is length. I do not mean this in a superficial sense, but in terms of holistic and overarching processes, considering the cumulative impact of how individual parts associate and work together. The most trademark comments relating to this are in terms of lengthy pieces which evolve slowly over time. As will be shown as part of the acoustic experiment, whilst this is common, formal aspects are also juxtaposed with shorter 'movements'. In this way, form represents the organisational relations – not only between parts themselves, but of parts to other parts and in relation to the whole.

Leo Treitler (b. 1931) is an American musicologist specialising in Medieval and Renaissance music, including Gregorian chant and polyphony and has also explored the area of historiography in music. Treitler (in Lochhead 1992, p. 1) in his unpublished book *The Shape of Time* defines form as 'the organisation of periods of time with change and with the effect of change'.

Organisation plays an important role and must be understood, according to Lochhead, to mean temporal order relations. Both Treitler and British musicologist and writer Arnold Whitall discuss temporal form in terms of the processes characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century music as having a beginning, middle, and end, and treat this as an isolated linear construct, as per the Aristotelian principles of tragedy. In this context 'the whole should encompass an overarching process that provides unity. While other types of organisation are possible, these authors are certainly correct in pointing out the extent to which these principles determine our expectations about temporal succession' (Lochhead 1996, p. 3). It is interesting that, with the erosion of the belief that the Aristotelian principles of aesthetics are absolute, there has been an expansion in the way form is viewed and experimented with. Lochhead then presents three different perspectives on form by three musicologists, which demonstrate there is not total agreement among them. Ian Bent, in his book on analysis from 1987, writes about 'three basic form-building processes: recurrence, contrast, and variation' (Bent 1987, 5). Wallace Berry, in *Structural Functions in Music* from 1976, identifies five 'fundamental classifications of formal process': introduction, statement, restatement, transition and development, and cadence (Berry 1976, pp. 5-6). And Roger Sessions, in *The Musical Experience of Composer, Performer, Listener* (1950), identifies three principles: 'progression or

cumulation, association or in a narrow sense repetition, and contrast. Repetition, or something implying repetition, is the one principle common to all three writers: for Bent, recurrence; for Berry, restatement; and for Sessions, association'.

Repetition itself is relational – through reference to past, present or future directions, in this way 'thickening' the formal process in temporally complex ways.

Lochhead sees that much of our unease about form in a contemporary setting seems to do with process and that discussions of form frequently do not account for the "'building up' of a whole by the accumulation of parts' i.e. 'an unease born of the contemporary change from thing-oriented to process-oriented thought'" (Lochhead 1992, p. 134).

Minimalists and Repetition – Stuck in the Groove or Evolving the Groove?

It is important to consider repetition and minimalism and their impact on how form applies to The Necks' music. Both the terms and perceptions polarise listeners. Robert K. Schwarz in *Minimalists* sums up the schism in the following: 'To its supporters, its directness and accessibility restores the severed link between composer and audience. To its detractors, it is maddeningly simple-minded, no better than pop music masquerading as art' (Schwarz 1996, p. 8).

It is well-documented that both Reich and Glass despise the word and reject its relevance to their present-day work. Critics unflatteringly describe it as "'going-nowhere music', 'needle-stuck-in-the-groove music' and 'wallpaper music'" (Schwarz 1996, p. 8). A term borrowed from the visual arts, the English composer Michael Nyman admits to being the first to transfer the word to music in 1968. La Monte Young defines minimalism in simple terms as 'that which is created with a minimum of means' (Schwarz 1996, p. 9).

Minimalist characteristics such as repetition (often short musical phrases, with minimal variations over long periods of time); small pitch sets; a tonal centre and an emphasis on consonant harmony; stasis (in the form of drones and long tones) and a steady pulse are inherent features. Minimalism describes a process. The music stresses the idea of reducing it to the minimum necessary elements to do with pitch, rhythm, instrumentation, texture and so on. In the classic minimalist compositions of the 1960s, practically every musical element – harmony, rhythm, dynamics,

instrumentation – remains fixed for the duration of the work, or changes only very slowly. The chief structural technique is unceasing repetition, exhilarating to some, mind-numbing to others. The intent of minimalism is dependent upon its genre. For example in Western Art music repetition is a structurally-defined, directionalised form. Glass views the use of repetition in minimalism as creating 'intentionless music' which replaces goal-oriented directionality with absolute stasis' (Schwarz 1996, p. 8). The Necks' minimalist label is a hybrid of the two. On the one hand the extreme use of repetition is structured so that performances do erupt in an aural climax (common in the former) yet also embrace the notion of stasis – but stasis with intent.

The Necks exploit and explore repetition ad infinitum. They have been quoted as saying that change occurs as a result of not being able to stand hearing it (a particular musical idea) anymore and having to move on to the next phase of the performance. It is an integral part of their music on a number of levels. Repetition is a form of change, according to Brian Eno when summing up the minimalist ethos, as quoted in Andrew Ross's book *The Rest is Noise* (Ross 2009, p. 556). Repetition is inherent in a wider context to do with 'the way the mind processes the outside world' (Ross 2007, p. 556). This statement is considered meaning repetition as an aesthetic external signifier. The significance of repetition in a thematic, internal sense as a structural device will also be discussed. Freud and others make the point that the tendency to repeat is essential to human psychology, a kind of built-in homeostatic mechanism for reducing tension. It is inherent in the scientific sense of tones moving through space in sound waves and in daily life activities. A form of routine, the more repetition is used, the greater it impacts on perception. Specifically in relation to The Necks' work, as repetition progresses throughout the performance, the way a person listens to and processes the musical act becomes compounded. Due to repetition as the process *per se*, each layering of repeated material is altered gradually, so that the initial statement of a motif is received differently from subsequent repeated material. Repetition is used extensively by The Necks in defining the structure of their music. In its simplest form it is used as a basis for communicating ideas to one another on which to base the piece. It can also connect in a collaborative sense to reinforce and to intensify. On a subliminal level,

repetition plays a significant part in the listener's own acoustic headspace relating to the listening experience, which is described further in Chapter 7, 'Listening'.

Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935) was a music theorist, best known for his approach to musical analysis, now usually called Schenkerian analysis. In 1932, Schenker published *Five Graphic Music Analyses* (Fünf Urlinie-Tafeln), analyses of five works using the analytical technique of showing layers of greater and lesser musical detail that now bears his name. The full extent of Schenker's work and its connection is beyond the scope of this dissertation. I have, however, taken heed of a number of his ideas relating to musical analysis. In conducting this research, whilst Schenker's work as a musical theorist lies in the area of Western art music (predominantly tonal and harmonic analysis relating to 18th and 19th century, and graphical analysis – the use of graphs to demonstrate relationships e.g. pitch relationships and structure) and is based on reference to written scores, I have been inspired and influenced by his laws of organic coherence. His spatial context of sound – foreground, middle ground and background – and perspective on sound and placement – like a three dimensional structure – in terms of analysis articulates that there is not only linear/temporal association, but a need to look at the vertical moment of construction as well in order to fully understand the acoustic experiment.

In discussing the principle of form, Schenker's theory is a surface feature 'not necessarily coincident in time with the background structure':

> All forms appear in the ultimate foreground; but all of them have their origin in, and derive from, the background. This is the innovational aspect of my explanation of forms … I have repeatedly referred to form as the ultimate manifestation of that structural coherence which grows out of background, middle ground, and foreground … but I here reiterate in order to stress the difference between this new theory and all previous theories of form (Dunsby & Whittall 1988, p. 38).

Technique and intentionality will now be discussed in terms of The Necks, charting the experiment with sound, both in an individual and collaborative context.

CHAPTER 4 AN ACOUSTIC EXPERIMENT

‘The players emerge, not as slaves, not as mere instruments, but as creators’ (Clare 1995, p. 18).

Photograph by Holimage – The Necks website

The Necks grew out of an experiment, evolving into a successful, long-term musical partnership. Their beginning is not unlike many collaborative boyhood backyard jam sessions. A group of musicians with common musical intent, the sole purpose initially to explore the collaborative aspect of music-making in its own right. The Necks never intended to play publicly, however from this chance encounter began an acoustic experiment spanning over 25 years. Adding to the fact they don’t rehearse and are more of a sporadic, intermittent musical outfit – coming together at various times when other individual projects permit – contributes to the experimental and spontaneous quality of their work.

In writing this chapter, there are certain issues which warrant consideration. The aim of this analysis of The Necks’ work is not to present an in-depth, musicological analysis. Rather, it is a comprehensive look at how this group of musicians have come together to create an acoustic experiment. The issues include grappling with temporal issues and a tendency to want to describe recordings in terms of time/unfolding/reference to what happens in the music and when. The fact that any analysis of improvised music takes place retrospectively and separately from the initial performance context, has implications for both listening to music and the subsequent analysis of it.

One of the most difficult aspects relates to attempting to define the abstract. Any use of words to describe this will never be adequate. The Necks’ work is the ultimate in abstractness, and the issue of discussion and representation of their work is a thorny area. Therefore in attempting any such use of definites and absolutes, the ultimate

aim is to adopt a fluid, amorphous approach in describing the evolving of their acoustic experiment. There has been much written about the disparate nature of visual art and music and the subsequent differences in the representation and perception of it. Unlike an artwork which is a fixed referent, the listening experience is unseen and temporary – made up of and influenced by the past experiences of the individual listener which in turn affect the receptive mode of listening. This is further explored in Chapter 7 which deals with listening. Also significant is the intention of the group stressing that the audience brings its own interpretation to the music and they make no statements about its meaning.

The Acoustic Experiment

In discussing the work of Ornette Coleman John Corbett makes a valid point:

> Jazz experiments … Is the second word a noun or a verb? … If you see a noun then what we're talking about are discrete events in jazz history, those 'experiments' that punctuate the jazz timeline like great exclamation points, or better yet, like giant question marks … On the other hand, perhaps you read the word 'experiments' as a verb and 'jazz' as its subject. Thus, experimenting is what jazz does (Corbett in Borgo 2005, p. 16).

Many definitions of the word 'experiment' exist. In this case I use the term in a less formal, more observational sense as opposed to the strict regime of scientific-based research. I take experiment to mean an innovative process involving trying new approaches and deal with this on a number on levels including behavioural and musicological, both in the 'laboratory' (studio) and 'field' (live) situations. Natural experiments rely solely on observations of the variables of the system under study, rather than manipulation of just one or a few variables as occurs in controlled experiments. To the degree possible, they attempt to collect data for the system in such a way that contribution from all variables can be determined, and where the effects of variation in certain variables remain approximately constant so that the effects of other variables can be discerned. The degree to which this is possible depends on the observed correlation between explanatory variables in the observed data.

I chart the acoustic experiment in terms of control aspects (those similarities which are constant throughout their work) and variables, which exist as signifiers of change, evolution and development. The control aspects include: nucleus of piano, bass and drums; a definable pulse and tonal centre; repetition (however the 'cause and effect' varies); following fairly traditional roles of a trio; unity and contrast; collaboration and an egalitarian approach; the fluid approach to the act of performance in terms of no rehearsal, not talking about or planning beforehand and just starting to play – the ultimate in creative collaborative music-making. The band adopts an onstage arrangement whereby there is no eye contact between individual members, a format often adopted by the legendary Keith Jarrett and his band. The aural relationship is heightened, contributing to the trademark trance-like mantra which is a feature of their live performances.

The variables – those aspects which form the basis of change in the context of an experiment include: a diverse set of tonal and harmonic variants; rhythmic construction and development; instrumentation; form and the way solos are featured. Also discussed is the relationship between the layers of sound; live versus studio albums; the way background, middle ground and foreground sounds occur and their placement; and how these sounds integrate, sometimes erupting in the edge of chaos. Form and the beginning-middle-end continuum varies from album to album. The way the sections relate to each other – or not – is of significance. The way change occurs is seen in the following – despite the constant factor of repetition being present, it is the way repetition is used that affects reception, perception and listening.

Deciding on Constructs

In setting up the acoustic experiment and following clarification of the constructs to be measured i.e. 'what' is to be measured , the second consideration is to decide on the evidence to be used as the basis for measurement i.e. 'how' performance will be measured.

Pierre Boulez has defined what he calls:

> The indispensable constituents of an 'active' analytical method: it must begin with the most minute and exact observation possible of the musical facts confronting us; it

> is then a question of finding a plan, a law of internal organisation which takes account of these facts with the maximum coherence; finally comes the interpretation of the compositional laws deduced from this special application. All these stages are necessary; one's studies are of merely technical interest if they are not followed through to the highest point – the *interpretation* of the structure; only at this stage can one be sure that the work has been assimilated and understood (Boulez 1975 in Dunsby & Whittall 1988, p. 3).

In pursuing an 'active' analytical method and framework, the initial research phase involved 'active' listening chronologically to the entire CD collection of The Necks a number of times, gathering musical facts and transcriptions of key motifs. This in itself can be viewed as somewhat contentious. Compounded by the fact that free improvised music is not written down, is of the moment and that any attempt to analyse it faced certain problems. The first of these was the lack of score. I grappled with a number of ways of pursuing how to refer to specific musical aspects and details regarding a body of listening that constituted over 20 hours of listening.

Notating Improvised Music

In order to address this problem a second arose. This relates to transcribing themes and a means by which some kind of collaborative connection between the parts could be noted. Classical music has the advantage of a written score on which to base an analysis. The difficulty here is in not being able to consider form using isolated constructs. The Necks music is 'a globalised mesh of threads' (Shand 2009, p. ix), a mesh of behavioural, collaborative connections. It is three-dimensional in its construction and reception. Bailey and others have written extensively on the subject.

The evidence

I also organised the evidence according to the elements of rhythm, pitch, timbre, texture and structure (form), then looking at the organisational constructs of repetition, unity (the creation and resolution of tension), contrast and connection. In this early phase the interpretation informs a cohesive, holistic view of the works. Thus this constituted the initial planning phase of elucidating the musical facts on which to demonstrate the acoustic experiment.

Initially I was going to discuss each of these elements (rhythm, pitch etc.) in relation to each of the works, however this was far too large a task to undertake convincingly. In establishing this wasn't the best way forward, I decided to undertake the experiment looking at the main variables used in each of the albums on which to provide a platform for subsequent discussion. In discussing The Necks' work in a holistic sense, I developed a 'law of internal organisation' based on a coherent, sequential and chronological framework. The link between disassociation and association in new music is an interesting one which is captured by Adorno:

> It is particularly in new music … that analysis is concerned just as much with disassociated moments [*Dissoziationsmomente*], with the works' 'death-wish' – that is to say, with the fact that there are works which contain within themselves the tendency to strive *from* unity back into their constituent elements – as it is concerned with the opposite process (Adorno 1982, p. 182).

The third aspect of considering the experiment considers what observations will provide valid information about the construct/s and the final stage concerns reporting the evidence.

Case study

I have based my analysis on a case study of The Necks' body of work, using it as a source of empirical data and synthesising it in a quantitative (background information, socio-historical aspects) and qualitative perspective. By case study I mean a detailed examination of The Necks' work, emphasising developmental factors, in this case looking at how their work constitutes an acoustic experiment. The case study is common in social sciences and may be descriptive or explanatory. I use a predominantly explanatory framework in order to unpack the various key aspects of The Necks' body of work.

I use a retrospective approach looking back at the progress of the band over the past 25 years. I based this on De Groot's empirical cycle which involves five steps: observation (in collecting and organising empirical facts), induction (formulating the hypothesis), deduction (deducting consequences of hypothesis as testable predictions), testing (the analytical phase) and evaluation (evaluating the outcome of the testing).

One group many influences – world, hybrid, fusion

As previously discussed, each of The Necks brings a wealth of experience from diverse backgrounds. Further global connections between the Necks' work and that of Borgo are seen in the following:

> Several players including myself came to the group from primarily jazz backgrounds, while others had experience with Western classical music, contemporary composition, American popular musics, and various 'world' music traditions, including Hindustani, Latin American, East African, and Balkan musics.
>
> The diverse backgrounds proved to be both an asset and a liability for the group. We revelled in interesting combinations of players, instruments, styles, and techniques, but each musician also had to confront the challenge of reconciling his or her own tradition, tastes, and personal experiences with the ongoing process of musical and community formation.
>
> We often began our weekly playing sessions with a collectively improvised performance; the only instruction, either overt or implied, was to listen first to the silence before beginning to play (Borgo 2005, p. 7).

Experiment with sound

The Necks individually experiment with sound. I now briefly consider this as a precursor to the analysis of their work. The Necks' collective and egalitarian approach to the creation of music impacts on their improvisatory nature and direction. Rather than the band planning their approach philosophically, The Necks have adopted their style more through improvisation and practice as almost aleatoric (chance) music.

Abrahams (in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 5) summarises the abstract, unconscious influences as well as his connection with Philip Glass in the following statement:

> I don't know what's really influenced me … subjectively. I've listened to a lot of Philip Glass's music and I know what it sounds like having that information. I don't want to get pedantic [by providing specifics].

In terms of their egalitarian approach, this is contrary to the usual hierarchical arrangement where there is a leader. 'It seems that any group of people who engage

in a common activity requires a leader who will coordinate the activity and be a source of ideas for carrying it out' (Small 1998, p. 80). Chris Abrahams has firmly conveyed the message that if any one of the Necks' members is unable to continue with the group, The Necks would cease to exist (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 6).

Improvisatory directions: the process – organic evolution in a free improvised context

Whilst the free approach to improvising is characteristic of The Necks' work, the abstract qualities in relation to chance and choice of sonic material present certain dilemmas. Abrahams (in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 4) encapsulates this in the following statement:

> I feel like if I'm forcing something into a direction ... then I start thinking 'Well I really want to start with this and then I want to end up there' then I feel I'm not particularly *in* the music. On the other hand it's very natural to want to achieve something.

The narrative aspect of The Necks' work is significant, defined by settling into a groove which then becomes a type of narrative for an audience. Three elements converge, then they find the 'right' track and then the track develops and reaches a kind of resolution. The sense of a relaxing or settling into a groove is why people compare The Necks' music to ambient music and even to electronica, or more specifically a type of electro acoustic music. Although the actual music itself seems deceptively simple there is a kind of density and complexity contributing to the overall hypnotic effect. Abrahams discusses this further in this quote:

> But certainly what I do on the piano with The Necks allows me to move away from what I'm actually doing to a certain extent because of the repetition and because of the simplicity of some of the motifs. I can listen to it possibly in a way [different from] if I was playing a Mozart sonata or something and I seriously had to be, as a certain achievement-based thing, competent about certain things and think about them. Maybe that would distract me a bit more than what I normally do with The Necks. In some ways I feel I can divorce myself from just the primary production of music and wherever it goes in terms of where it changes and why it changes at a certain point and why. I feel that the most interesting. You know when I feel the best

> is when I surprise myself making decisions not necessarily on a conscious level (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 6).

Programmaticism and Berlioz's tone poetry

The music on *Sex*, The Necks' first album, is not entirely different from what The Necks are doing today. Although obviously they have changed and matured due to their experiences, influences and technological advances, The Necks' musical trajectory parallels a large-scale version of one of their performances – the gradual convergence of musical ideas and a forward thinking approach to improvised music in a contemporary, hybrid, world music setting.

> I think the band very quickly did what it was going to do and I think the meaning that we've attached to what we do has changed rather than the actual music. But I think that there are certain things we're doing now. We have a wider scope maybe and we're more relaxed with it. But I think how we think about the music has changed a lot quite possibly (Abrahams in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 9).

According to Abrahams, the band has gone through different periods and stages of thinking about how to interpret things. He draws comparisons between the narrative of The Necks' approach and 19th century tone poetry explored by such composers as Berlioz. A specific example cited is from Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* which tells a story based on a drug experience.

> Well obviously there's no kind of figurative narrative there but [there is] in terms of one thing leading to another and an audience experiencing some kind of compounding event which unfolds over an hour (Galbraith & Mitchell 2007, p. 4).

Titles play a significant role in The Necks' albums. They are quirky, often confined to one word and descriptive evoking a programmatic aesthetic to their work. A strong visual connection is apparent as a result. Titles are unusual and evocative and often express a mood or place. According to Abrahams:

> It's probably the longest process of the whole thing. We record and mix our record albums and if we do it at the same time – probably in about three weeks to a month all up – we can take 18 months discussing album titles! (Galbraith & Mitchell 2007, p. 3)

The link between recorded space and title is frequently explored. The album *Townsville* has a specific relationship with environment, being discussed within a context of landscape, place and location. Live albums take on a more organic approach. The impact of the audience has an effect on the performance itself creating a more dynamic environment. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, 'Listening'. Studio albums have a more static, less dynamic aesthetic. Without the audience presence and because of temporal aspects relating to overdubs, 'We have so many other overdubs and other instruments at our disposal' (Abrahams in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005 p. 17), therefore the process has a direct impact on the end product. The re-enactment of the original performance takes on another form apart from that which was first intended. Certain limitations arise in live performance in terms of using the three instruments to create everything. The live/studio aspect thus impacts on the use and subsequent meaning of improvisation.

Abrahams, Swanton and Buck are virtuoso technicians on their individual instruments. Each uses both conventional and unconventional techniques, exploring and extending current trends in the quest for creating new sounds.

Chris Abrahams' Piano Techniques

Photograph by John Tapia Urquiza – The Necks website

The significance of the relationship between techniques and repetition as key defining aspects of The Necks' work is described by Abrahams in the following:

> With my using extended techniques on the keyboard – like my palms or my forearms – I find that particularly when things get repeated over and suddenly when something

> is repeated it assumes a kind of logic of its own. You could say it's almost quite similar to the idea that if you make a mistake just do the same thing again and people mightn't think it's a mistake (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 7).

Abrahams experiments with the sonic capabilities of the piano to try and find areas of playing the keyboard that produce different sounds:

> Because particularly if you're doing it repeatedly like with that part of your hand because as you know – if you play a note like that, like that, like that … you can actually use different muscles and they produce different sounds out of the piano (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 7).

Trademark avant-garde piano techniques Abrahams employs include the use of pounding clusters created by hitting the forearm horizontally on the piano keys and extending the use of the pedal to fine tune the subtle, sustained sonic capabilities of the instrument. Extreme use of tremolos, trills and other embellishments are common trademarks featured in performances. He is known for his flamboyant use of elbows and crossing over hands on the keyboard.

> Lately I've been interested in the keyboard as a kind of distancing mechanism. Even though it's presumably an interface with which you play the piano in a standard way by pressing the keys, I'm interested in trying to find ways of making the keyboard kind of problematic or in some way like indeterminate as to what's going to happen with the instrument (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 7).

Abrahams is also renowned for his experimental approach to creating new sounds out of the acoustic piano and often tries to do things that 200 years of piano evolution has tried to stop. He has explored microtonality out of the tuning by pressing the sustain pedal down and playing very fast notes which creates an effect whereby the wildly vibrating string sympathetically resonates every other string on the piano. This in turn creates a type of distortion – not unlike the effects pedal on an electric guitar. He often subverts traditional techniques by trying to get the piano to distort in ways that piano makers don't necessarily aim for. Keyboard sounds and techniques are also explored and incorporated into various multi-tracked studio albums. Technology contributes to extended techniques via the use of the DX7 synthesiser, audio samples, organ and Hammond organ.

Lloyd Swanton's Bass Techniques

Photograph by John Tapia Urquiza – The Necks website

Swanton explores the sonic capabilities using a variety of techniques ranging from conventional to unconventional. In a conventional sense repeated single, plucked notes and octave jumps are common and used as a foundation – predominantly as a middle ground sound source. Sustained notes in the form of drones are a frequently-used device, the effect of which is not only to bind instruments together, but also contributes to the spatial effect of suspension of sound. Techniques including pizzicato, arco, glissando, heavy vibrato, tremolo and percussive slides are also featured, often used as subtle means of varying motifs and riffs.

Double stopping – often bowed – thickens and intensifies the sound and is used to amplify the role of the bass. Although Swanton's usual instrument is the double bass, he also uses piccolo bass (pioneered by Jackie Orzaczky) and electric bass. Sometimes in studio albums, both electric and double bass are used concurrently (such as on *Next* and *Silent Night*).

Tony Buck - The Drums

Photograph by Tim Williams – The Necks website

Despite his virtuosic technical skill, Buck's work in The Necks is characteristically understated yet immaculately executed. His trademark is to take a simple pattern such as a basic swing, rock or Latin beat and repeat this virtually unchanged for lengthy periods of time (see analysis section for further explanation). Only very occasionally do we get a glimpse of his full technical capabilities, which, once unleashed, provide a dramatic contrast to the inherent simplicity.

Buck uses some common practices used in early jazz such as those of Baby Dodds (hitting the rims of very large bass drums) which he translates to the floor tom. Buck also experiments extensively with percussive effects, and, not unlike Phil Treloar's use of circular saws on the skin and rim of the floor tom, to create a variation on using brushes resulting in a thicker, harsher, more intense sound. Orchestral techniques are common, with soft mallets often used to add timbral contrast via cymbals and floor tom.

Despite his extensive experiments with electronic sampling and drum kits, Buck reserves these for work in other contexts. He doesn't use an electric kit in The Necks, preferring the standard kit and its acoustic-based sound capabilities. A minimalist approach is seen through often focusing on a part of the kit i.e. cymbal – where a simple crotchet pattern may be repeated on the beat or minimal, sporadic use of the bass drum.

I now turn to a discussion of The Necks' work, demonstrating how their 25 years of collaborative music-making is an acoustic experiment. The empirical evidence, i.e. short transcriptions which are used to reinforce and advance the case – is referred to as numbering in the text. These are included in Appendix B.

1. *SEX* 1989

STUDIO

Cover: Artist Tim Burns/Designer Meredith McAuley/Photographer Anne Zahalka

Sex is the first album released by The Necks in 1989. It is the band's biggest selling album selling around eight thousand copies. The album was recorded in 1987 and continues to sell two hundred or so copies a month. It is one of the most popular Necks' recordings. It was originally recorded on Spiral Scratch and then their own label Fish of Milk (who took over from Spiral Scratch). In 1996 it was released in the United States on the Private Music label.

Although *Sex* was the first record The Necks ever released, there is material on *Next* which was earlier. As Abrahams states: '[With] shorter pieces we hadn't quite got the concept down. We recorded it I think in '88 and then we didn't really do anything with it for about a year. Couldn't find anyone to release it and then we released it on Spiral Scratch' (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005).

The album came about through a contra deal with Chris Abrahams and an anonymous doctor film maker, who wanted to make educational medical films. Chris worked on a couple of soundtracks for him and ended up getting a contra deal resulting in two weeks in the studio:

> I actually don't know anyone had called an album *Sex* and I think when we decided to release it I think Prince came out with an album called *Lovesexy* (1988). And it's fairly humorous now – but we wanted it to mean slightly more than – you know ... It was more like gender equals sex, I mean it wasn't the other (Abrahams in Galbraith & Mitchell 2007, p. 7).

Sex is a single movement, studio recording with added multi-tracked material. The album is a pioneer in terms of the new compact disc (CD) format being used to expand the recording of longer performances. It is an example of the impact of technology on the contemporary parameters of performing and listening. One reviewer noted 'time limitations and format restrictions of cassettes, vinyl, and the

obtuse eight-track would have meant that their work could only be experienced live' (Adams 2006, p. 1).

Sex has taken on a variety of meanings and applications. With its calm vibe and soothing ambience it has even been a hit in birthing centres. Justine Clarke, actor and musician states:

> My children were born to it (apparently it's a popular hit in birth centres) and it played on high rotation at the Great Wedgetail Pizzeria where I worked as a waitress in my twenties. I've seen The Necks live and their music is truly magic. The CD itself I bought after the first time I saw them play and it's travelled with me through my house moves and a couple of breakups and been packed into that birthing bag every time. It's a family heirloom now and the recording is part of my life. Twenty years later, it continues to entrance, soothe, grip and delight. Thank you, Necks (Zuel 2010, p. 1).

Sex sets up the experiment. It introduces a number of constants – control elements – common traits which will subsequently be shown to be integral parts of other albums. It also features a number of variables which act in a contrasting capacity. These are atypical aspects of The Necks' work.

The piano, bass and drums form the nucleus and are the control aspect in terms of instrumentation. A defined rhythmic pulse and parameters are evident through the use of a 4/4 time signature throughout. The tempo is moderate and doesn't fluctuate throughout the work.

Variables, however, are explored using a number of added electronic-based sound sources. These include the use of saw, woodblock, finger cymbals, temple bells, bongos, maracas, vibraslap and ratchet sounds. Environmental sounds such as wood and water are also featured. Interestingly these sounds are used very quietly to create a subliminal illusion rather than overtly stating the sonorous aspects of the piece which is in keeping with the trance-like mantra, very much forming part of the background sonic fabric. The effect of adding various sonic material, in this case subtle shadings which emerge in the form of ambient (somewhat ambiguous) sounds like bowed saw and woodblock sounds, in a multi-tracked environment and the impact on the initial free improvised performance is significant. Apart from providing timbral contrast, the process by which additional sound effects are

incorporated into the aural fabric affects the textural layering. In terms of rhythm, whilst there are certain constants that remain throughout, rhythmic variables include a plethora of subtle rhythmic patterns and shifting accents. These are used to create not only variety, but also elasticity creating a similar effect to rubato – or robbed time – a technique used extensively by Chopin in 19th century piano music. In this case, however, the technique affects the assemblage – the trio of instruments. It is a technique present in many of The Necks' albums. In the earlier sections of the work the rhythm is defined by constant patterns used by bass and drums to contrast with the wide variety used by Abrahams by the piano triplets (7), (8). Drums range from the use of a simple swing beat in the opening to more complex world music/folk-inspired rhythms (42:37).

The technique whereby each instrument enters and establishes its presence on which to develop individual ideas is set up in *Sex*. The trademark trance-like mantra is created through the build-up of texture, staggered entries and the repetition and gradual transformation of rhythmic, melodic and subtly shifting tonal shadings. Texturally whilst the piece contains variety in the way sounds weave in and out, it follows a frequently-employed structural and textural device used by The Necks where each instrument enters in a staggered fashion one-by-one. Morton Marks in *Uncovering Ritual Structures in African American Music* (1974) refers to this technique as an African musical trope.

This work establishes the frequently used one-hour sonic journey and has, in turn, implications for form and development of ideas. A key temporal aspect relating to both internal formal structure and affecting the overarching form of the piece is the use of space in the way the piano moves away from the repetitive function of the other two instruments. In creating a minimalist, repetitive and hypnotic piece the band overdubbed a dual take whilst using a two-bar motif as a basis on which to construct the improvisations. The key is A minor. The bass sets up the opening with the main background constant heard in the octave A↑A' two-bar ostinato (1). This in its original guise forms the basis of the lower foundation of the piece. The hour-long track consists of a two-bar repeated set of variations. This forms a relentless, minimalist platform on which Abrahams provides contrast through a diverse array of piano registers, pitch patterns and rhythmic variants (2) (3) (4) (5). These include sustained cluster chords based on 4ths, sparse, angular descending chords based on

4ths and rapidly descending semiquaver scale passages. These operate as the key sonic foreground signifiers. Closely entwined with these two in working together as a collaborative unit is Buck's meticulous drumming, which captures a driving, constant swing beat. Like Swanton, repetition is the definer here with the two intimately collaborating to provide the mesmerising sound bed on which to facilitate contrast from the piano and other added sounds. Collaborative improvisation techniques are an integral part of the musical exchange of ideas. The most variety is seen in the piano, something which is also common in relation to the traditional jazz trio format. For example the triplet motif is heavily developed and results in increased intensity and complexity. Contrasts between assertive, punctuated, repeated notes (6), motifs, rapid-fire scale passages, crystalline sparse high notes and extremes of register in the piano are features of pitch. The piano explores chromatic notes in its middle and high register within a small pitch range. Random ascending and descending tremolos are used. Some added expressive techniques such as glissandos followed by extremes of registers are apparent towards the end of the piece. Contrast is also seen in the piano's diversity of pitch patterns – acting as a foil between the bass and drum repetition. Also common in The Necks' overall body of work is for the bass and drums to assume a background, sometimes oscillating between a middle ground role in connection with the way space is used.

The Necks experiment with sound on a micro (individual) level in terms of exploring new ways of creating sounds as well as in a macro (collaborative and overarching) sense. A variety of sonic capabilities are explored in the piano. There are several techniques established here which feature prominently in subsequent albums. These include the use of a hammered piano sound [(5) See Glossary], electric piano sounds and plucked strings. Extended techniques such as plucked glissandi inside the piano, deep, growling, heavily-pedalled bass motifs, tremolos and experimental pedal techniques are employed. Sustained harmonic/pedal notes are used to reinforce tonality. Similarly a common technique used in the bass is to explore harmonics and other string techniques such as sul ponticello (playing close to the bridge of the instrument).

Space is used extensively between the various ideas articulated in the piano part. Apart from the minimalist connotation, this functions as a repetitive trait in a formal and temporal sense, as contrast and as resolution. Each idea once stated and then

repeated is digested – absorbed. It also relates to the other parts in a textural sense, providing a focus on the remaining bass and drum parts whereby these assume more of a middle ground status, switching between providing an accompaniment and that of a focus. The juxtaposition between the constant bass and drum patterns and the varied piano meanderings occurs throughout the piece, and is something common in many other Necks' albums.

In setting up the experiment, *Sex* is hypnotic and repetitive, blending simplicity with experimentation. It establishes some common musical threads which feature predominantly in other albums. *Sex* has been discussed in terms of constants and variables. The frequently used one-hour unravelling characterised by subtle and gradual change is also established.

2. *NEXT* 1990

STUDIO

Cover painting 'Big Move to Georgetown' Michael Bell/Graphic design Paul McNeil and Ray Maras

Next, (literally meaning following on from, subsequently, and then), is an album of contrasting pieces and dramatically different from *Sex*. It is a multi-movement work which comprises six shorter pieces ranging in length from 4:54 to 28:31 and is suite-like in its conception. This is a direct contrast to the one long track approach to composition and improvisation displayed in *Sex*. This multiplicity is atypical of The Necks' work. There is greater diversity and more rapid changes between ideas in *Next* which takes on a more funk and popular music identity – the title being both simple and effective – a sonic pun. *Next* is not one of the more popular Necks albums, which could possibly be due to the one-off tangent the band has experimented with here. Abrahams plays piano and keyboard on *Next*, Buck drums, percussion and programming and Swanton both acoustic and electric bass. One of the key differences between *Next* and other albums is seen through the guest appearance of additional musicians. These include: Dave Brewer on guitar (Tracks 2

and 5), Michael Rose pedal steel guitar (Track 4), Mike Bukovsky trumpet (Track 6) and Timothy Hopkins alto and tenor saxophone (Track 6).

Next, whilst featuring control aspects such as repetitive bass riffs and the use of piano, bass and drums as the main timbral aspect, is the furthest away from any other of The Necks' works, possibly due to the fact mentioned in relation to their previous album *Sex* that some of these shorter pieces were recorded first. In terms of an acoustic experiment, *Next* is the most dissimilar on a number of levels. *Next* continues the experiment by exploring the aspects of instrumentation, style, rhythm and structure. Contrast and variety are also augmented (heightened) in this work. One effect of the shorter, more compacted set of pieces is that it inhibits the lengthy development/evolvement (or not) of melodic material seen in the piano part in longer pieces such as *Sex*, in turn affecting listening experience. *Sex* in its lengthy, gradual unravelling provides an almost luxurious sonic experience giving the listener time to get into the groove/trance-like space whereas the shorter rock/funk-based pieces assume a more rock-like act of listening. Each of the pieces contained in *Next* takes on its own sonic identity. A variety of rock, funk and jazz elements characterise these. The hybrid nature is clearly evident, with jazz elements pushed into the background as the dominant rock style takes over.

1. 'Carl's' 07:19

'Carl's' begins with the opening from *Sex*, offering a reminder of and link to their previous album (1). A triplet motif based around a tonal centre of A is then heard in the bass (2). This is then varied soon after to take on the character of a funk rhythm whereby the triplet idea is replaced with a duple feel. The funk groove is extended to the drums where Buck assumes his collaborative, minimalist rock feel (3). The relentless, repetitive pattern acts as a background anchor to the other instruments. A type of juxtaposition occurs in the relationship between the pitch and tonal centre in the bass (A minor) and the mode used in terms of pitch in the piano (Ab, Bb, Cb, Db, Eb, F and Gb). The frequency of the piano motifs presented lacks the spatial resting characteristic of *Sex*, therefore creating a sense of forward motion/propulsion rather than the statement/space pattern used previously. The opening piano lines adhere to the minimalist trait of small pitch range (4). The difference here, however, is that these motifs are embellished and then repeated, and then more elaborately

developed. This then changes with many new different ideas being introduced. Constant short stabs of melodic ideas are then articulated by the piano i.e. the continual use of many melodic ideas is the antithesis of the minimalist ethos and is atypical of The Necks' work in general. The piano explores some variety such as chant-like melodies (5) (6) and minimalist pitch-register motifs which develop from existing stated material i.e. (4) (7) in a range of resisters and keys. Expanding the concept of pitch and key centre, dissonant, minimalist clusters (9) are featured. Contrasting this are long loping melodies (8). There are allusions to simple nursery-rhymes with a parody of 'Three Blind Mice' heard (10). Again the piano forms the basis of the foreground sonic material, combining with the other two instruments which act as a solid albeit repetitive foundation.

Maintaining a constant medium-tempo 4/4 beat throughout the greater rhythmic definition and extensive use of syncopation result in a more traditional rock piece. Contrasting with this, however, and something not heard in *Sex* is the exploration of arrhythmic aspects whereby by the rhythmic feel is manipulated slightly at times by the combination of instruments.

2. 'Nice Policeman Nasty Policeman' 04:54

Track 2 parodies the good-cop/bad-cop scenario through the title 'Nice Policeman Nasty Policeman'. It experiments with a number of elements including added instruments such as electric guitar, electric and acoustic bass, with Buck on percussion (which sounds like an agogo) and programming. The addition of Dave Brewer on electric guitar adds to the nucleus of piano, bass and drums. A plethora of acoustic and electronic sounds are united verging on an almost dance music genre. The control aspect of a clear, definable, continuous pulse in the form of a rock/funk feel in 4/4 time is used. An electronic drum beat is featured with a high cow bell emphasising the beat. The 'Three Blind Mice' motif present at the end of Track 1 'Carl's' overlaps into this particular track (1). The key also centres on that previously used in 'Carl's'. Blues-influenced piano motifs are introduced based on an Ab tonality (2) followed by more random keyboard motifs based on 'Mary Had A Little Lamb' (3). A thick, multi-timbral texture and chaotic mood is created. Repetition of motifs and expansion of the initial idea in the piano (02:41) is heard.

The drums pick up on syncopated accents which give a Latin feel (4). This is then echoed by the piano and based on a simple two-note riff (on B↓Gb) (5).

A high cow bell plays a percussive rhythm. Interspersed in the mix is a slightly distorted funky guitar sound. Again the piano employs some tone clusters which contrast vividly with the single line motifs. The guitar accompaniment is overdubbed and features a solo section. The clever transition in the piano part whereby the minimalist pitch pattern (1) is transferred to this piece, forms a link between past and present. The use of an asynchronous rhythmic independence of parts is a typical feature which contrasts with the constant 4/4 time feel, the overall effect adding the occasional moment of elasticity to the rhythmic flow. Textural complexity results from both the addition of instruments and the way instruments are layered in terms of their rhythmic independence. The effect also is that it doesn't seem to work as a collaborative unit/assemblage. The addition of instruments here means more distractions. This diverse collection of constantly changing (and faster) timbral complexity lacks the subtlety of the approach used in *Sex*, taking on a more heady '80s rock band persona. Also, there are implications for the way repetition is used, which is atypical of their approach. The comparative brevity, in Necks' terms, means that repetition is used more akin to that of the rock idea, as opposed to extensively using it to obtain their trademark hypnotic focus in a listening sense. This is a relatively short piece in Necks' terms and tends to be a statement of melodic ideas rather than demonstrate the continuous evolving over time.

3. 'Pele' 28:31

One interpretation of 'Pele' is as the goddess of fire. In the key of C minor this is a comparatively long track in terms of this album (28:31). The nucleus of piano, bass and drums is featured with a moderate tempo and 4/4 time feel throughout. The opening piano riff uses the rhythm pattern used in the double bass in *Sex* and establishes a subdued feel and tonal centre of C minor (1). This motif is repeated a number of times by the piano in the opening and forms the basis of much of the pitch and rhythmic material in the piece. Typical repeated notes and the use of space as a defining characteristic are evident in the chant-like syncopated one-note riff on the 6^{th} of the scale, which adds depth to the harmony (2). This then alters to a descending two-note motif based on the interval of a 4^{th} (5). Octaves are used in the

piano left-hand bass to reinforce the C minor tonality (3). The harmony shifts to a two-note C → F tonic/subdominant progression (4). The rhythm used in *Sex*'s riff, which is also used in 'Carl's', is also stated at times in the piano (6) (05:30). The piece evolves through more complex textural, rhythmic and melodic ideas, again at a rate quicker than occurs in other albums. Ideas such as the altered bass idea develop at 03:57. Rhythmic ambiguity is present in the keyboard created by an 'out of time' feel with the drums. Each part takes on a rhythmic independence. The drums play a variety of rhythmic patterns and again this is unusual in The Necks' performances (7) (8) (9). The intrusive random, syncopated snare accents (7) at 07:00 are replaced by a heavier, more intense beat at 11:46. Also, Buck explores accents more so than in The Necks' work to date, adding not only variety but also the element of surprise and intensity. Interestingly the piano also explores a wide diversity of techniques which contrast with the simpler minor blues riff featured in the opening. Some beautiful, lyrical piano lines (10) (07:27) explore chromaticism and then shimmering, pedalled impressionistic Debussy-like layers descend over the repetitive drum and bass patterns at 10:00 (11).

Abrahams then contrasts this with more sparse, jagged lines and forced accents paralleling the more manic, heavy feel on the drums at 11:46. A variety of other piano ideas such as repeated low bass notes, pesante chords, tremolos and a hammered piano sound are featured and provide great contrast both within the piano's sphere as well as in relation to the other instruments.

4. 'Next' 09:39

'Next' is another short piece by The Necks' standards (09:39). The track is a funk-based smorgasbord which is introduced by slapped bass (C blues) and a loping 4/4 rock feel (1). Hawaiian guitar sounds play sustained blues notes (2) and quirky riffs (3) (4). A key difference is the extensive use of voice samples and sound effects as heard in the sampled male voice – 'I really feel very, very bad' – overdubbed in the opening. This is actually from a well-known Sydney jazz critic apologising for a bad review. Jaunty, angular, blues melodies are interwoven with the funk rhythm prominent in the bass and sometimes enhanced by a tambourine. The humorous, well-chosen set of voice samples makes full use of the effects of sampling, carefully edited in a musical way, with the repetition mirroring that of the instrumental parts.

There doesn't, however, appear to be any point or telos to the spoken word. It is there as sounds, making only provisional use of its semantic content. Irony plays a big role here. Sprightly keyboard melodies are interspersed as are the Hawaiian-guitar blues riffs which are borrowed from the piano (5). The piano reverts to its frequently used hammered technique at 04:40 with a relentless, repetitive quaver rhythm (6). Other sampled voice sounds continue to be overdubbed, repeated and interspersed. These voice samples complement the blues-based, improv-fest in the instrumental parts: 'I'm really hearing different things said', ' ... very unfair and silly' X 2, ' ... very ... ah ... yup, yup', 'I'm trying too hard to like the record and I really feel very, very bad' X 2, 'I feel very, very bad' X 2, 'I feel silly', 'I really feel very unfair and silly', 'hearing different things said', 'VERY YUP YUP!' x 2 and 'hearing different things said' x 2. This rap-style musical diatribe is distorted. 'BAD!', 'I really feel very, very bad!' Space is also used as contrast.

5. 'Jazz Cancer' 06:16

Track 5 'Jazz Cancer' sees the funk groove continue. The opening F blues motif played with a distorted piano sound is catchy and repetitive, again in 4/4 time using a rock feel as a basis (1). A distorted, minimalist Hawaiian-sounding guitar comps in the background (2) whilst the piano plays loping, blues-based funk lines in octaves. The double bass plays a funky walking bass line. Some syncopated ideas appear in the piano and contrast with the more regular funk rhythms. Organ sounds begin to appear faintly.

6. 'The World at War' 16:35

Again the title could mean a number of things – there are possible 1984 Orwell-ian connotations in the title 'The World At War' and a BBC series of the same name is also a possibility. Another comparatively longer piece in the set, it opens with a reflective, meditative C- based simple two-bar riff in 4/4 (1). This is repeated extensively throughout, something seen in the way the bass is used in *Sex*. The piano plays some brief, descending minimalist right-hand lines and contributes to the reflective mood (2) and subdued, sustained brass harmonies are evident (3) (4) (5). Abrahams uses a technique which is becoming prevalent in his work whereby the rhythm is manipulated to create a hammered piano effect (6). Another technique beginning to emerge in his work as part of The Necks is the exploration of extremes

of register in the piano (7). The three-note motif idea, not unlike that heard in 'Three Blind Mice' is almost nursery rhyme-like in its simple construction (14:04). It is often extended and further developed through the manipulation of rhythm, thereby exploring the concept of variety (8) (9). Thus whilst there is an element of similarity in the germination of an idea, subtly shifting alterations create interest. Rumbling, sinister left-hand tremolos evoke programmatic associations with the title on a subliminal level (15:00) (10). A complete twelve seconds of silence is employed as an aural resting place (15:43-15:55), preceding the Hawaiian guitar and crazy piano meanderings which end abruptly, overdubbed with a fading out from a remnant from 'Jazz Cancer'.

With its funk-based grooves and off-beat samples, *Next* ducks and weaves in a totally different and one-off tangent.

3. ***AQUATIC*** 1994

STUDIO

Front cover Tom Stitt/Back cover Martin Kirkwood/Design Chris Roberts and Stuart Eadie

This is the third Necks album released on the Fish of Milk label in 1994 and the Carpet Bomb label in the US in 1999. The album comprises two tracks, each titled 'Aquatic'. Apart from the regular line up of Abrahams (piano), Swanton (double bass) and Buck (drums), there is the addition of hurdy gurdy played by Stevie Wishart on the second track. *The Wire* (a UK magazine) review of 1999 speaks of it in terms of: 'Real splendour ... a hugely mature album, a rare spark of brilliance ... a marvel' (The Necks website).

The two main areas of experimentation in *Aquatic* occur in the form of instrumentation, the way sampled sounds are incorporated into the aural fabric and how two shorter pieces make up the album (almost splitting the one-hour model in half), comprising two half-hour tracks.

Track 1 'Aquatic' 27:38

In terms of association, the title ‘Aquatic’ means relating to water, living in or near water, or taking place in water. The control aspects are present in the form of the nucleus of piano, bass and drums, and the use of a definable key (A/D minor). A clearly defined pulse and meter is evident, again using a 4/4 constant time feel. There are also commonalities in the presence of repetition (of motifs, rhythmic patterns and bass riffs) and minimalism (spacing of piano chords).

I will now demonstrate how the aural experiment continues, discussing the variable aspects contributing to change over time. Abrahams adds a Hammond organ to his instrumental armoury. With its wah-wah effects and meanderings and wanderings, there are shades of Jimi Hendrix’s rock organist Mike Finnigan on *Electric Ladyland*. The addition of electronic effects and sampling becomes more prevalent, with these combining with the nucleus to form a kind of independent layer, the piece beginning with a phased, whooshing sound and Buck’s trademark simplicity in the form of a constant, repeated, syncopated riff on the hi-hat (1). Variation is achieved, however, through gradual addition of more accents and syncopation, with Buck exploring this to create more of a reinforced intensity. Minimalism is further explored in the understated bass riff throughout, although there are minor changes and slight exploration within the pitch area of an octave (2). The minimalist ethos is captured in the piano part through the use of open 4ths and 5ths (3) (4). The increased role of electronic sounds and samples – warped, distorted sound grabs which weave in and out – act as intermittent contrast both in a formal spatial sense and as middle ground sonic ephemera. In terms of pitch material, a wider range of pitch material is explored e.g. use of extremes in the piano register (5) (6) (7).

The comparative shorter length (27:38) does affect development of material, although more so in relation to rhythm rather than pitch. Whilst repetition is a key component, its extremity is not as extensive as in lengthier pieces. The additional sound sources also play a part in providing more variation. The trance-like quality occurs, however, in relation to form and in dynamic intensity where the edge of chaos emerges. Erupting into a climax towards the end of the piece (22 minutes), the organ features violent repetition of sparse, accented chords (8) and shards of distorted scale passages (9). There is a collaboration of not only more complex motifs but an increase in the intensity. This has not been something previously explored. The drum intensity propels it into the foreground at times, something else

not typical of Buck's work with The Necks to date. The bass, however, assumes its take on very much its typical background role throughout.

