The female free-improvising oboist: an investigation into the ways instrument, gender and community affect agency in free improvisation.

By

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Abstract

The aim of my autotheoretical and practice-led research has been to deepen understanding of the ways instrument, gender, and community affect the free improvising I and others undertake and the agency we have in doing so. My praxis is located in the free improvising communities of which I am a part in London and Canterbury. In this thesis I discuss the *masculine* social and sonic constructs I have uncovered, and the ways in which these function as tacit challenges to agency for women instrumentalists. Self-developed instrumental technique in free improvisation is compared with the imposed classical training I and many women free improvisers received. The sediment of this technical practice on instruments designed by and built for men is seen to act as one of several unintentional barriers to agency in free improvisation for us to negotiate. The development of my unique new instrument, the gliss anglais to overcome this obstacle, is discussed. I argue that the feministing practice I and others undertake is a push against the individualistic quest for ever more virtuosic self-expression which typifies much of the *masculine* free Improvisation canon to date. I demonstrate that a feministing 'making with' in which agency is shared, and precarity and imprecision are welcomed into improvisations, acts in part as an *unmasculining* of the canon by those of us practicing it.

I write from a feminist perspective. The introductory material situates my practice and defines key concepts. The methodology positions my feminist and autotheoretical stance within relevant literature. Chapters one and two function in part as a contextual review. Chapter one explores my practice as a classically trained oboist, and the challenges I negotiate as a free improviser in a *masculine* environment. Chapter two uncovers the androcentric roots of free improvisation in my communities, the obstacles this has created for female instrumentalists, and the ways in which I and other practitioners are overcoming these.

Chapter three contextualises recordings of my improvising voice and explains my development of and praxis with the gliss anglais. Chapter four explores recordings of my collaborations with others together with my use of invitation scores. The final part of this portfolio is a recording of an autotheoretical performance I co-curated and performed in titled *Social Virtuosity*. I conclude with a summary of my findings and discussion of their implications for further research.

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List of Audio Components

There are 11 recorded components of my research listed in appendices III and IV and discussed in chapters three and four. They are available here. https://figshare.com/s/6ec85fca2e7791ee7e25 DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.27051832. See also appendix I for a list of other formations I have improvised with and significant performances I have undertaken. Each improvisation presented here is autotheoretical (Baxter and Auburn 2023, 5) in that the improvising and collaboration is, like this thesis, my theorising. All these recordings, in their own way, explain my practice and research.

Chapter Three

An improvisation. Trio CZW. Performed and recorded at The Vortex, London. Sunday November 26th 2023.

Do you Hear me Breathing? Solo oboe improvisation performed and recorded at Cove Park, Friday February 16th 2024.

entanglement part 5-histories. *Improvisation.* extended version. Performed and recorded in Lossenham, UK. May 2022.

*Improvisation. '*Carceral Scrivings' performed and recorded in The Red Prison, Sulaymaniah, Iraq, Tuesday September 27th 2022.

Conduction extract by Adrian Northover and London Improviser's Orchestra. Performed and recorded in St. Mary's Church Stoke Newington on Sunday 4th June 2023.

Chapter Four

Birdsong improvisation. With patternbook at Free Women present *Lady Garden.* Performed and recorded at Free Range, Canterbury. Thursday November 16th 2023.

Trio improvisation. Stevie Wishart, Els van Riel, and Maureen Wolloshin. Performed and recorded at Cosy Nook, Thornton Heath. Saturday June 10th 2023.

The Lost Place by Khabat Abas. KIM Duo. Performed and recorded at Free Range, Canterbury. Thursday October 13th 2022.

A by Maureen Wolloshin. Performed and recorded at Iklektik by patternbook and Maggie Nicols. Wednesday March 29th 2023. (This performance is the opening piece in part three of this research).

O(d)e to Jonas by Maureen Wolloshin. Trio CZW. Performed and recorded at The Vortex, London. Sunday November 26th 2023.

***here.here/Social Virtuosity* with Maggie Nicols and Maureen Wolloshin**

A concert recorded and performed at at Iklektik, Old Paradise Yard, London. Wednesday March 29th 2023.

See appendix IV, 19-20 for a breakdown of the concert programme and brief commentary on this performance. This recording is a key component of my research and a description of my practice.

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Introductory Materials

'..88% of 2526 women surveyed by The Musician's Union in 2024 said their career had been restricted in some way by their gender. 51% reported experiencing gender discrimination while working as a musician, compared to only 6% of men.'
(Woods et al 2024, 9-11)

This statistic supports my argument that there is a need to correct the restrictions women experience in free improvisation because of the androcentricity of the music and its communities. The feministing I propose is one way to do this. I introduce the essential elements of my practice to contextualise my research and key concepts are defined.

Preface

The motivation for this investigation is rooted in my musical journey, beginning with my early training and continuing into my engagement with free improvisation. Identified at age 10 as having musical aptitude, I was given an oboe and began attending City of Leeds College of Music. While the oboe posed no obstacle to my participation in the improvisational and experimental practices encouraged by the College, my gender did. As a female student within a predominantly male environment, I became the target of unwanted sexualized attention. Such experiences, sadly not uncommon, have profound and lasting implications for girls and women in music. As Erin Wehr (2016, 478-480) elucidates, this type of male behaviour serves to exclude and marginalise women, contributing to their ongoing underrepresentation in improvising music ensembles.

Moving to Trinity College of Music in 1983 removed the improvising and experimentation from the curriculum in favour of a focus on technical mastery and orchestral repertoire. Anna Bull (2019, xiii-xvi) attributes this curricular focus to the enduring influence of nineteenth-century white British middle-class culture on conservatoires like Trinity. She describes this culture as intentionally disregarding and turning away from technological and cultural developments, including improvisation, in the twentieth century. The absence of opportunities for improvisation and experimentation for me as an oboist, drew out an increasing dissatisfaction with performance. By 1990, I had almost completely withdrawn from it in favour of a career in music education.

My practice-led research is situated within the free improvising communities of which I am now a part. It has three facets: my instrument, improvisation upon and with it, and collaboration with others. I explore how gender and instrument affect agency within these communities and the increasing agency and visibility women like me are enjoying in its contemporary formations. Having established the context and focus of my practice-led research, I now articulate a personal manifesto that encapsulates my artistic and philosophical stance.

Manifesto

I position my contemporary practice[1] within the musical, theoretical and feminist realms which are the focus of this thesis. Its premise, that for me the experience and action of self in music is primarily embodied, subjective and social, drives the arguments presented here.

My practice began when I first picked up an oboe as a young girl in 1970s Britain, when unbeknownst to me Maggie Nicols[2] and others were fighting for my right as a woman, to be heard. My priority is no longer to strive for an ever more precise technique on my oboe. It's to sound, with my instrument, in commune with others, that which comes to body in the moment. I don't seek ever greater understanding of complex compositional processes to inform the expression of sound in music. I seek clarity and simplicity in the invitation to perform which constitutes any score I may present to others. My musical training and experience inform my approach, but the focus is on the embodied, shared experience of sound.

Capitalist notions of the centrality of individuality[3] to human conduct seem at odds to such a manifesto. To express a manifesto at all is to share with others an articulation of what constitutes my own selfness. In improvisation, my practice is not a denial of this, it's an exploration of my location and human connection to others, enriched, bound to and entangled in a state of constant, influential togetherness.

Any personal achievement pleases me when it's attained with others and articulated in our combined efforts. This sensation is subjective and the wish to experience it is what drives human activity. Often this begins unconsciously and cloaked in the articulation of a kind intention. In music, the quest for this sensation drives performers to practice, composers and researchers to draft and refine, and improvisers to nurture the creative voice in preparation for an improvised outpouring. These are selfish acts which prepare us for this sensation in response to our performances. For me, they're impossible to achieve alone since music is always social[4].

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[1] See methodology p21 and appendix I p1-3 for details of this.

[2] See chapter 2, p83 for a discussion of her contribution to free improvisation and my practice.

[3] See Federici, 2004, 139-171 for a helpful feminist discussion of the development through Descartes, Hobbes, Marx, and Foucault, of the capitalist construct of the individual and the relationship between body and mind.

[4] See Born (2017,6) for a discussion of social aesthetics.

Aim and intention

My manifesto articulates an idealistic vision of music-making rooted in collectivity and shared experience. However, it's crucial to acknowledge the practical realities that underpin my research and artistic practice. While grounded in the values expressed in the manifesto, these aims and intentions reflect a pragmatic engagement with the complexities of the musical and social landscape in which I operate.

The aim of this investigation has been to deepen understanding of the ways instrument, gender and community affect agency in free improvisation and shape the improvising I undertake and the way I undertake it.

My intention has been to uncover then challenge the androcentric construct of my instrument, free improvisation, and the academic narrative which has emerged to illustrate these. I demonstrate that my autotheoretical 'feministing[5]' and reworking of my free improvising practice, alongside the work of other like-minded individuals in my communities, pushes against these; an *unmasculining* course correction. It's a shift away from virtuosic soloistic individualism towards collaborative 'making with' (Haraway 2016, 5). This approach, placing collaboration over individualism, and embracing uncertainty in improvisation, is gaining traction among improvisers - regardless of gender.

[5] See feministing p15 for an explanation of what I mean by this.

The oboe family and my practice with them

Instruments of the oboe family are rarely heard in free improvisation. The oboe is a western instrument which evolved in its present form over the last 100 years. Its double reed and distinctive timbre together are related to the zurna from the Middle East and shawm from Asia. While there have been modifications, its basic structure is as the zurna was 2800 years ago (Bogiages, 2014, 173).

The oboe range is the narrowest of the woodwinds at under three octaves. Oboe d'amore covers the alto register, cor anglais the tenor, and the bass oboe and heckelphone (contrabass) are very rarely heard. All instruments in the family have the same fingering system and oboists like me generally also play cor anglais.

The oboe and its siblings are technically challenging to make and play (Plugyers appendix V, 46, Maxwell appendix V, 38) in comparison to the clarinet and saxophone which feature regularly in the music. The nature of the reeds means that from the beginning of their studies oboists must learn how to adapt and eventually construct these to suit their embouchure. Oboists are rarely self-taught as a result.UK oboes, in an organological quirk[6], have a slightly different fingering system to those found in the rest of Europe.

Oboists train on instruments which are lighter and progress to professional models which are heavier with more keys and covered holes[7]. Having played marigaux instruments for years, I now play a loree 125 oboe and a loree cor anglais. I find they offer less resistance without compromising on the rich timbre which characterises my playing. Both have the English thumbplate system[8] I learnt my craft on. Recently I was gifted an old cabart oboe by Evan Parker. This has open holes and a European conservatoire fingering system as well as several unique mechanical features. For this reason, the embodied vestigial sediment of my technique, discussed in chapter one, has a limited role in my improvisations on this instrument.

[6] UK oboes use a thumbplate system The rest of Europe uses a conservatoire system which is identical save for the absence of this left hand thumbplate.
[7] See Howarth's of London, longstanding British oboe makers for details of the instruments and their characteristics at https://www.howarthlondon.com/oboe/ (accessed 12.3.24)
[8] See Gillet (1936) and Van CLeve (2014) for fingering system information.

Reed making and scraping is an essential skill for oboists[9]. There is insufficient space to explain the detail of this here. There are probably as many variations in scrape and technique as there are oboists. I favour a short, soft English scrape on oboe and cor anglais. My gliss anglais, discussed in chapter three, requires an entirely soft and open scrape that wouldn't work on a professional cor anglais.[10]

The construct, teaching, and canon of the oboe and other western jazz and classical instruments are, I demonstrate in chapter one, *masculine* archives which I initially experienced as an exclusionary barrier to participation in free improvisation. The rarity of the oboe in the free Improvisation canon together with the accepted hegemony of oboistic practice shaped my early career as a musician and drove me down the well-trodden rut of classical performance and for a time into teaching.

My praxis has led to the creation of a new instrument and several innovative techniques on it and the oboe. The gliss anglais is a de/reconstruction of the cor anglais to better suit my sonic imaginings. It is an important feature of my practice and research and is discussed in chapter three. Additionally, for the first time, female free improvising oboists have performed together in London and shared insights[11] into their technique and improvising practice with their instruments.

My improvising practice, its context, individuals and communities.

During this research my free improvising has developed into a unique process in which instrument and technique, gender and community, have emerged as central to my practice[12].

For me, free improvisation facilitates new, cross-disciplinary collaborations and insights, often shifting established conventions. With my instruments, free improvisation allows for deviation from learnt precision and the conventional oboistic aesthetic. In undertaking it I am developing new knowledge and skills not yet recognised in the accepted canons of the instrument and free improvisation.

[9] For a lovely description of the reed making work we do and the environmental origins of the reed and the instrument see Haskell (2023, 239-241)
[10] See Goosens and Roxburgh (1977,31-49) for more information about reed making and scraping and its role in our playing.
[11] See appendix V, p21 on for interview transcripts with four British oboists.
[12] See appendix I, p1-3 for details of the practice I've undertaken.

Because this thesis is about my practice, and because 'friendship as method' (Tillman-Healy 2003) and 'making with' (Haraway 2016,5) have been important parts of my methodology[13], when I refer to the words or views of a practitioner to illustrate my arguments, I draw as much as possible on the people with whom I practice in my London and Canterbury communities.

These people are cited frequently throughout this thesis, therefore. The citations are the result of numerous different 'friendly' interactions with these people; interviews, performances, rehearsal, dinners, and chance encounters. Evan Parker, Stevie Wishart, Faradena Afifi, Khabat Abas, and Henry Dagg are cited often. Anna Braithwaite, Emmanuelle Waeckerlé (my PhD supervisor), Steve Beresford, Maggie Nicols, Catherine Plugyers, Caroline Kraabel, Sarah Gail Brand, Isidora Edwards, Chris Batchelor and Annie Whitehead, also appear. For the same reason, the improvising formations of which I am a part; The London Improviser's Orchestra, Free Women, Free Range Orchestra, Noisy Women and ONe_Orchestra New, are referenced in chapter two when discussing the role played by large free improvising formations rather than ensembles of whom I have only theoretical knowledge.

Appendices, interviews and data

The full transcripts of interviews[14] I have undertaken with individuals whose perspective is significant to the discussion in this thesis are presented in appendix V. Each of these is a personal and subjective reflection on the practice, location, and perspective of the person concerned. As such they are referenced throughout this thesis, but they also function as standalone soundbites which give insight into the nature and practice of oboing, free improvising, instrument making, and the influence (or not) of gender on the work of those speaking. These transcripts have been edited by the subjects and myself to keep my voice to a minimum to foreground what they have to say.

The data in Appendix II supports my arguments throughout the thesis. Information on gender participation and tuition primarily comes from relevant practices within the London and Canterbury communities. Online or academic sources are corroborated by

[13] See methodology p21

[14] See my methodology p21. All of these 'interviews' took a 'friendship as method' approach; they are better described as informal themed conversations.

individuals listed in 'My improvising practice, its context, individuals and communities' above, or where possible the person cited. Evan Parker, Maggie Nicols, Stevie Wishart, Henry Dagg and Steve Beresford have been particularly helpful. As such I hope this small dataset serves to enrich the existing material out there on which I've drawn.

Free Improvisation in Britain

Free improvisation is characterised by its exponents determination to improvise in a way that is free from all existing musical structures and hierarchies. This results in a unique sonic identity, often achieved collaboratively with western instruments. Many such improvisational formations have evolved in the UK over the last 40 years and their sonic and social characteristics are a reflection of their situation and their membership.

In the London and Canterbury communities which are my focus, free improvisation has its roots in the 1960s, jazz, and the work of groups like American experimental artists *Fluxus* and free improvisers *AACM*. Aspects of its identity can be traced back to early twentieth century classical music, composers like Anton Webern (Brand 2019,21) and surrealist movements of the early twentieth century in Europe. While one or two women (Yoko Ono is a significant example from *Fluxus*) had agency in these collaboratives, the vast majority of those involved were men. Such gender inequality regarding musical agency can be seen to cascade into the free improvising communities of which I am now a part and within which they were perpetuated. For a detailed overview of the origins and character of the music and its *masculine* (see my explanation of this italicisation in the next section) character from a woman's perspective see Brand (2019, 16-24) and Krekels (2019,6-8 and 41-65).

My references to free improvisation begin when its character had come to be defined by a small group of London based practitioners. It captures the beginning of the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG), a female improvising formation who gave their first performance in 1977. It encompasses the publication period of the magazine *Musics: A British Magazine of Improvised Music and Art 1975-79* which, when the character and community of free improvisation had become clearer through performance, rehearsal, and discussion, was established and maintained to be the voice of this community during this time. David Toop, Steve Beresford, and Evan Parker are three of the main authors in this publication and key exponents of the genre. In addition, Derek Bailey, guitarist and author

of *Improvisation; its nature and practice in music,* 1993, and Eddie Prevost author of *No Sound is Innocent* 1995, were significant contributors to the development of the genre. From experimental music, *Scratch Orchestra,* and Cornelius Cardew were early contributors to the music and conversation. This is the broadly accepted academic canon from which such academic literature as there is draws its evidence and argument from.

Though Charlotte Moorman, founder of the Annual Avant Garde Festival in New York in 1963, Pauline Oliveros, author of *Sonic Meditations* 1974, and Daphne Oram, a British experimental composer active from the 1950s onwards, are examples of a small number of women who were able to gain agency and visibility in experimental music at the time, very few women participated in the initial (with the exception of FIG) free improvising formations in either country. (Oliveros in Fischlin, Heble and Monson 2004, 54).

Much has already been written about the *masculinity* of improvisation and the ways in which this has worked to exclude women (Raine and Strong, 2019, Reardon-Smith and Tomlinson 2020). Contemporary free improvisation in my communities now has a distinct character (Bailey 1992,133) rooted in this *masculine* world. Women like me are now gaining agency and visibility in the community, the rehearsal room, on stage and online (traditionally gendered spaces in all music (Libin 2016, 3).

The British free improvising community

Our free improvising community, while distinct, belongs to an international free improvisation movement rooted in 1960s experimental scenes. Prominent contemporary female exponents include viola player Faradena Afifi, saxophone player Dee Byrne, and cellist Hannah Marshall[15]. All London-based except for Afifi, these musicians have connections to the London Improviser's Orchestra (LIO), discussed in chapter two. They collaborate with improvisers active since the music's inception, including Steve Beresford and LIO founder Evan Parker. Parker moved out of London to Faversham (where I also live) twenty years ago. It's close to Canterbury, the location of the Free Range experimental music community of which we are both a part (see chapter two).

I posit that the artistic influence of these two men and others from the London community, shaped the musical and creative character of contemporary free improvisation

[15] See appendix II, p4-12 for participation data relating to gender in my free improvising communities.

in the UK over the last 60 years. However, as I argue in chapter two, social characteristics, cascading from the wider society within which this early movement emerged, acted until recently, mostly unintentionally, to hinder women's agency and visibility. (See Krekels, 2019, for further discussion).

Concept definitions

Identity

Identity is entwined with our sense of self and acts upon life choices, such as participation in free improvisation (Giddens and Sutton,2017 in MacDonald in McPherson 2022,221). It's multi-faceted; personal, political, cultural, professional, national, religious and other identities together form the basis of personality and how we understand and act in those different realms of our existence. As musicians our professional identity is, MacDonald (in McPherson 2022,221) tells us, the essence of our work. For improvising musicians like me, this identity defines and informs all other aspects of our lives. (MacDonald in McPherson 2022,221).

In 1960s Britain, when free improvisation was in its infancy, our identities were shaped in part by gender roles imposed by wider society in all areas of our lives. (MacDonald in McPherson 2022,221). Some women, often unconsciously, found it better to subsume their female gender identity and strengthen and objectify their professional identity to secure and sustain careers in music. In 1981, American sculptor and mother Anne Truitt said, 'I had used the process of art not only to contain my intensities....I had depended on objectification for defence.' (Truitt 2013, xii) She articulates a challenge I have experienced and that she as a young woman had, unconsciously, faced in trying to be artist, mother, and woman, and the separation and objectification of her identity as an artist which resulted from this.

In 2020 MacDonald and Wilson described improvisation as the most fundamental aspect of identity for improvising musicians. They presented the development and sustenance of that identity as something that is both individual and social in its character and its performance. The idea of identity is extended to the objects and instruments musicians interact with. Such identities are always socially performed, understood and enacted through their interactions with others. (Lewis in MacDonald and Wilson 2020, X) My relationship with my own instruments is explored in chapter one.

Gender

I navigate precarious waters discussing gender here, recognizing the complexities and potential pitfalls of doing so, particularly amidst heated contemporary debates.

Drawing on theorists like Butler and Spatz, I present gender as an important facet of 'embodied technique' and closely linked with bodily sex – although I find that this may not be the case for everybody. In music, gender attributes have been assigned to compositions, composers, genres, and instruments for many years; the feminine cadence, the guitar as she, the trumpet as masculine and so on. This, combined with the current heated political conversation around gender, make the situation within which and for which I write, sensitive, difficult, confusing and messy. It's not my intention within this thesis to suggest authority on my part in this debate. This doesn't detract from its importance, and I would welcome further exploration of the subject. It does mean that, discussing the masculine and feminine in improvisation (clarified in the next section), my concern with female agency, and my use of the terms male and female to describe aspects of music or behaviour in the improvising community, are potentially easily misunderstood as something which they unequivocally are not; a polarised contribution to this debate.

For my purposes, gender is an attribute. In humans it's influenced by biological factors yet also shaped by personal experiences and societal norms. Distinct from yet affected by our sex – something we physically are, gender is something we become and feel. For me (and others may feel and experience this differently), my agency as a woman is inseparable from my female gender and significant in specific contexts. Like Bennett in LaBelle (2018, 8) I experience this agency as affecting and affected by all the arenas and objects in which and with which I live my life.

This centrality of gender and its connectedness to agency and the world in which we live is often overlooked in explorations of identity in music. In The Oxford Handbook of Music Performance (McPherson 2022), for example, the performance of music, learning, practice, and psychology are discussed. Within these, gender is given very little attention. I acknowledge that gender is something we do (Butler 2004) and sex something our body represents. For me, gender may be described as an embodied technique, developed through the lens of and entwined within and without our bodily sex.

To serve the discussions which follow, I now offer a personal and subjective description of that which has been traditionally gendered masculine and feminine in music and, at the time of the inception of free improvisation in my communities, in

societal norms. I recognise the spread and interweave of these gender attributes and the resulting complex, subjective messiness of my task and the music and community I am attempting to discuss.

Masculine and feminine

Behaviours occupy all physical bodies and their designation as male or female, masculine or feminine, patriarchal or feminist and so forth is one of the many confusing linguistic challenges I face in writing this thesis. The accepted tropes describing gendered behaviour in the British society I and my musical communities inhabit are masculine domination and power, feminine submission and grace, but distinctions between these behaviours are often blurred and subtle and not confined to the appropriate sexed body. This is also the case with gendered sounds. In the classical realm gendered language is used to describe feminine cadences. In sonata form the first theme is masculine. In this way dominant soundings are considered masculine and gentler sounds feminine. It's not my purpose here to attempt a definitive itemisation of what gendered behaviours and soundings are. I am not offering a tight prescription for what constitutes the gender or not of a freely improvised outpouring. I recognise the depth and complexity of such an undertaking and there is insufficient space here to do it justice. However, it is necessary, at times to refer to them in broad terms and clarify their separation from our sex. Men can and do display feminine behaviour and women, masculine.

I need to engage with this because gendered behavioural difference does have an impact. It's markedly influential across all western music and its action upon our agency as women is significant in jazz and free improvisation. American female improviser Sherrie Tucker recognises the subjectivity and 'shifting sands' of gendering behaviour and sound over time. She stresses the deliberate masculinisation of jazz improvisation as intending to valorise its practitioners and negate the traditionally held notion that the act of improvising was feminine. She argues that this creates an othering and marginalisation of women who seek agency in free improvisation.

'…the tendency for sounds associated with masculinity to be more highly valued than those that signify femininity is relatively predictable. 'Free jazz', …, may be feminized in periods when it holds less prestige, and masculinized when it holds more prestige.'
Sherrie Tucker in Reardon Smith, Denson and Tomlinson (2020,12)

When I talk about masculine and feminine behaviours in this thesis, therefore, it is a subjective personal distinction to facilitate insight into and description of my practice and what I perceive in the work and influence of others. I repeatedly refer to these sonic and behavioural characteristics; favouring soloistic individualism and prowess, precision and control, and the striving to iterate and make one's voice and intellectualising heard, as masculine (Wehr 2016, 473). Additionally, band leader Graham Collier (in Wehr (2016, 479) points to power and its exercise as a masculine trait in jazz, a closely related improvisational style. Prioritising listening to, for and with others, working alongside them and for them, and favouring shared agency, collaborative interplay and unpredictability over control and precision I describe as feminine attributes (Reardon Smith, Denson and Tomlinson 2020,11, Oliveros in Fischlin and Heble 2004,54). When I do so I italicise the reference to indicate the meaning I apply and its subjective nature. Neither of these classifications suggests absence of or intends criticism of the other. They exist simultaneously in all of us and our soundings to a greater or lesser degree and their borders are at best indistinct. For me, the feminine are the driving characteristics in improvisation though not necessarily in other spheres of my existence. Each is of value, they are interwoven and entangled, and in varying degrees inescapable aspects of my own practice.

In chapter two, when discussing the work of Free Range Orchestra (FRO)[16] in Canterbury and ONe_Orchestra New, these distinctions are marked. The male majority membership of Free Range Orchestra doesn't preclude predominantly feminine behaviour and sounding across the ensemble as I describe it here. The overt restriction of membership to women and non-binary people in ONe_Orchestra New hasn't stopped masculine behaviour and sounding becoming part of the social and sonic palette of participation.

[16] See chapter 2, p76.

Using these subjective distinctions, in chapter two, male voices, I examine the way in which masculine intellectualism as an example of the wish to be heard is valued and prioritised by both free improvising exponents and men who have written about them. In doing so they have helped to instil in the free improvisation canon, by my definition, a masculine character. This has created an unintentional barrier that women (and men who favour feminine behaviours) have had to negotiate.

Technical and intellectual

In this thesis I discuss the technique of free improvisation on musical instruments. I separate this holistic practice into physically technical and thoughtfully intellectual pursuits. The technical is concerned with the way we act bodily with our instruments and the gestures we refine which are part of our 'technique'. Intellectual practice is defined here as concerned with the act of thinking and understanding complex ideas. Jazz improvisation, a closely related practice, largely over chord changes, requires such intellectual facility to be practised and refined. This is discussed in chapter one. While I need to make this distinction to clarify the arguments offered, I acknowledge throughout the connectedness of mind and body which forms part of my discussion and my own improvising practice. This, like the discussions on gender, is a facet of the confusing and indistinct realm of free improvisation I need to articulate here.

Feministing

My feministing practice is a 'making with' people and instruments, in spaces and places[17]. It takes from Reardon Smith, Denson and Tomlinson (2020,11), who describe feministing as consciously NOT adopting an individualistic stance.

'.. we seek instead to think through improvisation from a collective and inclusive origin. We posit that improvising is always 'making-with' ..., we are in dialogue with place, space, the environment, the listeners, the instrument, the body, as well as our own multiple histories.'

Donna Haraway's Staying with the Trouble (2016,5) informed the work of Reardon-Smith, Denson and Tomlinson and is a voice I engage with throughout this

[17] See appendix I, p1-3 for a list of the practice I've undertaken.

thesis. ‘Making with’ is used to describe my conscious turning away from individualism and towards communing with others.

‘..individualism in its many flavours … has finally become unavailable to think with, truly no longer thinkable, technically or any other way. Sympoeisis–making with–is a keyword…’
(Haraway 2016,5)

Meaning and connection emerge from the collaborative, messy flux of free improvisation. This shared, empathic experience fosters a fragile understanding, deepening our connection to each other and our surroundings. Recognising this, my practice embodies an ecological feminism (Palme 2022, 11; Voegelin 2023, xvi)—a contingent "making with" where all participants act in flux, affecting change beyond individualism. To facilitate this egalitarian flux, I employ "invitation scores" rather than directive notation, discussed in chapter two, 2.9.

Autotheory

The concept of autotheory is relatively new and has been primarily expressed in the academic and not practice-based arena. (Baxter and Auburn 2023,1) Throughout this thesis I take from Young (in Wiegman 2020,12) and use the word autotheory adjectivally to describe aspects of my theorising practice from a feminist perspective. Autotheory is the merging of autobiography and theory within a creative process (Baxter and Auburn 2023). It’s not an individualistic expression of self, however. Autotheoretical research requires engagement with the autobiographical self through ‘embodied theorising’ (Baxter and Auburn 2023,1).[18] The practice IS the theory. Until now autotheory has been applied to visual art and literature. My application of autotheory to sonic free improvisation in this research is, to my knowledge, the first of its kind.

The methodology expands on my autotheoretical practice, explains the relevance of autotheory to free improvisation, and situates it within relevant literature.

[18] See Baxter and Auburn et al (2023) for an overview of contemporary autotheoretical practice in visual art.

Autotheorising free improvisations are undertaken 'self' consciously. In them the improviser's shifting from theorising to acting is experienced as simultaneous. In chapter two,2.14 I discuss the swarming inherent in collaborative free improvisation as similarly simultaneous and happening everywhere all at once. Chapters three and four are a contextualisation of the autotheoretical portfolio of practice I present as my research and its relationship to this thesis. My practice at Cove Park, evidenced in chapter three, 3.2, was an attempt to consciously experience this autotheorising in an extended free improvising practice.

Discomfort, terror, and anger

'to write directly and overtly as a woman, ...placed me nakedly face to face with both terror and anger; it did indeed imply..., the end of safety, ...'
(Adrienne Rich 2018, 241)

As an oboist playing is physically uncomfortable. We're taught to manage a degree of discomfort in our practice. My free improvisation often requires the use of my body in oboistically unconventional ways to create the sounds I want to make which lie outside the accepted canon and its safety net[19]. Jackson (2016, 38-41) discusses the tension he experiences between him and his instrument. My discomfort is also experienced as physical tension when working against what my body has learnt to do. I come up against the masculine construction of the instrument and its technical canon. Developing then expressing one's physical, emotional, and sonic identity in this way is deeply uncomfortable for women like me who have, initially unconsciously, conformed to and come to identify as the male construct of what it is to be an oboist[20].

In writing this thesis I experience a discomfort tinged at times with the 'terror' Rich (2018,241) describes. It is, in part, an attempt to extricate a line of thought, from my embodied and autotheoretical practice, and define it linguistically through a jungle of academic definition. Such practice is not easy, and to an extent, mirrors the everyday challenge presented by gender, instrument, behaviour and socio-political

[19] See appendix III, p13 for a description of some of these techniques and chapter 3,3.2 for a solo oboe improvisation which utilises them.
[20] All the recordings discussed in chapter 4, 4.4-4.8 are a response to some form of emotional or physical discomfort, terror or anger.

constructs to me as a mature, white, heterosexual, British female free improvising oboist. Adrienne Rich describes a similar experience here.

'My personal world view, which … I carried as a conviction of my own uniqueness, was not original with me, but was, rather, my untutored and half-conscious rendering of .., the social and political forces of my time and place.'
(Rich 2018, 231-23)

Embodied cognition and technique

My embodied technique influences and interacts with, but is distinct from, the ways I bring forth soundings. My embodied cognition is a socially enacted and simultaneous expression of and response to the complexity of my identities and the others with whom I interact. Within this the others, including instruments and places have agency.

Embodied cognition is individual; a sensorimotor activity which happens in a situation (such as improvising) and with others (improvisers, tools and objects.). (Schiavio et al. 2022, 535). In my practice embodied cognition and technique are, in part, a physically manifested autobiography which I reference throughout this thesis. Increasingly, scholars are pointing to embodiment as an essential contributor to our ability to act in and with the world. In Emergent Musicalities (2022), Iyer tells us that 'Music first and foremost is embodied human action.' This is a helpful definition to begin from regarding the role of embodied cognition and technique in free improvisation.

Schiavio et al (2022, 537) position sociality as one of the key tenets of embodied cognition. Such sociality is a culmination of multiple identities, inclusive of gender, it needs to be better comprehended to enhance our understanding of agency of improvisation. In improvisation Spatz describes embodied technique as '…the way in which action and relation are worldly…a never finished bodiliness of being…' (Spatz 2019, xiii).

Agency

Agency is concerned with one's sense of control, ability to impact upon oneself, and in so doing exert external influence in the world. In other words, with one's independent

action, power and control over oneself and one's situation. (Fraser in Lehmann and Palme, 2022, 539-541, Schiavio et al, 2022, 553). In music, agency is situated in our individual capacity to impact upon and manipulate the sounds we make together with the location in which this occurs. George Lewis tells us that '…Improvisation puts agency, power and status in the hands of the performer.' (Lewis in MacDonald and Wilson 2020, xviii)

Mattin (2022, 195) discusses the need to break away from the '… self-perception that we as individuals are stable selves and the belief that we are already subjects with agency. .. exposing the performance of self as a historically specific … process[21].' Eckhardt/De Graeve (2017, 113) point to the wish many artists express for a move away from the notion of individual authority towards a more inclusive paradigm.

Though ideas of the music itself as autonomous agent have been a focus for discussion recently, the notion of the musical work or performance as object remain in debate and need further investigation. For my purposes, the term agency in musical activity has little to do with the work or the author. Rather, musical agency is a shared influence upon sonic utterance. It's distinct from an individual sense or experience of agency; the sensation or response associated with these activities.

Historicities associated with musical activity also have agency. The embodied technique learnt and taught on our instruments, the harmonic and rhythmic constructs in bebop improvisation, or the rules governing ornamentation. Social conventions and structures have embedded and embodied agency in directing our behaviours and responses in such settings. (Schiavio et al 2023 541-542)

Agency is negotiated with and facilitated by others (Barad in Juelskjaer 2012,16-17 and 23). All agential objects are constantly in flux, entangled and affecting change in and outside their individualism. Intra-action sees the accepted view of objectivity as therefore impossible- all objects and agents contribute to this flux. Such entanglement, for women, given the social constraints at the time free improvisation emerged, made participation and agency in the music extremely difficult.

[21] See Whalley and Waeckerle (2024, 1.2) for a discussion of the positions of Mattin and Braidotti.

Freedom

Freedom in life as in improvisation is concerned with one's ability to exist and act without constraint and with liberty. My freedom facilitates my rejection of the notion of and quest for individualism and is intertwined with society and the free improvisation communities within which I operate. This perception of freedom, rooted in the early twentieth century, often relies on Berlin's 'negative' and 'positive' freedoms (Reardon-Smith, Denson & Tomlinson, 2020, 11), distinguishing between freedom from external barriers and freedom to act according to individual intent.

Peters (2009,2) feels that for free improvisers, '...the task is to liberate the concept of freedom from the discourses of emancipation .. [..]it allows for a rethinking of freedom ... while also introducing into the past a freedom that, once remembered, must be preserved in the artwork.' His positioning of the remembered within a musical act or improvisation suggests that the improvisation brought forth acts as a liminal wall connecting us to a past conserved within the outpouring. I dispute such tacit valorisation of the intellectual sediment within the improvisation. Rather, like Tsing (2015), I see sediment like this as 'peripatriarchal', and yet, in our contemporary world, impossible to avoid in that it always acts upon us. This limits but does not remove the possibility of freedom.

Tsing (2015,66) tells us that "noncapitalist" forms can be found everywhere. These forms, or spaces, can be described as freedom 'patches' (Tsing 2015,69). If Tsing is correct, then my rejection of the individualistic free improvisation described by Peters (2009) in favour of the 'systemacity' (Tsing 2015,20) of precarity and indeterminacy in my collaborations is symptomatic of the ecological precarity of our contemporary situation. It is also more suited to the practice of a music intended to be free from any sonic rules. The role of precarity and imprecision in my practice is discussed in chapter one.

Methodology

My research adopts a practice-led, discovery-led approach (Bell 2016, 19), embracing chance, and adaptability. It's qualitative, exploring the subjective and experiential through embodied engagement with my instrument and others, fostering non-hierarchical relationships and prioritising women's knowledge. My improvising '...makes negotiations...of subjectivity audible' (Hannaford 2017,204).

During my research I have collaborated with feminist improvisers and taken influence from feminist theorists. The body of improvising and composing practice presented here is a sonic representation of the negotiations I have undertaken with these improvisers and others, including humans, instruments, theories, communities and contexts[22]. Adaptations and adjustments heard in the free improvisations discussed and recorded here, were subjective responses resulting from my work with these others, gendered behaviour[23], and my embodied technique. These intra-actions[24] have shaped and informed my research and helped me to distinguish emerging themes.

In the introduction I explain that when I refer to the words or views of an improviser to illustrate my arguments, I draw on the people and formations[25] with whom I practice. In selecting examples to illustrate my arguments I also draw on the work of collaborations of which I'm a part. The results presented here are a subjective entanglement of the social, sonic, and agential in my practice; a sympoesis or 'making with' (Haraway 2016,5). In this way, as I explain in the introduction, they are a feministing of free improvisation undertaken as an autotheoretical, practice-led investigation.

Autotheorising is an essential facet of my methodology, briefly defined in the introduction (p15). To explain and support this, what follows clarifies the nature of autotheorising and situates my work within such recent literature as there is on the subject.

Autotheorising to date has primarily but not exclusively (I discuss the experimental margin citation used by Maggie Nelson in her 2015 novel *The Argonauts* later in this methodology,

[22] See appendix I, p1-3.
[23] Prompted by Wilchins' assertions of gender as a visual system of meaning (Nestle, Howell and Wilchins 2002, 23-32).
[24] After Barad (2007).
[25] See Introduction p6.

and its influence on my thesis) been used in the field of visual art. In this arena the medium is visual, and the processes are physical with various materials. Free improvisation is a creative sonic practice which uses sound as its medium, improvisation as its process, and instrument and others as co-facilitators. In this way, like visual art and literature, it is a making and thinking practice in which the material is heard not seen. 'It matters what matters we use to think other matters with' (Haraway 2016,12). The 'thinking with' Haraway defines and discusses extends to the creative materials and processes I use.

My practice is an embodied and simultaneous thinking with medium, process, collaborators and facilitators. The act of playing the instrument is a co-creation with the instrument itself. Cat Auburn explains that the media she works with '.. co-contribute to and co-generate theory via alternative forms of knowledge production' (Auburn 2023, 77). Similar theorising practice with my instruments and sound (my media) has helped shape both the improvisations I produce and the way in which I produce them. In this way it is an autotheorising.

Wiegman (2020,12) credits Stacey Young's 1997 work 'The Autotheoretical Texts' as first using the term autotheory as an adjective. In Young's view autotheoretical works are the combination of '…autobiography with theoretical reflection ... They undermine the traditional autobiographical impulse to depict a life as unique and individual. Instead, they present the lives they chronicle as deeply enmeshed in other lives, ...' (Young 1997,69, in Wiegman 2020,12). My autotheorising is similarly entwined with the lives of those with whom I think and practice.

Lauren Fournier (2021) provides the first monograph devoted entirely to discussions of art based autotheory. She points to Meike Bal's (Bal in Fournier, 2021,67) assertion that making art is itself thinking. Auburn (2023,78) extends this and explains that her own making and thinking practice theorises by, like mine, engaging with material and process. As with my free improvising, these act upon her and influence the direction of her questioning, her practice and her research.

Read in this way, my collaborative free improvisation is a thinking and theorising with. This builds on Haraway's concept of 'making and thinking with' (Haraway 2016,5). My autotheorising extends beyond the reading and referencing of theory and is enmeshed with my free improvising. The practice itself is relational given my application of 'friendship as method' (discussed later in this section) with my collaborators. Such new knowledge

generation sits outside the academic norm for which I write. Like me as an oboist and woman in free improvisation, it is othered in that it sits outside accepted linguistic conventions for theses of this sort.

Maggie Nelson's collaborators are present in the margin citations in her 2015 autotheoretical text *The Argonauts* (Auburn 2023, 81). They are not cited in any other academically conventional way. In part two of this thesis my commentaries on my practice reference my collaborators and the emotion, sensation or sonic response they evoke in my improvisings. These descriptions take from Nelson's experimental approach to citation in that they are not conventional analyses of performances, laying bare structural, thematic, rhythmic and melodic detail. Rather, by placing these people in the text in this way, traces of the selves they brought to our improvising and socialising are present in this theorising. Nelson's placing of her collaborators at and in the margins of her text set the precedent for this.

Moutoula (2022, 114) uses 'nonstop languaging' to enact her practice-led research. In this way her autotheorising is'…a writing of the self that is not focused on recalling facts or narrating stories, but rather on tracing my thoughts in real time through (languaging) ... I perform autotheory by ..carrying the self in language...' My free improvising is another form of the carrying self in language Moutoula describes. My language is the sonic line I create. This is witnessed simultaneously by my collaborators.

Fournier (2021) examines conceptual artist Adrian Piper's 1971 work 'Food for the Spirit' (Fournier 2021, 74), in her view an early example of autotheory. In a private extended performance, Piper photographed herself regularly, read Kant and maintained strict diet and yoga practices to evidence her ongoing presence while examining the ways in which what she was reading was impacting on her selfness (Piper paraphrased in Fournier 2021, 72).

To test and examine my autotheorising, at Cove Park I wanted to experience the position of my autobiographical self within my sonic practice. Taking from Piper, from Auburn's 'wild swimming with theory' (Auburn 2023, 84) and from my earlier work with Will Montgomery and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé's 'Walking in Air' project[26], I undertook a private, extended and repetitive performance. I made audio recordings of self-imagined

[26] More information available here https://folkestonefringe.com/events/walking-in-air/(accessed 12.7.24).

extended techniques every day for six days and the free improvisations I played which utilised them. I practiced yoga every day, maintained a strict diet and photographed the view from my window while editing my recordings. During this time, like Piper (in Fournier 2021, 71-97) and Auburn (2023,84), I evidenced my self-presence. My diary, photographs and recordings are traces of this practice. Each is a different medium; sonic recordings, words and sketches in my diary, and photographs taken on an iphone. In this way I ensured my traces were visual, auditory, physical (the diary pages) and virtual (the sounds and images). Undertaking this allowed me to witness my own theorising beyond the knowledge of it and its application. It allowed me to observe, visually, and audibly, and through the tactile connection with the diary pages, my 'self' within and without the process I was undertaking.

Fournier (2021, 74) tells us that, like my Cove Park traces, Piper's photographs are more than a diarising documentation '... the photographs embody Piper's literalizing of Kant's transcendental aesthetic through the empirical confirmation of the "I" that self-imaging provides (Fournier 2021*,* 73–74).' The constant shifting from philosophising to photographic documentation of self present in Piper's work is identified by Fournier as autotheoretical. Auburn (2023, 83) extends this analysis and points out that Piper's practice in and of itself is not identified by Fournier as embedded theorising. For Auburn it is Piper's creative and practice-led process, not just the outcome (the images) that allows her to shift simultaneously between theorising and self-study. Auburn feels that, without the practice, the '….autotheorising would not have been possible.' (Auburn 2023, 83).

