

Notation, improvisation, writing: the early music of Roger Redgate

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Abstract

This paper examines Roger Redgate's music of the 1980s and early 1990s and its starting point relates to the composer's approach to musical notation. Due to the complex notation of his music, Redgate has been categorised in the 'New Complexity' school, a term that no associated composer feels comfortable with, since notational complexity does not imply a certain kind of music. Redgate's approach is preoccupied with the (im)possibilities of notation, whose level of detail does not aim at precision (like John Cage, he is not interested in transcribing music already heard in the mind); rather, notation is part of a broader approach to compositional systematisation and improvisational techniques. Redgate's compositional procedures, as he comments, include systems derived from notated fragments and serve to provoke a certain reaction on the composer's part. In the same way that an improviser creates a form of (tablature) notation by developing their array of performance techniques, the composer uses notation by way of creating structures that engender processes.

Redgate's titles are frequently direct references to writing (*Graffiti*, *Scribble*) or point indirectly to the thought of philosopher Jacques Derrida (*trace*, *+R*, *Pas au-delà* – a deconstructive reading of the earlier *Genoi Hoios Essi*). For Derrida the question of writing (which is no longer subordinate in the binary opposition with speech) precedes, or merges with, the question of technique. The latter is thus situated between life (logos, presence) and death (writing, absence) due to the deconstructive processes and supplementarity within the binary opposition. In a similar way that the technology of the instrument is a form of writing for the improviser, notation (as the composer's instrument) informs compositional technique. By connecting the notions of notation, improvisation and writing, this paper aims at an understanding of Redgate's music through analysis of his scores and a series of interviews with the composer.

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Dimitris Exarchos is a musicologist and music theorist. He holds diplomas in Piano and Advanced Theory Studies, a Master's in Music Theory and Analysis, and in 2007 he submitted successfully his PhD dissertation, on Iannis Xenakis's Sieve Theory, at Goldsmiths, University of London. Currently he teaches Music Theory and Analysis and Music History at Goldsmiths and at the University of Surrey. His research interests include the relation between Music, Mathematics, and Architecture, post-structuralist approaches to Aesthetics, and Analysis of 20th-century music.