It is worth noting here the influence of Chris Abrahams' keyboard motifs and use of repetition on the creative component. I refer to this in detail in Chapter 8.

Track 2 'Aquatic' 25:32

The main variable in terms of instrumentation is the inclusion of Stevie Wishart playing hurdy gurdy on Track 2. In contrast to Track 1, this track does not use the addition of electronic effects or sampling. The track opens with an octave bass riff (1). Perhaps the most significant observation relating to how foreground/ melodic/harmonic instruments are used is in the way the hurdy gurdy and piano feature separately. This lack of connection affects interaction in a collaborative sense. It is interesting to note the 'in-out' visits by these two instruments in a musical sense. The hurdy gurdy assumes prominent status at around the half-way mark – afforded the opportunity of a highly exposed cadenza, in the form of a reedy-sounding distorted improvisation. Due to the intermittent appearances by both instruments, this affects the overall construction (form) of the piece. The piano continues to explore a range of techniques and melodic material. It extends that heard previously to more expansive single-note motifs in the opening, ascending, fragmented scale passages (2), heavily-pedalled hammered piano, ascending pentatonic triplet motifs (3), chant-like motifs (4) and extensive use of heavily-pedalled trills (6). Interaction in the form interplay between the piano and overdubbed piano bass occurs when the minimalist pitch set, heavily pedalled, is juxtaposed over the bass riff. Swanton's double bass also has a solo role (preceding the hurdy gurdy cadenza), something not usually typical of The Necks' work. It explores repeatedly the two-note minimalist F → F# motif (5). The harmonic progression in the piano (7) is repeated unchanged for the last section of the piece (six minutes), the extreme repetition combining with increased rhythmic intensity to end the piece.

An interesting approach to rhythm is also adopted here. As heard in the opening, polyrhythmic effects are explored between the constant 4/4 pulse of the two-note octave jump in the double bass, this interval featuring predominantly in Swanton's bass motifs (such as both *Sex* and *Next*) (1). The juxtaposition of this motif with a

contrasting tambourine rhythm which, at first hearing, seems to be out of time, is actually a layering of triple time. This arrhythmic effect has also been previously used in their work (for example their second album *Next* – Track 3 'Pele'). Both feels, however, seamlessly combine to create a robust 12/8 rhythmic feel – in the form of a Renaissance folk dance.

Aquatic expands the sonic horizons to a Renaissance meets world music (Middle Eastern, ambient Turkish) festival of multi-tracked sound effects, wild animal sounds, 1980s organ, Hendrix-inspired wah-wah pedals (Track 1), tremolos, heavy reverb at times on the piano and solos by double bass and hurdy gurdy (Track 2).

4. *SILENT NIGHT* 1996

STUDIO

Cover painting by Tom Stitt/Graphic design by Paul McNeil and Ray Maras

Rather than any musical connection with the well-known Christmas carol – 'Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright' – all is not really calm, or bright in the two dark and brooding tracks 'Black' and 'White'. The fourth album, *Silent Night* was released on the Fish of Milk label in 1996 as a double CD. The *Rolling Stone* (Australia) review of the album states: 'The Necks create mood music of the highest calibre. Compelling and beautiful music that repays repeated listening' (The Necks website 2012).

Silent Night is perhaps The Necks' most experimental foray into the use of sound sources and verges on a soundscape in its use of old movie soundtracks (in Track 1 'Black'). Abrahams is featured on piano, organ, and samples, Swanton on acoustic and electric bass and Buck on drums and samples.

The control element nucleus of piano, bass and drums is prevalent, however merged and entwined with added sonic filmic material to create a significant new direction in their work. Other controls are the use of a fixed tonal centre (E minor), and a tangible 4/4 pulse.

The experiment continues with the main variants seen in the double-album comprising two hour-long tracks, the way a variety of pre-recorded movie sounds (in Track 1 ‘Black’) and samples are added and how they are used.

Track 1 ‘Black’ 1:03:27

The introduction features no musical content, only an ambient bed of pre-recorded film sound – someone closing doors, footsteps, creaking, unzipping a bag, clunking, more footsteps, moving stands, paper, unscrewing the lid off a bottle, pouring a drink and laughing. Although The Necks have used pre-recorded sound previously in other albums (Album 2 *Next* Track 4 ‘Next’), this is the first time it has been used as a single, separate entity to introduce a piece. It exists independently as a three minute introduction. This immediately sets up a different context and focus for the listener. This is followed by Buck emphasising a moderate tempo on loose hi-hat – I I I I – establishing the constant 4/4 time signature and a definite pulse. This in turn introduces the bass riff, however in this case it is played by low register piano (1).

Apart from the experiment with sound sources, one of the key variables occurs in the role reversal and interaction between the conventional piano and bass set-up – whereby the piano assumes the role of bass and the bass responds in a higher register to that of the piano with a complementary/supplementary riff i.e. a type of call and response interplay between piano and bass occurs as well as an overlap in registers between the instruments. These are new explorations, adding to their development and providing contrast.

Sustained Hammond organ lines drift in and out and extremes of registers are explored in the piano (2). The ‘Mary Had A Little Lamb’ motif, (another trait similar to ‘Mary Had a Little Lamb’ which occurred in *Next*) gives the impression of Abrahams practising a distorted, warped version of it, in contributing to the overall mood of the piece. Many different ideas are prevalent in the piano part, with the exploration of bass motifs something new (3). Again extremes of register are explored (6) as are minimalist pitch patterns (7). Many electronic sound effects in the form of industrial and warped, phased sounds are used, the effect contrasting with both the traditional acoustic sounds of piano, bass and drums and the pre-recorded old movie. Buck’s relentless crotchet-based rhythm is varied at times as the piece progresses by adding accents and a stronger, more intense feel (4) (5).

In terms of form, this takes on a double narrative as a result of the interweaving/ combination/mixing of old movie sounds and piano, organ, bass and drums. The points at which the grabs have been inserted post-production is interesting, and brings up the concept of freedom and choice on another level apart from their free improvising approach.

Whilst maintaining a steady, constant, repetitive rhythmic feel on drums, the piece oscillates between this and some use of asynchronous characteristics. Many of the effects and techniques used here create the effect of surprise. In this way The Necks have used a variety of new techniques to advance the sonic journey.

Track 2 'White' 53:49

One of the main differences between 'White' and other previous Necks' tracks is in the way form is used. Rather than adopting a flow-through approach, a more segmented approach is featured here. I have interpreted this as:

Section 1: 00:00-14:34

Section 2: 14:34-21:00

Section 3: 21:00-42:00

Section 4: 42:00-53:49

The control aspects of piano, bass and drums are evident, as is a tonal centre (which also shifts from a G Aeolian mode (G A Bb C D Eb F and G) to Eb. There is a definable pulse, although a time signature not commonly used by The Necks – that of 6/4. Repetition is used extensively as seen in Buck's simple crotchet ride cymbal pattern (1). This does evolve gradually however it maintains its minimalist characteristic (2).

'White' begins with a simple two-bar repeated double bass riff which reinforces the subsequent G minor tonality, also weaving in and out of Eb minor. This forms the basis of a type of question and answer, each comprised of a minimalist four-note pitch pattern (3). This is repeated extensively. Unusual timbral effects such as random bongos, tin cans, cow bells and percussive sounds enter at 00:15 creating an ambient texture. These continue to bubble up under the main instrumental lines and

act as a foil for the other instruments. The experiment with instrumentation and samples continues, with a plethora of organic sounds – the use of bamboo chimes is significant – as is the use of electronic sounds such as randomly-placed sounds (like a radio beeping or truck reversing).

A significant difference is seen in the musical material explored by the piano. Abrahams doesn't explore motifs or melodic ideas in the way he has previously, but focuses on trills (first line of (4)) and minimalist clusters as its 'musical content', playing either short melodic patterns e.g. descending minimalist phrases, clusters (5) and angular, widely-spaced arpeggios (second line of (4)). Occasional low register single notes at the beginning of the bar in octaves feature prominently in the piano.

The piano exploits the interval of a semitone through various heavily pedalled, trilled motifs (00:30) and ascending angular arpeggio motifs. This section continues in a similar vein, although the bass riff begins to atrophy, mutate, evolve and change gradually – altering the last note of the phrase every second time. Space is an important feature – and random, simple melodic ideas weave in and out.

In Section 2 (14:34) a more trance like feel is created, with the 6/4 triple metre mantra in the bass and drums evolving whilst a warped, distorted, cosmic synthesised sound like a spaceship both ascends and descends slightly within a narrow pitch range, often chromatic.

Section 3 (21:00) begins with a sustained pedal note G. Clusters are used in the piano. The organ plays an Eb pentatonic-based solo. Warped bass sounds are also featured in the background whilst the spacey solo continues its improvised fragmented statement, at times taking on a bluesy feel. Additional electronic effects in the form of panned L → R (left to right) tuning of an old analogue radio with an undercurrent of faint voices and squeaky tremolo effects are introduced. Trills frequently reoccur, with an almost Middle Eastern trill idea flourishing in the piano. Drums and bass combine to provide a solid groove and repetitive, relentless triple metre transcendental/trance-like rhythmic feel. Percussive right-hand short semitone-based riffs and trills flicker in and out (33:00-ish) and high register right-hand piano clusters based on the interval of a semitone punctuate the thicker texture of acoustic sounds combined with ambient electronica. An interesting array of electronic sounds such as radio tuning, reverse sound effects, panning L → R old

analogue radio with intermittent voices, squeaks and high pitched frequencies adds to the sonic material. Ideas continue to repeat ad infinitum. Evocative, dark, sinister shot-gun sounding audio and faint distorted voices intensify and flicker in and out, creating their own improvisation in a non-conventional sense.

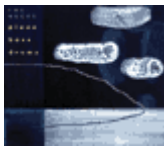
Section 4 (42:00) continues to articulate the radio tuning effects and the piano trill idea gives way to a brief climax consisting of clusters continuing in the upper register of the right-hand. The intensity decreases in both volume and freneticism. The trill ideas in the piano recur (44:00-ish) in the background, whilst the random 'changing stations' radio continues its lengthy improvisation. The piano then plays short percussive, hammered piano riffs. Whilst each part appears to have certain independence, the combination is trance-like and hypnotic. At 47:30 the piano continues with the short, percussive hammered riffs and intersperses this with a new idea – short ascending arpeggios. 49:00 again sees an increase in intensity albeit briefly which begins to die away at 50:20. Buck's open hi-hat patterns are relentless. More piano clusters are featured. The drums and radio noises are the prominent 'finishers' – with occasional flickers of warped piano trills. The piece ends with a crotchet bass drum pattern which evokes an almost military feel of a prisoner going to the gallows.

The segmented approach to form sees more discrete sections within the piece, each with their own differing style, with the added sonic material and time signature of 6/4 forming a constant point of reference between these sections. Section 1 is characterised by extreme repetition of motifs and exploration of sound material, Section 2 is more trance-like due to the use of electronic sounds such as warped, sustained spaceship sounds, Section 3 electronica meets the blues and Section 4 an extension of sound exploration in the form of ambient electronica and an independence of parts.

This album is unlike other albums to date, demonstrating an experiment combining old movie sound tracks in Track 1 'Black', as almost a film noir soundscape. Track 2 'White' further explores experimentation with both sound sources and, particularly in the piano, new ways of producing sound. The relationship with form in 'White' is an avenue not previously pursued – that of clearly defined sections within a piece as opposed to the more fluid evolving one-hour track as evident in *Sex*.

5. *PIANO BASS DRUMS* 1998

LIVE 53:22



Cover painting by Emma Walker/Photo Arunas/Graphic design Julia Biddle

Piano Bass Drums is the fifth Necks' album and their first live recording without overdubs which was released on the Fish of Milk label in 1998. It consists of a single track titled 'Unheard' (53:24). Recorded live at The Basement on 25 September 1996 the album was nominated for Jazz Album of the Year in the 1998 ABC Classic FM awards. The group frequently performed at The Basement so it was a familiar space, with background sounds kept to a minimum.

The Necks admit they often take their ideas from the live setting, with each room and audience inspiring a unique improvisation. This is their first live album and I pursue the experiment in these terms, showing there is a difference between their live and studio albums. There is a case of more intensity – erupting into the 'edge of chaos' – which ebbs and flows and creates contrast. One thing to bear in mind is that the first live recording format itself prohibits additional instrumentation and sampling. The control nucleus of piano, bass and drums is featured. A triple time 3/4 definable pulse and tonal centre of D Dorian mode is used. In typical fashion Swanton introduces the piece with a minimalist four-note motif (1). This, combined with Abrahams' expressive, ambient piano meanderings creates a reflective state. Abrahams continues to morph into yet another guise here – exhibiting influences of impressionist and 20th century masters such as Scriabin and Webern. He oscillates between initial lyrical, transcendental, impressionist melodies (2), minimalist clusters (3) and angular, rapid-fire, wide-ranging pitches which tend to dominate at a loud volume at times with sustained chords. Some trademark similarities are also evident in the form of trill-like motifs (4) and hammered piano tremolos (5) (6). More aggressive, heavily-pedalled repeated cluster chords are used to create more intensity (7) (8). Abrahams' work here reflects the live environment and the band's relationship with it. He explores contrast in greater depth and detail than has been evidenced in previous work. There is greater diversity and change. The typical

relentless hi-hat rhythm from Buck as a constant background source sees slightly more development and connection with that which occurs in the piano part. He achieves this by subtly mirroring and imitating some of the piano rhythms demonstrating a symbiotic relationship between the instruments. It seems overall that the connection between the musicians is heightened – with more organic development of melodic and rhythmic ideas featured in *Piano Bass Drums*. Around the 17 minute mark the group trips into the edge of chaos – a mesmerising, transfixing effect ensues. This is achieved through intense, frenetic rhythmic patterns on piano (8) and drums (9). Whilst there are moments of quieter reflection, there is more frequent use of crescendo and many climaxes used to create contrast. Abrahams assumes more of an '80s rock keyboardist with shades of Elton John's 'All The Girls Love Alice' keyboard motifs making an appearance (20:44).

In summary, there is more intensity which develops in this performance, with more ideas featured more frequently and therefore more contrast created. The extreme relentless rhythmic propulsion contributes to this, with all of the instruments developing the element of rhythm more so than in previous albums. The link with environment and location, the musicians' reaction to it and subsequent consequence of it sees the intensity and energy of The Necks in performance captured in this live recording.

6. ***THE BOYS*** 1998

Cover: Stills from the film by Tristan Milani/Design by Paul McNeil

This studio album is dealt with in Chapter 5.

7. ***HANGING GARDENS*** 1999

STUDIO 1:00:30

Cover painting by Marisa Purcell/Design and inside photography by Tim Kliendienst

Recorded in January 1997 and released in 1999 on The Necks' own label Fish of Milk, *The Guardian* review describes this as:

> Mesmerising, grandiose music from one of the greatest bands on the planet. *Hanging Gardens* is an album that you can just let wash over you or listen to carefully, as its interlocking melodic, rhythmic and timbral elements slowly evolve and shift over this hour-long track (Walters 2002, The Necks website p. 2).

The Guardian's John L. Walters, a UK music journalist and critic, is a consistent advocate of The Necks.

Hanging Gardens, The Necks' seventh album, is another hour-long spontaneous improvisation, created from the kernel of an idea and which gradually evolves through the process of repetition and minimalism. The key variants explored here as part of the acoustic experiment include additional multi-tracked electronica and keyboard sounds as well as the aspect of more complex rhythmic patterns.

At this point The Necks are beginning to gain international recognition. Prominent UK jazz writer Stuart Nicholson in his review of *Hanging Gardens* (*JazzTimes* 2001) describes The Necks' work in the following terms:

> It is tempting to say that if you want to hear jazz that is not another wearying variation of hard bop but is pushing the envelope, reaching out in new and interesting directions, look beyond American shores. Tempting, but, like all generalisations, is only partly, if nevertheless substantially, true. And yes, at around the 100-year point in jazz's evolution, conjuring new spirits out of old spells is a difficult mojo to work. But people are doing it – a case in point is The Necks, an Australian piano/keyboard trio that's developed an enormous cult following, generating album sales in the thousands with little or no publicity.

He also draws parallels with the work of French composer Vincent d'Indy's *Istar Variations*:

> Where a Babylonian goddess of the same name passes through seven gates, divesting some garments at each. When she passes through the seventh the transformation is complete; she is naked. At the end of 60 minutes, The Necks (Chris Abrahams, Tony Buck and Lloyd Swanton) may have passed through more gates than Istar, but the effect at the final one is just as attention grabbing.

The control aspects include use of piano, bass and drums. The time signature of 4/4 is used and Eb minor tonality. In *Hanging Gardens* piano, organ and Fender Rhodes electric piano all feature as part of Abrahams' instrumental armoury. The single, hour-long piece begins with a fast, florid, energetic semiquaver rhythm on the hi-hats reminiscent of a dance groove (1) (2). Swirling sound effects, intermittent sustained organ chords (3), watery synthesiser sounds and whoosh-type wind effects are added. The Eb minor key lends itself to creating riffs, pitch patterns on black notes of the piano, with Abrahams often basing his melodies on a pentatonic scale. Extensive repetition is seen in the use of a relentless semiquaver drum rhythm and the piano's bass riff (04:55).

Of particular significance is the bass riff which is played in the piano's extremely low register, replacing the role of the double bass (4) which is not introduced until later in the piece when double stopped pizzicato notes become evident (6). The gradual multi-layered approach is commonly used by The Necks. Created by inserting random yet well-chosen sound effects over a repetitive bed of sound also contributes to increased intensity. The Jimi Hendrix style wah-wah organ (à la Mike Finnigan) of phased sustained chords pulsate and intertwine with the other layers of sound, including a synthesiser-based organ sound (07:00) (8).

At 07:15 the drums become more complex and heightened in intensity, playing an aggressive, syncopated rock beat (7) unleashing some virtuosity – at times featuring Buck as a soloist. A Japanese style pentatonic melody is featured in the piano. Other sound sources continue to be placed at various aural locations in the mix, and the piece builds texturally, dynamically and rhythmically but not melodically. Melodic ideas tend to be stated and then repeated. There is a complex simplicity about this piece. Simple ideas are utilised, but innovatively and cleverly combined to produce a rich, more sectionalised and complicated work. Rather than ease into the piece and let it develop at its own pace, there is more energy and rhythmic drive present than

in previous albums whereby a more immediate rhythmic intensity occurs caused by Buck's highly danceable groove and the incessant low-register piano bass riff.

In terms of form, the simple sixteen-bar piano motif from the beginning of the piece is varied and augmented through the addition of stabs of electric piano manipulated through an echo box and the occasional organ sound making sweeping appearances. Typically material is stated and repeated, however with more of an ornamented approach which embellishes the music in an understated way. This piece is slightly unusual for The Necks as there are clearly distinct sections which make up the piece as opposed to their usual single-minded developed pieces. For example, a completely different section (Section 2) occurs at 21:45 where the key now becomes major, and is characterised by the extreme repetition of this harmonic progression (9), not unlike something found on a Joe Jackson album such as *Stepping Out*. Complexity of rhythm is a feature of the accompanying instruments here, with Buck going off on many flamboyant tirades reminiscent of '80s rock. The end of this section transitions with extreme use of the low-register piano riff (5) and warped, minimalist two-note organ motif (8), then Buck changes to a more of a straight-ahead funk beat which dies away. The low register piano bass riff persists, in dialogue with Swanton's faint, weak double stopping and some punctuation by organ. At 34:20 complete contrast is achieved when all instruments drop out, only to leave a heart-beat-like synth pad bass sound (10), with minimalist interjections by a variety of sawing sounds: electronic, organ and electric piano and pizzicato double stopped double bass. Section 3 sees the return of extreme repetition of the low register piano motif (8), however over this is layered a tremolo repeated single string-like piano note (11).

Section 4 (39:30) sees a repeated, warped organ chord prominently focused, above the low piano bass riff. Buck's syncopated accents feature here which are picked up by the organ. There is much more complexity and building of sound texturally and dynamically. The organ develops to create a virtuosic display characterised by rapid ascending and descending scales, (not unlike something from Rick Wakeman's *War of the Worlds*) distortion compelling the piece to the edge of chaos. The reoccurrence of literally repeated motifs such as the low register piano motifs (4) (5) and chord progressions (9) is atypical in The Necks' work.

Section 5 (53:00) builds and new melodic material is introduced by the heavily-pedalled piano.

Hanging Gardens is like a set of movements – a suite/symphony/minimalist/jazz-rock fusion piece. The most obvious variant and exploration is that of rhythm. This is explored not only via independence of parts whereby the resulting asynchronous effect is created, something which evolves over the course of their sonic journey, but also in a collaborative context. A more intense approach to rhythmic drive and its resultant intensity is explored which is offset by occasional interrupted rhythmic flow and use of space. Despite the rhythmically fragmented approach, the intensity is maintained.

8. ***AETHER*** 2001

STUDIO 01:03:50


Cover by Asi Föcker

A term used in ancient and Medieval science, in Homeric Greek 'Aether' means 'pure, fresh air' or 'clear sky'. In Greek mythology it was the pure essence where the Gods lived and which they breathed, and is also personified as a deity, Aether, the son of Erebus and Nyx. *Aether*, with its klangfarbenmelodie approach to sound, uses orchestral-like tone colours to create a rich, aural pointillism. The opening section alternates between single sustained chords and silence. The piece begins with a sustained E minor 9th and then B minor 7th chord on synthesiser (1) (2) and unfolds gradually, exploring the extreme use of space and sustained sound in the supra-minimalist opening. The suspension of sound is created through this delay, seeming to hang in the air – aether. The critic John Walters refers to this as 'a manner that slows down the listener's perception of time' (Walters 2004, p. 1). The interesting feature about this work is the intermittent approach in a structural sense. This piece does not set up a groove and sense of forward propulsion, but rather is characterised by an interrupted rhythmic flow. It is interesting how The Necks have dealt with the horizontal flow – or lack of it – in a temporal sense. The inconsistent rhythmic feel

and the subsequent use of silence as a contrasting mechanism between sound grabs are unusual in their work. This is a complete contrast to their other previous work. There is much intercutting between short grabs of sound and silence. In both a linear and vertical sense it is carefully constructed and well thought-out. The ambient and minimalist approach to pitch is evident with single, sustained, floaty, ethereal sounds and sparse two-note chords a feature.

This piece uses extreme repetition the most to date. Occasional saw sound effects appear and the two-chord riff featured in the opening is repeated ad infinitum forming the harmonic basis of the piece at this point. Some slight expressive variation occurs in the form of sul ponticello tremolos. The piece at this point continues to build. It is the effect of the canopy of sound that is important here. If the listener zones in and doesn't concentrate on one particular sound or idea a trance effect is generated. The result is mesmerising and transfixing. A similar effect could be derived from psychedelic material from the 1960s. As a result a more intense and focused listening approach is required. The total aural kaleidoscope erupts in a lengthy climax (50:00-ish-01:01:32). Extreme repeated quaver pedalled chords appear in the mid-range right-hand piano part creating a mesmerising effect. Extended techniques are used including cymbal rolls which create waves of sound and an orchestral element. Constant ride cymbal hits (background) are 'in sync' with piano chords. The piece then dies away, with waves of cymbal rolls as the coda. Washes of sound and palettes of sound colour constitute the overall sound. Klangfarben. This album is a little more of an innovative orchestral experiment than previous ones in the way sounds are combined and produced. Other sound sources continue to be placed at various aural locations in the mix, and the piece builds texturally, dynamically and rhythmically but not melodically. Again melodic ideas tend to be stated and then repeated. Despite the simple but not simplistic approach to pitch and ideas, the combination of the sounds results in considerable complexity. The piece is characterised by very ambient sound choices. More jarring sounds are included briefly. Sounds include whirly noises, à la Mike Finnigan's (Jimi Hendrix's organist) organ, electric piano (phased, spacey) a harmonic saw sound, bottle sounds and distorted bass.

> There's a similarity to the music of Feldman and the New York School, or to Cardew and the English Experimentalists – a concern for stillness and simplicity, but also for

> the complex, unpredictable timbres you get in work for larger ensembles (Walters 2001, p. 1).

Aether explores the concept of orchestral minimalism and a number of rhythmic directions not found in previous albums such as extreme suspension of sound and manipulation of time. In 2012 Screensound Australia included *Aether* in its national registry of recordings.

9. *ATHENAEUM, HOMEBUSH, QUAY, RAAB* 2002

LIVE

Cover painting 'Rain' (detail) by Emma Walker courtesy of King Street Gallery
Band photo © Hamish Ta-mé/Design by Paul McNeil

> The live boxed set.
>
> Everybody can release them can't they and everybody does. You see people along Devonshire tunnel now busking and they're selling their CDs. With the live boxed set, did you pick four of the best or something? (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 5)

Athenaeum, Homebush, Quay and Raab make up the four CD set recorded in Melbourne, Sydney and Austria. The Necks celebrated their 15th birthday with its release. It was recorded between 31 January 1999 and 30 March 2001 and released on 11 November 2002 on the Fish of Milk label.

Chris Abrahams describes the recording process as follows:

> For the Basement one we hired a 16 channel and the Homebush one was through a mixing desk but the other two were just straight stereo recordings. The live one was totally acoustic. Most of my recordings I used to do are just purely stereo – just 2 mics on a stage getting an overall band sound from the centre of the stage.

CD 1 'Athenaeum', recorded in Melbourne, opens with a characteristic single repeated note bass riff on Bb (1) and establishes the 6/4 time signature and a lilting dotted rhythm on the drums. Abrahams uses his trademark triplet idea (2) (3) and small melodic cells (4) – Michael Nyman-ish in its conception. The usual formula of

gradually shifting ideas is used as seen in the subtle changing bass part at 21:19 (5) (6). Middle Eastern scales and modal improvisation are featured in the right-hand pedalled piano part which is characterised by a combination of hammered single repeated notes and more ornate scalic flourishes and arpeggios (7). The mesmerising, climactic, transcendental bed of sound takes over at around 25:00. Increased frequency of the melodic and scalic motifs and expansion of note choices in the piano occurs as does some intermittent chromaticism. The bed of sound idea becomes very prominent (32:00) and other instruments drop out except for sforzando orchestral cymbal hit (8) whilst the piano improvises a high register right-hand melody. Plucked percussive bass (33:15) matches cymbal hits temporarily. At 34:25 the piano begins to die away with a lack of pedal and in the high register. Small cell motifs and trills are explored.

Variation is achieved through the percussive orchestral crashes. Rhythmic interplay between this and violently plucked double stops on the bass begin irregularly then become regular. Textural and dynamic reduction occur sounding like the piece is about to prematurely finish. The piano introduces trademark tinkling chord clusters in its upper register above the cymbal hits (9) (35:10). This idea is developed horizontally by the use of repetitive small scalic/arpeggio motifs. Much repetition is used in this section, as well as the piano playing its extended extemporisation which incorporates a number of scalic motifs, tone clusters, tremolos and repeated notes/motifs. Glissandi also feature extensively in the piano (13). The drums evolve into more of a regular, recurrent rock beat (10) (11) (12) (36:00).

CD 2 ‘Homebush’ opens with a characteristic single note plucked riff on the bass between pedal notes low G and C (1). The ride cymbal keeps a two-note motif paralleling the rhythmic pulse of the bass (2). A polyrhythmic feel develops into a two-fisted left- and right-hand cluster exchange in the mid-register of the piano (3). Warped grabs of sound are created via the distorted, dissonant, clustered piano poundings. Descending chromatic motifs are used extensively in the piano (4) (5). The piece builds in intensity, volume and texture. Drums develop syncopated ‘bomb’ accents on snare. The bass continues to anchor the pulse whilst other instruments take on their own rhythmic identity (7) (8). The triplet idea is developed in the drums. Puffy, repetitive, clustered tremolos become more florid and intensified (6). Intensification transforms into manic freneticism. At 29:00 the drums

play a more complex triplet/dotted note rhythm on the ride cymbal (9) which later morphs into a syncopated rhythm (11) and at 30:35 a chromatic Chopin-esque motif appears in the piano (10). Then the bass becomes more frenetic, percussive and nasal in tone colour. An alternating tritone interval (C → F#) (12) creates tonal ambiguity and distorted sound. An African-inspired rhythmic rock feel emerges in the drums (31:58) (13) creating a stronger dynamic. This creates more movement and intensity, whilst the bass takes on a manic, repetitive transcendental feel.

The climax occurs in the piano part which plays an extended, manic, highly percussive, heavily accented tone clustered improvisation (14) (15). The volume intensifies to support the other instruments. Abrahams exploits the full range of the piano through the use of contrasting, virtuosic single-note lines. The aural emphasis is on thick, heavy texture and rhythmic stasis. The piano ideas develop further with pounding, low register tremolo rumblings (up to 37:25) and playing heavily – pesante – over the top of an African-inspired rhythm. The drums reinforce this pattern, after which a more fragmented, rhythmic percussive motif appears. A dramatic decrease in volume, rhythmic and melodic intensity then follows.

39:00 continues this rhythmically intense reincarnation of the music with the bass playing distorted, plucked notes in the high register, often double stopped, picking up into a warped presto 'in 2' country feel with accentuated accelerando. The track dies away with drums and bass more prominent and the piano virtually disappearing.

A variety of rhythmic feels are used in 'Homebush' ranging from more simple, loping march-like rhythms, meditative tribal rhythms to shifting, more complex polyrhythmic effects. Syncopated, punctuated accents – 'bombs' – occur on the snare which contrast with the anchoring role played by the bass. The rhythm shifts into three at times, adding to the rhythmic ambiguity ranging from regular to fragmented and back again. Each instrument takes on its own rhythmic independence and identity. There is some pitch ambiguity created by the opening G minor tonality which is clouded by extensive use of chromaticism and tone clusters.

CD 3 'Quay' opens with bass only playing a gently plucked three-note motif (1). A minimalist, thin texture, repetition and extensive use of space are musical characteristics evident throughout. Following the introduction the piece continues in its repetitive, meditative, quiet, gentle state where beautiful, meandering, random

piano lines (2) weave in and out of the single repeated bass notes (3), with drums using a repeated brushes reversed-snare sound. Slightly shifting clusters occur in the piano (4). At 19:00 the drums develop a dotted motif playing a more consistent rock feel (5). The percussive timbre and rhythmic feel intensifies but in a subtle way which reinforces the more elaborate, embellished piano idea arising in this section. There is a heavily repetitive treatment of the piano's ascending chromatic line which contrasts the use of clusters (6) (7) and chromaticism (8).

There is an abundance of polyrhythms featured where 3/4 occurs against 5/4 simultaneously. Accelerando and more urgency occur in the piano riff which slowly metamorphoses into a heavily pedalled, warped and manic sound. A percussive two-handed closed-fist technique emerges. At 44:50 a cleverly intertwined new melody interlopes in intrinsic fashion. The volume and texture intensify and percussive sounds add to and reinforce the level of intensity. This is the most complex and climactic section in the piece thus far. At 47:15 the music becomes quite dissonant, warped and distorted. Frantic motifs exploit the full range of the piano in capricious style. Even with each new idea introduced each individual part is clearly defined. An aural kaleidoscope effect is achieved. The section at 51:46 continues in climactic fashion with very intense, shimmering two-fisted piano lines evident. Pounding, repetitive, relentless rhythm is a feature. The piece dies away at 52:40 with volume and intensity dwindling suddenly.

CD 4 'Raab' opens with a simple two-note right-hand melody (1) (00:00-00:26) and immediately sets up a minimalist, transcendental atmosphere. The bass plays in the high register creating a faint moaning sound (2). A very beautiful two-chord pattern becomes prominent in the foreground (4) whilst the piano continues to refer to its repetitive short motifs at various times. The drums become more animated (3) and the focus is on timbral exploration on the ride cymbal which contributes to the very transcendental sound. The idea of polyrhythms is prominent in that there is both an independence of sound in a melodic, harmonic and rhythmic sense as well as a collective cohesive, overall effect. This is an example where all musicians converge and the sum of the three separate instrumental parts creates the whole. The piece is very repetitive with the two-chord motif exploited whilst other instruments continue as a background bed of sound. The drums become more orchestral through the use of gongs, trills and rolls on the ride cymbal, and orchestral-sounding bass drum. The

irregular frequency of motifs, cymbal rolls and spatial aspects (silence) create variation even though much of the melodic material remains constant. Some new two-note left-hand motifs occur in the low register of the piano (5) (19:28) which repeat. This is a complete contrast to the opening and the piece becomes quite dark, brooding and menacing. At (6) (24:00) violent, percussive, col legno (with the wood) effects appear in the double bass followed by intensification in volume. The piece is climactic in the way overall rhythmic movement and textures are combined. Accents gradually appear creating respite from the relentless, repeated rhythmic ideas whilst the bass changes to become slightly more animated. The piece ebbs and flows, dying down a little at 35:00. Repetition occurs in a similar vein with two-handed tremolos prevalent in the aural foreground. The shimmering two-fisted tremolo idea is extended to sound like a flamenco-style dulcimer at 41:30. The drums increase in militaristic intensity. Crisp, rapid, constant, percussive arpeggiated right-hand keyboard motifs appear and develop into virtuosic improvisatory ramblings. The tempo becomes elastic with accelerandos and rallentandos prominent as variation. The piece suddenly dies away (47:50) until the end (49:25) with rhythmic independence demonstrated in a heightened polyrhythmic sense.

10. ***DRIVE BY*** 2003

STUDIO 01:00:17

Cover by Asi Föcker

> If *Drive By* is a hitch-hike, it's an hour-long ride through William Gibson territory in a sleek limo, blurred shapes barely visible through the tinted windows. A triple-time electric piano figure provides a click track against which several versions of The Necks fade in and out (Walters 2004, p. 3).

The Necks use a variety of subtle shifting temporal gradations in the way they explore the concept of having separate groups of instruments recorded simultaneously and gradually manipulating these as different polyrhythms. According to Swanton:

> The concept of the album was to have discrete instrumental groups in different polyrhythms recorded simultaneously and move between them gradually. There's a couple of weeks of recording involved there. Most of the overdubs went for an hour – it's just that in the final mix, we may have only used a few minutes (Walters 2004, p. 3).

As usual, much more material was recorded than was utilised in the final mix, which condenses the material a great deal in the way hour-long dubs were reduced to a few minutes duration. Abrahams describes this as follows:

> We do a lot of mixing and editing – not so much in terms of mixing the album tracks – particularly with *Drive By*. That was a situation where we just loaded it up – all – I think we ended up with 30 tracks. And each other had an idea and we just did that for an hour on a piece of tape and then when we came to mix it it became more of a performance phase (Abrahams in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 5).

It is interesting here that the process whereby sounds were chosen, recorded and edited now becomes an integral part woven into the fabric of the improvisation. Buck reinforces the significance of this stage:

> The mixing is more important than the recording. After we finished recording we took away 'rough mixes' with everything on them, they were really dense. At the mix the multi-track becomes like playing a huge sampler with hour-long samples (Walters 2004, p. 3).

The constants remain in the form of piano, bass, drums, with a tonal centre of C evident (this, however, is manipulated through the addition of Eb and Ab in the piano). There is some exploration of time through the use of 3/4 and 4/4 time signatures. *Drive By* begins with an electronic bass sound playing a repeated syncopated tonic/dominant pattern (1) followed by a constant electronic beeping sound (2). Sonic variation is achieved through the use of brief L → R panned radio signal effects. More intermittent grabs of sound effects appear as brief sonic punctuations (helicopter and phased synthesiser sounds at 21:05). The piano repeats a pattern from 08:15 at 23:10 which undergoes further repetition until (3) 24:15. More sound effects (electronic wind up sounds and phased, tinny bell-like sounds) fleetingly appear whilst drums increase in intensity and the organ plays a short improvised solo. Textural variation occurs whilst drums briefly take the aural

foreground. At 26:16 other sound effects in the form of children's playground noises create a narrative snapshot of sound. The piano repeats 08:15 motif at 27:15 with the organ repeating its brief original descending motif from 11:00 (4). Extreme use of repetition intensifies and the transcendental groove kicks in creating an aural kaleidoscope effect. The 3/4 drum feel becomes more prominent via the use of accents, a stronger rhythmic feel and semiquaver pattern, with the Hendrix organ weaving its two-note-based heavily sustained improvisation. Bass and drums have an interlude interspersed with radio sound effects and electronic sounds (war-like sounds and gun shots 41:19). At 48:24 foreground sounds of swirling radio tuning, locusts, Hendrix-style organ and cockatoos flying overhead are heard. At 49:44 bird sounds recur. The Hendrix-style organ continues its sustained two and three-note improvisations. All sounds converge/merge to create a thick texture and repeated motifs. *Drive By* is very meditative, mesmerising and transfixing. The multi-tracking from here on becomes more exploratory as a feature of the development of the piece.

> Much of the music made by this Australian trio depends on free improvisation, but it remains firmly reliant on western tonality and on the virtuosity of the musicians playing it. As keyboardist Chris Abrahams treads gently across the shifting sands provided by drummer Tony Buck and bassist Lloyd Swanton, *Drive By* might be their finest hour. Literally – like much of their repertoire, it's a single track lasting roughly 60 minutes (Fullford-Jones ed. 2008, p. 236).

11. *PHOTOSYNTHETIC* 2003

LIVE 42:20

Printed by LiniaGrafic!

'Photosynthesis' (from the Greek – *photo* – 'light', and *synthesis* – 'putting together', 'composition') is a chemical process that converts carbon dioxide into organic compounds, especially sugars, using the energy from sunlight. In this experiment-related context, *Photosynthetic* is the eleventh album and third live album by The Necks which was released on the Russian Long Arms label in 2003.

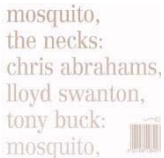
The album features a single track (42:22), titled 'Photosynthetic,' recorded live at DOM Cultural Centre, Moscow on 29 March 2002. Opening the piece is the piano which sets a groove and rhythmic feel playing a repetitive, meditative motif initially based on a repeated quaver F (1). The characteristically trebly, hammered piano sound which is often favoured sees this motif exploit the semitone idea, again a characteristic feature in The Necks' music, and expand it to include a juxtaposed F → F# idea (2). This is used in both a cluster context and trill idea, both often used by Abrahams. A descending three-note motif (3) is then extended to four notes, evolving gradually (4). A number of contrasting motifs appear in the piano, increasing in complexity (5). At 09:44 the piece builds in intensity via increased volume and punctuating drum fluttering. An accented quaver pattern overlaps the other idea resulting in the ideas recurring with greater frequency. The double bass continues to provide a double stopped plucked foundation (6). 13:00 sees a convergence of sound and an ambient sound bed. The sum total of three independent ideas merges to be 'as one' creating a hypnotic and mesmerising effect. The double bass extends its armoury to incorporate double stopped notes played with a deliberate rhythmic inconsistency creating an independence of rhythmic status. More rumbling sounds and accents appear prominent in the overall bass sound. The piece continues to repeat with a stasis of pre-stated ideas (14:56). Slight variations take place in the form of a more distorted, punctuated sound in the double bass and a slightly shifting pitch note as a focus. At 16:54 the dynamic level increases significantly as does the overall level of intensity. Clustered chords appear and punctuate a more arpeggiated piano part. Drum rolls and the rhythmic feel intensify. Subtle timbral contrast is created through the soft mallet rolls prevalent on a gong. A thumping timpani sound is introduced dominating with an African rhythm (7) (21:13) adding to the fluttering cymbal sound, clusters and arpeggios in the piano and continuing restatement of repeated motifs in the double bass. Extensive repetition is used. Crashing waves of sound emanate. The timpani sound continues to dominate and exploits the 3/4 idea. At 25:43 percussive, accented cluster chords create a polyrhythmic feel in the piano 4 against 3 (8) (9) (10) (11) (12). At 30:48 we see the emergence of a totally free section which is characterised by extremely dissonant, atonal rumbling. Tremolos appear in the high register of the piano leading to an extreme climax. A bed of crashing, ambient shards of sound alternates between the aural foreground and background creating an almost pulsating sound. A high,

percussive, growling convergence of dissonance predominates the work. The percussive clusters in the piano intensify in extreme high register (13) (33:10). The frequently used triplet rhythm (14) is introduced in the drums and exploited via piano clusters. A kind of call and response ensues with overlapping entries of sound. At 35:00 the piano takes off on its improvisatory clustered ramblings. Swells in dynamic intensity ebb and flow – an example of this is a repeated alternating of a crescendo → decrescendo pattern. This is prevalent in the articulation and phrasing of all instruments, contributing to the overall collaborative focus. Clusters shift from mid-range → higher register then extend to an even greater range in the piano (36:20). It is slightly more melodic in this section which results in reduced intensity. At 38:53 it begins to die down. Florid right-hand piano lines are prominent whilst other instruments provide a sensitive backing role via the continuing repetition of pre-stated musical material. Rapid meanderings form the basis of the extended improvisation in the piano. The piece is elaborate and virtuosic. Some violently plucked single notes punctuate the sound bed in the double bass. Buck's drumming explores orchestral techniques such as the way he treats the floor tom – using soft mallets and cymbal rolls to sound like a timpani and cymbal rolls with soft mallets sounding like an orchestral gong. The swell effect – < > – is a feature of his articulation and inherent in the phrasing.

Overall, manipulation of rhythm and the subsequent ambiguity created by it are features of *Photosynthetic* and the acoustic experiment.

12. *MOSQUITO/SEE THROUGH* 2004

STUDIO 01:01:43



Cover and photos by Asi Föcker

> The track is particularly reminiscent of the (for its time) long, drawn-out intro to [Pharoah] Sanders' 'Upper Egypt And Lower Egypt', but instead of lasting eleven minutes or so, continues with practically zero linear or narrative development for the entire hour. The Necks intensify the magic by contrasting the richness of the vamp with occasional periods of up to four minutes silence, or near-silence broken only by

> Aeolian harp-like high frequency resonances from piano strings, cymbals, and other objects in the studio (May 2005, p. 1).

Track 1 ‘Mosquito’ 01:01:43

‘Mosquito’ experiments with rhythm as seen in the time signature = 9/4 (4 + 5), not something The Necks have explored previously. Most common is the use of 4/4 meter, with 3/4 and 6/4 being used on occasion. ‘Mosquito’ also explores a completely different approach in the opening – whereby hit bamboo/xylophone sounds (samples) are juxtaposed with a dissonant, minimalist ambient piano motif (1) in dialogue – a type of call and response interaction occurs between the two. The bamboo FX assume greater significance and importance here as a legitimate sound source which assumes foreground status, as opposed to background context typically used (i.e. as a timbral contrast). Silence is used as a temporal spatial device. The piece is sparse but unified. An extreme minimalist motif is heard in the form of two repeated notes setting up the bass (2) which is then repeated extensively throughout. Abrahams’ piano meanderings alternate between ambient angular motifs and a more conventional set of major 7^{th} jazz harmonies (3) (8). These more traditional keyboard chord progressions are not a typical feature, (although they are used in *Hanging Gardens*) and contribute to a stabilising jazz piano sound. As can be seen from the transcriptions in Appendix B there is extreme repetition of the supra-minimalist bass riff which forms the aural focal point (4) (5) (6). A variety of traditional piano, bass and drums sounds are used and mixed with a plethora of unusual sounds such as woody sounds, random clunking sounds and space-like sounds.

> There’s lots of multi-tracking and overdubbing. I think we put the drums, bass and piano down first and then I think we put some bass down. Then I did two piano masters. I did three all up and Tony did two drum masters and I think there were two bass masters. After the initial kind of duo – simple things – it is totally acoustic (which is) one of the main things we wanted to do. [Contrary to the review – May 2005] there’s no samples. But we have used samples in the past. It’s a collective decision (Abrahams in Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 2).

It is interesting that even though there is an interrupted structural approach with the punctuated ‘in/out’ of the drum part, it doesn’t sound disjointed and still flows.

There is an interesting take on the role of the drums. Questions arise such as is it an integral rhythmic part in a conventional use of a drum kit, or is its function more like that of the other instruments in terms of their tone colour and textural role? The quaver pattern is an underlying feature of the drum pattern which is varied ever so slightly throughout (7).

Comparing this work to earlier albums it is interesting to skip forward and see the metamorphosis in their style. I find in the earlier work there are many more ideas present in terms of rhythm, texture and melody. The aspect of length and how repetition contributes to it is significant. The effect of extreme repetition here requires a new type of listening – with a form of aural fatigue possibly occurring – it requires a certain focus and aural stamina from the listener.

The opening five seconds of Track 2 'See Through' consists of silence after which the piano enters playing an ambient, Chopin-sounding G minor pentatonic motif (1) (2). The bass uses a typical repeated G on which to base other melodic and rhythmic material (3). Some minor blues touches (4) (5) (6) (16) are added which are further developed as the piece progresses. The bass features a number of subtly changing, minimalist pitch patterns, each building on the initial idea (3) (7) (8) (9) (10) – 'Three Blind Mice' motif. A wash of sound is prevalent texturally which creates a hypnotic, mesmerising and transcendental effect. Techniques such as tremolos (12) (15), trills (13) (14), inverted trills (11) and cymbal rolls are extensively featured. The multi-tracking of piano ideas is very intricate yet the overall effect created is not.

Silence is used as a contrast to the more musically concentrated sections of the piece. Between 11:24 and 14:08 there is a complete stop where silence hangs thick in the air, creating atmosphere and giving the listener time to both rest and absorb – an audio digest of musical intensity. Long pauses are frequently used. Silence is golden. It is used as punctuation, often creating suspension of sound.

Fluttering brush patterns (17), snare rolls and tremolos on parts of the drum kit add slight variation and rhythmic intensity. Soft mallets are used in cymbal rolls adding to the mesmerising continuous drone-like sound bed. Buck undertakes further exploration in tonal contrasts by using the whole cymbal face, edge and bell creating

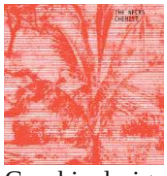
subtle timbral contrast. Buck only explores three rhythm patterns, and uses diminution to add further subtle variety to his playing.

Despite the intricate multi-tracking of ideas the effect is simple and illusionary. The extreme use of repetition is intense. The ending features something like a motor sound playing in the background, followed by a snare roll and helicopter-like sounds. The circus high wire rhythm on snare gives new meaning to the piece – quirky yet suspenseful and foreboding. Then it just stops. There is no dying away or fading although the sustained, resonating sound of a cymbal/gong remains.

Combining live performance with pre-recorded, sampled material, a type of hybrid within itself, affects the overall construction in new ways. It follows more of a 'brick-laying' approach to the creation of a soundtrack/soundscape. It is also more static due to the recurring repetition of ideas which are used in a very different way to that of live albums. There is extreme repetition of motifs in their original format, although the work does not demonstrate the fluid, evolving nature of *Sex*. The more premeditated, less organic way the album is constructed is different, with overlaying of material consciously planned and chosen therefore reducing the concept 'of the moment'. Complete silence in Track 2 'See Through' (between 6:08 – 7:04 and 11:14 – 14:08) is exploring new territory – something they have never done before in their albums. Silence can serve a number of purposes – of interrupted flow, signalling another section is about to start, as a resting place, to provide the listener with the opportunity to interpret and digest what has come before or prepare for what is to follow. The Necks use a close association with Cage's work here, as seen in *4'33"*.

13. ***CHEMIST*** 2006

STUDIO



Graphic design by Asi Föcker

Track 1 'Fatal' (21:13) opens with a very heavy, aggressive drum beat (1) over a rich bed of ambient sounds, sound effects, white noise and synthesised sounds. A

key development here is Buck's debut on electric guitar. Sustained vibrato chords occur in the middle ground (2) (3). Various groups of sounds are panned L → R to produce a swirling mass of sonic combinations. The drums establish a rock groove. Swanton's two-note bass riff forms a foundation (4). Sound effects are very prominent and include crashing, distorted metallic and wooden sounds, swirling spaceship sounds, white noise and organ, which echo the opening rhythmic ideas. Nyman-ish florid piano runs, trills, (5) and hammered, percussive tremolos on one tone (6) are used extensively. Trademark extended techniques are present including the tremolo idea which recurs in the piano and is embellished slightly. Triplet rhythms are another commonly used feature in the piano part which exhibit some blues characteristics (7) (8). The bass explores various tone colours and extended techniques such as arco, sul ponticello and pedal points. The piece is very repetitive. There is a static bass line on a repeated note G in the opening over which subtly shifting sounds of other instruments and SFX are layered. At 10:00 slight variations appear and industrial SFX are added to create a fuller orchestral texture. Chord progressions then appear in the piano part which add depth and create a polyrhythmic effect. At 12:00 the piece starts to build a little, ebb and flow and then die away.

'Fatal' tends to be immediately in the moment from the outset rather than adopting the subtle and gradual additive approach.