This analysis of Piper's work by Fournier and then Auburn can be applied to my autotheorising at Cove Park and to my entire body of practice. My daily, ritualised oscillation from thinking through free improvisation to documenting by diarising, recording then editing was a practice-led process. One outcome alone, heard in chapter 3,3.2 is not in itself embedded and autobiographical theorising. Auburn's contention that my practice-led process is an essential component in my autotheorising is correct and easily evident when described in this way.

My musical practice includes my improvising, composing, and performing activity. I am travelling through this research as a musician who is an adaptive subject (Bourriaud 2009,53), responding to such external influence and self-analysis as may arise. In this way

my methodology tests, informs and shapes the themes which emerge, theories I investigate and the conclusions I draw.

It includes:

- My improvising practice,
- Engagement with experts in the field, including case studies, literature review, conversations, and interviews,
- The development and presentation of a body of work including performances, invitation scores[27], videography, and recordings.

I search for and prioritise authored citations from women (Ahmed 2017, 2-6). This choice is not a criticism of male theorists (though my critique here does, in the main, shine a light on important omissions from their writing regarding gender). It is to give voice to women's perspective and highlight their absence from the academic and performance canons relating to the music and its practitioners because,

'.. it is difficult to describe accurately just how integral women's contributions to the development of free improvisation … were in the early days, as women's participation was limited and remains under-documented…'
(Smith in Fischlin and Heble, 2004, 236-241).

Given the body of academic material in the field is limited and has been written largely by men (Peters, 2009, 181-6, Bailey, 1992, 143-144), conclusions drawn from this research are informed by a variety of relevant sources including scholarly texts, journalism, footnotes and archival material, interviews, conversations, and the lived experience of the author and other contributors. The words of the author and contributors are woven through the text in academic, informal, and conversational style as appropriate to best illustrate and support the arguments offered[28]. I share subjective personal observation and reflection on my

[27] See chapter 2,2.9, for a description of these and an examination of their use in my practice and that of my collaborators.
[28] This is another example of autotheoretical method which takes from Nelson's (2015) approach to citation discussed earlier in this methodology.

experiences, improvisations and interactions to illustrate the points made. Where appropriate these are italicised and idented.

Music is a social activity; it's born of collaboration. 'Women players negotiate social and cultural processes that confer and withhold recognition (Butler 2004) and these negotiations influence women's and girls' subject-formation and subjectivity'. (Caudwell 2012, 400-401). It's essential therefore for me to confer recognition and 'make kin' with other improvisers, (Haraway 2016,4), developing the 'friendship[29]' Oakley placed at the centre of her method with research subjects. In her 1974-9 'Becoming a Mother' study, (Oakley, 2016, 195) Oakley argued that the relationship between researcher and subject, when the subject is a woman, is socially and culturally entangled. The ideas of gifting data and forming 'friendship' within this transaction should be considered when framing methodology and interaction with subjects. 'Friendship as method' (Tillman-Healy 2003) is therefore employed in all interactions and interviews with participants in this research.

In the introduction (p6) I list the people with whom I have developed such relationships and explain the ways in which they have contributed to this thesis. These 'friendships', like my practice, developed organically during the period of this research. They were built and sustained through, '..*conversation, everyday involvement, compassion, giving, and vulnerability.'* (Tillman-Healy 2003,734). In them, the unequal researcher/ subject paradigm Oakley challenged is levelled. An example of this is the regular consultation with participants listed in the introduction (p6) as this thesis developed. Where necessary subjects read and consented to written drafts and offered edits and adjustments which I honoured. Appendix V presents nine edited narrative interviews, prioritising the voices of participants whose experiences aligned with mine. They contributed to the editing process and provided many helpful additions, subtractions and alternatives during the process. I am very grateful to all of my research 'friends' for the time they spent of this. Their words are a 'gift' to me, to you, and to my research.

[29] Oakley and Tillman-Healy use the word 'friendship' to describe their method with subjects. I use their word here to reference the centrality to my methodology of nurturing supportive platonic relationships with peers formed through mutual respect, shared interest, support and encouragement. In chapter two I examine the significance of relationships within collaborations in the free improvising communities of which I'm a part.

'…the complex political and social relationship between researcher and researched cannot easily be fitted into a paradigm of 'feminist' research, … the concepts of a gift and of friendship as components in this relationship deserve more attention.'
(Oakley 2016,195)

This research portfolio does not, alone, guarantee the transformation of the *masculine* sediment in free improvisation in my communities. Rather, it makes the negotiations required to gain agency as a woman instrumentalist in free improvisation in contemporary Britain, visible and audible. It functions as a canonic chink in the exclusionary barricades that have been, until recently, the patriarchal tomes that are oboistic technique and practice, and the story of free improvisation in Britain.

A contextual review of feminist theory

This review of the work of relevant feminists and feminist music theorists situates my position and approach within the feminist theoretical canon.

Following Wambui, (2013,1), my feminist research employs qualitative methods and utilises subjective observation gleaned from relationships. It offers challenge to the existing *masculine* dominant discourse[30] on the nature and origins of free improvisation.

Sara Ahmed (2017,22) points to the discomfort and opposition she has experienced as a feminist theorist. As a result, 'To be part of a movement requires we find … meeting places. A movement is also a shelter.' (Ahmed 2017, 3). 'Making with' is a part of my practice and discussed in chapter two. This gathering is a part of my method and was something the first male free improvisation practitioners in the UK did too. Throughout this thesis, I show how their grouping may have acted as an unintentionally exclusionary barrier for women. Such exclusivity is not what I propose as a route forwards.

In 1995, Toril Moi told us that 'The principal objective of feminist criticism has always been … to expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices.' (Moi 1995, xiv). In 1991 Susan McClary noted that 'Since the early 1970s, feminist criticism had flourished ..., with musicology, …lagging behind.' (McClary 1991, ix). Her essays explored gender, sexuality and the body across a broad spectrum of musical eras and styles. She contributed to the breaking down of the hierarchies which sustained and legitimised elitist and patriarchal discourse like Esman's on body and emotion in music. Esman (1951,222) was dismissive of music 'of the body' including improvisation like mine, seeing it as a threat to the quality of the western art music canon in general[31]. Also in 1991, Fuss (1991,1*)* argued that women are objects on the outside of the masculine norm and culture Esman saw as under threat.

Killam points to identity as more than the gender binary which had preserved unequal power structures. Rather than a focus on power and identity, she tells us we might consider 'the powers associated with dispersion and rupture' (Killam 1994,1). This is an

[30] Defined generally by Salome Voegelin as a 'chauvanist battleground'(2023, xiii)
[31] See Adorno (1941) *On Popular Music* for his critique in this regard.

important distinction for my research which explores in part the different experiences and developments in geographically separate locations[32].

Cusick proposes 'If…gender is always and everywhere a metaphor of power … then we might learn a great deal about how the norms of gender pass sideways through society by watching them pass through such bodily actions as musical performance.' (Cusick 1994, 20). She believed that a feminist music theory would consider the situation of such power alongside how bodies interact in performance. In 1993 Butler had pointed towards a dilemma here; the widely accepted perception of the body as feminine and mind as masculine, a binary which Cusick unpicks regarding music theory and practice. Cusick's questions about this refer to Butler's (1993, 37) early writing on gender and anticipate work by Houben (2018) and Bull (2019). In 1994, bell hooks argued that sonic agency is enabling and that its practice can be emancipatory, allowing for a creative navigation of such power systems. As such it may interrupt and challenge power where it exists. She presents this as a feminist practice in which women may gain agency and visibility. This position is a description, in part, of what contemporary female free improvising practitioners are doing. By taking sonic agency for themselves they are interrupting the *masculine* power structures which have built up in the genre.

Toril Moi, in 2001, pointed to the need to guard against the often myopic focus on gender identity of some feminists, '...generalisations about gender may be just as oppressive as generalisations about sex.' (Moi 2001,7). '…. Women have interests, capacities, and ambitions that reach far beyond the realms of sexual differences….' (Moi 2001, notes 9).

The physical differences between sexes are discussed in 2004 by Italian feminist Silvia Federici. Her historical account, from a feminist perspective, of the history of the body through the birth and growth of capitalism, recounts the commodification of labour and the resultant gendered separation of the bodily and the intellectual debated by Butler and Cusick. She describes the positioning of the woman as a reproductive vessel with no rights as central to the development of capitalism in Europe.

[32] For example, the agency easily afforded to me by my membership of the London Improvisers Orchestra in comparison with that associated with Free Range Orchestra in Canterbury. London as the capital city has a tacit power and agency which attracts, when one is associated with its music scenes, attention and visibility.

Opposition to my argument that physicality plays a significant role in gender identity and performance comes from Judith Butler, '…there is no way to collapse the distinction between the other and myself.' (Butler 2004,20). She argued that our perception and understanding of our own gender comes from the reaction it receives from others in the social world we enter. While I accept that internal perception of one's gender experience could lead to this, her theory does not encompass physicalities and their agency in performance for musicians of both sexes, regardless of their gender. Despite the differing perspectives we have on the influence and significance of the body, Butler's work is an important contribution to the drive to correct the sexism and female lack of agency inherent in the situation described by Federici (2004). The scale of the challenge accounts, to some extent, for the stridency and emotion associated with and often running through the position she and others adopt.

2012 sees Karen Barad in a refreshing counter to the debate around agency, ask 'What happens to our ability to engage in practices of feminist analysis if one draws a universal boundary…that says who should and who shouldn't be granted agency …?' (Barad in Juelskjaer 2012,16-17). She goes on to suggest a rethinking of the male agency and female lack of agency inherent in this. Donna Haraway extends this, '...bounded individualism …. has finally become unavailable to think with, truly no longer thinkable, …' (Haraway 2016,5). She situates her argument in the universally precarious present, arguing that to 'stay with the trouble' (Haraway 2016,4) requires a turning away from the individuality of agency.

International relations expert Linda Åhäll takes from Ahmed's (2017) notion of feminism as an intense sensation of discomfort. Åhäll argues that feminist knowledge is often overlooked even when it is invited by scholars in the field of International Relations. She supports Ahmed's view that to be a feminist is to be united in a feminist community. '…. Feminist research questions are about power and how the world works through power structures.' (Åhäll 2018, 42).

Academic and theatre practitioner Marissia Fragkou's 2020 publication is an autoethnographic, feminist exploration of theatre's response to and interaction with the risk and instability inherent in our contemporary political reality. It's a helpful exploration of the position of an art form in contemporary society from the perspective of a woman who identifies as marginalised. As such her situation is similar to mine and her discourse lends insight into debate which I too am examining. Like me her practice is driven and

informed by feminism and explores the marginalisation and lack of visibility experienced by some, together with human relationships with other objects. (Fragkou 2020,4). Recent contributors to this debate, Irene Lehmann and oboist and academic Pia Palme also point to our precarious interdependence on one another and the others we live alongside. They extend the argument, positioning this precarity and fragility as not just political but biological and ecological. *Sounding Fragilities an Anthology* (Lehmann and Palme 2022) is devoted to discussion of music and sounding from this perspective.

My position and methodology take from the theorising presented here, and are most closely aligned with and articulated by, Haraway (2016), Reardon-Smith, Denson and Tomlinson (2020), and Lehmann and Palme (2022). Debate on gender, identity, agency, power, embodiment, 'making with', and their impact on and position within collaborative music making are drawn together here. Reardon-Smith, Denson and Tomlinson posit that thinking such as mine on free improvisation and the 'freedom' inherent within it, has until now been undertaken, by writers like Gary Peters (2009), from a *masculine* subject position. Like me, they adopt a feminist position and propose that '...Peters' subject position and theorisation of free improvisation bear little resemblance to our experiences as women instrumentalists working in a range of musical settings. We have found improvisation to be a collaborative rather than a solitary experience ….' (Reardon-Smith, Denson and Tomlinson 2020, 10).

In so doing, they argue that free improvisation may not, as its *masculine* subject position has claimed, be as 'free' as it claims to be in its practice. They posit that a feminist theory of free improvisation would acknowledge autonomy while recognising and valuing the relational nature of the activity. Their arguments challenge the writings of Peters (2009) and Bailey (1993) and cite Ahmed (2017) and Haraway (2016) in support of their position. Like me, they point to individual valorisation in improvisation as a *masculine* trait and the pursuit and valuing of collaboration as *feminine*. This premise is the starting point for my research and underpins both my methodology and the arguments I offer and explore here.

Innovations and contribution to knowledge

My investigation has cast a methodologically original autotheoretical and feminist lens, through my practice, on the *masculine* origins and character of the oboe I play and the improvising communities I occupy. This portfolio is innovative in that – as the methodology explains and contextualises - it is the first practice-led research to take an autotheoretical approach to an investigation of sonic free improvisation. The practice presented has made audible and visible the autotheorising inherent in the act of free improvisation itself. This thesis and the body of work presented alongside it is a new contribution to our emerging understanding of autotheory and its application. I am grateful to Cat Auburn for thinking and conversing with me about this.

My research has uncovered the challenge to gaining agency in the music and its formations women experienced at its inception, and female oboists continue to navigate. The source of the increased agency female improvising instrumentalists now enjoy has also been examined. It has been important to fill this gap in the field to understand why the recent improvements in agency and visibility for female instrumental free improvisers are gaining pace while the oboe remains a rare presence in the music. It catalogues, for the first time, the views of contemporary female free improvising oboists in London and has facilitated the first performance by two female oboists in a London based free improvising formation[33].

I have devised and applied several new technical approaches to performance. This is a conscious attempt to give my instrument agency in improvisation and to introduce imprecision and precarity into my taught technique and sound palette. They are catalogued in appendix III and can be heard in audio examples discussed in chapters three and four. I undertake an intra-active free improvising practice which is shared by an increasing number of collaborators. The 'invitation score' as a concept is positioned within this (see chapter 2, 2.9). This holistic practice is (after Braidotti 2019,5) transversal, collective, embodied, and embedded. It is an active and ongoing feministing of my oboing practice and the genre of free improvisation.

[33] Georgina Brett and I performed with the London Improviser's Orchestra in 2023. Catherine Plugyers and I performed together on 1.2.24. See appendix I, p1-3 for further information on performances I've undertaken.

I commissioned my unique new instrument the gliss anglais to further facilitate my sonic explorations (chapter three, appendices III and IV). These innovations contribute to liberating my free improvisation, instrument, and creative output from patriarchal constraints. Ultimately, and in part through this research, I am working to liberate my free improvisation, instrument and research output from the vestigial sediment of patriarchal practice.

Chapter One: A feministing oboist

'…, I am caught, always already, in the form of the text and the conventions of language, which as a frame organises the very order that makes what I hope to say invisible.'
(Voegelin 2023, x)

This chapter explores how instruments embody the androcentric intentions of their makers. It contrasts the informal and positive self-development of technique in free improvisation with the formal and negative corrective practices in the classical domain, examining the differing perceptions of virtuosity in both realms. The role of precarity and imprecision in my feministing practice is seen to challenge the androcentric hegemony of the music.

To provide context for my descriptions of technique and approaches to its development here, I describe the oboe, its androcentric roots, and its contemporary position as a classical instrument rarely featuring in free improvisation. I uncover the patriarchal hegemonies inherent in instrument construction and the techniques learnt upon them.

1.1 The oboe

The oboe[34] has a distinctive tone, a narrow bore, complex keywork and small double reed. It rose to popularity in the baroque period and retained its position in the orchestral woodwind section as its design and the western classical orchestra developed. In Britain it is almost exclusively seen in classical orchestral and chamber music. In the late twentieth century composers like Luciano Berio[35] wrote technically complex solo works for the oboe which extended the technique and increased the challenge for the performer considerably. This contributed to the developments in instrument design to accommodate these which have emerged in the last 50 years.

Oboist Lorraine Hart (appendix V, 26) graduated from the Royal Academy of Music in 2014 and was given very little repertoire by women while studying. Catherine Plugyers[36]

[34] See p5 for more detail on its construction.
[35] Berio's Sequenza vii for solo oboe, written in 1969, has become such a standard in the canon that it has been edited by renowned oboist Jacqueline LeClair to make some of its technical challenges more accessible for students. (Berio, L.2000)
[36] See p6 for an explanation of Plugyers's relevance to my research and appendix V, p45 for an interview with her.

(appendix V, 45) graduated from the Royal College of Music in 1979 and in part because she was given no repertoire by women has made playing and commissioning music by women a priority in her career. No works by women were presented to me during my time at Trinity College of Music even though my teacher was an eminent oboist herself.

1.2 Instruments as masculine archives, tools and barriers.

'Women are the vessels. The bowl. Introverted with our internal gynaecology. Men have this external member. Our bodies describe that personality. It makes sense to me. It's a struggle…'

Georgina Brett oboist (appendix V, 26)

The realms of instrument construction and design remain almost entirely male. I argue that they respond to the requirements of composers, the vast majority of whom are and have always been men (Doubleday 2008,15). The absence of women oboe makers and designers may account for the absence of consideration of female biology in their construction. But it could also be that, because it was so challenging to be taken seriously as a female performer, women denied their own physicality to be accepted as equal to men. Equal here meaning physiologically no different. In 1984, while I was an oboe student at Trinity College of Music, Mary Hinely (Hinely 1984, 34) cited pianist Susan Starr's belief that '...women sometimes exhibited weak technique because of social attitudes and their own sense of self-identity…'. Starr explained that instrumental tutors felt women were less capable than men and didn't understand the need to treat them differently given their female physiology. She went on to cite the widely held belief at the time that women played differently because of, among other gender attributes, their menstrual cycles. Hinley cites Starr's response to this, as a woman with two children; 'what bunk!'. In standing up for women's equality inadvertent challenges are presented here for contemporary female woodwind players; we ARE physiologically different which influences our breathing, and Starr was a pianist not a wind player-a very different technique far less centred on breath and diaphragm.[37]

[37] It is outside my remit here to consider whether her female hand had sufficient reach to play tenths in the left hand. Nonetheless it's another way in which women are, in the main, physically different to men. Our hands do tend to be smaller.

The incredibly narrow bore of the oboe offers great and sustained resistance to the breath we push through it. Oboists breathe from the diaphragm at the centre of our bodies.

'The oboe is interesting in terms of the effort it takes to play it. Anyone who doesn't play the oboe doesn't realise this. You can't play for longer than an hour because you're exhausted. It's all the support the lungs need and the pressure in your head. It's not like any other instrument.'

Georgina Brett oboist (appendix V, 22)

I cannot be the only female wind player to have experienced enormous monthly physical discomfort when doing so during my menstrual cycle. Two of the oboists interviewed for this research confirmed similar experiences in confidence and outside of the discussion documented in appendix II. In 2007, oboist Helena Gaunt undertook research with her students at The Guildhall School of Music and Drama into the learning and teaching of breathing for and with oboists (Gaunt 2007). Despite her own womanhood and that of a number of the students in her sample (she doesn't say how many), despite her finding that anatomical and physiological understanding was a problem for her students (ibid, 208), and despite the critical centrality of breath technique for oboists, she doesn't mention this at all. And don't even get me started about trying to breathe and play when pregnant. Poppy Philligreen (2024) gave a clarinet lecture-recital when seven months pregnant at a conference I participated in earlier this year. She apologised for having to sit down to play. She managed to stand to talk. In discussion afterwards we shared stories of the mysterious and physically unusual, often uncomfortable sensation of playing while pregnant. Why did she feel the need to apologise and feel 'othered' by her need? And why don't we consider these biological realities for 50% of the population in instrument design?

Stepping away from these, for me, emotive questions, and returning to the improviser, instrument design can be both a restriction (the instruments require a reiteration of the sounds they were designed to make) and an opportunity (they have the potential for new soundings unintended by the maker). Free improviser and academic John Corbett tells us that our instrument '…is literally composed and manufactured by culture and its possibilities are previously encoded to the degree that the instrument facilitates facility. Implicit in the instrument are techniques for playing it; the knowledge one can have

on an instrument is mapped out progressively in terms of a training that allows the musician to move only a certain way and thereby forces the instrument to sound only a certain way.' (Corbett in Jackson 2016**,** 39)

'The instrument [is] designed by and for men; I have small little fingers, and my hands aren't that big. Having to try and adjust on quick passages is difficult. It's not just because of my co-ordination, it's the instrument itself.'
Female oboist (appendix V, 36)

Clarinettist Tom Jackson argues that instrument design should facilitate the intention and requirement of the performer. He tells us that the intention of instrument design coupled with the inherent physical character of the instrument provide the most important resource improvisers can utilise. The instrument is an ally in the act of improvising, to be interacted with and explored.

'For improvisers … instrumentality (what it is designed for) and materiality (the innate physical characteristics) are crucial considerations, which we can think of as different archives of the instrument to interrogate.'
(Jackson 2020,5)

The modern professional oboe[38] is highly engineered and delicate. It's sensitive to temperature and any slight knock can dislodge complex keywork. Either or both impact on tuning and sounding. As a result, oboists tend to avoid spaces where their instruments are vulnerable. In chapter two I discuss the small intimate places where free improvisation is practised. In chapter three I describe the hot and humid atmosphere in Iraq, the location of one of my improvisings, which made my instruments vulnerable. Such sensitivity is another barrier to participation in the music for oboists.

Henry Dagg,[39] instrument maker, musician, sound engineer and composer, is fascinated by instrumentality and materiality and the potential they offer. His free

[38] See p5 regarding the oboes I play.
[39]See p6 for an explanation of Dagg's relevance to my research and appendix V, 54 for a transcript of my interview with him.

improvisation with Evan Parker[40] is facilitated by electronic machines he designs and builds which are specific to each performance. Dagg sees the design and construction of these as just as important as his spontaneity in the free improvisations they undertake together (Dagg and Parker, 2022).

Dagg's design and building of my gliss anglais has been intriguing to observe. The irony of working with a male designer and maker in this way is not lost on me and I must point, again, to my position in this research regarding *masculine* and *feminine* behaviours existing in bodies of either sex. Dagg's free improvisations with Parker are collaborative and supportive of Parker's individual voice[41]. My diary extract describes the effect of that on me during a performance at Free Range in Canterbury.

Sunday December 5th 2022
Evan and Henry were extending and augmenting both the tape loop as instrument, and Evan's playing. Technically Evan's mastery of circular breathing and overtone looping is groundbreaking. The simultaneous manipulation of that by Henry takes this to another, quite breathtaking level- there is something extraordinary, almost super-natural, and consequently emotionally exhilarating in being present at such a live and intimate performance. The audience see Evan but hear super- natural soundings from him via Henry's machine and his work upon it.

Together with his careful listening and response to my needs regarding the gliss anglais, my perception of Dagg is that his improvising behaviour is *feminine*, and it acts in the male realm of engineering and instrument design and construction (Doubleday 2008,15). My gliss anglais is a product of my sonic imaginings, facilitated by his creative and practical response to my ideas.

Jackson does not consider gender or emotion in his discussions about instruments as tools (2106 and 2020). Given that one's physicality is also one's sex the fact that instruments are designed by and for men means this debate simply may not have, as a man, occurred to him. It is an important omission and weakens his argument. See Jackson (2016, 32-43) for a description of the role of the instrument as a tool in free improvisation and his personal application and adaptation of this. All his citations and references are male.

Christopher Redgate's 'Howarth-Redgate Oboe' (Redgate 2012)[42] is a stunning instrument which enables even more precision (via greater complexity) in extended

[40] See p6 for an explanation of Parker's relevance to my research.
[41] To hear what this sounds like listen to Dagg and Parker (2022).
[42] For a review of the development process of this instrument see Bogiages (2015, 20-23).

technique. It's an example of what I am emphatically not doing in my practice. Devised in response to the demands being made by the composer on the performer, this oboist feels that, though a fabulous development, it is yet another embodiment of *masculine* sonic imaginings and striving for technical precision. It extends the current 833 available multiphonics (an impressive number in itself) to 2,548. Oboist Melinda Maxwell is uneasy about this instrument given the existing inherent capacity of the oboe to play quarter tones and pitch bend (Maxwell in appendix V). Catherine Plugyers told me that this oboe was built specifically to suit Redgate's sonic taste and is not for her. (Plugyers in appendix V).

Instead of striving for the microcosmic detail inherent in the capacity to play so many multiphonics, in undertaking free improvisation on my instruments I am also rejecting such precise technicality and external demand on my gesture and output because,

'Oboists … need a place where the definition of what constitutes a beautiful sound is openly challenged and constantly reinvented, and where the only pre-requisites for entrance are an open mind, and a desire to learn and try new things….'
(Bogiages and Silveira Campos 2014, 179).

1.3 Formal tuition for oboists

It is unheard of in the UK for an improvising musician whose first instrument is the oboe to be self-taught. 'The reason there aren't many women oboists who can improvise is that it's a numbers game. If you had loads of self-taught oboists, they would filter in but that doesn't exist for our instrument because it has to be taught' (Plugyers appendix V). Oboe technique is passed down through formal instrumental tuition in music centres, conservatoires, and universities with music departments of sufficient scale to have an oboe teacher on their staff. This limits the number of oboists in comparison with the much larger numbers learning sax and clarinet.

'…the oboe is SO difficult–it's such a difficult instrument to play; you have to make a good sound, which requires a particular technique. I don't think any self-taught musician could do that. Oboists are highly trained.'
Catherine Plugyers oboist (appendix V, 46)

This does raise the question of whether, because formal tuition is and always has been the tradition, an autodidactic approach to learning the oboe could facilitate the precision required of a classical player. Certainly, improvising multi-instrumentalists like Yusef Lateef have developed facility on the instrument but even Lateef needed the guidance of a classically trained oboist[43]. The lack of an autodidactic tradition here is entangled with the rarity of the instrument in the realm of improvisation where self-teaching is a tradition of the practice.

Partly a result of technical challenge, there has been a perception of improvisation as an inappropriate practice for oboists to pursue. Bassoonist and oboe player Lindsay Cooper was a notable exception to that. A founding member of the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG) with Maggie Nicols[44], Cooper trained at the Royal Academy of Music. Her experience with FIG led to her rejection of such classical confine. She hadn't realised until she started working with FIG that her ability as an improviser matched the technical aptitude she had developed in training. (Smith 2001, 234-236).

1.4 Techniques

In the introduction I explained the distinction I make between physical technique and intellectual practice discussed in this chapter. It would be difficult to find a musician in any genre who did not agree that physical technique as a musical tool is essential. Musicians refine technique through repetitive practise of the physical skill and dexterity required to navigate and sound the instrument. Chapter four part two example ii is a recording of an improvisation in which my conventional technique facilitates my sounding in a physically demanding situation. Such technique is dictated by the instrument designer. These techniques have been taught and learnt by UK oboists via the creation and practise of technical studies for 150 years or so. In particular, eminent oboist George Gillet's *Studies for the advanced teaching of the oboe* first published in 1909 and still an essential for oboe students.[45]

[43] See https://yuseflateef.com/about-yusef-lateef/ (accessed 12/6/24). Lateef took lessons with Ronald Odermark of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.
[44] See p6 for an explanation of Nicols's relevance to my research.
[45] See Gillet (1936), and Bogiages (2014, 174-175) for further information on this.

The 2023 AQA Music A' level syllabus[46] assessment grids separate the 'musical' from the technical. For their purposes technique and its mastery refers to precise and accurate conventional manipulation of the instrument, as directed by the score. Though this clarification is important to my argument, it is not the purpose or intention of this thesis to define and discuss the detail and nature of instrumental technique. For a thorough analysis of this and its application see *The Oxford Handbook of Music Performance* (2022).

Our instruments embody the sonic imaginings of their male creators then. 'The instrument – that's the matter – the stuff – your subject.' (Steve Lacy in Bailey, 1993, 99). To fully realise their burgeoning potential, the pursuit of an ever more assured technique was and is valued and respected by improviser and listener alike (Burwell in Toop and Beresford 2016, 19:7).

'Jazz music has always been to do with instrumental technique and developing it on specific instruments, whereas in other areas of music it doesn't seems so important…'
(Burwell in Toop and Beresford 2016, 19:7)

I now turn to virtuosity, a problematic word for musicians, given its association with hyper-technique, or exceptional technical facility.

1.5 The nature of virtuosity

It's necessary to address the nature and perceptions of virtuosity here because valuing the individual technical prowess I've described, and foregrounding it in improvisation is, for my purposes, a *masculine* behaviour. I return to the topic later in this chapter. Maggie Nicols points to the dictionary definition, before critically examining it as an unhelpful capitalist commodification of music.

'A virtuoso is a highly skilled performer, and a virtuoso performance is one that astonishes the audience by its feats.'
(Merriam Webster Dictionary in Nicols, M. in Devenish and Hope 2023,79)

[46] Available at; https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/music/a-level/music-7272/scheme-of-assessment#Component_2_Performance_assessment_grids (accessed 10.12.23)

Virtuosity is also a term commonly associated with a conservatoire education and is enjoying recent debate by musicians and academics. Such institutions, I go on to demonstrate, prioritise the acquisition of technical prowess among their students. (See appendix II, p4-12 for statistics regarding how many free improvisers received formal tuition like this).

Louise Devenish and Cat Hope attempt a broad contemporary definition which is explored in a series of discursive chapters, of which Nicol's essay on social virtuosity is one, in their 2023 publication *Contemporary Virtuosities*. Their definition of virtuosity as, in part, embodied, experiential and social, for me, suggests an, autotheoretical component which merits further investigation.

MacDonald's mastery and mystery skillsets (Wilson and MacDonald 2012,7) and his endeavours to define contemporary new virtuosities[47] consider each of the conventional skills musicians must possess (listening, breath control and so forth) as combined in 'technical mastery that is viewed as virtuosic'. (MacDonald in McPherson 2022,222). MacDonald goes on to point out that 'broader creative skills [ ] may also be viewed as virtuosic' (MacDonald in McPherson 2022,223). His categorisation of skills into technical, creative, and intellectual highlights criticisms of instrumental tutors focusing solely on technique, neglecting other essential skills.

1.6 Technique and gender

Female 'sexed bodies' and the instruments they play can be understood as '..the objects of others' affective responses.' (Ahåll 2018,41). Therefore, I argue, the perceived masculinity of instruments hindered women's agency and visibility in improvisation until recently.

Free improviser Caroline Kraabel[48], self-taught, wanted to play the saxophone with other women in part because she was tired of being told she sounded and played like a man. She founded Mass Producers in 1998; a group of 20 women saxophone players who used their instrument and their voices (Brand 2015). Krekels (2019,113) confirms that a female instrumentalist seeking to be heard as a free improviser would have to conform her female body and improvising voice to a technique, sonic vocabulary, and an instrument devised by and for men. This androcentricity can act as a significant barrier to the ability to

[47] See also MacDonald, R., & Saarikallio, S. (2024).
[48] See p6 for an explanation of Kraabel's relevance to my research and chapter 2, 2.12.

articulate one's improvisational style as a woman. It also, probably unintentionally, serves to unite and empower the male exponents of the genre who experience no such restriction to improvising with a distinctive individual voice. Judith Butler's (2004,28) norm in this context is male, and the instrument an embodiment of it. As an oboist it is particularly difficult given the technical challenge the instrument presents and its rare appearance in free improvisation.

The very fact that an article titled *Women in Music* (Tick 2001) exists in *Grove's Dictionary of Music* is evidence of music's universally androcentric nature; women are an exception to that which therefore needs cataloguing. Regarding instruments, this is particularly marked. In this article, feminist music theorist Judith Tick outlines the way in which, over time, women instrumentalists have fought to participate in musical performance work. Because domestic responsibilities limited their access, and perceptions of self-learning by women as inappropriate prevailed, taking teaching positions using the skills they had acquired through formal instruction became the norm (Tick 2001,18).

This gives us insight into the continuing gender disparity in free improvisation and music more broadly. It also explains why women instrumentalists in classical performance and improvisation in this country are far more likely to have received formal instruction on their instruments than men. The gender disparity continues. The Musician's Census 2024 (Woods et al 2024, 9-11) which surveyed 5,867 musicians, 2526 of them female, in music tells us that women musicians have higher levels of music education than men, yet earn less, and have greater primary caring responsibilities. 69% of those women surveyed worked in classical music and 34% in jazz and blues. No separate distinction for free improvisation was made.

1.7 Private corrective practise

The instrument, Jackson (2016) has rightly established, is our tool. As such our improvising relationship with it, as with our collaborators, is formative and responsible for the sounding of our musical voice (Butcher 2011). For classical performers, this relationship is developed through rigorous hours of private practise. Only when a technical gesture has been mastered is it presented on the concert stage.

'I was lazy with scales. I .. wasn't as dedicated as you need to be to be a super oboist. But I was interested in what the instrument could do…. If you're an improviser you like to find the funny fingerings ...'

Georgina Brett oboist (appendix V, 22)

Anna Bull (2019,75-76) explains the labouring and submission of our own creative voice such practising requires. 'Practising 'properly' means looking for what is wrong and correcting it.' This correction of mistakes is '…a repetitive scrubbing away at what is wrong…' Bull points to metaphors around cleaning and dirt which are common in the language classical musicians use to describe their work. The satisfaction gained from playing correctly both individually and in an ensemble is often cited by the subjects in her study (Bull 2019,75). For them, as was my experience in the classical domain, such satisfaction in collaboration comes solely from the 'hard slog' I experienced in my practise. I am grateful for and make use of the technical proficiency I now have, however. The quiet muted playing you can hear in chapter four (4.2) would not be possible without it. For Maggie Nicols, private practise has always been enjoyable because it is rooted in and related to her collaborative experience as a free improvising musician.[49]

Pianist Steve Beresford[50] recognised the isolation and lack of creativity of private practise as a challenge in 1978.

'One of the biggest problems is how people actually privatise particular facets of their music … and how people's problems with their music are only dealt with in private situations.….that would be best dealt … in a less privatised situation….how they see most or all of those problems as technical in the traditional sense, and technique problems are seen as just private problems, ….'

(Toop et al. 2016. 1978. 19:11)

This practise is, in part, a disposal of all sounds and gestures which fall outside of the accepted classical technical canon for the instrument. Libby van Cleve's *Oboe Unbound* (2014) is the contemporary oboist's manual of what is deemed acceptable and how to

[49] See appendix V, 71 for the full interview transcript.

[50] See p6 for an explanation of Beresford's relevance to my research.

attain it, including an extensive repertoire of recently developed extended techniques[51]. Some of these extended techniques are only achievable on the heavy, complex 'professional' instrument models cited earlier.

Instrumental practise to hone technique then, was and is an entirely separate and negative private rigour for the classical musician (Bull 2019,76). In free improvisation it is also, as Toop et al (2016,19, 4-12), articulate, a shared, self-developmental positive process, entwined with the act of improvisation itself[52]. The sounds improvisers wanted and wished to make were often imagined in rehearsal and refined, with one's instrument, in private practise. This self-teaching and its shared development in the rehearsal room may be a legacy of the jazz heritage a number of these musicians had in common. This is discussed later in this chapter. The twentieth century introduction of 'extended techniques' in the classical domain is seen in the next section to further augment the physical requirements imposed on the oboist.

1.8 Extended technique and oboes in free improvisation

Extended techniques for the oboe were introduced in the late twentieth century in response to requests from composers to extend its sonic capability.

'In the "extended" form of playing, oboists ….must be able to push their embouchures to the extreme even using teeth on the reed in some cases – all with much more speed and agility than in traditional playing.'
(Bogiages and Silveira Campos 2014, 176-7)

In Britain, technically exceptional oboists like Christopher Redgate and Melinda Maxwell (see appendix V, 37 interview with Maxwell) have been exploring this catalogue of techniques (Van Cleve 2014) as performers, improvisers and composers throughout this time. Of these two only Redgate's improvisations are 'free'. Redgate's free improvisation utilises the full range of his conventional extended techniques, including those made

[51] Listen to Redgate playing *Sting of the Bee* on Redgate (2006) to hear a virtuosic free improvisation using conventional extended multiphonic techniques.
[52] Eddie Prevost's London Improvisation Workshop is a weekly practice. It has been active for 22 years. Despite being male dominated, close listening and the social and environmental and exploratory dimension of playing has always been the focus.

available on his Howarth-Redgate oboe. They do not extend the timbral palette beyond the accepted sonic palette in the oboe canon.

Free improvisation is an excellent way to investigate the sonic capacity of our instrument to the full, yet still, most oboists do not undertake it, preferring to subsume experimentation in favour of the rigour of the technical perfection typified by Redgate[53]. Thanks largely to the work of Libby van Cleve (2014), progress is being made in the absorption of composer-directed extended techniques into our technical canon. However, in female contemporary free improvising circles in this country only classically trained oboists Catherine Plugyers, Georgina Brett and I appear to be venturing into the realm of personalising our techniques to suit our improvising voices.

'[if children learning the oboe were free to improvise] …it might shift the repertoire... improve the mental side of playing and therefore also generally in life! ... It might make us freer …and result in more exciting, risk taking music making, … I think classical training and the world of free improv could positively inform one another.'
Lorraine Hart oboist (appendix V, 33)

Given the freedom[54] inherent in free improvisation, this reluctance among oboists to undertake it may stem from the overwhelmingly formal teaching culture and circumstance in which their technical practice is learnt. The oboist Kyle Bruckmann (Everett Ganong 2016, 21-25) argues that this message focuses the interests of young practitioners on striving for technical perfection rather than developing an improvising voice. The oboist must adapt the internal voice in response, not to the masculinity of the genre as with free improvisation, but to the demand of uniform technical perfection.

I now describe the ways in which free improvisers, in stark contrast, evolve techniques through positive self-development. This highlights a challenge for classically trained instrumentalists, who must 'unlearn' formal techniques in order to express themselves in free improvisation.

[53] Oboist Lorraine Hart (appendix V, 26) describes her commitment to this rigour and feels classical training would also be of benefit to free improvisers.
[54] See p20

1.9 Self-taught technique in free improvisation

In my free improvising communities, in the main, exponents with agency and visibility were and continue to be, self-taught[55]. By that I mean that these instrumentalists have taken the lead, from the beginning of their learning and performing lives, in developing a technique that works for them, rather than it being imposed on them through classical training.

The sound imaginings of free improvisers were and are often mediated via personal utilisation of unconventional sounds on their instruments to extend the sonic palette available to them (Butcher in Jackson 2016, 36). This can also be described as extended technique (Lipsitz in Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz 2013,38-9), albeit one which is a self-prescribed and developed exploration of the sonic world at their fingertips.

Free improviser and saxophonist John Butcher is critical of the imposition of traditionally taught extended techniques on performers by composers imagining alternate sonic worlds. He describes them as 'awkward appendages' (Butcher 2011) which bear no relation to the requirement or character of the performer. For oboists whose technique, as we've seen, has been tightly prescribed in formal tuition over the last 150 years or so, I argue that the entirety of our technique may be viewed in this way. Free improvisers have no such limitation. Butcher goes on to describe these self-developed extended techniques by free improvisers as an '…intrinsic, inseparable part of the music and a completely necessary part of the artist's sound…' (ibid).

1.10 Self-developed techniques in free improvisation

Instrumental technique, whether self-taught or formally instructed, and its rigorous practice is what Wilson and MacDonald (2012,7), in their research with members of the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra, (a British free improvising ensemble) call 'mastery.' Technique for improvisers who are self-taught cannot be understood as separate from the broader skillset (which encompasses the intellectual realm I explained in the introduction) they develop over time[56]. The enjoyment of collaborative practice, and its creative and exploratory purpose in free improvisation contrasts with the established paradigm in classical ensembles, learnt through orchestral rehearsals by young classical musicians in

[55] See appendix II, 4-12 for statistics in relation to this.

[56] For a detailed discussion of what these are and how they are applied in collaborative improvisation see Toop et al. (2016,19, 4-12), Wilson and MacDonald (2020) and MacDonald in MacPherson (2022).

training. Bull (2019,81) explains, and my own experience supports, that intention and practice is corrective and negative. The conductor, who epitomises *masculine* behaviour and purpose as I have defined it in the introduction, stops and starts the ensemble to correct musical aspects of their practice. Additionally, self-improvement by individual musicians is a constant exercise throughout the rehearsal regarding intonation, phrasing, tuning and so forth.

As an oboist my classical training and professional life necessitated the offering of an 'A' to my orchestra to which they must tune. The naked terror many oboists experience in training when exposed in such a way is experienced by many orchestral students on all instruments. Bull (2019,83) in discussing the fear of inaccuracy the subjects of her study reported in orchestral rehearsals found that '… possibly the most powerful effect of wrongness is shame. This was most often connected with tuning…' Bull goes on to cite Sara Ahmed's assertion that the sensation of shame is experienced when exposing that which should remain out of view. (Ahmed 2004 in Bull 2019, 83). For me, this was a powerful sensation for many years. Oboist Melinda Maxwell (appendix V, 37) feels oboists must develop fearlessness if they wish to play first oboe in an orchestra, given the 'horrible feeling' she describes when a solo is approaching. It was only my emerging practice as a free improviser which helped me to understand its origins and work to correct it. This was the stimulus for the composition of my invitation score[57] *A* which is discussed in chapter four.

Adopting and developing a new paradigm regarding collaborative practise and individual technique forms part of the desire of free improvisers to do away with the musical rule book, in all its forms, including its rehearsal hegemony, and find a new way to sound (Bailey 1992,4). Morris (in Bogiages, 2015, 33) points to their utilisation of instrumental technique from a broad spectrum of musical genres. Borgo (in Bogiages, 2015, 33) tells us that the utilisation of what are understood as extended techniques by classical performers are widely applied in free improvisation. In addition, free improvisers, as Jackson (2016, 32-43) has described, develop their own extended techniques to achieve

[57] See chapter 2, 2.9 for an introduction to the concept of the invitation score and its position within my practice.

the sonic palette they require. This is my experience, and a part of my practice explored in chapter three.

Oboist Kyle Bruckmann describes his own freely improvising development of new oboistic techniques and sounds like this as, 'backwards', as he came across them not through study guided by a professor, but through individual explorations and experimentations kept hidden from his teachers of the time.' (Bruckmann in Bogiages 2015, 33) It's significant that Bruckmann had to hide this experimentation from his oboe teachers. Such practice and, for me, its tacitly autotheoretical nature is frowned on by classical oboists[58].

1.11 Technique and agency in free improvisation[59]

Pianist Irene Schweizer, one of the few female free improvisers to gain validation and agency in the music and its community in London in the 1960s and 1970s had no such restrictive technical tutoring and, like Derek Bailey and Evan Parker was self-taught (Weiss 2012, 82-91). Much of what Schweizer learnt as a free improviser was gleaned in clubs like Ronnie Scott's in London in the early 1960s. From this grew her knowledge of the emerging free improvisation scene in London and her involvement with it. She enjoyed the freedom of expression, inspiration, and influence that came with that (Weiss 2012, 82-91).

The small number of women instrumentalists, including Maggie Nicols who plays piano and sings, who have gained visibility and agency in my free improvising communities since then have, in the main, been self-taught, or have rejected their formal training, seeing it as unduly restrictive.[60] A notable example of this is classically trained bassoonist and oboist Lindsay Cooper who, with Nicols and Schweizer, was a founder member of the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG). Her initial insistence on only including technically assured women performers in FIG dissipated as her experience with improvisation and Nicols' insistence on inclusivity grew. As a result, her relationship with the oboe and bassoon diminished in favour of the saxophone, on which she had the self-taught freedom to express herself (Smith 2001, 233-234).