Track 2 'Buoyant''s (19:51) highly original opening features extensive use of electronic sounds such as a beeping, cricket sound and radio frequency from Abrahams' DX7 (1). Key minimalist pitch patterns are evident in the piano (2) (3) (4). This forms the basis of drawn out improvisation which continues to evolve. The bass sets up a two-note tonic/dominant pattern (5) (6). Bellbird sounds appear briefly (10:08) and recur a few more times in this section. A warped minor key two-chord pattern is heard. The piece is very repetitive. 13:00 sees temporary timbral respite in the form of a descending, cascading electronic glockenspiel/string sound. Complete change occurs when the drums take off at 13:22 playing a rock beat fused with a Latin-type rhythm – almost like a samba. A dramatic change in rhythmic intensity occurs, with accents and volume provided by the drums, with the other static ideas taking on a different meaning as a result. A conglomeration of SFX is used. The drums play an extended improvisation under the repetitive, static sound bed and

reach an abrupt climax cutting out at 17:48. Other instruments continue in an even more ambient way with heavily sustained organ, plucked electric guitar chords, harmonics, some bowed sound and retro/warped piano sounds concluding the piece in a conglomeration of sustained mesmerisation.

Track 3 ‘Abillera’ (19:50) begins with a lengthy introduction based on a plucked tonic/dominant two-note bass motif (1) using some harmonics and double stopping and a solid D pedal on which subsequent melodic and harmonic material develops. A swirling bed of phased tremolo organ is introduced (2) and clustered tremolo chords are typical of the piano techniques used (3). A very full texture and rich bed of sound conglomeration ensues with all instruments increasing in intensity and volume to a climax. A transfixing aural landscape and effect is created. Again the focus is on overall sound and sum of the parts which create this illusion. The band sustains this static climax for quite a while with slight variation as is heard in Buck’s three-note guitar motif (13:00). The drums start to fade and disappear altogether (16:00) whilst rhythmically complex tremolos in the piano become prominent – like an extended improvisation – except the same idea is repeated in the sustained wah-wah organ (which acts like glue ...). The piece begins to die down (18:30) and fades out (19:16). This is the least jazz inspired of the three tracks and is more like Steve Reich-influenced Krautrock.

This album is unusual in that it contains three short tracks which make up the whole. It is more suite-like in its conception and is the antithesis of the lengthy tracks featured on most of their other albums. Album 2 *Next* is another which uses this same approach. Buck’s debut on electric guitar extends the sonic armoury as well as demonstrating another of his musical skills.

14. ***TOWNSVILLE*** 2007

LIVE 53:40

Cover painting by Emma Walker/Graphic design by Tim Kliendienst

This album is dealt with in Chapter 6.

15. *SILVERWATER* 2009

STUDIO

Drawings and graphic design by Asi Föcker

This Necks' episode begins by:

> Weaving an austerely elegant extended improvisation that explores the possibilities of asynchronous rhythm (i.e. each musician pursues his own pulse and metre, - independent of the others). This time they begin in a tranquil mood with hovering Hammond organ tones and pinging, tinkling Zen-ceremony percussion, slowly adding deliberate bass figures, shifting tom-tom rolls and resonant piano until, on the half-hour, a real novelty appears: a simple, almost Byrds-like two-chord guitar pattern, played by Buck. Suddenly the music picks up pace, adding impetus to the mesmerising moiré effect created by the rhythmic overlaps and underlays, which ebb and flow all the way to a typically unrhetorical but satisfying conclusion (Williams 2009, p. 1).

Whilst adhering to their trademark hour-long unravelling which takes the listener on another similar yet different sonic journey, *Silverwater* is different from other albums on a number of levels. Structurally the trademark characteristics are all there. The extreme use of repetition, Abrahams' preoccupation and fascination with organ and electronic sounds, Buck's intermittently spaced, immaculately articulated drum patterns and some hard to identify percussion sounds and ambient electronica. This album breaks new ground in both a structural and textural sense. The structure consists of two starkly differing sections. The first comprises a typical lengthy introduction whereby a minimalist, small pitch fragment sets up the direction and stylistic focus of the piece (1) (2) (3) (4). The minimalist industrial-sounding effects and chimes weave in and out continuing in the ambient vein. Some slight variations and additions occur such as the short, irregular, pounding, random drum beats

(07:30) creating a polyrhythmic effect layered over a plethora of Balinese-sounding, wooden percussion instruments and a very dry, dampened-sounding set of high register repeated notes in the piano (5).

Typical plucked double bass riff rises to prominence (6) (14:30) based on a small pitch range motif in a minor key. This is echoed and repeated by other instruments further in the piece and becomes a unifying element. Buck's ride cymbal echoes the repeated single note idea.

The convergence of sound begins to emerge (17:55) paralleling the thickening texture and rising dynamic level. Exploration of changing time signatures occurs, climaxing in a crashing 5/4 syncopated rhythmic pattern.

Extreme repetition sees all musical ideas present and adding to much aural confusion and complexity. Buck's inclusion of the electric guitar provides a contrast playing sexy, ambient phrases interspersed with the piano and woody-sounding FX. Abrahams explores some more keyboard effects in the form of pitch bending which creates a warped, weird, ambient effect. 40:34 sees a dramatic increase in rhythmic complexity and dynamism, more polyrhythms and a polyphonic texture, subsequently easing into more of an ebbing and flowing idea. The latter sections of the piece are dramatically different from the first. Rather than building to a climax and then fading away, the last 20 minutes or so feature a relatively thin texture focusing on blues-based organ fragments à la Ray Charles, spacey electronic sounds and the development of drum patterns. This provides a jarring contrast to the previous section.

16. ***MINDSET*** 2011

STUDIO

Graphic design by Asi Föcker

The Necks opt for two 21-minute long tracks rather than the singular instrumental piece that characterises most of their past releases, partly because this is their first release on vinyl as well as CD, and designed to fit on two sides of an LP.

'Mindset', according to the Encarta Dictionary, is 'a set of beliefs or a way of thinking that determines somebody's behaviour and outlook'. It refers to a state of mind and attitude. It connects with the relationships inherent in the group.

Track 1 'Rum Jungle'

The most likely association with the title is again place-oriented. 'Rum Jungle' is a uranium deposit formed in 1949 in Northern Territory 65 kilometres south of Darwin.

The track opens with an overlaid sonic conglomeration led by Swanton and Buck. A single repeated note at the same pitch, arrhythmic in its approach, is heard in the bass whilst Buck adopts a single, repeated note on the ride cymbal, but with more of a 3/4 rhythmic feel. An independent focus is established by each instrument. Following this (01:30) low bass notes emerge in the piano, heavily-pedalled and percussively articulated. These heavily-pedalled tremolos in the extreme low register of the piano subvert the traditional approach to melody. The absence of melodic material – or is it transference of melodic riffs into the bass part – extends the way The Necks have used melodic material previously. Abrahams moves from this thunderous, low-end rumblings to mid-high range motifs, and whilst not equating to a melodic theme in a conventional way, is nonetheless deeply musical. Total independence of rhythm is also created. Both an arrhythmic approach (as heard in Buck's drumming speeding up and then slowing down) and the asynchronous rhythmic approach further explore The Necks' concept of rhythm as part of the acoustic experiment. The acoustic experiment now delves into the realms of 'art music'. As well as the presence of rhythmic independence, there is an abstraction in terms of pitch. Whereas other albums have a definable key and tonal centre, 'Rum Jungle' is more ambiguous and atonal in its approach. There is some allusion to key centre in Abrahams' two-chord repetition which is used extensively and there is the presence of a constant 'white noise' element. Very polyphonic and minimalist, the repetitive build-up reaches the edge of chaos relatively early and sustains this for longer than is present in previous albums. There are definite similarities with *Drive*

By in terms of the use of samples and electronica, with a number of sonic additions including industrial sounds, jack hammering and old alarm bells. Abrahams' Hammond organ also makes an appearance with trademark sustained sounds and punctuations a feature. The ending is abrupt and surprising with 'Rum Jungle' being like industrial-influenced art music.

Track 2 'Daylights' ('daylight' meaning sunlight, daytime or more abstractly public awareness or a visible gap) is described by the BBC reviewer Bill Tilland in the following:

> The second piece, Daylights, uses the same basic strategy but to radically different effect. Proceedings begin with processed temple bells, improvised melodic fragments from the piano and two separate lines from the bass, one an impressionistic thumping and the other a steady but leisurely pulse. Organ drones and other tiny sounds provide a lush background carpet, but the piano is predominant throughout, with Abrahams teasing every possible variation out of the same basic chord sequence – even while new sounds, including curious electronic insect buzzing continue to weave their way into the carpet. More than anything else, this track reminds one of Brian Eno's *On Land*, another brilliant sonic recreation of a natural environment (Tilland 2011).

There are definite similarities with Eno's *On Land* (released 1982) which features a mixture of synthesiser-based sounds, nature/animal recordings and a complex array of other sounds, most of which were unused, collected recordings from previous albums and the sessions which created them. Eno used a process of constant feeding and remixing of tape sounds into the mix, using both an additive and subtractive approach. The album took over three years to make, and during this time he found that the synthesiser was of limited usefulness. This led to his exploration of tone colour:

> My instrumentation shifted gradually through electro-mechanical and acoustic instruments towards non-instruments like pieces of chain and sticks and stones .... I included not only recordings of rooks, frogs and insects, but also the complete body of my own earlier work (Eno in Gillespie 2005).

Eno also gave explicit instructions in terms of how the music should be listened to. In his liner notes he suggested 'a three-way speaker system that is both simple to install and inexpensive, and which seems to work very well on any music with a

broad stereo image'. *On Land* makes reference to a number of places in Britain such as 'Lizard Point', named after the exposed, southernmost tip of Britain close to Land's End in South-West England.

'Daylights' opens with ambient sounds (clunking, metallic sounds and sustained electronic sounds). An angular, resonant and heavily-pedalled piano melody is repeated extensively, interspersed with the sound effects. Again this track is more abstract as no definable pulse or key centre is evident. The ambient, dissonant nature is comparable to a serial composition by Webern. The piece patiently sits in a groove, with a complete change occurring at around 06:57 where Buck takes off on an energetic, fast-paced rhythmic diatribe over the constant piano motifs which have been extended slightly to incorporate subtle chord clusters. The asynchronous rhythmic approach adopted in 'Rum Jungle' continues, and the extreme use of repetition is evident.

Evolving the groove, not stuck in the groove, this is The Necks first ever LP released on both vinyl and CD.

Conclusion: Vast Sonic Territory

Through conducting the aural experiment in terms of control and variable aspects, I have demonstrated how, whilst certain aspects remain similar in their work such as the process they adopt in live performances, their work has explored vast sonic territory. The way The Necks start from nothing and don't discuss in advance is the ultimate in spontaneous creativity. Ironically this enhances the collaborative aspect of their work rather than impedes it. In terms of pitch, although there is a clear use of tonal centre and traditional harmony, this is manipulated through techniques such as dissonance, bitonality, chromaticism and use of modes. In terms of rhythm, although there is a defined time signature, The Necks again demonstrate the ability to manipulate it through asynchronous explorations, at times a fluid, organically evolving approach, and at other times using a variety of feels such as rock, funk, minimalism and others. Chris Abrahams explores a number of keyboard techniques ranging from Western art music (Scriabin, Webern and Debussy), blues (as seen in his Hammond organ work), rock keyboard and jazz. His varied use of a vast array/armoury of keyboard instruments including piano, Hammond organ, Yamaha

DX7 synthesiser and portative organ contributes significantly to the sonic experiment idea. The addition of sound sources/electronica and how these are used also differs throughout the course of their time as The Necks. Sampled sounds/electronica such as film sound tracks, industrial sounds and radio signals contrast with natural sounds such as bamboo chimes or nature sounds. Electronic samples are sometimes used as instruments/groups of instruments in their own right, assuming their own prominent sonic status such as in *Drive By* and *Chemist*. The occasional use of guest artists and added instruments (*Next* and *Aquatic* and Buck playing electric guitar on *Chemist* and *Silverwater*) has been explored, although not extensively. The way repetition is used differs between albums and between studio and live contexts. Live performances assume more organic, and often virtuosic, proportions whereas studio albums tend to be more static. The way The Necks have experimented with form is interesting, in terms of later multi-tracked studio albums exploring the concept of grouping large samples together as separate tracks in their own right, producing a more segmented, 'block of sound' structural encounter. The Necks have combined a number of these jazz, ambient, rock, minimalist, art and world music influences to create their own individual version of free improvised fusion.

CHAPTER 5 *THE BOYS* – FILM MUSIC

The Boys

Cover: Stills from the film by Tristan Milani/Design by Paul McNeil

The Boys is an Australian film directed by Rowan Woods released in 1998. The plot is loosely based on the Anita Cobby murder, although the murder is never graphically represented. The film is based on the original play *The Boys* by Gordon Graham which was then adapted to a screenplay by Sydney playwright Stephen Sewell. The Necks' approach to film composition in this instance can be described as ambient, stark and minimalist. Subtly shifting nuances.

The Boys is a powerful and disturbing portrait of three brothers and the women in their lives. Things have changed for Brett Sprague while he has been away for 12 months in jail. A violent psychopath, he returns to find his brother Glenn has moved out with his girlfriend Jackie, younger brother Stevie's pregnant girlfriend Nola now lives with the family, and his mother Sandra has taken on an Aboriginal drifter. Brett uses his first day reunited with his brothers to restore order. The film is set within the timeframe of a day (with flashforwards) and predominantly around one location – the house. The relationship between the characters and the mind-numbing boredom of suburbia is portrayed in the film.

I will focus on the sonic narrative aspects of how The Necks created music for *The Boys*. The music is characterised by mesmerising repetition, stillness and silence; an aesthetic of sound entirely appropriate to the mood of *The Boys*.

There is a direct link with place, location and identity. The main set is a house situated in the beachside suburb of Maroubra which is meant to portray the western suburbs of Sydney. The house was used extensively as a rehearsal space prior to shooting. Mitchell (2005 p. 7) cites Chris Abrahams as comparing the use of the Maroubra house to *In Cold Blood* (USA 1967), Richard Brooks' film of Truman Capote's non-fiction crime novel. Fiona Villella (in Mitchell, 2005 p. 3) describes the relationship between The Necks' music and the film as:

> The heaviest and bleakest view of suburbia ever represented on local screens … here is an existence right in the heart of suburbia--the quiet streets, the brown-brick 3-room house, the car in the driveway--ruled by a cultural and existential void, monotony, emptiness, blandness, unfulfillment and discontent.

A long-time fan of The Necks, in 1997 Rowan Woods invited them to be involved in creating music for the film. Woods was particularly impressed with the double album *Silent Night* (1996), containing one CD 'Black' and the other 'White'. The film-noir aspects of 'Black', which incorporates a "'narrative' of movie samples" (Swanton in Mitchell 2005) footsteps, laughter, screams, phone ringing etc., embeds small audio grabs of classic films Abrahams had recorded off SBS television over a few years. Abrahams sees 'Black' as homage to his favourite films, and a soundtrack to a film which has been shot using small sound samples. 'Black' contained film-noir elements Woods sought in conveying the disturbing masculine violence and drama in *The Boys*. 'Black' was played on the set during rehearsals and filming as a means of psyching the actors into their parts and creating atmosphere.

> Their involvement with *The Boys* began long before the film entered production. Their response to the film started during script development, continuing through production as they visited the location, rehearsals, rushes and weekly edits. Unlike the traditional approach to film composition, they did not wait for a locked off final cut to compose to. Instead, exposed to all aspects of the film, they entered the studio and simply played (Woods in Mitchell 2005, p. 7).

Rowan Woods has said regarding the use of music in the film: 'If it was used more extensively it would become claustrophobic …'. Mitchell (2005 p. 11) comments on the establishment of a distinctive formal aesthetic in *The Boys* which indicates its cinesonic properties are significant and something of a landmark in Australian cinema. The haunting score is amplified by this sense of an aesthetic which immediately creates an unnerving quality. The rhythmic quality to *The Boys* evokes a lingering intensely hypnotic effect, achieved through Woods' masterful use of 'silences, pauses, the score, elliptical narrative time and a haunting sense of space ….' (Villella cited in Mitchell 2005, p. 3). The use of silence is important for a number of reasons. It provides a certain spatial contrast, a reflective state for the listener/viewer and also acts as a unifying element.

Australian songwriter and rock musician Paul Kelly in his autobiography *How To Make Gravy* (pp. 147-8) mentions how The Necks' music for *Sex* and *The Boys* had a direct influence on his music for Ray Lawrence's film *Lantana*. Kelly and his band went through a similar process of free improvisation and then he and Lawrence edited the music down for the final cut of the film.

Minimalism, as discussed previously, is a term associated with the 20th century art movement and style stressing the idea of reducing a work of art to the minimum number of colours, values, shapes, lines and textures. It is a term applied to music which displays some or all of the following: repetition (often short musical phrases, with minimal variations over long periods of time), small pitch set, a tonal centre and emphasis on consonant harmony, stasis (in the form of drones and long tones) and a steady pulse, and has been demonstrated in the previous chapter. The Necks' music contains many of these attributes. The process is an integral part of minimalism whereby the music is reduced to its necessary elements. The term can be applied to a diverse range of musical styles ranging from art music to rock, jazz and world music. Often whilst the melodic material is altered, the rhythmic and dynamic elements will remain constant.

Chris Abrahams commented on the minimalism connection and the way The Necks approached creating music for the film:

> About my strategy of playing piano ... I would think it's sort of similar to how John Cage just put two things together and see what they hang … how they resonate off each other. And I think in *The Boys* because the music was composed away from the image that there was a fair amount of indeterminacy of how we're actually working that's quite exciting. You know a lot of those connections weren't necessarily pre-planned but they definitely did seem as they were improvised in the connection (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 23).

According to Swanton, in keeping with Necks tradition, large swathes of music, most of which were not used in the film, were recorded based on an abstract, vibe-related atmosphere. From the 90 minutes of music presented to the editor less than ten minutes were used in the film. Extensive editing took place on the raw material, as did other studio processes. An illusion is created whereby there seems to be more music than is actually used in the film. This is because of the placement and content-

based aspects of the music. Not only is the music minimalist, but it is also minimalist in relation to its placement in the film, hence the term I use to describe it as 'minimalist minimalism'.

There is a distinct duality in how The Necks were looking for 'ways to establish the music as both a separate entity from the film and a commentary on it, which would exist on its own terms' (Mitchell 2005). Mitchell also makes the point that the music released on the soundtrack CD (their sixth) differs considerably in format from the majority of releases by The Necks: 49 minutes of music consisting of seven tracks of varying lengths (from just over three minutes to 20 minutes and 20 seconds), most of which evoke dark and menacing undertones. Four tracks not featured in the film occur on the CD. The original 1997 *Boys* soundtrack was deleted, which saw Abrahams and Swanton remixing and repackaging a version of their own in 2004 on their label Fish of Milk. Some additional less threatening, more lyrical pieces were added to the album.

Bernard Zuel (1998) in his review of the CD soundtrack describes the music as follows:

> Long fluid lines spin out, pianos and disfigured bass lines twist in the wind; the drums don't punch they stalk. And always there is the knowledge that something ugly, something dark, is just out of reach.

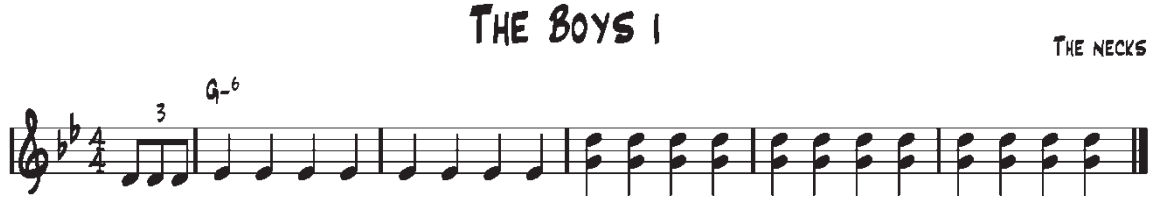
In both main musical themes from *The Boys* – 'The Boys I' and 'He Led Them Into The World' – there are common elements relating to minimalism. A study of the two main themes from the film *The Boys* and the link with repetition and minimalism shows how The Necks have combined these elements to produce a unique approach to film composition.

'The Boys 1' (Main Theme) (04:28)

Of the three sequences which use music in the film, the opening credits begin with black and white footage tracking shops, houses and the road complete with white lines, as seen through the eyes of the main character from a moving car. A myriad of sounds like buzzes are created by a DX7 synthesiser, electric machines contorting and malfunctioning and 'subaudible sounds emitted from high tension wires' (Woods in Mitchell 2005, p. 11) are present. Mitchell (2005 p. 11) cites the origin of

these sounds as from Alan Lamb's 'Beauty' (from his 1995 album *Primal Image*). Lamb recorded ambient sounds by attaching microphones to telegraph wires in various locations and under various weather conditions over a seven year period. The resultant foreboding white noise then merges using an overlapping fade into The Necks' music.

The resulting minimalist main theme exhibits a tonal centre of G minor. A simple two-chord harmonic device based on fifths – G and D is featured in the piano and some colour is added through the use of the 'devil's interval' – the tritone – A and Eb – represented by an ambiguous sound source with a sawing-like sound. Repetition is used not only in the vertical and horizontal harmonic structures, but also in relation to pitch material, where a Wagnerian leitmotif-like device based on a semitone creates an almost Hitchcock-esque tension. Mitchell (2005 p. 3) draws parallels between Bernard Herrmann's cinematic representations of violence and minimalism in the music from *Psycho* (USA 1960) and The Necks' music used in *The Boys*. Herrmann's use of high pitched, screeching, repeated string motifs is a widely-referenced early example of cinesonic minimalism. The Necks' piece opens in evocative fashion, with an ambient sound bed created using sustained, atmospheric sounds. Evocative, atmospheric and spacey ambience ensues, with sounds panned L → R. The establishment of a leitmotif-type theme (00:26) acts as an anchoring point of reference for the development of thematic material. This forms the foundation and basis of the approach to repetition and minimalism. The main theme is composed of a simple piano fragment of triplet DDD to Eb followed by simple repeated G two-note crotchet chords based on exposed 5ths which fade out.



A distorted electric guitar with slight ascending pitch bend then features, followed by a reference to the pitch material borrowed from the main theme in the form of D↓G on the double bass. The drums play the rhythm based on the opening motif which echoes the piano melody. The sparse use of pitch material lends itself to producing a haunting, lyrical, Hitchcock-esque effect. Sound effects both intrude on

and embrace the overall audio aspect of the film. The overall sound design is paramount. The conglomeration of sound effects – road noise, electronic sounds, machinery, Hammond organ and spiky, edgy DX7 buzzes – acts as reinforcement for the accompanying music, enhancing and supporting the overall bed of sound. Effects such as distortion further contort and morph sonic ideas. When music is present, it is 'confusingly allusive, disconnected, detached, often enhancing the disturbing indeterminacy of the film's mood by confusing the distinction between noise and music' (Coyle 2005 p. 104). Nick Meyers, editor and sound editor of *The Boys* recalls:

> The Necks also did atmosphere effects ... We were chasing the tonal quality of the sound effects ... you're not quite sure where the effects stop and the music starts because a lot of the effects have a musical quality and some of the music is used like sound effects (Coyle 2005 p. 105).

Long, suspended drone-like elements in the bass and sound effects contribute to stasis – a wash of sound contrasting with the smaller repetitive pitch sets provided by the right-hand of the piano. There is a steady pulse which provides a unifying element. These musical elements provide a foreboding quality. Within the 4:28 framework the motif is repeated fifteen times. I believe that the way repetition is used in a sonic sense, both when linked to filmic elements and as a separate entity, is necessary as a defining element and as reinforcement in a cognitive and mnemonic sense. Information is formatted so that the message may be remembered in a recollective sense. In terms of the compositional process and an underlying principle of minimalism – whether visual or aural – if an idea is too complex then it is not conducive to repetition.

'He Led Them Into The World' (10:20)

This track is, according to Abrahams: 'a reference to Brett's manipulation of his brothers to commit a rape and murder' (Mitchell 2005). It is not used in the actual film, however it is included as a sound bite on the DVD.

Abrahams (Mitchell 2005, p. 9) describes the piece as:

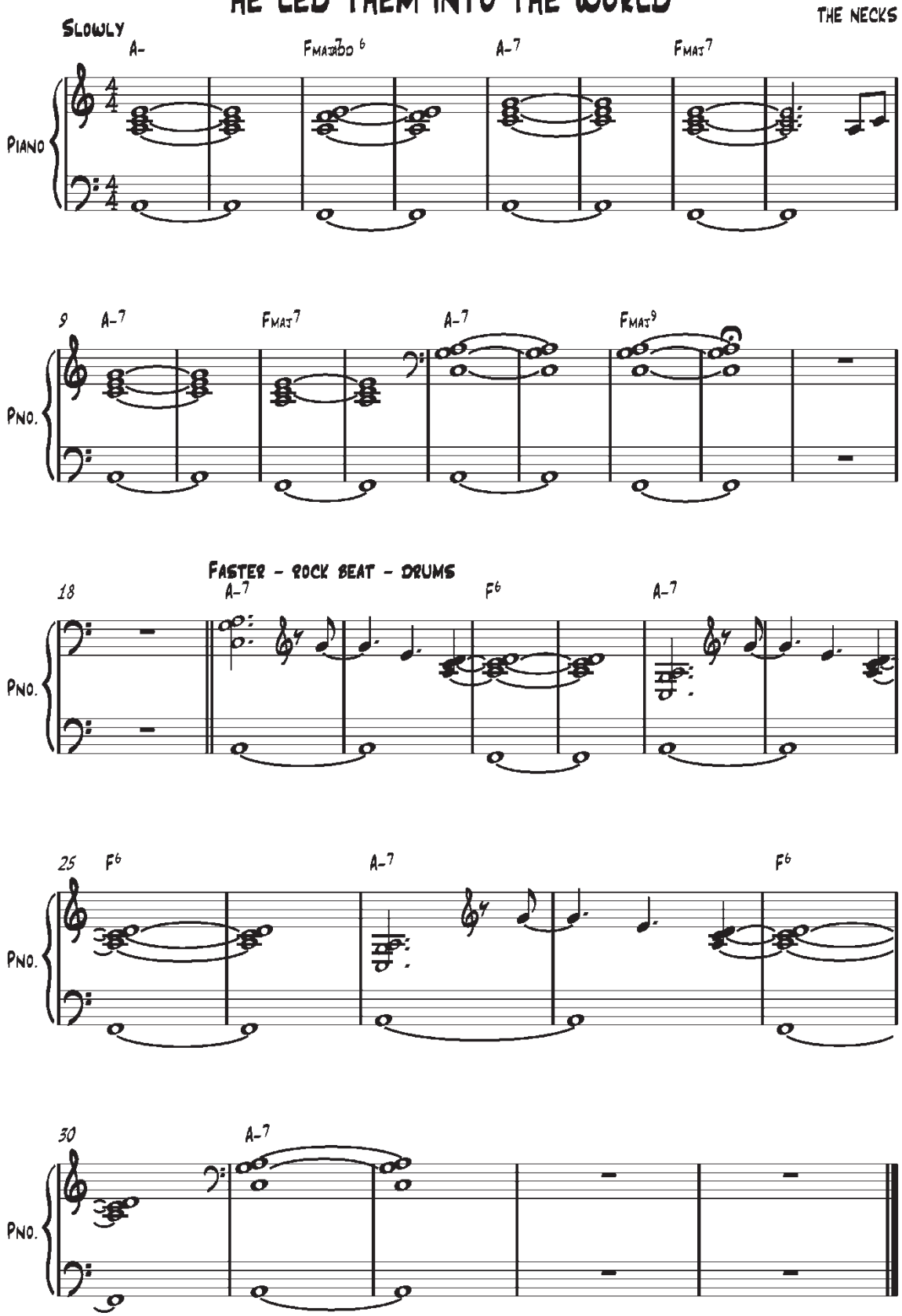
> probably the 'nicest' track on *The Boys* soundtrack album and I think that the contrast with the bleakness and horror of the film is powerful. The title doesn't refer to any

particular scene in the film. The film plots the journey the brothers make from the private world into the public world. There is a sense in which the fate of the brothers is inevitable, there is no other outcome given their upbringing and socio-economic conditions. In the tradition of Mailer or Capote, the film makes no mystery of the crime, rather it sets out to give humanist reasons for how it possibly could have happened. I think the gentleness of the piece and its sad melodic quality emphasise the doomed nature of the brothers' existence and the 'unavoidable', horrific and tragic crime which they commit.

There are many similarities in a repetitive and minimalist sense, between the two themes. In 'He Led Them Into The World' repetition again is a key feature. The two-chord repetitive, horizontal chord structure (sequential) is a feature. This theme is slightly more complex melodically and extends the sustained material to include descending arpeggio movement as a kind of contrasting countermelody. The pitch set is expanded slightly to include a greater range. The tonal centre alternates between A minor and F chord providing a certain harmonic tension yet unification. The opening bars on piano provide directionalised symmetry – with often subtle shifts between the two simple chords. Only one note is altered in bars 3 and 4 to shift the harmony/tonality between A minor and F. The piece is longer than 'The Boys I' – 10:20 – and is more complex in the use of all musical elements. Again subtle tonal shadings in the form of sound effects create an understated subtext. The beautiful undercurrent of religious elements in the form of a chant with the piano's long and drawn out lyrical phrases evokes a sacred, hymn-like character. Pauses and sustained chords contribute to the spiritual ambience alluding to peace and serenity. The piano states the initial 16-bar motif on which piece is based:

HE LED THEM INTO THE WORLD

THE NECKS



The Boys exhibits an interesting correlation between music and place. The link between the minimal music and featureless, monochromatic suburban environment is clearly evident. The environment in which the film was set triggered a process whereby The Necks absorbed various notions of plot and expressed this using both overt and covert musical signifiers. I have shown that in both musical themes used in *The Boys*, repetition and minimalism are key features of the aural style. Despite the minimal use of music in the film, unity is created through the reinforcement of musical material in a condensed and intense way. Not only is the music minimalist, but it is also minimalist in relation to the placement of music in the film. The role of music in the film is 'never mere accompaniment, but operates as an underscoring pulse which taps into the unspoken violence simmering beneath the surface of the protagonists' conversations and behaviour' (Mitchell 2005, p. 3).

As part of the 2011 Sydney festival, the Necks played prior to an open-air screening of *The Boys* in the grounds of Sydney University, and did a Q & A about their music for the film after the screening. Then in 2012, the Stables Theatre, who had presented the original production of the play *The Boys* in 1991, with David Wenham in the main role (who also starred in the film), revived this production with a new cast. This demonstrates the continuing relevance of *The Boys* as a powerful study of Australian masculinity and violence, and the impact of the film was considerably enhanced by The Necks' music.

CHAPTER 6 LANDSCAPE PLACE LOCATION – *TOWNSVILLE*

In this chapter I explore the relationship between music, cultural memory and place and The Necks' fourteenth album *Townsville*. It was recorded in 2007 in Townsville, a town in far North Queensland, and I focus here on improvisation, thematic development, repetition and the link with landscape, place and location.

The idea of repetition that slowly changes to become something else is a feature of The Necks' music. Chris Abrahams describes the connection between place and music in this way:

> The size of Australia – I see a real relationship in that. I found in about 93/4 I drove from Alice Springs to Darwin and I thought that was actually like a Necks' experience. To see just this gradual, constant landscape that looks the same but then you're somewhere else ... (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 13).

Road to nowhere ...

Photograph by Holimage – The Necks website

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7, the acoustic environment in which The Necks play also has an effect on their music. In their live albums The Necks respond to the acoustic environment which gives their live albums particular significance (for example *Homebush*, *Athenaeum*, *Townsville* and *Silverwater*).

Although drawing extensively on European, North American and Asian minimalist musical influences, The Necks' music is distinctly Australian in many ways, referring to a Sydney-based jazz tradition and a sense of locality which is not expressed directly, but rather suffuses the texture of their music.

‘To understand the place, you’ve got to listen to the music’ says German bassist Alexander Hacke, who comes to Istanbul to play and learn about Turkish music (*Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul* 2005).

Australia is a vast continent. A diverse and distinctive range of landscapes and topography coexist. There is a theory that the continent of Australia began to separate from Antarctica some 85 million years ago. It had been part of the Gondwana supercontinent. This complex geographical mosaic ranges from large desert formations surrounded by ancient rocks ...

Uluru...

Photograph by wozza8 http://www.flickr.com/photos/wjd01/7163261126/

... to lush, tropical rain forests ...

Photograph by Igomak http://www.flickr.com/photos/igomak/6092226921/

... to cityscapes such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge …

Photograph by John Dalkin http://www.flickr.com/photos/59303791@N00/4131151287/

... and the Opera House ...

Photograph by Gordon Milligan

http://www.flickr.com/photos/el-milligano/6443335369/sizes/l/in/photostream/

... and of course its famous beaches.

Photograph by Ales Patrovsky http://www.flickr.com/photos/29280558@N08/2752385475/

There is no geographical or spiritual consistency in the landscape that is Australia, rather it is a diverse place stimulating a wide range of responses. Sydney-based composer Paul Stanhope (b. 1969), for example, sees himself as 'relating to time and place, that might not necessarily be the physical landscape of the outback or the bush … but aspects of just what is around us physically' (Stanhope, 2004). He thinks of his music as a 'personal geography, personal dreaming sites' (ibid) (Stanhope in Richards 2007, pp. 1-2).

Australian artists and musicians have a history of preoccupying themselves and their creative pursuits with national identity. These include John Antill's legendary piece *Corroboree* (written in the mid-1940s), an orchestral ballet suite based on the ceremonial dances of the Australian aborigines, Peter Sculthorpe's *Kakadu* and *Port Essington* and Percy Grainger's *Hyde Park Shuffle* and *Australian Up Country Song* which use specific titles as programmatic inspiration. Cellist David Pereira has recorded twelve solo cello works on the CD *Uluru*. The work for saxophone sextet by Moya Henderson titled *Picture a Brisbane Afternoon* and orchestral work *Ku-ring-gai Chase* use landscape and place as titles. Australian jazz performers have also used place and location as a designation of both title and identity in their work, for example Don Burrows' *Kings Cross Mambo*, Bernie McGann's *Bundeena*, and Don Harper's chamber jazz suite *Illawarra.* The bassist and composer Dave

Dallwitz wrote many pieces which rely on a programmatic aesthetic linked to Australian landscape and place which include: *Piano Portraits of Australia*, *Gulgong Shuffle*, *Illawarra Flame* and *Melbourne Suite*. Tony Buck plays percussion and samples in a recording with Australysis titled *Moving the Landscapes*. Other musicians featured in the recording include Sandy Evans (saxophone), Roger Dean (piano) and Greg White (samplers and electronics).

Apart from the diversity of the continent, there are also large stretches of vast landscape such as desert and rainforests in Australia. The ocean surrounding Australia is also part of this diversity. Here begins a connection with minimalism. The gradual unravelling of a seemingly constant outlook, changing on a microscopic scale parallels the nucleus of minimalist intent. According to Steve Reich it emphasises the structure of the music – what he calls the 'musical process' – which must be audible to the listener. To ensure that audibility, the process must unfold very systematically and very slowly.

> I am interested in perceptible processes ... I want to be able to hear the processes happening throughout the sounding music. To facilitate closely detailed listening, a musical process should happen extremely gradually … so slowly that listening to it resembles watching the minute hand on a watch – you can perceive it moving after you stay with it for a little while (Reich in Schwarz 2000, p. 11).

The composer Warren Burt said that:

> When he moved to California (from New York) and then to Australia he was completely taken with these broad, flat vistas, and [doesn't] think it was a coincidence that at that point he started writing minimalist music with no harmonic motion in it (Keam 2007, p. 12).

The geographical proximity to Asia has had an increasing impact on Australian culture, including music. The use of a harmonic language consisting of simple pitch sets, as seen in Japanese koto or Indonesian gamelan, is a metaphor for the way in which The Necks use a simple, but not simplistic, approach to pitch in their music. Frequently a repetitive drone or riff in the bass part sets up a bed of sound on which to base rhythmic pulsations from the drums and ambient, free flowing angular melodies in the piano part.

Both repetition and space are defining characteristics in The Necks' music. This space can be created, and recreated, in a number of ways. Tangible, defining aspects include the use of silence, the use of sparse instrumentation, sparse harmonic aspects and using minimal pitch and rhythmic sets (often motif-based). On a more abstract scale, the way in which the improvised paradigm of The Necks' music evolves, rather than overtly states, suggests a connection with location and identity and parallels a connection with the geographical landscape. The art of observation – that is incorporating not just the immediate environment and its surrounds but more abstract elements as well – impacts on the art of free improvisation in their music.

In her paper 'Parallel Views: Notions of Landscape-in-Music on Both Sides of The Tasman' (2007), Glenda Keam discusses the use of 'space' in New Zealand music. She makes the point that the use of the word 'space' in New Zealand music criticism generally implies:

> 'Spaciousness', in other words it is neither defining a general music space, nor using general terms to describe the various musical parameters, but categorising the music as somehow giving an impression of an open landscape, a sparseness or an emptiness.

She also makes the point that post-war New Zealand music: "'Suggests that the predominant 'space characteristics' in many works are 'clarity', 'steepness of melodic line' and 'relative unclutteredness'". Texturally she points out that the relationship between 'independent musical layers' and 'a sense of space' is represented through clarity of texture paralleling 'notions of emptiness, certainly insofar as wide open landscape images are concerned'.

The duality in the way The Necks use texture – both in terms of an independent layering and in a cohesive, holistic sense – directly links to this idea of an open landscape which in turn evokes a sparseness and emptiness.

In an interview with Chris Abrahams I asked if there had ever been a conscious connection with minimalism relating to that slow, repetitive idea:

> I don't think so. Not so much in the kind of pantheon of serious minimalism [of] Steve Reich or Larry Marshall, but in the sense of I guess jazz musicians have been thought of as being minimalist – people like Mal Waldron. He was a very big

influence on me. I think when I was really into his style he was clearly repetitious and harmonically very simple. Not in his later work really – [but] before the '70s (Galbraith & Mitchell 2007, p. 14).

Townsville

Townsville is a tropical coastal city in Far North Queensland. It features a diverse economic base with a population of 150 000 people.

Photograph by kmgarmire http://www.flickr.com/photos/kmgarmire/4881739627/


Photograph of the Great Barrier Reef _4530 Alice & Seig
http://www.flickr.com/photos/askop/5367454645/

Townsville was recorded at the Riverway Arts Centre in Thuringowa. The City of Thuringowa was originally a mostly rural area which has taken on an aspect of suburbia as Townsville has grown over the last 30 or so years. The Arts centre itself is a unique space in a unique location.

Riverway Arts Centre in Thuringowa


Kierobau http://www.flickr.com/photos/35322119@N00/6021624705/

In an interview, Chris Abrahams described the location and experience of live recording here as having:

> The best acoustics ever. It was just fantastic. It was quite a modern building next door to a sunken 150 metre swimming pool. They told me two weeks prior to the concert that I'd have the choice of a new Yamaha or there's an old Bösendorfer. I went 'I'll have the new Yamaha thanks!' and when I turned up there was this Bösendorfer that must be a 1910 maybe and it was about 7 foot. It wasn't a concert grand. It's from a legendary Townsville bar but they assured me it had been reconditioned in the '60s! I looked at it and the keys were kind of orange and I played it at the sound check and thought 'Well! It's not too bad.' But then when we started playing it just came alive and it's one of the best pianos I've ever played (Galbraith & Mitchell 2007, pp. 20-21).

John Shand's review in the *Sydney Morning Herald* describes the album as:

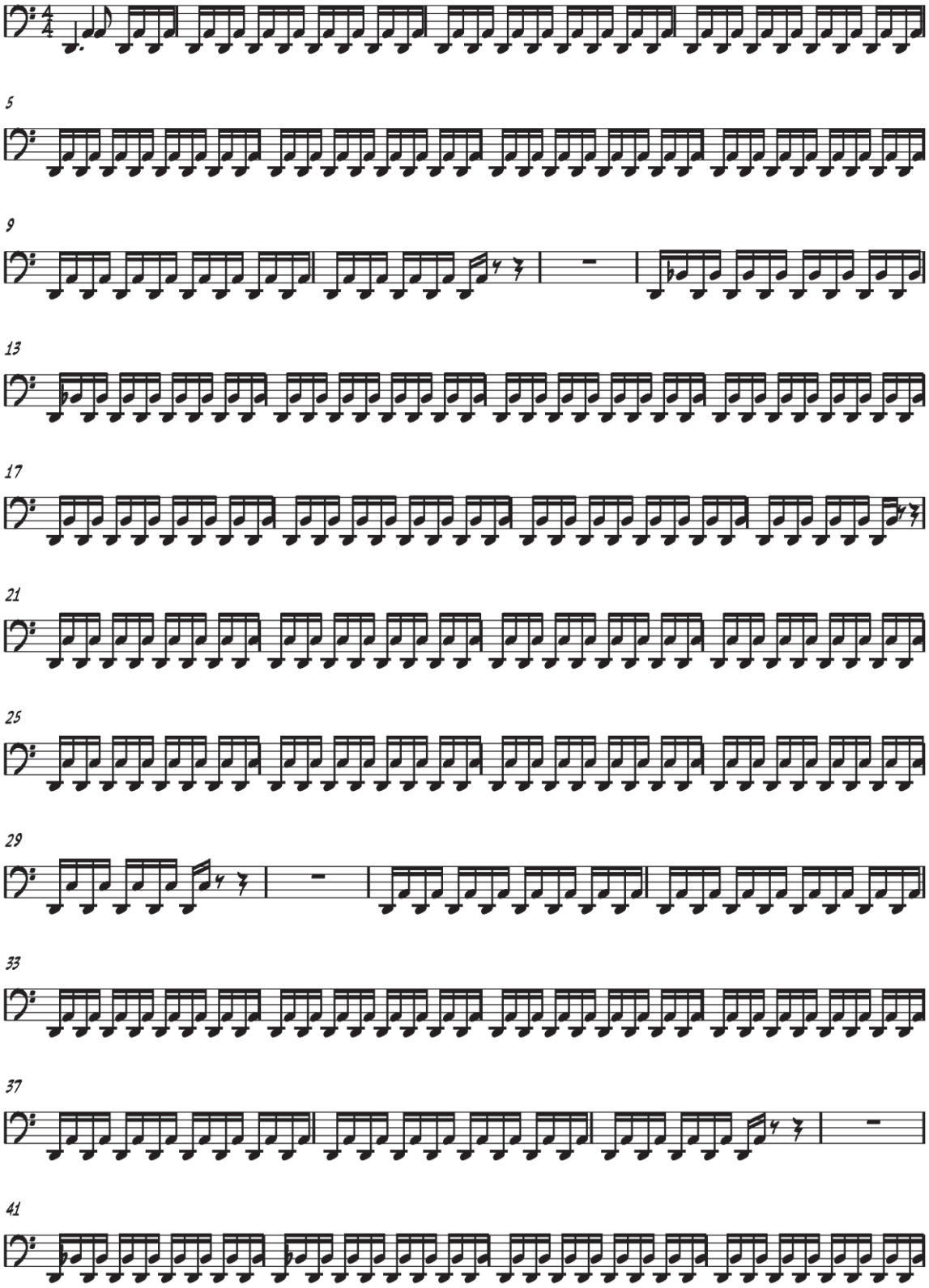
> Although lush to the point of denseness, this is also The Necks at their most lyrical, with enchanting piano figures from Chris Abrahams cascading against the rubato sizzle and wash of Tony Buck's cymbals (Shand 2007).

Timbral aspects of the piece are one way The Necks weave an overarching minimalist ambient link with performance space. The typical acoustic instruments only are used – piano, bass and drums. The opening evolves gradually and from a non-existent dynamic level. The initial nine or so seconds of the recording are silence – almost Cage-like in its approach to silence as a musically defining characteristic. A simple melodic idea with a small pitch arrangement and a simple pulse characterised by well-defined, florid rhythmic movement faintly emerges on the bass.

A tonal centre on a low D on the bass as the pitch anchor point sets up D minor tonality on which small note values – almost tremolo-like – float above in an ascending, fluid fashion. The idea uses the interval of a perfect 5^{th} between D and A manipulated up/down a semitone/tone in a sequential pattern.

TOWNSVILLE

THE NECKS



The piano enters at 01:34 with its Nyman-esque, shimmering, angular ambient motifs which frequently explore extreme registers of the piano. On the fourth repeat of the double bass pattern the drums enter playing an uneven cross rhythm on the ride cymbal (possibly in 7) juxtaposed against the regular, rhythmic independence of the bass part. The use of bitonality as melodic material in the piano is based on an Ab four-note scale (Ab, Bb, Eb, F) and the bass pitch foundation is D minor (tri-tone). Abrahams' improvisation at this point consists of staggered, minimalist, arpeggio figures. His acquiescent, angular rambling contrasts with the semitone idea (E → F above middle C). The pedal is used as an expressive technique and contributes to the programmatic aesthetic relationship with the title, evoking a sense of water and movement. The drums keep time with a pedalled, sustained, echo-like ride cymbal sound. Dissonances occur in the piano adding variety and colour. The piano is Debussy-like in its impressionistic, pointillist evocations. Some chromaticism appears at times, heavily-pedalled in its articulation (02:56). Drums continue to keep time with loping uneven crotchet rhythm and the bass begins to play repeated single notes, shifting the pitch up a semitone to Eb. 03:14 sees a reference to *The Boys* semitone motif which has been used both previously in this work and frequently occurs in other works. Whilst repetition is used as a key structural element, a lot more thematic development is present in the piano than normally is the case. This also extends to include increased rhythmic movement, alluding to the link between title and setting. The bass pattern becomes sparser with more space created through the rhythmic construction which is based on simpler, repeated notes (05:30).

At 05:46 the drum pattern is relentless, contrasting with the changing bass line which, whilst maintaining the rhythmic feel, uses upper register and repeated notes in between the mid-range of the piano (07:00). The drums continue playing a repeat of the original rhythm (07:40). The piano continues its rambling, arpeggio-based, meandering melodic ideas further emulating the programmatic aesthetic of water and movement. New pitch material and a new approach give a slightly brighter sound compared with the opening tonality/scale due to the use of an Eb Lydian mode. At 07:50 the bass plays tremolo-type repeated note phrases and angular, fragmented piano motifs are heard at 08:48. The drums alter their mantra slightly to include timbral additions (09:39). A deep, growling, arco bass pattern based on a semitone

emerges faintly at 09:50. An illusory effect is created, and it also flickers in and out. Is it there or is it not? The bass changes yet again at 10:55 and drops in and out with forced accents apparent. Metamorphoses. Sometimes note clashes occur between the bass and piano creating dissonance. Forced accents in the plucked bass – and small pitch ranges are exhibited in the semitone motif (A → Bb), whilst the piano employs the interval of a tone emphasised by Bb → C (12:15). This continues to repeat and alter slightly using rhythmic augmentation (13:31). Piano lines become more elongated and flamboyant with descending scalic flourishes prominent at 14:20. Slightly larger intervals emerge such as the interval of a fourth – between C → F (pedal note – right-hand of the piano, bass) – prominent at 14:40. The overall sound canvas becomes more embedded and luscious. One of the trademark Necks' techniques manifests itself at 15:46 in the form of the bass tremolo played arco which further explores the semitone idea A → Bb. The piano continues to have a strong tonal relationship with C → F.

The quintessential Necks' trademark emerges. It sounds like there are three separate parts working independently but the effect is of a cohesive whole. There is an inherent analogy with those trick photography 'Magic Eye' pictures. At 17:30 the bass continues to develop the tremolo idea, varying it ever so slightly with a newly emerging close to the bridge extended technique using sul ponticello. The piano plays heavily-pedalled descending scalic sequences. The drums become more frantic and increase in intensity using the bell of the ride cymbal as the primary sound source. Other parts of the kit become more prominent. The bass continues the A → Bb repetition of the two-note pattern. At 19:50 hammered tremolos are introduced in the piano part, picking up on the idea from the double bass. These continue to evolve in the piano part along with higher, single, repeated notes (21:00). Some blues-type notes occur very occasionally. The piece increases in intensity in all instruments as well as in texture and melodic ideas. The piano explores the tone idea Eb → F (22:00). At 23:10 the bass explores a glissando-type ascending tremolo idea which is both explored and exploited. The trademark pedalled/hammered piano idea emerges whilst the drums ebb and flow, continuing to contribute repeated rhythmic energy and vitality to the piece. This idea is then slightly altered to provide stabbing, uneven, percussive cymbal sounds. The bass changes back to the single note idea played arco and with less tremolo at 25:15. At 28:25 the piano motif continues to

repeat with some minor 3rd intervals used for variation (F → Ab), extending slightly the previous blues note idea. The tremolo idea is prominent again in the bass and left-hand of the piano. This idea is developed and more rhythmic momentum is provided by the left-hand of the piano. The interval of a fourth is featured in the piano at the ends of phrases (29:00). The bass plays a motif using C D Eb/D Eb G pitch. At 31:10 some new piano ideas are introduced which explore higher registers. These short motifs develop in a florid, rapid, acquiescent manner. The percussive hammered piano idea is explored and exploited. At 32:20 the piano introduces new ideas in the form of flickering tremolos. Buck extends the drum's sonic vocabulary to include rattling chain sound effects and shells on a rope. The interval of a fifth is significant and the tonality becomes slightly minor sounding in this section. This provides textural and timbral variation. The drums continue their stabbing, uneven, percussive, repeated pattern and the cymbals intensify. Additional sound effects emerge adding timbral variation (e.g. tin cans).

Ideas continue to evolve and develop affecting gradual change (34:00). A C bass is prominent and moves between G → C. The mid-low register of the piano explored. At 34:40 the semiquaver rhythm is exploited in the drums and a deliberate unevenness adds interest. The double bass intensifies due to double stopped pizzicato at 35:50. The piano ideas are extended where hammered, percussive tone clusters are exploited. The piano ideas change with slight evolution of repetitive material which is relentless. The double bass picks up on this idea and explores the arco tremolo idea. The drums continue to extend timbral aspects by exploring other sonorities of the kit and sound ideas e.g. shells/rattling tin cans. The piano plays note clusters which exploit the hammered piano idea. At 38:40 pounding, hammered clusters continue in the piano. The double bass alters slightly to include more space. 39:30 sees more single notes present temporarily in the arpeggiated piano and octaves prominent. 40:00 C → G tremolo interval in the piano part. The piece ebbs and flows rhythmically and melodically, reflecting the space in which the performance was recorded, with the introduction of a descending minor 3rd becoming prominent. At 42:00 the minor 3rd interval idea is repeated in the piano bass. 43:00 sees expansion of the double bass pattern to incorporate arco double stopping (from previous sections in piece). The drums explore more syncopated, percussive rhythmic ideas. At 44:15 very hammered, tremolo-style piano chords

using alternating descending intervals are prevalent. Some dissonance in the piano adds diversity. 45:20 sees the extreme low register of piano emerging whilst trademark right-hand meandering melodies continue to weave in and out. A descending, ambient four-note phrase is then repeated (45:50). Cymbal rolls/tremolos in the drums add timbral contrast and mirror the extreme repeated, florid, arpeggiated tremolo patterns in the piano. Added piano effects occur in the form of repetitive, descending, left-hand semiquaver triplets (47:30).

This idea is further developed through the use of small, ascending, repeated, triplet demisemiquaver semitone motifs which invert the previous idea. 49:30 begins to die down slightly in intensity in terms of tempo, rhythm, texture and dynamic level. The crazy, incessant, ascending piano triplet pattern develops and repeats (51:00). The continuing, ever present rolls on cymbals complement bass and piano. 52:00 sees the emergence of low- → mid-register heavily-pedalled piano motifs which dominate the overall sound bed. The bass plays an arco descending pattern whilst cymbal rolls repeat. 53:10 dies away in volume, rhythmic drive and melody and fades out (53:30).

Interestingly the role of the drums, apart from simple, repetitive 'keep time' use of quarter notes, is in keeping with the timbral contrast idea prevalent in the relationship between music and place. Frequently the instruments, whilst playing together, also play independently (but concurrently) when later in the piece they assume their individual rhythmic identity. Three separate time feels emerge and converge, creating an independence of parts, yet the overall effect is surprisingly unifying and mesmerising. Repetition and minimalism form the foundation of the musical identity, linking it with the Townsville location. Many minimalist characteristics are clearly evident including repetition, use of small pitch sets and rhythmic ideas, tonal centre and emphasis on tonal consonance, stasis and a process whereby silence and space are used as musical elements within the piece. These in turn reflect various aspects of location, place and identity, conveying a sense of place through the various musical features.

Whilst there is unity within the piece as a result, connecting with the static location, contrast is achieved through the way the group improvises, gradually shifting small pitch motifs as a forwardly propelled momentum paralleling the diversity of the

tropical environment – arid country outback meets rainforest meets beach paradise. Lengthy pieces which evolve slowly over long periods of time use minimalist characteristics in both a structural and conceptual sense. A frequent trigger for their work *is* related to place and many albums reflect this both in the title, as inspiration for creative practice and in a more abstract sense.

The lack of geographical consistency and apparent diversity of the Australian landscape parallels the compositional process whereby The Necks' music represents aspects of both unity and diversity. Whilst repetition is a key unifying device, the subtle development of thematic material creates contrast reflecting both the static and diverse aspects of the Australian landscape. The art of observation – that is incorporating not just the immediate environment and its surrounds but more abstract elements as well – converges and impacts on the art of free improvisation in The Necks' music.

The Necks have explored this approach in regard to many genres of music – including their own body of audio work and an appropriation (in a reactive sense) to landscape, location and aspects of identity through filmic and television media. The significance of the acoustic space they inhabit is an important consideration. *Townsville* again contains many minimalist parallels between music, place and imagination.

"Not every composer connects strongly with the 'Australian landscape and elegy approach'" (Smalley 2004, in Richards 2007, p. 1), but there is an overriding sense of 'musicians having an imaginative connection with the immediacy of the physical environment and a general acknowledgement that landscape has to play a part in shaping the music of the country' (Richards 2007, p. 1).

CHAPTER 7 LISTENING

‘The ear is a faithful collector of all sounds that can be gathered within its limits of frequency and amplitude. Sounds beyond the limits of the ear may be gathered by other sensory systems of the body’ (Oliveros 2005, p. 19). Listening forms a significant part of the whole performance act and I now turn to a discussion of The Necks’ work in the context of acoustic architecture, space, relationships, interaction and perception. Following on from the analysis-based Chapter 4, intrinsically linked is the art of listening. I view this in a holistic way, not only considering the ear as ‘a faithful collector of sounds,’ but in terms of the effect of listening within the spatial environment – between performers, between the performers and the physical space, between the performers and the audience and the physical architecture of the surrounds.

The act of listening

There are different types of listening. To consider even within the genre of jazz, a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is asking for trouble. As John Szwed points out ‘some may hear it bodily, finding pleasure at the physical level of response, and for this jazz can offer a great deal’ (Szwed 2000, p. 61). This is perhaps more applicable and evident in jazz of the big band era than in terms of a Necks’ experience. I discuss some possible ways The Necks’ music connects with the listening experience later in this chapter. Szwed pursues this further by making the point that jazz can be listened to with different degrees and modalities of intellectual activity viewed as a kind of ‘auditory architecture or visual structure, while hearing melodies built note by note, forming figures against a ground of rhythm and harmony; or by listening to music as scrims, as textures of sound woven tightly or loosely’ (Szwed 2000, p. 63). Other less formal modes of listening occur as part of an outdoor concert or recording or in the background (shopping centres, restaurants, muzak in a lift, as part of the soundtrack to a film or outdoors). The location (‘where’ aspect of performance), and context (whether formal or informal), determines not only what is heard but how one reacts to it of the moment. Szwed cites three basic things inherent in an encounter with jazz in an acoustic sense. The first of these is the significance of rhythm – a fundamental aspect of all music but particularly so in jazz, ‘elevated to an equal (or even higher) status with melody and harmony’ (Szwed 2000, p. 63). Szwed also

talks about rhythm in terms of Bud Powell's 'totemic rhythmic approach' and the 'more subtle, diffuse, or even oblique rhythmic sensibilities' (Szwed 2000, p. 64) of current jazz pianists such as Keith Jarrett, Matthew Shipp, Randy Weston, John Lewis, McCoy Tyner, Cecil Taylor and Geri Allen.

The second element is that of variation. Again this has formal connections and implications for the temporal ordering of musical material. In the case of traditional jazz piano trio formats such as Bill Evans, the usual approach is to state a theme and then to vary this with what has come before in the form of improvised solos, then to 'round off' the performance with a fairly literal restatement of the original main theme. In contrast, in terms of formal structure, The Necks adopt more of a through composed approach, and in doing so use repetition as an integral part of this process. Another overriding difference here is the absence of solos in the traditional sense of the word. Whilst occasional pockets of brilliance emerge in Abrahams' playing, The Necks do not feature solos in their work. The acoustic relationships occurring relate more to the present (statement of motifs) and future (repetition-influenced), rather than in the head-solos-restatement format. This has an impact on listening.

A third thing to listen for, according to Szwed, is interaction, the response of one musician to another during a performance. The significance of shifts made in response to what has been played by another is a fundamentally significant part of improvised musics. As stated previously, collective improvisation is not only a trait of early jazz (Dixieland), but is also applicable to the work of The Necks. There are obvious tangible elements such as the choice of key, chords, motifs and rhythmic feel(s) and even the choice and placement of silence. Szwed defines these independent choices made by the musicians as part of interplay – at times capturing a symbiotic relationship and at others a more separatist independence.

I discuss the idea of interaction and relationships in greater detail through referencing an actual Necks' concert later in this chapter.

Borgo argues that 'musical meanings are best located in the act of listening rather than at the structural level of notation or even sound. Just as a painting becomes more than brushstrokes when viewed as a whole, music lives when it is heard and understood' (Borgo 2005, p. 67). He speaks of listening as an active human process which is the essence of music. In this way physical and cognitive capabilities and

limitations of human listeners are crucial for analysis. He highlights the significance of viewing active listening in terms of 'models of musical experts (either performers or listeners) rather than models of disembodied pure music, a vacuous abstraction that cannot ever really exist' (Borgo 2005, p. 67). I have pursued this approach in Chapter 4 in my discussion of The Necks' work as an acoustic experiment. I view the act of performing holistically, a complex web/paradigm involving the processes surrounding their approach to free improvisation, relationships and constructs. This chapter deals further and in more detail with the concept of active listening and its aesthetic and receptive relationship with The Necks' music.

Borgo posits his view through the lens of constructing two functions that describe the dynamic qualities of *music* and *listening*. He defines 'music' as meaning:

> Music making, the process of sound unfolding in time from instruments in response to the control exercised by musicians and to any predetermined instructions that may exist (the 'score' in a generalised sense), plus of course any applicable fixed acoustic properties of instruments, microphones, halls, etc. (Borgo 2005, p. 67).

He posits 'listening' in terms of an:

> Active, dynamic process of understanding music, which includes the hierarchical segmentation of what has been heard into qualia, the anticipation of what may come in the future, the saliences associated with these, as well as the current state of relevant memories, including sensory, short- and long-term memories, and transpersonal cultural memories (Borgo 2005, p. 67).

Music and listening, as defined in these terms, are inextricably linked, with a reciprocal dependency occurring between the two. Listening exists in a number of ways which I will discuss in greater detail later in this chapter. These include the act of listening between musicians, of musicians listening to the combined, overall sound and engagement of listening in relation to the acoustic surrounds. Listeners also engage with the acoustic soundscape and with sounds in the present which are shaped by prior associations. Borgo terms these as 'long-term cultural patterns and personal predispositions' (Borgo 2005, p. 68). This links directly with Lochhead's discussion of form – what is occurring (present), what has occurred (past) and what may occur in the future.

Of specific interest is the three-dimensional aspect of listening. Whilst there is the linear, temporal unfolding over time in relation to listening, 'nonlinearity can arise in this tightly coupled system due to both the great complexity of factors involved and the fact that the state of each function, music and listening, acts as the control over the other' (Borgo 2005, p. 68). As previously discussed in Chapter 4, whilst any analysis generally commences with a start-to-finish linear consideration commensurate with real-time listening, I have stressed the importance of a three-dimensional, vertical synthesis of musical material in demonstrating how The Necks' work is an acoustic experiment.

Borgo also discusses the triggering of transformations in the music and its reception inherent in improvised performances in particular. Small details in sound production can be acknowledged by musicians and listeners, affecting the initial causes so that the outcome is disproportionate:

> This includes the possibility that current activity in the performance or its reception can force a reinterpretation of previous moments. In other words, the qualia of musical experience remain dynamic; they can be altered, incorporated into, or even supplanted by more recent qualia (Borgo 2005, p. 68).

Interestingly Borgo then refers to '*minimum complexity description*', whereby active listeners are involved in attempting to construct 'what they hear now by combining and transforming fragments of what they heard before and what they expected to hear now' (Borgo 2005, p. 68). Again this has associations with prior references to Lochhead's discussion of form.

These stored fragments, according to Borgo, are 'not simply unprocessed sonic details; rather, they include the qualia of musical experience' (Borgo 2005, p. 68). He also makes the significant point which applies directly to The Necks and the listening experience. The various 'transformation possibilities' which listeners may anticipate are connected via 'cognitive weights that reflect the perceived difficulty of their application. By anticipating what might come next and comparing that with what does come next, listeners can greatly reduce the complexity of understanding' (Borgo 2005, p. 68). The element of surprise, therefore, is the difference between the known and the unknown – between heard and projected sound. This, according to Borgo, is described by a '*conditional complexity measure'* (Borgo 2005, p. 68).

Acoustic Interaction – functions of listening, deep listening, sonic awareness, meditation etc.

In her ground-breaking book *Deep Listening* Pauline Oliveros offers a number of insightful views on listening including the differences between listening and hearing, the impact of profound attention to the sonic environment and how consciousness affects it and practical exercises aimed at developing aural awareness. A pioneer in electronic music, she was a founding member of the San Francisco Tape Music Centre in the '60s. Her interest in "'inner listening' – an altered state of consciousness full of inner sounds" (Oliveros 2005, p. xvi) led to her interest in electronic music.

Oliveros coined the term 'deep listening' in 1991 from 'deep' meaning, complexity and boundaries, or edges beyond ordinary or habitual understandings coupled with 'listening', which she defines as 'to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically' (Oliveros 2005, p. xxii).

She points out the difference between hearing and listening, and that they are not the same. Hearing is connected with the physical means that enables perception. A brief description referring to the physical analysis of how listening takes place ensues i.e. in the auditory cortex and how waveforms are transmitted by the ear to the brain, although I am not concerned with the scientific properties of hearing and listening in this instance. I am more interested in the perception and the various relational components of listening. She also discusses consciousness and its role in the act of listening. Deep listening is 'a practice used to heighten and expand consciousness of sound in as many dimensions of awareness and attentional dynamics as humanly possible' (Oliveros 2005, p. xxiii).

Oliveros also speaks of deep listening facilitating the expansion of the perception of sounds to include the holistic space/time continuum of sound:

> encountering the vastness and complexities as much as possible. Simultaneously one ought to be able to target a sound or sequence of sounds as a focus within the space/time continuum and to perceive the detail or trajectory of the sound or sequence of sounds. Such focus should always return to, or be within the whole space/time continuum (context). Such expansion means that one is connected to the whole of the environment and beyond (Oliveros 2005, p. 96).

As discussed in Chapter 4 and demonstrated in Chapter 6 through their album *Townsville*, The Necks have a particular relationship with environment and the space in which they occupy during a performance.

Performer, audience and acoustic space

The acoustic environment in which The Necks play has an impact on performance i.e. the place of listening, the physical architecture of the space occupying the act of performance. The initial stages of the performance follow an almost trance-like introduction. Swanton describes the relationship between the acoustics and the band in the following way:

> The acoustics affect us a great deal ... we're literally playing the room. The first few minutes we're finding how what we're doing sounds in that particular space. When we've established that, we start to see how far we can push it. It's not the only objective, but one thing we like to do is to get the harmonics bouncing around the room to the point where they're creating sounds that we ourselves didn't actually create (Walters 2004, p. 2).

They have played in a diverse range of settings. The Necks' early concerts were held at the Old Darlington School in Sydney University in the 1980s and 1990s. John Clare describes an early Necks concert as follows:

> If you were to walk in near the beginning of a Necks performance, you could well feel as if you were in one of those scenes from *Last Year at Marienbad* in which a room full of characters stand like dummies in frozen tableau while one or two protagonists move through them at the tempo of everyday life ... the audience and musicians seem spellbound (Clare 1995, p. 192).

The Necks perform at a variety of venues ranging from outdoor locations such as The Spiegeltent in Hyde Park as part of The Sydney Festival in 2008, cultural centres such as the Riverway Arts Centre in Thuringowa, Townsville, to average-sized indoor venues such as The Basement, Circular Quay, the Harbourside Brasserie, The Vanguard in Newtown, The Factory, Enmore, The Metro Theatre (in intimate mode with tables) and larger concert settings such as The Sydney Opera House Drama Theatre and Opera Theatre. In Melbourne, they have played numerous times at The Corner Hotel in Richmond. In 2006 The Necks played at the Melbourne

Town Hall with Abrahams playing the pipe organ instead of piano. Unfortunately a hard drive failure meant the recording of that performance was interrupted, much to the dismay of the band. They also played outdoors at the 2008 All Tomorrow's Parties Festival on Cockatoo Island and at a screening of *The Boys* in the grounds of Sydney University in January 2011. They were the supporting band for the experimental rock band Swans at The Metro Theatre, for the Australian part of their 2010/2011 tour.

Architecture – acoustic and physical

David Brown in *Noise Orders: Jazz, Improvisation and Architecture* describes architecture in abstract terms as 'frozen music' (Brown 2006, p. xii). The architectural space captures the sounds and silence – music, environmental sounds, traffic, surrounds – subsuming and preserving these within the architectural space. A keeper of the sounds.

He then goes on to unpack this using the view that the dominance in Western culture and thought has already frozen its sense of music whereby musicologists have been less concerned with the process of music and more with the completed work. He makes the point that as it has developed throughout the 20th century: 'Western classical music has focused on fixed, rather than active, relations that emphasise the composer over the performer' (Brown 2006, p. xii). He cites the musicologist Bruno Nettl, discussing improvisation in terms of accounting for this type of music outside the vision-based relations occurring within the realms of written music, focusing on the broader and heightened sense of creative activity associated with it. We are reminded that playing and creating music are not necessarily separate activities, 'jazz insists that order might not reside when we expect it – in the places described by Western notation, its techniques, and its harmonic preferences. Order might in fact reside in what that system perceives as noise' (Brown 2006, p. xii). Referring to Jacques Attali's *Noise The Political Economy of Music,* noise bears meaning in the following:

> A noise is a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission. A resonance is a set of simultaneous, pure sounds of determined frequency and differing intensity. Noise, then, does not exist in itself, but only in relation to the system within which it is inscribed: emitter, transmitter, receiver. Information theory

> uses the concept of noise (or rather, metonymy) in a more general way: noise is the form for a signal that interferes with the reception of a message by the receiver, even if the interfering signal itself has a meaning for that receiver (Attali in Brown 2006, p. xii).

Noise is part of The Necks' work in a number of ways. As previously stated in Chapter 5, in the soundtrack to *The Boys*, white noise forms part of the musical material, itself containing meaning in the form of that contained within the power lines from which it was emitted. Noise is an integral and integrated part of the outdoor and live performances. There is no control over noise. It exists in their first live recording at The Basement – Album 5 *Piano Bass Drums*. Whilst background noise was kept to a minimum, the track opens with the sounds of plates and people being served meals, glasses chinking etc. It is preserved in the recording, assuming and reinforcing a reminder of the presence of the audience.

The Necks – acoustic architecture

I now turn to a discussion of The Necks' performances focusing on listening and the link with architecture. The acoustic space they occupy is and becomes part of the performance i.e. the interaction with space forms an integral part of the acoustic architecture. I discuss their music in the context of listening, acoustic architecture, space and the relationships which occur in this acoustic paradigm. I refer to a specific example using the Sydney Opera House (SOH), a frequent venue of The Necks in recent times, in order to demonstrate these relationships. It is not only regularly home to The Necks' performances, but is also featured in Episode 2 of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC's) documentary series titled *In the Mind of the Architect* for which they also wrote the music. Whilst I have no audio visual or recording of this concert, what remains forms an account personalising and internalising the listening experience, documenting this as it unfolds. Whereas in Chapter 4 a more analytical approach was taken as a means of demonstrating their work as an acoustic experiment, this account forms the basis of a holistic listening experience – complete with observations about the music, the audience and the venue.

Christopher Small in his book *Musicking* extensively describes both the acoustic space drawing on reference to the physical relationships between the acoustics and

performers/audience and a description of the totality of a performance in relation to its surroundings. In Chapter 1, 'A Place for Hearing', Small makes the point that:

> The chances are that it is a modern building, built since the Second World War ... Countries and cities that wish to signal their entry into the 'developed' world often do so through the construction of a 'centre for the performing arts,' of which the centrepiece is a big concert hall, and through the establishment of a symphony orchestra to play there (Small 1998, p. 19).

Photograph by future15pic http://www.flickr.com/photos/future15/5694915556/

With a moment of genius the Danish architect Jørn Utzon changed Sydney forever with the construction of the Sydney Opera House (1957-1973). It is a masterpiece of late modern architecture admired internationally and a proud symbol of not only a world-class performing arts centre but also a challenging, graceful piece of urban sculpture set amongst the stunning backdrop of Sydney Harbour. It was inscribed in the World Heritage List in June 2007: 'Sydney Opera House is a great architectural work of the 20th century. It represents multiple strands of creativity, both in architectural form and structural design, a great urban sculpture carefully set in a remarkable waterscape and a world famous iconic building' (UNESCO World Heritage website). The expert evaluation report to the World Heritage Committee stated: '…it stands by itself as one of the indisputable masterpieces of human creativity, not only in the 20th century but in the history of humankind'.

Photograph by John Hoare http://www.flickr.com/photos/jomiho/5359548344/

Small describes the setting of formal performance spaces in general:

> As we approach the building, our first impression is likely to be of its great size. It is a landmark in the cityscape and even its external appearance tells us that it was built with no expense spared, probably in the forefront of the design and building technology of its day. It stands most likely on a prominent site, on a rise perhaps, in a park, beside a river or harbour, or as the focal point of a complex of civic buildings (Small 1998, p. 19).

From this description, Small then makes the connection between the physicality of architecture and relationships. He makes the point that every building is designed to house some aspect of human behaviour and relationships, noting the connection between its design and the builders' assumptions about that behaviour. The next phase leading up to the performance is through an inner door at which point the attendant takes the tickets, allowing only those with tickets to enter. In the Sydney Opera House Opera Theatre, the space is lofty and cavernous, symmetrical with curved rows of seats and angled walls made of wood. The space is designed to keep the sounds in and limit the impact of external sounds.

Photograph by future15pic http://www.flickr.com/photos/future15/5694327597/

Richard Leplastrier, who worked with Utzon on the project, discusses the following in Episode 2: The Public Good of '*In the Mind of the Architect*':

> I think the wonder of Utzon's design is that what he's actually made for us there over and above two theatres in which performances can be held, is that he's made us the quintessential public place because it's as important or even more important what happens outside that building and around that building than what happens actually inside the theatres itself. He knew when he made that building that that platform would be the place for the greatest of public rituals and performance, he knew that. Not only that, what he's done in the way he's set the theatres inside and connected them by these great flights of stairs and the spaces go up and around those theatres and come back out, essentially that is a public street.

> If the front doors of that building were not there, and maybe they shouldn't be, the citizens of Sydney could walk up the stairs around the theatres hear being broadcast what's going on and walk back out as a public street. And that's what his intention was and that in my mind is a public building.

It is interesting also to notice the global connection in an acoustic architecture perspective of a Danish architect being commissioned to design an opera house in Australia. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, an examination of whether and how this has affected the acoustic design principles provides much scope for future investigation.

Performance

> When I go to a concert by The Necks, I know what I'm in for, but I'm always surprised; or more likely, shocked somehow that they continue to surprise me. So that, at the same time as I'm there because I know, I know nothing (Walker 2004, p. 2).

I now turn to a review I wrote about a Necks' concert at the SOH Opera Theatre on 18 March 2012.

First half 8.00-8.50 pm

The band enters. On stage. Almost unassuming. Not showy. Looked like a few average blokes. Musicians, friends, colleagues, partners. A common goal…

Random.

Piano …

Chris Abrahams started piece on the Steinway with a lyrical, two-handed, repetitive, arpeggiated figure in the mid-range of the piano not unlike Chick Corea.

Bass and drums …

The other instruments then joined in. Swanton on the bass played an anchoring role in the group, flitting between simple 3 or 4 note bass motifs which he really stretched out rhythmically as well as some feel playing to complement what was happening on drums and piano. His use of arco as an expressive device later in the piece added tonal contrast and variety which juxtaposed the repetition inherent in all instruments.

Patient.

Let the music groove and settle in to establish a framework on which to layer other instrumental parts.

Simple.

Tony Buck began simply, by listening to what was going on in the other instruments and formulating reciprocal feels and fills on the kit. Again there was both repetition and contrast in the music. Extreme timbral contrast explored by Buck. The conventional parts of the kit were represented. Not so much use being made of the saws, other urban percussive sounds I have heard him use – but the more traditional cymbals, snare, some use of bass drum and floor tom.

Depth.

The focus and concentration on the faces of all the musicians was quite extraordinary. We were very close to the stage – right at the front in fact – and there was an almost spiritual, tantric channelling by all the musicians so that they were 'in sync' on both a musical and aesthetic wavelength. The unpredictability versus predictability element interests me. Several questions sprang to mind. What is the style? How would you categorise this music? How would you describe this music? How would you describe the musicians' approach to improvisation? How are the classical music influences, minimalists and world music evident and fused with jazz? The piece typically evolved and changed direction – but so subtly as to not be noticeable. Not jarring but smooth transitions between ideas.

Deceptively simple. Repetition versus contrast. How do they know when to change ideas? Listening. The spatial and structural concerns. The narrative aspect of the music. Random evolution of a musical idea. Random randomness. Change. Change of direction.

We change but still we stay the same …

Experimental.

Stamina.

Climax.

In typical Necks style the piece/performance built texturally, dynamically and rhythmically. Kind of formularised in terms of one instrument starting the piece and then the others gradually entering. Linear variations on a theme. As usual Abrahams explored (and exploited) the full pitch capabilities of the instrument, with the rise in pitch paralleling the frenetic increase in the dynamic level. Simple repeated, arpeggiated motifs gave way to increasingly percussive, almost violent, intense pounding. Fists crossed over, Cecil Taylor move over.

An exploration of piano techniques. Chopping – using the hands as vertical chopping blocks. Karate. Over and over. Mesmerising. Repetition used until the senses gave way and the piece moved on. Frenetic, crazy bowing by Swanton on the piccolo double bass. A petite new-age instrument. Sawing.

Side to side, eyes closed. Buck – intense pockets of sound repeated and repeated and repeated – until 'whack' on the drum kit signalled finality.

Tension and release.

The end.

Second half 9:15-10:05pm

There was a drum that played – par-a-pa-pum-pum

Drums playing a horizontal percussive motif in 7/4.

Athletic backhand swipe across the top parts of the kit. Timbral exploration. The beginning of a journey.

Communication. Conversation. Camaraderie.

Establishing a rock solid, funk-based ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-wam-bam. The exchange of musical ideas begins. Bass enters. Simple idea. Again repetitive.

Focused.

Transcendental. Religion. Spirituality. Self-expression. Chakras. Mantras.

Some bass riffs were established in the piano part. Low, deep, world music, resonant. Piece develops, evolves and takes on a wandering narrative life of its own. Superb technicians. Beautiful touch, and ethereal resonance. A wash of sound crescendoing early on in the piece to fever pitch. Some crazy bowing. More exploration of piano techniques by Abrahams. Rapid, even, controlled motifs give way to frenetic ascending melodic ideas. Time metamorphoses into a more established regular rock/jazz feel.

Simple versus complex.

Again the transitions are covert and not really identifiable.

The seen versus unseen.

The known versus unknown.

The concrete versus abstract.

Full range of the instruments is represented. Twisted, turning and looping in sound.

Altered states.

Same issues raised as in the first half … questions now answers later.

Sustaining momentum. Amazing stamina, focus and concentration …

Frenzied fever-pitch climax. Intense volume and wall of sound. More crazy bowing again by Swanton. Frenetic. Simple turns to more complex. Crazy piano playing. Percussive is a euphemism. Extending the realms of technique into a dynamic vertical motion – chopping the keys like an axe.

Blending of their own unique style of eclecticism. Originality. Some quirky, off-beat bohemianism.

Audience.

Educated. Intellectual. Well-behaved. Appreciative. Demographic = 25-65 year olds. Bohemian. Arty.

Atmosphere.

Ranged from quite controlled, subdued and focused (matching the lyrical and tranquil moments) to wild applause and acknowledgement of this amazing group …

I now unpack this account of listening, referring to Small's Chapter 12, 'What's Really Going On Here?', from *Musicking*. He begins by asking this question. The performance is essentially the same as any other in the context of the presence of an audience, and he stresses the importance of musicking being about relationships:

> Members of a certain social group at a particular point in its history are using sounds that have been brought into certain kinds of relationships with one another as the focus for a ceremony in which the values – which is to say, the concepts of what constitutes right relationships – of that group are explored, affirmed, and celebrated (Small 1998, p.183).

The Necks can be viewed in terms of exploration, affirmation and celebration.

The first of these – exploration – epitomises their work as an acoustic experiment. This is seen in how they try out new things, 'to see how they fit, to experience them without having to commit themselves to them, at least for the duration of the performance. It is thus an instrument of *exploration*' (Small 1998, p. 183).

Affirmation is described by Small in the following:

> In articulating those values it allows those taking part to say, to themselves, to one another and to anyone else who might be paying attention: these are our values, these are our concepts of ideal relationships, and consequently, this is who we are. It is thus an instrument of *affirmation* (Small 1998, p. 183).

The third of these, Small speaks of as celebration which occurs in relation to those taking part being empowered as part of the exploration and affirming phases:

> It leaves them with a feeling of being more completely themselves, more in tune with the world and with their fellows. After taking part in a good and satisfying musical performance, one is able to feel that this is how the world *really* is, and this is how I *really* relate to it. In short, it leaves the participants feeling good about themselves and about their values. It is thus an instrument of *celebration* (Small 1998, p. 183).

A collaborative project The Necks were involved in is *Life After Wartime* (LAW). The project began in 1998 with Ross Gibson and Kate Richards collaborating on a suite of multimedia artworks. Based on a collection of black and white images from Gibson's extensive research into a NSW Police Service crime scene archive, it captures images from Sydney nearly fifty years ago, and offers a glimpse into territory often ignored by traditional records of history. The project developed into a CD ROM in 2003, whereby a narrative can be constructed around various characters and locations in a portside city immediately following World War II. A live version was also devised whereby they improvise storytelling using images and texts from the LAW database. A 'synaesthetic relationship' was forged with The Necks, who collaborated with the project in a performance at the Adelaide Fringe Festival in 2002. Two sell out concerts were also held at the SOH Studio in 2003, whereby The Necks created an improvised soundtrack. 'The Necks' music fuses with these evocative images to take audiences on a fascinating journey exploring the underside of Australian history' (LAW website). One of these performances was interrupted by the venue management due to a minor technical problem, to the obvious dissatisfaction of band and audience. This highlights the potential risks associated with live performance whereby aspects beyond the control of the performers, audience and management impact on the outcome.

Further to the differences between The Necks' live and studio performances, Chris Abrahams speaks of a momentum which is present in their live performances:

> I think that that's one thing that's different about all our studio albums as opposed to live. The live ones tend to be more that kind of form whereas the studio ones because you don't have that same audience pressure you know (we have – you know – time to think about it) and we have so many other overdubs and other instruments at our

> disposal and the idea of trying to make everything just out of the three instruments – I mean live together – once you don't have that things tend to – I think we get much more kind of – less dynamic on studio albums (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005).

Derek Bailey views this connection as improvisation's responsiveness to its environment placing the performance in a position to be directly influenced by the audience. He also speaks of improvisation in terms of:

> Invoking professionalism – the ability to provide at least a standard performance whatever the circumstances – usually has a deleterious effect on improvisation, causing it to be confined to the more predictable aspects of idiom or vocabulary (Bailey 1992, p. 44).

Abrahams views the role of the musician as part of the audience in the following:

> I guess what we do can be physically demanding but it's not really technically demanding. I mean there's a certain stamina that's involved and what I actually do is not necessarily that difficult in terms of playing. So I don't think any musician is just a performer. I think a musician is also a part of the audience as well – that interactive element of being a musician (Galbraith & Mitchell 2005, p. 6).

Minimalist pieces demand a new kind of listening. Philip Glass speaks of how the 'emotional catharses' provided by the way patterns of directionality – the tension and release – are replaced by challenges created by our perceptions of time itself. They require a type of listening 'lacking in traditional concepts of recollection and anticipation' (Schwarz 1996, p. 9).

The relationship between listening and The Necks music is often described in terms such as hypnotic, mesmerising and trance-like. Different music requires a different approach to listening. For example, Valerie Wilmer makes the following important point about listening to different types of jazz:

> Whereas, fast as it was, you could listen to every note in an Art Tatum piano solo, it is virtually impossible to do the same with Cecil Taylor's playing. Taylor's intense keyboard dissertations hit the ear as great wedges of sound rather than single lines. It is the overall *effect* of his music to which the listener responds (Wilmer 1977, p. 24).

In his book *The Blue Moment*, Richard Williams (2009, p. 272) describes how the listener has to adjust when listening to The Necks' work. Apart from the length of

the pieces which requires a certain level of intense aural stamina, Williams praises The Necks for having the gift of 'choosing motifs that make you want to listen to them, and developing a slow-burning tension which, since the music generally lacks rhetorical flourishes, ultimately serves as its own release'. The impact of extreme repetition has often been referred to in terms of creating a trance-like atmosphere.

From a performer's perspective modern music has been concerned with ways of increasing freedom to improvise, but to the listener, its most obvious characteristic was that the musicians constantly explored, and exploited, new sound systems. This leads to no sound being considered unmusical in a contemporary setting.

Silence is also an integral part of their work. The way silence is used is another abstract aspect relating to The Necks' improvisatory practice. Silence is used for a number of reasons including for contrast to provide disparity in relation to instrument and sound production/tone colour. This also subsequently impacts on other musical elements including texture (contrast between definite versus indefinite sound layers), unity (which ties in with the structural design aspect used to define the piece) and the expected versus unexpected.

Reactions and Controversy – A Pain in the Neck or the Next Best Thing?

Reactions to The Necks' music are polarised and I now deal with this issue. Whilst there is a loyal fan base, The Necks' music evokes a strong reaction from an audience and critics. On the one hand, there is a celebration of their music as highly original, experimental, free improvised music performed by highly skilled, virtuosic musicians, each of whom brings a wealth of experience and ideas to each performance. On the other hand, there are those who see their music as a tedious, overly long listening experience, where little changes and repetition is used ad nauseam creating an almost unlistenable experience where aural fatigue and an inability to engage in, or be engaged by, the music is apparent.

This discussion will take the form of a comparison of two different reviews of their concerts and a response to critics by The Necks' bass player Lloyd Swanton. The Necks have built up a cult following in Australia and overseas. Critics' reactions, whilst generally favourable, are on occasion less than flattering. The first is by the American jazz critic and writer John Litweiler and the other by British jazz critic

(*The Guardian*) John L. Walters. Full copies of these reviews are contained in Appendix A of the thesis.

In reference to a Necks' concert at the Chicago Cultural Centre in Chicago, Illinois in February 2009, Litweiler states caustically that: 'Lazy reviewers such as myself love to write about an act like The Necks because their music is easy to describe and they start from a concept that might even be taken, or mistaken, as an important development'. The critic reduces the music to a simplistic description of a Necks' concert. Following this is a real-time, blow-by-blow description of their music. However rather than drawing musical conclusions, it tends to be highly descriptive and subjective – reducing the music to simplistic value judgements: 'As a friend pointed out, it would have made good accompaniment to a movie chase scene'. There are positive references by Litweiler, albeit brief, whereby he describes The Necks' music as 'improvised minimalism' – more enjoyable than the few Philip Glass pieces he has heard and acknowledging 'The Necks' medium is unique and wholly improvised'.

Curiously Litweiler draws comparisons between gangs of Elvis impersonators and teenaged Charlie Parker imitators, citing parallels between their 'self-conscious intellectual sources, and in their manipulation of emotion'. Whilst Litweiler is entitled to his opinion, the statement is quite derogatory, and contains more contradiction than accuracy. In interviews I conducted with Chris Abrahams, a high level of intellect, evidence of wide reading and awareness of current trends in an altruistic, genuine sense was apparent. The 'manipulation of emotion' is also puzzling and can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Is it the manipulation of the audience's emotion or the audience's reactions? In either sense the programmatic intent of this statement implies a certain contrived exploitation. Thus Litweiler's review is controversial and thought provoking and illustrative of some of the issues inherent in those who have difficulty listening to, relating to and fully coming to terms with, The Necks' music.

Swanton's reply to Litweiler's review opens with:

> I'm not sure how to take John Litweiler's description of himself as a 'lazy reviewer'. Perhaps it's false modesty, utilised pre-emptively. Or perhaps he's being totally

> honest, which we'd have to take as an admission that his review is the disrespectful, out-of-hand effort I suspect it is (Swanton 2009).

Further concerns are expressed by Swanton in the form of suspecting Litweiler's opinions were shrouded in premeditation – 'as if he had already made up his mind to hate the concert before arriving ... although that cannot be proven'. Litweiler's act of opting for a blow-by-blow description of the concert, according to Swanton, raises so many troubling issues he (Swanton) hardly knows where to begin. Swanton argues that logging every single musical move is ridiculous and counter-productive to objectively assessing any concert, and that in doing so Litweiler has isolated himself from the rich Necks' listening experience which can only be achieved in a holistic, deeper, immersive sense. Litweiler has adopted the rigid, 'prosaic role of timeline controller' as opposed to the fluid unravelling of a Necks' performance. Swanton describes Litweiler's review as a 'bloodless account' and the 'blow-by-blow description is extremely reductive, devaluing every musical occurrence in a concert to a hollow, meaningless zombie action'.

Also problematic is Litweiler's lack of reference to the act of making music per se – the interaction of the musicians on stage, the exchange of musical ideas, the relationship with the acoustic space and the audience which Swanton observes 'hardly makes for scintillating reading' and where 'all musical decision is rendered as so much values-free husk'. Swanton then refers to Litweiler's comment that 'their music is easy to describe and they start from a concept that might be taken, or mistaken, as an important development' as 'sneering assertion' which trivialises what The Necks do. The reference by Litweiler to the band reminding him of 'the ad hoc ensembles of conga, bongo, and other hand-drum percussionists who play for hours at the 63rd Street beach house here in Chicago on every warm summer evening' serves as an uncanny, backhanded compliment to Swanton, who cites that The Necks' 'are not unlike a bunch of hippies jamming in the back room at a party. You wander off, and when you come back, they're still playing the same groove, but it's morphed into something else'.

One of Swanton's main arguments is that on the one hand Litweiler has identified many elements in The Necks' music and on the other hand can't acknowledge the good points or present the review with any degree of accuracy or objectivity.

Litweiler also misses the point in regard to the manipulation of emotion with Swanton counteracting this statement by saying: 'Emotion in music is something I don't usually care to express, let alone manipulate' and that 'decadence in music is one thing we have never striven for'. Swanton ends his response with a philosophical manifesto summing up his experience of playing with The Necks as 'the most deeply rewarding and fulfilling way of making music that I have in my life'.

In contrast to the Litweiler review**,** positive acclaim is frequently acknowledged by *The Guardian's* jazz critic John L. Walters. I now refer to a review by him from *The Guardian*, Thursday 8 November 2007 based on a Necks concert at the Vortex Jazz Club in London (5 November 2007). His opening paragraph encapsulates the uniqueness of The Necks' music and is a very complimentary, celebratory description of their work.

> Australia's The Necks defy conventions about making and listening to music ... if you are a Necks' fan, you cannot be sure you will hear your favourite Necks moment again. After 20 years, there are no 'greatest hits', only what is next.

Walters then follows this with an objective description of what happens in the concert situation and is more specific in recounting the unfolding musical occurrences, describing it as 'a 12 inch remix in slow motion', referring to Abrahams playing a 'gorgeous chord sequence', Swanton beginning with 'a light, one-note riff over which Abrahams plays decorative arabesques' and Buck keeping a steady pulse 'that never flags'. The excitement which captures the dynamic live experience of The Necks is aptly described in the following terms: 'Two-thirds through the number, the entire room is throbbing to an ecstatic pulse'. Walters concludes the review by acknowledging the uniqueness of The Necks' experience which is 'neither jazz nor rock nor conventional improv', with each performance a one-off – something never to be heard again. Walters' review of Album 7 *Hanging Gardens* (1999) ends with: (The Necks) 'are not so much a trio as a revolutionary consortium redefining music for the new century'.

I have shown through this discussion that despite having a loyal fan base and a cult following both here and overseas, that The Necks' music evokes strong reactions. Most view them as unique, virtuosic, minimalist and neither jazz nor rock but a

fusion of many musical styles and influences, at the core of their music being free improvisation. In a concert environment the audience revels in the trance-like, hypnotic and organic musical journey, typically reacting with spontaneous enthusiasm, ‘the entire room throbbing to an ecstatic pulse’. The other end of the spectrum sees The Necks’ music in terms of those views expressed by the American jazz critic John Litweiler – whilst being free improvised minimalism, ‘not being taken, or mistaken, as an important development’.

ALL PIECES COMPOSED, PERFORMED AND RECORDED BY

JANE GALBRAITH

RECORDED AT STUDIO JR

PRODUCER AND SOUND ENGINEER JOHN ROY

AL PACKER PRODUCTIONS

TRACK LISTING CD *PLACES*

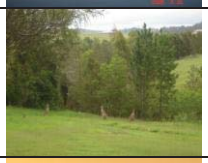
TRACK	TITLE	
1	MEMORY LANE (04:24)	
2	THE VINEYARD – PROTECT THE HUNTER – DO NOT TAKE GRAPEVINES PAST HERE – PHYLLOXERA EXCLUSION ZONE (04:23)	
3	THE PIER (02:07)	
4	GEORGE STREET (03:26)	
5	RIVER OF GLASS (03:03)	
6	KANGAROOS IN THE TOP PADDOCK (04:18)	
7	BIRD ON THE CHIMNEY OUT THE BATHROOM WINDOW (03:08)	
8	CAPTAIN'S FLAT (04:39)	
9	CULBURRA BEACH CARAVAN PARK IN THE RAIN (03:32)	
10	SOUTH SEAS DRIVE (02:48)	

FIGURE 1: MAP OF NSW

Source: http://www.au.totaltravel.yahoo.com/destinations/maps/australia/nsw/

CHAPTER 8 NOTES ON THE CREATIVE PROJECT *PLACES CD*

Brief introduction

This chapter involves an original body of work in the form of a CD audio recording representing contemporary keyboard practices and improvisation. I have composed and performed a set of piano pieces exploring the theme of landscape, place and location. Central to this framework is the notion of identity. This also links with a section in the thesis Chapter 6, 'Landscape Place Location – *Townsville*'. I link the chapter on the creative project to what has been discussed previously in this dissertation. I begin with a consideration of how research-led practice plays a role in this regard. Despite being a solo piano recording, relationships play a part on a number of levels. Also significant are stylistic features which have influenced the creation of the music. These include jazz, improvisation, repetition and minimalism, the blues, ambient music and world music. I have been influenced by Debussy's tone colours, use of the pedal and his impressionistic solo piano compositions. Asian music – the art of simplicity and clarity – has been a contributing stylistic consideration in the sense of minimal use/economy of pitch and repetition. Extended piano techniques used by Chris Abrahams have also been a source of inspiration and I use his solo piano album *Glow* in order to draw on some specific examples which have informed my own creative practice. The music of pianists such as Cecil Taylor and Carla Bley and the way their sonic practices have been explored is another influence. Australian jazz pianists such as Mike Nock and Roger Frampton (my teachers) and the way colours, new sounds and new music are created in a contemporary Australian context are inspirational. Through this discussion I articulate a number of ways these have influenced my own work. Ultimately I have explored a number of ways the acoustic piano can create new sounds via extended techniques.

The scores provided for each of the pieces serve as a guide only, and are performed with some degree of flexibility in relation to interpretive aspects. Copies are provided in Appendix C. I have also used additional sound effects in some cases to both complement and augment the musical material, however I was conscious of avoiding a clichéd approach whereby if the title featured water I did not necessarily always want to use water sound effects. In some cases they are an integral part of the

aural fabric (‘Memory Lane’, ‘George Street’, ‘Kangaroos in the Top Paddock’ and ‘Culburra Beach’) which feature the multi tracked addition of sound effects whereas others do not (‘The Vineyard’, ‘River of Glass’ and ‘Bird’).

This project was inspired by music, art, photography, poetry, culture and most importantly place and identity. *I Love A Sunburnt Country*. Poets, artists and musicians have been preoccupied with landscape, place and location. This work was inspired by places I visited whilst working in a band which toured much of NSW.

As a musician the phrase ‘communities in dialogue’ (Fishlin & Heble (eds)) is a significant one encapsulating the collective sense of inclusiveness as a band member, as well as in a wider context. This also relates to The Necks and the type of personal and professional connection inextricably linked to their musical output.

In this way *Places* is an autobiographical musical journey not only in a personal, introspective sense but also in describing the external signifiers of places which tell us about the people, landscape, place and location.

Research-led practice

I refer now briefly to the idea of research-based practice discussed previously in Chapter 3, whereby the term is acknowledged as scholarly research leading to the creative work. In basing the framework on qualitative and quantitative analyses and research, these aspects – philosophical, aesthetic, historical, social and cultural – have formed a significant platform on which to base a discussion on The Necks’ work. I now extend this to an informed discussion of Chris Abrahams’ solo piano work *Glow* and my own work *Places*.

As previously mentioned, research-led practice is terminology used to complement practice-led research, suggesting more clearly than practice-led research that scholarly research can lead to creative work. Apart from qualitative and quantitative research methods being applied here, the creative work embodies research findings in terms of symbols which in turn contain their own meaning. The use of a score on which to base the music is an example.

Relationships

Despite my project being based on a solo piano performance, there are nonetheless a number of significant relationships that occur in relation to it. I now refer to a number of influential readings which have influenced both this dissertation and creative project. These serve as a basis on which to contextualise and frame my own work as research-led practice.

The first of these is from Christopher Small's book *Musicking* Chapter 13, 'A Solitary Flute Player'. He refers to a scenario where:

> A herdsman is playing his flute as he guards his flock in the African night. Alone with his flock, playing his flute with no one but himself and his animals to hear him, what relationships could he possibly be conjuring up, when there is no one within earshot to whom he might be relating? Surely, there is nothing there but his own solitariness? (Small 1998, p. 201)

Whilst on face value the solitary nature of the herdsman's solo flute performance remains just that, we are encouraged to look and listen more carefully. Questions are then raised surrounding technological aspects regarding the flute he is playing – where the instrument is made, by whom and how it is constructed. Small makes the point that whilst it looks a simple thing:

> Between the herdsman and his flute there already exists a complex set of relationships before he ever uses it to make a note of music. Like all musical instruments it does not exist in a social vacuum, but in its design and making, its tuning and sound quality, it is a product of the society of which he is a member. It represents in tangible form the society's technology and its ways of thinking and especially its concepts of human relationships (Small 1998, p. 202).

Instruments are a product of technology and technological attitudes. Despite the herdsman's flute being somewhat primitive when compared with a finely adapted Western orchestral instrument: 'Neither flute is a better or worse instrument than the other; each is the result of different technological and musical choices' (Small 1998, p. 202). The herdsman's performance is characterised by a stream of single pitches, limited in number and sounding out of tune to Western ears, who are accustomed to large numbers of notes based on a specific pitch base. His articulation, rhythmic

inflections and phrasing are ‘full of meaning in his musical universe if not in ours’ (Small 1998, p. 203).

One of the most significant issues relating to music and relationships is captured in the following:

> But whatever it is he is playing, it will not be invented from nothing. No human being ever invents anything from nothing but is guided always in his invention by the assumptions, the practices and the customs of the society in which he or she lives – in other words, by its *style*. A person may rebel against the assumptions of the society, but the style of the rebellion will inevitably continue to reflect those assumptions. It is inescapable. And since style is concerned with the way in which things relate, it is itself a metaphor for the way in which the society conceives of the pattern which connects (Small 1998, p. 203).

The connection between the sounds produced by the herdsman is influenced heavily by the set of relationships in common with his social group in a global and local context:

> Exploring, affirming, and celebrating the concepts of relationship of the group, as well as his own relationships within it and with it ... They range from love to hate, from dominance to submission, from dependence to independence, from respect to contempt, and any of those in complex combinations (Small 1998, p. 204).

Small then makes a number of connections with the flutist’s way of playing whereby it contains within itself ways of reconciling such aspects as:

> Change with continuity, stability with instability, stagnation with renovation, in complex relationships with one another. So it is that he will be articulating not just his solitariness but his relationships with the entire population of his conceptual world. Although physically alone, he is surrounded as he plays by all the beings that inhabit the world, not only humans, animals and plants but also the land itself, the ancestors and the yet unborn, and even the illimitable population of the spirit world; and through the sounds he makes he is exploring, affirming and celebrating the ways in which he relates to them (Small 1998, p. 204).