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[58] See appendix III, 13 for a catalogue of the techniques I have developed over the course of my free improvising practice. See also appendix V, 26 for Lorraine Hart's description of the rigour and precision of formal training and practise.

[59] See appendix II, 4-12 for statistics on this among a cohort of London based free improvisers.

[60] ibid

More recently, violinist, hurdy gurdy player and composer Stevie Wishart[61], though primarily dedicated to composition in the present day, was an active free improviser in the London free improvising community and in Australia from the 1990s onwards. Wishart was classically trained as a violinist and composer. She doesn't reject the formal teaching she received but considers the hurdy gurdy more suited to her free improvising because it's '…culturally and temporally neutral. It's …ideal for improvisation. Perhaps it makes sense then as my improvising instrument, because what a lot of improvising is about is not having these categorizations. With the grand piano or the violin, for example, there is all that historical baggage. The hurdy-gurdy doesn't have that – it's a free spirit. (Denzler and Guionnet 2020,144).

Earlier in this chapter I pointed to the fragility and financially valuable physicality of my oboe and its unsuitability for the often hot and small spaces in which free improvisation is performed. Having performed with Wishart, it's clear that the hurdy gurdy - like my gliss anglais - is less technically challenging to play. It's also less physically fragile and financially valuable than her violin so better suited to the physically restricted spaces in which we play. This section bridges the gap between 'then,' exposing the androcentrism in classical training and early free improvisation, and 'now,' where we challenge these norms through feministing[62] practices. I distinguish between technical prowess and the intellectual process of jazz improvisation. Several early free improvisation pioneers in my communities emerged from this tradition, its influence shaping their approach.

1.12 Virtuosic technical and intellectual entanglement[63]

Virtuosity was tacitly understood as technical prowess in the mid twentieth century jazz community from which free improvisation emerged. American jazz flautist Charles Lloyd, '…whose virtuosity outran his imagination…' (Hewett 2024) was perceived by his contemporaries to have greater technical than intellectual improvisatory proficiency. For them, this was a shortcoming. In jazz, alongside the pursuit of such technique sat equal relish for the intellectually imaginative, accomplished development of an improvised idea to its logical conclusion. Such intellectual agility around often complex chord changes and

[61] See p6 for an explanation of Wishart's significance to my research. Her work is discussed further in chapter 2, 2.10.
[62] See p15 feministing.
[63] See p15 for an explanation of how I separate these realms in this thesis.

in response to the contribution of other ensemble members can only be practiced with others. The valuing of such intellectual and technical precision is, Pauline Oliveros in Fischlin, Heble and Monson (2004, 54) tells us, a *masculine* trait. Jazz improvisation has an identity that is, as a result, male. Consequently, 'women have had to be largely written out of jazz, in order to prevent them from rewriting the power structure of discourse itself.' (Willis 2008, 294)

1.13 Valorisation of the soloist

I now uncover the *masculine* soloistic practice at the heart of the jazz tradition free improvisation emerged from. With its roots in the complex harmonic progressions over which jazz soloists would improvise long, often rapid, and well-crafted improvisations, intellectual mastery (made possible by technical mastery) was seen as an articulation of the individual 'logos' by practitioners and fans of the music. This logos was largely performed by male instrumentalists and received by male audiences at the time[64]. These improvisations were spontaneous conversations, intellectual debates in a harmonic language which required its accomplished mastery if one was to participate.

Eminent jazz instrumentalists like Miles Davis (Kahn 2001,25), and Evan Parker's inspiration, saxophonist John Coltrane (Thomas 1976, 14-17), have famously honed their improvising voice in a way that is aligned with the technical facility they have, and which develops over time. Soloistic technique, individual intellectual prowess in improvisation, and consequent sonic character for them are inextricably entwined. Eminent British jazz trumpet player Chris Batchelor's technical evolution at the time is an example of this.[65] Intellectual facility in improvisation falls within Wilson and MacDonald's (2012,7) 'mystery repertoire.' Instrumental technique is not essential for this, other skills could be called into play. As an oboist however, my practice, as defined by my teachers, has historically

[64] For an interesting take on the gender difference in expression of *logos* see Cixous (in Moi 1995, 105, 112 and 191). She takes from Derrida in describing western thinking as consistently privileging the *logos.* She felt that men suffer castration anxiety which causes them to keep this logos hidden. In women their logos was ever present and embodied.

[65] Batchelor studied at Leeds College of Music from 1980-1983. His interest was in the creative character of his improvisation and with developing compositional skills. At the time Miles Davis and Chet Baker were inspiring for him. Both had far from perfect technical prowess which they used to their advantage with regard to space, phrasing and melodic shape in improvisation. Batchelor followed suit. Over the years since then his technical prowess has significantly increased but always in order to shape the melodic character he requires rather than be able to play 'high and fast' for its own sake.

prioritised the pursuit of technical virtuosity not such intellectual prowess. All the oboists interviewed for this research share that experience (see appendix V, 21).

Tom Jackson (2016,19) describes the melding of the technical and intellectual in collaborative free improvisation in which 'skill is redefined to demonstrate the ability to create and develop relationships…' Here he is referring to musical communication in a collaboration. For me, this facility with relationships is both a musical and social feature of my own free improvising practice. Emphasis on technical and intellectual facility in performance as defined by Jackson and Prévost (1995,5) is (Reardon Smith, Denson and Tomlinson 2020,11) favoured by men[66]. Women tend to prioritise and value timbral quality, relationships, emotion, and an embodied connection with their instrument (Dyson 2006,3). Rosenberg and Reardon-Smith (2020, 68) define this as 'sound use of body, of emotion,' in our own practice. This is aided by the autotheoretical re-imagining of the instruments best fitted to this purpose, and the valuing of the interpersonal and collaborative. This is discussed further in chapter three.

1.14 Breadth and depth in virtuosity

In the sixteenth century virtuosity had a broad meaning and involved knowledge, intellect and cultural pursuit alongside social standing and moral virtue. (Impett 2023, 17). Such virtuosity could not be deemed to exist if it hadn't been heard and observed. For the listener and observer, it gave a view of the capacity of humanity at once unattainable yet within reach of the performer. This developed through eighteenth century political, philosophical and cultural understandings and norms. For music, Impett tells us that the travelling 'virtuosi' of the nineteenth century led to the concept becoming singularly associated with a technical brilliance yet emotional emptiness.

For the first London based free improvisers particularly a technically mesmerising improviser like Evan Parker, this sixteenth century notion of the virtuoso as being an imparter, holder and delivery mechanism for ideas which stretched the potential of humanity seems appropriate.

[66] See p14 for my subjective distinction of these as *masculine* and *feminine*.

'The virtuoso is a shaman–showman sensing the readiness of the audience to be led to a new understanding, but one that is ephemeral, …. In witnessing, in nearly participating in the performance, the observer learns something about themselves, and by virtue of their connection with both the virtuoso and others present, about the nature and potential of humanity.'

(Impett 2023, 20-21)

Thinking about and perceptions of virtuosity for these musicians, encompassed not just the technical and intellectual realms I have explored, but also the moral purpose of expressing the improvisation itself. There is insufficient space here to explore this further but it's important to point to improvisers like John Coltrane, a huge influence for Parker. He and others like him can be described as devotees to something higher than the expression of personal ego. Technical virtuosity for them, offered flexibility regarding what the music itself might need, rather than the potential for further valorisation[67].

This broader, deeper definition of virtuosity can be applied to the musicians who imagined and developed free improvisation (see chapter two for more detail). For these early exponents, it was essential for their music to do away with existing norms and conventions (Bailey 1993, 83). Theirs was the morally virtuous high ground of rejecting the stagnated imperialism of classical music constructs and the embedded tropes of jazz improvisation in favour of music that was free of hierarchy and open to all new ideas.

Such playing is bound with a display and expression of individualism and brought with it an elevated social standing in the free improvising community in London that evolved around it. In part this is because the music was performative in that it was conveyed on stage. The CD hadn't yet been invented and recording an LP was an expensive undertaking[68]. To hear the music, you had to see it and be in the presence of the 'virtuoso' who conveyed it. *Musics* (Toop et al 2016) came into existence to ask questions, debate ideas, pursue greater understanding, and spread the knowledge and intellectual debate that such performative expressions of these ideas conveyed more widely[69]. These performative and discursive articulations were also competitive given the need even for a

[67] For a discussion of logos, thought, and the state of grace perceived in and by improvisers like Kieth Jarrett and John Coltrane perceive in their improvisations see Moreno (1999, 78-88)

[68] Evan Parker and Derek Bailey founded Incus records in response to this.

[69] See appendix II, 4-12 for statistics on gender balance among contributors to this publication.

free improviser to make a living. To do so required performance opportunities given that gigs at that time were paid and recording sessions few in number if you lacked reputation and therefore status.

Paradoxically, because modesty is a tacit requirement in anyone with true moral standing (and free improvisers, in my experience, are and were politically and morally driven), the pursuit of such status and any visibility that came with it wasn't and isn't undertaken as an end in itself. The virtuosity of these musicians had to be perceived by others and therefore assigned to them rather than sought.

Despite the integrity implicit in this virtuous activity, virtuosity and the virtuoso when perceived in this way can be easily reduced to a quantifiable commodity. In other words, one who has significant agency in the music economy. Without their audience, individual virtuosity, given not taken, was as unattainable as the gig fee needed to pay the rent. These gigs occurred in small spaces where most of the audience, promoters and performers were male (Krekels 2019,57), the technically assured solo was revered, and the *masculine* behaviour was challenging for women to negotiate. This is discussed in chapter two.

Taking from the descriptions of technical development so far, I now demonstrate the distinction between striving for the individual expression sought by free improvisers and the prioritising of 'making with' as a feministing approach to free improvisation. Embodied technique, precarity and imprecision are examined as important facets of my approach.

1.15 Embodied technique and its ventriloqual agency

In the introduction I explain what, for my purposes, constitutes embodied cognition and technique. My practice explores the idea of an embodied technique that is independent of the *masculine* sediment inherent in my instrument. In part it questions how many techniques there could be and whether they could operate without the notion of composed material - in free improvisation for example (Spatz 2015,182 on gender). One of these, for me, is autotheoretical. The technique AS the theory.

Improvising musicians like saxophonist Tina Krekels and trombonist Sarah Gail Brand are aware of the role of the body in shaping their playing. Lakoff and Johnson (1999) in Rose (2017,131) articulate the importance of this and suggest that the same neurological process involved in bodily movement such as that required of a musician is also central to acts of intellectual conception like improvisation. Berliner (1994) in Rose (2017,131) explains that

the language used to describe the improvisations conceived by these processes is filled with references to space and this embodiment. As performers we 'feel' improvisation, we 'move' through the performance, the movement is 'fast', or 'slow' and so on. Such language echoes the embodiment present in our conception of an improvisation (Jackson 2016, 3). It's fundamentally an autotheoretical understanding of ourselves made sonic, facilitated by instrument use.

The application of this self-knowledge among all improvisers is essential and becomes intuitive over time. It's what drives us to avoid over preparation and analysis before a performance and allows us to trust our bodies to perform and embody our improvising voices successfully. It facilitates embodied interactions with other improvisers and demands the separation of spoken discussion and embodied improvising (Oliveros in Rose (2017,141).

My embodied relationship with my instruments is a conscious rejection of the gendered *masculine* sedimented canon of soloistic technique, behaviour and knowledge discussed in this chapter and inherent in free improvisation as we have come to understand it in Britain. This does not exclude, rather it usually includes, striving for traditionally understood individual technical and intellectual rigour with a combination of private and collaborative practice. It's an exploration in part of my gender and its embodiment within and without my technique and sounding.

When approaching the gliss anglais[70] its contingent soundings are facilitated by my touch. They are the product of my intention, experience, situation and identity. My experience (my sediment you could say) includes my learning as an oboist both formal, circumstantial, and cumulative. Swanwick and Tillman's influential 1986 learning spiral is a useful visual description of this.

[70] See chapter 3, 3.3.

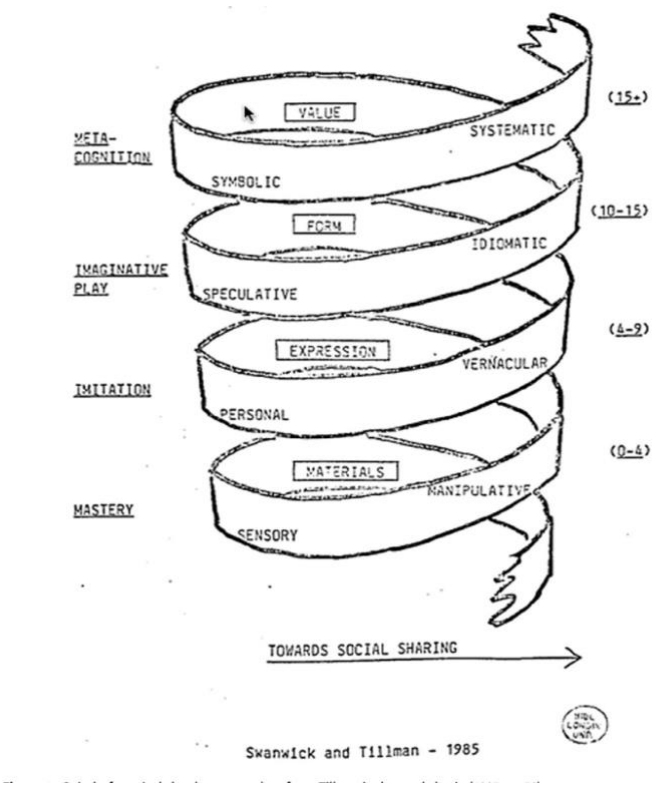

Figure 1. Swanwick and Tillman's learning spiral 1985 (Anderson 2022,33)

The physical gestures which are part of my embodied cognitive action in performing with this instrument form part of the 'mastery' layer in this spiral. My free improvising occurs in and above the upper 'meta-cognition' spiral level. This gestural palette has a meta-cognitive agency of its own. It acts from the mastery layer, as a ventriloquist from past learning, shifting my body and the movement of breath through it in response to what I hear and see from others. I am not conscious of the puppetry my present self undertakes in response to the guidance offered by this past self in the form of a ventriloqual palette. It acts upon and with me and my instrument, influencing the sonic outpourings I and the listener receive in a constant feedback loop of ventriloquy, action, outcome and influence. Because of this, one could argue that my free improvising is occurring at a sensory level while these actions by and upon me, occur simultaneously. There is insufficient space here to debate this but it's an interesting idea. It might look something like this.

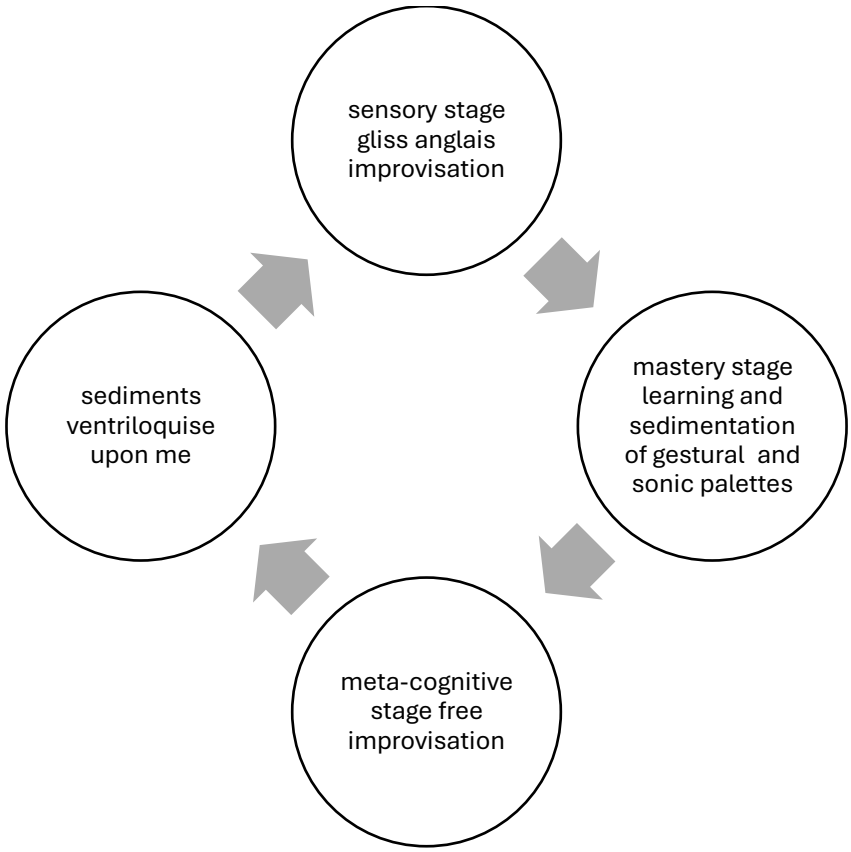

Figure 2. Free improvising learning loop. Maureen Wolloshin 2024.

Ventriloquy, or the notion of soundings coming from '…elsewhere literally, metaphorically, or through technology…a metaphorical severing of the hegemony of the master (score, text, composer) over its (voice, instrument, performer) puppet,' (Waeckerlé 2020) was explored in the *here. here* concert series in London in 2020[71]. The dissolution of performative 'mastery' over instrument via an acceptance of this ventriloquy-in this case the influence of learnt technique via embodied cognition on interactions with my instrument, is, for me, another form of 'making with'. This "dissolution of performative mastery" through acceptance of ventriloquy aligns with the spiral's cyclical nature. It suggests a continuous process of learning and unlearning, where the performer's "voice" is shaped by a dynamic interplay between internal and external influences.

Cassie Hay (2010) tells us that in *Ventrakl,* a book which is written as a conversation between two writers, one alive, and one dead, 'Hawkey's preoccupation … is with the very nature of translation, which he thinks of as "a conversation or dialogue—and this means

[71] For more details see https://www.thebookroom.net/here-here-concept-ventriloquy-cage-ellis-oliveros-reage/ (accessed 10.2.24).

one is already entering a constructed, communal space."' The 'constructed communal space' is the story itself. We can think of my collaborative improvisation as a similarly constructed communal space in which my learnt technique is in dialogue with my body and impacting upon my gliss anglais. This contributes to the precarious contingency inherent in my performance with it, guiding my movement, shaping gesture and the soundings which emerge. You can hear this in the recordings discussed in chapter three part two. As my work with the gliss anglais develops, the idea of it becomes, in turn, another ventriloquist acting upon its situation.

1.16 Embracing precarity

Precarity is '…the condition of being vulnerable to others' (Tsing2015,20). As a woman in the *masculine* world of free improvisation I am vulnerable; my power is limited, and my agency and visibility have been challenged by my gender**.** My contemporary societal freedom to act as a white healthy British female free improviser is existentially precarious (Tsing 2015, 20). This is also the case for my free improvisation. I have demonstrated so far that if, as De Beauvoir (1948) tells us, we are all dependent on one another and the sum of our experience to date, then I cannot be truly free in my improvisings. My soundings are the product of my learnt self, location, and intuitive response to these. Precarity is therefore an inherent component of the dependency De Beauvoir describes.

This precarity is present in our socio-political reality. Before the advent of what Haraway calls the chuluthene, (the point beyond the anthropocene which, because of environmental destruction, requires humans to work with all occupants of the planet to secure our survival) (Rosenberg and Reardon-Smith 2020, 73), it did not occur to us to look to precarity and indeterminacy for a new way to progress; it was taken for granted that though individually our time was finite, our progress as a species was an implicit assumption. Our human ability to progress as a species beyond singularly finite individualism (Tsing 2015,21) has recently been doubted, however.

Fragkou (2020, 47) discusses theatre's '…response to and interaction with (the) contemporary risk and instability inherent in political reality.' At the outset of free improvisation in my communities, its practitioners were responding to their creative and political situation by freeing and articulating their individual sonic identities from the constraints they saw in conventional music and political practices of the day. My political

reality and that of my collaborators is filled with the precarity and risk Fragkou discusses here. Mattin describes what happens when this sense of self-identity is precariously destabilised by such precarity. He points to our contemporary societal situation as catastrophically facilitating this.

'Social dissonance can become a noise which one is no longer able to manage, and when this happens, the individual's self-perception as 'helpless' spirals out of control…..given the…increasing individualisation, … of society, we may expect many more 'catastrophic reactions'….'
(Mattin 2022,15)

Mattin is describing a contemporary fragmentation of sense of self within our socially dissonant society and the potentially damaging impact of that[72]. Concern regarding the destructive capacity of the 'helpless' sensation we experience is contributing to the work theorists like Haraway, Braidotti and Barad are making in defining the entangled way of making with or sympoeisis I argue for here as a contemporary solution. Their writings are clarifying what Fraser (2022, 241) calls a '…general wish for change in the paradigm away from the author as a single genius.'

Free improvisers at the outset of the genre valued soloistic technical and intellectual self-expression. Ingold (2022) argues that knowledge (to him the pursuit and application of information) and wisdom are separate, and that such valuing of intellectual acquisition and application of knowledge has encouraged a mindset which values and seeks out certainty. This, Ingold tells us, has caused us to overlook the value of attending to the world and what resides within it. To do so opens us to the possibility which is inherent in the unpredictable and precarious. He points us to the need to be attentive to rather than intent upon, and to accept that such attention is imbued with anticipation.

'Knowledge thrives on certainty and predictability. But in a certain world, where everything is joined up, nothing could live or grow. If a world of life is necessarily uncertain, it also opens up to pure possibility. To arrive at such possibility, however, we have to rethink the relation between doing and undergoing, or between intentional and attentional models of action.'
(Ingold 2022,1)

[72] See also Whalley and Waeckerlé (2024, 1.2)

Ingold's comparison of self and soul in this article - self being strengthened through the acquisition of knowledge and soul being nurtured through attentiveness to life's uncertain path - serves as a helpful distinction between the individualistic approach of these improvisers and the feministing approach I advocate for. This deepens the argument I present in this thesis, adding another dimension to the push away from the androcentricity of free improvisation and pull towards feministing my practice. I return to this facet of my approach in chapter two 'swarming,' and in part two when discussing my practice.

Implicit in Ingold's argument is the idea that pursuit of knowledge is an act of self-making and prioritisation which sees reason and predictability as achievable and laudable goals. These could be seen to be the pursuit of the soloistic intellectual and technical virtuosity I am arguing against. Ingold does not suggest that there needs to be a balance between knowledge and wisdom as he describes them, rather that attentiveness and openness to uncertainty will themselves bring the knowledge we need rather than the knowledge we seek. I take issue with the walking analogy he offers, however. He describes every step as precarious and a move into the unknown. Yet we have learnt the technique of walking and have the muscle memory from the billions of steps we have taken which assure us that this is not the case. Such embodied memory removes the precarity and creates a tacit certainty that we will not fall.

My practice as an oboist and music educator was, until the beginning of my journey into free improvisation, concerned with knowledge acquisition and application, error correction, and the certainty and predictability we have seen that this offers. The oboe is limited by the precision of its keywork and the technique required to master it. These are embodied in the technical facility we develop. But the appeal of free improvisation, for me, is the unpredictability and consequent precarity implicit in the freedom it offers. This is evident in the oboe improvisations discussed in chapter three part one[73]. Such improvisation offers me '…the wisdom that lies in taking the time to observe, about how the inherent uncertainty and anticipation with which we creep forward in life can nevertheless open to immense possibility…' (Ingold 2022,2)

[73] See appendix Iii, 13-18 for a list of these recordings and a list of new techniques which have emerged for me through this practice.

Knowledge of this, in part, lies behind the autotheoretical and collaborative approach to my practice explained in the introduction. In the shared spaces in which I work, I hope that techniques and strategies '..once discovered, become[] available for dissemination. As knowledge, it has the potential to travel beyond its community of origin and to effect widespread transformations far beyond the imagination of its original discoverers.' (Spatz 2015, 177). This diary extract offers an illustration of this transformation in practice.

Friday March 18t 2023 Meetings about Free Women, patternbook[74], and our upcoming gig.
I am realising that my ability to organise and think quickly isn't shared by a lot of the creatives that I work with which can make me frustrated.
I am also learning to be patient, listen, and allow the process to generate an outcome.
I realised that Free Women is evolving into something I quite like.
It is difficult to be a creative practitioner and have to work with admin constructs. It is also difficult to have worked effectively in these constructs and to step back from that way of doing things.
In a way this is informed by my feministing practice and the description of being together, making with and entanglement described by Rosa Braidotti, Salome Voegelin, Tim Ingold, Donna Haraway and Reardon-Smith. Trusting the act of collaborating to provide a good outcome. Which is an approach Emmanuelle Waeckerlé recommends. Another way of describing this comes from flautist Paul Cheneour 'the universe will provide' or my grandma's oft stated, 'what's for ye will nae go past ye'. Perhaps Braidotti and Voegelin are just moving to a more informed articulation of such metaphysical, fatalist approaches to living.

1.17 Imprecision and 'making with'

To put all this another way, in this section I explain that I am rejecting teleologically formed free improvisation in favour of a 'systemacity' (Tsing 2015,20) with unpredictability and precarity at its heart in my collaborations. This is not only symptomatic of my situation in the ecological instability of our contemporary situation, but more suited to the practice of a music intended to be free from any sonic rules and in which we may sound as we please. Alongside this is a welcoming of imprecision into my praxis.

'I don't attach my identity to how good I am as an oboist. … recently I put up a funny youtube video of me online because I got a new oboe reed. … I've realised you don't need to be the very best to … have something valid to contribute.'
Georgina Brett oboist (appendix V, 23)

[74] See p6 for an explanation of Free Women and patternbook's relevance to my research.

Oboist Molly McDolan (McDolan in Lehmann and Palme 2022, 261-270) discusses her rejection of the striving for precision common to all classical instrumentalists in their technical practise. We practise microcosmic details of our techniques until they become an unconsciously embodied aspect of our playing, requiring no conscious effort to achieve. McDolan describes this as '..the functioning virtuosic infrastructure..' of our technique in which '… there is an easy mastery in the ability to precisely place a note at precisely the right time…'(McDolan in Lehmann and Palme 2022, 261). Implicit within this precision is the self-knowledge that we can rely on its action to emerge, with no effort on our part, when needed. In Cox's (2016,181) case earlier it was reliably reassuring when climbing the stairs. The realm of imprecision on the other hand, offers conscious exploration, surprise and self-discovery. Its unreliability, for me, is a positive aspect of the opportunity for exploration it provides. Within this I am offering agency to my instrument and the soundings it offers up. McDolan also works with this imprecision and, like me, enjoys the occasional opportunities it offers for a new action to be added to the embodied practiced technique which sits tacitly within us.

'Some of these emergent actions drive the development of precise technique; they offer themselves as objects that can be tamed, trained, and made repeatable. Others are ephemera, existing only long enough to be observed.'
(McDolan 2022,262)

These actions would not have emerged for me without the practice of experimentation and its inherent imprecision (in chapter three I discuss the technical objects which I have developed through my practice on my instruments and are catalogued in appendix III). My improvising blends conventional technique, these new technical and sonic objects, and the uncertainty born of the imprecision described here.

The lexicon of conventional techniques for the oboe does not yet encompass the vast range of soundings possible on this instrument (McDolan 2022,270). From its narrow and fragile double bamboo reed, through the conical bore (responsible for its capacity to create overtones and multiphonics aplenty) to the metal and wood of its construction and the wet soundings of saliva. Many of these noises are what I have already described as sounds that are disposed of in private practise. In removing them from our vocabulary we

constrain the oboe to the conventionally understood sonic hegemony oboists offer up. It's only through imprecise exploration that as a free improviser I can extend this sonic palette to express my own imaginings[75]. In this way, you could say, I am advocating an imprecise prowess, which includes and builds from my classical technique. To play in this way is precarious and allows my instrument agency in a constant cyclical feedback loop.

As an oboist who, in part, rejects the embodied gestural technique my instrument has come to expect in favour of the precarious and imprecise, it seemed natural to de/reconstruct my instrument to better facilitate this. The gliss anglais is the result and the construction of and performance with this instrument is discussed in chapter three. With this instrument I allow my body to enact a sound world as yet unknown to me, and therefore undetermined, in response to my gesture and breath. This is like a dance between us; an intra-active making with my instrument, which is an 'other' with agency in our improvisations.

1.18 Chapter one Summary

The role of western instruments, particularly the oboe, as *masculine* sonic archives, the teaching of classical techniques on them and their physical development in response to the demands of male composers has been explored and explained. Because women, from the 19th century onwards were seen in music to be confined to teaching or performance, the instrument, the technique taught and learnt upon it, and its private corrective practise, have acted as barriers to participation in the self-taught world of free improvisation. Women have had to negotiate these in order to participate. The women who did gain and sustain agency as free improvising instrumentalists have been seen to be either unusual in that they were never formally taught, or having received such tuition, were able to dispense with it in favour of the experimentation and manipulation for their own ends that self-taught and developed technique allows. Lindsay Cooper gradually turned away from the precision of the bassoon and oboe in favour of the freedom the saxophone afforded her.

I have demonstrated that the idea of the virtuoso which evolved in the 19th century to refer solely to technical mastery, was rejected by free improvisers along with all other norms in classical and jazz traditions. However, the intellectual and technical self-taught

[75] See chapters three and four for contextualisation of audio examples listed in appendix III, 16.

mastery that characterised jazz improvisation and influenced musicians like Evan Parker have been seen to typify an intellectually virtuosic *masculine* prioritisation of soloistic valorisation more akin to the original sixteenth century definition of the term. This sits at the heart of western classical music and the patriarchal sonic and social construct within which free improvisation was formed. The ways in which precarity and imprecision are welcomed into my practice to counter this individualistic practice and 'make with' my instrument and others has been introduced. This is explored further in chapter two.

Chapter Two: The masculine roots of British free improvisation and its contemporary collaborative practice

'The history of music, as it is generally told, is conspicuous by the absence of women.'
(Cook, N. 2000,105)

I now survey the origins of patriarchal hegemony in free improvisation. I lean on examples from my London and Canterbury locations, the groupings which have developed in these communities, and their action as influential networks for their membership. The negative impact of these institutions on women's access to opportunities in the music is uncovered. Social virtuosity and its close relation 'making with' as an alternative to the *masculinity* of the genre is presented as the precursor to a contemporary move to push against this androcentricity by feministing[76] free improvisation in my communities. This *unmasculining* includes the use of invitation scores and an exploration of the ways in which we 'swarm' together in free improvising ensembles.

2.1 Male voices in UK free improvisation

It's important here to demonstrate the male hegemony that pervaded free improvisation[77] at its inception in London, and the social, physical, and emotional challenges these offered to women. It's not that women weren't active in the 1960s and 70s British free improvisation community. They were. *Musics* (Toop et al 2016, 1) was imagined by Evan Parker, Martin and *Madeleine* Davidson[78]. On page three is a photograph of the Feminist Improvising Group (FIG). It's just that women's voices, then and until recently, lacked the influence and visibility of their male counterparts. This lack of agency for women across wider society in Britain at the time is starkly laid out here.

'In the early 1970s, women were second-class citizens...There were no statutory maternity rights or any sex-discrimination protection in law. Married women were legal dependants of their husbands, and men had the right to have sex with their wives, with or without consent.'

[76] See p15 for an explanation of what this means in my practice.
[77] See p8 for a brief overview of the origin and character of the music and its community at its inception.
[78] See appendix II, 4-12 for statistics on gender balance among contributors to this publication.

(Berg and Sjöö 2024)

At the same time, coinciding with the birth of free improvisation and an outpouring of feminism in arts and politics, (Maggie Nicols[79], bass player Julia Doyle, and oboist Lindsay Cooper among them) women were still struggling to make themselves heard in British music of all genres. This was particularly true in experimental and improvised music, where male voices had acted to quiet and sideline women since the inception of these categories[80].

The male contributors to such writings as emerged from the origins of free improvisation in the UK sought to position their craft as valuable[81] by situating it as a site of intellectual merit. Derek Bailey's *Improvisation It's Nature and Practice in Music,* in 1993, and Eddie Prévost's *No Sound is Innocent* in 1995 were significant texts which emerged from this group of 'founding fathers'. Bailey describes free improvisation as a practice which requires the utmost skill, creativity and rigour. Prévost argues that improvisers are 'meta-musicians' 'Sensing, evaluating and acting in creative dialogue' (1995,3). He extends Bailey's positioning of the free improviser as superior to other musicians by describing the approach of some improvisers as akin to that of classical experimental composers like Cardew and Stockhausen[82]. His intellectualised descriptions of meta-musicians and dialogic heurism are compelling but exclusive. Importantly, neither of these writers references the work or involvement of women. One exception is Bailey's reference to singer Christine Jeffery, who Bailey met at art school.[83]

In 2009, Peters, in a book which argues from a philosophical position, describes free improvisation as a paradox within which there is no autonomy, '…freedom as the beginning rather than the end of the artwork.' (Peters 2009,2). Rather, the performer must maintain the tradition of free improvisation while simultaneously creating a spontaneous composition ultimately pre-conceived because of the beginnings from whence it came. In so doing, he too positions the act of free improvisation as intellectual. He considers the

[79] See p6 for an explanation of Nicols's relevance to my research.
[80] See Krekels (2019 41-120) for a detailed analysis of this.
[81] See Adorno 1941 for his famous critique of the value of 'serious' intellectual music and the lesser value of 'popular' music-a categorisation he applied to jazz.
[82] I contrast Stockhausen's *Aus den Sieben Tagen* with the work of John Stevens and Pauline Oliveros later in this chapter.
[83] Evan Parker told me this in conversation at Wintersound Festival 22.1.22.

work of male improvisers only, from a position which assigns great value to the intellectual facility[84] of its exponents. It is exactly the sort of scholarship which, by neglecting to mention the work of all but a tiny number of women[85], acts to deny agency and visibility to female practitioners.

The birth of free improvisation and the acknowledgement of the need to be free of rule-bound virtuosity did not remove the value of intellectual discourse. So much so in fact, that in 1975 *Musics: A British Magazine of Improvised Music and Art* magazine was launched to provide a journalistic space for such debate because, editor David Toop (2016,5) tells us in the introduction to this volume, 'Music needs the air of discourse flowing through it…' While such articulate and dogged riffing on a theme as was included in the magazine is of interest and value, argument and dominance in debate are *masculine* behaviours[86] undertaken by a close knit and largely male community, whose audience was also male. The magazine published 23 editions between 1975 and 1979. Most of the voices in this publication were male. A brief analysis of total article contributions found 309 male and only 37 female contributors, of whom, Annabel Nicholson is cited 8 times (see appendix II, 4 for further data on this imbalance).

In an article which typifies the discursive tone of *Musics* (1978, 19,4-12), Toop, Beresford et al. discuss the nature, purpose and position of technique in improvised music, exploring instrumental technique, the nature of and need for disruption in improvised music, incompetence as technique, social technique and finally the interconnectedness of mind and body. It is a frank and challenging discussion which is articulate in its presentation of the social and musical themes at the centre of improvisation at the time. It anticipates work by MacDonald and Wilson (2020,112-137) on defining and separating musical virtuosities. However, as with Bailey and Prévost, there is no mention of gender. It is another attempt to impress upon the reader the importance of the genre by intellectualising it.

The Wire magazine, first published in London in July 1982, took up the journalistic mantle *Musics* left behind. A similar analysis tells us that between the summer of 1982 and January 2000, there were 187 editions of *The Wire* published. By the end of 1983, except

[84] See p15 where I discuss the separation of technical and intellectual.
[85] Of the 102 references in the bibliography, 8 are by women, and of those only 2 (LaDonna Smith and Ingrid Monson) refer to works about contemporary improvisation. One (Erica Mane) is about classical Italian style and the remaining five are about dance.
[86] See p13 for an explanation of my use of the term *masculine* in this context.

for an article about Annette Peacock in the final edition of the year, not one significant mention is given to the work of a female instrumentalist. Clearly, to be a woman was and is still to sit outside that group, and to be an unusual and unfamiliar presence on any stage for improvised music. This presents yet another unconscious male garrison acting as an unintentional barrier to women seeking agency and visibility in the music.

Running parallel to this *masculine* exclusivity, in the 1970s, second wave of feminism in the UK and the USA was shining a light on the traditionally male-centric behaviours (Oakley 2016,196) in social sciences which favoured quantitative data gathering. Oakley and others pointed to the exclusionary nature of this in interviews with women who favour a more informal and conversational style. The influence of this on my own approach to research is explained in the methodology.

2.2 Women negotiating *masculine* barriers

This section is an overview of the challenges many women have experienced in music over the last 200 years, one of which (sexual harassment) is described here by oboist Melinda Maxwell. The patriarchal socio-political backdrop cascading into the development of free improvisation in my communities and influencing my contemporary situation is laid bare.

'When I started improvising at university … I was the only woman. .. In the classical world there have been occasions where I've been 'approached' -which is a type of harassment. … I do know some female oboists who've had a worse time than me.'
Melinda Maxwell, oboist (appendix V, 39)

Women in Western Europe have always made music, but it wasn't until the 19th century that they began accessing a music education in larger numbers. This was due in part to a growing feminist movement.[87] Despite facing opposition, many women were able to pursue music education as a means of earning a living. By the start of the 20th century, 76% of music teachers in England were female (Tick, 2001, II). Although society in the late 19th century believed that women could perform, they were not allowed the creative agency enjoyed by men, who could become conductors or composers. This exclusionary barrier

[87] See Tick et al. (2001) for an overview of how and why this was happening.

persisted in classical music for much of the 20th century, preventing women from pursuing careers as composers and conductors and instead limiting them to roles as performers or more frequently as educators within musical institutions[88].

By 1963, Maslow (1963,6) was articulating the effect of this on societal creative output: that creativity was a *masculine* pursuit which did not consider the work of women worthy. This male power acted like an exclusionary garrison for women in the UK who were intent upon pursuing free improvisation. As a result, few, if any, women participated in the initial formations (see appendix II). Four women participated in the inaugural tour of the 23 piece Skyscraper Ensemble who went on to become London Improviser's Orchestra.

At the time of its inception, the microcosm that was the free improvisation and wider society in the UK was fraught with tensions surrounding race, class, sexuality and gender (Berg and Sjöö 2024). The challenge women presented wasn't just embodied in the female form it was also evident in the wielding of the instruments they played. These instruments can be viewed as cultural artefacts. To pick one up and play it is to hold the power in the room (Doubleday 2008,2). As a woman in this male world the taking and wielding of power was a literal enactment of the challenge the feminist movement was offering up to the male political institutions of the day[89]. Founding member of the Feminist Improvising Group, oboist Lindsay Cooper was frustrated in the 1970s by the view among male free improvisers that women were not 'good enough to participate' (Smith 2001, 233). FIG was founded, in part as a response to this. The need for and influence of the feminist movement is laid bare in Nicols' words here.

'Before the Women's Liberation Movement, I honestly thought women weren't biologically suited to playing an instrument…. I'd felt humiliated and of a lower status than the men.'
Maggie Nicols (appendix V, 75)

In 2020 Sarah Raine's interrogation of gender balance in British Jazz Festivals presents the outcomes and recommendations of the research she undertook for

[88] Henry Dagg describes his mother's unhappiness and frustration at being forced into a part time contract as an orchestral oboist in Ireland on the birth of her child in the 1950s. Mothers were forbidden from holding full time orchestral posts.
[89] See appendix V,71 interview with Maggie Nicols for her perspective on this.

Cheltenham Jazz Festival across several UK festivals and improvising styles. The data is thorough and detailed. It includes granular information on instrument presence across genders which shows among other things that in 2019, women accounted for just 30% of programming. Of those, 26 were vocalists, 26 instrumentalists, and just one of those played violin. Unsurprisingly no oboists appear in any of the data.

While progress had been made, she concludes that there is still much to do to attain 50/50 gender balance on improvising stages in the UK. While this project looked at jazz, there is a close relationship between this and free improvisation[90]. My personal experience and research to date suggests that the situation for women in free improvisation in this country is just as, if not more challenging (see Woods et al 2024 and Eckhardt 2017 for extensive data sets examining the experience of women in music).

2.3 Bodies

The role of the body is central to instrumental technique, my practice and research, and therefore appears in many different discussions throughout this thesis. Here I draw together those debates to highlight their importance. These arguments also concern sexed bodies and the role they often play for women in isolating us and heightening the challenge we face within the androcentric world of free improvisation. I end with a brief comparison of the approach of free improvising saxophonist Tina Krekels and clarinettist Pete Furniss to illustrate how feministing our bodily practice can shape our female improvising voice.

The body's influence and impact are widely acknowledged, and feminist literature, including Federici (2004), Butler (2004), and Cusick (1994), highlights the gendered separation of the bodily and intellectual. In the introduction I draw attention to the role of the body and societal perceptions of it in shaping facets of our identity and behaviour. I go on to cite the obvious bodily physicality of instrumental technique and then describe the bodily discomfort inherent in oboe playing. In chapter one I describe the physiological differences between men and women regarding breathing, diaphragm control and the impact of the menstrual cycle on this. The strong association between musical instruments, the gestures used upon them in performance, and gender is then presented as a further challenge for women to negotiate.

[90] Saxophonist Evan Parker worked as a jazz improviser and guitarist Derek Bailey came from the dance band tradition.

In the Preface I disclose my own distress and discomfort as a young student at the sexualised attention my body received from other music students and the way in which this negatively impacted on my developing career. In part two of this chapter, I point to the experience of Maggie Nicols as young woman having to learn to navigate similar challenges and to the simple fact that all the women free improvisers I have spoken to as part of this research cite (mostly in confidence) similar experiences and stress the need to learn, quickly, to manage them, and protect yourself from being vulnerable in the spaces and places the music occupies. Nicols in appendix V(p72) talks about her gratitude to Dennis Rose who she saw as a protector in this sometimes dangerous male world. In the 1970s world of London improvisation, the day to day physical vulnerability of female bodies, to the predatory male behaviour of some men, cascaded from the wider British societal norms at the time. I began this chapter by citing Berg and Sjöö (2024) and paraphrase them again here. 'In the early 1970s, women were second-class citizens... Married women were legal dependants of their husbands, and men had the right to have sex with their wives, with or without consent.'

Earlier in this chapter I highlight the small number of women instrumentalists in the jazz tradition which influenced the beginnings of free improvisation. In part two of this chapter, I discuss the physical bodily intimacy associated with the spaces and groupings in which the music is and was rehearsed and performed. In these spaces I describe the 'othering' of female instrumentalists who took to the front of the stage as soloists (a space in which the gesture and physical norm was *masculine* and performed by male bodies). I go on to explain the recent emergence of women only ensembles in my London and Canterbury communities as, in part a response to the isolation and loneliness I and other women instrumentalists experienced as a result of the challenges I have raised here.

In 2019, Krekels shone a light on the impact of female bodies in free improvisation and its continuing gender exclusivity. She argues that free improvisation spaces are, in the main, *masculine* and they apply a hierarchy to different approaches to the practice. She challenges these places, pointing to the entangled relationship between the socio-political in improvising, one's relationship with instrument, and the gendered *masculine* touching and physicality inherent in that as a saxophonist.