It is here that the relationship between global and local also becomes significant, a point I link with previous discussion in Chapter 2. The flutist does not live in an isolated, self-contained society. The notion of hybrid music – and the flutist being

influenced by his neighbours highlights the relational connection so evident in music. Small is also influential on Lloyd Swanton and he has often referred to him in interviews.

> All human beings are about as complex as one another. ... Wherever they have gone, human beings have used the language of sonic gestures to articulate those relationships, to model the pattern which connects, and have developed that language in ways that can deal with the pattern's complexity (Small 1998, p. 205).

The second influential reading I refer to is David Borgo's Chapter 3, 'The Embodied Mind', which focuses on the solo improviser in general and the performance practice of English saxophonist Evan Parker. Parker is a key figure in the development of the European free jazz movement. He has recorded prolifically in both collaborative and solo contexts with performers including Derek Bailey, Anthony Braxton, Tony Oxley, Milford Graves, George Lewis and Cecil Taylor. Borgo makes the point, one which is also a well-known Mike Nock quote, that 'it's not *what* you play (the notes), but *how* you play them' (Borgo 2005, p. 36). In other words, the physical connection with the instrument as much as mental awareness and intellectual planning is a central consideration. There has been much written about the Cartesian split between mind and body (intellect and intuition). The language of jazz, intellect-related, has evolved significantly over the past sixty years. Apart from being recognised for his interest in collective improvisation and a fascinating range of musical collaborators, Parker is perhaps best known for creating a distinctive solo saxophone language. Borgo cites a number of these including his use of circular breathing, overtone manipulation, multiphonics, rapidly layered harmonics, polyrhythmic fingerings, and various slap and multiple tonguing techniques (involving an up/down motion rather than the more traditional throat attack) which facilitate the formation of complex, overlapping patterns of sound, both highly virtuosic and intensely beautiful. Parker first explored circular breathing after encountering it in the work of saxophonist Roland Kirk and ethnographic recordings of traditional music from Africa and Middle East, again highlighting a link between jazz and world music. When in Australia Parker also worked with didgeridoo players.

Borgo refers to Parker's evolution in solo playing as:

> Exploit(ing) technical possibilities and acoustic possibilities unique to the solo situation. When you have all the space to fill, you can listen more closely to the specific resonances in the room, to the specific interaction with the acoustic, to the overtone components in the sound – the harmonic components in any one note become more audible. The temptation to fragment individual tones into their harmonic components becomes very attractive because you can hear yourself that much more closely; you can hear the *detail* of what's happening in any one sound (Borgo 2005, pp. 37-38).

This links with Borgo's comment from Chapter 7: 'Just as a painting becomes more than brushstrokes when viewed as a whole, music lives when it is heard and understood' (Borgo 2005, p.67).

In describing his solo approach, Parker has spoken of a desire to create the 'illusion of polyphony' on a monophonic instrument, as seen in his exploration with circular breathing techniques and harmonics whereby he is able to explore several layers of musical activity at once, and the specific ability to sustain a low tone while articulating selected overtones (or its reverse, sustaining an overtone while injecting low notes). He explains:

> I try to give [the listener] a sense of dialog with myself anyway, you know the way I move lines around in the overtone structure against lines in the lower register of the instrument. There is still some sense of dialogue in the music but it's just one person speaking to himself (Parker in Borgo 2005, p. 39).

Parker also experimented with extended duration sounds – in particular amplified strings and controlled feedback – with colleagues Derek Bailey and Hugh Davies in the Music Improvisation Company in the early 1970s. This led to his interest in uninterrupted sound flow, exploring extreme registers of the instrument and wide intervals, all at phenomenally high speeds. According to Parker his approach was controllable but not predictable

A key aspect of both of these readings which links to my creative project is the fundamental approach of creating not only a very personal sound but the significance of the relationship to the instrument in the creation of sound.

The piano

‘To me, the piano in itself is an orchestra’ Cecil Taylor.

An Italian Bartolomeo Cristofori is credited with the invention of the modern piano around 1700, it having been founded on earlier technological innovations. Whilst it has undergone many advancements during its 300-plus year history (including tremendous change during the Mozart era between 1790-1860 and extending the range of the instrument from 5 octaves to 7 1/3 or more octaves found on modern pianos), the fundamental principles remain. A key is struck, a series of reactions occur whereby the key raises a wippen, which forces the jack against the hammer roller or ‘knuckle’, which then lifts the lever carrying the hammer, the key also raising the damper and immediately the hammer strikes the wire it falls back, whereby the wire resonates, producing the sound. The piano is a magnificent, highly complex instrument consisting of intricate parts and painstaking construction, and has stood the test of many centuries. Australia has recently pioneered the construction and development of the piano. Wayne Stuart from Newcastle NSW has spent the past 30 years developing the Stuart piano, and is quoted as saying: ‘Innovation enables exploration’ (Stuart piano website). These include extending the limited 19th century range from 88 keys to 102 keys, expanding textural effects and tone colours by incorporating 4 pedals, and new approaches to improving the resonance and clarity of the piano. In this way technology continues to evolve, and whilst the Stuart piano maintains much of the pianos original machinations, the work here parallels the idea of an acoustic experiment which has global and local connections. Ron Overs is another Australian pioneering the development of piano technology and Chris Abrahams has played on one of his instruments.

Jazz piano

The piano is a unique instrument. It can play melody, harmony and bass. Its versatility is evident through functioning as an accompanying, lead and solo instrument. It is capable of an extensive array of subtle tonal shadings, articulation (percussive, sustained, smooth, sharp), melodic, harmonic and rhythmic possibilities. Over the past hundred or so years rapid change has occurred in the development of jazz piano. Over the past sixty or so years Bebop has spawned a revolution in jazz harmony, rhythm, and melodic aspects. Pianists such as Bud Powell, Art Tatum and

Oscar Peterson established jazz piano in virtuosic terms, exploring its melodic, harmonic, rhythmic aspects to the full. Herbie Hancock and Chick Corea extended the acoustic properties of the piano to explore the realms of electric keyboards including the famous Fender Rhodes with its unique sound, synthesisers and organ. Mike Nock has also explored and extended the tonal range and capability of the instrument in similar ways, although the acoustic piano is his preferred mode of performance. As previously stated he has also used landscape as an inspiration for some of his works. Roger Frampton's (1948-2000) experimentations with electronic music (as previously mentioned in his work with the group Teletopa) are also at the forefront of free jazz keyboard performance in this country. He was a virtuosic technician who often merged the bounds of cutting-edge jazz piano with contemporary art music and world music. One of my early recollections as a student at the NSW State Conservatorium of Music was listening to Frampton's serial-inspired version approach to 'The Girl From Ipanema' on vinyl in the university library. He took the head and compressed it, taking out any repeated notes and morphed the tune into an unrecognisable, percussive, atonal-sounding reconstituted sound object. He also reworked the entire harmonic structure, a feature for which he was renowned. These types of explorations and change ensure that the art form remains dynamic, organic, innovative and forward thinking. I refer to the quote from Steve Lacy (Bailey 1992, p. 57) and the significance of forward thinking change, bridging the gap between known and unknown and of being on the 'edge' whereby you have to keep pushing towards the unknown – if you don't change and evolve then you die. This philosophy underpins my own approach to the creative arts. Through researching this project I have explored a number of significant readings and analysed The Necks' work as an acoustic experiment, acknowledging the role of change as crucial to the process.

Whilst my work contains elements of jazz and blues, other influences such as minimalism, ambient music and world music are significant and I now turn to a brief discussion of these.

Influences – a reflection

I refer to the quote at the beginning of Chapter 7, 'Listening', whereby 'the ear is a faithful collector of all sounds'. It is difficult to separate past listening influences on either a conscious or subconscious level. There are a multitude of influences, past experiences, past listening and performances, whether part of these in a performance capacity or as part of an audience, which form the point of reference/memory bank of a musician. These diverse musical encounters carry with them both sounds with their own historical and cultural identities. Sounds contain their own meaning. For example the blues are a key influence on my musical identity, and carry with them a long tradition based on a fascinating, colourful set of historical, political and social events. As will be discussed also in a description and analysis of the creative project, the minimalists have been an influence, as well as global and local developments in improvised music.

Thelonious Monk (1917-1982)

Thelonious Monk is recognised as one of the most inventive pianists of any musical genre, and a great composer of the Bebop era. Monk's startlingly original sound is almost impossible to imitate. His music was both visionary and ahead of its time, with the great players in the history of piano jazz such as stride masters James P. Johnson and Willie 'The Lion' Smith as well as more avant-garde aspects evident in his work. Monk's music is a calibrated balance between these early elements of stride, boogie woogie, blues and at times nursery rhymes and percussive, orchestral qualities.

Bill Evans (1929-1980)

His use of impressionist harmony, his inventive interpretation of traditional jazz repertoire, and his syncopated and polyrhythmic melodic lines influenced a generation of pianists, such as Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, and Keith Jarrett.

Cecil Taylor (b. 1929)

One of the first performers to explore the concept of free improvisation from fixed harmonic structures, Taylor developed a radical improvising style at the piano that indulged in tone clusters, percussive attack and irregular polyrhythmic patterns. This

required a very ‘physical’ style of playing that incorporated manic energy during lengthy and frenzied performances, and a somewhat ‘harsh’ style that featured both atonal and tonal passages. Taylor was influenced by both classical music and jazz using an extensive repertoire of devices to develop simple material into dense, complex, extended, but structurally unified works.

Taylor has been a pioneer in realising the wide-ranging sonic potential of the piano, which lie outside the traditional sounds standard notation communicates.

> Every instrument both enables and conditions us through its implied physical relations – fingerings, volume control, and body control. In jazz, through explorations of how the body may relate to an instrument provide the basis for developing technique. ‘Each man,’ Taylor declares, ‘is his own academy,’ deriving techniques from an individual exploration of gestures in relation to a particular instrument as well as from the latent intelligence of that instrument’s material and form (Brown 2006, p. xxiv).

In pioneering a free approach to improvised piano playing in the 1960s, Taylor manipulated pitch and tone qualities and incorporated new sounds from non-western music traditions like those of India, China, the Middle East, and Africa. His playing is challenging, experimental and provocative, characterised by a high level of dissonance. There is a sense of ‘organised chaos’ prevalent in his music.

Taylor has influenced my work as much, if not more, through researching him talking about how he does what he does, as his actual work itself. ‘From Cecil Taylor (and saxophonist Eric Dolphy) Parker claims to have inherited a sense of wide interval playing that moves away from clearly ascending and descending phrase structures’ (Borgo 2005, p. 37).

Chris Abrahams’ *Glow* (2001)

I now turn to a discussion of Chris Abrahams’ solo piano CD *Glow*. This demonstrates how he operates in a solo context and some of the influential ways he explores piano techniques (these were outlined in Chapter 4). Apart from his work as part of an acoustic experiment in a collaborative sense, Abrahams also uses the piano as an acoustic experiment, bringing together a diverse array of individual influences (world music, Asian music, rock and jazz) and other group experiences.

The issue of influence is a complex one. Influences can be obvious, exterior, inherent, subliminal, abstract, visible and invisible, known and unknown, conscious and subconscious. The research I have carried out in undertaking this project has affected my creative project through vast listening to and analysis of The Necks' music, as well as the individual work of Abrahams.

'... the notes seem to float into existence with the gracefulness of falling leaves' (*Sydney Morning Herald* review of *Glow* – The Necks website).

Glow is Abrahams' third solo album. The album consists of a collection of shorter pieces (when compared to The Necks' work) ranging from 03:37-08:08 minutes.

Track 1 'From a Tower, Lost as Heat' 08:08

This piece is based on a heavily tremoloed and pedalled six-note predominantly ascending phrase in a minor key. It is percussively articulated and extensively repeated, with the only variation initially in the way different rhythmic approaches are adopted. Borgo's surprise element, discussed previously, occurs as a result of Abrahams choice over which notes are tremoloed extensively and which are not. The listener is not quite sure what will follow despite the constant pitch repetition. The use of rhythm to manipulate and vary the phrasing of the melody is the underlying compositional tool on which to base the piece. Therefore the juxtaposition between the known and the unknown is cleverly and subtly combined. The use of silence is significant, with the ends of phrases given deliberate sustain and emphasis. At 04:13 there is a change from the monophonic single right-hand melody to the introduction of gently articulated minimalist tone clusters and a three-note melody. The way the pedal is used creates subtle harmonics and overtones, a technique acknowledged by Abrahams. A third section is then developed whereby a very low bass note is introduced, expanding the range of the piece. Overall the piece seamlessly segues into the different sections.

Track 2 'River of Hammers' 07:01

The programmatic title reflects and describes the piece aptly. The piece is characterised by a very fast, heavily-pedalled tremolo, however despite the constant frenetic rhythm, Abrahams manages to clearly articulate an Asian-inspired, minimalist pentatonic melody which is embedded in the intricacy created by the

repetitive arpeggiated rhythm. The effect created is not unlike that of church bells ringing out – a sustained resonance with overlapping harmonics creating a continuous bed of sound. The sustain pedal is used extensively. The melodic material evolves from a couple of notes, then extending to an increasingly more complicated pitch set. One of Abrahams' highly-developed skills relates to stamina and his ability to sustain an even, consistent sound, tone, touch and rhythmic control. This piece does not feature the aspect of silence, but is a continuous sonic journey.

Track 3 'Natural Selector' 06:28

This track explores the asynchronous rhythmic approach which is commonly heard in The Necks' work. It begins with a '50s arpeggiated rock riff in a minor key in the left-hand. It is extensively repeated as a foundation on which to base subsequent melodic and harmonic material. The independence of rhythms between the left and right-hand is seen through the introduction of a simple right-hand melody which is off-set rhythmically in a syncopated relationship with the on-the-beat 4/4 dotted bass riff. Again the piece is heavily sustained due to the extensive use of the pedal. Around the half-way mark the piece begins to evolve with the introduction of one of Abrahams' trademark three-note descending motif – like 'Three Blind Mice'. Another of his key traits is apparent through the extreme use of the tremolo, which escalates and descends into chaos as the piece progresses, then simply dies away.

Track 4 'Silent As Sheet Music' 03:37

The opening is very quiet, ambient and minimalist. A low bass note sporadically appears, followed by a fragmented right-hand minor key ambient melody which is heavily sustained. This piece has an Asian-inspired simplicity about it, not unlike koto music of Japan. Pitch-wise the piece transforms from a minor key to a major key. This piece bears many of the characteristics present in three of the tracks on my album (Track 6 'Kangaroos in the Top Paddock', Track 7 'Bird on the Chimney out the Bathroom Window' and Track 8 'Captain's Flat').

Track 5 'Self Taught Bouncer' 05:56

This track explores extreme use of the sustain pedal and repetition, and is a good example of how a simple idea is used effectively, that a strong idea is one of the most important elements associated with creative work. In many ways this

encapsulates The Necks' work, and is also a key consideration in the creation of my own work. Like Buck, who uses simple patterns immaculately, Abrahams is a master of control, even tone, sound and rhythm. Minimalist tone clusters are explored, adding depth and resonance. The use of the sustain pedal is extended to form a type of mechanism for the production of overtones. This is created by holding the sustain pedal down halfway. Despite the extensive use of the sustain pedal, Abrahams manages to create a hammered, percussive articulation. The Necks' approach to presenting a simple idea and then developing it slightly is inherent in the structure of the piece.

Track 6 'Diving Board Harmonic' 07:24

This is an example of only using the left-hand register of the piano, and the melodic material is featured only in this range of the instrument as a single line. There is no harmonic accompaniment, only a monophonic, chant-like motif. Based on a constant moderate tempo 4/4 time signature, the repeated two-bar motif is altered slightly at times. Percussive and resonant, the use of the sustain pedal is kept to a minimum in the opening section. At around 03:30 the dynamics and intensity increase, exploring tone colour more with repeated, heavily-pedalled single notes. The chant-like mantra continues with a relentless, driving quaver rhythm propelling the piece forward. This is a very minimalist piece due to the monophonic, single line approach and extreme repetition of the opening 'melodic' riff (in the extreme low register of the piano). Variation occurs in the edge of chaos which erupts around the 06:15 mark, where a complex array of repeated tremolo ideas, virtuosic in their articulation, end the piece.

Track 7 'Smoke and Magnets' 06:24

'Smoke and Magnets' sees the use of three main ideas on which the piece is based. These include descending, mid-range, scale passages which are heavily pedalled, a single, low register sustained bass note and high register single repeated notes which gradually evolve into a sparse, angular motif. The piece relies on heavily pedalled, sustained sound and an ambiguous, ethereal sense of time. The tonic and dominant notes are used as cadence points at the ends of phrases. The piece is supremely minimalist in both melodic and rhythmic aspects, and uses many of Abrahams' common traits employed not only in a solo context, but also as part of his work with

The Necks. A wide range of the instrument is explored, as is the concept of ambient music.

Places

I now turn to a discussion of my own work, referring to a number of techniques, traits discussed in the previous section in relation to Abrahams' work and ways I have explored these in my own way i.e. how I have taken these forward.

Track 1 'Memory Lane' 04:24

Brief description of the place

'Memory Lane', the first track on the CD, is a metaphor for all the places we have been to and the way we remember them. I am interested in the way time impacts on memory and our recollection of events. Whilst the street sign serves as a visible and tangible signifier of our immediate surrounds, we also carry round an internal set of reminders of past events.

The music

I aimed to create a spiritual mantra in 'Memory Lane', not unlike that produced by The Necks in 'He Led Them Into The World' - a track from the soundtrack to *The Boys*.

The piece begins with a set of chimes, which form a significant part of the sound bed. Used as a primary source, I recorded this track separately. In doing so it takes on its own independence, and the crisp, jangling piety contributes to the intended hymn-like quality. The Necks' use of a variety of percussive sound sources is a source of inspiration. Another sound effect was recorded as another track being that of a Tuvan throat singing by a male voice which creates a drone. The Tuva people of southern Siberia use this technique which is based on overtone chanting and harmonic singing. Two or more pitches are created simultaneously creating a mesmerising and entrancing quality.

The piece is extremely repetitious and uses a repeated set of only four chords. These are varied slightly rhythmically as the piece progresses. Originally the chords are played vertically and the sound is in sustained blocks, this is then varied using

arpeggiated chords in a more horizontal sense where a melodic line is created, then a climax is achieved towards the end of the piece where tremolo chords are played loudly.

The Necks' music has been a source of inspiration in many ways. These include the use of sound effects mixed with the solo piano and the minimalist use of a repetitive small pitch set (based on four chords). Chris Abrahams' extended piano techniques such as tremolos, extreme registers of pitch, heavy use of the sustain pedal combined with slight variations which change quite slowly are also a source of inspiration.

Track 2 'The Vineyard – Protect the Hunter – Do Not Take Grapevines Past Here – Phylloxera Exclusion Zone' (Mulbring, Hunter Valley, NSW) 04:23

Brief description of the place

'The Vineyard' is inspired by the juxtaposition between the beauty of the landscape and an undercurrent of the destructive side effects of nature's microorganisms as seen in the photograph featuring the sign: 'Protect the Hunter – Do Not Take Grapevines Past Here – Phylloxera Exclusion Zone'. The small but deadly grapevine pest phylloxera is capable of destruction on a large scale.

The music

The piece is based on a very small pitch set – only two chords C and F (mostly C) – and an intense use of the C blues scale in keeping with the album's minimalist intent. Terry Riley's epic piece *In C*, written in 1964, is a major influence. The key component of *In C* is to play the note C in repeated quavers (eighth notes) typically on a piano or pitched percussion instrument such as a marimba. Riley uses this as a metronome – referring to it as 'The Pulse'. There is no set duration for the piece, which usually ranges between 45 minutes and an hour and a half. Like Riley, I have used C and the median 'E' and subdominant 'F' as the pivotal notes on which to base the piece. Whereas Riley uses 53 short, numbered musical phrases, I have used a number of short sections where the performer is to improvise short blues riffs and more complex rhythms as the piece progresses. Apart from the introduction which features percussive, heavily accented staccato chords, a crotchet low C is played throughout the piece for 4 minutes. As well as Riley's influence, this technique is inspired by the disco music of the '70s and funk-soul classics. The aim was to

produce a Thelonious Monk-inspired, minimalist, blues piece which was to be percussive in its articulation and encapsulate the touch and spirit of this great jazz player. Interest is created through a certain use of suspense so that the listener is not quite sure at any moment where the piece is going and how it is to evolve. I have used some improvisation and free sections based on blues and rock motifs and combined this with set forms and riffs. Despite the extreme use of repetition, these different small sections within the piece create interest and variation within the fixed minimalist characteristics.

Track 3 'The Pier' (Greenwell Point, South Coast, NSW) 02:07

Brief description of the place

> Looking for somewhere to totally relax and enjoy white sandy beaches, crystal clear waters and interesting walking trails, majestic cliffs, pristine waterways and wonderful nature parks and reserves? Then travel a short 20 minutes east of Nowra and discover the quaint coastal villages of Greenwell Point, Culburra, Callala and Currarong (*Southcoast Leisure Times* website).

The music

This piece is rhythmically continuous capturing a sense of water and the cyclic tidal rhythms. It uses small melodic ideas as a basis that are initially stated, then gradually added to, until a thicker texture and more complex sound bed eventuates. Like The Necks' use of an additive approach, I have deliberately explored this technique. The sparse intervals of 4ths, 5ths and octaves add to the minimalist intent. I wanted the piece to remain simple in its nature and complexity – so even though the ideas change, it is ever so slight.

Track 4 'George Street' (Sydney CBD, NSW) 03:26

Brief description of the place

George Street is one of the busiest streets in the CBD. It winds from Circular Quay and the Rocks to Central where it collides with the busy railway station. The origins of George Street lie in the layout of the Sydney Cove colony. Captain Arthur Phillip placed the convicts and marines on the rocky western slopes of the bay. A track led from the convicts' encampment in the area of The Rocks, past the marine barracks

and alongside the banks of a stream to a brick pit, located near to the present location of Central Station. This track that eventually became George Street is one of the two original thoroughfares, along with the track that became Bridge Street. It is possible that George Street was the first street in Australia. Until 1810 George Street was generally referred to as High Street in the English custom. George Street was named for King George III of the United Kingdom by Governor Lachlan Macquarie in 1810.

The music

The place inspired the music. The issue of how repetition was to reflect certain aspects of the city (grinding, recurrent pulse, business, catchy melody etc.) is significant in developing a framework for this piece. I chose a 12 bar blues pattern, one of the most widely used patterns in rock and popular music, which in itself has inherent meaning, social history, structural and repetition aspects. Juxtaposition occurs between the ambiguous rhythmic approach in the opening (bars 8-43 on score) whereby an arrhythmic approach is used and the repetitive nature inherent in the 12 bar blues harmonic pattern. Structurally the piece follows a traditional format of the head (repeated twice), then a number of solos based on the 12 bar blues format, then a repeat of the head, therefore using a type of ternary form. The funk rhythm parallels the strong, driving, city hustle and bustle. George Street is crowded and chaotic. If you don't get out of the way people just walk over you. The edginess of the city – the fun, dark, sinister, sunny, overcast, windy, rainy, bustling, exciting, fast paced, gritty, in-your-face constant is represented in 24/7 repetition. With some variation. The elements are all here and in the music.

Track 5 'River of Glass' (Kempsey, NSW) 03:03

Brief description of the place

'River of Glass' is based on a photograph taken at dusk, showing the gradual purple haze of the skyline which seems to change ever so slightly on the colour spectrum. Once it's blue then it's purple ... like a Necks' experience ... The invisible versus visible. The mirror effect of the trees and swamp-like reflections in the water inspired this piece. The way the outline of the organic shapes meets the sky is beautiful and evocative. It is fascinating how the image is almost an exact replica –

almost a perfect mirror image – adding an aspect of ambiguity and mystery which I wanted to capture in sound.

The music

The essence of the water and the glass effect are key defining aspects in creating this piece. The choice of tone colour is significant represented by a lucid, bright, transparent, trebly percussive sound. It is a combination of percussive effects produced on the instrument, as well as fluid harp-like sounds created by plucking the strings inside the piano. It is based on a set of four sustained chords. These are to initially be played in order, then the performer is at liberty to a) change the order of the patterns and b) change the sustained idea if he/she desires to a different rhythmic approach e.g. arpeggios, single notes, repeated notes etc. The only real stipulation is that the dynamic level does not rise to anything above mf mezzo forte (moderately loud) so the range is quite small – say between pp (very soft) and moderately loud. The use of the sustain pedal is a feature here, and one inherent in Chris Abrahams' *Glow*. Structurally the piece consists of a cyclic approach, ending with the same tremolo chord pattern which begins the piece.

Track 6 'Kangaroos in the Top Paddock' (Bolwarra, NSW) 04:18

Brief description of the place

'Kangaroos in the Top Paddock' is Australian slang for intellectually inadequate (like the phrases 'a sandwich short of a picnic' and 'a sausage short of a barbie'). Its literal meaning from the photograph is real kangaroos in a real top paddock. This piece is inspired by kangaroos – Australia's national symbol and featured on the coat of arms. Kangaroos hold a unique place in Australian iconography. They are emblazoned on cheap T shirts in Chinatown (made in China), in songs – 'Tie me kangaroo down, sport', on road signs, cheap, furry souvenirs and had their own TV show *Skippy* in the 1960s. The word 'kangaroo' is from the Aboriginal word (of the Guugu Yiidhirr language) 'gungurru' for the grey kangaroo. Early explorers first described them as creatures with heads like deer but without antlers. The photos were taken 'in the top paddock' of my mother's semi-rural property in the Hunter Valley in NSW, near Newcastle, at a place called 'Bolwarra' which means 'a flash of light'.

The music

The opening explores a number of non-conventional techniques including glissandi inside the piano, using a plectrum to facilitate percussive articulation and an ability to create harmonics and overtones. The exploration of tone colour is a major factor in the creation of this piece. Environmental sounds are multi-tracked and overlayed. The opening melody is heavily pedalled and angular, resulting in an ambient, resonant and sustained sound bed. Musically I have tried to explore the concept of rhythm via repeated pitch patterns based on various small melodic cells, in keeping with minimalism. These are to be repeated at the performer's discretion and to be used more in an abstract sense rather than literally. I have been influenced by Stravinsky's strong, pounding, dominant approach to rhythm. Tonally I have used a combination of a modal approach and a D minor blues scale. This is perhaps the most programmatic of all the tracks due to the inherent use of rhythmic movement.

Track 7 'Bird on the Chimney out the Bathroom Window' 03:08

Brief description of the place

Inner city living. 'Rat race crowding my brain' (from the song *City Living* by singer/songwriter Lynne Newman).

The view out my bathroom window is of rooftops in Rozelle and a chimney on the adjoining property. The inner west is characterised by a plethora of close knit, turn of the century terrace houses with shared fences and shared (albeit unintentional) sounds, sights, smells, closeness. Neighbours ... The sound of the city.

Repetition inspired this piece. The cyclic, grinding, every day, monotonous, routine, treadmill, existential, repetition.

I get up in the morning. I open the bathroom window. I have a shower. I look out over a sea of rooftops, ivy-clad shrubbery creeping silently over the walls in the courtyard. The rising sun creates an apricot haze silhouetting the eastward vista. The chimney has three upward-protruding stacks. Every morning I look for the bird ... A pigeon sometimes roosts on the middle chimney stack. Sometimes it's there – sometimes it's not. Its presence breaks up the early morning monotony ... something different ... the unknown ...

The music

Routine is a defining factor underpinning the idea behind this piece, the most minimalist and ambient of all the works on the album. I have achieved this through the use of call and response. The right-hand/left-hand single-note interplay forms a musical dialogue. This piece both reflects and parallels the daily cycle, as well as including an element of surprise which is captured through the use of silence as a spatial contrast. There are repeated motifs, fragmented, angular melodic shapes and percussive, minimalist characteristics evident. Small clusters are also included to thicken the texture. The very fast arpeggios are technically demanding and contrast the resonating, sustained sound heard at the end of phrases. Effects are used whereby the reverb is used to drive delay which also contributes to the overall ambience. The score is open to interpretation and the performer's discretion is to be used in regard to rhythmic and pitch aspects.

Track 8 'Captain's Flat' (near the ACT) 04:39

Brief description of the place

Captain's Flat is a sleepy little village nestled on the Molonglo River, among hills adjacent to the Jingera Mountains. It is a quaint little gold mining town 50 kms from Queanbeyan, near Canberra. A number of theories exist as to its exact origins. The favoured story as to how Captain's Flat got its name does not involve men, but rather a bullock. According to the legend, nearby Foxlow Station owned a gigantic white team bullock called 'Captain'. Whenever work was to be done he would invariably be hiding somewhere, his favourite spot being a particular patch of river flat. Drovers travelling through the valley became so used to seeing 'Captain' on his patch of grass that they began calling the area Captain's Flat.

The music

The piece was inspired by the drive from Queanbeyan to Captain's Flat near the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The drive was pitch black, the temperature freezing and the stillness of the landscape inspired a certain ethereal quality, hence the extensive use of space. I have never experienced cold like this before, hence the invisible silence and numbness of the landscape impacted on the creation of the music. There are minimalist, ambient pitch motifs used and inspiration in the form

of Japanese music in the way simplicity is used in relation to structural and pitch aspects. The interval of a fourth has been explored, which is also a feature of Asian music and has been used extensively in The Necks' works. Sparse, angular motifs are used and a type of G minor (over an A bass) pentatonic scale/mode based on G A Bb (sometimes B natural) D and E. Tibetan finger cymbals are recorded as a separate track. The use of such percussion sounds in The Necks' music has been a source of inspiration. Rhythmically the piece encapsulates the minimalist ethos through the fragmented, sustained and heavily-pedalled motifs. Again different small sections make up the piece and are at the liberty of the performer in terms of interpretation. This is another of the most minimal of the tracks on the CD and evokes a sense of location, place and landscape.

Track 9 'Culburra Beach Caravan Park in the Rain' (near Nowra, NSW) 03:32

Brief description of the place

Culburra Beach is situated in the Shoalhaven region of New South Wales, Australia. It is 18 kilometres east-southeast of Nowra on the South Coast. With a population of 2,910 (2006 Census of Population and Housing), Culburra is a small seaside town and a popular holiday, fishing and surfing location. Its local industries include oysters, shrimp, and prawns. It has two of the closest surf beaches to Nowra, Culburra Beach and Warrain Beach. The town is flanked by the Crookhaven River to the north and west, and Lake Wollumboola to the south.

The music

The piece is inspired by my visit to Culburra Beach in the rain. The repetitive use of an E → D# semitone/semiquaver pitch pattern in the left-hand which descends sequentially is representative of the lapping water and the choice of major 7^{th} chords reflects the liquid transparency of the light reflecting on the ocean. The tonic/dominant relationship is also explored. The simple melody explores the interval of a 4th and major 7th. I have added a deliberate juxtaposition in the form of the intervals of a minor 7th/major 7th (bars 22-23) which creates both contrast and ambiguity in terms of pitch. The left-hand accompaniment comprises a relentless semiquaver pattern, a key element used in Abrahams' work. Whilst

appearing relatively simple, there are certain difficulties in relation to sustaining an even rhythmic and tonal sound.

The whole scene takes on a different aspect from the beach in broad daylight with the sun out. In the rain it is more subdued, tranquil and reflective. One of my favourite Bill Evans jazz piano ballads 'Peace Piece' was a major source of inspiration.

Track 10 'South Seas Drive' (Ashtonfield, NSW) 02:48

Brief description of the place

The street sign in a typical working class area near Newcastle, NSW, bears no relationship to the somewhat exotic title which, in a literal sense, conjures up tropical holidays, balmy weather and a beautiful, glistening, azure sea. Apart from the occasional palm tree, the suburb is an endless sea of red and grey roofs, neatly manicured front gardens and three bedroom, brick houses – clones of each other. The Australian dream personified. 'Pride and joy' in the 'burbs. The source of inspiration is the misrepresentation, rather than representation, of landscape, place and location. Subverting the initial meaning and how what you see is not always reality is captured here.

The music

The piece begins with a Hawaiian-sounding guitar, setting the tongue-in-cheek mood which is to follow. The quirky, repetitive Latin-style accompaniment is embedded under the syncopated main melody, over which a short improvised solo takes place prior to the return of the main melody. Syncopation is a key rhythmic feature which is explored throughout the relentless accompaniment. A degree of space in the form of rests followed by heavily accented chords is a feature of the middle section, providing respite from the relentless repeated accompaniment.

Relationships form an integral part of all music making in a holistic sense. They exist not only in relation to collaborative performance, but also in a number of complex ways in solo performance. Technology and the way it applies to the evolution of instruments over time and the way musicians embrace these changes in their own way mean that music does not remain static, creating new sounds and

approaches. The significant aspect of influences has been discussed in this chapter. The set of past influences in performing and listening in a global and local context form a part of this – sometimes in an overt manner, at other times more subtle and less obvious in their representation. In this way 'communities in dialogue' (Fischlin and Heble 2004) play an important part in the process, with the link made with Chapter 2 of this thesis whereby a plethora of styles such as world music (Latin-American, African, Asian etc.), rock, jazz, ambient and minimalist musics have all impacted on the creation of music in this project.

Evolution and change, as seen in The Necks' acoustic experiment, are important developments progressing the arts forward. My creative work has demonstrated subtle ways of manipulating sound, extending new sounds through some non-traditional ways of playing the instrument. I have discussed a number of significant influences which have impacted on the creative project including global musicians such as Evan Parker, Bill Evans, Thelonious Monk and Cecil Taylor, and local musicians such as Mike Nock and Chris Abrahams. I have discussed Abrahams' solo piano CD *Glow* and drawn some comparisons between his work and my own. The significance of landscape, place and location has been outlined as an inspiration for the creation of my work in this project, paralleling that of The Necks in both overt, programmatic ways (*Townsville*) and in the way the acoustic space impacts on the creation of their music.

CONCLUSION

The Necks' music is a Pandora's Box of diverse aural stimuli. Their works range from soundscapes to suites, studio and live albums, film music, interactive collaborations and television. All have a common theme in that they use a set instrumental formula of piano, bass and drums, explore free improvisation, adopt a particular format of live performance and incorporate influences from world music (such as Africa and Asia), art music (Medieval and Renaissance), jazz, rock, funk, electronic music and minimalism. An amalgam of musical experiences, their body of work contains a varying set of aural landscapes which reflect a range of cultural and social trends.

I have outlined a number of key aspects relating to The Necks as an acoustic experiment, beginning with an outline of the significant influences on the individual members, which when combined produce a kind of hybrid, collective, cross-genre musical outcome. Whilst the way they perform – usually starting with one instrument and building on this using simple free improvised, repetitive minimalist patterns – has not changed greatly, they have nonetheless developed a 'unique ensemble syntax and sound' (Whiteoak 2004, p. 5) as a result of their close relationship as part of The Necks. Relationships are an essential part of creative work, and I have illustrated these connections by incorporating a global and local perspective, drawing valuable links between these, The Necks' work and my own creative practice.

I have outlined the methodology and framework adopted, demonstrating a clear direction using a research-led approach on which to base a case study and analysis of The Necks' work. Referring to a number of significant and influential readings, I have made connections with the work of other key writers on the subject of jazz, improvised music and world music both internationally and nationally. Music does not exist in a vacuum, and in an increasingly global world the way music is produced, performed and received reflects the technological set of circumstances which also impact on the nature of the music.

I have charted the progress of The Necks' 25 years together, from their first album *Sex* released in 1989 via an acoustic experiment to their most recent sixteenth album *Mindset* released in 2011. As part of the empirical evidence gathered I have notated

some of the main themes evident in their work, using these as a basis for a comprehensive analysis. The Necks extend the capabilities of their instruments leading to new ways of producing sound with thought being given also to the philosophical aspects relating to the individual capabilities of the instruments. Their quirky titles, with studio albums added post-recording and live performances often identified by their connection with where the recording took place, contribute a poetic narrative programmaticism to their work. The fascination lies in how they manage to create a discrete, original aural sound piece with each of their works, characterised by a clearly focused, improvisational narrative approach. The aural effect is kaleidoscopic.

The way The Necks interact with their acoustic environment is also significant, and I have illustrated how live performances take on a different direction and dimension being more dynamic and organic, whereas studio albums take on a more static, constructionist approach with the addition of a diverse array of carefully chosen multi-tracked material. Some of their other projects have also been referenced, including the soundtrack for *The Boys* where it was shown both how the music was composed and used in the film.

The link with landscape, place and location has been a common thread, linking both The Necks' work and my own creative project, the CD *Places*. The relationship with their performance space is further explored in the analysis of their live recording *Townsville*, which explores the question of whether there is a tangible link between the place and the music.

Listening is considered in the context of 'the ear being a faithful collector of all sounds' (Oliveros 2005, p. 19) with a discussion ensuing which makes the point that a one-size fits all approach to listening to jazz and improvised music is not applicable, that different styles of music require a different mode of listening, albeit in a personalised context for the individual listener. The impact of repetition, for example, is a key point, with The Necks quoted as saying they repeat material ad infinitum, until a point is reached whereby a decision is made to affect change. The Necks have been quoted as saying they listen to the music in a performance context as much as the audience, something which has never happened to them individually when playing with other groups. A personalised account of a Necks' concert serves

as an example of how the listening experience is perceived in my own terms – how their performance has impacted directly on my own act of listening.

Reactions to The Necks' music can be contradictory and polarised, and I have shown this through a comparison of two different concert reviews, one favourable and the other less so. Swanton's articulate response to the latter justifies the aim of the group and argues the case for their overall philosophy and sonic identity.

The creative component highlights a direct correlation between landscape, place and location, whereby I have linked my own work to a set of global and local influences and piano techniques. I have used a comparison with my own work and Chris Abrahams' solo piano album *Glow* in order to explore connections and explorations of new sounds.

The group has begun to influence future improvisatory trends both here and overseas and are gaining critical acclaim on an international scale. It is interesting to see the connection between The Necks, who were all born in the early sixties, and Miles Davis' epic *Kind of Blue*. Richard Williams in his book *The Blue Moment* (2009 p. 274) hears a direct, parallel lineage whereby:

> Abrahams' keyboard strumming is the tremolo laid by Evans under the theme of 'All Blues', Swanton's slowly changing bass figures are Paul Chambers' underpinning riff, half a century on. And everything Buck plays is a descendent of the cymbal crash with which Jimmy Cobb gave Miles Davis a prod in the back at the start of his solo on 'So What', the happiest of accidents.

The Necks grew out of a 'happiest of accidents' scenario. Through the initial informal process of the aural experiment, this trio of like-minded virtuosic musicians, each with their own set of musical influences, went on to pioneer new music on a world scale. In doing so The Necks have created new aural spaces which require new ways of listening, forging new communities in sound based on an experimental dialogue created through the extensive uses of repetition and minimalism. In fact the way they approach the art of musical performance is not unlike walking the tightrope without a safety net in order to create an aural experiment.

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DISCOGRAPHY/COMPACT DISCS

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Next ©1990, The Necks, Spiral Scratch – reissued on Fish of Milk

Aquatic ©1994, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

Silent Night ©1996, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

Piano Bass Drums ©1998, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

The Boys – music for the feature film ©1998, The Necks, (original soundtrack) (Wild Sound/MDS, 1998 reissue on Fish of Milk/Shock Records)

Hanging Gardens ©1999, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

Aether ©2001, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

Athenaeum, Homebush, Quay & Raab ©2002, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

Drive By ©2003, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

Photosynthetic ©2003, The Necks, Long Arms

Mosquito/See Through ©2004, The Necks, Fish of Milk

Chemist ©2006, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records ***Best Aria Award – Jazz Category – 2006

Townsville ©2007, The Necks, Fish of Milk/Shock Records

Silverwater ©2009, Fish of Milk

Mindset ©2011, Fish of Milk.

MISCELLANEOUS

TELEVISION

In the Mind of the Architect ABC TV, 2006 ABC TV May, 3 x 30 minute programs.

The Necks have worked on one other film project: in 2000 they were commissioned to produce music for a series of three-hour documentaries, *In the Mind of the Architect* (produced by Tim Clark and Janne Ryan, written and directed by Tim Clark, and narrated by David Wenham) for the Australian Broadcasting Commission. As Swanton has indicated, 'the *Architect* music was commissioned, and we went about it much the same way [as *The Boys*], (although we'd learnt by this stage not to do such lengthy rough versions--this time they were an arbitrary five minutes duration) and again we left the editor to drop in the music where he saw fit'. The Necks' music, especially a figure involving a repeated single note on Abrahams' piano which gradually increases in volume, often produces a dramatic effect, and underscores shots of some important public architectural sites in Australia, such as the Federation Square project in Melbourne, the Sydney Opera House and the East Circular Quay project. The association of the music with architectural surfaces and public buildings gives it a locational grounding and a cartographic function which identifies it as having a distinctively Australian identity (Mitchell, 2005).

Set Program 1 2006, television program, aired 2 May 2006, ABC, Sydney. <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/set/1.htm>.

DVD/FILM

Beyond El Rocco 1993, Vox, Sydney. Soundtrack to Kevin Lucas' documentary on Australian jazz features one track by The Necks – 'Royal Family'

The Boys 1998, film, Arenafilm, Sydney.

LIVE CONCERTS

Sydney Opera House:
Food Court – music to play with Back To Back Theatre Tuesday 9 June 2009 at the Sydney Opera House as part of Luminous Festival curated by Brian Eno
The Necks with video art by Tony Buck – Sydney Opera House The Studio 29 May 2008 The Basement:

The Necks Monday 27 February 2005

The Necks 13 March 2007

The Necks 18 March 2012

COLLABORATIONS

Collaboration with Brian Eno, Lucid Festival Opera House 2009

Life After Wartime – Ross Gibson and Kate Richards
Adelaide Fringe Festival in 2002 and to standing-room-only crowds at The Studio, Sydney Opera House in 2003.

MAP

<http://www.southcoastleisuretimes.com.au/index.php/top/greenwell-point-culburra>.

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APPENDIX A:

REVIEWS

The Necks in North America

Review – John Litweiler

Chicago Cultural Center
Chicago, IL
Tuesday, February 3, 2009

Tuesday night in Chicago was bitterly cold, nearly zero degrees Fahrenheit, with ice and several inches of snow covering the city and brutal winds blasting from the north. But Chicago jazz and new music people love to hear a free concert, so the little theater at the downtown Cultural Center was crowded with a couple hundred listeners. Actually, this concert was well publicized, even though The Necks were new to America, on their first tour.

They played two sets on Tuesday, a total of nearly two hours of music. If you haven't heard The Necks, what they do is improvise on one chord. What they improvise is simple licks that they vamp over and over, licks that ever so slowly and slightly alter, move, transmogrify. There is no melody line over the trio's vamping, no main line of development. The net effect is of very long introductions to events that never happen.

Lazy reviewers such as myself love to write about an act like The Necks because their music is easy to describe and they start from a concept that might even be taken, or mistaken, as an important development. For example, perhaps the best way to show what The Necks' music is like is to give a blow-by-blow account. The first set began like this:
7:10 p.m. Piano plays a little noodling lick centered on a repeated treble note, then rests; Abrahams then repeats this little motif over and over, with a little rest between each repeat.

7:11 Bass enters with intermittent, frantic strums on one note.

7:12 Drums enter with quiet, repeated mallet sounds on toms, snares. Now they are a trio, all repeating their little, complementary motifs.

7:18 Bass, by now, is strumming different repeated tones and the piano is repeating treble chords based on that opening motif.

7:21 Bass strums and mallets on drums are now making a very gradual crescendo, while the piano chords remain piano.

7:25 The piano piano chord becomes fuller and Abrahams is now repeating the chord without rests. There are no rests between the forte, machine-gun bass strums, which alternate without any more rests between two tones — a sorta seasick feeling.

7:29 Now the bass strums three alternate tones.

7:32 As the pounding of a piano chord (Abrahams has added some bass-clef notes, too) also begins to crescendo — remember, this trio crescendo is extremely gradual — cymbal rolls swell at the end of each series of three bass tones, and now the bass drum enters.

7:37 A drumsticks, now, pattern on snares; the bass now frantically bows two alternating tones. Is the piano playing very quiet treble notes or chords? Can't tell because repeated bass notes, drum patterns, and hammered piano bass-clef chords are so loud.

7:38 Drum rolls now alternate with the drum pattern.

7:40 Bass introduces a longer, high, treble tone to alternate with the two frantically bowed tones.

And so on, and on, and on, ever so slowly, ever so slightly, through a decrescendo, too, until the music fades on a four-note piano arpeggio at 7:55. Especially the repeated frantic bass strums created a sense that something was impending, that a musical event was going to happen any moment now. There was stimulation in the trio crescendo. And the very gradual crescendo in the second set was more exciting because of its fast momentum, with Swanton sawing on his bass strings, the swinging Buck making busy, catchy drums-cymbal swells, and Abrahams playing piano trills. As a friend pointed out, it would have made good accompaniment to a movie chase scene. In fact, the piano beginning of the second set, an Erik Satie-like

lick, and occasional later, repeated, impressionistic noodles threatened that Abrahams might start to play melodic phrases. But the aggressive austerity of Swanton's vamps seemed to discipline the others into remaining ever so slow and slight.

When melody is removed and harmonic and rhythmic development are restricted, ensemble unity becomes much easier. Without linear movement, the music's tension arises from the incremental changes in the vamps and, in these two improvisations, from the crescendo-decrescendo form. Without linear development, those slow, incremental changes become the music's line. This was improvised minimalism, more detailed than the few Philip Glass pieces I've heard, and I enjoyed it more than Glass. It also reminded me, faintly, of some old recordings of African drummers, and especially of the ad hoc ensembles of conga, bongo, and other hand-drum percussionists who play for hours at the 63rd Street beach house here in Chicago on every warm summer evening. (They and their spiritual ancestors have been drumming there for decades.)

Like free improvisation, The Necks' medium is unique and wholly improvised. Abrahams, Swanton, and Buck may come from jazz, pop, and/or classical music, but the vestiges they bring to The Necks are cut away from those traditions. In today's music, in their self-conscious intellectual sources, and in their manipulation of emotion, The Necks are as decadent as gangs of Elvis impersonators or teenaged Charlie Parker imitators. As diverting, too.

Chicago-based writer John Litweiler is the author of *Ornette Coleman: A Harmolodic Life* and *The Freedom Principle: Jazz After 1958*.

Lloyd Swanton Replies to John Litweiler

AUTHOR:

Lloyd Swanton

DATE:

Tuesday 17 March 2009

SIMA invited US music writer John Litweiler to review one of the two Chicago concerts by The Necks on the trio's recent North American tour.

Below The Necks' bass player Lloyd Swanton responds.

I'm not sure how to take John Litweiler's description of himself as a 'lazy reviewer'. Perhaps it's false modesty, utilised preemptively. Or perhaps he's being totally honest, which we'd have to take as an admission that his review is the disrespectful, out-of-hand effort I suspect it is.

His bizarre decision to opt for a blow-by-blow description of our concert raises so many troubling issues I hardly know where to begin.

Above all else, such an act has a strong whiff of premeditation about it, as if he had already made up his mind to hate the concert before arriving.

But that's only a suspicion of mine, and cannot be proven. Let's give him due respect as a critic, and assume that, in a spirit of impeccable fairness, he decided, mere seconds into a concert, that the best way to convey to the reader what was taking place was to whip out his watch and maintain a detailed written log of every musical entry and departure. There are still many valid objections to this approach; to his claim of it being 'perhaps the best way to show what The Necks' music is like':

It is ridiculous to think that anyone would be able to objectively assess any concert, if attempting simultaneously to log every single musical move. Our brains simply aren't wired that way. Either the logging, or the objectivity, is going to suffer.

It is all the more ridiculous in the case of our music, where 10 minutes' research on the internet could have told Litweiler that a key part of what we do concerns our (hopefully artful) re-orienting of the perception of time passing. Countless listeners and writers have referred to our one-hour pieces passing as if in a few seconds. Litweiler is wilfully shutting himself out from that deeper, immersive experience by opting for the prosaic role of timeline comptroller.

A blow-by-blow description is extremely reductive, devaluing every musical occurrence in a concert to a hollow, meaningless zombie action. Look again at Litweiler's bloodless account. Nowhere is there the faintest hint that any of us might actually be joyfully responding, and contributing, to the musical textures which land in our laps, or to the acoustics of the room, or to the subliminal responses from the audience. All musical decision is rendered as so much values-free husk. (Perhaps this was Litweiler's point. If so, he should just come out and say so, and spare us the tedium, for it hardly makes for scintillating reading as it stands.)

Furthermore, even if one were to conclude that there is indeed something about our music that makes it terribly apt for a blow-by-blow account (we make no apologies for the fact that we work with the basic building-blocks of music, and sound production), it doesn't automatically then follow that any music which cannot be so rendered is actually saying anything profound. Litweiler may protest that he is not claiming this to be the case, but it is surely the only logical and reasonable corollary from his sneering assertion that 'their music is easy to describe and they start from a concept that might even be taken, or mistaken, as an important development'.

I don't think I'd be the only reader feeling that Litweiler has gone out of his way to trivialise what we do, rather than objectively analyse it. The funny thing in this review is, on occasion he demonstrates an uncanny ability to nail the essence of some elements of what The Necks are about. I see this in his penultimate paragraph, firstly where (putting aside my suspicions that in saying 'ensemble unity becomes much easier' he really means 'they have taken the sneaky way') he not only makes

some knowledgeable points about immersive, gradualist music in general, but also when he says our music reminds him of ‘the ad hoc ensembles of conga, bongo, and other hand-drum percussionists who play for hours at the 63rd Street beach house here in Chicago on every warm summer evening.’ Uncanny! I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve described our music in interviews as being not unlike a bunch of hippies jamming in the back room at a party. You listen for a while, wander off, and when you come back, they’re still playing the same groove, but it’s morphed into something else.

Equally uncanny is when he says ‘the net effect is of very long introductions to events that never happen’. Again, I can’t begin to count the number of times I’ve stated that one of the impetuses that drove me, personally, towards The Necks’ concept was that I often found myself enjoying the one-or-two-chord intro and outro vamps to jazz tunes more than the tunes themselves. (Just for the record John, we don’t ‘improvise on one chord’, as a rule. Sometimes we work with far less than that, a mere trill or a single note or just a timbre, and sometimes there is a great deal of harmonic variety and movement in our pieces.)

But the dismaying thing is, Litweiler appears to think these statements are put-downs, rather than simply descriptions of the way things are, and in doing so reveals more about his own prejudices and preconceptions than anything about our music. It’s so facile to say someone simply doesn’t ‘get’ something, but it’s resoundingly the case here. Litweiler has correctly identified many of the elements that make up our music; he simply can’t, or won’t, acknowledge that there is something good going on in it. For balance, I invite readers to check out some of the other US reviews in which writers manage to describe similar events with a sense of wonder rather than dismissal.

I also feel that if a reviewer is to stray from straight description of the music that took place into general descriptions of the audience, he or she then has an obligation to report all the facts, not just those that suit his or her argument. It seems to me to be less than fastidious to make what could be seen as a disparaging comment about the quality of our audience, namely that they were only there because there was free admission and they are cheapskates, and then fail to mention the standing ovation we received, or the scrum of people buying CDs after each set.

Finally, Litweiler's closing thoughts are quite baffling. Why raise 'self-conscious intellectual sources' for the first and only time, in the last paragraph? Please identify said sources. Likewise 'manipulation of emotion' – who mentioned emotion? (And by whose measure were we 'manipulating' it?) Emotion in music is something I don't usually care to express, let alone manipulate. Universal truths, heightened states, the wonder and beauty of all that it is to be human, most certainly, but emotion? Dreadful muck. I leave that to opera. And 'decadent'? Who said we were trying to be decadent? What a ridiculous measure to attempt to apply to our music! I can state categorically that decadence in music is one thing we have never striven for.

I can also state categorically that playing the music of The Necks is the most deeply rewarding and fulfilling way of making music that I have in my life. Litweiler may say so what, it leaves him cold, but there were many hundreds of other Americans, on other occasions in February, who clearly felt otherwise. And they were paying customers too.

The Necks

John L. Walters

The Guardian, Thursday 8 November 2007 09.13 GMT

Australia's the Necks defy conventions about making and listening to music. Each performance (and each CD) by Tony Buck on drums, Lloyd Swanton on bass and Chris Abrahams on piano is an hour of unbroken improvisation, each one different to the last. So if you are a Necks fan, you cannot be sure you will hear your favourite Necks moment again. After 20 years, there are no ‘greatest hits’, only what is next.

The first of tonight's two sets is spacious and airy; the second is more intense and visceral. Abrahams starts the former alone, as if testing the resonance of the room, before the others join quietly. When Swanton moves from busy bowing to simple pizzicato you might expect Buck's shimmering cymbal part to get tighter. Wrong. He changes the pulse, adds new timbres, and the bass and piano parts become more minimal. It is like a 12in remix in slow motion. Later, Abrahams plays a gorgeous chord sequence, a repetitive arc that shifts from tension to semi-resolution (like Bernard Herrmann) with shivery pleasure until Buck pulls back to nothing.

Swanton begins set two with a light, one-note riff over which Abrahams plays decorative arabesques, then phrases that are almost (but not quite) jazz licks. Buck provides a steady pulse – first on cymbal, then tom, and eventually full kit – that never flags. Swanton and Abrahams play cat and mouse with bass riffs and piano vamps, and the pitch of Buck's high-tuned tom somehow becomes part of the harmony: the sound is everything. Two-thirds through the number, the entire room is throbbing to an ecstatic pulse.

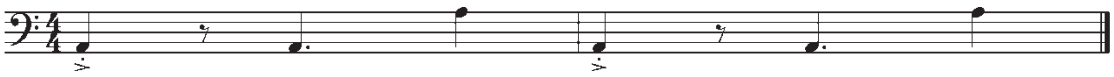
What the Necks play is neither jazz nor rock nor conventional improv, but something unique. We go home happy, knowing we will never hear it again.

APPENDIX B:

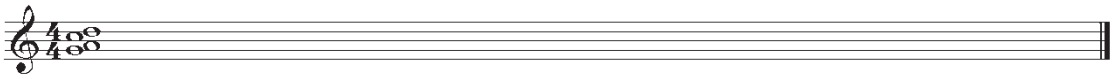
TRANSCRIPTIONS

ALBUM 1 *SEX* 1989

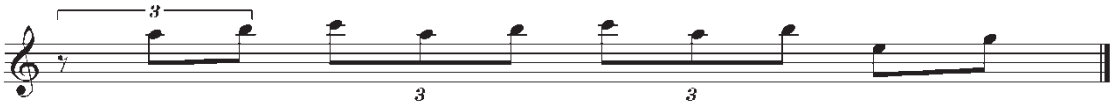
Example 1 Bass – opening riff in *Sex*



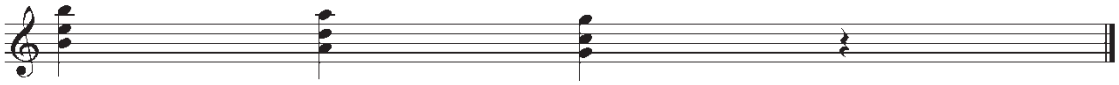
Example 2 Piano – sustained chords



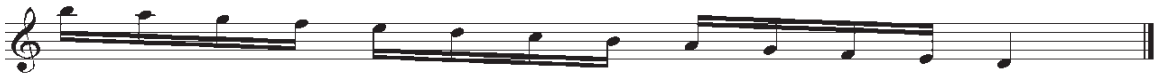
Examples 3 Piano – triplet motifs



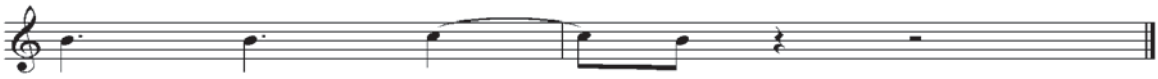
Examples 4 Piano – sparse chords based on 4ths



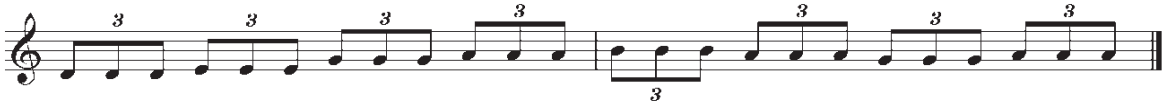
Example 5 Piano – rapidly descending scale passages



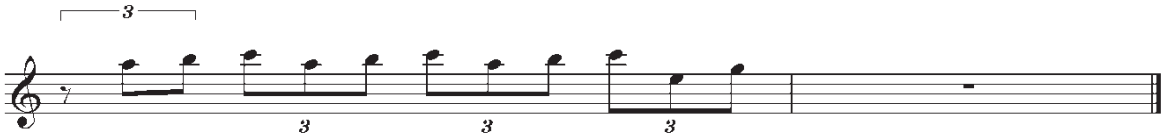
Example 6 Piano



Example 7 Piano – triplet motifs



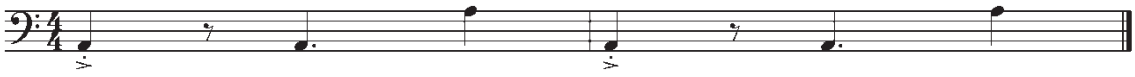
Example 8 Piano – triplet motifs



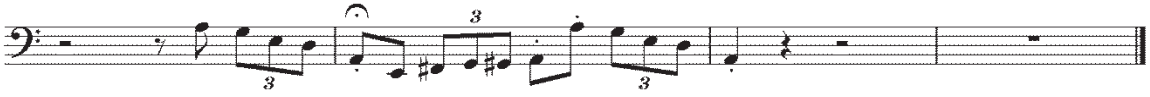
ALBUM 2 *NEXT* 1990

Track 1 ‘Carl’s’

Example 1 Opening bass riff from *Sex*

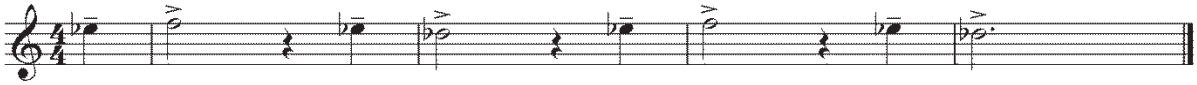


Example 2 Bass

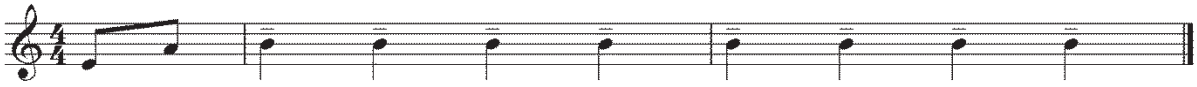


Example 3 Drums

Example 4 Piano



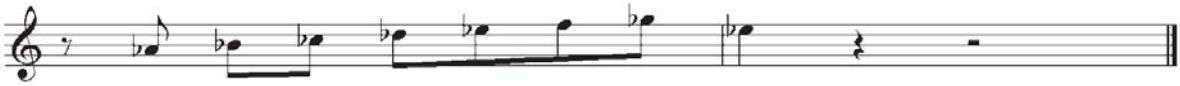
Example 5 Piano



Example 6 Piano

Example 7 Piano

Example 8 Piano

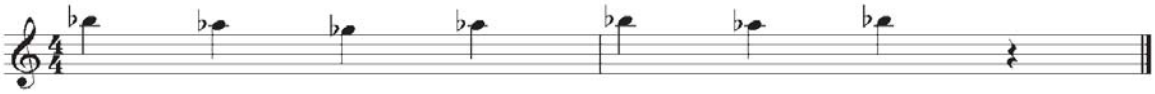


Example 9 Piano

Example 10

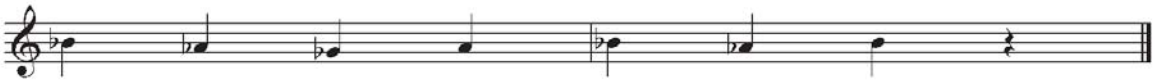
Track 2 ‘Nice Policeman Nasty Policeman’

Example 1 Piano



Example 2 Piano

Example 3 Piano

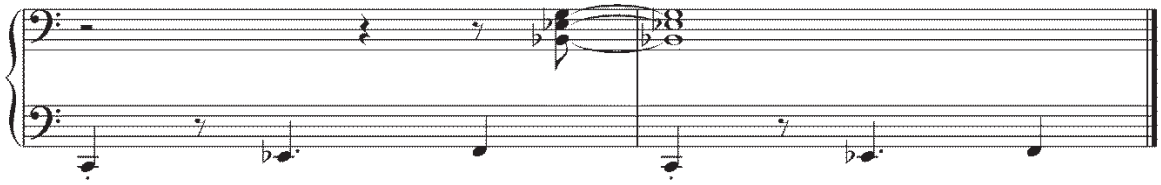


Example 4 Drums

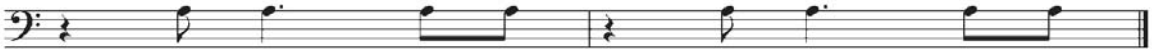
Example 5 Piano

Track 3 ‘Pele’

Example 1 Piano riff – opening

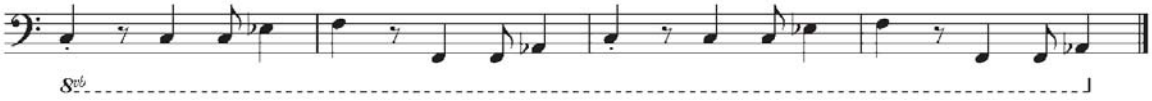


Example 2 Piano

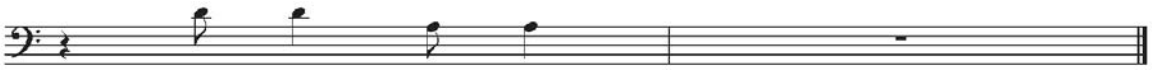


Example 3 Piano – left-hand octaves

Example 4 Piano

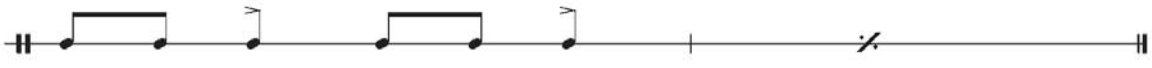


Example 5 Piano



Example 6 Piano

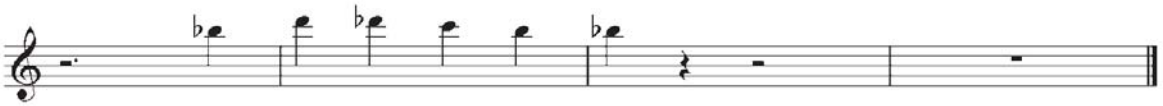
Example 7 Drums



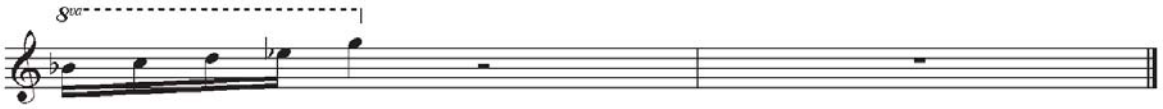
Example 8 Drums

Example 9 Drums

Example 10 Piano



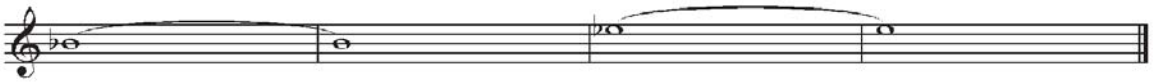
Example 11 Piano



Track 4 ‘Next’

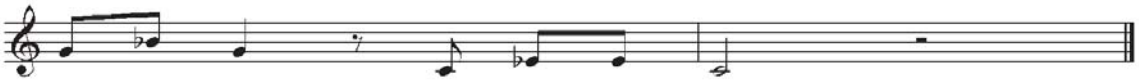
Example 1 Slapped electric bass riff – opening

Example 2 Hawaiian guitar

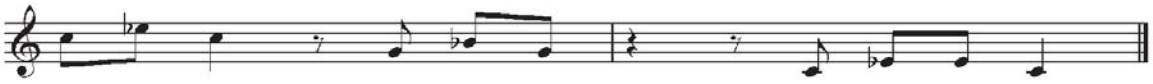


Example 3 Hawaiian guitar

Example 4 Hawaiian guitar



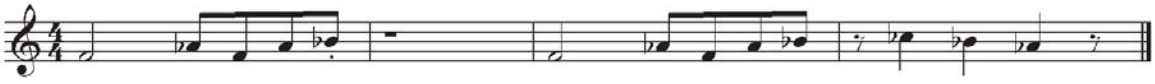
Example 5 Hawaiian guitar



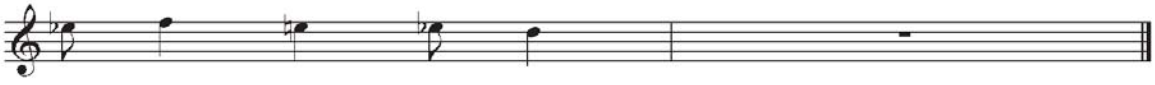
Example 6 Piano

Track 5 ‘Jazz Cancer’

Example 1 Distorted piano

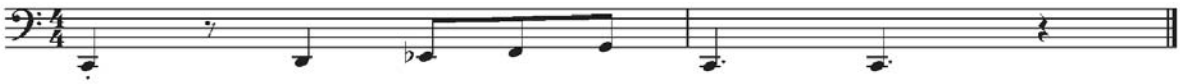


Example 2 Distorted Hawaiian guitar



Track 6 ‘The World at War’

Example 1 Bass



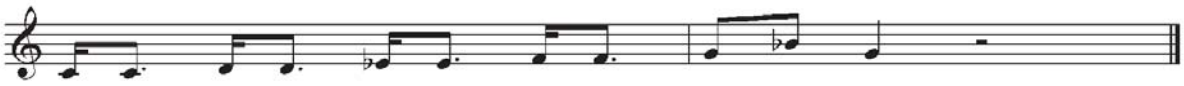
Example 2 Piano – descending fragment

Example 3 Sustained brass harmonies

Example 4 Sustained brass lines

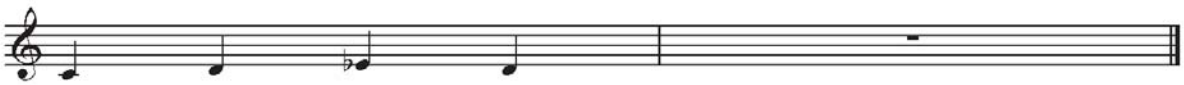
Example 5 Sustained brass lines

Example 6 Abrahams’ hammered piano technique

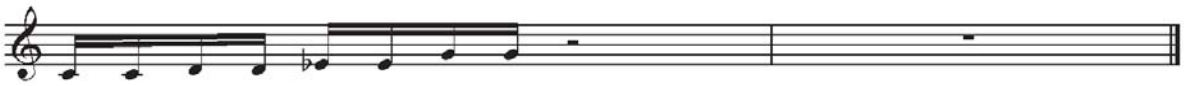


Example 7 Piano – extremes of register

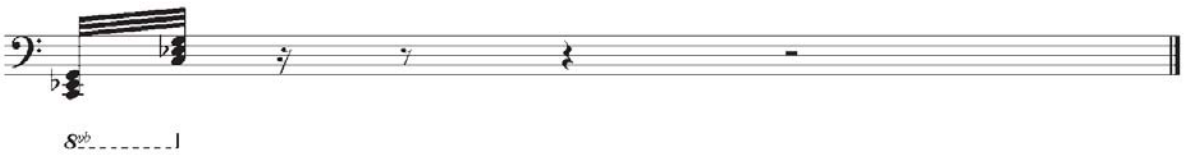
Example 8 Piano



Example 9 Piano



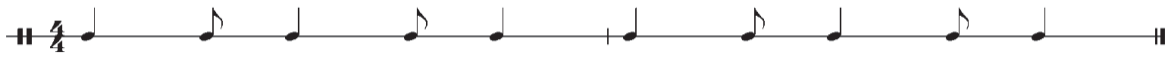
Example 10 Piano – rumbling, sinister, left-hand tremolos



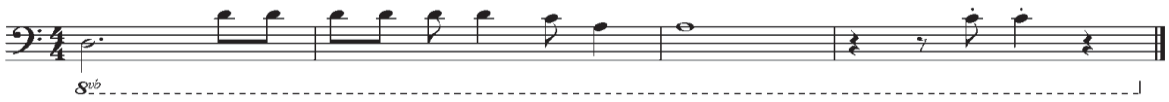
ALBUM 3 *AQUATIC* 1994

Track 1 ‘Aquatic’

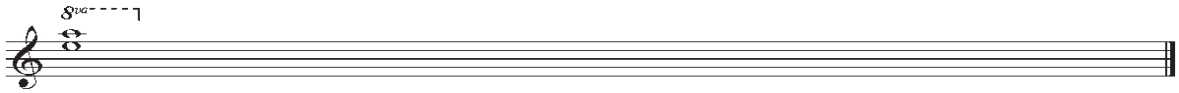
Example 1 Drums – hi-hat rhythm



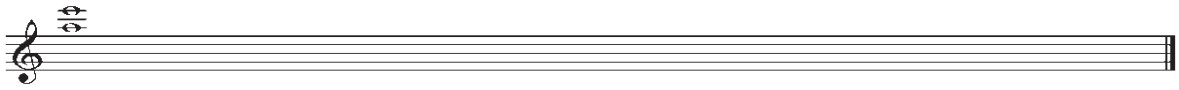
Example 2 Bass riff



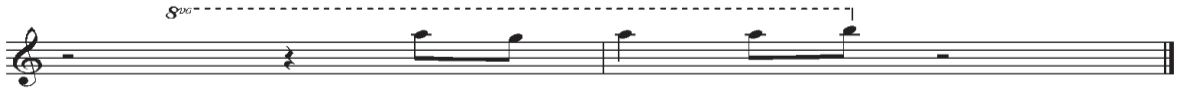
Example 3 Piano



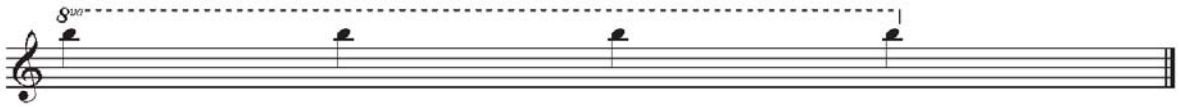
Example 4 Piano



Example 5 Piano

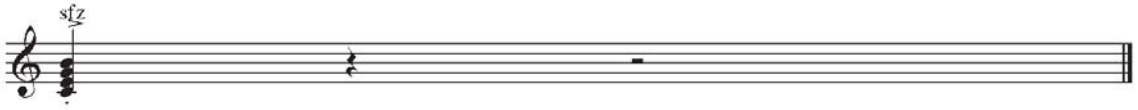


Example 6 Piano

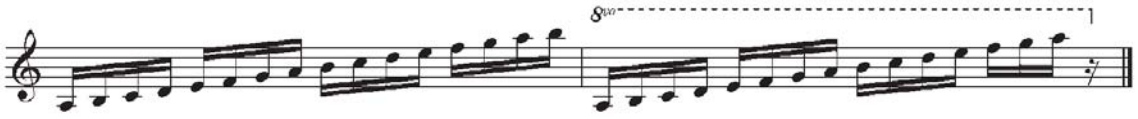


Example 7 Piano

Example 8 Organ – sparse, accented chords

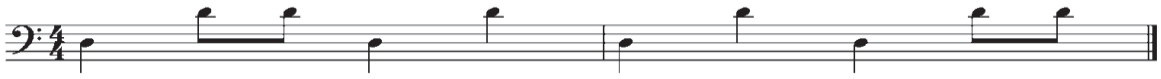


Example 9 Organ – shards of distorted scale passages



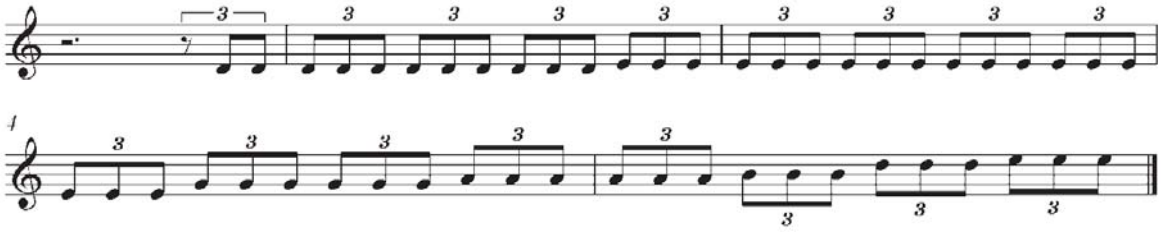
Track 2 ‘Aquatic’

Example 1 Bass riff – octave

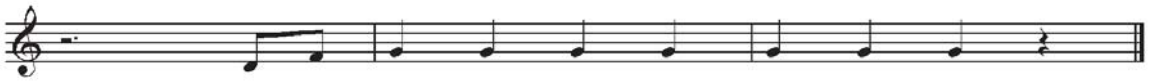


Example 2 Piano – ascending, fragmented scale passages

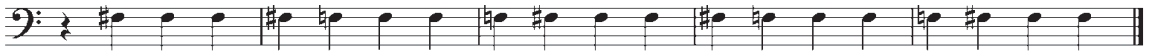
Example 3 Piano – pentatonic triplet motifs



Example 4 Piano – chant-like motifs



Example 5 Bass



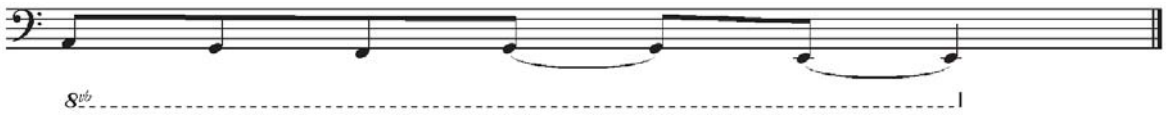
Example 6 Piano – extensive use of heavily-pedalled trills

Example 7 Piano chords

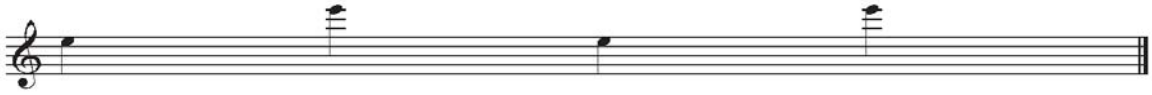
ALBUM 4 *SILENT NIGHT* 1996

Track 1 ‘Black

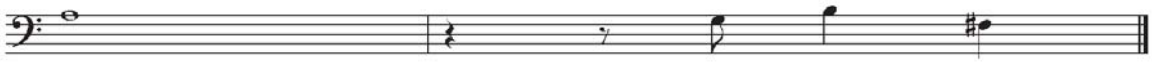
Example 1 Piano – low register bass riff



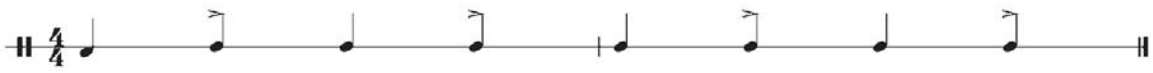
Example 2 Hammond organ



Example 3 Piano

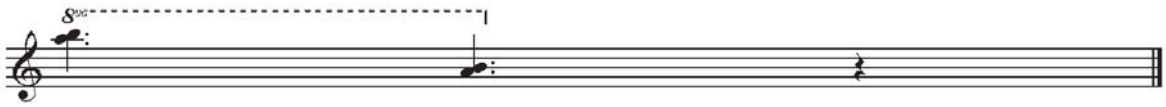


Example 4 Drum syncopation

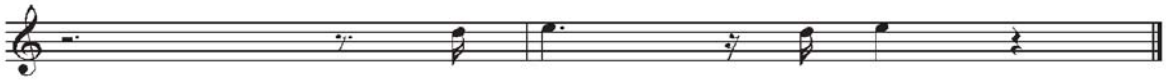


Example 5 Drums

Example 6 Piano

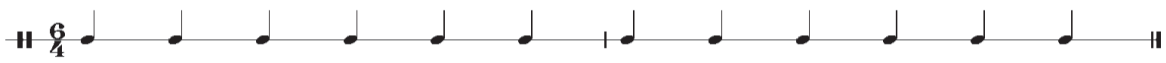


Example 7 Piano



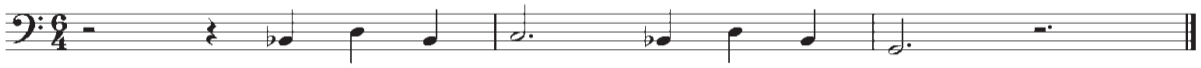
Track 2 ‘White’

Example 1 Drums – crotchet ride cymbal

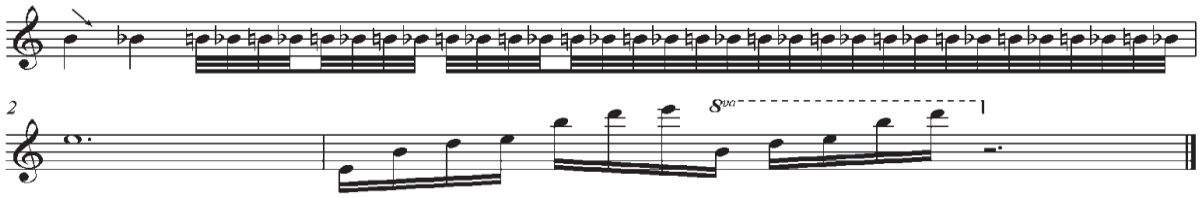


Example 2 Drums

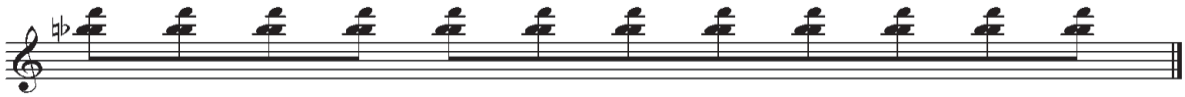
Example 3 Bass



Example 4 Piano – trills/angular, widely-spaced arpeggios

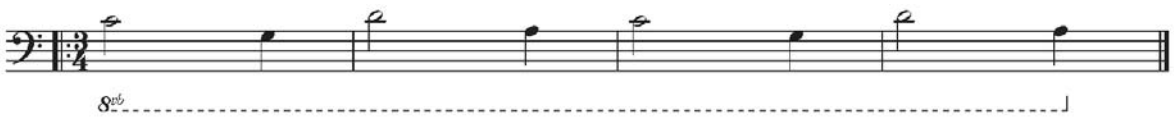


Example 5 Piano cluster chords

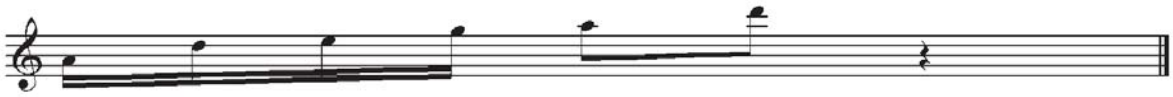


ALBUM 5 *PIANO BASS DRUMS* 1998

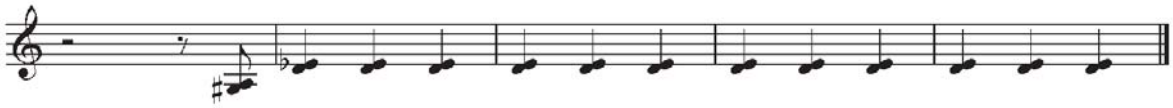
Example 1 Bass



Example 2 Piano – lyrical, transcendental, impressionist melodies



Example 3 Piano – minimalist clusters



Example 4 Piano – trill-like motifs

Example 5 Piano – hammered piano tremolo

Example 6 Piano – hammered piano tremolo

Example 7 Piano – heavily-pedalled repeated cluster chords

Example 8 Piano – heavily-pedalled repeated cluster chords

Example 9 Drums

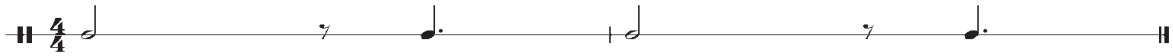
ALBUM 6 *THE BOYS* 1998

The transcriptions for *The Boys* are included in the text.

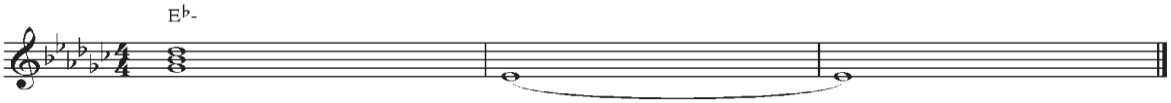
ALBUM 7 *HANGING GARDENS* 1999

Example 1 Drums – dance-groove

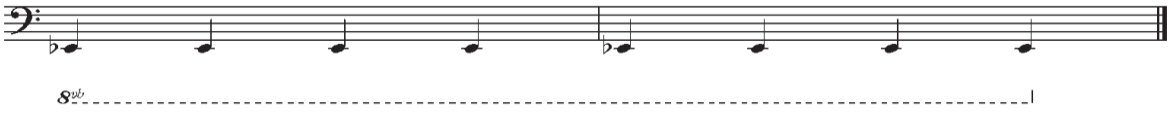
Example 2 Drums – dance-groove



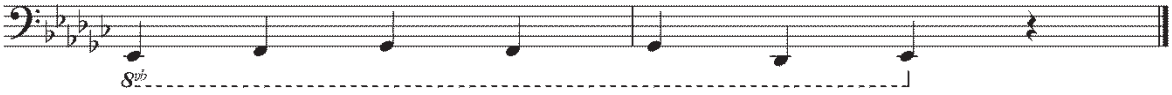
Example 3 Organ – intermittent sustained chords



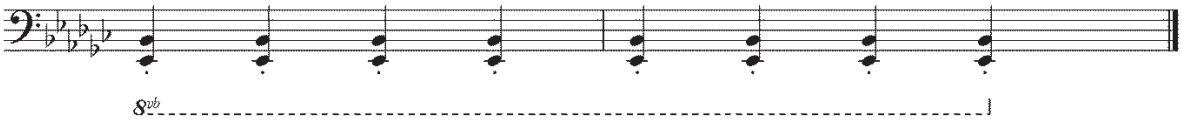
Example 4 Piano – bass riff – extreme low register



Example 5 Piano – bass riff – extreme low register



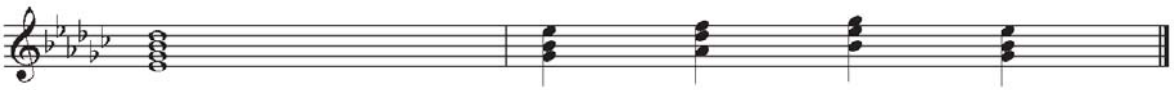
Example 6 Bass – double stopped pizzicato notes



Example 7 Drums – aggressive, syncopated rock beat

Example 8 Organ

Example 9 Piano chord progression



Example 10 Synth-pad heart-beat sound

Example 11 Piano/synth – string-like sound tremolo pattern

ALBUM 8 *AETHER* 2001

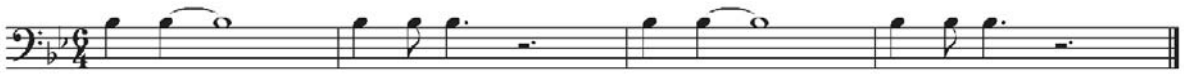
Example 1 Synthesiser

Example 2 Synthesiser

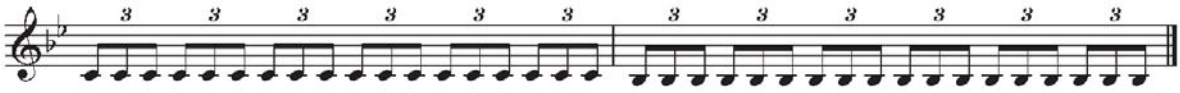
ALBUM 9 *ATHENAEUM HOMEBUSH QUAY RAAB* 2002

CD 1 Athenaeum

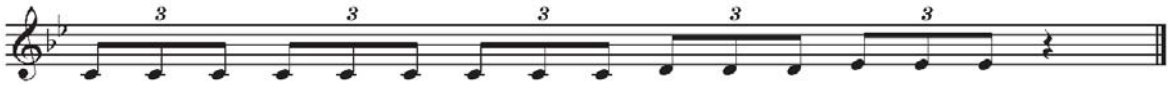
Example 1 Bass – repeated notes



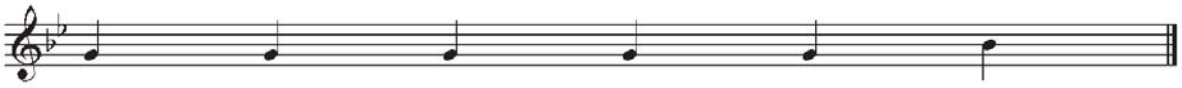
Example 2 Piano – Abrahams' trademark triplet rhythms



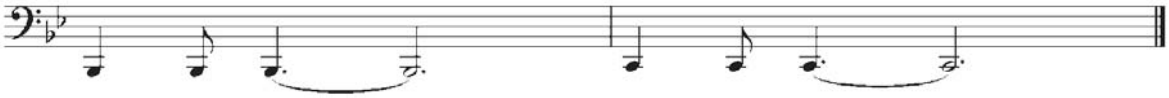
Example 3 Piano – Abrahams' trademark triplet rhythms



Example 4 Piano – minimalist small melodic cells

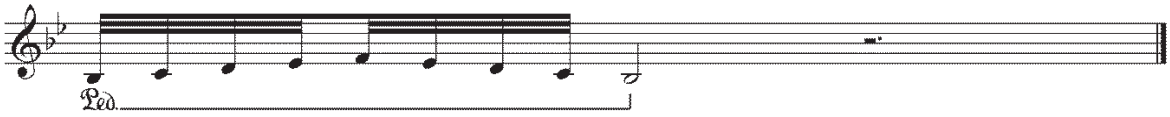


Example 5 Bass



Example 6 Bass evolves and develops

Example 7 Piano



Example 8 Drums – sforzando cymbal hit

Example 9 Piano – high-register chord clusters

Example 10 Drums

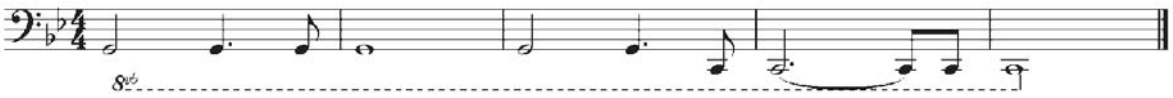
Example 11 Drums

Example 12 Drums

Example 13 Piano – glissandos feature heavily

CD 2 Homebush

Example 1 Bass riff – opening



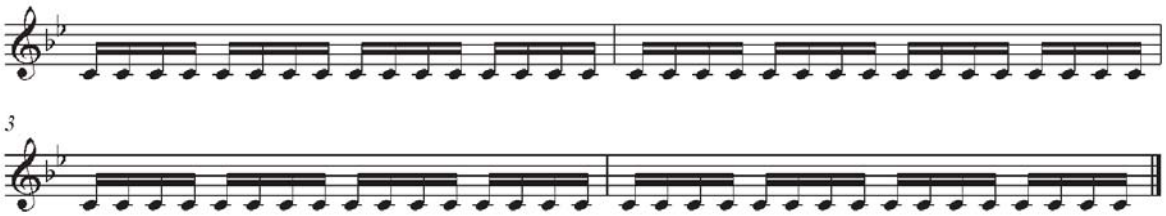
Example 2 Drums – ride cymbal

Example 3 Piano

Example 4 Piano – descending chromatic riffs

Example 5 Piano – descending chromatic riffs

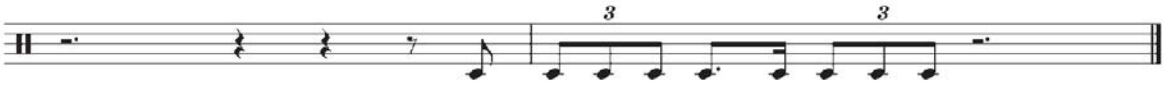
Example 6 Piano – repeated tremolos



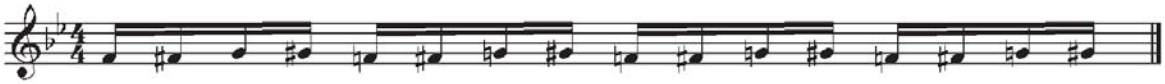
Example 7 Piano – rhythmic development

Example 8 Piano – clusters

Example 9 Drums – develops into a triplet/dotted rhythm

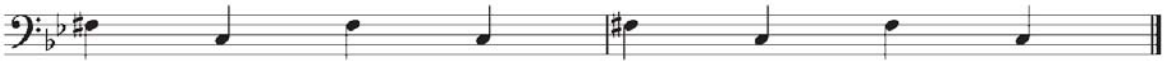


Example 10 Piano – minimalist semitone motif



Example 11 Drums – syncopated rhythm

Example 12 Bass – tritone interval



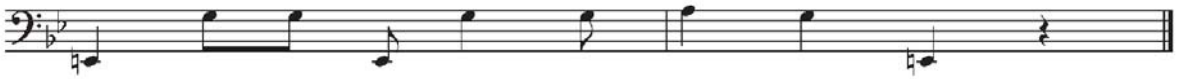
Example 13 Drums – rock beat

Example 14 Piano – tone clusters

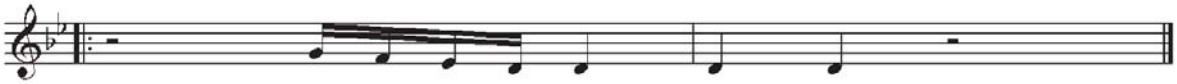
Example 15 Piano – tone clusters

CD 3 ‘Quay’

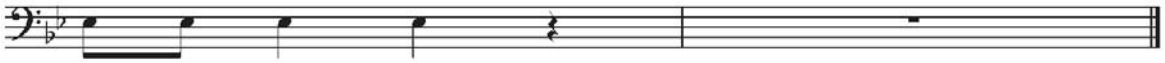
Example 1 Bass – gently plucked three-note



Example 2 Piano – meandering, random lines



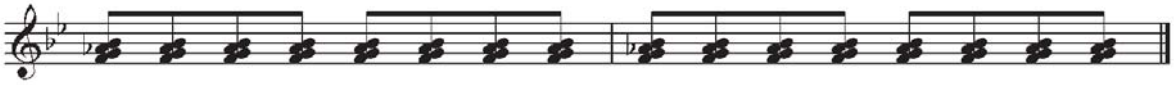
Example 3 Bass plays single note repeated riff



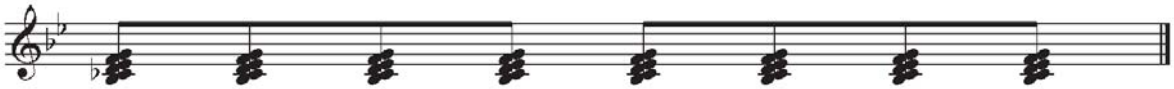
Example 4 Piano chords

Example 5 Drums develop a dotted motif

Example 6 Piano clusters



Example 7 Piano clusters

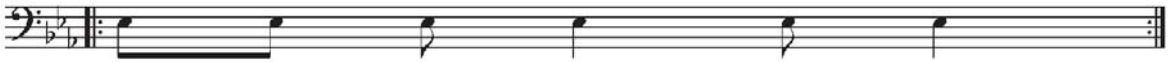


Example 8 piano chromaticism

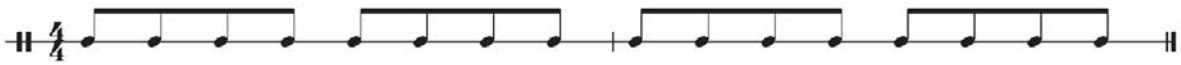
CD 4 Raab

Example 1 Piano – simple two-note right-hand melody

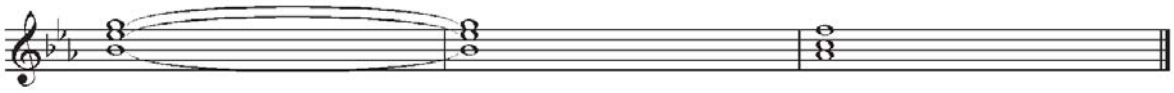
Example 2 Bass – high register



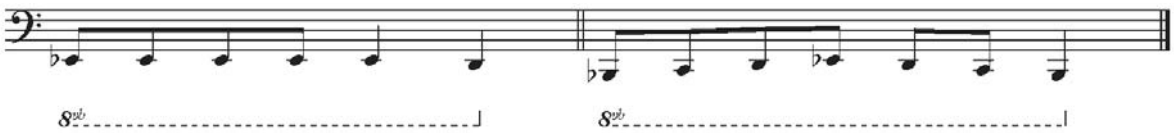
Example 3 Drums become more animated



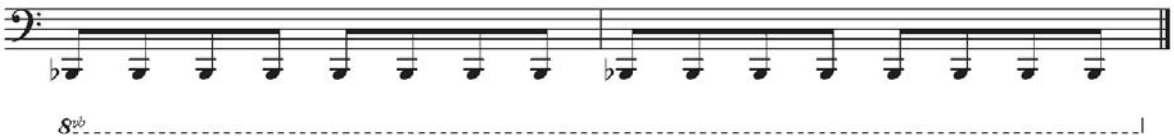
Example 4 Piano two-chord pattern becomes prominent in the foreground



Example 5 Piano – two-note left-hand motifs Piano low register scale passages

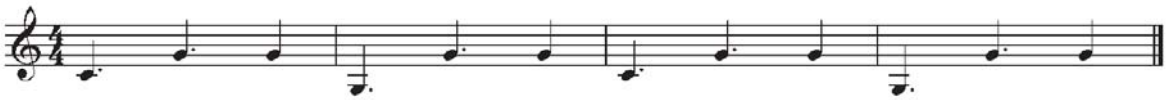


Example 6 Bass – violent, percussive, col legno repeated notes Notate articulation+P

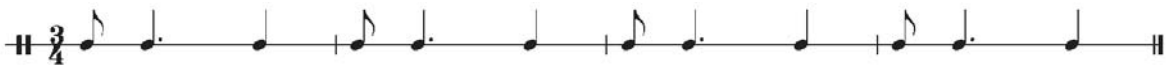


ALBUM 10 *DRIVE BY* 2003

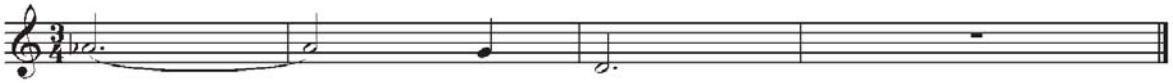
Example 1 Electronic bass sound playing a repeated tonic/dominant pattern



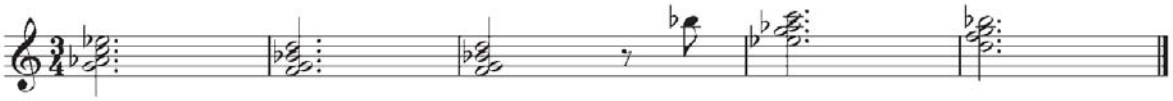
Example 2 Constant electronic beeping sound



Example 3 Piano

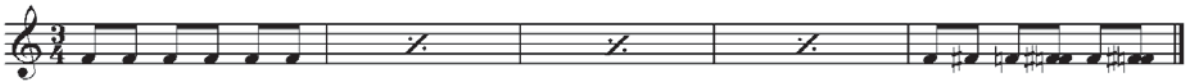


Example 4 Organ

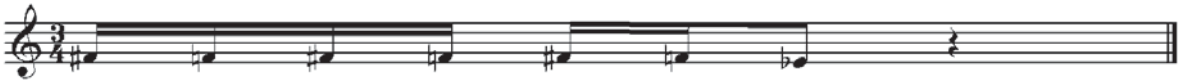


ALBUM 11 *PHOTOSYNTHETIC* 2003

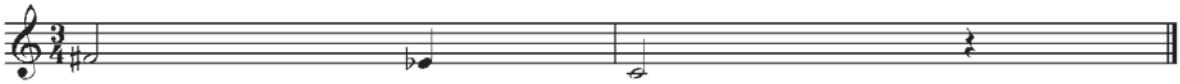
Example 1 Piano – repeated F then semitones



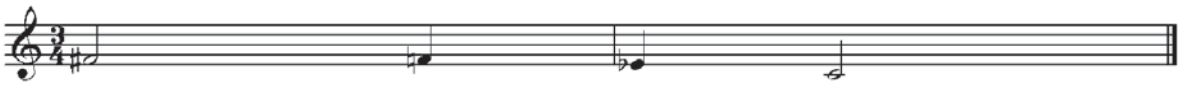
Example 2 Piano – semitone interval – juxtaposition between F and F#