Her practice and research are feminist, in particular her refusal to adapt herself to the *masculine* technique her saxophone demands of her in favour of an intertwined

relationship with it in which she allows the instrument to participate in the materialisation of sound through their encounter. In contrast, clarinettist Pete Furniss (2018,68-70) when devising his electronically augmented clarinet, discusses the new gestures he is required to learn because of the addition of footpedals to his performance set-up. Furniss describes practising these gestures until they became an embodied part of his technique. While he does cite Pedro Rebelo (2006, 28 in Furniss 2018,70) arguing against such direct objectification of our relationship with our instrument, he goes on to describe the objectified approach he took. After two years of practise and performance on his electronically augmented instrument he was able to feel '…at once at the interface of an instrument and in the midst of a …self-emanating ensemble.' (Furniss 2018,70).

Furniss is discussing the conventional approach to performance practice consciously rejected by Krekels who refers to amateurism as one of her preferred, feminist approaches to performance[91]. (Krekels 2019,13). For her, this is '…a refusal of work (pre-established playing and performance techniques) …a conscious choice to play against musical practices.' While, for me, such conscious application of amateurism is not my intention, I share with her the choice to work against existing *masculine* performance practices with my body and instrument. The construction of and interaction with my gliss anglais (a de/reconstructed oboe; more on this in chapter three) is an example of my own feminist approach to this.

2.4 Interactivity

Trombonist Sarah Gail Brand[92] supports Krekels's argument that the socio-political is entangled with our improvising. She points to the power of the interpersonal (a facet of social virtuosity[93]) in improvisation. 'It's really important to be .. nice to everyone… You learn that's key to success. (Georgina Brett oboist, appendix V, 25)

In 2019 Brand argued that the interpersonal in the creative and social impacts on decision making by free improvisers. This is examined through her practice as an improviser and music therapist in collaboration with others. She presents a conceptual framework with which to investigate the objective in such subjective music making. She concludes that the

[91] Oboist Georgina Brett describes herself as '…a perpetual amateur.' (appendix V, 25)
[92] See p6 for an explanation of Brand's relevance to my research.
[93] Maggie Nicols first coined this term. A detailed explanation of what it means for her can be found in her chapter of the same title in Devenish et al (2023).

processes she identified in her practice form the foundation of her improvising collaborations and impact her creative decision making (Brand 2019,130).

Brand was one of a small number of women selected to participate in Skyscraper Ensemble, the group which went on to become London Improviser's Orchestra (see appendix II for further information). Her 2019 writing explores and responds to her free improvisation with *Musics* editor and contributor Steve Beresford[94] so she is well placed to observe and discuss the effect of collaboration on her practice. For her social interactions affect creative decision making. Her development of a schemata for analysing her own technique on a male instrument is aligned with my gliss anglais practice, presented as a case study in chapter three.

The act of free improvising in this way may be seen as a way for women like myself, Brand and Krekels to resist and challenge via the embodiment of the creative voice and the prioritisation of the interpersonal (Hannaford 2017,202). The instruments we use and the technique we apply to them have agency in the dance that occurs between us. In chapter one I discussed the challenge the androcentric world of instruments and techniques upon them present to women free improvisers.

So far in this chapter, the *masculine* order in British society and the social construct which evolved in the music, together with the role of bodies and interactivity, have been seen to form the basis of a further, entangled barrier women like me experience in attempting to gain agency in free improvisation. The challenges offered up by the spaces and groupings in which these occur are discussed the next.

2.5 Improvising orchestras as networks

Men created, occupied and shaped the spaces, communities, and formations of free improvisation. The venues and on stage conventions, their social and bodily intimacies, and the development of free improvisation 'orchestras' are now examined to illustrate this. The counter challenge offered up to these imposed difficulties by Maggie Nicols in the shape of 'social virtuosity' is introduced.

I offer a caveat that collaboration of any kind brings interpersonal challenges regardless of gender and intent. My focus here is the impact of gender, but I tacitly

[94] See p6 for an explanation of Beresford's relevance to my research.

acknowledge the trickiness of human interactivity throughout the discussion I offer in this chapter.[95] Juliet Fraser (Fraser in Lehmann and Palme 2022, 239) describes any collaborative practice as risky and unpredictable. Here she describes a frustration I have experienced in collaborations and a view which I share. This may seem to counter my position that collaboration is central to my practice. It doesn't. Rather it's an articulation of the challenge and difficulty inherent in the work. In the introduction I describe the discomfort, terror and anger associated with my research. In chapter one I explain the centrality of precarity to my feministing practice. In describing the instability inherent in collaboration, Fraser here is, in part, articulating that.

'… there have been times in the past few years when I have despaired, when I … have been frustrated by the work. … I think I see collaboration for what it is, now, which is a pretty unstable chemical experiment….'
(Fraser in Lehmann and Palme 2022, 257)

Over the last 20 years free improvising orchestras have emerged in the UK and function as networks in their own areas. These include The Oxford Improvisers founded in 2001, The Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (GIO) [96] formed in 2002 (Maggie Nicols and Faradena Afifi[97] speak highly of this as a more gender equal space). In this section I discuss the work of improvising orchestras in my London and Canterbury communities. The reason for this repeated focus on particular ensembles and individuals in this thesis is explained in the introduction, 'My improvising practice, its context, individuals and communities'.

The London Improvisers Orchestra (LIO) is the longest standing example in the UK of a large social and professional grouping of free improvisers. Most of the membership is and has always been male and between them there is an entanglement of interpersonal and

[95] There is insufficient space for me here to delve further into this important topic. See Fraser's chapter 'In the thick of it; Further reflections on the mess and the magic of collaborative partnership' in Lehmann and Palme (2022, 239- 259), for a helpful discussion of collaboration from a feminist position I share.
[96] For more information on these formations see; GIO https://www.glasgowimprovisersorchestra.com/about/, Oxford Improvisers http://www.oxfordimprovisers.com/about/ and FRO https://freerangecanterbury.org/free-range-orchestra/ (accessed 10.2.24)
[97] See p6 for an explanation of Afifi's relevance to my research.

musical connection which serves, in part, as an access point to work in the London scene[98]. In 1997 what would become LIO was formed by eminent practitioners Evan Parker and Steve Beresford together with Ian Smith to participate in the UK section of a tour by American free improviser and inventor of 'conduction' (discussed later in this section) Butch Morris. Musicians were 'handpicked' by them for this tour[99]. Today conduction, explained later in this chapter, is one of several strategies employed by LIO to facilitate collaborative free improvisation. They meet monthly in London to perform and undertake several other UK performances each year. Communication with their large network of performers is maintained by Steve Beresford and a small group of volunteers.[100] LIO evolved over time, via regular get-togethers and performances. This, because of its reputation and refinement of its practice, and because so many practitioners who are significant in the accepted canon I have discussed here were or are members, makes it a networking centre for contemporary free improvisers.

Conduction is a series of agreed hand signals delivered by a conductor to a free improvising ensemble who must respond in a sonically appropriate manner. In this sense, to me, its rehearsal and performance practice seems contradictory to the principles of free improvisation and akin to that of a traditional orchestra. Attention of all 'improvisers' must be directed to the conductor (who is freely improvising directions using the agreed hand signals). In conduction, the roles of composer and conductor merge into one.

For me, the soloistic and directive nature of leading a conduction is therefore *masculine* by my definition. The free improviser has more capacity for creativity in their response than the classical orchestral player who must deliver exactly what the notation they have in front of them conveys. Nonetheless, participation in conduction is made more straightforward than large formation free improvisation by the imposition of these hegemonies and the direction of action and attention they necessitate on the entire ensemble[101]. The nature and effect of this is discussed further in 'Swarming' later in this chapter

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[98] My experience and the discussions I've had with many practitioners support this.
[99] See appendix II, 5-12 for numbers, names and instruments.
[100] See http://www.londonimprovisersorchestra.co.uk/ (accessed 9/4/24) for further information.
[101] There is insufficient space here to discuss other strategies developed to facilitate free improvisation by large ensembles. One worthy of note here, *Micromotives,*was devised by Moss Freed and Union Division. You can read about its development here. Freed, M. (2019, 91-110) *Composing for improvisers: information flow, collaborative composition and individual freedom in large ensembles*.

Eckhardt (2017) confirms the importance of membership of such networks in securing agency. Her 2016 survey of musicians and sound artists found 56% of the jobs women attained were via professional networks (Eckhardt 2017,86). One female contributor noted that this was mostly through female networks. The effect of this on women's agency is self-evidently negative when taken alongside her finding that 48% of those surveyed worked mostly with men (Eckhardt 2017, 81). Of the men surveyed only 3% said they worked with females[102].

A positive example of the influence such networks exert and opportunity they offer is that, because we are all associated with LIO, the female free improvising oboist is still very rare but is an increasing presence on London free improvisation stages. Georgina Brett and I have performed together with LIO[103]. Catherine Plugyers[104] and I performed together in a quartet including other LIO members in February 2024.

Diary Extract
Sunday June 4th 2023; LIO performance
Today was the first time I rehearsed and performed with LIO…. Georgina Brett[105]was also playing- I interviewed her on Wednesday May 31st. This is the first time that two female oboists played with the orchestra. A surprise presence was Kat Peddie[106] who came along to the performance. It was good to talk with her briefly afterwards.
I was glad that Georgina was there and that Charlotte Keefe[107] was friendly when I arrived; it helped with my nervousness about joining the group. My first impression was of a group of men my age-who … clearly knew one another well, along with a small number of young men and an even smaller group of women of mixed ages.

While there have always been a small number of female members in LIO, their numbers were negligible in the early years and, though they have gradually increased, women remain in the minority.[108] Viola player Faradena Afifi and until 2022 saxophonist Caroline Kraabel[109] have had significant involvement in shaping the nature and musical direction of

[102] See Eckhardt (2017, 81-144) for granular data and commentary on gender imbalance in music.
[103] See appendix V, 21 for an interview with Brett. Chapter three part two example iii is an excerpt from this performance.
[104] See p6 for an explanation of Plugyers's relevance to my research and appendix V for an interview with her.
[105] Another oboist. See appendix V, 21 for a full transcript of this interview.
[106] A member of Free Women and Free Range Orchestra formations discussed in chapter 2, 2.12.
[107] A member of Noisy Women and ONe_Orchestra New discussed in chapter 2, 2.12.
[108] My own experience of playing with LIO on two occasions in 2023 was that, of the 30 or so performers present including Charlotte Keeffe, Dee Byrne and Faradena Afifi, less than a third of those in the ensemble were female.
[109] See http://www.londonimprovisersorchestra.co.uk/history.html (accessed 21.1.24) See p6 for an explanation of Kraabel's relevance to my research.

the group. Further discussion of responses to their contribution appears later in this chapter. In contrast, the work of Free Range Orchestra in Canterbury is now seen to provide a different set of challenges and opportunities for its participants to navigate.

In Canterbury, Free Range Orchestra (FRO) was established in 2012. I joined the orchestra in 2018 and remain a member. It evolved from the Free Range community[110]. Initially it was a gathering, initiated by Free Range Artistic Director Sam Bailey, of similarly minded improvisers and composers who wanted a space where they could try out new ideas and practice free improvisation together. The participants are professionally and musically diverse. Many FRO members are not full-time musicians or do not rely on their music making to earn a living. FRO is a workshopping and experimentation space. It's a place where composers can try out works in progress, free improvisers can play together, music students can workshop ideas, non-specialists can enjoy music making, and electronics specialists can work on new ways to treat and utilise the soundings of a group with a diverse instrumentation. No one tradition or style of practice exists in this formation and conduction has been used only rarely.

Among their number, as FRO has developed, are artists, poets, movement specialists, dancers, free improvisers, academics, and electronics specialists. Local resident and saxophonist Evan Parker has always supported the work of Free Range and performed with the orchestra in 2021 and 2023. Maggie Nicols has delivered workshops for and performed with the orchestra on two occasions in the last two years. The second of these was alongside Evan Parker in 2024. Her enduring influence and use of Steven's (2016) *Search and Reflect* exercises by the orchestra is discussed later in this chapter.

This creative and professional diversity has not helped the gender balance, however. Like LIO, FRO is and always has been largely male[111]. In behaviour and creative output, the gendered nature of their work is far less polarised. Increasingly my experience is that in listening, playing and working together, the culture of behaviour and improvisation is gendered *feminine* as my diary extract here confirms.

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[110] Free Range in Canterbury was formed in 2012. It provides experimental and cross-disciplinary performances and opportunities, free at the point of entry, for the people of Canterbury and East Kent. See https://freerangecanterbury.org/ for more information.

[111] See appendix II, 4-12 for more detailed data

Sunday March 3rd2024
Free Range Orchestra Rehearsal 2-5pm Anselm Studio Canterbury
The gender balance is overwhelmingly male, yet the social and improvising behaviours are never soloistic. Attention was given to balance and space in improvisation. This has become a feature of the work we do and means people are listening and responding with care and skill to one another. Listening FOR the contributions of others, making space and accommodating them. This idea-listening for someone rather than to someone is anticipatory and creates space and interweave naturally in the ensuing improvisation. When a number of people are playing together this is what we're trying to achieve.

The broad creative and professional diversity and intention of the participants, and the ways in which these are performed and enacted in rehearsal and on stage, may have contributed to the increasing lack of gendered *masculine* behaviour in the ensemble[112].

2.6 Gigs and groupings

I turn now to the spaces where free improvising formations gather and perform. Improvised music venues in late twentieth century Britain were controlled by men. Chapter one, virtuosity, demonstrated the reverence offered to those who performed in the spaces. In the rehearsal room and in the performance space, if you could get there, navigating the gender challenges I have described so far was wearing for women. This, in part was because '..it is/was men who ran and occupied the spaces of free improvisation, the socio-political fact is that these men controlled and produced these spaces, ….' (Krekels 2019,7)

Maggie Nicols was a regular visitor to the Soho clubs where jazz thrived and developed her sonic palate and ardent feminism in response to her experiences there. Like pianist Irene Schweizer (Weiss 2012, 96-97), Nicols told me that she had to learn and negotiate the club culture she described as difficult.

'I haunted Ronnie Scotts from the age of 15.... I was desperate. Nobody helped me when I was being abused. A lot of the men were quite predatory.'
Maggie Nicols (appendix V, 73)

Schweizer was uncomfortable with the drinking culture which pervaded among these men but didn't have to endure the sexual advances from the male musicians. She points to her openness about her lesbianism as a possible reason for this (Weiss 2012, 95-96).

[112] See appendix II, 4-12 for specific data confirming gender participation rates.

The gender separation in the pubs and clubs where free improvisation was performed, and the *masculine* culture described by Nicols and Schweizer, was ingrained across the UK in the latter half of the twentieth century. My own experience of the overtly sexually predatory behaviour of some male students at Leeds and Trinity Conservatoires was challenging and upsetting (see preface). Every woman I have spoken to as part of this research privately describes similar experiences. These continue today. Woods et. al (2024,10) census of musicians identified 51% of women compared to 6% of men had experienced gender discrimination, and 33% of women had experienced sexual harassment at work. Few women are prepared to go on record. Stevie Wishart[113] (discussed later in this chapter) and Maggie Nicols are notable exceptions. Wishart experienced greater comfort, acceptance, and visibility in Australia with the band Machine for Making Sense.[114] The reason for this reticence to speak publicly about their experience of sexism among other women should be investigated further. It is often the result of a need to be diplomatic to maintain working relationships (Parker in Brand 2019,130). It's experience which is common for women in all walks of life in Britain and has been since the inception of free improvisation (Berg and Sjöö 2024, Woods et al 2024).

'I think it's always been more difficult for women. You have to be better than men in order to prove yourself.'
Georgina Brett oboist (appendix V, 25)

A contributing factor to the dominance of *masculine* behaviour in these spaces, which was so difficult to navigate for these women at the time,[115] may be that the social fabric of the country was united in training men to keep a 'stiff upper lip', not show emotion, and be controlled - because families knew their boys and men may have to go to war[116]. The second world war and national service in peace time, (which came into effect in 1949 for all 'physically fit males between the ages of 17 and 21' in the UK ended in 1960) exacerbated this. National Service did not apply to women (UK Parliament, no date). At the

[113] See p6 for an explanation of Wishart's relevance to my research.
[114] In conversation December 26th, 2023.
[115] See Truitt (2013, 109-110) for a description of the ubiquity of this masculine dominance and its impact on her.
[116] I'm grateful to my supervisor J. Harry Whalley for 'thinking with' me in discussions on this topic.

inception of free improvisation, the men who practised it had grown up in this social context and were a product of its hypermasculine character. Several of them went to military music school and many of them were self-taught[117]. It was natural that this combined with the socially separated gender norms of the time, led to informal male groupings which functioned as professional networks, and were cultivated and sustained in these spaces. Women had little access to these as a result.

2.7 Intimacy in male spaces

Intimacy can take numerous forms in improvising ensembles; not only the shared, developmental dialogue of the improvisation, but also the close, prolonged physical intimacy of the transport while on tour, the green room, small stage, and the low budget shared accommodation typical of the free improvised music scene[118]. In 1970s British venues, such intimacy was a barrier to female performers given the *masculine* majority and culture they found difficult to navigate. As a result, most musicians, conscious of the need to hone positive working relationships in such an intimate setting, are extremely diplomatic, preferring to offer words of support rather than criticism wherever possible (Brand 2019, 129-130).

Most venues were and are small and attract audiences of less than 100 (Riley and Laing in Medbøe and Moir, 2017,10). Even in a venue like Ronnie Scott's club in central London, frequented by Nicols and Schweizer, the small scale of the venue meant audiences sat in extremely close proximity to performers and vice-versa. In chapter one I explained the challenge this presented to classical oboists whose highly engineered instruments are fragile and vulnerable in such spaces. The close physical proximity and intimacy brought on by this, with an audience which, like the performers they admired, was made up almost entirely of men, could be difficult to navigate for a self-conscious young woman at the beginning of their career like Nicols.

Most women performers in these venues at the time were singers[119], whose bodies traditionally take centre stage as soloists. The sexualised dress and physicalisation in

[117] My own experience and conversations over the years with many musicians tells me that Evan Parker studied botany at Bristol, pianist Steve Beresford composition at York University, Drummer Tony Oxley and flautist David Toop went to art college, Eddie Prévost and Derek Bailey were self-taught. See appendix II for a brief related dataset.

[118] Listen to chapter 4, 4.2 for a trio improvisation I undertook in a small venue in a confined stage space.

[119] See Caudwell (2012) for a discussion of this and the impact it has on women instrumentalists.

performance for vocalists is well documented. When wind players took to the stage in ensembles they would be in very close proximity to male colleagues, at the rear of the stage, in a 'horn section'[120]. Few if any women drummers were active at the time so could not enjoy the natural separation sitting behind a drum kit offers[121]. Pianists and singers who accompanied themselves at the piano at least enjoyed the distance afforded by sitting at a keyboard.

When women wind players took to the front of the stage as soloists their bodies (usually presented as sexualised vocalists) were 'othered'[122], outside the norm of the male instrumentalists who dominated as soloists, and adapting themselves to instruments and their technical gestures which were *masculine* in construct[123].Their female form drew the attention away from the improvisation and back into the consciousness of the venue via an unwanted engagement with and acknowledgement of the feminine physical presence and all that it represented and evoked in the eyes of the largely male listeners. Trombonist Annie Whitehead (Wolloshin, 2021,83) describes a sustained wish that her body did not have such an impact.

'.. I wish I could be invisible-just another musician-without this excitement. …. it was that patronising attitude-you're a girl and you can play the trombone! I wish I wasn't because I wish I didn't have to put up with all of this.'

Pauline Oliveros (Fischlin, Heble and Monson 2004, 54) describes her experience of being positioned in an exclusively male improvising community as difficult. She felt excluded from discussions and performances. Whitehead's comment here speaks to an emotional challenge faced by women instrumentalists who are othered in this way. This, for some, will cause anxiety and a reduction in confidence (Wehr 2016, 475-6).

[120] ibid
[121] Drummer Phelan Burgoyne described to me the need for drummers who improvise to imagine climbing over the drumkit and into the music.
[122] ibid
[123] See chapter 1, p35.

'...I've been on the receiving end of [gendered sexist behaviour] both during my studies and in the profession. And most unfortunately, this is encountered by many people I've spoken to who are working in music.'
Lorraine Hart oboist (appendix V, 33)

As well as the emotional and physical challenges women needed to negotiate, Oliveros (in Fischlin and Heble 2004, 54) points to the different musical values such as the precision, energy and intelligence valued by men in contrast with the tone quality, emotion and atmosphere valued by women. Wehr (2016, 473) is helpful here in pointing to the many jazz studies which found no disparity of note between improvisations by men and women. Collier (1995,7) in Wehr (2016, 479) describes what may lie at the root of gender categorisation in improvisation.

"The problem is something more than simply between women and men. Jazz is a macho thing, a power thing. … The gentler way of doing things is often ignored and regarded as effeminate"

Moving on, this is the second inflection point in my thesis; a nexus between 'then', my contextual review of the androcentric roots of free improvisation and the obstacles they have created for female practitioners, and 'now,' the ways in which I and other contemporary practitioners are pushing against and overcoming these. The work of Maggie Nicols and Stevie Wishart is discussed, women only spaces examined, and the 'invitation score' is described.

2.8 Maggie Nicols and social virtuosity

'…I believe everybody is powerful and creative in their own way. Each unique being contributes to a stronger collective ...'
Maggie Nicols (appendix V, 72)

In the 1970s, ardent feminist Maggie Nicols (she was also a fervent member of the Socialist Workers Party) called the valuing of the social over the technical and intellectual in free improvisation 'social virtuosity'. Her approach prioritises the development and sustenance of nurturing interpersonal relationships. Taking from the early work by John Stevens (I

explore his influence on invitation scores later in this chapter) in improvisation workshop leading (Stevens, 2007), it actively respects and nurtures everyone as equal, creative and capable of making valuable improvising contributions using whatever sonic capacity they have[124]. Wilson and MacDonald (2012,7) give tacit support to this when they explain that the ability to foster and utilise mutually respectful and supportive interpersonal connections in rehearsal and performance is just as important as technique in collaborative improvisation. The enormous influence and inspiration provided by Nicols to me and other practitioners has rightly been acknowledged, as I write, by Edinburgh University in the form of an honorary Doctorate.

Nicols first enacted this practice with FIG (introduced earlier in this chapter) in 1977, who at the time were lone voices challenging the patriarchal construct of free improvisation musically and socially. FIG, whose members included Lindsay Cooper, Irene Schweizer, and Georgina Born (Smith, in Fischlin and Heble, 2004, 236-241), actively and vocally rejected precision and the technical and intellectual prowess valued by men, embracing and enjoying social virtuosity (perhaps what Collier (1995,7) meant by 'gentler') and its enactment alongside these.

'… We didn't have to prove that we could play loud or fast or technically brilliant. There was a different way of communicating with the other women than with the men …, I liked it.'
Irene Schweizer on FIG (in Weiss 2012, 96-97)

Active throughout the 1980s, Dyson (2006) points to their 'radical and subversive' use of the prevailing political notions of liberation and freedom for women. Despite the now-acknowledged importance of the work of FIG, the only significant female free improvising formation at the time, there is little audio documenting their work[125].

Because Nicols is a woman, she feels her looks, then personality, then music, have been valued by many men in the community in that order historically. Now she is an elder

[124] For a comprehensive explanation of her modern definition and practice of social virtuosity, refer to Nicols in Devenish and Hope (2023).
[125] For comprehensive accounts by women of the work and impact of FIG see; Krekels (2019, 107-124), Smith (2001,107-140) and Smith (2004, 50-70).

stateswoman of the music[126] working in a newly gender-conscious free improvising community her own voice is being prioritised, and she is busier than ever. In November 2022 Nicols came to Canterbury to run a workshop, in which I participated, with Free Range Orchestra (FRO), and performed with us in Canterbury. This was the first time I'd worked with her and what struck me was her warmth and genuine concern for each person in the 30-strong formation. What follows is a brief, personal observation on the workshop.

Demeanour and the space she creates, invite you in. She exudes warmth, curiosity, support, fun, and musical possibility. She holds herself with the poise and grace of a dancer. Her voice is never raised yet she is always heard. You are drawn into that presence and filled with the possibility it offers and find yourself singing back an offering. This poise and presence together create an invitation to sound and build confidence and connection. In short, one feels valued, listened to, and connected with her and the ensemble.
This way of being in a collaborative setting is the essence of social virtuosity as Maggie describes it. Drawing from a well of belief that everyone is creative and full of possibility and leading to an outpouring of supportive gentle yet firmly furious compassionate creative collaborations which begin from naming and listening to everyone in the room[127]*.*
FRO with Maggie never played so sensitively or quietly. When, inspired by this workshop and performance with her, we improvised a version of 'Click' by John Stephens at Wintersound Festival in January 2023. It was so sensitive and unified that composer Stevie Wishart, who was present at the Festival, couldn't believe it was unrehearsed and improvised[128]*.*

Nicols' increased agency and visibility in free improvisation, together with a developing understanding of and respect for social virtuosity as she defines it is making a significant contribution to the work, not just of women, but to all those exponents of the genre who are in sympathy with the prioritisation of collaboration over individualism and the tacit hierarchical social constructs that evolve from its pursuit.

2.9 Invitation scores

In the mid-twentieth century, some experimental composers were utilising means other than conventional notation, with its hierarchical conventions and restrictions, to communicate their intention to performers. One of these was the text score. The use of text scores by Karl Heinz Stockhausen in *Aus den sieben Tagen* (Stockhausen 1968) and Pauline Oliveros in *Sonic Meditations* (Oliveros 1974) is briefly examined here to situate the contemporary idea of an invitation score without the *masculine* order (and the text scores

[126] *The Wire* Magazine. Issue 445 published in March 2021 contains an extended interview with Nicols by Louise Gray discussing her life and work. She features on the front cover for the first time in the magazine's history. Available at: https://www.thewire.co.uk/issues/445 (accessed 2.4.24)
[127] Cellist Isidora Edwards has described Nicols as 'pure love'. Evan Parker in conversation has commented more than once that her caring and inclusive character is unchanged in the many years he's known her.
[128] In conversation with me, 26.12.24.

within it) of which Stockhausen is a part, and within the emerging feminist free improvising canon. The significance for many exponents including Maggie Nicols, of *Search and Reflect* (Stevens 2007), a book of free improvisation workshop activities by free improviser John Stevens as a precursor to the invitation score is then briefly examined.

Free improviser Hugh Davies, (Davies, 1975, 1, 3) points to the distinction between performer and composer present in the scores of *Aus Den Sieben Tagen.* The pieces direct the performers to sound in various ways. Several of them require acts of extreme discomfort of the participants. Beresford in Stevens, (2007, introduction l) bemoans the 'bossiness' of such instruction in contrast with the activities in *Search and Reflect* (Stevens 2007).

Pauline Oliveros adopts a different approach in *Sonic Meditations* (Oliveros 1974) a body of text scores for groups of people who are committed to sounding together regularly and over time. Oliveros is not composing here in the traditional, patriarchal sense. She is a director of listening who is extending an invitation to participation among 'sound users'. Rosenberg and Reardon-Smith (2020,70) describe these Meditations as drawing forth 'direct active participation from all sound users, requiring listeners … to co-create a listening experience that is both communal and deeply individual…'. This idea of co-creation by all participants dispenses with the traditionally defined roles of performer, composer and listener in favour of a shared 'making with'. They are a precursor to the intra-active approach to music making I advocate throughout this thesis.

Search and Reflect is a book of workshop activities written by free improviser John Stevens. Maggie Nicols cites Stevens, and his workshop activities as a huge influence on her both as a young and developing improviser, and in her contemporary practice and theorising[129]. Steve Beresford described its impact on the world of improvisation. 'Wherever you went in the world …there would be someone asking about this book.' (Beresford in Stevens 2007, i). Christopher Small (Stevens 2007, iv), describes the pieces as,'… inclusive; anyone can play…provided he or she approaches them with simplicity and seriousness and a mind drained of high-culture assumptions of what music is supposed to be about…'. The high-culture he references here is in part the power dynamic in the composer/performer/listener paradigm sustained in *Aus Den Seiben Tagen.*

[129] See appendix V, 72 interview with Nicols.

The contemporary idea of an invitation score is a direct descendant of the inclusive and liberating approach intended by Oliveros and Stevens. It was introduced to me by members of The Wandelweiser Collective[130]. Invitation scores as I define them here, are intended to facilitate rather than direct a performance which has an element of free improvisation. The amount of improvisation may vary. They do not require technical prowess on the part of the performer when conventional instruments are utilised. Examples of them include Heledd Francis Wright's *Music Box* and Marianne Schuppe and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé's *Still Light* (2020)[131]

These scores have an anti-virtuoso intention at their heart. In this way, the invitation score is a way to initiate free improvisation from a formation who may wish for the articulation of a shared starting point rather than an open beginning to their soundings. As such they act against the unspoken traditional and *masculine* triumvirate power structure in performance and facilitate a feminist levelling of the hierarchy within this. I wrote one such score, *O(d)e to Jonas* with exactly this intention for a performance with Trio CZW[132]. This is examined further in chapter four[133].

2.10 Stevie Wishart

Stevie Wishart is a British musician known for her work as a composer and violinist in the classical and free improvising realms[134]. In improvisation, Wishart feels that who she is playing with rather than any musical skillset they may possess is extremely important (Denzler and Guionnet 2020,37). For her, improvisation with others can enrich the music she makes just as effectively as the accurate performance of a notated score[135]. A frustration for her is the restriction conventional notation places upon the performer's capacity to extemporise[136] and enrich her compositions with their own character. The

[130] For an introduction to the work of Wandelweiser see https://www.wandelweiser.de/texts.html (accessed 1.2.24).
[131] *Still Light* available here https://ewaeckerle.com/work/still-light/ (accessed 7.2.24). *Music Box* was written for and performed by Free Women on November 16th, 2023, at Free Range Canterbury.
[132] Maureen Wolloshin oboe, Paul Cheneour flutes, Alistair Zaldua e-violin. See https://www.panyrosasdiscos.org/trio-czw/ (accessed 1.2.24) for more information about the Trio and chapter four for information about the performance of this score.
[133] See appendix III for the two invitation scores discussed in this chapter.
[134] See Wishart, S. *Stevie Wishart Music* Available at; https://www.steviewishartmusic.com/about.html (accessed 7/4/24)
[135] In conversation with me, she and I discussed her work at length.
[136] In the classical realm creativity, by the early 20th century had become the arena of the composer and conductor; roles which from which gender prejudice and societal norm excluded the majority of women.

restrictive precision of this notation developed post-1800 (Bent et al 2014) alongside innovations in instrument construction and technique at the behest of male composers. To resolve this, Wishart works with performers whose own sonic and interpersonal character she admires, and which enriches her music.

In the performance score for *Strahlender Himmel*, Wishart suggests the players may '…follow the composer's fully notated version or, … use it as the basis for extemporisation… …' (Wishart,2017, 5). The heart and richness of this song, composed in 2016 for soprano and piano, stem from the balance between an invitation to sound with one's own voice and perform the notation as Wishart offers to the performers. The priority for Wishart, is that the performer can sound as herself. The presence of the performer's sonic identity, entangled with and emerging from *Strahlender Himmel*, is as essential to the performance as Wishart's composed notation.

The score as, in part, an invitation and facilitator is a refreshing and *feminine* alternative to the requirements of many of her counterparts whose priority is the precise performance of the notated score. Moving on, I turn my attention to the recent development of women only ensembles of which I am a part in London and Canterbury. The need for these spaces and the surprising frustrations (Fraser in Lehmann and Palme 2022, 257) these collaborations provide is uncovered.

2.11 Women's Spaces

'The Women's Movement gave us strength .. There was a sense of liberation…Before the women's movement, many of us suffered from what Mary Daly calls 'mad' male approval desire.'

Maggie Nicols (appendix V, 78)

Nicols articulates a need for women only spaces here. Women improvisers, conscious of the 'second-class' (Berg and Sjöö 2024) status of their sex across society, were finding support and sanctuary in feminist groups and communities sympathetic to their cause like

(Tick 2001, II). In performance, an area where women were present, increasingly precise notation was restraining individual flexibility in matters of rhythm, pitch choice and metre in favour of an ever more precise notation and iteration of the requirements of the composer. For a comprehensive discussion of this see Bent et al (2014.)

The Women's Liberation Movement[137] and in free improvisation, The Feminist Improvising Group. Despite this and the enthusiasm with which their work was received in their own communities, '… these artists were often left out of the artistic narratives of the time…' (Berg and Sjöö 2024). Maggie Nicols describes here recent agency and her anger with the continuing inaccuracy in the media surrounding her work.

'It's been insane. Suddenly in my 70s in this country it's happened. Abroad there was more recognition for me. In this country no. I was really insulted, for example, by the programme Jazz Britannia. … They looked at Paul Rutherford and I and said that what we'd done had killed jazz. How ridiculous. I was steeped in jazz. They hadn't done their research properly.'

Maggie Nicols (appendix V, 77).

Catalogues of female free improvisation practitioners are emerging online. Among them[138]; Audible Women, Google arts and culture's 'women on the London free improv scene', and British Music Collection's 'Spotlight on female improvisers in London'. While these sites help academics like me justify and reference our arguments, and interested parties find out about the work of these women, they are no substitute for the physical face to face camaraderie and collaborative improvising opportunities provided by ensembles like LIO. The isolation women like Nicols and I experienced in male formations has contributed recently to the formation of women's improvising ensembles. These offer the '…trusting and trustworthy company of my equals' (Arendt in Stonebridge 2024,152) to their membership.

[137] More information available at https://womensliberationmusicarchive.co.uk/(Accessed 3.2.24) and appendix V in Nicols interview

[138] Available at: audible women; https://www.audiblewomen.com/?listing_category=improv,
Google arts and culture; https://artsandculture.google.com/story/female-musicians-on-the-london-improv-scene-sound-and-music/hQVxUfGPq0lXLg?hl=en,
British music collection https://britishmusiccollection.org.uk/article-category/spotlights-female-improvisers-london (accessed 10.3.24).

2.12 Women only ensembles

The work of ensembles of which I am a part and who are active in my London and Canterbury communities is discussed here. The challenges I discuss have formed part of the social backdrop to my practice in collaboration with these women.

Free Women (FW) was founded by Anna Braithwaite with London based free improviser Sylvia Hallett[139], initially as a response to what she saw as the gender imbalance across *Free Range*[140] and FRO.

'…Free Range at the time was largely older white men. … I asked Sylvia Hallett. … it was phenomenal; the best improvising I've ever done. …There were lots of women in the audience, and they all wanted to come up and talk to us afterwards. And I thought, yeah, this is what we need'
Anna Braithwaite (appendix V, 50)

In 2022, in response to the continuing gender imbalance in FRO, Anna and I together with others re-established FW as an open space for local women interested in free improvisation to come together and practice in a woman only space (see chapter four for a discussion of a recording of our work). Most of us are at the time of writing are, and were when we established FW, members of FRO. Additionally, pianist and accordion player Frances Knight, Heledd Francis Wright, Nadia Tewfik Bailey and I formed patternbook to come together as a free improvising quartet. The work of patternbook is discussed in chapter four and features in the final recording in part three of this thesis.

In London, free improviser Faradena Afifi formed Noisy Women[141] in 2022. She is supported and mentored by Maggie Nicols in doing this and Nicols is also a performing member of the ensemble. For Afifi, inclusivity, especially for the neuro-diverse community she is a part of, together with a deeply held belief in the innate creativity and potential of everyone who wishes to participate, takes from Nicols' concept of social virtuosity. She invites and accepts contributions and participation from all, including men, who wish to

[139] See Anna Braithwaite's interview with me in appendix V, 139 for more detail.
[140] See appendix II, 7 for statistics on gender balance in *Free Range*.
[141] See https://www.noisywomenpresent.co.uk/ (accessed 10.2.24) for information about *Noisy Women.*

participate and supports and nurtures their ability to do so. Maggie Nicols is a fervent supporter of this approach and of Afifi's work, seeing echoes of herself and her own experience in her praxis.[142]

In 2022 Caroline Kraabel founded ONe_Orchestra New[143], an improvising orchestra for female and non-binary people. In their first session the group explored how to avoid 'oppressor-created structures and hierarchies' and 'let go of power' (Kraabel 2022). This shared commitment does not appear to have led to a feministing[144] of their approach to performance or social organisation or to a *feminine* approach to their practice. Instead, my experience with the ensemble is described in this diary extract.

Wednesday 6th March 2024
Caroline spent a lot of time explaining and practising conduction techniques with us.
Another member demonstrated her conduction signs, and we practised them. It's very clear that just because this is a women's and non-binary people's ensemble working to counter the male dominance of the music and its spaces, doesn't mean that masculine behaviours and soloistic priorities haven't rapidly become part of their practice. Free Range Orchestra on Sunday was much more feminine in its output and the behaviours of those present, yet the majority were men.

The impact of the work of this formation is yet to emerge but participation in this process already 'feels' significant for me and others including trumpet player Charlotte Keeffe, and cellist Khabat Abas[145]. Despite the support and camaraderie identified so far in these formations, the frustrations and difficulties Juliet Fraser (Lehmann and Palme 2022, 257) articulates concerning collaboration and which I experience as part of all human interaction, do emerge in these groups.

2.13 Resistance

In this section I describe the ways in which the work to correct the patriarchal hegemonies I have uncovered, has, by some exponents, been described as 'difficult'. My observations are subjective and are offered here to illustrate the discomfort[146] we experience when pushing against the androcentric norms I have described so far. Nicols describes her experience of this when FIG was established.

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[142] Maggie Nicols in conversation with me January 2024 and November 2022.
[143] See https://oneorchestranew.com/about/ for information about this ensemble. (accessed 20.3.24).
[144] See p15 for a definition of my feministing approach.
[145] See p6 for an explanation of Abas and Edwards's relevance to my research.
[146] See p17 for an explanation of the situation of discomfort in my practice.

'…we got such stick from the men. They treated us as though we were some sort of novelty act. Lindsay (Cooper) got so fed up with journalists asking, 'why only women?' She would say why don't you ask the men, 'why only men?' Why are we being asked that?'
Maggie Nicols (appendix V, 78)

Interpersonal stridency is evident in Faradena Afifi's conducting and direction of LIO, and in her work for and with Noisy Women. This echoes the passion and determination of the first male free improvisers writing in *Musics* (Toop et al 2016). This community building behaviour and insistence upon being heard was a feature of the *masculine* community at its inception.

Acting to support women in free improvisation is not passive and, like all attempts to affect change, sometimes requires insistence on being heard and seen[147]. Such stridency is *not* always a characteristic of the improvisations these women undertake in their respective formations, however. In January 2024, Afifi and Noisy Women performed at Wintersound Festival in Canterbury. Her improvisations were never dominant and supported and wove among the soundings offered by others. This juxtaposition of stridency in demanding agency and visibility for themselves and others alongside an improvisational style which prioritises the interweave and making with others is an important feature of Afifi's approach.

Kraabel and Afifi have been seen to exhibit both *masculine* and *feminine* approaches and soundings. Both women are, for me, actively taking agency for themselves and other women rather than waiting for it to be bestowed upon them. Like me, both have '..come up against the world' (Ahmed 2015, 19) as a result. I have heard and seen in the community that their approach has caused them to be '..identified as being too reactive or overreacting….' (Ahmed 2015, 21). Evan Parker, Steve Beresford, David Toop et. al who were in part responsible for the imagining and development of free improvisation as we know it were and continue to be similarly strident in conversation when articulating their

[147] An example of audible anger in our improvising, inspired by the invitation score we are performing, is chapter 4, 4.5 *The Lost Place* performed by Khabat Abas and I.

understanding of their music and how it should be practised[148]. They have not, to my knowledge, been described as overreacting or exaggerating any challenge they might face. It takes bravery to change the patriarchal structure of which Kraabel, Afifi and I are a part. Their stridency and my own practice and thesis are an important contribution to that work.

2.14 Swarming[149]

I now examine the ways in which we are communicating and the questions this raises for us. Because identity[150] is multi-faceted and because our agency is always shared and enacted with others, the ways in which we communicate lie at the heart of our practice. Valuing soloistic expression of individual identity in free improvisation has been seen to be rooted in western classical and jazz traditions. Now, I and other feministing free improvisers are prioritising collaboration over individualism.

Diary Extract
Saturday September 10th, 2022; dinner with Paul Cheneour
In our conversation about the quest for individual virtuosity common to classical and jazz musicians in the UK, I came to the view that what other cultures share-Mexico, Brazil, Cuba-in their music making is that it is the music which comes first not the individual mastery of one's part in it. (Paul spent five years living and performing in Mexico). Musicians support one another in order to achieve the best musical outcome. This may be by supporting rhythmically, taking over melodically or harmonically if needed, and stepping out when someone else has something stronger to say. In so doing, musicians learn by doing within the ensemble. And it is the community, the social, the ensemble which is most important in enabling the musical output.

My identity as an improviser is informed and shaped by self-knowledge, and by the social dynamic within which it is situated. It gives structure to my practice which is delivered via an embodied technique which is itself the product of my various identities. An infinite, self-creating and sustaining feedback loop. Spatz describes this defining influence as '…deeply sedimented agency' (2015,173). This identity is not fixed, rather it is characterised by fluidity and subject to shifts in priorities.

Sheldrake (2021,251) sees such decompositional change as essential to our evolution not just in music but across ecologies, '… composers make; decomposers unmake. And unless decomposers unmake, there isn't anything that the composers can make with.' Put this way, we are decomposers us men and women who wish to uncanon and feminist

[148] I have witnessed and experienced the passionate and articulate nature of this with Beresford and Parker on many occasions.
[149] See Borgo, D. (2022) for an informative discussion of this.
[150] See p11.

the free improvisation story. In doing so we are creating space and drawing in new material to reshape the way in which our improvisation can happen. In this way our behaviour as humans is natural. '…organisms grow; machines are built. … Organisms self-organise; machines are organised by humans.' (Sheldrake 2021, 236). We are simply undertaking a timely remaking of ourselves and re-organising of our instruments to better serve our feministed purpose.

An unlikely example of the unconscious and sustained application of the principle of intra-action and shared agency over individual valorisation in instrument formations outside free improvisation is the ontology of the workings of The Market Strummers in Faversham, Kent.[151] The Market Strummers are a group who come together in their local pub to play the ukulele and sing. They have been active for 13 years. Their current membership of 12 includes artists, architects, social workers, and delivery drivers enjoying one another's company while making music together. I and one other member can be described as 'musicians' in the conventional sense. Most of the other participants had no instrumental facility or experience before joining the group.

'I don't want to take a role as a ... leader of a group. That then makes a distinction in performance and rehearsal between me and the others. … I don't want to be seen by my friends as seeking to manage them… '
Mark Holmes, Market Strummers co-ordinator (appendix V, 67)

This prioritising of the social, absence of 'performance' (the group rarely 'perform' to an audience, rather they play through together), and shared development of technique on their instruments to a point where they can participate is a perfect example of the feministing behaviours I am advocating here. In conversation, Holmes, the group's co-ordinator, describes their ability to play as an ensemble, with none of the conventions used by musicians-counting in, leading and following, as 'murmuration' (appendix V, 71). This is also my experience of playing with them. In the section on swarming that follows I offer the provocation that when we undertake collaborative improvisation '…we literally can hear

[151] For a detailed description of the way this group has evolved and the influences upon it see appendix V, p65 interview with Mark Holmes.

the inside and outside of multiple beings simultaneously…' (Di Paolo 2022). I conclude with the question Parker is attempting to answer in what follows and which extends beyond this thesis and my contemporary practice; how do we do this?