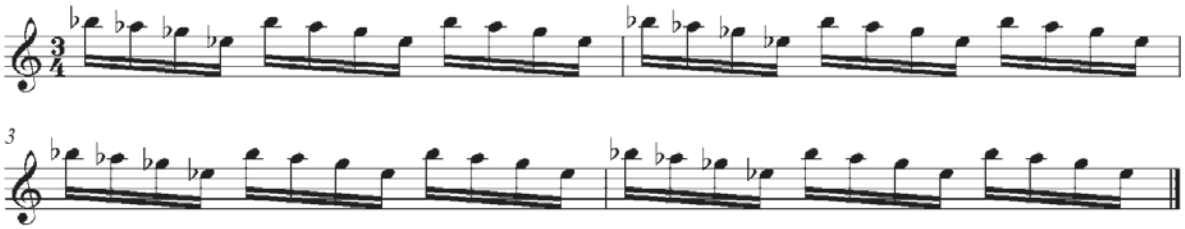
Example 3 Piano – descending three-note motif



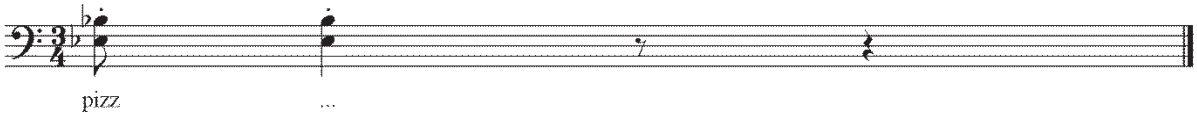
Example 4 Piano – descending four-note motif



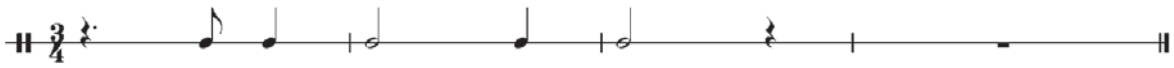
Example 5 Piano – increasingly complex descending repeated motifs



Example 6 Double bass continues to provide a double stopped, plucked foundation

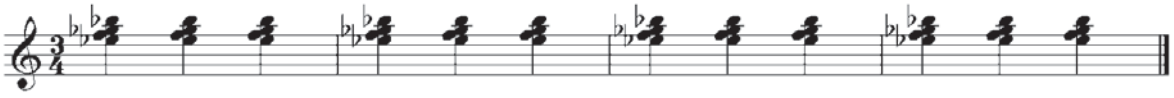


Example 7 African-inspired, thumping timpani rhythm

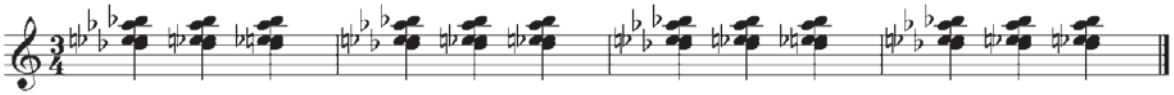


Example 8 Piano – percussive, accented cluster chords

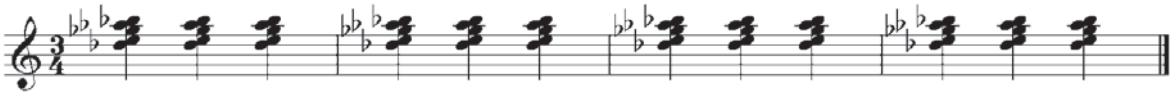
Example 9 Piano – percussive, accented cluster chords



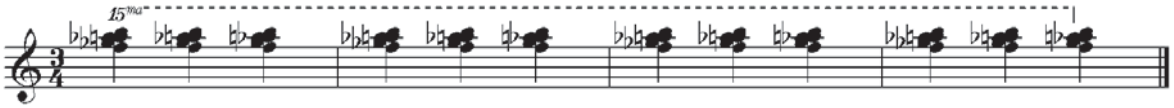
Example 10 Piano – percussive, accented cluster chords



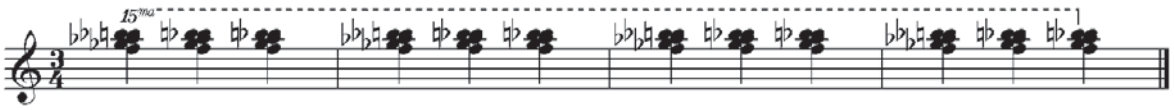
Example 11 Piano – percussive, accented cluster chords



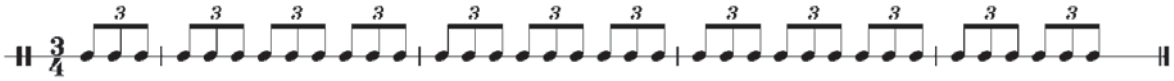
Example 12 Piano – percussive, accented cluster chords



Example 13 Piano – percussive clusters intensify in extreme high register



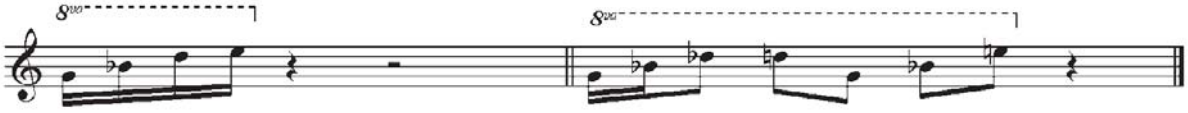
Example 14 – Drums – introduce the frequently used triplet rhythm



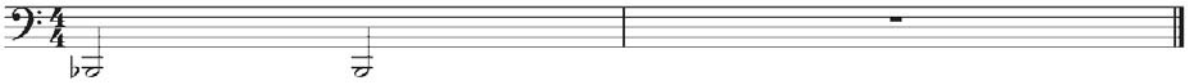
ALBUM 12 *MOSQUITO/SEE THROUGH* 2004

Track 1 'Mosquito'

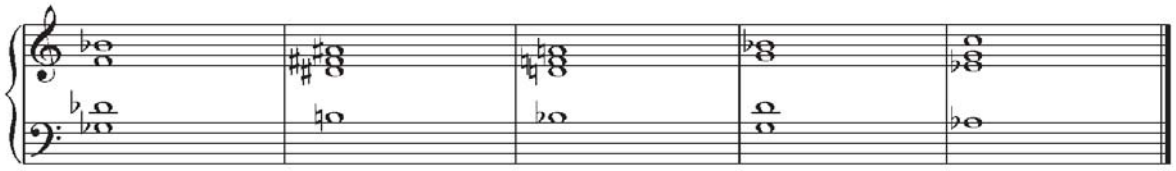
Example 1 Dissonant, minimalist ambient piano motif



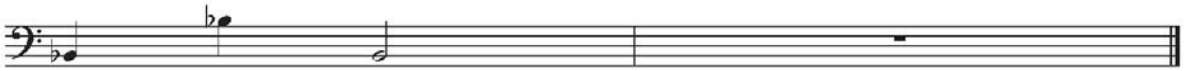
Example 2 Bass



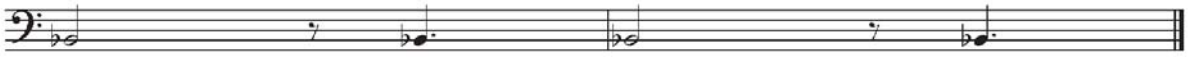
Example 3 Piano – conventional major 7th jazz harmonies



Example 4 Bass riff

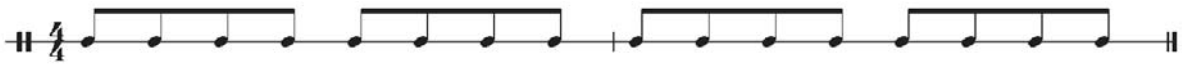


Example 5 Bass riff

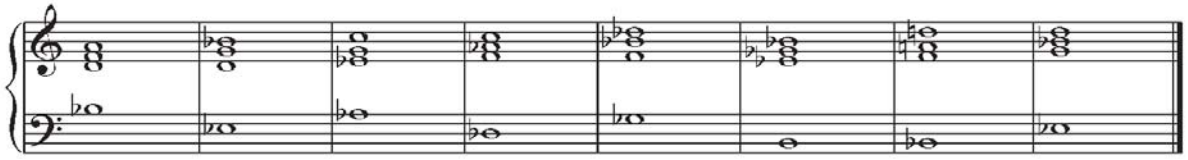


Example 6 Bass riff

Example 7 Drums – quaver rock beat

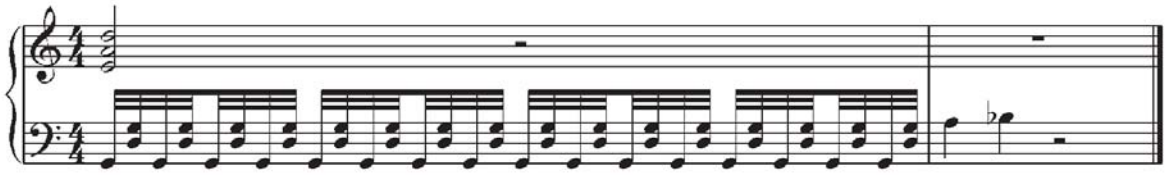


Example 8 Piano – conventional major 7th jazz harmonies

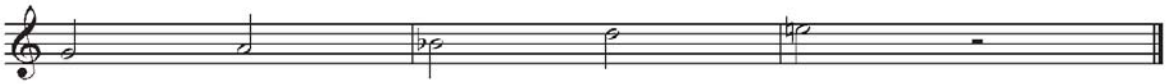


Track 2 ‘See Through’

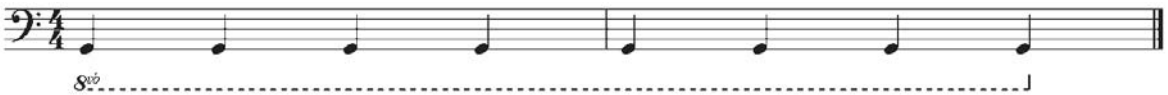
Example 1 Piano



Example 2 Use of G minor pentatonic



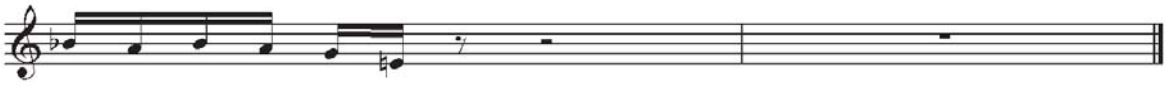
Example 3 Bass



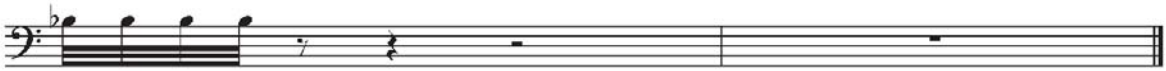
Example 4 Piano

Example 5 Piano

Example 6 Piano



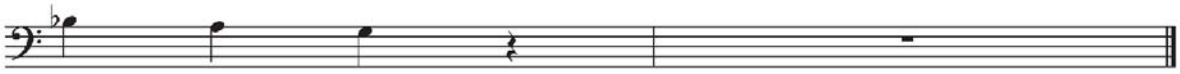
Example 7 Bass



Example 8 Bass

Example 9 Bass

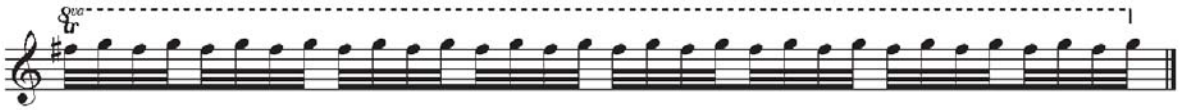
Example 10 Bass – ‘Three Blind Mice’ motif



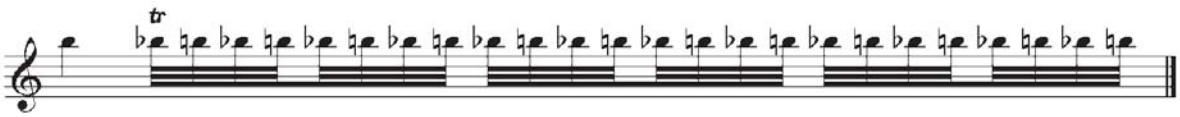
Example 11 Piano – inverted trills

Example 12 Piano – octave tremolos

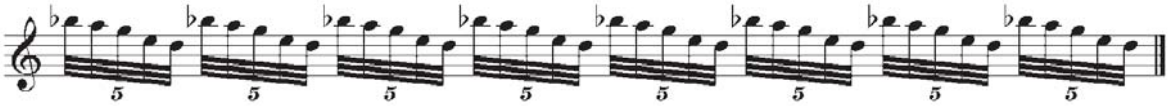
Example 13 Piano – trills in high register



Example 14 Piano – trills



Example 15 Piano – tremolos



Example 16 Piano

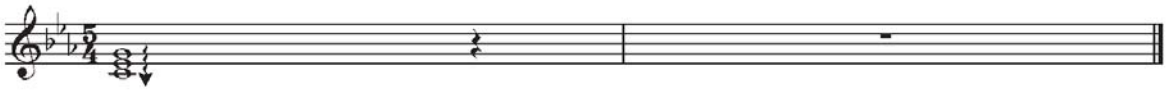
Example 17 Drums – fluttering brush patterns

ALBUM 13 *CHEMIST* 2006

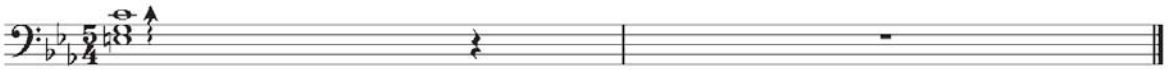
Track 1 'Fatal'

Example 1 Drums – opening very heavy, aggressive beat

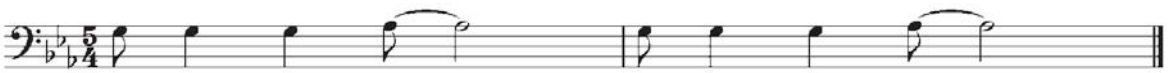
Example 2 Electric guitar – sustained vibrato chords in the middle ground



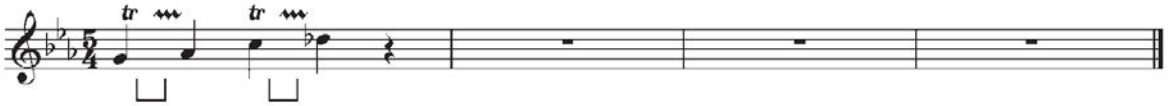
Example 3 Electric guitar – sustained vibrato chords in the middle ground



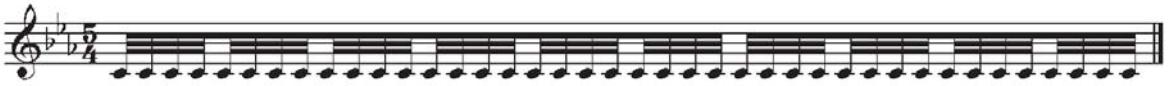
Example 4 Bass – two-note riff



Example 5 Piano – trills

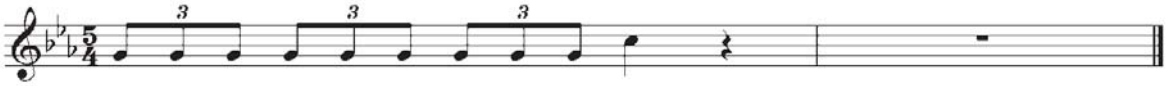


Example 6 Piano – percussive one-note tremolos



Example 7 Piano

Example 8 Piano X

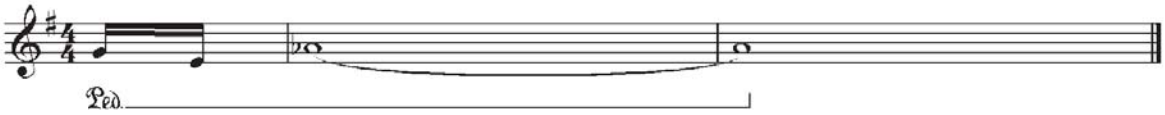


Track 2 ‘Buoyant’

Example 1 Electronic sounds

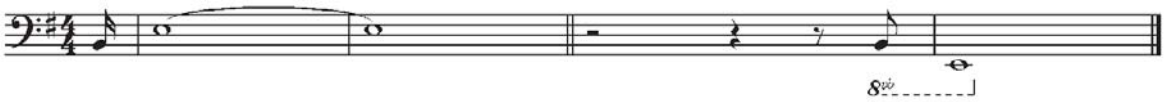
Example 2 Piano – minimalist pitch patterns

Example 3 Piano – minimalist pitch patterns

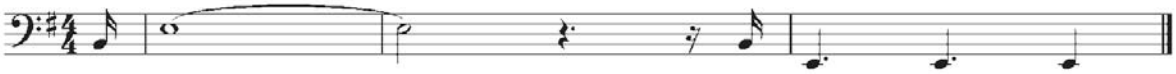


Example 4 Piano – minimalist pitch patterns

Example 5 Bass – two-note tonic/dominant pattern

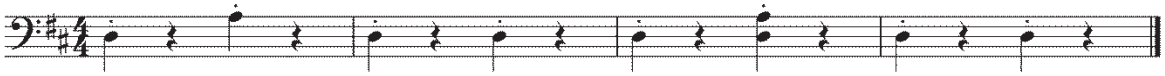


Example 6 Bass – two-note tonic/dominant pattern

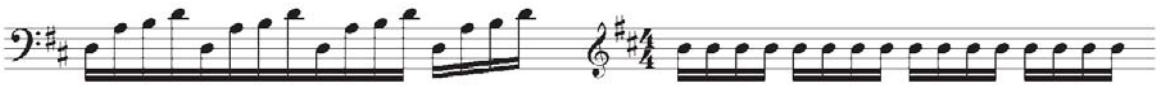


Track 3 ‘Abillera’

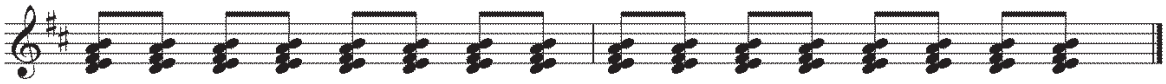
Example 1 Bass – plucked two-note tonic/dominant motif



Example 2 Organ – swirling bed of phased tremolo



Example 3 Piano – clustered tremolos

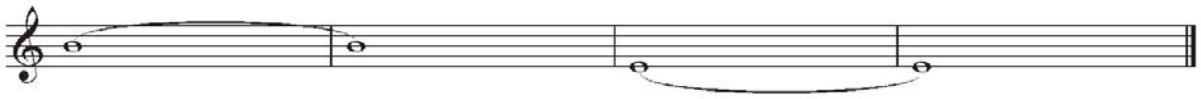


ALBUM 14 *TOWNSVILLE* 2007

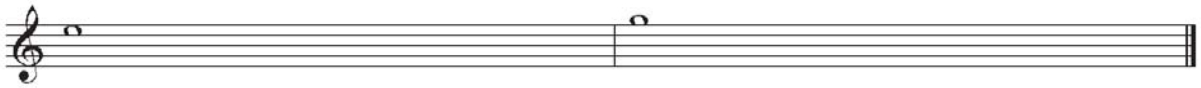
The transcriptions for *Townsville* are included in the text.

ALBUM 15 *SILVERWATER* 2009

Example 1 Electronic sounds

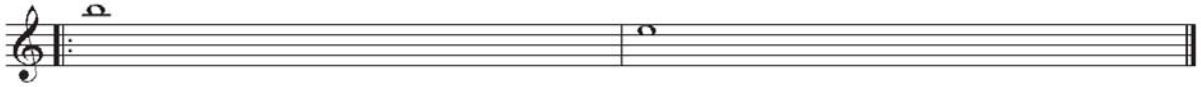


Example 2 Electronic sounds



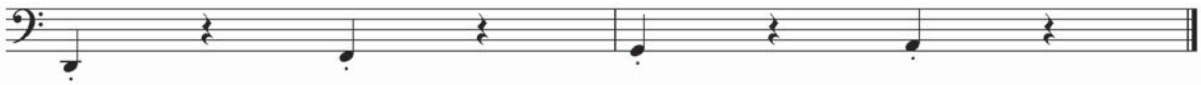
Example 3 Low pedal notes – bass

Example 4 Glassy, sustained high notes



Example 5 Piano – dampened-sounding set of high register repeated notes

Example 6 Bass – pizzicato



ALBUM 16 *MINDSET* 2011

APPENDIX C:

CHAPTER 8
THE MUSIC
COPIES OF THE SCORES
CD
PLACES

ALL PIECES COMPOSED, PERFORMED AND RECORDED BY

JANE GALBRAITH

RECORDED AT STUDIO JR

PRODUCER AND SOUND ENGINEER JOHN ROY

AL PACKER PRODUCTIONS

TRACK LISTING

Track 1: Memory Lane ... (Balmain, NSW)

Track 2: The Vineyard – Protect The Hunter – Do Not Take Grapevines Past Here – Phylloxera Exclusion Zone (Mulbring, NSW)

Track 3: The Pier (South Coast, NSW)

Track 4: George Street (Sydney CBD, NSW)

Track 5: River of Glass (Kempsey, NSW)

Track 6: Kangaroos in the Top Paddock (Bolwarra, NSW)

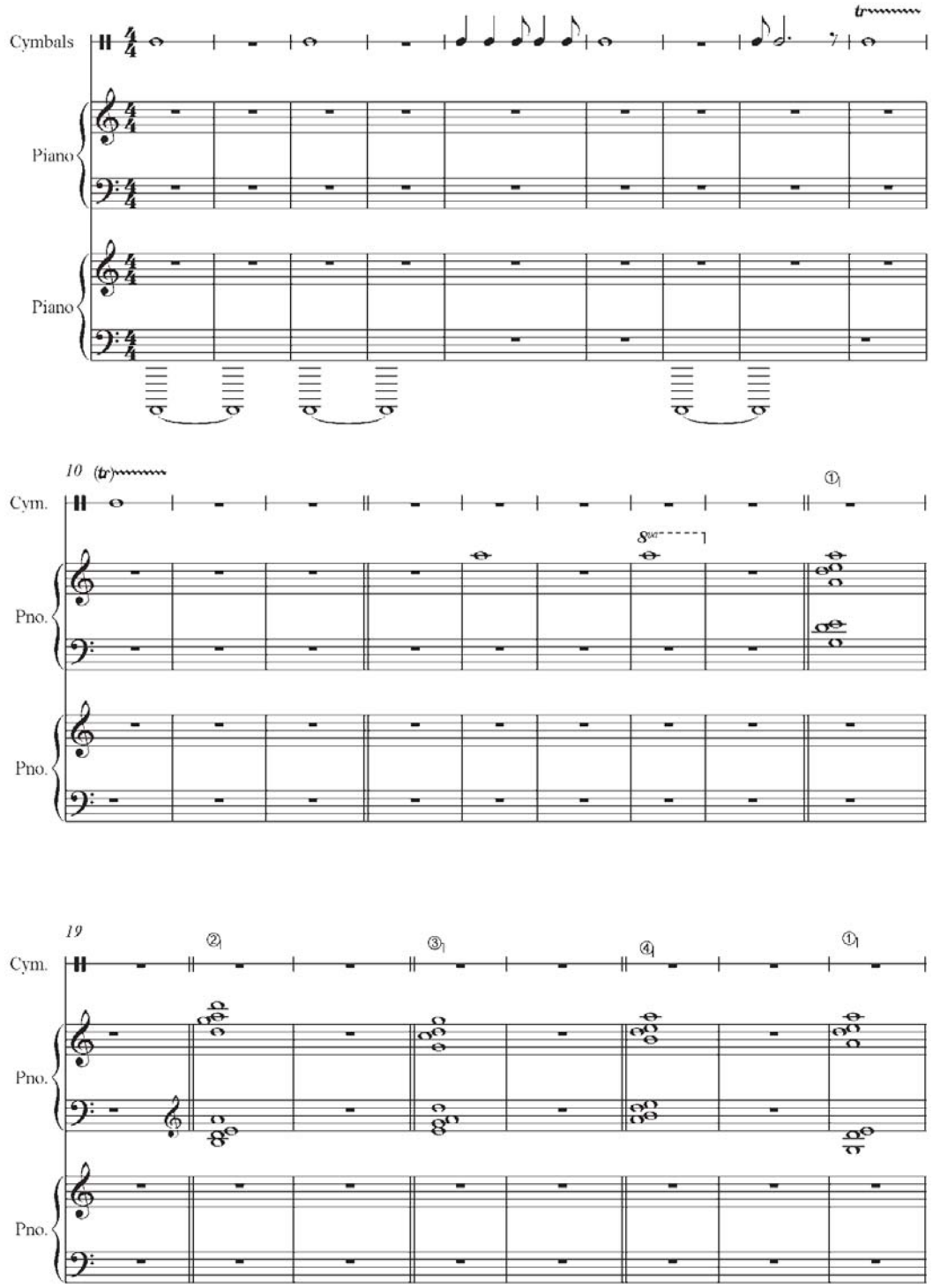
Track 7: Bird On The Chimney (Out The Bathroom Window) (Rozelle, Sydney, NSW)

Track 8: Captain's Flat (near Canberra, ACT)

Track 9: Culburra Beach Caravan Park in the Rain (Culburra Beach, South Coast, NSW)

Track 10: South Seas Drive (Ashtonfield, NSW)

Memory Lane



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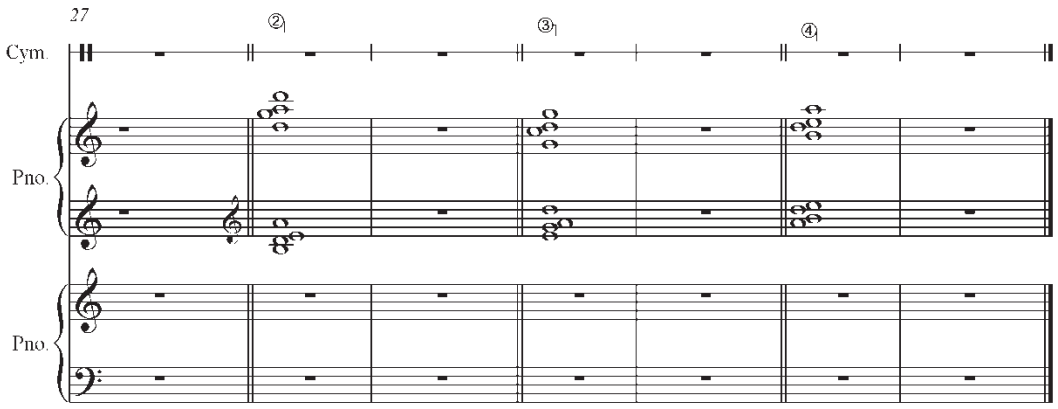
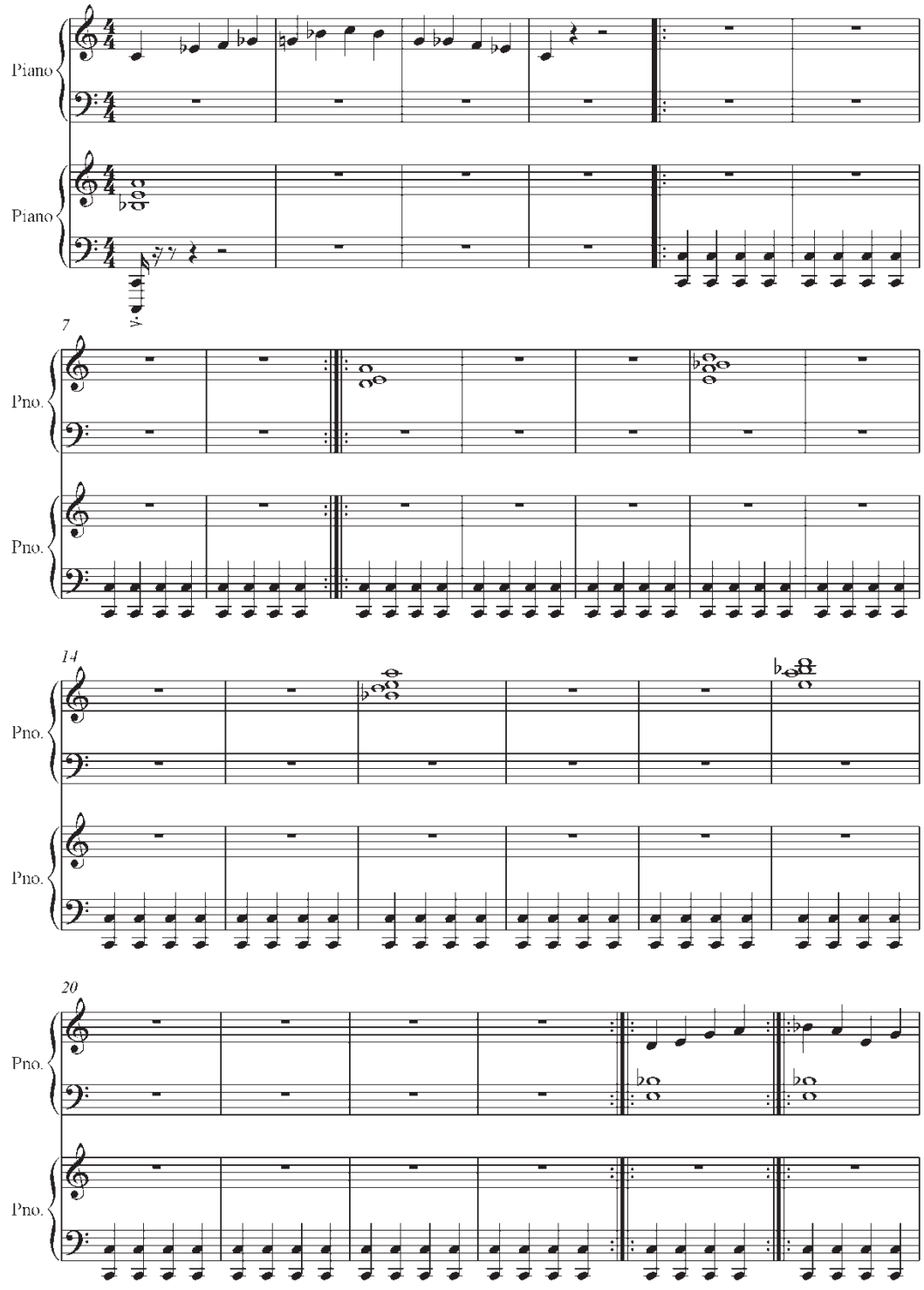
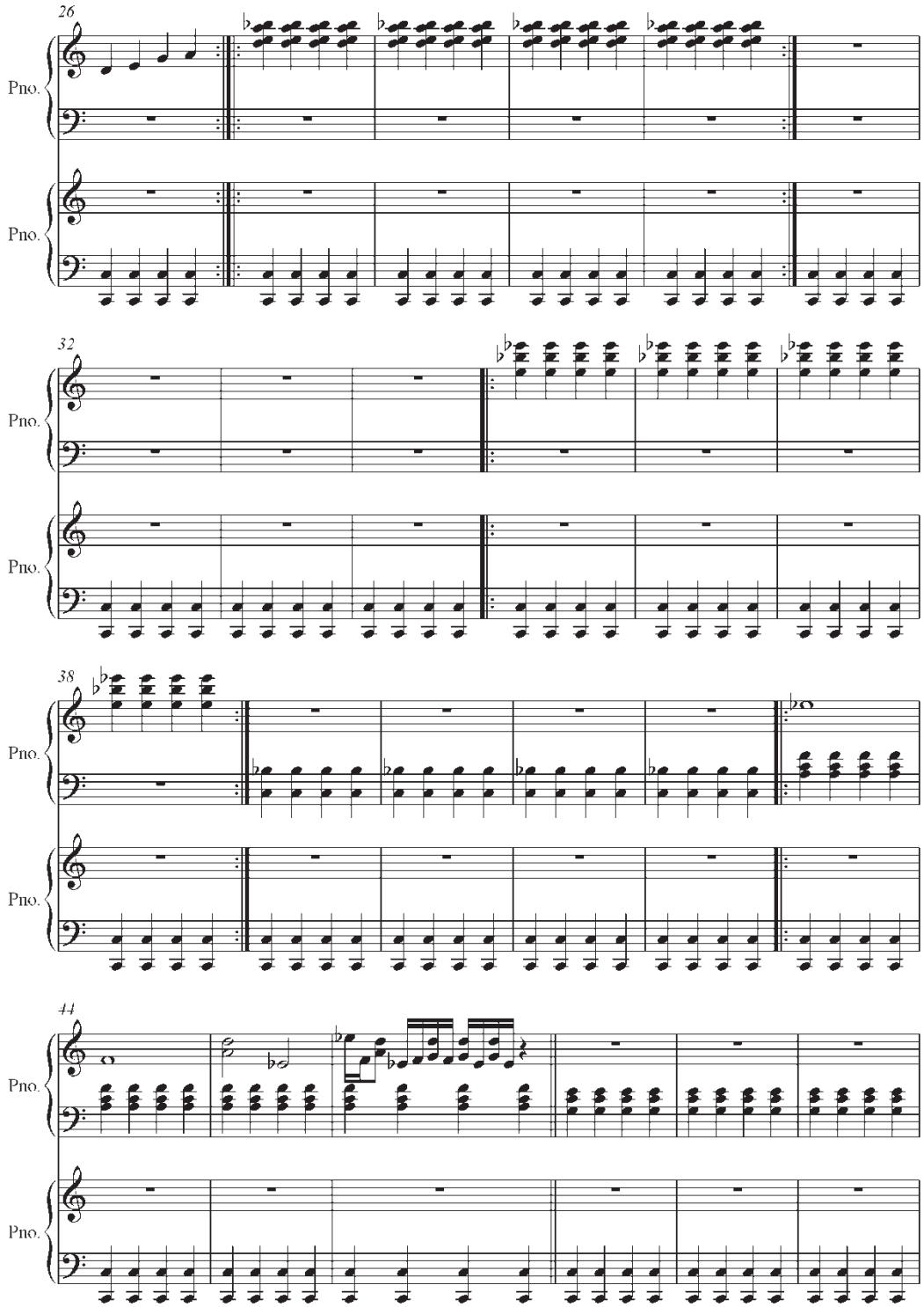


The Vineyard

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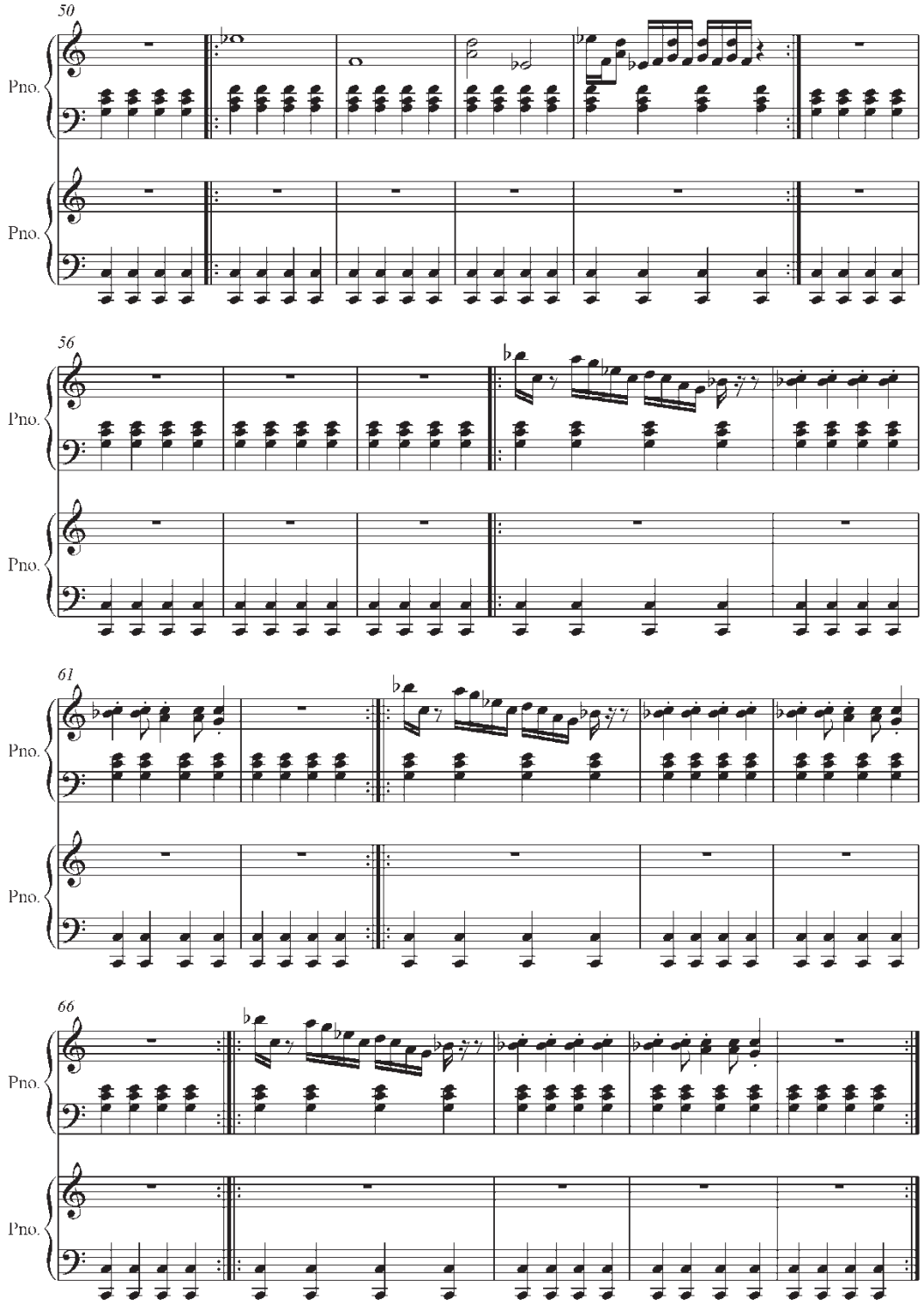
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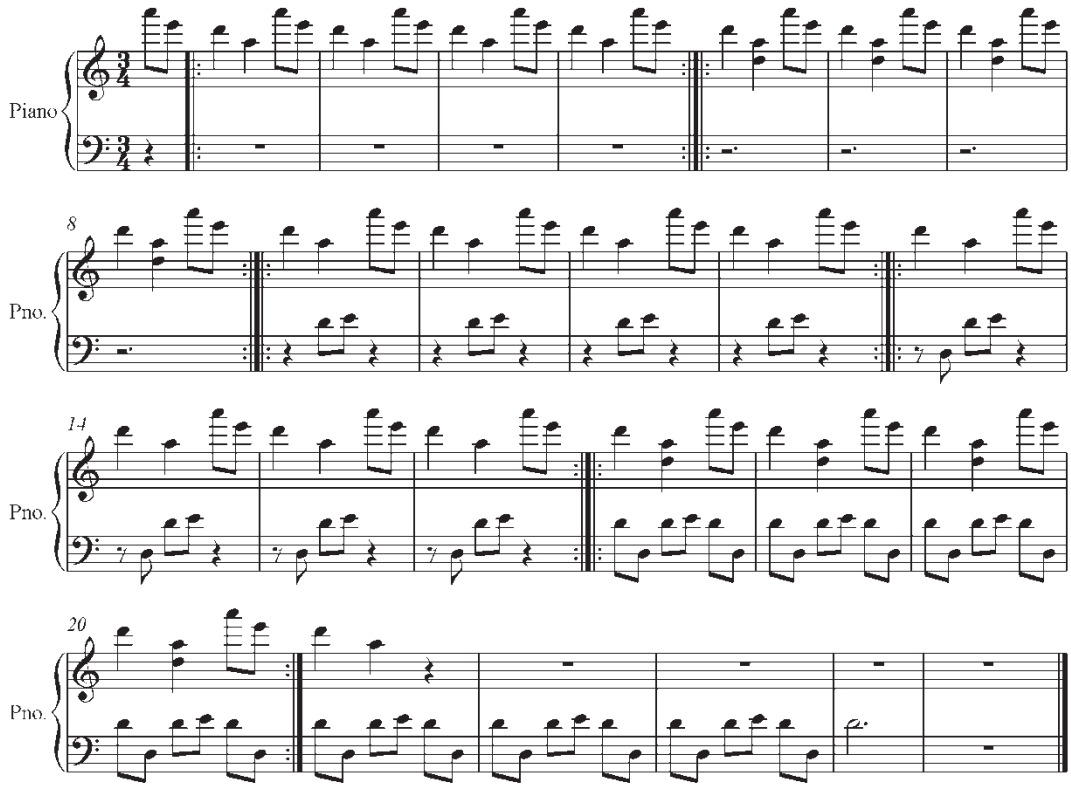
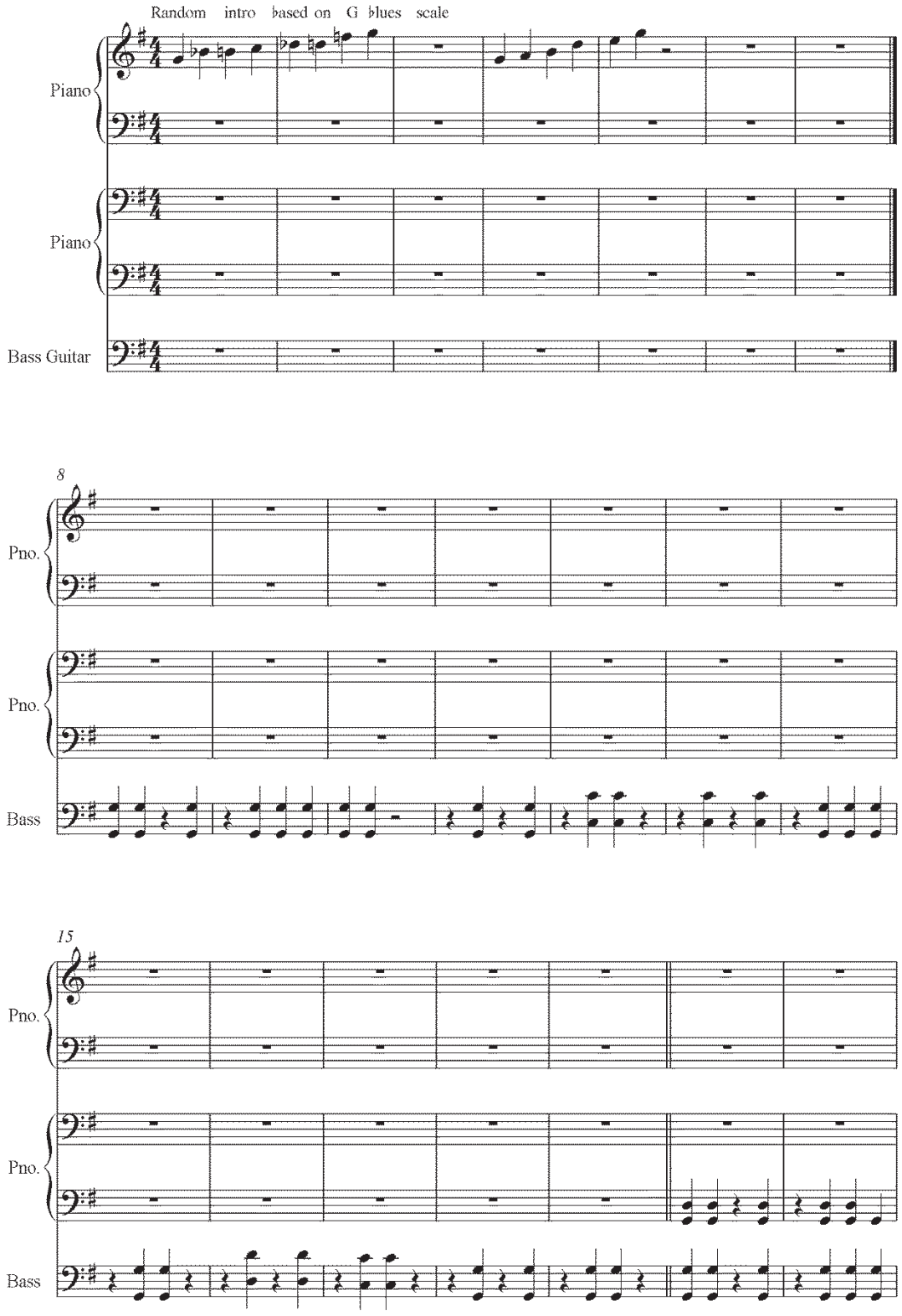
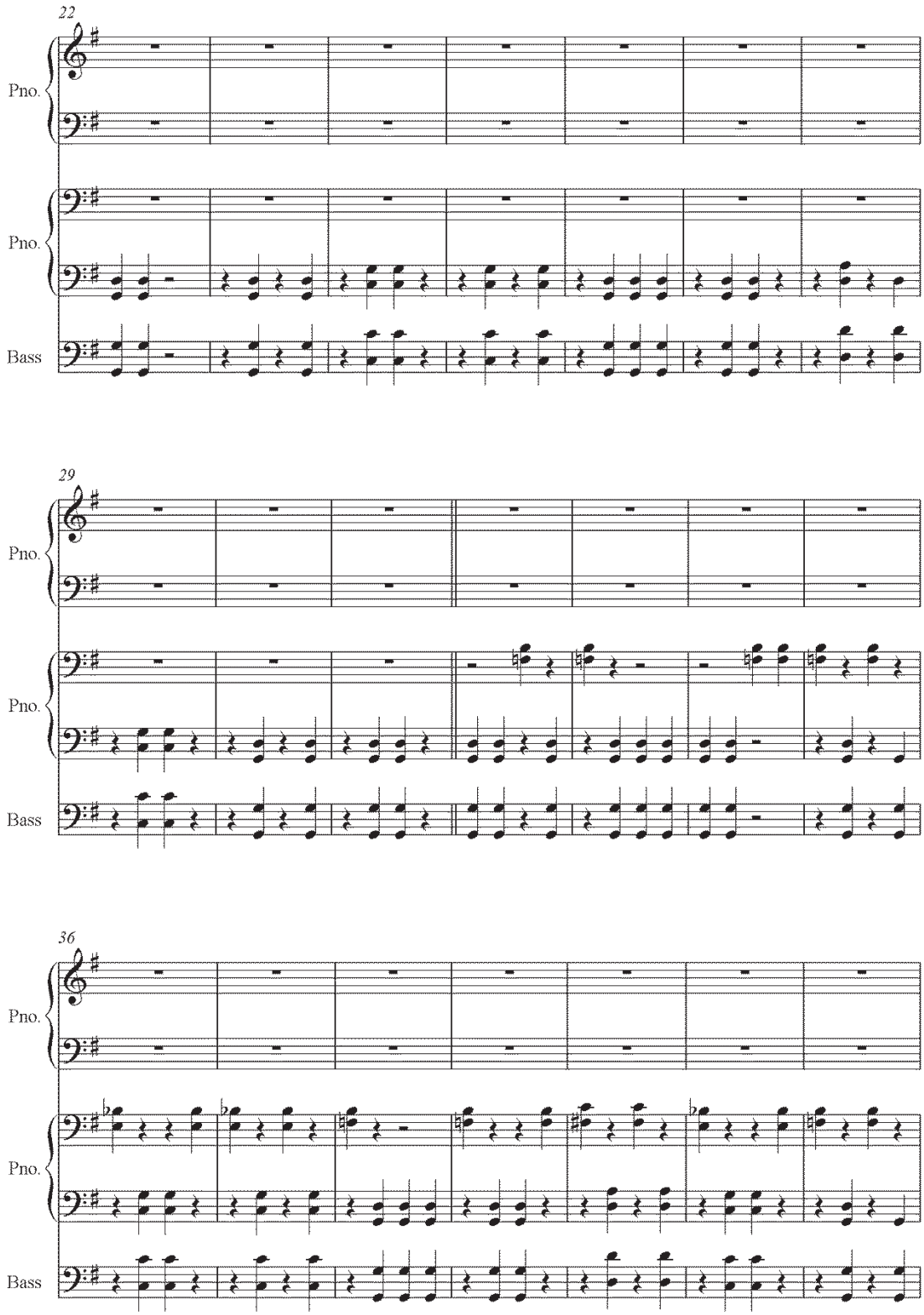
The Pier