2.15 Swarming collaborative improvisations

'Your mental process, especially in a group situation, sometimes runs in sync with the other players and sometimes it runs out of sync. So you have the idea that this and this will fit really well, but if somebody else is moving in a different direction, you can't count on what they're doing anymore so suddenly you're in a new situation. … We also work with intuition and telepathy, ….. '
(Evan Parker in Denzler and Guionnet 2020,53)

Parker is attempting to articulate murmuration or synchronising with others and its position within a 'swarming'[152] collaborative. Free improvisation, since its inception, has been understood and enacted through the prism of soloistic individuality like Parker's. Here, he is describing his actions as distinct from but communicating with, the formation. Or, as Borgo would put it, 'syncing and swarming.'[153]Maggie Nicols describes her understanding of the shared reciprocity in ensemble communication here. The absence of any sense of or need for her individual influence is markedly different to Parker.

'It was as though I was receiving and then channelling information from the other musicians, but also from something bigger. It wasn't until a few years later… that I found out how what I'd done had affected them....'
Maggie Nicols (appendix V, 74)

The contradictory dualisms in free improvisation of which this is one, I have cited before. The position of self in relation to other improvisers, the need to express self bodily and intellectually (another word in this context would be 'mind'), and the sonic utterance of an individual imagining alongside the collaborative improvisation experienced by the

[152] See Borgo (2022, chapter 6) for an analysis and discussion of swarming and the way free improvising formations enact this.
[153] See Borgo (2022,173-177) for an extended definition and description of syncing and its pervasion across nature.

listener[154]. Di Paolo (2022) draws our attention to our 'natural' consideration of these as separate or opposing positions. What I propose here is that these dualisms are continuous in the embodied technique of the improviser and the collaborative sonic outpourings of a free improvising formation. In this way, free improvisation, undertaken with this paradigmatic shift in mind, is, in part, consciously '…dissolving barriers without erasing difference.' (Di Paolo 2022).

Borgo (2022) argues for a shift to a new systemacity in collaborative free improvisation with an enactive sympoesis like this at its heart. I describe this, in my own practice, as a mindful swarming. My diary entry from a One_Orchestra New[155] session reflects this.

Monday October 23rd 2023

Why do I assume that ensemble sonic interactions in free improvisation mirror wider societal behaviour? In particular swarming. How to achieve this 'oneness' 'togetherness' when playing? When we're taught, at best we're 'advised' to listen carefully and respond sensitively. Julia said a band she plays with talks about using swarm intelligence a lot. She pointed to orchestral sectionals as being like the subgroup movements you see in a swarm–moving against the pattern but with the crowd. A swarm can be likened to an orchestra playing 'as one'; a great compliment to orchestral players and something that all strive to achieve. We agreed that UK free improvisation has historically been soloistic and individuated. Feminist playing as a tapestry is a counter to this.

Self-prowess in listening is developed, in part to help us 'swarm' with distributed mindful attention within an orchestra or other classical formation. In a free improvising formation, it includes the need not to be heard necessarily as the individual source of an idea (though it doesn't preclude this) – rather, to contribute to its development and articulation with others. This can be a solo with an instrument or a collaboration with a gathering. This is unlike a jazz collaboration in which each improviser has a clearly predefined context and role. In free improvisation**,** each player has no such context. The sonic beyond the space and others, is unknown until it develops as the improvisation progresses and its participants 'swarm' in the manner described. Conduction is a notable exception to this and discussed in 'Improvising Orchestras' earlier in this chapter.

Conceptually, truly free improvisation is difficult to perceive and to articulate in practice. Sheldrake (2021,56) when discussing mycelium, gives a useful visual image for us to consider regarding the act of togetherness swarming entails. In it, '..control is dispersed:

[154] Listen to my improvisation with London Improviser's Orchestra chapter 3, 3.6 to hear this in practice.
[155] See https://oneorchestranew.com/about/ for information on this orchestra. (Accessed 12.2.24).

mycelial co-ordination takes place both everywhere at once and nowhere in particular.' In this way, idea development in collaborative free improvisation can rapidly build to being everywhere all at once and out of the control of its initiator. The ensemble not the author needs the credit for it[156].

In a classical orchestra there are clearly defined communication systems to limit the number of places a performer should attend to; section leader, orchestra leader, and conductor. In a free improvising collaboration, attention must be distributed and focused on the emergent whole and our position within it. What we hear and play can't be understood by unravelling it and describing it in the conventionally separate strands musicians use; melody, motif, accompaniment and so forth. We move musically, like mycelium, as a process in which control is dispersed and co-ordination is everywhere and nowhere simultaneously.

We have inadequate language to describe the skillset we use to achieve this. We use words like listen, focus, concentrate and attend to articulate what we do. 'Make eye contact' is a standard instruction offered as part of a conservatoire education. In the orchestra this will again be with the conductor, section leader or orchestra leader. In a large free improvising formation, there is no such hierarchy to helpfully reduce our frame of attention. In its place, free improvisers often talk about the transcendental state they need to achieve to improvise and listen well together, all at once. Parker described it as a kind of telepathy.

Here again, Sheldrake might be helpful. He (68-72) explains the ways in which animals use electrical impulses to communicate across networks simultaneously. Our brains, he tells us, '…are fantastically complex networks of electrically excitable cells.' What if the telepathy Parker describes is the utilisation of this electrical communication system? We often talk about charged atmospheres, or 'hairs on the back of my neck standing up' in the room when performers achieve the syncing and swarming we're aiming for.[157] We and the audience don't just hear it, we feel it too. What if we're forming the type of electrically

[156] Listen to the improvisations inspired by invitation scores in chapter four, and our performances of my invitation score 'A' and 'Spider Ballet' by Frances Knight in here.here/social virtuosity, appendix IV, p19 to hear this in practice.

[157] For an interesting explanation of the way bees and other insects communicate via electrical fields, see Puiu, T. (2022) 'How insects literally electrify the atmosphere.'
Available at https://www.zmescience.com/ecology/animals-ecology/how-insects-literally-electrify-the-atmosphere-a-swarm-of-bees-can-generate-as-much-electric-charge-as-a-storm-cloud/(accessed 10/8/24).

dynamic mycelial networking system Sheldrake discusses? There is insufficient scope or space here to examine this question, but it merits further investigation from biology as well as musicology.

2.16 Chapter two Summary

This chapter identified the androcentric nature of my free improvising communities both implicitly in their lack of female representation, and explicitly in the literature. Gender inequality cascading from twentieth century social structures hindered women's agency in male-dominated groups. The invitation score was seen to offer one *feminine* way to counter this in the collaborations I undertake. The influence brought to bear by practitioners John Stevens and Pauline Oliveros on the development of these scores has been acknowledged.

Soloistic egocentrism was rejected by Maggie Nicols and FIG in favour of the practice of social virtuosity. The impact and development of this concept has been situated in my practice and an emerging autotheoretical, intra-active, feminist collaborative approach to improvisation among some of my collaborators. My practice and emerging feminist collaborative approaches consciously reject individual valorisation and traditional *masculine* norms. Women-only groups provide alternative spaces, as exemplified in my communities. New paradigms and soundings in 'swarming' collaboratives are being explored in these ensembles, though the full impact of this conscious 'unmasculining' remains to be seen. Chapters three and four present examples from my practice, demonstrating the autotheoretical nature of my research and supporting the arguments discussed so far.

Chapter Three: My soundings

'Thinking I would not survive, I found myself enriched by myself.'
(Anne Truitt 2013, 22)

This chapter and the recordings which accompany it are an account of examples of the evolution of my free improvising voice[158] during the period of this research. 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate my improvisational approach, rooted in classical training but shifting towards collaborative free improvisation. This involves embracing imprecision and precarity. 3.3-3.6 focus on the gliss anglais, showcasing its use in three improvisations. The final recording features two free improvising oboists on a UK stage for the first time.

3.1 The evolution of my technique/an improvisation

My priority when improvising with my instruments is to allow my body to move across my instrument, spontaneously, in response to the soundings I, my instrument, and my collaborators make. Doing so causes a sonic response to emerge from my instrument which contributes to the cyclical loop that is the improvisation itself. As I move forwards as an improviser, new patterns of self-developed[159] bodily response emerge. Those I use frequently are listed in appendix III (p15). Their description facilitates listening to the improvisations offered here for those with an interest in the detail of oboe technique. I retain as far as possible a rich timbre. This requires a medium soft, short scrape on my reed- an oboistic preference that I am not prepared, (yet?), to relinquish[160].

I make conscious use of 'incorrect'[161] circular breathing. Instead of smoothing the throat and cheek movement to reduce as far as possible any sonic impact, I 'play' the sonic break. I'm never sure when or if this will occur and my improvisation responds to whatever

[158] See appendix III, 16-17 for a brief commentary on each recording and the location of the audio and video files.
[159] See chapter one for a discussion of the difference between technique development in the free improvising and classical realms and their impact on the free improviser.
[160] The subject of oboe reeds is important to all oboists. There is insufficient space here to do it justice. See Van Cleve (2014) and Goossens and Roxburgh (1977) for more information. See introduction; 'The oboe, cor anglais and gliss anglais and my practice with them' for information about the reed scrape I use. See Hart appendix V for the difference in reed scrape in the UK in comparison with Germany. Maxwell and Plugyers appendix V for the importance of reeds and timbre for oboists and the Englishness of preferring a warm timbre.
[161] See chapter 1, 1.7 for a discussion of the private, corrective way in which oboists and other classically trained instrumentalists practise.

soundings emerge. I also utilise sucking sounds. These require large breath inhalation and consequent often audible exhalation (something which oboists rarely do given how little air we can push through the instrument). Wet soundings from saliva lodged in the reed can be added to this timbre. Finally, uncontrolled rapid finger movements in both hands with thumbs remaining in position give the impression of florid pitch and overtone changes. In addition to the technique catalogue in appendix III, at times I employ any of these individual physical adaptations as 'feels' appropriate in the moment of improvisation.

An improvisation. 10'47"

Trio CZW at The Vortex. Sunday November 26th, 2023.

Paul Cheneour flute, Alistair Zaldua e-violin, Maureen Wolloshin oboe.

This improvisation took place after the performance of *O(d)e to Jonas*[162], whose performance is discussed in chapter four. This influenced its sonic character, as did the cabart oboe I play and my emotional relationship to it. (see introduction,i, p14 for information about the instrument and appendix V,14 for diary extracts relating to this improvisation and the instrument I play). Playing this instrument is a way to work against my sedimented technique (see chapter one) given its open holes and, because of its age and design, unstable character. Additionally, it has a different fingering system[163] to the one I'm used to, rendering this sediment useless around B, Bb and C in the mid and upper registers. Its open holes mean more pitch bending is possible than on the closed hole loree I'm used to.

I begin with short, muted squawks and am joined by Paul who offers longer supporting tones. Alistair takes up this role and Paul recedes into a series of quieter flourishes while my oboe produces lengthy bending whines. At 1'25" I revert to a purer warmer tone in a long note joined in this by Alistair then Paul. My short multiphonics are unstable and I allow the reed to have agency here before moving to a tension filled higher long note. This moves to a flurry of notes during which my throat is tense and fingers uncontrolled. At 3'23" I take

[162] See appendix III, 14 for the score.

[163] British oboists typically play a thumbplate system. This oboe has the conservatoire system favoured across the rest of Europe. See introduction; 'The oboe, cor anglais and gliss anglais and my practice with them' for information about the oboes I use and their fingering systems. See Van Cleve (2014) and Gillet (1936) for fingering charts and further detail.

back conventional control of the timbre of my instrument again for a long note. Alistair and Paul shift out of their drone at this point. By 4'30" Paul and Alistair have remained in the mid register for some time, and I introduce rapid flurries high in the register as a counter to this. Paul responds in similar fashion but still low in the register.

We have settled into a sombre and muted sonic painting which takes from the performance of *O(d)e to Jonas* which preceded this and matches the mood in the room. The collective tone set by those present is acting on our agency by making apparent what is (and is not) appropriate. At 6'12" a moment of silence is broken by Alistair, personal agency restored, with higher, short interjections. I join, above his register with tight longer notes which he decorates. Paul joins underneath and his long notes are a support and comfort. I enjoyed a sense of security at this point in the improvisation, consciously giving thanks for the moment. My mid-register call of a 6th was a response to that sensation-it offers a moment of light and hope in an otherwise static sombre and reflective sonic landscape. At 9'02" Alistair begins a prolonged mid register flurry and Paul offers very quiet interjections. I join a little later with some high short multiphonic breathy colour which merges with the scratch of Alistair's timbre. The three of us continue in this vein and the sound, to me, is a blending of our tonal colours into a new timbre which I enjoy very much.

***3.2 Do you Hear me Breathing?* Solo oboe improvisation 6'02"**

Friday February 16th, 2024.

This is a solo oboe improvisation recorded at Cove Park[164]at the end of a week-long investigation of my autotheoretical practice[165]. I'm playing my loree 125[166]. The acoustic in this large, bright and airy studio with a high ceiling was perfect to play with and in. Almost churchlike in the natural bright acoustic it provided. The view from the studio window was inspirational. The agency of this location was evident, and I was happy to work with it.

The improvisation took place at the end of my weeklong residency cataloguing and editing my practice. My intention here was to improvise using my self-developed techniques. I seem to have favoured breath sounds. In the main I tightened my throat and bent my neck

[164] See https://covepark.org/ (accessed 10/7/24) for information about this international artist's residency centre.
[165] See methodology p21 for an explanation of this.
[166] See p5.

to further constrain breath and timbral control. I think this was a response to the tension I was experiencing at the time; I was in the middle of a negative personal interaction. The emotional tension I was aware of acts upon me and is expressed physically here in the gesture, movement and breath control I apply. In the timeline which follows I give the time for each event followed by a short description of the sound then the number of the technique I am applying. These techniques are listed in appendix III technical innovations.

Analysis timeline

1" Rhythmic Sucking sounds 8
16" vocalisations-tongue and throat short sucking and clicking sounds
23" tongued long and short notes with pitch bends 1 and 2
37" key rattles with vocalised sucking and clicking
56" key rattling and inward breaths 8, shifting between 7 and 8 at 1' 06"
1'10" rapid louder flurries 7
1'20" traditional technique for long note moving to pitch bending 2
1'35" breath sounds
1'43" key rattling and sucking 8
2' breathy C# bending 4
2'15" sustained bending continues 5 and 11
2'27" sucking sounds-rapid then becoming sparse 8
2'34" unstable breathy sustained multiphonic 4
2'38" sustained note bending 3
2'45" rapid flurries 6
2'50" sustained note then flurries 3, 6
3' 3" dull breathy sound 7
3'16" shorter sounds 7
3'26" register shifting 3
3'33" pitch bending then flurries 2
3'41" rapid flurries 6
3'47" breath sounds
4' breath sounds and key clicking
4'8" breathy reed sounds with key clicking 3
4'25" unstable breathy circular breathing 11
4'35" continues and shifts into louder flurries 10 and 11
4' 56" breath and key sounds
5'3" continues with sucking sounds 8
5'9" flat dull timbre shifting register 3 and 1, 2
5'40" pitch bending 1
5'46" short sounds 7
5'51" breath sounds

Figure 3. Photograph by Maureen Wolloshin February 16th, 2024. Loree oboe on the desk by the studio window.

Figure 4. Photograph by Maureen Wolloshin February 16th, 2024. View from the studio window.

3.3 A case study; my gliss anglais practice.

I now explain the imagining and creation of the gliss anglais[167]. Its development and my practice upon and with it are positioned as feministing acts. This instrument allows me to produce soundings unlike those available on a conventional oboe. Appendix III contains a catalogue of the oboe techniques I have developed. I utilise some of these on the gliss anglais in these recordings. In addition, I employ sweeping hand movements. At times I strike the string repeatedly or tap the wooden body of the instrument. These are new gestures for me, and I enjoy employing them.

[167] See also Wolloshin and Abas (2023) for an account of the way in which the idea of the instrument developed, and chapter four 'invitation scores' for another gliss anglais performance.

My description of the development of the gliss anglais is accompanied by an extract from my conversation with Henry Dagg (see appendix V,7 for the full transcript), designer and maker of the instrument. Also in appendix V,10, are diary extracts which chart the making with Henry, development of and thinking behind this instrument. These situate it within the complex web of relationships across my communities, giving further personal and technical insight into the making and thinking with Henry and others that was part of this journey. The section concludes with accounts and more contextual musings on the three gliss anglais performances in my practice portfolio.

Figure 5. Photograph of me playing the gliss anglais by Henry Dagg taken in his studio the day of its completion in 2022. In the background is his 'sharpsichord.[168]

[168] The sharpsichord was commissioned by the English Folk Dance and Song Society then designed and made by Henry See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharpsichord (accessed 20.6.24) for more information.

Figure 6. Photograph of me by Emmanuelle Waeckerle taken at Cosy Nook, Thornton Heath Saturday June 10th, 2023. Here you see the gliss anglais next to my cor anglais.

The gliss anglais is essentially a cor anglais with all the keywork removed and replaced by a magnetic string. It's inspired in part by my playing with 'cellists Khabat Abas and Isidora Edwards, in particular the huge gestural and harmonic range possible on their instrument. Saxophonist John Butcher was similarly inspired by string players. 'Nearly all of the kind of sound areas I've been interested in looking at with the saxophone came through playing with other people, …. In the early days, it was with string players and all the incredible things they can do with overtones and bows. That's a great stimulus, inspiration for trying to do it on a wind instrument.' (Butcher in Denzler and Guionnet 2020,28)

Henry Dagg in conversation. *See appendix V,7 and V,10 for a detailed account of Henry Dagg's design and construction of this instrument. For a full account of the feminist imagining and development of the gliss anglais see Wolloshin and Abas (2023).*

HD *The obone goes way back to the late 70s or early 80s. I thought it would be interesting to see if I could modify a telescopic aerial to make an oboe with portamento. I fitted a small brass horn to serve as the bell. Once I had made a fitting for the reed, I started trying some oboe reeds, but couldn't really get much range..*

The gliss anglais retains the timbral warmth and pitch range of the cor anglais but is much lighter so easier to manage. It requires a much softer and open reed scrape[169] so there is slightly less breath resistance to contend with. The absence of key work, and its replacement with a metal strip is where its potential lies. It offers the ability to manipulate pitch, sound and range with embouchure and glissando techniques, together with an unpredictability which I enjoy.

Diary Extract

Sunday November 21st2022

The portamentoboe

'I went to Henry's studio today to try out his first prototype. …

Playing without the tyranny of fingering precision was completely liberating. One can experiment freely with the sensation and sound world you can experience while still 'playing like an oboe' with the muscle memory and satisfaction that brings.

…. I love it-it's exactly what I'm looking for and will allow me explore the sensation and soundworld it opens up free from the tyranny of precise technique.'

The gliss anglais requires the breath control and embouchure of the oboe but in all other ways a completely different approach. This expands the sonic possibilities available to me in

MW *How did we get from that meeting to beginning work on the gliss anglais?*

HD *From your description of how unsatisfactory you were finding the precise tuning inherent in the oboe, and as the portamento of the Obone appealed to you, I thought you obviously needed something custom made for you, which allowed this facility, but also scope for fingering. I proposed an instrument that used the 'magnetic-strip-over-slit' tuning method, an idea which I've known about ever since Bart Hopkin described the instrument that he developed back in the 80s, and so the easiest way to produce a trial prototype of that, was to base it on a piece of 20 mm steel box section.*

Being steel, it didn't require any special treatment, apart from cutting a long slit along most of its length, and it was completed by making a coupling section to connect the reed with the tube and making a flared bell for the other end. Also, a device to allow you to hold it without compromising your fingering too much. The biggest drawback of using that was that it was a parallel-bore resonator which, of course is not the conical bore of an oboe. What we both found was that the reed wasn't really capable of driving the very

[169] See Goossens and Roxburgh chapter three (1977) It's an art form that all oboists must learn.

improvisation, providing a more intimate and personal dialogue with its material. In working with the gliss anglais I am aware that I am drawing attention to my feminist position and challenging, and in time disrupting and altering, accepted oboistic practice.

'… when playing a solo improvisation, we are in dialogue with place, space, the environment, the listeners, the instrument, the body, as well as our own multiple histories. By 'feministing' free improvisation we seek to extend the boundaries and challenge the assumptions that frame the discussion around this musical practice.'
(Reardon-Smith 2020, 11)

The material agency of my oboe and its technique demands my negotiation with it. In de/reconstructing it I alter the terms of this interaction and the power balance inherent within it. My learnt and embodied oboe technique enacted on the gliss anglais draws out unexpected and unpredictable soundings from it. Its unfamiliar materiality draws out new gestural responses from me which invoke new soundings for which the instrument is responsible. In this way it has greater agency and power in our exchange.

much bigger bore of the air column. But it showed enough promise for you to consider it worth investing in.
The most important thing was to provide it with the correct conical bore, which conformed to the typical oboe or cor anglais. A big difference between the gliss anglais and the standard oboe is that it needs to be made in one unbroken length. This threw up massive technical problems, when it came to giving it a conical bore, particularly when you consider the dimensions of the taper. The bore needs to start at around five millimetres, and then over the length of about 760 millimetres, taper out to about 20 millimetres. I had to take a completely different approach from that of a typical oboe, which is made in sections.
I had to treat it more as an engineering operation, and either machine or fabricate it with a square bore with a long taper. I didn't really like the idea of something that was made with four continuous joints all the way along the body. It would have been functional, but I much preferred having the integrity of an instrument being made from one solid piece and the only way to do that was to treat it as a milling job. So it's machined from a square section length of padauk. That's an African hardwood, with

The de/reconstruction of my cor anglais is a personal preference for the rejection of my *masculine* sedimented technique in favour of *feminine* timbral flexibility and imprecision. It would be possible for me to feminist my improvisations on other instruments simply by exploring their greater inherent technical and sonic flexibility. Orchestral instruments like the clarinet and flute and to an even greater extent string and brass instruments, while technically challenging and requiring precise technique in the classical domain, also have greater timbral and technical flexibility inherent in their construction. In addition they are less fragile than the oboe with its delicate reed and laborious and therefore expensive construction. This means that improvisers approaching these instruments can explore these flexibilities more easily and extend their timbral palette far beyond that possible on an oboe.

I am simultaneously rejecting the tyranny of oboe construction, the classical canon for which it is designed, and the rigidity of conventional oboe teaching and practice.

a fine grain and a sort of orangey brown colour, and with enough density and consistency to do the job, although obviously in an ideal world, I would have preferred something like an African ebony. The starting point was to take the length of padauk, three inches square by about 30 inches long, and reduce its square section, and leave the full three inches for the bell. Everything to do with the bell was done first.

***MW** So how long did that take?*

***HD T**hat's very hard to say, but it was just a small part of the custom tooling needed; the biggest part was the milling jig which allowed me to adjust the vertical and horizontal taper angles, and rotational angle being machined in the main bore. Probably several days at least. Part of turning the bell included turning and fitting the stainless steel ferrule, it's not just decoration. It reinforces the bore while a 3-jaw chuck is gripping it internally during each milling and turning operation.*

3.4 Improvisation - Entanglement part 5-histories.

Improvisation. extended version. 5’47”

Benedict Taylor viola, David Leahy double bass, Izolda Reeder violin, Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais, Paul Cheneour flutes, Margaret Taylor vocals. See appendix V, 11 for illustrative diary extracts from this time.

This was the first time I had improvised and recorded using the gliss anglais. The improvisation was recorded on day three of our week-long Lossenham residency. It was a beautiful late spring morning and we had already spent time improvising and talking together. We had built a close and sympathetic ensemble, and I had become confident about how I could work with the gliss anglais’s palette to contribute to our outpourings.

We had spent a fair bit of time positioning ourselves so that, as far as possible, Nick could record the sound in the room and be confident that it was well balanced. The gliss anglais in this recording, however, is a little lower in the mix than I would have liked - a personal preference for him perhaps.

This improvisation has the sound and feel of a conversation between new friends, politely and informally taking turns, offering support, picking up and moving on from the ideas we each introduce. It moves quickly, never quite resting on one idea long enough to embed it. Rather like the conversations we’d had the night before. The agency of the small community we had become is evident. The positive interpersonal interactions we had created and enjoyed together are woven into this improvisation. I enjoy David’s melodic ideas and his movement to more conventional pizzicato accompaniment figures when the music requires it. Around 2’50 I loved the experience of joining Benedict and Izzy briefly in their rapid string scratchings. This was a first for me and the precarity and uncertainty felt liberating and strangely empowering. I try it again around 3’40” this time quietly-and Paul counters with a rhythmic motif which leads to a more spacious period for us.

FIgure 7. Photograph by Maureen Wolloshin May 12th, 2022. The view from the studio window.

3.5 I*mprovisation* - *'*Carceral Scrivings' 4'41"

Recorded as part of Space 21 Festival[170] in The Red Prison[171], Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, Tuesday September 27th, 2022. (see appendix V, 12 for diary extracts relating to this festival).
Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais, Khabat Abas bomb cello, Dror Feiler saxophone, Hardi Kurda electronics, Moe Ali electronics.

I investigated my relationship with the gliss anglais in Sulaymaniyah in an emotionally heightened, politically unstable, unfamiliar and precarious situation. The project involved musicians and artists from Queens University Belfast, Sulaymaniyah, Baghdad, and London. We spent ten days together in the city of Sulaymaniyah. Together, we performed in three abandoned buildings in the city; the old tobacco factory – a vast suite of derelict industrial buildings, the Saray Building – the oldest building in the city which has been refurbished but remains empty, and The Red Prison – site of Saddam Hussein's death camp which has been turned into a museum of remembrance. The agency of these spaces, of our shared emotional heaviness, and of our mutual support for one another at this time acted within our improvisings, colouring the shape and tone of our outpourings.

This recording is an edited series of short extracts cut together from an impromptu improvisation which lasted for over two hours. It's accompanied by video and photography taken during the performance whose purpose is to foreground the vestigial horror and menace acting upon us in that place. It was extremely hot and humid during this time. There

[170] More information about this project led by Hardi Kurda and Adam Denton is available here https://space21.org/abandonment-spaces/ (accessed 10/6/24).
[171] Built by Saddam Hussein as a prison it's now a museum. Khabat's parents have lived close to this building for many years. Details here; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amna_Suraka (accessed 10/2/24).

were moments where I was very lightheaded and had to lean against the wall to support myself. Yet I felt compelled to continue and completely absorbed in the physicality of my breath and the contact with and movement of my hands on my instrument. It became trancelike and ethereal in places, almost as though my 'self' was absent, and my body was a medium through which the improvisation occurred. I had many moments like this during the project in Sulaymaniyah but none as intense and sustained as this.

As well as the action of this space, place, and our communing upon us, the sound of the cell and the courtyard in which we performed is audible at the beginning of this recording. It's interrupted by Khabat's bomb cello, determined to take agency and be heard, supported by electronic drone provided by Moe who is situated in a separate courtyard. A silence leads to an outpouring from Khabat and I. Then an interjection from me during which I have moved into the women's cell itself. The gliss anglais's wailing sits alongside the different acoustic of the room, and the throbbing hum of electronics audible from outside the room. I interject with what to me feel like wails and I can hear Dror from outside the room, in a different part of the courtyard on his sopranino saxophone, playing extended rapid and angry rivers of notes. I recede into a pining and bending drone supported by the electronics and underneath his outpouring. The extract ends with low bomb cello notes and a flurry from me alongside Dror. It ends with me merging almost imperceptibly into a harsh long note from Khabat on her bomb cello and a long high sine tone from the electronics.

Figure 8. Photograph of Hardi Kurda, Maureen Wolloshin and Dror Feiler improvising outside the women's cell in The Red Prison by Gunilla Sköld Feiler September 27th, 2022.

3.6 Conduction - extract 2'43"

Adrian Northover and London Improviser's Orchestra. St. Mary's Church Stoke Newington 4th June 2023.

Adrian Northover conduction[172], Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais solo with LIO. (see appendix V, 13 for a diary reflection on this performance)

This was the first time the gliss anglais had played with LIO and the only occasion on which two oboists[173] had been part of the ensemble in its history. In this short improvisation, towards the end of a ten minute conduction by Adrian Northover you hear the texture shift with the glissando activity of the gliss anglais away from short percussive and spacious short soundings to a following of the sweeping character of what I'm playing. This is a new experience for me. The oboe is incapable of playing like this and I enjoy the swooping and swooning character that emerges between us.

The extract begins with a flurry and then a swooning series of vocalisations into which the gliss anglais enters. I loved being able to swoon and bend with them using the string on my instrument-not possible on an oboe or cor anglais. The others recede and a percussive background is established on top of which I continue bending and swooning and rasping. Others join and I love the 'Clangers[174]' character we invoke, and my thinking shifts to my enjoyment of this programme as a child. It's playful and moonlike. Different to any texture I've been able to create before this. We fade out together. This brief improvisation was enormously satisfying to me. When I listen back to it, I hear the speed at which others respond to and contribute to what I'm doing. Their contributions are, because of the palette I'm offering on the gliss anglais, very different to responses I've received from oboe or cor anglais improvisations. It literally felt as though a whole new sound world had emerged. That's perhaps why I felt the soundings were moonlike and other worldly in character.

[172] See p75 for an explanation of conduction and its evolution as a practice for LIO.
[173] The only oboists who have performed with LIO in the last ten years are women.
[174] A children's television programme in the UK popular in the 1970s in which the characters-clangers' live on the moon and communicate using characterful high pitched tone bends.

Figure 9. Photograph by Sean Kelly September 9th 2023. Southend Arts Centre. Maureen Wolloshin cor anglais,(gliss anglais clearly visible) Adrian Northover and Dee Byrne saxophones with London Improviser's Orchestra.

3.7 Chapter three Summary

This chapter has explored the evolution of my free improvising voice, heard in all but one recording in improvisations with others, the new instrument that has been imagined and created to facilitate this, and the techniques I have developed on the oboe and gliss anglais to facilitate my imaginings. The agency of the spaces, audiences, instruments, emotions and communities involved has been clear and audible. In chapter four my focus is entirely on making with others and the use of invitation scores as vehicles for beginning and inspiring our improvisings.

Chapter Four: Sounding with others[175]

'…agency and human flourishing would be equally impossible without repeated intersubjective and interactive exchanges.'
(Schiavio 2022, 538)

This chapter concerns OUR practice together – activity involving my individual improvisation making with that of others, including my instruments. 4.2 and 4.3 are work by women only formations. 4.4-4.7 are performances of invitation scores written by Khabat Abas and I. We invite then initiate, rather than direct, improvisations in which agency is shared. My collaborators share my *feminine* approach but not always the same sex. Nor do they always share the view that there is anything to push against in the first place. It's the *feminine* approach to improvisation that can be heard here, and which is being explored. An unintentional outcome of the curation of my practice for this thesis is the discomfort, terror and anger[176] expressed in each of the invitation scores and the improvisations they invoke here.

4.1 Women only groupings and feministed improvisations

4.2 Improvisation - Birdsong. 3'27"

Patternbook at *Free Women present Lady Garden*[177]. Free Range, Canterbury. Thursday November 16th, 2023.

This brief, spacious improvisation began an evening presented and performed by Free Women as part of the Free Range concert series. The seven women involved in this production came together in response to an invitation from Anna Braithwaite and I to participate in a women's improvisation group. Most of us were already members of Free Range Orchestra, also discussed in chapter two.

Lady Garden was devised, curated and performed by us and included physical and sonic improvisations, slapstick, theatre and dance on the theme of gardening. This

[175] Recordings (DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.27051832) can be accessed here https://figshare.com/s/6ec85fca2e7791ee7e25
[176] See p17 for an explanation of the position of these sensations within this research.
[177]Information available here https://freerangecanterbury.org/free-women-present-lady-garden/ (accessed 17/7/24).

improvisation by Nadia Tewfik Bailey violin, Heledd Francis Wright piccolo, birdsound recording and me playing the unstable cabart oboe[178] discussed in chapters one and three opened the evening with lighting and staging signifying dawn in a garden. The acoustic in the venue was reverberant and easy to play with, similar to the studio at Cove Park where I recorded the solo oboe improvisation discussed in chapter three. Its agency is evident in the recording.

During the improvisation I am responding to the birdsong on the recording and leave space for Nadia and Heledd to do the same. The sparseness is reminiscent of the waking sounds of the birds in my own garden at dawn. I use the upper register, rapid finger movement, and silent glottal stopping to make the end of the motifs I'm playing sound extremely short. At one point, around 2'15" in I play a quiet repeated short multiphonic which evokes the sound sparrows make. Longer strokes from Nadia and Heledd provide contrast and timbral colour. The improvisation came to a natural end a little before the five minutes or so we had intended and segued into a dance and videography sequence about snails.

4.3 Trio improvisation 10'15"

Cosy Nook[179], Thornton Heath. Saturday June 10th, 2023.

Stevie Wishart hurdy gurdy, Els van Riel, film, Maureen Wolloshin oboe then gliss at 3'27".

This is an extract from a trio performance making with and responding to place, 16mm film projection and later, live moving images from the garden. Stevie plays hurdy gurdy, Els film and projection, and I play my modern loree oboe [180] then gliss anglais.

Our improvisation is responding to a segment of *FUGUE, A Light's Travelogue*[181], a film created by Els van Riel and being projected live. The sound of the projector is audible in the room but barely perceptible on this recording. As we begin, flickering images are visible on the screen to which I respond with details rather similar to those I use in the previous extract. This is the first time Stevie and I have undertaken an extended improvisation

[178] See p5 for information about this

[179] A long running concert series curated and hosted by Emmanuelle at her home. See here (scroll down for cosy nook) https://ewaeckerle.com/more/concert-series/ (accessed 14/7/24).

[180] See p5 for information about this.

[181] Information about this film can be found here https://www.elsvanriel.be/works.php?id=275 (accessed 15/7/24).

together (this film is 30 minutes long) so I am curious throughout as to what she will do. I like the uncertainty of this very much. I'm conscious of the friendship which exists between Els, Stevie and I, and also with Emmanuelle who is hosting this performance. The community in the room have eaten supper and chatted together before our performance. The connection this created between all of us is tangible. It acts upon me and I am aware of the positive impact this has on my ability to focus on what I am about to do.

Even though my reed is dry and challenging when we begin (we had been sitting in silence for 15 minutes or so watching the film on a hot summer's evening) I enjoy experimenting with the timbre and texture of the oboe in combination with the hurdy gurdy and spend time early in the improvisation playing with dynamics and pitch bends. The solo which follows combines these in response to longer visual sequences on the screen. Stevie and I use wood and reed sounds very quietly when I switch to gliss anglais at 3'27". The vibrato, pitch bend, and tone of this instrument makes it easier for me to match and blend seamlessly with the drone of the hurdy gurdy moving to a sudden stop by both of us in response to an image on the screen. Stevie's low register solo with drone from this point suits the visual accompaniment of a slowly emerging flame. I then play mid register staccato notes before extended flurries leading into an unstable long high shifting multiphonic/single tone. This blends with the hurdy gurdy and shifts into a drone whose dynamic and pitch move together. This is a very rewarding thing to do on the gliss anglais and was previously unavailable to me on the oboe. This extract closes with repeated unstable multiphonics on the gliss anglais alternating with more lyrical brief and breathy motivic figures.

Figure 10. Photograph of Els and her projector by Emmanuelle Waeckerle June 10th, 2023.

Figure 11. Photograph of Stevie Wishart and Maureen Wolloshin by Emmanuelle Waeckerle June 10th, 2023.

Diary Extract; Saturday June 11th, 2023
In the performance, all went as planned until the end when I felt, despite what we'd agreed earlier, that Stevie wanted to Improvise alone, and we came to a natural end. It seemed right to stop at that point. Stevie came back home with me, and we talked till the early hours about improv. Next morning she told me she'd had news of the death of her aunt just before our performance and the final improv had been inspired by her thoughts of her. No wonder it seemed wrong for me to join in.

The focus on timbre and tonality weaving in and out of our work, of the scratch and interweave with the film, of the communing is at the heart of what we're doing. Very different to LIO, and the content based, emotion free conversation of Henry and Evan.

4.4 Invitation scores

I hadn't intended, when curating a suite of examples of my practice for this thesis, that so many of them be inspired by or evocative of discomfort, terror and anger[182] in some way. Yet each of the invitation scores[183] represented here, together with *Carceral Scrivings* and the improvisation by Trio CZW in chapter three, has a thread of at least one of these sensations running through it. They are each inspired by a push against an unwelcome curtailment of freedom or a restriction of some sort. In this way, they echo the discomfort, terror and anger I and some other women experience as a response to the central tenet in this thesis; that the patriarchal hegemonies in free improvisation restrict the agency of women instrumentalists who wish to participate. This intention was not present in their writing, performance, or selection for this portfolio, An unintended consequence of the organic evolution of this selection is that this suite of improvisations is both a push against

[182] See p5 for the position of these sensations within my research.
[183] See chapter 2, 2.9 for an explanation of these scores and their position within my practice.

the patriarchal hegemonic norm in the music, and representative of this aspect of my practice.

4.5 *The Lost Place* by Khabat Abas. 5'21"

KIM Duo. Free Range, Canterbury. Thursday October 13th, 2022.

Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais, Khabat Abas cello (adapted with the addition of safety pins).

This is an improvisation in response to an invitation score by Khabat Abas, first performed in Iraq[184] by Hardi Kurda, Dror Feiler and I as part of Space 21 Festival (see also appendix V, 12, for diary extracts relating to my participation in this festival). The three parts are printed on muslin and shown in figures 12-15. A fourth part was a recording of the voices of speakers reading words relating to the experiences of Khabat and others during Saddam Hussein's occupation. In this performance at Free Range, Khabat and I played two of the available three parts, and the words were given to the audience as a handout and displayed on a banner made by Khabat (suspended behind us and visible in figure 15). We asked the audience to speak these words quietly if they wished to.

Khabat begins and the rattle of the safety pins is audible. The audience join us and the gliss anglais provides sustained and unstable notes. One of the voices contributing 'violence' at 1'16" is that of patternbook flautist Heledd Francis Wright's eight year old daughter. I then hear Heledd call the word more loudly immediately after her. I recognise the voices of many of those making contributions, which both supports me and draws out a deep sadness simultaneously in me. The gliss anglais evokes this emotion. It's a keening beyond wailing. While I was playing, I was remembering the improvisations Khabat and I undertook outside the women's cell in the red prison. The sound of Heledd's young daughter contributing a word to the performance caused an immediate visceral and physical return to the sensations I experienced when I learnt that the children's cell in The Red Prison was positioned next to door to the women's cell so that the women would have to hear and endure the cries of their children, helpless to assist them.

[184] See chapter 3, 3.5 for information about the project within which this first performance took place.

When my attention comes back to the room, I can hear that Khabat is playing with the anger and determination I heard in her improvisations with me at the time. The gliss anglais and cello become more insistent, a heavy and loud keening and the audience continue to contribute frequently. I am surprised and pleased by this and at the point when I think this, Khabat begins to play more forcefully and rapidly. My gliss anglais becomes almost desperate in its shorter pitch bends which move into a long note during which I am slapping the instrument causing it to vibrate. Towards the end the voices subside and the intensity Khabat and I are feeling can be heard in our playing, within which Khabat becomes louder and I allow the gliss anglais to recede so that her energy can be foregrounded. I interject with short rhythmic stabs before we end.

Figure 12. Photograph of part one of *The Lost Place* by Khabat Abas next to my gliss anglais in the Saray Building Sulaymaniyah by Maureen Wolloshin September 29th, 2022.

Figure 13. Photograph of all three parts of *The Lost Place by* Khabat Abas with gliss anglais in The Saray Building by Maureen Wolloshin September 29th, 2022.

Figure 14. Photograph of Dror Feiler saxophones, Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais and Hardi Kurda violin performing *The Lost Place* by Khabat Abas September 29th, 2022

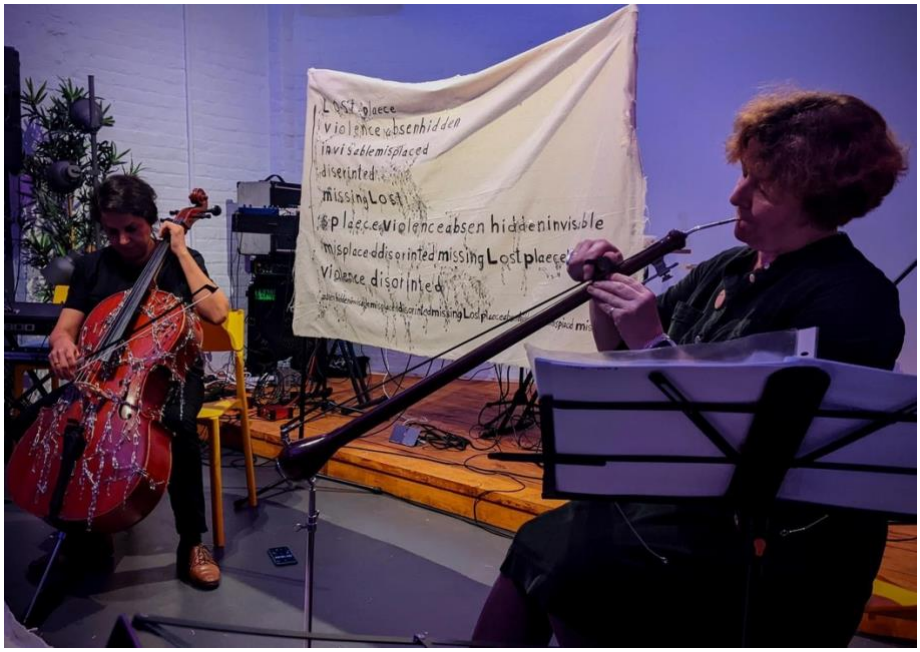

Figure 15. Photograph of Khabat Abas adapted cello and Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais with text score from *The Lost Place* by Khabat Abas. Matthew De Pulford for Free Range October 13th, 2022.

Diary extract: Thursday October 13th, 2022 (see also appendix V,12)
A Free Women gig with Khabat
Khabat and I played her piece again (we had played it in Saray Building).
Perhaps we should consciously investigate restraint in our playing-it's evident throughout when I listen -and I enjoy it in this piece. I also enjoy the way the invitation score is hidden behind the improvisation. It's secretive-veiled-it would be good presented in clouded glass. I enjoy more and more the possibilities afforded by the gliss anglais and playing with Khabat.
The audience at Free Range is so welcoming and open that it is a pleasure to play for them. This gig confirmed for me my wish to move feminism away from its central position in my research. I am more interested in instrument, ensemble interaction, and notions of virtuosity as resistances at the moment. I am also interested in the instability and unpredictability of my instrument-and the indeterminacy this brings to my improvising.

4.6 A by Maureen Wolloshin. 9'11"

(See appendix III,13 for the score).

patternbook and Maggie Nicols at Iklektik as part of here.here/Social Virtuosity. Wednesday March 29th, 2023.

Maureen Wolloshin oboe, Nadia Tewfik Bailey violin, Heledd Francis Wright flute, Frances Knight piano. You can hear this recording as the first performance of the complete concert in part three.

This invitation score was written during a week-long Wandelweiser[185] residency in France, during 2022. I am grateful to Marianne Schuppe, Stefan Thut, Emmanuelle Waeckerlé and Els van Riel for their thinking with me on this piece during this time. The score is a response to the discomfort and dread I and some other classical oboists experience when giving a tuning 'A' to their orchestra. This is discussed in chapter one.

In this performance patternbook are joined by Maggie Nicols. When discussing who would give an 'A', we agreed that, because Nadia felt uncomfortable improvising alone, Maggie and Frances, then Nadia and I would do this together rather than individually. One of the things I've noticed during this and different performances of the score is the nervous, tentative support offered to every 'soloist.' I didn't intend this inversion of the discomfort experienced by classical oboists when giving an A to their orchestra. It's an unintended consequence which becomes part of the character of each improvisation this score initiates.

Heledd begins with an extended improvisation which takes some time to settle. Tentative voices join her, quietly supporting with a shared drone Bb. Heledd joins us and continues to shift, unsettled, before very briefly finishing on our shared note then leaving us to sustain the pitch at 3'25". In contrast Maggie and Frances twitter around wide ranging figures before Maggie finds a pitch and settles low down and grumbling uncomfortably in her bottom register. Frances continues to decorate this, and Maggie leaves the voices who have joined her from time to time in ornate flutterings. This settles into quiet and subdued lower register, mesmeric dronings and Frances moves to low register accordion before the group fade away.

The final A is led by Nadia with very quiet, anxiety ridden pizzicato offerings. I then respond with high register flutterings, and Nadia tentatively moves to a drooping bowed note in the mid register. I join her here quite quickly and our range and timbre offers another contrast to both Heledd's initial meanderings and Maggie and Frances's low register ominous dronings. We are joined by quiet voices and begin to play with the note briefly, sticking to a limited range before ending quite suddenly.

[185] See https://www.wandelweiser.de/composers_meet_composers/ (Accessed 10/6/24).

Figure 16. Photograph of Heledd Francis Wright, Naida Tewfik Bailey, Maureen Wolloshin and Maggie Nicols by Harry J. Whalley March 29th, 2023.

Diary extract; Monday September 12th, 2022; patternbook rehearsal
I enjoyed this rehearsal enormously-the playing of all of us is sympathetic. We agreed that the balance of personalities in the group is important. Our playing is respectful, careful and interwoven-The longer Free Women carries on the more I feel the need to work with behaviours like these rather than have a gender divide in the formations I practise with. It is socially acceptable to exclude men from this group. Would it be controversial in the extreme to exclude certain behaviours? We do not yet have a free improvising convention of language or practice which naturally contains or excludes unhelpful behaviours.
The behaviour in patternbook is feminine, non-threatening, listening, inclusive and respectful. The music, while appearing to have these characteristics, in staying firmly on one path can be stubbornly unswerving and closed to otherness in sound and approach.

4.7 O(d)e to Jonas by Maureen Wolloshin. 6'14"

See appendix III,14 for the score and appendix V, 92 for relevant diary extracts.

Trio CZW. Mopomoso at The Vortex, London. Sunday November 26th, 2023.

Paul Cheneour flute, Alistair Zaldua e-violin, Maureen Wolloshin cor anglais.

I was introduced to the work of the inspiration for this score, Jonas Mekas, by Tim Fletcher, another Faversham resident[186]. Tim curates the Mopomoso series at The Vortex and invited me to bring a performance to the event. He also volunteers in our local bookshop and has lent me different texts by Mekas to read. Mekas, like my grandmother, was Lithuanian. His stark, angry and defiant writings and improvisations resonate with me. Perhaps because we have this heritage in common.

[186] I live in Faversham. See p6 and references throughout this thesis to the significance of friendships with other Faversham friends, Evan Parker, David Leahy, Henry Dagg.

The text in this score is taken from stanza V of *In the Woods* (Mekas 2018,34-35), in which Mekas bemoans the way Europe '…shattered my childhood...' and caused him to still '…carry my ruins…'(Mekas 2018,34), a reference to his experience of the second world war as a prisoner of war and later a refugee. The poem matched my own angry, hopeless mood at the time (there is no need to expand on this here beyond the fact that a conflict between Hamas and Israel had begun on October 7th 2023[187], a heartbreaking, violent reality played out in the national media at the time-the mood is what's important). The score invites improvisers to respond with 'a sense of being lost, hopeless, eternally whirling.' (score available in appendix III,14). Our performance at The Vortex coincided with a brief, temporary ceasefire in Gaza. When I introduced this score to the audience and described the relationship between its text and the hideous reality being played out in Gaza there were many nods and sighs of acknowledgement and sympathy from those present.

'Our previous work together was recorded in our album, … Anyone who has heard this … will have been struck by how different both sound worlds will have been. … we … rehearsed and performed a text piece by Maureen that is based on a poem by Jonas Mekas, …. I felt this worked well for the concert ...'
Alistair Zaldua (2023)[188]

During this performance the air conditioning unit above us is stubbornly, annoyingly loud. You can hear it at the beginning of this recording. I added a little noise reduction and reverb in LogicPro after the performance, but the sound is still evident. We begin with barely audible sucking sounds on the cor anglais followed by pizzicato interjections from Alistair. Paul and I play a long series of sustained notes, moving together. We are low in the register and Paul adds pitch bends before he joins Alistair in a series of shorter offerings without the spaciousness of Alistair's playing. I sustain the role of 'drone' requested in the score. Alistair's continued spacious pizzicato has an ominous tone above and below which the drone has the air of sadness I feel at the time. Paul leaves a lot of space in this recording.

[187] See https://committees.parliament.uk/work/7983/humanitarian-situation-in-gaza for more information (accessed 17/4/24).
[188] Taken from; http://www.alistair-zaldua.de/trio-czw-performance-at-the-vortex-album-release-on-pan-y-rosas-discos/ (accessed 10.6.24).

This is unusual for him - in our playing he is usually generous in his sonic offerings. This absence of Paul's sound feels appropriate, and I am conscious of the sensitivity in his playing at the time. Towards the end, Alistair offers longer bowed sounds which balance with the timbre of the gliss anglais. I inject a series of higher short and rhythmic interjections which lead us into the silence at the end of the performance. Alistair stops playing at this point. I am surprised by this - Alistair often ends our improvisations with lengthy solo flourishes which I enjoy. His silence here matches and complements the sombre tone of the improvisation and the mood in the room.

Diary extract: Friday November 24th, 2023 (See appendix V, 14 for a further diary extract describing the performance itself)

Today Trio CZW rehearsed at Goldsmith's[189]. We had a long chat over coffee to begin with. We then improvised together several times. I recorded each take. I brought along O(d)e to Jonas for Jonas Mekas. We played a couple of versions of this.

The playing was very different to our last performance. Spacious, long notes and careful listening. I am now using Evan's oboe[190] and it's transformed my playing-for the better I think. It's still unpredictable and I am using a much smaller tonal and rhythmic palette but a broader dynamic and timbral one which I like. The different oboe has a huge effect-I feel much less restricted by it and am enjoying its unpredictability. The tension that exists between us is working positively and there is no wish to dominate from anyone. As a result, most of what we are doing is with resonance, timbre and texture.

O(d)e to Jonas was atmospheric and exactly as I'd imagined. The invitation score coloured the whole rehearsal-sombre yet positive. It gave a focus to our beginning, and I think set the pensive tone for our playing.

Figure 17. Photograph of Trio CZW at The Vortex by Sean Kelly November 26th, 2023.

[189] Alistair Zaldua is married to Lauren Redhead who at the time of writing is Head of the Music Department at Goldsmith's in London. Khabat Abas and Isidora Edwards are both undertaking PhD research there. This gives us access to rehearsal space in the university.

[190] See p5 for information about this instrument; gifted to me by Evan Parker. See also appendix V, 91 for relevant diary extract.

4.8 Chapter four Summary

The character and entangled making with of each of the improvisations discussed in this chapter has been seen to be affected by the instruments, invitation scores, objects used and the locations in which they occurred. This was particularly evident in the performance of the invitation score *O(d)e to Jonas.* Within these *feminine* collaborative outpourings, my individual improvising voice, illustrated in chapter three, has been seen to merge with and respond to the others with whom I am playing in an audible feministing.

here.here/Social Virtuosity **with Maggie Nicols and Maureen Wolloshin**

As an illustration of the nature, character, and outcome of my practice, the final component of this thesis is a recording of a concert I co-curated with Emmanuelle Waeckerlé titled 'Social Virtuosity'. The technical details and recording of this performance can be found in appendix IV, 19-20. The first performance in this concert was discussed in chapter four, p120. Maggie Nicols performs with patternbook and Emmanuelle Waeckerlé. In these performances, the feministing and shared agency, *feminine* approach, and entangled making with is audible throughout. In this way it offers further support to the arguments offered in this thesis and illustrated by the recordings discussed in chapters three and four.

Thesis Conclusion

The body of autotheoretical practice developed during the three year period of my research captures ideas, techniques and activities which will continue to evolve beyond the scope of this PhD. As a result, it's not possible to offer a conclusion to my practice itself; by its nature, like the community within which it emerges, it's in a perpetual state of evolution. Instead, I reflect here on my original intention and offer a summary of the perspectives, ideas, approaches and innovations examined and developed during this study. My conclusion is in my pointing towards ways in which we can continue to push against the patriarchal and restrictive hegemonies I have identified in free improvisation. In particular, the further thinking and researching needed on ensemble communication, the ways in which we acquire and develop technique, and the need in free improvising formations to continue prioritising 'making with' others over soloistic expression identified in chapter two.

In the introductory material I situated myself, my feminist approach, and my oboe within the communities in which I practice. I explained the concepts and ideas which underpin my feministing practice and provided a contextual review of relevant feminist literature, a description of my free improvising communities and my position within them. The italicisation of *masculine* and *feminine* throughout this thesis was explained and has referred to the *masculine* quest for soloistic individualism and the *feminine* prioritising of community and shared agency.

In chapter one the oboe and the way in which its technique has evolved and is taught was explained. Negative and corrective oboistic practice was positioned within a patriarchal European classical tradition and seen to be the norm for instrumentalists in the genre. This was contrasted with the positive and self-developed techniques of free improvisers, which evolved to facilitate their imaginings. The embodied sediment of our technique and the way in which it ventriloquises upon us in improvisation was explained. The patriarchal construct of the classical and jazz domains from which free improvisation emerged and the soloistic quest for expression at the heart of these musics was seen to act as a barrier to agency for women. In my own practice, precarity and imprecision were described and positioned as a counter to this individualistic and *masculine* quest for technically precise self-expression. Instead, I am seen to prioritise making with my

instrument and others, welcoming and engaging with the agency of my instrument in my free improvising.

Chapter two examined the construct of the free improvising community, its groupings, and the patriarchal norms which had cascaded from the social constructs pervading society at the time of its inception. Social virtuosity was seen to emerge within and without second wave feminism as a challenge to this androcentric hegemony. This was a precursor to the feministing practice I advocate in this thesis. The women's only groupings which have emerged in my London and Canterbury communities in the last five years in response to this hegemony were seen to take inspiration from and be influenced by this idea.

In chapter three the evolution of my free improvising voice, the instruments on which I improvise, and the development of my gliss anglais, were illustrated in a solo improvisation and in collaboration with others. A catalogue of technical innovations accompanies this and can be found in appendix III, 15. My instruments and locations were seen and heard to have influence of their own. The agency of my instruments, location and communities is evident in the entangled web of influence heard in my outpourings.

Chapter four elucidated my collaborations with other improvisers, including our use of invitation scores to facilitate our playing. A *feminine* 'making with' was evident in all the performances regardless of the gender of the performers. As with chapter three, the shared agency of instrument, gender and community in and on our improvising was welcomed by the formations heard and influenced the character of the playing and, at times, the action and mood of those in the room.

A recording concludes this portfolio and stands alone as an example of an autotheoretical concert on the theme of social virtuosity performed by Maggie Nicols, Emmanuelle Waeckerle, patternbook and I. Our shared agency, *feminine* approach, and our prioritising of this throughout reflects and illustrates the explanations and arguments offered throughout this thesis.

In this thesis and the body of practice submitted with it, I have demonstrated that instrument, technique and its sediments, community and gender, have agency and act upon and with us as improvising instrumentalists. Free improvisation is an intersubjective process in which, alongside these, the social has as much influence and agency as the technical and creative. In my Canterbury and London communities the character of the

music itself and the social construct of the formations undertaking it has in turn been seen to be shaped by existing behavioural and educational tropes which cascade from the broader society we occupy.

Armed with the insights and understandings uncovered by this research, I hope that all those with an interest in instrumental collaborative free improvisation can think with and make with these ideas and ways of practicing. In particular, the ways in which we 'swarm' in large formations, and the autotheoretical nature of free improvisation, need further investigation. The reason so few oboists undertake free improvisation has been seen to be due in large part to the uncomfortable, restrictive, patriarchal and negative corrective practices inherent in the instrument, its teaching, and the technique required to play it. The development of my gliss anglais together with a range of technical innovations on my oboe push against this and will evolve beyond and as a result of this research. Such gendered impact - of instrument design and the development of technique on agency in free improvisation - clearly needs further research. In making and thinking together, feministing free improvisation, we can further correct androcentric patriarchal hegemonies which continue to challenge the agency women instrumentalists, oboists in particular, have in the practice.

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Appendices

Appendix I Ensemble membership and participation

During this research I have performed, among others, with the following formations.

Trio CZW. Paul Cheneour flutes, Alistair Zaldua e-violin, Maureen Wolloshin oboes.

KIM Trio. Isidora Edwards cello, Khabat Abas cello, Maureen Wolloshin oboes.

KIM Duo. Khabat Abas cello, Maureen Wolloshin oboes.

A Priori. Paul Cheneour flutes, Izolda Reeder violin, Benedict Taylor viola, David Leahy Double Bass, Maureen Wolloshin oboes.

Ensemble Triptik with Maureen Wolloshin oboes. Adam Bohman prepared strings and objects, Adrian Northover alto sax, Catherine Plugyers oboe and cor anglais.

Whereness. Ansuman Biswas strings and percussion, Paul Cheneour flutes, Alistair Zaldua e-violin, Maureen Wolloshin oboes, Annie Catford film.

Trio. Els van Riel live projection, Stevie Wishart hurdy gurdy, Maureen Wolloshin oboes.

Noisy Women led by Faradena Afifi.

o t t e r Duo. Maureen Wolloshin oboes, Stevie Wishart hurdy gurdy.

ONe_Orchestra New led by Carolin Kraabel.

Free Range Orchestra.

London Improviser's Orchestra.

patternbook. Heledd Francis Wright flutes, Nadia Tewfik Bailey violin, Maureen Wolloshin oboes, Frances Knight piano and bandeon.

Free Women. Heledd Francis Knight, Nadia Tewfik Bailey, Maureen Wolloshin, Kristin Fredriksson, Kat Peddie, Anna Braithwaite, Celia Rose.

Performances and composition commissions.

Among other performances the following have been significant.

October 2021 Album release; 'Where the Wind Takes Us' *Trio CZW* on Pan y rosas discos.

January 2022 *Wintersound Festival*. Curator with Matt Wright for Canterbury Christchurch and The Orpheus Instituut. Performance *KIM Trio* with Isidora Edwards and Khabat Abas.

May 2022 *CCCU Jubilee* Monteverdi Vespers Canterbury Cathedral

July 2022 *A Priori* (with Paul Cheneour, Benedyct Taylor, Izzie Reeder and David Leahy) recording and performance Lossenham for Paul Cheneour.

August 2022 Free Range Orchestra album with Evan Parker *Connections* released on Redgold music.

August 2022; *Wandelweiser* Composer Meet Composer, France.

September 2022 *Space 21 Festival* Kurdistan duo recording and presentation with Khabat Abas. Sound construction with Dror Feiler,Hardi Kurda, Adam Denton and the SARC at Queens University Belfast.

October 2022 Free Range Canterbury concert series KIM Duo performance with Khabat Abas/ *Free Women with an instrument* performance of *Woman much Missed* by Maureen Wolloshin.

November 2022 *Free Range Orchestra* performance with Maggie Nicols Colyer Fergusson Hall in the Canterbury Festival.

A Priori album release.

January 2023 composing residency Canterbury Christchurch University with *Bl!ndman.*

January 2023 Wintersound Festival curation and performance *patternbook,* Els van Riel and Stevie Wishart and *Bl!ndman.*

March 2023 Iklektik with Maggie Nicols and *patternbook/* Free Range Canterbury with *patternbook.*

June 2023 *Cosy Nook* performance with Stevie Wishart and Els van Riel.

June, -December 2023 *London Improviser's Orchestra*; various performances.

August 2023. *Underscore* with David Leahy Double bass, Will Glanfield clarinets, Neil Metcalfe and Lawrence Fletcher saxophones, Paul Cheneour flute, Maureen Wolloshin oboe. Victory Wood, Kent.

September 2023. *Noisy Women.* Cambridge.

November 2023. *Free Women present Lady Garden.* Free Range Canterbury.

January 2024. *Wintersound Festival.* Curation and performance with Maggie Nicols, Evan Parker, Noisy Women and Free Range Orchestra.

February 2024. Ensemble Triptik with Maureen Wolloshin. London.

March and July 2024. ONe_Orchestra New.Kings College Chapel and The Vortex. London.

Summer 2024 *Colourscape Festival* various UK locations. o t t e r Duo. Stevie Wishart hurdy gurdy, Maureen Wolloshin oboes,

Writing, Curation, Directorships and Research

Among others, the following have been significant.

September 2021 onwards Royal Music Association Music and/as Process Committee Member.

January 2022; '*Late twentieth century British Jazz; why women didn't play*.' Helsinki University Gender Study Conference.

April 2022 onwards Project leader; *Free Women improvising group* for Free Range Canterbury.

May 2022 *Bl!ndman* commission for percussion quartet.

June 2022 presentation UAL PhD panel *The female free-improvising oboist: a practice-based feminist investigation into the agency of gender and instrument in British free improvisation*

July 2022 presentation UCA postgraduate research festival *The paradox of free improvisation; instrument de/reconstruction as a feminist practice.'*

July 2022 *Walking in Air* commission and performance with Emmanuelle Waeckerle, Will Montgomery and Sophie Stone. Folkestone Triennial

September 2022 *'Virtuosity and free improvisation; instrument de/reconstruction as a feminist practice.'* RMA Music and/as process conference presentation

November 2022 *'Abandonment in Kurdistan; instrument de/reconstruction as a feminist practice.'* Sound Image 22 conference Greenwich University.

June 2023 *Echo* and *Performance Philosophy* Article publication; *The paradox of free improvisation; instrument de/reconstruction as a feministing practice.*

June 2023 *Music as Process* RMA conference planning, participation and delivery.

July 2023 guest composer *Klangraum Wandelweiser Festival* Düsseldorf.

February 2024. Artist in residence. Cove Park, Argyll and Bute.

January-June 2024. *Sound Arguments.* Orpheus Instituut, Ghent, Belgium.

September 2024 *'Masculinity and feminism in British free improvisation; Evan Parker at 80/Maggie Nicols at 75.'* RMA 150th Anniversary Conference.

Appendix II Gender participation and presence data

1 Men and women contributors to *Musics* (Toop et al 2016)

2 Men and women members of Skyscraper Ensemble

3 Free Range Canterbury

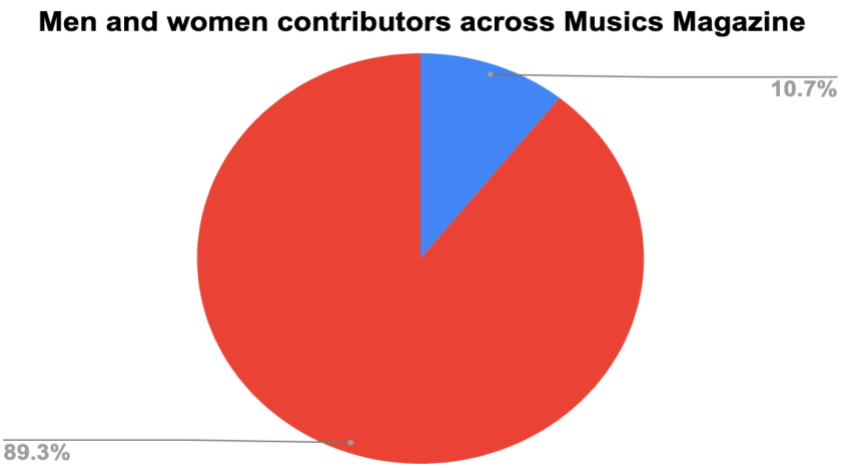
4 men and women instrumentalists in my free improvising communities

1 Men and women contributors to *Musics: A British Magazine of Improvised Music and Art 1975-79.* (Toop et al 2016).

The table consists of data related to the number of men and women contributors who are heard across the publication. Note that some individuals might have contributed more than once within the same issue or across the entire publication. This data refers to the number of contributions made by men and women and not the number of individuals or articles.

Issue	women	men
1	0	11
2	0	8
3	1 Annabel Nicholson	14
4	0	12
5	1 Jessica Meyer	14
6	0	8
7	1 Linda Walker	10
8	2 Annabel Nicholson, Sylvia Moore	7
9	4 A single article with six contributors. Annabel Nicholson, Louise Harrison, Anny Caddle, Angela Puckey.	12
10	2 LaDonna Smith in a multi-interview with 28 men. Denise Riley in a multi-interview with 8 men	48
11	1 Annabel Nicholson	16
12	0	7
13	2 Ingrid Emsden, Noreen McIvor	25
14	1 Lindsay Cooper	6
15	2 writing one article. Susan Hemmings, Norma Pitfield	15
16	3 Georgie Born, Val Wilmer, Kerry Trengrove	22
17	2 Two articles by Annabel Nicholson	19
18	1 Annabel Nicholson	15
19	1 Lily Greenham	11
20	2 Annabel Nicholson, Carola Klein	7
21	1 Marie Leahy	9
22	5 Annabel Nicholson, Ingrid Emsden, Sue Steward, Kazuko Hohki (all photographers) contribute to one article.	3
23	6 LaDonna Smith, Lily Greenham, Frankie Armstrong, Marsha Love contribute to one article.Hannah Charlton, Sue Steward	10
Totals	37 (Annabel Nicholson 8 times) (26 articles in total)	309

Red; men Blue; women



2 Men and Women members of The Skyscraper Ensemble.

Created for the Butch Morris Conduction Tour 1997-1998. This ensemble became the first formation of The London Improviser's Orchestra and was curated by Evan Parker, Steve Beresford and Ian Smith. (Tierney 2023)

19 men

Steve Beresford	piano
John Bisset	acoustic guitar
Ansuman Biswas	percussion
John Butcher	soprano sax
Rhodri Davies	harp
Phil Durrant	violin
Simon H.Fell	double bass
Robin Hayward	tuba
Roger Heaton	bass clarinet
Aleks Kolkowski	violin
Evan Parker	tenor sax
Orphy Robinson	vibraphone
Keith Rowe	electric guitar
Mark Sanders	percussion
Ian Smith	trumpet
Pat Thomas	electric keyboard
Philipp Wachsmann	violin
Byron Wallen	trumpet
Alex Ward	clarinet

4 women

Kaffe Matthews	sampler, violin
Sarah Gail Brand	trombone
Zoe Martlew	cello
Nancy Ruffer	flute

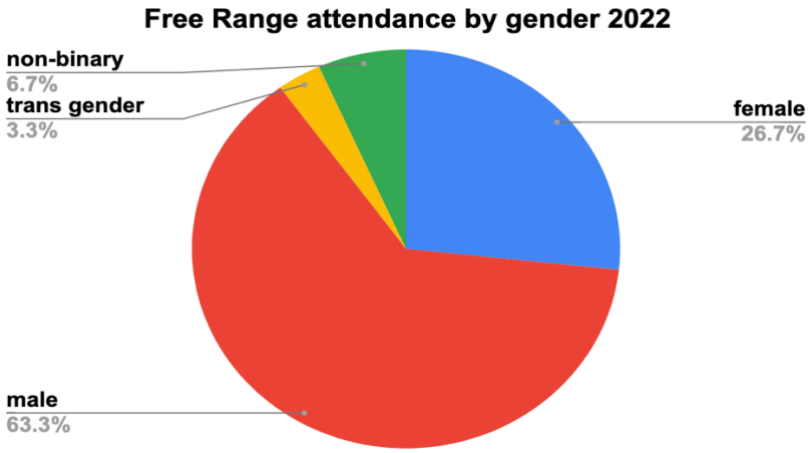
3 Free Range, Canterbury

Free Range was founded in 2012 by Sam Bailey, with support from Ben Horner, Ben Hickman, and Andrew Birtwistle.

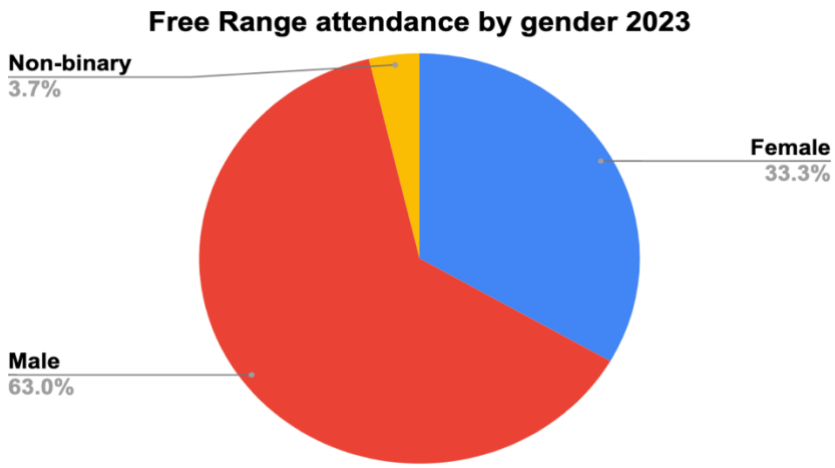
Participating in eight performances in the 2012-13 season, Bailey discusses in *Free Range Reader* (Bailey 2018, 16-34), were 29 performers; one of them was a woman.

Bailey understands the need to bring more equitable gender balance across Free Range. He now supports Free Women and ensures at least 50/50 gender balance across scheduling. There is still work to do.

Free Range attendance 2022 x35 respondents to annual survey



Free Range attendance 2023 x40 respondents to annual survey



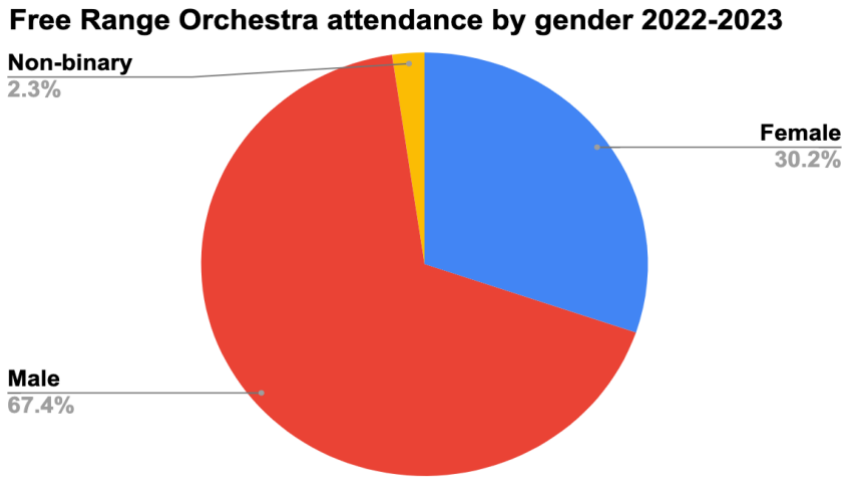
Free Range Orchestra attendance 2022 to 2023

Between September 2022 and July 2023 there were 17 Free Range Orchestra events. These were either rehearsals or performances. Within the combined data the individuals represented are as follows;

13 women

28 men

1 non-binary person



Total attendances across all 17 events was as follows:

75 by women (28% of attendances)

187 by men (70% of attendances)

5 by non-binary people (2% of attendances)

4 Men and women instrumentalists in my free improvising communities

These data compare information on 20 men and 20 women free improvising instrumentalists. The people represented are those in the communities who were active at the inception of the music, contemporary practitioners, and/or those who were initial exponents and remain active in the field.

The first data set refers to the main instrument they play.

The second shows, on this instrument, whether they were;

1 Entirely self-taught,

2 formally taught; in receipt of conservatoire or university training on an undergraduate course in the UK from the age of 18,

3 in receipt of a combination of self-taught and formal tuition; university or conservatoire trained on a postgraduate course in the UK from the age of 21 and utilising self-taught technique in addition.

Women Instrumentalists

Information on education is drawn from personal conversations with Evan Parker, Steve Beresford and Maggie Nicols together with the following theses and websites (all accessed 12.4.24);

https://womensliberationmusicarchive.co.uk/

https://pointofdeparture.org/PoD75/PoD75PageOne.html

audible music https://www.audiblewomen.com/?listing_category=improv

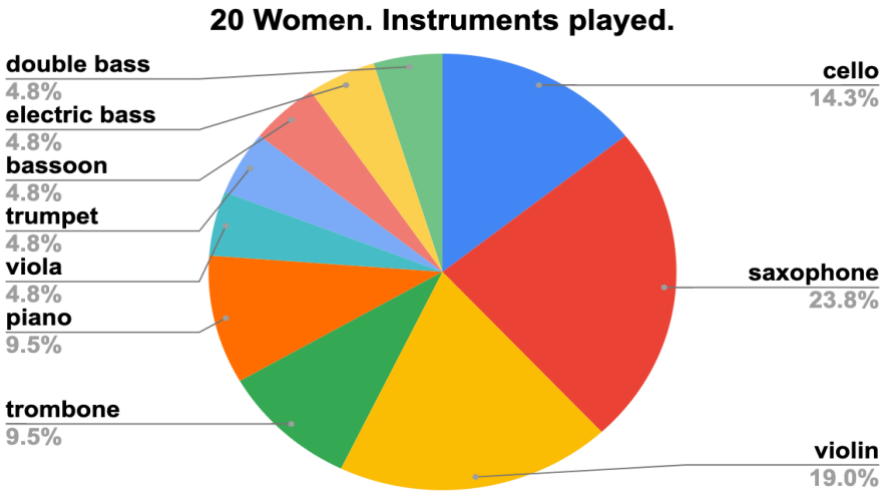
Google arts and culture https://artsandculture.google.com/story/female-musicians-on-the-london-improv-scene-sound-and-music/hQVxUfGPq0lXLg?hl=en

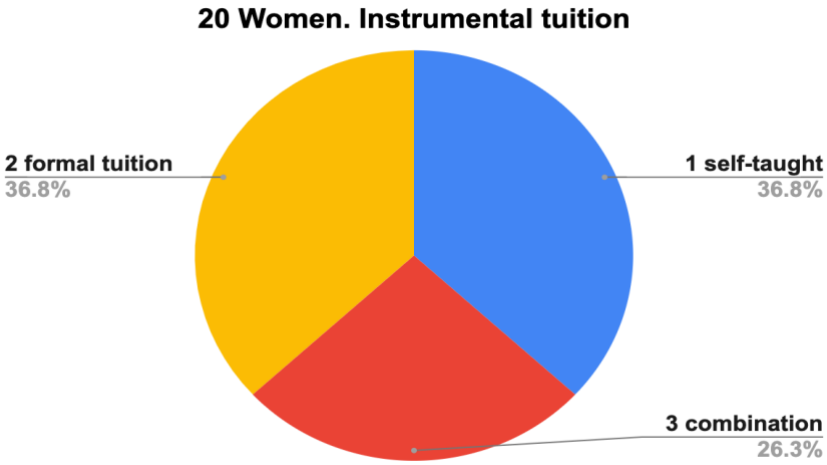
British music collection https://britishmusiccollection.org.uk/article-category/spotlights-female-improvisers-london

https://www.angharaddavies.com/about.

Smith, J.D. (2001, 233-241).

name	instrument	tuition
Francesca Ter-Berg	cello	3
Sue Lynch	saxophone	1
Sue Ferrar	violin	1
Annie Whitehead	trombone	1
Hannah Marshall	cello	2
Syliva Hallett	violin	3
Sarah Gail Brand	trombone	3
Rachel Musson	saxophone	3
Maggie Nicols	Voice/ piano	1
Faradena Afifi	viola	1
Angharad Davies	violin	2
Cath Roberts	saxophone	2
Charlotte Keeffe	trumpet	2
Dee Byrne	saxophone	2
Irene Schweizer	piano	1
Lindsay Cooper	bassoon	3
Georgina Born	cello	3
Andie Brown	electric bass	3
Julia Doyle	double bass	1
Caroline Kraabel	saxophone	1
Stevie Wishart	violin	3





Men Instrumentalists

Information on education is drawn from personal conversations with Evan Parker, Steve Beresford and Maggie Nicols together with the following websites (all accessed 12.4.24);

https://hcmf.co.uk/rhodri-davies-time-on-his-hands/

https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/jul/11/peter-brotzmann-obituary

counterflows.com/pat-thomas/

https://johnbutcher.org.uk/biog.html

https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/feb/28/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries

https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/dec/29/guardianobituaries.artsobituaries

byronwallen.co.uk/biography

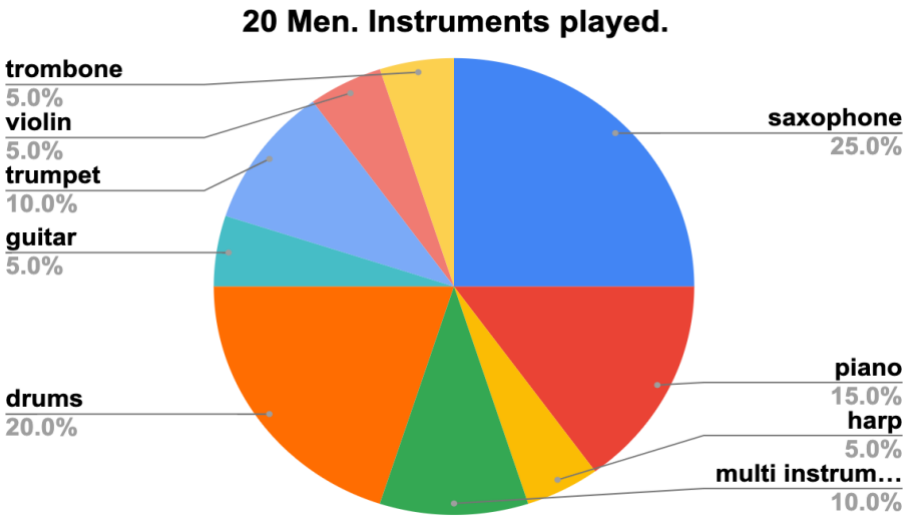
q-o2.be/artist/phil-durrant

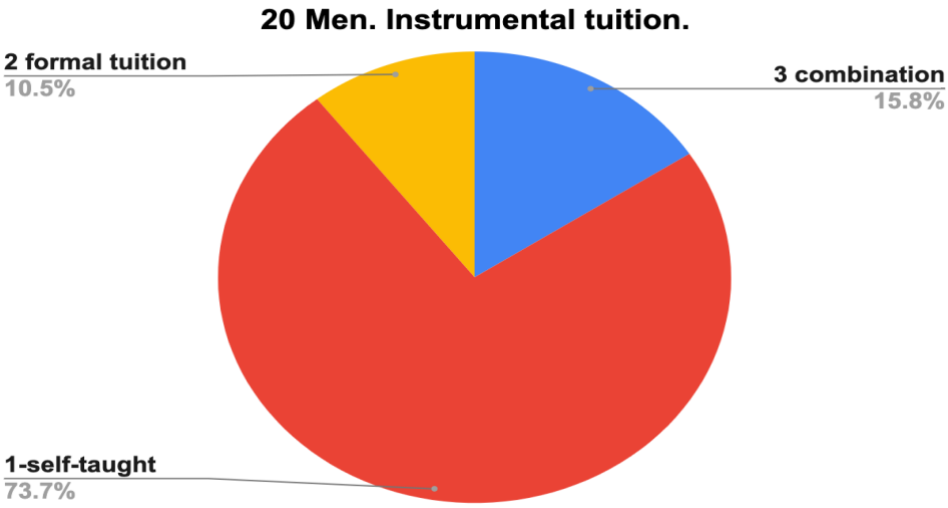
https://veryanweston.weebly.com/biog--discog.html

https://www.lozspeyer.com/biog

name	instrument	tuition
Evan Parker	saxophone	1
Steve Beresford	piano	3
Rhodri Davies	harp	3
David Toop	multi-instrumentalist	1
Peter Brotzmann	saxophone	1
Mark Sanders	drums	1
Pat Thomas	piano	1
John Butcher	saxophone	1
John Stevens*	drums	1
Hugh Davies	multi-instrumentalist	2
Paul Lytton	drums	1
Derek Bailey	guitar	1
Eddie Prévost	drums	1
Byron Wallen	trumpet	1
Lol Coxhill*	saxophone	1
Phil Durrant	violin	2
Trevor Watts*	saxophone	1
Paul Rutherford*	trombone	1
Veryan Weston	piano	1
Loz Speyer	trumpet	3

*attended military music school




20 Men. Instrumental tuition.
2 formal tuition
10.5%
3 combination
15.8%
1-self-taught
73.7%

Appendix III Invitation scores, technical innovations, and recordings of my practice for thesis part two Recording (DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.27051832) available here https://figshare.com/s/6ec85fca2e7791ee7e25

Invitation scores

1; A by Maureen Wolloshin

A

For solo (ists and others)

Soloist

Find a sustained version of a note. *

Then,

let it go.

When you are ready, play with this note.

Then find,

again, a sustained version of this note.

When you are ready,

Let it go.

Others may offer soft, or very soft, versions of the note, once given, by the soloist.

**Only the oboist must attain, then sustain, a pure A for her orchestra.*

They will join her.

Eventually.

Notes
i Duration 5'-7' per solo
ii Other soloists may repeat this process
iii Another soloist may take over with any pitch
iv Others could use voices or a pitch making instrument

2; *O(d)e to Jonas* by Maureen Wolloshin

O(d)e to Jonas

"…. I write, I write, I write… I don't think about it at all, it doesn't matter in any way." Jonas Mekas

For 3 or more performers.
A sense of being lost, hopeless, eternally whirling.
Begin anywhere.
Read or/and play in any direction.
There will be a drone throughout. It may falter from time to time.
There will be moments, of any length, of silence in one or all parts.

Read	Play
O	C
it	Eb
was	D
you	G
I	C#
fall	
my	C#
ru in(s)	
it	Eb
was	D
you	G
O	C
fall ing	Eb C
still	Eb
fall ing.	B

Jonas Mekas *Up Close and Far Away* available at https://mekas.lt/2022/07/2022-07-13-08-20-paroda-jonas-mekas-is-arciau-ir-is-toliau/ (Accessed 4.8.2023)

Technical innovations

This is a descriptive list of new techniques I have developed as part of this investigation. Because the oboe, cor anglais and gliss anglais share the same breath and embouchure techniques, these innovations can be used on all of them. As my improvising moves forwards, further technical innovations will emerge.

Technique Number	Technique Description	Technique Sound
1	Extreme embouchure tightening and loosening with even breath control.	Pitch bending by up to a tone in either direction
2	Over and underblowing while retaining traditional embouchure. Any fingering.	Pitch bending by up to a semitone in either direction with accompanying increase/decrease in volume.
3	Pursed and quite loose bottom lip. Reed pressed hard against top lip. Muscles around throat tightened. Extreme pressure control from diaphragm. Cheeks pushed out. Any fingering.	Dull, 'flat' timbre. Breathy note opening and closing. Complete absence of vibrato or internal note dynamic. Shifting into and out of multiphonics. Breath sound at 'edge' of note timbre.
4	Slight throat closing. Shoulders lifted. Chin down. Slightly open embouchure. C#6 short ((thumbplate) fingering with any combination of C, C#, B or Bb keys.	Unstable and 'breathy' multiphonics. Flat timbre. No vibrato.
5	As technique 4 with pulling in or out of the oboe with the arms.	Dynamic variation plus pitch bend up to a semitone plus movement from single tone to multiphonic and back.
6	Throat straining. Puffed cheeks, chin down. Rapid movement across fingers LH 2 and 3 and RH 1 2 and 3 with LH thumb and finger 1 largely stationary.	Rapid flurries of high pitched single tones and multiphonics with frequent landing on C5. Flat and breathy timbre. No vibrato.
7	Cheeks flattened and slightly sucked in, entire embouchure slightly pursed. No tonguing.	Dull timbre with breath sound at its edges. Muted mp dynamic.
8	Reversed breathing and embouchure. Strong inward long breaths with embouchure pursing and tightening to begin and end pitches. Any fingering.	Sucking sounds at different pitches.
9	As technique 8 with circular breathing and moving reed in and out using arms at any fingering.	Squeaking, sucking sounds at different pitches with wet reed sounds for up to one minute.
10	Open embouchure; no control beyond slight lip pursing to stabilise the reed, no tonguing. Any fingering.	Shawm like, loud uncontrolled pitches which may shift in and out of multiphonics. No vibrato.
11	Unstable circular breathing. Traditional circular breathing technique without cheek control. Any fingering.	Pitch variations at breath points. Note cracking, note bending

Recordings Chapter Three

Recording (DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.27051832) available here:
https://figshare.com/s/6ec85fca2e7791ee7e25

Improvisation. 10'47"

A free improvisation by Trio CZW. This was performed at a Mopomoso concert and recorded at The Vortex on a Tascam DR-40X PCM recorder. Slight echo, reverb, and noise reduction was added in logicpro post-recording to enhance sound quality. Sunday November 26th, 2023.

Do you Hear me Breathing? 6'02"

Solo oboe improvisation recorded at Cove Park, Friday February 16th, 2024. This recording was made at the end of my weeklong residency in studio G on a Tascam DR-40X PCM recorder. The view across Loch Long from the studio was breathtaking. The acoustic perfect for an oboe. No filter has been added to the recording and no editing or mastering was required.

entanglement part 5-histories. *Improvisation.* extended version. 5'47"

An edited version appears as track nine 'Drink Only, From the Fountain of Light' by A Priori. Released 21st November 2022 by North Star Music. [CD] Recorded at Lossenham Farm Studio in May 2022 during a weeklong residency as part of The Lossenham Project. Sound recording Nick Taylor. Post-production Paul Cheneour and Nick Taylor. Editing, mixing and mastering Porcupine Studios. Benedict Taylor viola, David Leahy double bass, Izolda Reeder violin, Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais, Paul Cheneour flutes, Margaret Taylor vocals. Artwork and design, Russell Burden.

Improvisation. 4'41"

*'*Carceral Scrivings' recorded in The Red Prison, Sulaymaniyah, Iraq, Tuesday September 27th, 2022. This audio and videography was taken during my time in Kurdistan as part of Space 21 Festival on a Tascam DR-40X PCM recorder and an apple iphone. Participants are listed at the end of the video.