George Street

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Bass
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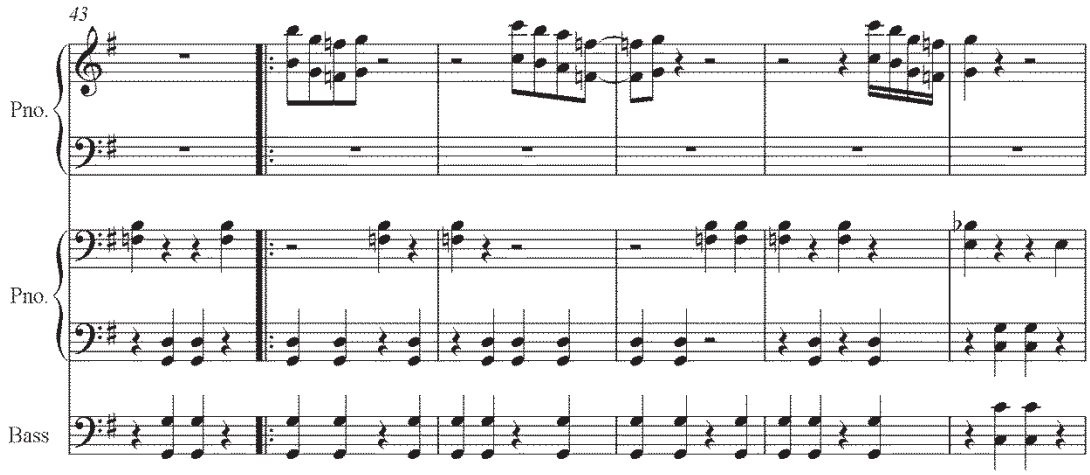
Bass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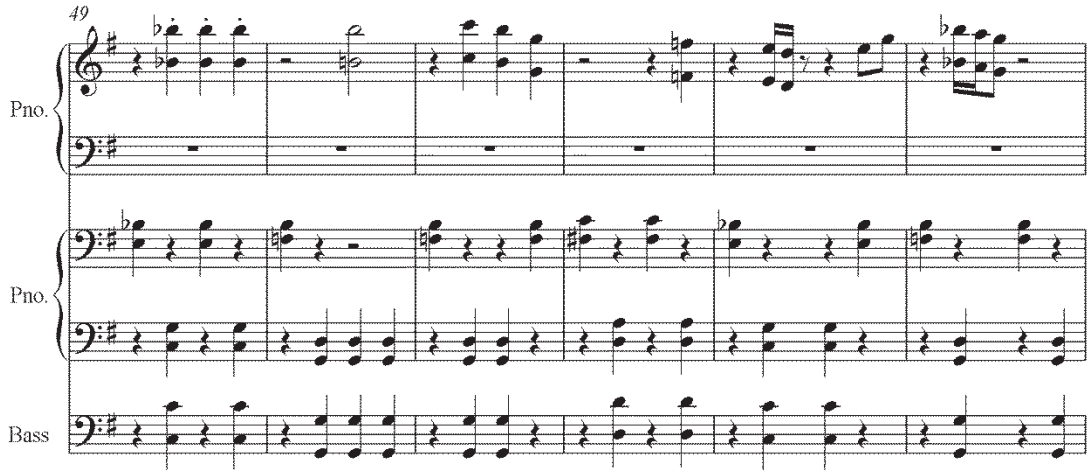
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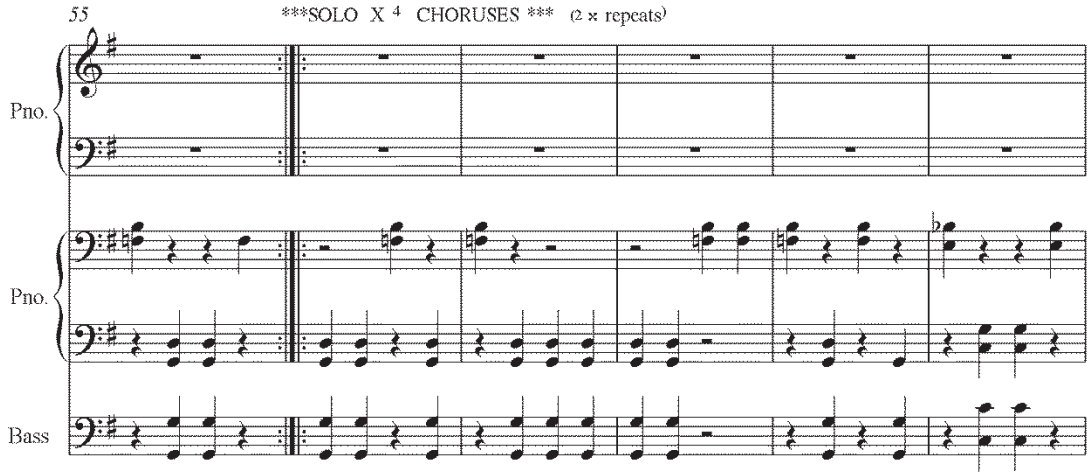
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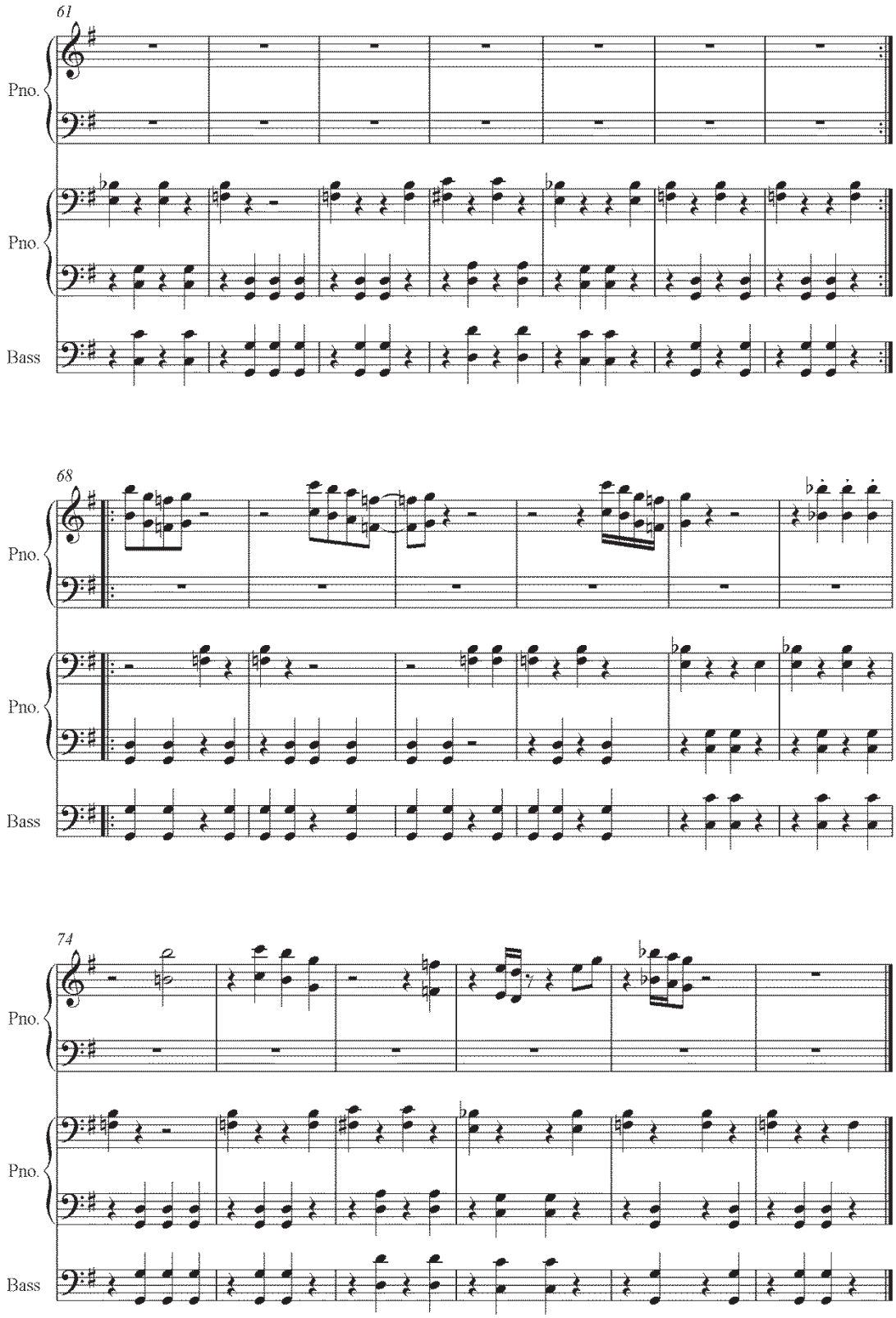
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Bass
74
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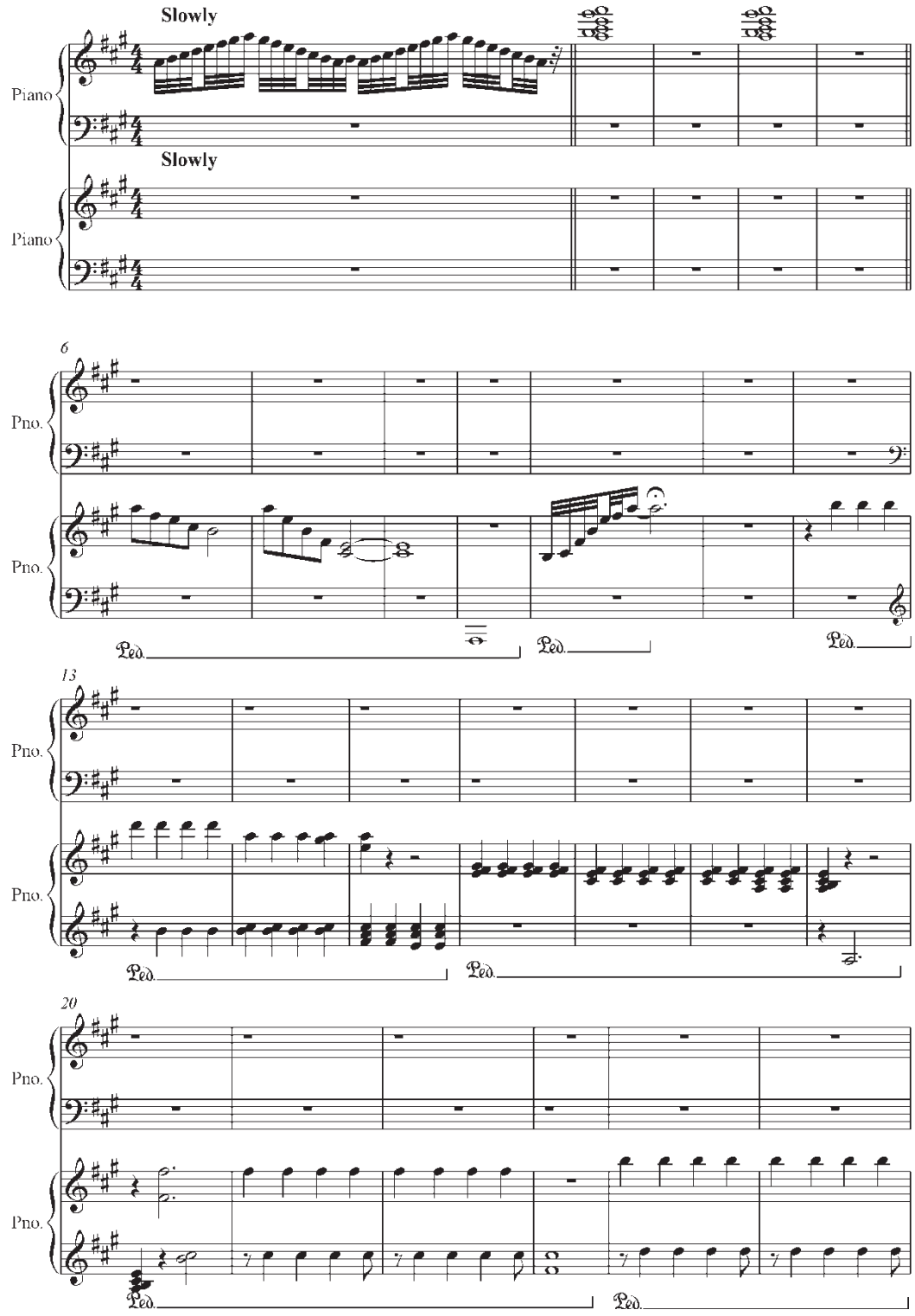
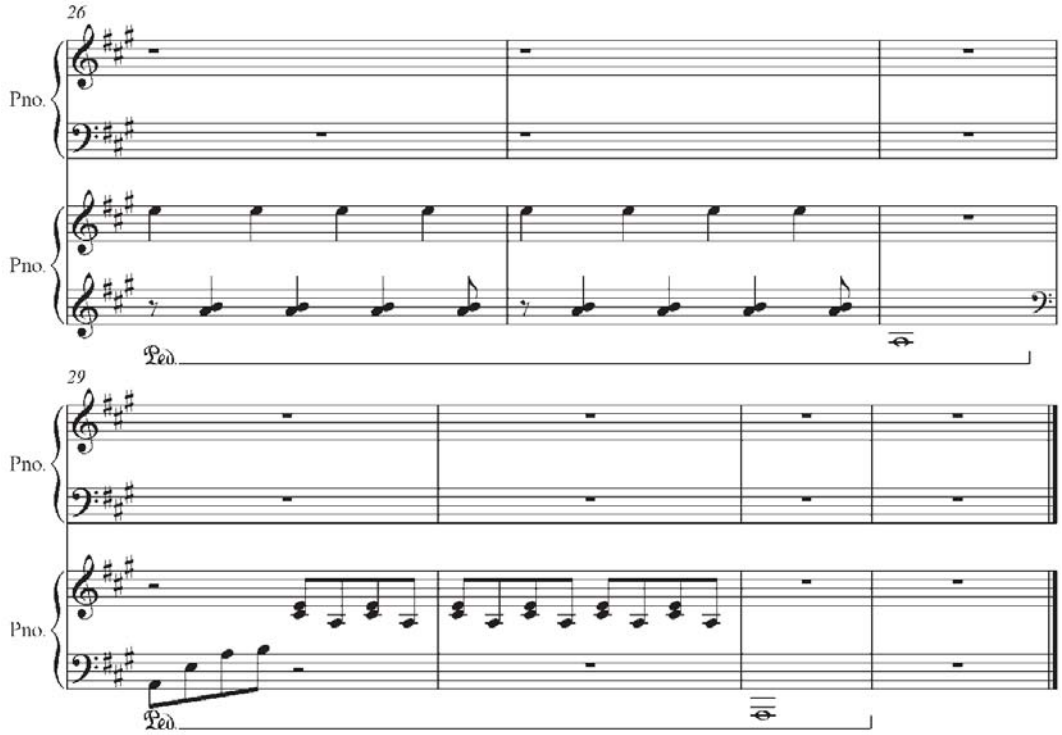
Bass

River of Glass

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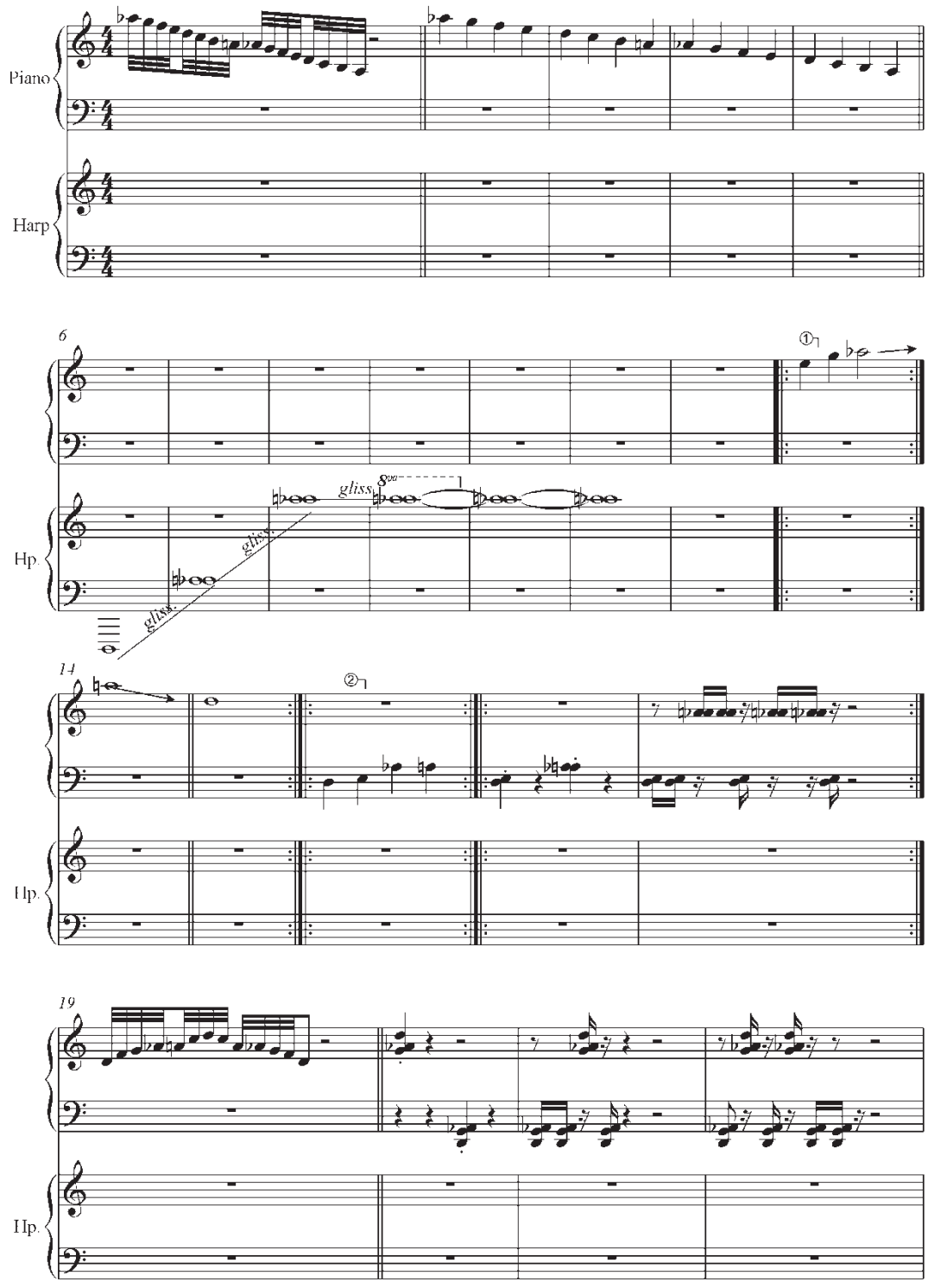
Kangaroos in the Top Paddock



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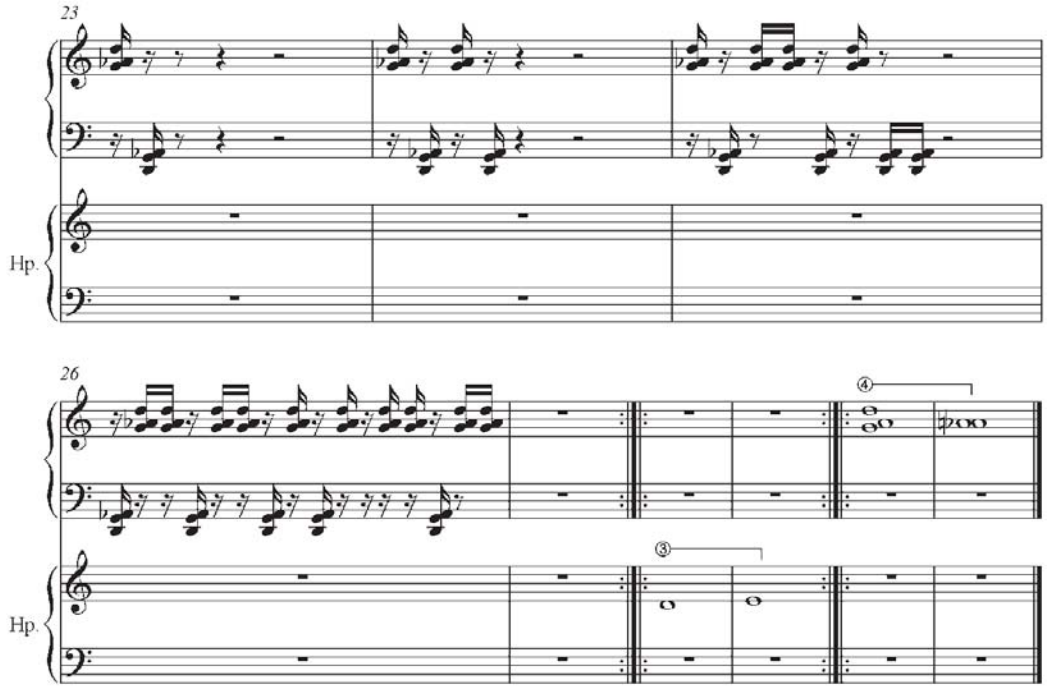
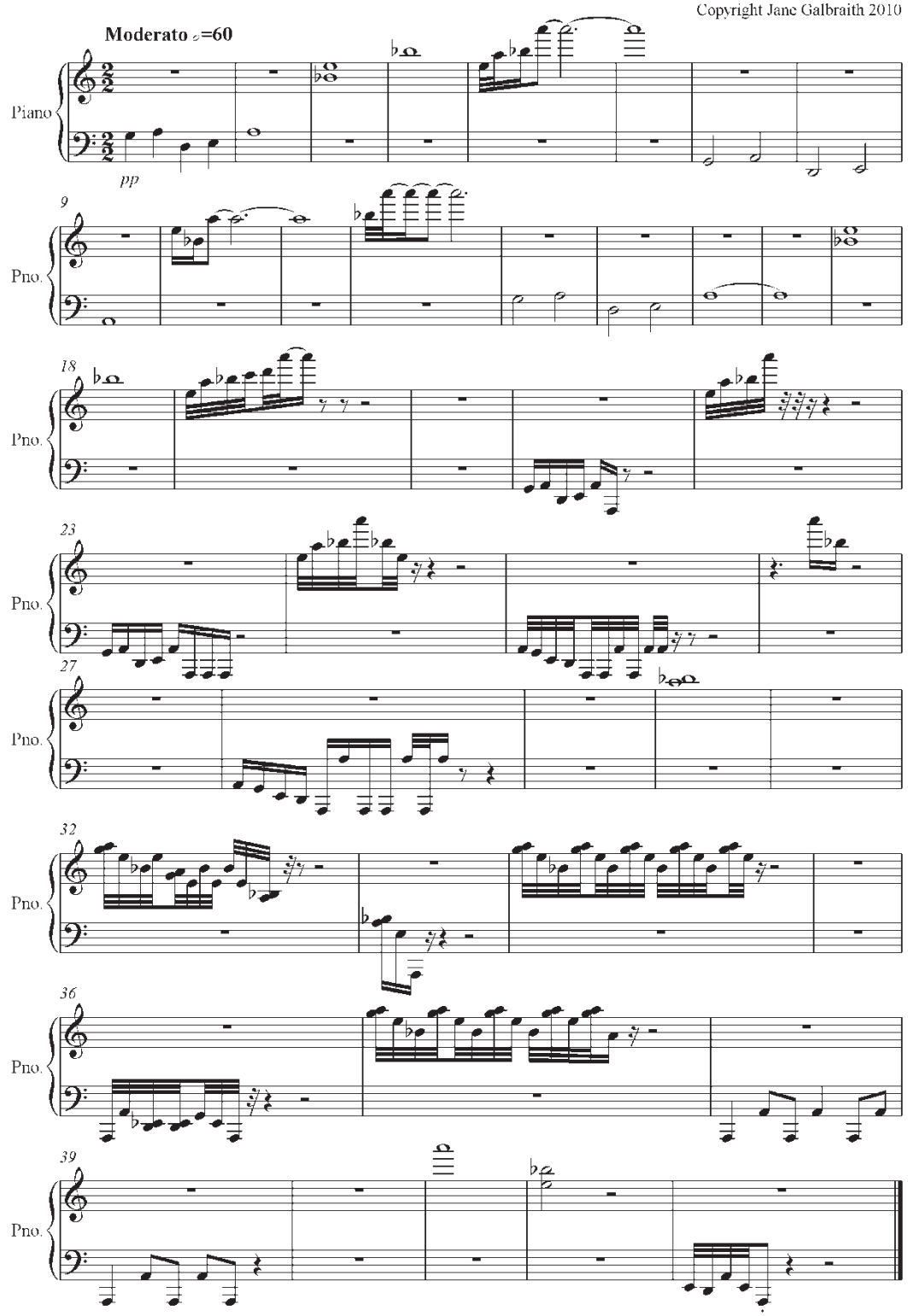
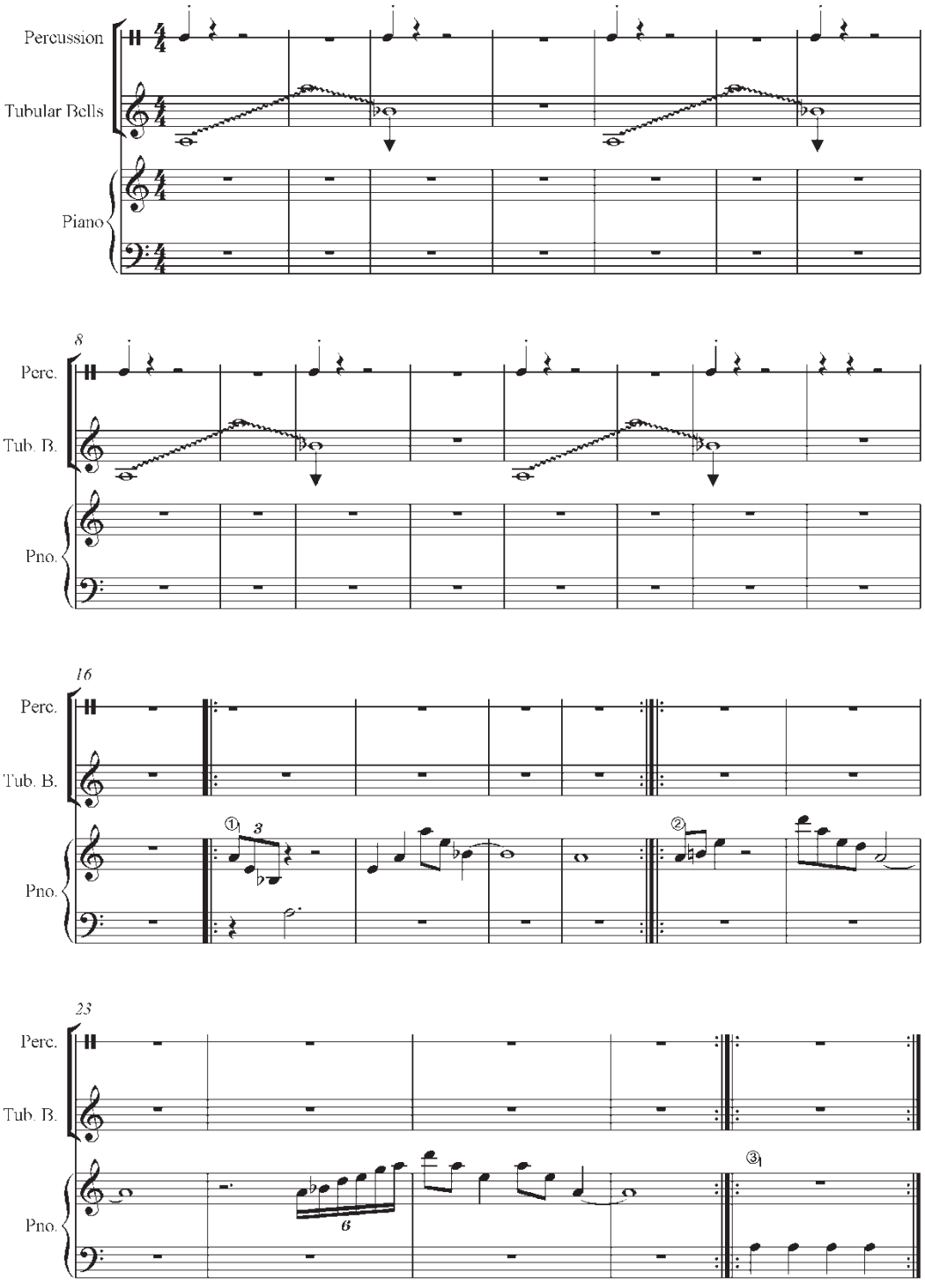


Bird on the Chimney



Captain's Flat



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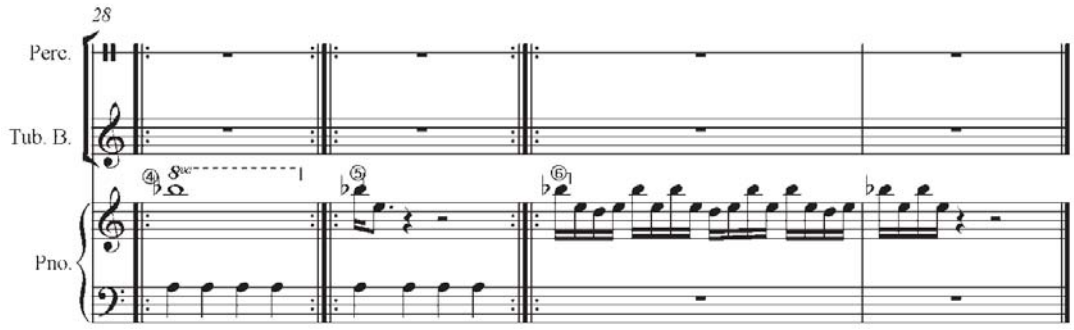
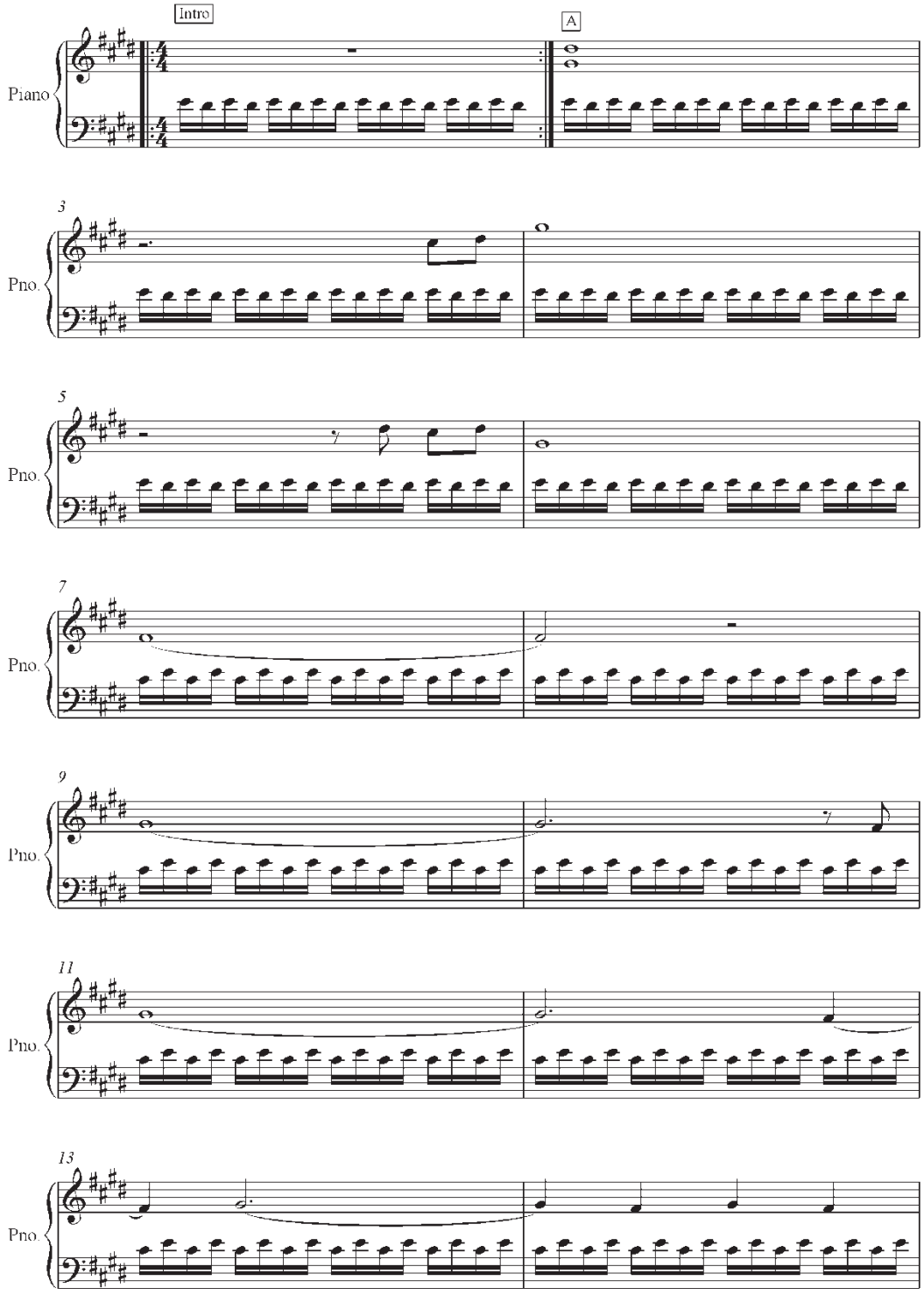
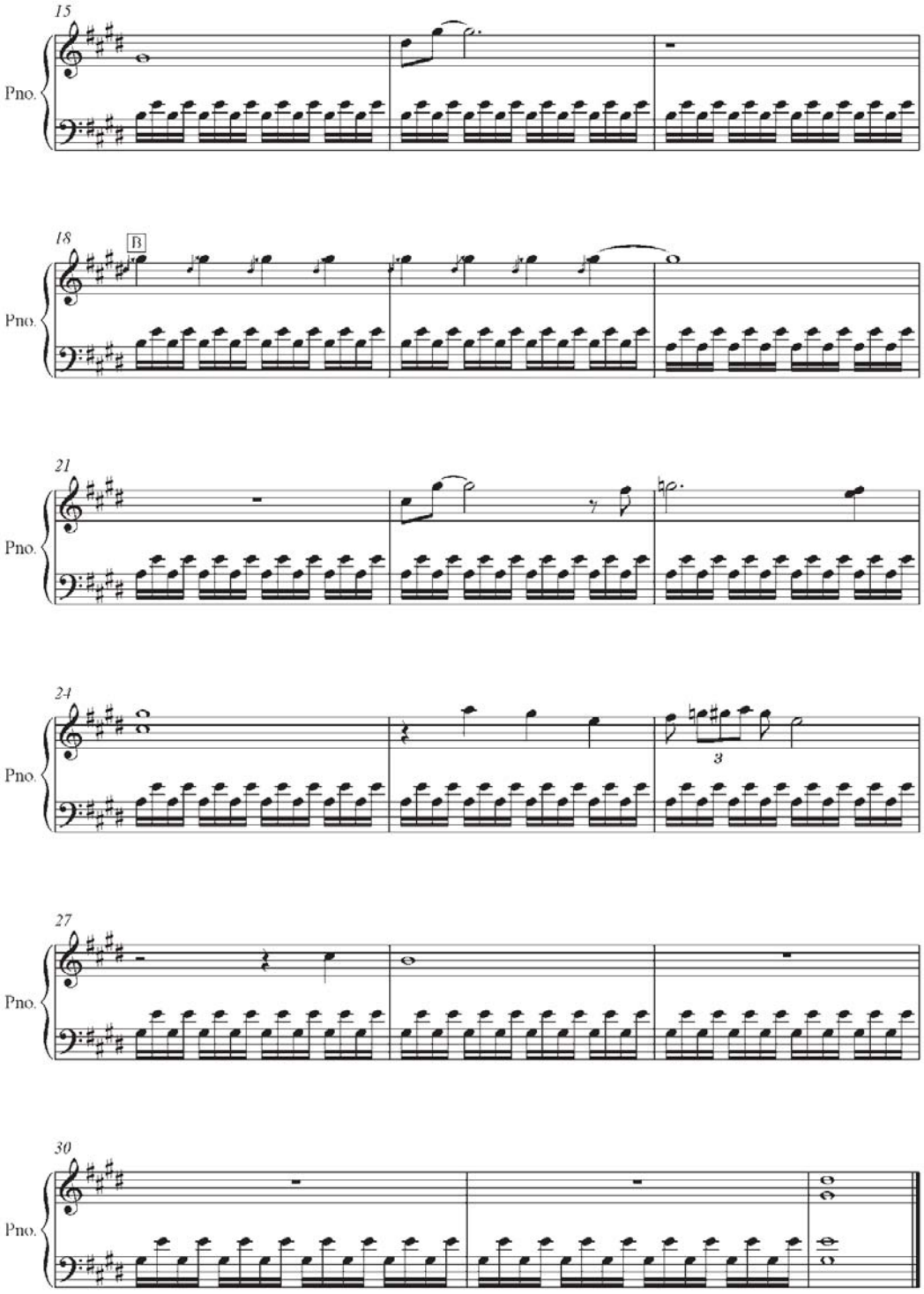


Culburra Beach

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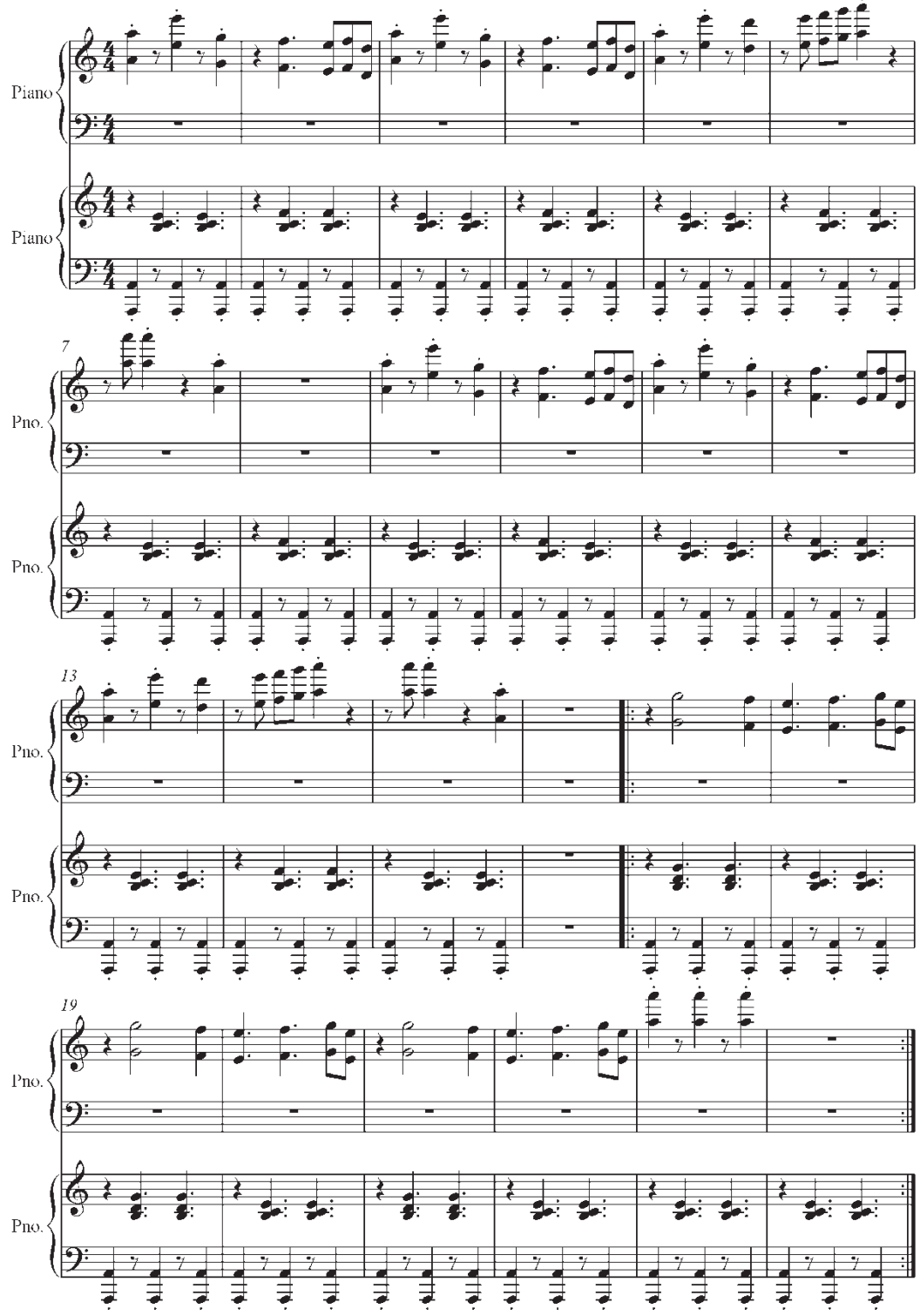
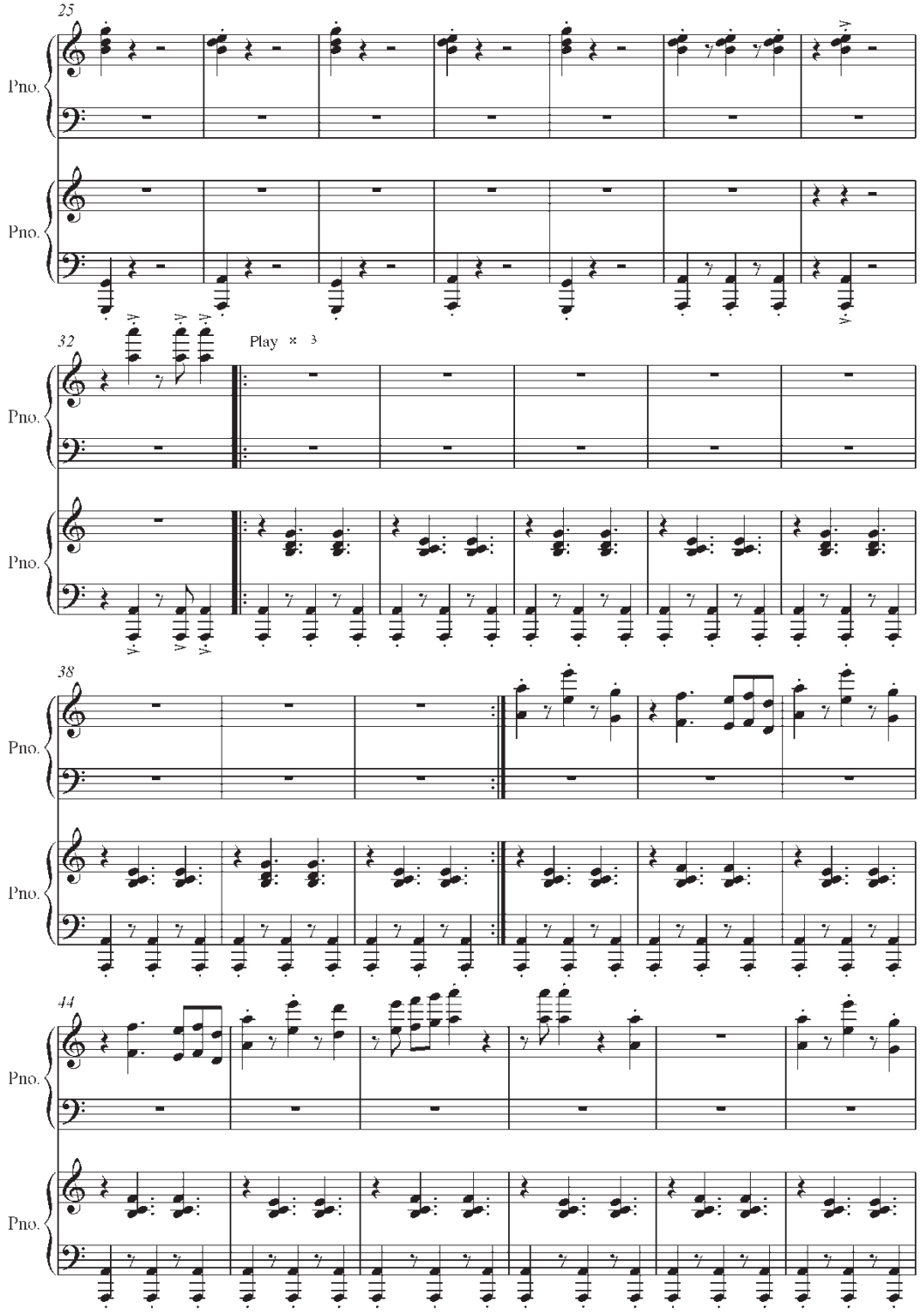
South Seas Drive

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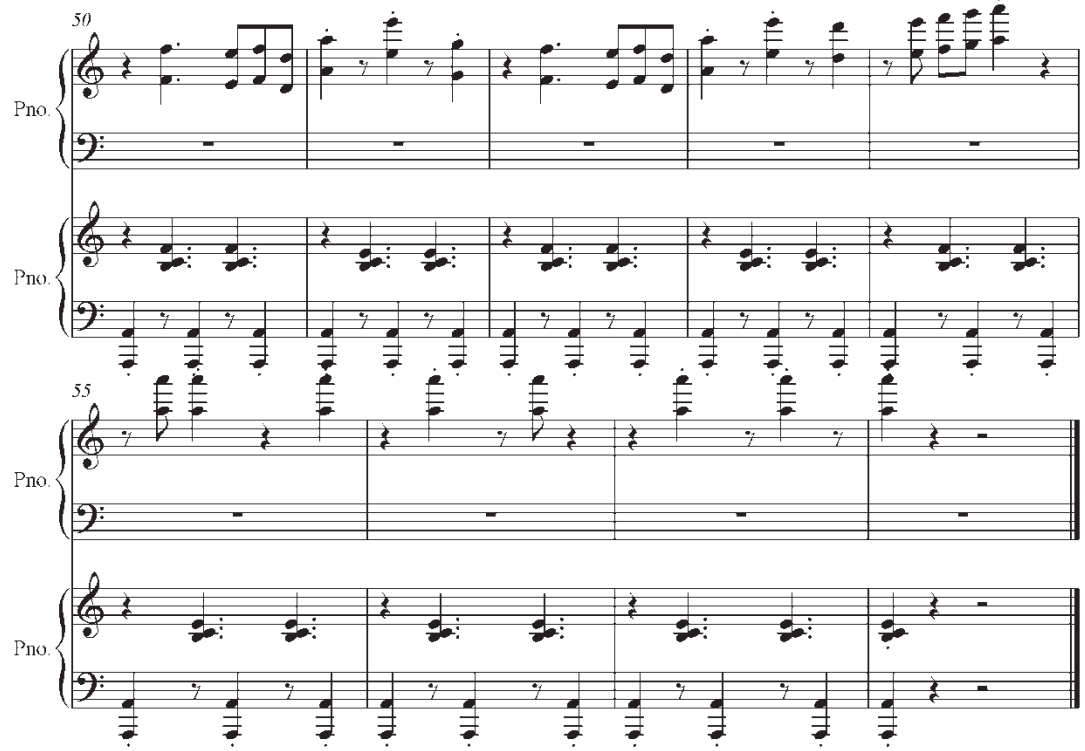
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APPENDIX D:

GLOSSARY

Term	Meaning
Ambient music (2)	A relatively ambiguous term, ambient music focuses on creating a mood or atmosphere through synthesisers and timbral qualities. Ambient music often takes influences from many other genres, ranging from house, dub, industrial and new age.
Hammered piano (5)	This is a sound choice available on synthesisers such as the DX7. It is characterised by a percussive, hammered sound which uses effects such as reverb.
MAX (3)	MAX is a graphical development environment for music and multimedia developed and maintained by San Francisco-based software company Cycling'74. It has been used for over fifteen years by composers, performers, software designers, and artists interested in creating interactive software. MAX was originally written by Miller Puckette at IRCAM in the 1980s to give composers access to an authoring system for interactive computer music.
Soundscape (4)	A soundscape is a sound or combination of sounds that forms or arises from an immersive environment. The study of soundscape is the subject of acoustic ecology. The idea of soundscape refers to both the natural acoustic environment, consisting of natural sounds, e.g. the sounds of weather and other natural elements; and environmental sounds created by humans, through musical composition, sound design, and other ordinary human activities including conversation, work, and sounds of mechanical origin resulting from use of industrial technology. The term ‘soundscape’ can also refer to an audio recording or performance of sounds that create the sensation of experiencing a particular acoustic environment, or compositions created using the found sounds of an acoustic environment, either exclusively or in conjunction with musical performances. The term soundscape was coined by Canadian composer and environmentalist, R. Murray Schafer.
World music (1)	World music is a term with widely varying definitions, often encompassing music which is primarily identified as another genre. This is evidenced by world music definitions such as ‘all of the music in the world’, ‘somebody else's local music’ or ‘non-western music’. In the classic definition, world music is the traditional music or folk music of a culture that is created and played by indigenous musicians and is closely related to the music of the regions of their origin. The term was originally intended for ethnic-specific music, though globalisation is expanding its scope; it now often includes hybrid sub-genres such as world fusion, global fusion, ethnic fusion and world beat. These terms may

	also be considered sub-genres of pop music, illustrating that the term world music refers to music that is also classified under other genres.