Conduction extract 2'43"

Conduction by Adrian Northover and London Improviser's Orchestra. 4th June 2023. St. Mary's Church Stoke Newington Recorded and mastered by Jeff Ardon. This extract is at the end of a 15 minute conduction.

Recordings Chapter Four

Recording (DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.27051832) available here:
https://figshare.com/s/6ec85fca2e7791ee7e25

Birdsong improvisation. 3'27"

patternbook at Free Women present 'Lady Garden.' Performed and recorded on a Tascam DR-40X PCM recorder at Free Range, Canterbury. Thursday November 16th, 2023. This improvisation opened the performance of Lady Garden presented by Free Women. Within it you hear recorded birdsong to which we are responding.

Trio improvisation 10'15"

Stevie Wishart hurdy gurdy, Els van Riel, film, and Maureen Wolloshin oboe and gliss anglais. Performed and recorded on a Tascam DR-40X PCM recorder at Cosy Nook, Thornton Heath. Saturday June 10th, 2023. The improvisation heard here accompanied a film project by Els as part of a performance in the Cosy Nook house concert series.

The Lost Place 5'21"

Composed by Khabat Abas. Performed by KIM Duo. Maureen Wolloshin gliss anglais, Khabat Abas cello. Recorded on a Tascam DR-40X PCM recorder at Free Range, Canterbury. Thursday October 13th, 2022. This piece was first performed as part of Space 21 Festival in Sulaymaniyah Iraq in September 2022 by Dror Feiler, Hardi Kurda and I accompanied by recorded voices of Kurdish women. In this performance the audience take the role of the women and are heard calling out their words within the performance.

A 9’11”

An invitation score composed by Maureen Wolloshin. Performed at Iklektik by patternbook and Maggie Nicols. Wednesday March 29th, 2023. This performance is the opening piece in part three of this research.

O(d)e to Jonas 6’14”

An invitation score composed by Maureen Wolloshin for this performance. Performed by Trio CZW. Mopomoso at The Vortex, London. Recorded on a Tascam DR-40X PCM recorder Sunday November 26th, 2023. Post recording I added a little reverb in LogicPro to balance out the dry acoustic of the space and the irritatingly loud air conditioning unit hum.

Appendix IV Audio recording

here.here/Social Virtuosity with Maggie Nicols and Maureen Wolloshin

Recording (DOI: 10.6084/m9.figshare.27051832) available here:

https://figshare.com/s/6ec85fca2e7791ee7e25

A concert performed at Iklektik, Old Paradise Yard, London. Wednesday March 29th, 2023. Video available at: https://youtu.be/hLJsD4SeIFI?si=j7Nxx3JVJu_Cql7F (Accessed 10.6.23).

This performance was part of the *here.here* concert series. A collaboration between bookRoom and the Audio Research Cluster at UCA Farnham, led by Emmanuelle Waeckerlé and Harry Whalley. The project was supported by UCA research fund. Sound system powered by AMOENUS. Film by Stewart Morgan Hajdukiewicz Recorded live at IKLECTIK by Isa Barzizza.

Programme notes by Emmanuelle Waeckerlé.

The works chosen for this programme explored feminist approaches to individual vs collective agency between soloist and ensemble, and to sonic intimacy in notated/text compositions and free improvisation. The first of these performances is a response to an invitation score. 'A', discussed in chapter four.

A (Maureen Wolloshin, 2021) discussed in chapter four.

An invitation score for solo(ists) and others. You are invited to offer soft, or very soft, versions of the note, once given, by the soloist. Inspired by the orchestral oboist who must attain, then sustain, a pure A for her orchestra. They will join her. Eventually.

'A's' given by Heledd Francis Wright, Maggie Nicols and Frances Knight, Nadia Tewfik Bailey and Maureen Wolloshin.

9'12" *Spider Ballet* (Frances Knight, 2021)

An improvisational tango. Inspired by Emily Dickinson's poem The Spider holds a Silver Ball. Maggie Nicols reads the pome at the beginning of the performance.

The Spider holds a silver ball / In unperceived hands / And dancing softly to himself / His yarn of pearl unwinds.

15’ 42” *What is left if we aren’t the world* (Emmanuelle Waeckerlé, 2022)

An invitation score (commissioned by Amsterdam Wandelweiser festival 2022), inviting us to individually and collectively find out what pandemonium feels and sounds like, and what intimacy can mean in that context, what distance it may require. The work was inspired by some reading during lockdown. (Franco Berardi, Timothy Morton, Luce Irigaray)

26’56” *Sketches* (Maggie Nicols, 1970’s)

Silence as common ground, sometimes broken by a few spontaneous sonic outbursts, as a springboard to longer improvisation: the way the sketches of a painter or sculptor lead to more accomplished works.

43’ 23” *Free Improvisation*

All of us participate in this improvisation which brings the performance to a conclusion.

Appendix V Interview transcripts and diary extracts

See 'Introduction; appendices, interviews and data,' and my methodology for an explanation of my feminist approach to these narrative interviews, undertaken as friendly and informal conversations, and the way in which they have been edited.

1 Georgina Brett oboist

2 Lorraine Hart oboist

3 PhD student and oboist

4 Melinda Maxwell oboist

5 Catherine Plugyers oboist

6 Anna Braithwaite Free Women co-founder

7 Henry Dagg gliss anglais designer and maker

8 Mark Holmes Market Strummers co-ordinator

9 Maggie Nicols singer and pianist

10 The development of the gliss anglais; diary extracts 2021-2022

11 The Lossenham Project; diary extracts July 2022

12 Space 21 Festival Sulaymaniah, Iraq; diary extracts September 2022

13 The gliss anglais with London Improviser's Orchestra; diary extract June 2023

14 Trio CZW and my cabart oboe; diary extracts 2021-2023

1 Georgina Brett and Maureen Wolloshin in conversation. Online. 11.30am May 31st 2023

G The oboe was my primary instrument when I was a kid. I started learning when I was 10 and ended up doing Music A level. Oboe performance was part of that. I had an amazing experience with it at school. There were only two of us doing music-me and a great clarinettist. We both got to play solos with an orchestra. I played the first movement of the Mozart which was a really beautiful, incredible experience.

I went to an expensive (girl's) [mixed] boarding school to do A levels having been at a fee paying girl's day school where I did O levels. I wasn't doing Music [O level] and halfway through my Mum encouraged me to swap to Music because she felt I was good at it. I did Music O level in a year then did A levels. When I was growing up we had a conservatory

attached to the house. It had been built by the man who owned the house before us. It was a lovely room and the acoustics were great. I was really motivated to practise because there's nothing better than playing oboe in a beautiful acoustic like that. Before I went to boarding school I would practise every evening in there because I really enjoyed it. I then went to this amazing school-where Benjamin Britten studied. I was given the key to the chapel and allowed to practise whenever it was empty which was also incredible.

But I got into boys and lost focus a little during my A levels. But I did get into Edinburgh University and was toying with the idea of orchestral playing. I realised I wasn't committed enough to the oboe at this point. I'd done A levels in Maths and Electronics and was really interested in technology. I ended [up] doing courses in acoustics, music technology, community music and music in the [avant-garde] so I was moving in that direction. One of my final studies was oboe. I got a merit at grade 8-I was lazy with scales. I couldn't get my head round them and wasn't as dedicated as you need to be to be a super oboist. But I was interested in what the instrument could do-the things people wouldn't necessarily realise. If you're an improviser you like to find the funny fingerings and so on. At university I ended up doing a lot of work in theatre. I [was music director of] the university theatre company and wrote music for [many plays, including writing for strings, flute, harp and singers, I enjoyed interpreting a script and collaborating with a director] (them and for other music students- a harpist for example.)

M It sounds as though from a young age you had an interest in acoustics. Did that come from teachers at all?

G In terms of inspiring teachers, I don't think any of my oboe teachers did that. We all have an experience of someone who really fires you up but it's a shame that didn't happen with the oboe. I travelled to Glasgow for a lesson with someone and even that didn't fire me up. The oboe is interesting in terms of the effort it takes to play it. Anyone who doesn't play the oboe doesn't realise this. You can't play for longer than an hour because you're exhausted. It's all the support the lungs need and the pressure in your head. It's not like any other instrument.

I had a piano teacher who was very supportive of my oboe playing and that was great. When I left university, I considered being an oboe teacher. I did the teaching qualification but fell down on the scales and arpeggios having passed performance so didn't get the qualification. I didn't want to be a teacher and because that didn't work, I didn't go in that

direction. I got a scholarship to study composition in Canada for 3 weeks on a residential course and I got funding from Edinburgh to go on to Birmingham University to study electro-acoustic music. That's interesting because I didn't get a first in my undergraduate degree at Edinburgh. But I was doing all this stuff with the theatre company. I did get a first in composition but a 2ii in the oboe exam because I hadn't been practising much.

M Were you still playing in the way you've described? Playing in acoustically bright spaces?

G No because I didn't have easy places to practise. The university practise rooms were in the basement and were dead and boring when it comes to sound which wasn't encouraging. The oboe definitely took a back seat. In my postgrad years I really didn't play much. But it was my first instrument and it's the instrument I know best. It's a bit like riding a bike. If you know how you played it and you know how you used to be able to play, then you can practise and attempt to get back up to speed. That's what I've done recently since I joined London Improvisers Orchestra (LIO). There was a long period where I hardly used it. I'd forgotten that I started working with a friend-we had jam session on a Sunday starting around 2003 for 3 or 4 years. I used to take it along to that. Around that time, I ended up on a couple of albums as well. One was called *Youth in Dub* with Martin Glover as producer. The friend running the jam sessions also put my oboe on several tracks and there was a solo I did on another track too. I can send you the links.

M What ties you to the oboe?

G When you have an instrument you've been confident on it's something not to pass up on. There's still the enjoyment of the instrument even though my diaphragm and embouchure aren't as strong as they were I can still enjoy it if I have a good reed and good instrument. I don't need to be as good as I was. I don't necessarily mind because I do lots of other things. I don't attach my identity to how good I am as an oboist. I just like playing and being in LIO is fun. I enjoy the instrument and recently I put up a funny youtube video of me online because I got a new oboe reed. It got positive comments and people want me to play for them. I've been a music maker for so long that I've realised you don't need to be the very best to do a good performance and have something valid to contribute.

M What do you mean by best? Technique?

G Yes exactly. You lose that if you don't practise. I'm aware of that. It's interesting. I think I'm not a perfectionist generally. I enjoy music but the struggle of perfectionism can be detrimental. I had a friend like that. He wanted everything to be perfect. He drank himself

into an early grave. If you're constantly striving for the next thing, you can do that is difficult and will bring you recognition for being amazing then you're not valuing your current offerings as good enough. If you don't acknowledge that there's an issue-it makes life very difficult. That's why I'm not a perfectionist.

M That sound emotionally healthy.

G Yes. It was distressing. He died a couple of years ago. We all knew how brilliant he was, but he didn't see that. [I'll send you a track to listen to.]

Zoom interruption while I listen to the track.

M I notice you enrich the recording with reverb-it sounds like you're playing in a small church. I love that and I do it too.

G I know-it's wonderful. It excites the space. Somehow the reflections reflect back on you and give you good vibes. Do you want to listen to another one?

Zoom interruption while I listen to the track.

M Did you enjoy studying [electronic composition] (?)(electro-acoustic) music at Edinburgh?

G Yes. It was one of 10 modules. I got a 1st in [composition, a 2i overall. but they gave me the scholarship because of the work I did outside the department. My lecturers came to my performances and were obviously impressed that I'd got that together when I wasn't interested in the competition in the conventional arena.

Zoom relaunch

M Edinburgh has a good reputation for music. Evan Parker has an honorary doctorate from there. Maybe they could see that doing what you do is about creative input not academic results. The quality and the imagination in the work.

G I think so. My keyboard skills aren't that great. I didn't start till I was 15 and it's always held me back a little. My piano teacher was encouraging and gave me lovely pieces which challenged but interested me musically. Colin Kingsley. He was my favourite music teacher. After I'd left he donated his time to accompany me so that I could get a place on a teaching qualification. He liked my oboe playing and was really supportive.

The two main influences were Peter Nelson who became head of department for many years. He taught avant garde and music technology modules. He was really helpful and encouraging. We had mutual friends who we would hang out in Rosslyn with, where the Rosslyn Chapel is. He was friends with a philosopher there. We sang pagan chants and took

turns making dinner. That was a formative experience. We'd go from singing a simple deep chant into something more esoteric. We were all intuitive shifting in and out of harmony, drums and vocals. A musical journey. I never took my oboe to that.

M I can hear how you've accessed your own creativity through that. It's unusual and I wonder how you were able to do that as you journeyed through the conventional education route.

G I've always approached my music making in terms of enjoyment. I'm interested and want to try doing things and following my particular fascinations. That drives me to do stuff. Once a channel is exhausted, I try something else. It's an exploratory approach. I haven't allowed anyone to tell me what to do.

M Has anyone tried to?

G No. I've never been in that situation. Record companies like to pigeonhole you if you have a certain degree of success. I'm a perpetual amateur. I was really pleased with yesterday and that Gabriel did it. I was so pleased someone with such a huge profile agreed to do it.

M It was your idea. You're impressive too.

G It's nice of you to say so.

M Have there been any barriers for you associated with your gender?

G Over the years men have been dismissive when it comes to technology. They assume you don't know anything. I haven't experienced that recently. There were some issues a few weeks ago. A couple of guys thought I would just sing, and I had to be stern in order to be heard. It's odd-a woman's issue. I scheduled us first on the gig last night and put the men as headliners. It's about respecting someone's musical experience, but I was aware it was women first half and men second half.

M Is there a self-fulfilling prophecy with that? Men put themselves forward and the woman is perpetually taking second place.

G As an event organiser I'd say the more relaxed you are the happier everyone is. It's really important to be calm and nice to everyone. Whatever the problems you have to be positive. You learn that's key to success. My relationship with my artists is more important for me than the one with the audience. Part of that is the billing. Putting experienced artists first might irritate them a little so you do what you have to do. It's an art I think.

M Do you think there's no longer a challenge for women to get visibility?

G I think it's always been more difficult for women. You have to be better than men in order to prove yourself. I have the added challenge of life long mental health issues which isn't immediately apparent. It's dominated my life and affected my ability to work. I got a postgrad diploma in mental health practice. I tried to work in a mental health team full time for a couple of years but it got on top of me and I realised that I couldn't cope with endless everyday trauma. It's too much for me.

M Do you think the added challenge of being a woman is unhelpful for you when you have this condition to deal with? I've certainly had that experience and only got my mental health diagnosis a couple of years ago.

G It's certainly difficult. I think if you've been discriminated against it makes it harder. Sometimes in the studio I was regarded as something of a curiosity because I was very shy and nervous. No one wants that around. I had severe problems with that. I don't mind doing things for free because it means I don't have to think about my own self-worth. If you have issues around that there's a danger you will self-sabotage in a field in which you are talented. I didn't realise how good I was when I left university. I had good reviews 'Georgina Brett's music is divine' I was only 21. Then I went to Banff and had my first breakdown aged 23. I had been miserable and using drugs neither of which helped.

M Women often speak about their lack of self-worth when they were younger. Men often speak of frustration around lack of recognition when they were younger. Both were battling in inverse directions.

G That makes sense. Women are the vessels. The bowl. Introverted with our internal gynaecology. Men have this external member. Our bodies describe that personality. It makes sense to me. It's a struggle and interesting within the current trans debate.People seem more accepting of that and of mental health problems now. I feel as though I'm getting work in spite of the label I have.

I think we go through seasons. Times when society is asking itself difficult questions. At the moment it's the trans debate. Before that was mental health, before that was the gay agenda, and before that was feminism. I imagine the way the trans conversations of today and the flavour of their anger and emotion were replicated in the debates that came before. As far back as the suffragette movement. The energy around the conversation would have been similar.

2 Lorraine Hart, oboist and Maureen Wolloshin in conversation Monday May 29th, 2023, 4.30pm London EC1Y 8JL

L When I graduated from the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) with a BA in 2014 I had spent 2 years in Mannheim as part of that, but still wanted more for myself and my playing.

M You felt, even with that qualification and education that there was something not good enough about your playing?

L That's partly a mindset I think I adopted in London and partly due to my path into music. But at the time, I felt I had further to go by the time I graduated to get closer to achieving my potential.

M What was your route? Where had you come from?

L The Luton Music Service and then I did a year of Junior RAM on Saturdays the year before I started at RAM.

M But Luton/jRAM is a specialist music service. When you say music school what do you mean? Where had your contemporaries come from?

L The full time music schools in the U.K which the majority of the peers in my circle had attended at the time. I think it makes a significant difference to the starting point of a student's playing at the beginning of their bachelor studies at age 18. However, I think my lifelong love for the oboe and music was nurtured by first oboe teacher Catherine Pluygers at the Luton Music Service.

M But you got in so you must have been at the required standard?

L It was always said I had a lot of potential, but I wouldn't say I had gotten close enough to that when I finished my bachelor studies. 4 years is a short time, and everyone develops at their own pace. However, now, after my bachelor, master's and private study both in the UK and mostly abroad, I feel confident as an oboist and enjoy working in the profession immensely.

M Who was your oboe teacher at RAM?

L While at the RAM, I studied with the majority of the teachers there, as is normal in London. In Mannheim, I studied with Emmanuel Abbuehl through the ERASMUS scheme and then I did my masters in Hannover with Klaus Becker and Kai Froembgen and I studied privately with Svetlin Doytchinov and Lena Schuhknecht.

M could you say a little about technique?

L In Germany, I had the space and time to work thoroughly on the basics of support, air and breathing so that I could feel comfortable on the oboe. I spent 2 years on this alone and then slowly made my way through the appropriate repertoire at my own pace. In London, I had supportive teachers, many performance opportunities, exposure to a wide variety of repertoire and ensembles, but also due to this, there just wasn't the time to go totally back to basics with oboe playing for the required time.

In Germany, I was able to do this and hone a sustainable, reliable technique that I fully understood. Celia Nicklin, one of my teachers at RAM, encouraged us to go to Germany on the ERASMUS scheme - she'd encourage students to go to Germany and 'play some long notes!' So I did. And it was the best decision I made for my professional life as an oboist.

The focus point of my exploration in Germany was learning how to properly support and conduct the air in a free flowing way. I was particularly supported on this by two ex-pupils of my first teacher in Hannover. I visited them privately and from these building blocks I was able to implement all other aspects of my technique.

M This makes your technique expensive to acquire.

L It would have cost me vastly more if I'd stayed in London for my masters due the rise in tuition fees and cost of living in London. In Germany, the cost was much much lower.

M Why did you stick with it?

L I love orchestral playing and the oboe. Part of the attraction is the challenge of the instrument. You can really learn how the body works and that motivates me. The sound of the instrument caught my attention on the *ET* soundtrack when I was 11 and I remain drawn to it.

M Is there anything about that challenging technique that you feel has become embedded and embodied for you?

L I think the most valuable piece of information I learned, and now impart ad nauseum to my students, was that strength on the oboe comes from support in your belly and is little to do with building muscles in an embouchure; a naturally weak area of the body, vs. the core; a naturally strong part of the body. It's also much easier to build strength in our bigger muscle groups (core) as opposed to focussing on small areas (embouchure.) One approach to playing certainly doesn't suit everyone, and I know people have had success with embouchure training, but for me personally, focussing away from the embouchure and directing my attention to my support and air conduction was key for my body and myself as

a player. I feel this is very well embedded now and previous unattainable facets of oboe playing such as very good stamina are now within my remit. There was a point in 2020 during lockdown, when I decided to see how well this was working for me. I really like practise, and I found I was able to, through relaxing through the support (and also doing cardio!), play the Strauss concerto[191] twice and still feel like I could go again. My tone quality improved too.

M I remember using very thick scrape and a heavy marigaux when I was 15. With support I was able to use medium soft scrape.

L Yes, I also moved away from heavier reeds and switched to lighter ones whilst studying in Europe. This gives me more possibilities in terms of dynamics and colour in orchestral and chamber settings. In terms of auditions, having a setup that's too heavy can really exacerbate a higher stress situation, create extra tension and therefore limit expression under pressure.

M Are you aware of any wish among European oboists to undertake free improv given their superior technique?

L While living in Germany, I didn't personally encounter oboists who were also improvising. Now, I do improv with my own interdisciplinary collective, but my first experience was improvising in Mannheim with a friend who played the Marimba. I've always been drawn to it and this year I've taken part on two occasions with LIO.

M Is it free improvisation?

L What do you mean by free? I don't even know how to talk about it.

M It's free if you're not improvising over changes, over a set structure, or following pre-imposed rules.

L So when I started in Mannheim it was free. With my group last year, it was structured. What I experienced in LIO was different[192]

M Most of what I do is free. Free Range Orchestra in Canterbury is more free than LIO which has structure-conduction, small groups and and so on.

Do you know any other free improvising oboists?

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[191] Famously technically challenging piece of standard oboe repertoire by Richard Strauss

[192] I went in because I'm friends with pianist Rowland Sutherland. I didn't know what to expect and I'm up for anything.

L I didn't come across anyone in person whilst living in Germany or Denmark. On occasion, when orchestral musicians are asked to improvise in contemporary compositions, I've found it suits us better to have a structure. I also notice that classical orchestra musicians have a wide range of different reactions to it. I wonder if this is to do with the training we have gone through in classical music to hone our skills as instrumentalists; when asked to improvise, there's suddenly no more a 'right or wrong' which can either be freeing or blocking.

M You're talking about learning a skill to a point of virtuosity. Is it where this meets free improv that this becomes creative? Or would a classical musician disagree and say there's artistry in playing a written work well?

Women oboists don't go into free improv perhaps because of the rigour of technique required. What I've found now I've entered it is that I can play with that. Is that your experience?

L Last summer my collective put on an event which used a lot of free improv. Two of our players were experienced with improv, and the rest of us less so to varying degrees. People came at it from a whole range of different emotions; fear, curiosity, joy, trepidation. I think it was emotionally a wonderful experience to go through as a new collective and those who were most anxious about it were fully into it by the end - it was amazing to see this transformation. In fact, I think improvisation can be transformative for many of us. For me, it quietens down the critical voice and opens me up to alternative approaches to making sound on the oboe which is a welcome liberation.

M Are you saying that your experience of free improv opened the possibility for you to bring your aesthetic to the table now you have this technique?

L Yes. Basically. And also, it really turned off the pressure in a way that doesn't often happen. The voice is always there.

M Is it good to have it turned off?

L Yes. In performance it has to be off-that's the only way of doing it. In practise you need it. At the moment I have a healthy relationship with it but I've only really developed that in the last couple of months. I've been aware that I needed to enjoy the job but it's hard to make the change. Accepting mistakes is key to that and something about improv eliminates that (voice) completely. In the improv I've done the environments I've been improvising in

versus classical orchestral playing are really different. Really, really different-people, aesthetics, goals, what's good and what's worthwhile.

M In the classical environment how much work by women is part of the world? Teachers, leaders, writers, conductors, colleagues and so forth.

L Orchestral repertoire; in the last year or so there's been an obvious shift to represent everyone and that's very obvious in the classical world. I wouldn't say there's been a shift in the canon. It tends to be that a piece by a person of colour or a female person is put at the start of the programme. It's rarely the main event. I'm sceptical about what drives this. In terms of getting in people who aren't white and women I think it boils down to funding. I don't think there's a genuine interest from my white colleagues in playing this music and that's a shame.

M Do you think there's a conflation of person of colour and woman?

L Yes. Now there is and that's a problem.

M Is that your experience as a woman of colour with an oboe?

L Yes definitely.

M Let's come back to bringing your own aesthetic to free improv. Tell me about the process you went through with your collective.

L We had all come to this project from different perspectives as classical musicians and this was our inaugural event and also our first time improvising. We wanted our audience to experience continuous improv in between each interdisciplinary performance and I wanted everything to be a collaboration. As classical trained musicians broaching a new space for us, there was an element of two worlds colliding in this event which was so exciting. By the end, there was an opening, a softness and a better understanding between us. I'd say the act of improvisation and the vulnerability of it helped create the environment for understanding and respect.

M Catherine Plugyers and you are the only two people in this country who are playing in both worlds-classical and free improv.

L But I'm not even doing that.

M But you are-you're describing a shift in dynamic that you're experiencing. Many oboists move away from the oboe towards electronics and recorder. Georgina Brett, Pia Palme are examples.

Have you found in free improv that you've moved away from standard technique?

L The only example would be the occasional multiphonic or bending pitches. I am motivated to learn more stuff like that.

M When you say learn it are you identifying a technique and learning it?

L The improv I've done so far everything has been spontaneous. Being the person I am, if I was going to do more, I would do some studying to make sure I could do all the things I want to use.

M Do you think young oboists should be encouraged to improvise?

L Yes. I do it with my students. I find they hate it and then do it and don't like it but it makes other things better. I find the best way is to use drones. I might tell them to play a drone and then I'll tell them to change note whenever they want. If they don't mind, then I'll play a drone and get them to do whatever they want. The thing we do when trying reeds is improv and once you get them to realise that it's fine. It would have been cool to have done that with Kitty (Catherine Plugyers) but I was 10.

M The embouchure, reed and silly noises-do you get them to play with that or is it always with correct technique?

L I always encourage them to breathe well. Always. Right now, I wouldn't encourage a young student to do anything with their lips because I'm very much into freedom. It's always free. That's how excellence in oboe playing is happening. The best oboists have a free embouchure.

M That's a very different oboe world to the one I was used to.

L It was for me at one point too. Then through a combination of fantastic teachers and personal exploration, I've been able to access more and more freedom in my technique and therefore also as a musician.

M Interesting that your teachers were mostly women, yet women aren't represented in the canon.

L Yes. I'd be interested to know how many teaching positions and principal orchestral and chamber seats are filled by female oboists. During my studies, I played very little repertoire by female composers and virtually nothing by composers who weren't white. But I've had incredible teaching from both female and male oboists throughout my education.

M Maybe this is your time? Nikki Iles and Maggie Nicols are only just getting recognition. Perhaps the power dynamic in conservatoires isn't something women enjoy. The terms masculine and feminine are inadequate to describe this but the masculine leading in

conservatoires/ collaboration and equality as equal. If that's so maybe the conservatoire is uncomfortable for women?

L I think conservatoires generally should shift, and perhaps already are to some extent, towards a more comfortable, tolerant and equally nurturing environment for everyone - regardless of their gender or background.

M Have you experienced gendered sexist behaviour?

L Yes, I've been on the receiving end of this both during my studies and in the profession. And most unfortunately, this is encountered by many people I've spoken to who are working in music.

M What if there was a different way of playing and being? What if children learning the oboe were free to improvise? What would that do to the oboe world?

L it might shift the repertoire. It might improve the mental side of playing and therefore also generally in life! It might open up professional possibilities for a wider range of classical musicians. It might make us freer when approaching notated music and result in more exciting, risk taking music making, thoughtful interpretations and special performances. The same could be said for improvisers approaching their techniques with the helpful aspects of a classical training. I think classical training and the world of free improv could positively inform one another.

3 Female Oboist and 1st year PhD student and Maureen Wolloshin in conversation

Thursday June 29th, 2023, Midday. Microsoft Teams

M It's great to talk with another PhD student looking at the oboe.

R definitely. I'm still at an early stage with my research. I'm part time and coming up to the equivalent of the end of year 1. It's really intense and what I'm doing is becoming clear which is exciting. I'm looking at the way that oboists past and present discuss, report on and perceive their playing; the discourse about it that they engage in. There is a crossover with your research in that I would like to change what I perceive; that only people from certain societal groups play the oboe. I'd like more people to experiment with it. People talk about the instrument and their relationship with it very negatively at the moment.

M I'm looking at barriers to agency for women in free improvisation and the instrument is a significant one, not just the oboe. But the oboe is barely present in free improvisation at

all. You're looking at language and the women I have spoken to are, as you've said, using negative language to discuss their playing and their relationship with the instrument.

What's brought you to the oboe?

R My Dad said everyone does the flute, it looks as though you could play the oboe at school. He talked about it and pointed out the sound of it a lot. I became intrigued before I saw one. I was at an ordinary secondary school and was given a really poor instrument from the cupboard. It was old and conservatoire system. The girl older than me who was playing the oboe was allowed to use the thumbplate one the school had. It was hierarchical and I got that instrument when she stopped. I was determined to make a success of it (there's that word! *Laughs*).I was intrigued by the instrument. The school seems quite good now, but it wasn't great then. I went to university but studied English Literature which seemed like a safer route than Music to me. I was disillusioned; I hadn't had a support network at school. I'd done GCSE but not A level because it wasn't an engaging experience for me. Studying English has probably helped inform my PhD.

I had carried on playing the oboe and took it to university with me. I'd carried on with lessons while refusing to do any exams-I couldn't deal with that and A levels. I was doing repertoire at grade 8 standard. I didn't really play at university and into my 20s. Around the time I had my third child I saw a poster asking for players for a community orchestra and I decided to give it a go. I went along and realised I needed to play, and I began practising again. I got a teacher, did grade 8 then a diploma and then my teacher left to study at The Royal College. She told me to apply to university to do MA performance. I didn't think I'd be up to it but she encouraged me and so I did. That was a few years ago. During covid; it was crazy. I suffered severely with a lack of confidence, but I try and do it anyway.

M Where does that come from? Is it gender, instrument, social?

R I think it's an accumulation of stuff. I grew up with 5 brothers and a sister. It was lovely and complex. In the 80s girls weren't really to shine too much. The boys did that. It was really complicated-it's about not being overtly given permission as a female. Men weren't aware of it at the time-perhaps that's changing a little now. As a woman you come from a place of having been, not sidelined, perhaps marginalised. It's that you're only allowed to do things or achieve at them on someone else's terms.

M I like your use of the word permission. I think you're also saying that you can never be really good. You have to limit your success. That resonates with me and is echoed in what I've read. What is it about this instrument that draws you to it?

R That's really tough. Sometimes I just want to throw it across the room and play recorders because I would probably spend a lot less time trying to get a decent sound. Other people say the same things to me. Is it the resonance? It feels like my voice in a way. Even when I wasn't playing it for many years I was singing to the kids, and it was definitely a part of me. I think it might be a vocal connection. It's so frustrating. When I can't get it to do what I want I always think that it's me. Maybe that is the case but I think I give myself too much of a hard time. You describe the instrument as a beast and I think it's my own ineptitude almost, and not feeling in control, that make me annoyed about it.

M There's something about the pressure and tension around the embouchure and neck that is constantly present. It is like a voice, but we push such a tiny amount of air through it. If you've struggled as women may have to be heard. Perhaps that is associated with the struggle we have and is why some oboists turn to recorder or oboe da caccia.

R I've started learning baroque oboe and would love to try oboe da caccia. The pressure is difficult. I'm having to learn to relax a little and this may have improved my modern oboe playing.

M Do you improvise at all?

R I don't know whether you would call it that. I've been doing it on the quiet for most of my playing life. Sometimes I sit and make stuff up and think it's quite nice. A tune may haunt me for a while and other times I might think what I've done isn't nice at all. I do it as part of my practice and warming up. Sometimes I get carried away with that and forget what I'm supposed to be doing. I've become more interested in that since I met a lady who is a baroque violinist. She spoke about us losing the art of improvisation since the baroque period. When I play baroque instruments, it makes me want to make things up even more which I find really interesting. I feel like there's a more fundamental connection maybe-it's just a feeling. I'm not a pro at improvising at all but I do try to incorporate it into my teaching. When they first start, they see the separation between notation and instrument and you have to try and make them have or feel a connection to the instrument; it's got to have some reward for them. If you're constantly, as you are with classical oboe, telling them to do things differently, you have to try very hard not to say 'that's wrong' all the time. If

you do call and response or jamming it's really fun and makes them more aware of their control over their own sound.

M The notion of the instrument being a barrier comes from what you're talking about-the precision of technique. If we can teach this to professional level you have to tell them where they're going wrong because the instrument is so demanding. The techniques were devised by men in response to composers like Berio.

R The instrument designed by and for men; I have small little fingers, and my hands aren't that big. Having to try and adjust on quick passages is difficult. It's not just because of my co-ordination, it's the instrument itself. One of my teachers told me to get a Fossati because the left hand key distance is slightly kinder to fingers like mine.

M The oboe brings challenges which are also emotional.

R Definitely and maybe that's why we pursue it. There's a drive there, perhaps a drive to be better and to strive for something.

M For me there's something about the struggle to sound which I find engaging. I don't know why that is. When Henry Dagg designed and made the gliss anglais for me I wanted to retain the bocal and reed but get rid of the fingering challenges.

R I've started to meet up with the lady who plays baroque violin to try and get into improvisation. When we begin it sounds very folky, which is what you would expect; the aristocracy in music at the time plundered the countryside. I don't want to do fancy runs which can easily go wrong on this instrument. I enjoy playing really nice melodies. The instrument is made to do this or to play sad songs. Sometimes technical progress is not real musical progress.

M I have the same experience- I enjoy pastoral soundscapes or strange timbral shifts that come from experimentation-or drone sounds.

R That's the way I want to go. I feel inhibited by the playing structures I've been given and work within.

M I also have a problem with the words professional and amateur in contemporary circles. So few musicians can make a living solely from playing.

R I had a really unpleasant experience learning oboe when I was doing my MA. I was used to gentle teachers and this person was much more strident and directive. On reflection I think perhaps I had been a little self-taught. My first oboe teacher was a flautist and perhaps a little surprised that I could do it. She was determined that I would get an oboe teacher

and be taught properly. I was never taught breathing properly. I was told things like 'it's just a feeling' so I had to really dig into that myself. I'm sure it can be taught better that the teaching I received.

M It's all about the embouchure in this country. Maybe it did you a favour?

R This teacher made me do breathing exercises and it's made me feel I can do it. It made me think of the instrument as an extension of myself rather than as a tool. In my teaching I use a singing analogy-that you have to support the sound and your whole body is involved. The expectation in the British way of teaching is that you use the book and get the children to play what's on the page.

4 **Melinda Maxwell and Maureen Wolloshin in conversation. Online. Saturday July 8th 2023 2.30pm.**

MW I love your aulos. I was watching a video of it earlier.

MM Thankyou! It's been quite a journey. I've only been playing it for a year and a bit. The Aulos community is very small. The instrument is being revived and there are very few people who play it. I've performed live with it and recorded some improvisations. I wrote a piece called *Janus* for it and performed that last November. The aulos is in there together with a second one played by another aulos player-we improvise together. I play the nadaswaram too, which is a South Indian oboe. A recording is coming out in September 2023 which includes *Janus*, and trio improvisations with aulos, bass and percussion called *Hecate Tryptich.*

MW How ancient the instrument is. I heard Stef Conner last year. She plays an ancient lyre which has very few notes. It's magical to hear these sounds from the past.

MM Isn't it just. We don't really know, especially with the aulos (where the reed is so important), exactly what they sounded like. There is a high register – if you put the whole reed in your mouth and squeeze the lips a bit, you get a very shrill sound and it's very loud. When you play with less reed with relaxed lips you get a lovely, soft, mellifluous sound. The tuning is something else. It's not equal temperament at all which is very interesting, although one's ears do adapt to equal temperament, but I feel one must try not to do that and let it be a bit 'out of tune'.

What's your research about Maureen?

MW It's ended up in an oboe space. The question is why women were so underrepresented in British free improvisation and why is that improving. I didn't expect to disappear down the instrument rabbit hole so far and be looking at the agency of the instrument and the gendered nature of it. Instruments are essentially male devices and sound archives. I hadn't expected to need to speak to so many oboists. Oboists rarely register in free improvisation in this country.

MM Yes-that's true.

MW A couple of years ago my friend Nikki Iles suggested I talk to you about this.

MM Wonderful. A couple of years ago I did a masters in jazz performance which is how I met her. She listened to one of my improvisations and I got to know her very well. She's very kind and supportive. Doing the jazz as a middle-aged oboist in a cohort of 18-22 year olds was wonderful. I've collaborated with some of these musicians in my PhD. The jazz musicians I've met are extremely sophisticated musically. They listen to a lot of music-all types. There's this wonderful space as a jazz musician, yes you can play an instrument but it's what you DO and HOW you play it, that's paramount. You're booked to do a gig because you have a reputation for a certain style, or a way of interacting and being. It's your character that's the essential part of the mix, not the fact that you play an oboe. It's a very different perspective and I absolutely love it. It's changed my life.

MW I'm sure. I was married to a jazz musician for 20 years and I was in the world as a classically trained oboist wondering how I could fit in that scene. Character and technical prowess have equal importance. The instrument is an extra barrier for women especially oboists.

MM My route wasn't primarily through orchestras. I started as a pianist and came to the oboe age 14. My family were all architects and radio 3 was always on at home. I heard an oboe on the radio one day, mesmerised by the sound, and asked if I could learn to play it. I didn't know what it was in that initial listening. I didn't realise what a beast the instrument is and that you had reeds to make. That calling, or initiation if you like, kept me going through the slumps of–I can't do this, I can't make the reeds –and so forth and everything else that followed. I just persevered because there's something about the oboe and the sound it makes that drew me in and the fact that it's an instrument that's changed so much since it began – particularly since the aulos. It's now a covered hole, not an open hole instrument. You have this abundance of delicate mechanism that you must deal with and

that I think has oppressed the sound a bit. We have to blend now with the clarinet, flute and bassoon which can be very quiet – they can play very quietly. But an oboe is so much harder because the sound is very penetrative and for me it's either on or off. It's a bit like a trumpet; on or off. You can sort of creep in in certain contexts but basically, it's the sound that's got this wildness in it that I've always been attracted to. It's a bit like the beast within the machine and it has all these multiphonics. It creates a sound world that can be ridiculously wild.

MW I love the word wildness. Why do we stick with this when it has such challenge?

MM For me I love it. Aside to this though I love its natural sound too. I love Bach's music who wrote so beautifully for the oboe. Bach loved the oboe. He wrote more melodies for it than any other instrument. Mozart loved it too, then the clarinet took over for him. We have so much baroque music. There's an awful lot of modern music now too. There are some composers like Bruno Maderna who loved it-he wrote 3 concertos for it. These composers understand the nature of the oboe, so they write for it beautifully. Since *The Fires of London*[193] were formed a lot of pieces have been written with that instrumentation; flute and clarinet were the instruments for modern music. The oboe has made a comeback though. I love the possibility of, if you like, a prehistoric sound with it. I'm not into extended techniques per se. With some new music I've played, a lot of the composers use these sounds in a musical way. When they work for the music then it gets really interesting.

MW I come at playing from the same position. It's physical and I enjoy it.

MM Particularly when you have a good reed Maureen (both laugh). What I learnt through the years is that you have to make do. It's very rare that one has a perfect reed – I think I've had three in my life (Maureen laughs). The rest have been things I've had to adapt. Cane is a natural substance – you can't copy a good reed because the cane is different every single time.

MW It's part of what makes the caricature of the oboist an anxious one. Has there been anything about gender of note in your career? Especially given your involvement in jazz?

MM I have to say Maureen it hasn't for me. When I started improvising at university I started in a group. There were 5 of us and I was the only woman. It didn't make me feel

[193] British modern music ensemble active from the 1960s to 1980s directed by Maxwell Davies. Flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano.

estranged at all. In the classical world there have been occasions where I've been 'approached' -which is a type of harassment. In those days you just brushed it off. I do know some female oboists who've had a worse time than me. I haven't had any antagonism or disrespect or unkindness.

MW Most women I ask this of who are female improvisers with respected careers – Annie Whitehead and Nikki Iles for example – would say the same. It hasn't been about gender; it's been about the music and the character of the musician.

MM Yes. Very much so. Maybe that's why it works in the jazz and improvisation world because in the classical world you're a bum on a seat who plays an oboe and very well of course. Good sound, good intonation, don't mess things up. I find it's quite an oppressive world. I always felt I was having to compromise in some way. And the pressure was enormous. For instance, the solo in Brahms 1. So many great oboists have played it and when the moment arrives for you to do so it's a scary feeling. I never really enjoyed that; I don't know why. I think it's because I didn't grow up through the mainstream of youth orchestras. I always felt a bit of a fish out of water in the classical world even though I loved it. I played, for example, with the London Bach Orchestra, The Orchestra of St John's Smith Square, The BBC Symphony Orchestra, and the LPO. I did film sessions.

MW So you're a top of your game oboe woman describing a discomfort with the classical scene. Why has it taken until now for you to be established in the improv scene? Why did you swerve into orchestral playing when you were younger.

MM It was just what one was expected to do as a musician at a conservatoire. I went to the College[194] for a postgrad year and they said well you've done 3 years at university you don't need to play much. I said no-exactly the opposite. I want to play more. I want to learn my instrument so that was a bit unsuccessful. I really learnt the oboe in Germany in a place called Detmold. I had a two-year DAAD scholarship, and I practised, practised, practised. That's where I learnt the Berio *Sequenza* (both laugh), I learnt to double tongue and I met some really interesting musicians. I felt it was very different to England. I always tell students to go abroad to study. Then you come home, and you have to earn a living so I found myself doing chamber music, the odd bit of teaching, going for symphony orchestra auditions and just 'jobbing'.

[194] The Royal College of Music (RCM)

MW Were you in a professional or social network with improvising musicians at all?

MM No. I improvised at university, and I knew I was excited but frightened by it. But with *The London Sinfonietta* who I've worked with for over 40 years, they did education projects organised by Gillian Moore (at one time the head of Education/Outreach at the London Sinfonietta). That's when I really got the bug. They were ground-breaking experiences. Gillian used Richard McNicol and people who were player composer improvisers to lead workshops. Gillian's idea was to use building blocks from pieces, for example, by Berio and Ligeti that we were playing in a concert, and she would get the kids to come and listen, to hear these great pieces. One of these pieces would be the one from which we'd take the building blocks to use in making our own music. This encouraged them to listen and hear a modern approach. We did this in different communities, all sorts but mainly 15- and 16-year-olds. I loved it because you had to make something work. You had a couple of notes or a rhythm. Everything was from memory, so you had to memorise, and you made a piece with the children and performed it. It was such fun and so fulfilling, especially when you see a child grow in confidence when they've been given a leading role. I think improvising HAS to be put into classical education. It's a disaster that we don't do it as classical musicians. I think it's almost immoral.

MW It's really good to hear you saying these things. I completely agree. I loved your piece; *Pibroch* with John Harle from that time. Thankyou for that.

MM Thankyou. I was always doing a bit of composing, but I suddenly got interested in the bagpipes and its music. I thought, I wonder if I can do something like this with the oboe.

MW And you did and it's cool! I have that same interest in the bagpipes. It seems increasingly to me that there's something about the separate socialisation of classical and improvising musicians that starts in education. Both parties lose out I think.

MM Absolutely. I've been doing improvisation with the NYO[195] oboists for the last seven years. Before that I would go through their pieces, as required, their orchestral repertoire. But I thought, I've got to put in some improvisation. So, every session we do some sort of improvising and I've done it with the whole NYO woodwind section too. I'm always saying to students that we should improvise together. It's always based on some sort of structure, a scale or a rhythm. I think and worry that conservatoires are not sure how to approach

[195] National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain

this. There are of course many fantastic players and musicians out there who don't wish to improvise. That's fine. There is an obsession in making the right sound. This comes first. The second thing is learning the orchestral repertoire but not everyone is going to go into an orchestra. There must be other paths for these musicians. A change is developing a little in conservatoires where you can take electives in making your own music but it's moving slowly. Improvising is just not considered serious enough. I remember when I was Head of Woodwind at Manchester,[196] a player was told that he couldn't improvise in his exam because the examiners wouldn't know how to examine it.

MW That world is still alive and well. It comes from a self-perceived lack of improvising ability in the teacher which may lead to an anxiety and insecurity about having improvising in the room. I've never come across a self-taught oboist. Perhaps the teaching of the mechanics is a little restricting. Do you let your students experiment with technique?

MM Of course but you have to be very careful. I've noticed quite a lot of young players don't listen to a wide range of music or explore it. Film music has become important; music related to images. That's fine but they need to know more repertoire. They need to know more modern music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They touch on the nineteenth and early twentieth century but when it gets to around 1950 there's a sort of cut off. I think a lot of teachers don't go there because they don't want their students to upset their sound. I think that's a shame. You're not going to upset the right sound idea– you can always return to it. But you do need to explore the potential of the instrument. In doing that with your own music you get into a very interesting place. It's very creative and it gives you confidence in yourself as a musician. Improvising is a holistic skill that feeds into your Mozart, your Bach and your orchestral playing but in particular your listening. Listening is key to all of this. If you don't listen to other music, it's a bit of a dead end. You need to feed your mind so that you can draw on stuff. You need to improvise with a massive backlog of 'stuff'. This is where I find it interesting because I think one's aural history feeds into your imagination and how you make music. You need to nurture that. A lot.

MW I agree with you. Free improvisers have an aural history from the jazz or classical tradition. Women coming into that are listening to a largely male aural repertoire and playing on instruments using masculine techniques. Those oboe teachers not allowing

[196] Royal Northern College of Music

improvisation are restricting their students within male movements. In particular this is the case with instruments like guitar. Chris Redgate's oboe is something I can argue against in this regard.

MM I remember a very interesting musician and percussionist called James Wood who directed the London Chamber Choir. He asked me about 20 years ago, 'Melinda can we design an oboe that plays quarter tones?' And I said, we already can play quarter tones! I spend my life trying to play pure semitones because I can bend any note. I'm deeply respectful of Chris's work. But for me, to keep an E at precisely a quarter tone sharp worries me. I don't know why. I feel nervous about it. With the London Sinfonietta we played a lot of music by Gérard Grisey who died over a decade ago. His music is full of sixth tones. We spent a lot of time trying to get the chords to sound with these sixth tones but the thing is your ear naturally adapts to playing in tune, so you have to work very hard to play out of tune by the right amount. It's desperately difficult. I was part of a concert with the London Sinfonietta and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment. We played a Mark Anthony Turnage piece. Both groups were on the same stage on opposite sides. The OAE were playing at 435 and we were playing at 440. But you adapt and it became vaguely in tune because our ear adapts. You don't just press the key down and have the note come out the same every time. It depends on the acoustic of the space, who you're playing with and how you listen. It's a very complex aural space.

MW To return to your beginnings. Which university did you attend before you went to the Royal College? You must have been an exceptional oboist.

MM I don't know. Things were very different then. I noticed at university that the oboe seemed to 'work' for me. I got by. I was at York in 1976, and it was a fantastic course and the most wonderful place. I did an awful lot of playing, but I wasn't making reeds. I went to have a lesson with Janet Craxton because I wondered about getting into the Academy. I had four lessons and in one of them she gave me a piece of tube cane and told me to go and make some reeds. When I asked what I should do with it she was very angry. 'What do you mean? You don't know how to make reeds? Go away and find out!' `I was absolutely fraught and in tears. I was 21 and it was unheard of not to be able to do this. But she was also very kind to me. She gave me lovely herbal teas and homemade cakes. She was a fantastic oboist and was stricter with women I think than with men. I think she could see that if you were a

woman you had to stay at the top of your game. Perhaps. I don't know. I never asked her about that.

MW York had an amazing music course at that time.

MM Yes. That's when I started being creative with my music. I think if I'd gone to a conservatoire at 18 I would probably have found my way to improvising but it would have been very tortuous and I'd have been thinking 'I can't go there, it's not what I should be doing,' because that's how one is trained as a classical player. The other thing I've only just realised; the perfect interpretation of your sonata is drilled into you. Phrase it like that, this is the tempo. Everything had to be nailed down so when you got to your first performance and you made a mistake because all sorts of other things come into play (the temperature or acoustic might be different), you think oh no! aaargh! I've made a mistake. I've realised that's a totally unhelpful way to teach. Much better to teach these pieces by saying, do a version of your sonata. Of course, you study the form, shape and so on, but when it comes to performing you have to let go and go with the moment because that's what music is. That's why improvising is wonderful because you play in the moment.

It's about trusting your ear. You get out on stage, wherever that may be, and at that moment, when you enter the space, you have to trust all the work you've done beforehand and go with the moment. So, if something's a bit loud or the crescendo is happening sooner or the phrase is moving quicker, go with it. I was told not to do this.

In my PhD I've made improvisations on all six Britten *Metamorphoses*, both in and outside the form. It was a revelation to me. The way I was taught them was to, for example, 'imagine Pan sitting by the river and he's got a reed and when the A# starts…' (Maureen laughs 'we had the same teacher!') and I'm thinking now that's not useful. It's about the harmony and the notes which metamorphose. Yes, there's a lovely story you can think about but that's just a place to imagine a type of feeling. It's Britten's pitches that are important and this explains the expression. As oboists we're not taught harmony. We're not taught about how the Poulenc sonata works harmonically or any Bach. It's about learning your instrument to a very high level. This is laudable but limited. As orchestral players we have to perform at a very high level which means we have to know our instrument. It's a sort of curse. You must learn to play with the right sound, with a fantastic technique, and you must be fearless, especially if you're going to be a first oboist; totally fearless. Second oboe is a very different skill and in some ways a lot harder. But I'm afraid I've become disinterested in all that.

MW It was never for me but at that time there wasn't an alternative. If you keep saying things like this then there will be another way for young oboists.

MM I'm trying to change it but it's very slow.

5 Catherine Plugyers and Maureen Wolloshin in conversation. Online. Thursday June 29th, 2023, 10am.

M Thankyou so much for talking to me today Catherine. In all the research I've been doing the only female oboist name which occurs in London in free improvisation is yours.

C It's not my main activity. I'm a classical musician so I tend to come at it differently to others in LIO. There are and have been some amazing musicians in that band. A lot of them come from a jazz background with some from the classical world. Alison Blunt the violinist for example. Others didn't necessarily go to a conservatoire.

M What do you bring to that world? What's it been like?

C Well I'm not going to break into a jazz riff *both laugh.* When I went to college I did my ARCM and BMus and the free improvisation started there. I was at The Royal College of Music (RCM) from 1974 to 1979, I'm 67 now. The Royal College at that time was a very lively place. It was extremely busy. They had contemporary musicians like Edwin Roxburgh who was one of my teachers. Lawrence Casserley ran an electronics studio so we were all happily cutting and splicing bits of tape there as students. Then we had people like John Lambert[197] and Adrian Jack. They and others were extremely interested in improvisation and ran groups for us. I'd started working in improvisation, with non-written, instruction and graphic scores. I really liked it and found that sometimes it was quite nice to get away from the traditional orchestral practice I was used to. I'd been in youth orchestras and have had a career as a freelance player that encompasses orchestral playing. I didn't know until I started at RCM and came to London that this was available to me. It was quite mind blowing really.

M Did you go to RCM to study oboe or composition initially? Or both?

C I went to study oboe. I grew up near Colchester. Colchester had an opera orchestra and from the age of 14 I was in that playing 'little operas.' I was also in the chamber orchestra

[197] Information on John Lambert's improvisation classes vailable here https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-john-lambert-1610456.html (accessed 29.8.23).

from the same age. Essex County Council was and is blessed with a great music tradition, so I also had the youth orchestra to participate in. Basically it was a standard classical training. From about the age of 17 I was coming up to London for the odd lesson here and there and I went straight to college after school and A levels. I studied for a Masters in Composition at University of London Goldsmith's in later life.

M Were there many other young women at RCM at the time doing what you were doing?

C I was at College at an extraordinary time. Can you imagine it? There were 8 oboe teachers available and in each year there were 10 oboe students. They all went, with the exception of myself, straight through to *THE* jobs at the time unless they were academics. I didn't quite fit so I couldn't find my way. It took a while for me to understand what I wanted to do.

M What do you mean by that?

C I was an orchestral player for 15 years. It was okay, but it didn't sit comfortably with me which is probably why I didn't get one of the very top jobs. I don't think I'm enough of a team player to be honest. I didn't know that at the time and I had to learn that. There is an intellectual freedom, an enthusiasm, and fun to be found in free improvisation and in exploring some of the experimental scores I had discovered at College which is missing from the traditional orchestral role for an oboist. On the other hand, it was thrilling to be part of a top wind section, and I enjoyed the touring and got some good concerto work.

M I'm interested in your relationship with the instrument. You're talking a lot about the music. It's so unusual for an oboe to appear in free improvisation but even more so for a woman to play it in such a male environment at the time. Is that your experience.

C I do not think about it. Of course I am aware of gender imbalance. I've spent my whole working life promoting the work of women composers and women's improvisation events. I do it but I've never thought 'goodness I'm the only woman.' At College I think I could have been the only woman in the experimental music ensemble but I thought nothing of it. When I entered the profession there were lots of women doing all sorts of things and it just so happened I had an oboe. That was my attitude. I also think, and you will know this, that the oboe is SO difficult–it's such a difficult instrument to play; you have to make a good sound, which requires a particular technique. I don't think any self-taught musician could do that. Oboists are highly trained. We spend our whole time at college trying to make a decent sound, the sound that is popular at the time. I'm a Leon Goossens fan so I went for a thinner, lighter timbre and had to adapt that for orchestral work. You've got to be taught

to play the wretched thing to get anywhere with the oboe. I'm not criticising other improvisers; there are some brilliant improvisers on other instruments who have come to it from a different direction (jazz, self-taught, busking, a lesson here and there, working in clubs and so on). I am very serious about this. I've also worked with some players in the free improvisation world who have a dreadful technique, and this is a source of great chagrin for me as a classical musician. I choose not to do that anymore. I select the people I play with. The players I'm referring to, had they been oboists, would not have had that poor technique tolerated. I'm very serious about that.

M It's really helpful to talk to you about this. I've been surprised by what I've found so far- that the instrument can be a barrier. Oboists, and I don't mean people who double, all point to the difficulty of playing the instrument which, when struggled with, can make the prospect of free improvisation as another hurdle a step too far. Lorraine Hart, your ex-student, spoke of her anxiety across her work and still describes herself as not very good. The technical challenge when learning to play doesn't include improvisation.

C There are a couple of things to say. The reason there aren't many women oboists who can improvise is that it's a numbers game. If you had loads of self-taught oboists they would filter in but that doesn't exist for our instrument because it has to be taught. So there are very few of us. It's not sexual politics it's that. I don't know of any male free improvising oboists.

M There's Chris Redgate.

C He specialises specifically in contemporary playing and techniques. The Howarth-Redgate oboe was built especially for him and is a quarter-tone instrument. I do not have the mindset to play the instrument. I am too much of a generalist, but I am happy it is there. Chris is a very accomplished player.

M The instrument seems to remove any intuition and increase the precision required.

C That is the point. And free 'classical improvisation' was the anthesis to that mindset taken a long time ago to extremes by Boulez. Should I need quarter tones I can do it with correct fingerings or embouchure. I can't do massively long runs of quartertones at great speed - I would hand that to another player. But I learnt Berio's *Sequenza* at college which nearly killed me but then went on to give plenty performances. I thought "this is a really worthwhile piece" and it made me want to know more.

M It's a different thing, that pursuit of technical precision, to the world of free improvisation.

C Exactly. The thing about numbers of oboists is also important. Mike Winfield was my teacher at the College then I went on to others who were all stunning teachers. There were great student oboists coming in too. Some dropped out, some went into teaching. At the College you got a better education if you were a good player than if your technique was less promising. It was very competitive in the 70s and 80s. Now they only take 2 or 3 players a year and they pick the best students technically. But these are not necessarily the people who will stay the course. I wouldn't send students there now because I'd prefer them to get an academic training which is broader then go to College for a year postgraduate to polish their technique and when they're a little older and better able to handle the pressure. It's very competitive now and the pressure is enormous.

M You sound as though you don't double on other instruments and haven't gone into electronics like a number of other women.

C Yes-I'm an oboist. I have performed plenty of stuff for oboe and electronics in the past but do not compose electronic music. I have lower grades in strings and the piano of course. But I'm an oboist. I play cor anglais too. I used to play oboe d'amore but I've never played oboe da caccia. In orchestral work I did a lot of cor anglais playing. The progression of my life after college was that I did session work and, on the side, my flat mates were into experimental music and Scratch Orchestra. If there was anything by Cornelius Cardew and the like, I'd be there. I've been in a couple of groups too. I also joined several small improvising ensembles and have one of my own *Edges* for Oboe, found objects (Adam Bowman) and Saxophone (Adrian Northover). I left LIO about 12 years ago because the direction of travel seemed to change for the orchestra, and I had other priorities. There had been people like Lol Coxhill and Phil Wachsmann. There were lots of guest artists from across the globe and its character changed.

M It became a hub in an international scene I think.

C Yes. I was also teaching so it was a lot to be doing gigs in the evening and teaching during the day. The teaching paid the mortgage, and I took the decision to leave LIO. It was a big decision. I've been following their progress and still take an interest.

I've been in various improvising groups throughout my life-a thread running through it. I've also spent 26 years supporting the work of women composers. I've done a lot for women

composers because when I started my festival (The London New Wind Festival) 26 years ago it was easy to programme men and I had to make an effort which was worthwhile to programme women.

Last year I had a day of new work presented for various instruments. We did a call for new solo or duo works for one of our events with *Composers Edition*. There were 240 entries. The proportion of female to male entries was 1 in 10 which meant I had to specifically pursue the women and the scores to try and get a decent gender balance in our programme. Perhaps we're all so busy multi-tasking we don't have the time. The work is important, and I continue to do it.

6 Anna Braithwaite and Maureen Wolloshin in conversation. Online. Thursday November 23rd, 2023.

M I'm interested in your position in Canterbury, as a free improviser, but also as the woman who started *Free Women*[198]. And I just wondered how you came to this and why you felt the need to launch *Free Women*.

A I moved to Folkestone, and I noticed that there was some space for the kind of work I was doing already, which was verbatim text work. I was looking further afield, and I heard about Sam Bailey who leads *Free Range*. I went to *Free Range* and I thought, this feels like a place where I could try and do stuff that's more experimental and at the edge of my practice. That was about eight years ago. I wrote a piece for *Folkestone Fringe* to coincide with the Folkestone Triennial, which was 2014. I had a tiny budget so put a notice out to students at Kent and Canterbury Christchurch Universities saying, 'composer needs people to play for free', citing the instruments I needed.

Then through Matt Brown, because I needed an accordion player, I met Aidan Shepard, and we formed the *Montrose Composers Club.* We all had music careers, that meant we were playing other people's music, and we were established performers. We composed for one another, for our instrumentation and wrote and did a series of four concerts, doing music that was written by us that had some elements of improvisation. I think for Matt and Aiden in particular, improvisation was something they liked to do. We started to form a mini

[198] A women's improvising collective Anna and I now co-lead. In 2022-23 it was an offshoot of Free Range, an experimental music charity in Canterbury.

improvisers band. Among others Phil Self, Sophie Stone and Samuel D. Loveless joined us. Sophie uses improvisation so she was bringing material that required some. We just got more and more confident by just doing it. But to begin with, it helped us to have a bit of a structure like a graphic score or more of an instruction about what we were supposed to be doing. I think both all? of us now are much, much happier improvising than we were before we met Matt and Aiden.

While performing at *Free Range* I noticed that I was one of the few front women at the events. And Sam (Bailey) then invited me to perform at an end of series gig where the *Free Range Orchestra* were playing. It was then I found out about them and I'm not sure it really had that name at that point. I thought it was poor that there were only four women and about 27 people squashed into the band. I was in the process, at the time, of doing a lot of gender counting. I was using a bit of improvisation as part of my compositional process and starting to get confident about using it in composition. I was being invited along to a lot of events. I was always counting how many women were in the room. At the time, I was reading things in the press; articles with female composers saying, 'you know, I don't want female only opportunities, because then I don't feel like I've got there on my own merit. I feel like I've only got there because I've had this advantage of being a woman and this sort of thing. I kept bemoaning the fact I couldn't really find any other women to join *Montrose Composers Club.* I thought, you have to work much harder to involve women because they don't even apply for positions and opportunities.

You've got to go and find women so I'm going to go, and I'm going to see who's there and what they're doing. And change my idea of what a composer is, as well. And what a free improviser is. *Free Range* at the time was largely older white men; the young ones were the composers, and we had the old ones in the improvising on the whole. That is a generalisation of course. I met with Sam Bailey and pointed out this problem to him. I don't feel that the men that work in improvisation are particularly the problem to be honest, because they are a very diverse group and I feel that we've got loads in common. It's just the fact that for some reason, women haven't felt able to do it so much. And I think perhaps it is quite scary for me, I put it up there with kind of stand up or something like that. Something that really pushes you to the limit when it comes to performing, but it does also free you from the structure and the hierarchy. Sam agreed that it was something he'd like to do. I asked Sylvia Hallett who I'd been speaking to about running some workshops. We

performed with my friend Gemma Storr and it was phenomenal; the best improvising I've ever done. It a was really great experience for me. There were lots of women in the audience, and they all wanted to come up and talk to us afterwards. And I thought, yeah, this is what we need.

M Why did it stop? Was it because there was no funding?

A Yes. We had a whole series of workshops planned but had no funding and what gigs there were, were low paid.

M What was it that happened that led you to be a composer who was free to improvise?

A I was a composer that used process. I was also a Mum at the time.

I took some courses at Birkbeck while working during the day doing advertisements and TV gigs. In the evenings, I was learning to become an opera singer and that's where I met Tanya Holt. We both had talents in singing, dancing and acting, but we hadn't been to music college. So we decided to create our own thing. Tanya asked me what kind of music I like, and I said "swing". Thus, we formed an Andrews Sisters tribute, which was unusual at the time (23 years ago). We often received criticism from people who didn't understand our passion for vintage music, dressing up in '40s style, and burlesque, which were not popular at the time. We couldn't find a third member, so it was just the two of us with occasional accompaniment from a pianist. For 20 years, we made our living by performing at corporate events and rural tours. Eventually, we started performing in theatres, which was more fulfilling but not as well-paid as our earlier gigs. I wanted to write something for us, so I convinced the Arts Council to fund our show. They had initially rejected us, saying that our work was just "entertainment". However, I persisted, and eventually, they funded our show called "The Entire History of Cabaret". In this show, I composed a 10-minute music theatre piece that looked at the history of anaesthesia. This was based on a story from the Chat Noir in Paris in the late 1800s. I imagined the text and wrote the piece for Tanya, me, and the pianist. This was when I started composing music, around 2009 or later. We took our show to Edinburgh.

M are you comfortable with free improvisation now?

A I remember back when I used to create music. I would sing into the mic and let my voice go down to the strings of the guitar. Then, I would listen to the recording of my singing and try to turn it into notation. Even though I didn't really play the piano at the time, I would have a keyboard plugged in, and I would start playing with the chords and the tonality. I

would sit with my eyes shut and imagine what the music should sound like. I would improvise and use my creativity on stage as a performer, especially since people would often talk us to during performances. It was like stepping off the edge of a cliff and making up the music as I went along. I got rid of all my rubbish ideas of what improvisation was and then just got better at it. As part of the *Montrose Composer's Club* we actually improvised an entire piece for orchestra, which has been played by the Chatham and Rochester symphony orchestra and is based completely on composition sparked by improvisations.

M Do you feel as though the nature of the score is important as a facilitator for improvisation?

A If you're used to having scores, it's just literally something to look at and have in your hand. But I think in the end, it doesn't allow you to be free. It's an exercise, I would say. If you're an athlete, you have to exercise, and if you're using your instrument, you have to practice. I think it's good to have those moments where you just go and practise and remind yourself to listen and not use the same old sounds that always pop into your head when you improvise. So that's part of the discipline I suppose. But it is a way in for some people. Sylvia Hallet said that she didn't mind creating some kind of score for her workshops for complete beginners, because it was her experience that some people like that as a way in.

M do you feel your work would be better if you'd had a formal training?

A Because I haven't had the formal training I can't really speak to that. But I think what I would have done is gone in and as a singer, and probably wouldn't have come to composing until I did anyway at 38. I don't think it would have got me any further down the road with composition. I had a mentor so I've improvised my path through the industry as well. But that does mean that when I pull on those things I know from my cabaret background, or I know from my opera background, or I know from being a costume designer, or someone who's been in pantomime, since they were two, you know, when you pull on that stuff that isn't necessarily the stuff that other people are pulling on. But also, you very quickly work out what your voice is. Because nobody's telling you what the correct voice is. You're busy, contextualised in what you do all the time. People expect you to be able to talk about it. And that was the only problem I had, I would say that when people come out of college, they're able to talk about what they're doing. I couldn't. I couldn't write about it. I had to do blogs then I realised that I could write about it. It just took me a long time.

M Was it because you didn't feel beyond having to publicise your work, it was important to articulate it, you just wanted to get on with it.

A I wanted to get on with it. But also, I had no idea what a practice was. Somebody for the first time the other day asked me how's your practice? Interesting, isn't it? I enjoyed the freedom that question allowed me rather than someone just asking “how’s work going?” Something about that word I find very tricky. My practice is constantly evolving. And the main problem people have with my practice is that it's so varied.

M has gender had an impact on your professional life?

A I was invited to speak on a panel about feminism at Folkstone. At that time, I was mostly working in cabaret and had little experience in composition. I realized that I had no representation in the industry. During the panel, I shared some of my personal experiences of sexism in cabaret. However, as someone who has visibility and a profile, I felt it was my responsibility to accept invitations to panels and Q&A sessions, even if they were difficult. It is important for women to be seen and heard in the industry, especially for those with preconceived notions of what a composer looks like. As a female composer and entrepreneur, I need to be present and platform myself.

I'm presenting the kind of woman I want to be seen as. I want to be a role model for others. But in order to get to this position, I had to establish a professional identity rather than just being seen as a feminine woman. What you're saying is that my success came from being a professional who happens to be a woman, rather than just being seen as a female.

I wasn't intentionally creating feminist artwork. However, my perspective was undoubtedly influenced by my female background. It was different, but I wasn't purposely presenting my work as such. For instance, during a recent panel discussion on AI, we talked about how the technology uses archives of music to create new tracks. I became curious about what exactly is contained in those archives.

I've noticed that women, especially those of a certain age who are thinking about having kids, give me a certain look. They're curious about how I manage to balance my career and motherhood. They want to know if I'm able to do both, if it's working for me, or if it's killing me. They're wondering if they could do it too. It's a big deal, and I think it's important to talk about it.

Parenting and having a career in the arts is really challenging. I think it's important for me to use my platform to be a female face in the room, even if it means stepping out of my

comfort zone. For example, when I was invited to speak on an AI panel, I didn't know much about AI, but I did my research and participated. I could see that the panel was lacking in female representation, so I felt it was important to be there.

I'm happy to be on these professional panels talking about AI and being a composer, but I also think I need to lift the lid a bit on what it's like to be a working mum. It's important to be honest about the challenges and the struggles, so that other women know what to expect. Otherwise, we're all just pretending to be swans, calm on the surface but paddling furiously underneath. It's not fair to gaslight other women into thinking that it's easy.

7 Henry Dagg in conversation. 1: Sunday October 29th, 2023, 4pm on my sofa. 2: Wednesday November 15th, 2023, 11am in Henry's kitchen.

MW You're the only person I'm speaking to about work. It's two separate things because you designed and made the gliss anglais, but you also improvise with electronics and with other people. However, I don't know much about how you got into free improvisation, or if you even consider that to be what you do.

HD When I was about 8 or 9 years old my parents gave me an electronic construction kit made by Philips. It included a perforated base-board on legs and a set of punched cards. You could assemble circuits using little spring-loaded connectors that you push through the holes in the card laid on the board, then insert the component leads through the connectors.

MW Was it a toy?

HD It was a kit really, primarily meant for education; it could hardly be called a traditional educational toy. It focused more on creativity and construction. Although it wasn't specifically designed for adults, anyone who wanted to learn about electronic design and construction could use it as a starting point. At the age of 8 I wasn't allowed to use a soldering iron. That's why this kit was the perfect introduction to electronics. I started by building circuits according to the diagrams provided, but soon realized that I could modify them to perform tasks they weren't designed for. I was particularly drawn to the radio circuit, a very basic medium-wave radio receiver, because I discovered that this type of receiver could also act as a transmitter quite easily. You could persuade the circuit to oscillate, producing audible tones while transmitting them to a nearby radio receiver.

During my primary school years I began experimenting with electronic sounds, and I started building circuits to modify the sounds, which eventually led to me creating a small portable electronic music studio. This studio was perfect for creating improvised electronic music, inspired by the music concrete of the 1950s and early 1960s. I was around 15 years old when I built the studio, and by that time, I had already been manipulating tapes on several tape recorders. The studio included two tape decks with multiple replay heads for echoes, two oscillators, a rhythm generator that controlled both oscillators in rhythmic patterns, and a spring line reverb, which allowed me to create artificial reverb effects. In addition, there was a mechanical effects unit that had various springs and even a tiny motorized klaxon, all added to the mix by a magnetic contact mic.

MW Was your Dad into this?

HD When not at work as an architect**,** my father's interests were mainly limited to building and flying model aeroplanes and practising his clarinet; he didn't take much interest in what I was doing. However, as both my parents were musical, I was trained on the cello. I also taught myself piano and electric bass. The studio I built was not suitable for composing conventional western music as it was really just centred around a few oscillators and tape decks, so it lent itself more to improvising with random and unpredictable sounds and building up tape montages; I had recorded some radio broadcasts of Music Concrete, which inspired my improvising experiments.

MW So that was before you were 15?

HD I think I developed the portable studio between 14 and 15. However, I was always short of money to fund my projects, so around that time, during the summer holidays, I began working behind the counter at my local electronic component shop called 'Peat's for parts' in the middle of Dublin. I had been a customer there for a long time and they offered me a job. I wasn't a good salesman as I had no commercial sensibilities.

However, the job did come with some great perks. One of the most useful items I found was an old Grundig TK 46 tape recorder in the untidy stockroom, filled with all sorts of clutter. I asked about it and was told that nobody knew where it had come from. I managed to buy it for 14 quid, and it turned out to be the best recorder for my purposes that I could have asked for. It had 3 speeds and 3 heads, it allowed echoes, track-bouncing, synchronous recording, stereo, flanging etc, and its only flaw was that (as with practically all domestic recorders) the heads were too inaccessible to allow easy marking for tape editing.

My parents didn't take a whole lot of interest in any of that, really. I mean, as classical musicians, they were very much confined to their own field. And in fact, my mother was extremely resentful; when I started teaching myself by transcribing pop and rock music from tape at the piano, there was a lot of pretty nasty abuse for that, so I had to do it covertly. I also had to practise the cello quite often within earshot of my mother, which was not good. She was a frustrated orchestral oboist having to work part time because she wasn't allowed to work full time as a married female musician. She would regularly take out her temper on me and my sister when we were practising and come in and box our ears if she didn't like what we were doing. So classical practising for me wasn't a positive experience.

MW Did you go and study music or electronics or anything?

HD I didn't find many opportunities out there at that time for people who were interested in both music and sound engineering. After I finished school, I knew of no universities offering such courses. Though I didn't get bad grades in my leaving certificate, they weren't outstanding either. However, I did well in Physics, English and Music. It seemed to me that the sooner I left the place, the better it would be for me. So I applied to BBC for a trainee post in audio engineering, in the hope of progressing to the Radiophonic Workshop, which had always been one of my major influences.

MW Did you go there when you were 18 or 19? And what was your job when you started?

HD Yes, the BBC provides in-house training for all its technical staff at a kind of boot camp around an ex-stately home called Wood Norton at Evesham. This location was once an emergency studio during the war and later became the main technical training centre. I spent the first three months of my BBC career there in 1975 before being stationed at BBC Northern Ireland.

MW tell me a little about that.

HD Every trainee has a row of buttons in front of them. After receiving a lecture, they are asked a series of verbal questions and must press the appropriate button for the answer. This allows the instructor to see instantly who has understood the material and who needs further help.

MW So how many trainees were in the lecture theatre?

HD I think there were around 20 to 30 on my course, but other courses would be running simultaneously. When I began working at Broadcasting House in Belfast, my creative drive

was quickly extinguished. The nature of the work was mundane, with editing reporters' 'Uher' tapes being the most frequent task. The Uher was a portable quarter-inch tape recorder, which was the industry standard for use by reporters of the day. A lot of my time was spent in studios with reporters and producers, editing these tapes and creating packages or inserts for programs. This included balancing and recording interviews in the studio, which I often found tedious and uncreative, particularly during long periods of inactivity before any work arrived. There was also the dreaded possibility of continuity work. That was just death on wheels. It was the studio from which every programme was introduced by an announcer, whose every cue would require an instant response from the audio staff on the other side of the glass. We would be left sitting there for most of the day doing absolutely nothing. And then suddenly, at the at the change of the hour, we would have to do about fifty things at once. Fade out the programme just finished, fade up the pips, fade up the next studio programme or play a tape, do a line-up check with up the next studio. At certain times there might be a regional opt out, or network change-over to do. So I always compared it to a railway signal box, where nothing happens most of the day, but just occasionally, several trains pass and you have to open the gates, communicate with the other boxes by ringing bells and stuff, you suddenly have to come to life as if you had been firing on all cylinders all day long. I was completely incapable of doing that, I'm very much project orientated; I have a lot of inertia, so it takes me a long time to get up to speed, but once I do, I go like the clappers, but that concentration and focus needs to be maintained. And this sort of work was something I just could not do. It was a very demoralising job in so many ways.

At the beginning of the 1980s, things changed quite a lot. Because, along with the upgrade of the studios themselves, came a whole new fleet of tape machines. And the significant thing about both the machines and the new studios was that we'd gone from mono to stereo, and we'd upgraded from a type of tape, which was as hissy as hell, to something that really had good low noise levels. One night when I was really bored, preparing the morning current affairs programme, I recorded the sound of a match being struck, added a flanging effect to give it a pitch, and used tape speed control to create a scale. Then I made up a cardboard splicing block with measuring marks to calibrate the tape length, and then spliced together a single line rendition of God Save the Queen on this struck match sound;

I played it to the producer of 'Good Morning Ulster', who asked 'Can we use it on the programme?'

Not long afterwards, a schools producer asked me to create a rendition of '3 Blind Mice' on the sound of rain dripping into a jam-jar. A commission for a new arrangement of the programme's sig-tune followed. With the new Studer stereo tape machines and better tape, I decided to try an original polyphonic tape composition to check out their possibilities.

Once I had built some basic tools, like a splicing ruler and a chromatic speed controller for the tape machines, I composed a kind of theme for Northern Ireland called Siren and Firin' which is a satirical depiction of a day in the life of the Northern Ireland fire service. It used a rhythm loop of gunfire, including a steady beat made from pistol shots filtered in a sequence of rising and falling pitches. The melody and harmony parts were created from recordings of sirens and air-horns. I went to Lisburn fire station to record all the horn/siren samples. A year later, the BBC sent me on an attachment to the Radiophonic Workshop, following which I spent nearly a decade composing music commissions for radio and T.V programmes.

MW So when did you leave?

HD Around 1989 I was coming up to my 15th anniversary at the BBC. I was reaching the conclusion that since all my spare time was now taken up with BBC music commissions, it was about time I went freelance. And by this stage, I had also taken up the musical saw and realised its potential for making a very useful financial contribution through busking and gigs, TV appearances and other bookings. So I decided to take the leap and go freelance as a composer/ musician at the end of 1989, just before the broadcast of the first documentary the BBC made about my work. Originally, that documentary was set up to cover my second saw festival in California. They'd previously sent me out to record material for a radio programme about the first one in 1987, and I'd won the first place in the category I had entered, and then produced a radio six-part series called 'Clutching At Saws.' Sadly, the BBC got a fit of departmental meanness in their TV budget and cancelled the documentary. So I went out under my own steam, and I entered the saw-off contest again. I won two first places, Classical and pop/jazz, and they awarded me the title of Master Sawyer. At that point, I was only one of five who had been given this honour, complete with a gold saw!

MW That is impressive by any measure.

HD So they realised that they had missed rather a good gig there and said, Well, maybe they could make a film about my work anyway... just based in Northern Ireland. So that's the origin of a documentary called 'Anything that makes a Noise' made in 1989. It was basically a snapshot doc, filmed in a couple of days, but I managed to prepare a number of re-enactment sequences which allowed them to film the process of things I'd been working on. Like the kitchen units I was building; etching glass panels, making and finishing the oak doors and mouldings, various stages of composing, including scoring at the piano or synths, and then in the BBC studio with the final realising process with tape manipulation and everything, all that was covered. So that was a useful snapshot of my work at the time.

For some years I'd saved quite a substantial budget for my own studio, because I had realised that ultimately, I was going to need my own facilities to become a full-time composer. I decided to completely relocate because I'd never felt at home in Northern Ireland, and I felt cut off from mainstream music. I'd also realised that the house I was living in, although it was a good size, was far from ideal; I was trying to use it as a factory and not succeeding very well. So that's when I set out to find a more suitable building.

MW Is that when you came to Faversham?

HD Yes. by 1993 I had started spending the summer months of every year in Bath, because I've found it to be the best place to go busking. Basically, I treated it as a job, it was a seven-day week, and a five hour day. Good for improving technique!

MW Could you make good money as a busker?

HD Yes, between performance and album sales it wasn't a bad hourly rate, on average. Bath was well set up for that because it had a good tourist industry, and it had a city council which understood the value of street entertainers to the local tourist industry, and to help maintain cordial relations, my great friend and fellow-musician Ken Ritchie created an association to represent us all: The Guild of Bath Buskers.

MW They were golden years for performing musicians I think.

HD I'm not sure they're entirely gone but maybe some of the freedom in busking has. I think my last busking season in Bath was 2005 so it's been some time since I stuck a toe in the water. I don't think things have got any easier, really. Particularly now that so many people don't carry cash. At the time it allowed me to generate the bulk of my income in a relatively short part of the year, which gave me the funding to develop the equipping of my

workshops here in Faversham for the rest of the time. Most of the machinery I use now was all paid for by that period of busking.

MW When did you move to Faversham?

HD While I was in Bath in 1993, I had done a little bit of looking around the area for a possible relocation. I found an interesting rural property in Dorset, but it was really too far from London, and just then, a friend suggested I look in Sittingbourne, Kent for a suitable building.

It was there that I found an estate agent with an old factory in Faversham for sale. It took a while to get permission for the change of use but with help from a wonderful architect and a sympathetic council I managed it. It's very far from perfect; it's a rather crumbling old building with a lot of floor level anomalies, and rather low headroom. But on the other hand, it's got all the industrial infrastructure, like three phase supply, and built in compressed-air lines. Crucially, it's within comfortable distance of the centre of Faversham which is a vibrant town with a good atmosphere.

MW Did you know when you moved here how many free improvisers and other musicians and artists lived here? Evan Parker, David Leahy, Robert Jarvis and so on.

HD Well, It was only after I'd actually moved in that I began to discover there was quite a community of very individual people here doing their own kind of music or art form, so I felt quite at home very quickly, and many of them have become friends and have given me terrific help over the years, My neighbours are mostly very friendly as well, and many of them have also provided some crucial help at times. It's a good place for creative people and over time I've made lots of friends and connections in the town. Although my choice of Faversham was entirely dictated by the building I had found, I do feel lucky in finding that this mediaeval market town also happens to have so much to offer in its own right, like the fabulous music and arts venue 'The Hot Tin', and of course, its proximity to London when needed, and Canterbury, with its own creative outlets such as *Free Range*.

MW So you've completely taught yourself all of this stuff. You said earlier that you did improvise at the start, and then you came back to it much later?

HD Yes, the improvising, well I suppose it always has been there as part of the initial stages of composition. I tend to improvise or compose from the ground up. So I tend to start with harmonies, and then try to find a melody line, which is happy to be superimposed on that harmonic sequence. And if that proves too contrived, then I have to alter the whole

sequence to allow the melody to go in a better direction. It's far more abstract improvising with Evan Parker. Neither of us is concerned with creating conventional harmonies.

MW How do you measure the quality of your own improvisation when it's as abstract as what you're doing? What's your criteria?

HD To be honest, I sometimes feel a bit of a fraud. I'm trying to sound as coherent as possible with what Evan's doing, but at the same time, making various decisions as to how to treat what he's doing, or to add to what he's doing. I try to reinforce the mood he's creating, but with an ear to keeping the sonic landscape moving on to new areas, with lots of contrasts, as I don't want my inner audience-member complaining that they're bored. I'm very lucky that Evan wants to work with me as he has a lifetime's improvising experience, while I still find my own performance quite difficult to judge.

MW You created the *Stage Cage* for that purpose. Were you thinking about the way that you were going to improvise and what tools you need available to you when you came up with it?

HD It began with a commission to compose the final movement for a piece called Carpe Vitam by Laura Rossi, as a tribute to female electronic music pioneers like Daphne Oram and Delia Derbyshire. I restricted myself to using the same early technology and sounds they would have used throughout, and just as they would have done, I composed and assembled it on tape machines in my studio, but I thought of including a break for a live improv section on stage using a kind of 'mini-workshop'. It was just a bench with a couple of oscillators, a ring modulator or two, a replica of Delia's famous steel lampshade, and a few tape machines that allowed me to create long and short echo effects with tape loops, and in subsequent performances, the later upgrade to variable speed recorders expanded its scope further. This marked the beginning of improvisation in my recent work.

However, When Evan and I started discussing a performance together, I realised that to provide an adequate sound palette to perform with Evan for an hour or more, I needed something with more scope and expressive capacity. So the Stage Cage incorporates four vintage audio oscillators, a zither, two ring modulators, a frequency shifter and two variable speed studio tape machines sharing one tape, separated by a five-foot rail carrying movable tape heads reading the tape. The element which binds this disparate assembly into one expressive instrument is the 'dynamic router' I developed for it; a five-key keyboard which gives me separate dynamic control on each finger of one hand, of all the available sources

and effects. It currently delivers a stereo image, but I'm hoping to upgrade it to deliver Quadrophonic sound for live performance.

Compared to today's digital technology, it looks extremely cumbersome, but it does have the advantage of allowing an audience to see the physical activity behind what they're hearing, and being entirely analogue, it has its own unique warm sound qualities which can be hard or impossible to emulate digitally.

MW Do you feel as though with that setup, you are able to do the things that you want to do when you're on stage with Evan?

HD Yeah, that's what I strive for...what you're hearing is the result of hours and hours of practice. The 'instrument' is mind-boggling to navigate, but in some ways, much like learning a conventional instrument. I need to practice because on stage, I feel under a lot of pressure, and it's easy to forget some detail of what's needed to get the sounds I'm looking for. The Stage Cage has a series of modes, each requiring a certain number of operations. The oscillators and frequency shifter must be set to the right frequency range, the router set to the correct mode (it has three modes), and the mixer needs the right combination of settings.

If you forget one of those details you spend your time listening and thinking, why am I not getting what I'm looking for? By the time you realise, the moment is gone, and you're on to something else. The frequent thought is: how can I get as fast as possible to the next thing I'm looking for and, what is it I'm doing next? Am I doing this? am I letting him do his thing? Am I just treating him? Sometimes it's quite useful to have Evan noodling away, giving me space and time to think about what it is that I'm doing next.

MW do you enjoy doing it?

HD I think it's like a lot of these things… you enjoy it more afterwards. I just feel a bit under pressure when I'm doing it, but If it suddenly turns into something that I wasn't expecting, and somebody really liked it, that gives me a bit of a kick. And so far, I certainly enjoy listening to the recordings! I hope to reach the point where I can relax and enjoy the moment of performing more.

MW Can we talk about the 'obone' that you showed me when I first visited you

HD The obone! That goes way back to the late 70s or early 80s.

I'd begun experimenting with acoustic instrument ideas at that time. I thought it would be interesting to see if I could modify a telescopic aerial from a radio to make an oboe with

portamento. The biggest part of the job was to seal the sections; I had to take the whole aerial apart and fit a little felt ring just before the retaining end of each tube. I fitted a small brass horn to serve as the bell. Once I had made a fitting for the reed, I started trying some oboe reeds, but couldn't really get much range. I got chatting to an oboist in the Northern Ireland orchestra who kindly invited me over to his house and showed me his reed- making setup. He had raw cane, and various shaping tools. He showed me the process of shaving them; I think he used a razor blade. So that's the technique I used, and it did give me a reed that worked fairly well, although I never found the Obone a very satisfactory instrument.

MW I remember so well coming and meeting you that first time. You let me play your mum's Marigaux cor anglais and I felt very honoured to be doing that. It was a very beautiful thing for me to play.

How did how did we get from that meeting to beginning work on the gliss anglais?

HD From your description of how unsatisfactory you were finding the precise tuning inherent in the oboe, and as the portamento of the Obone appealed to you, I thought you obviously needed something custom made for you, which allowed this facility, but also scope for fingering. I proposed an instrument that used the 'magnetic-strip-over-slit' tuning method, an idea which I've known about for a long time, ever since Bart Hopkin described the instrument that he developed back in the 80s in his experimental musical instruments magazine, and so the easiest way to produce a trial prototype of that, just to give you an idea of what sort of thing to expect, was to base it on a piece of 20 mm steel box section.

Being steel, it didn't require any special treatment, apart from cutting a long slit along most of its length, and it was completed by making a coupling section to connect the reed with the tube and making a flared bell for the other end. Also a device to allow you to hold it without compromising your fingering too much. The biggest drawback of using that rather cheap and cheerful approach was that it was a parallel-bore resonator which, of course is not the conical bore of an oboe. It's a clarinet, effectively. What we both found was that the reed wasn't really capable of driving the very much bigger bore of the air column which was about 16 mm square. So it barely worked, really. But it showed enough promise for you to consider it worth investing in trying to build a proper prototype in hardwood.

The most important thing was to provide it with the correct conical bore, which conformed to the typical oboe or cor anglais,. A big difference between the gliss anglais and the standard oboe is that it needs to be made in one unbroken length. This threw up massive

technical problems, when it came to giving it a conical bore, particularly when you consider the dimensions of the taper. The bore needs to start at around five millimetres, and then over the length of about 760 millimetres, taper out to about 20 millimetres. The dimensions required of a single drill or reamer to machine that length at those diameters would make it practically impossible to make or use. I had to take a completely different approach from that of a typical oboe, which is made in sections, each of which is short enough for a reamer of feasible dimensions to shape its bore.

I had to treat it more as an engineering operation, and either machine or fabricate it with a square bore with a long taper. I originally thought the best way to make the bore square was to build the tube up in sections from four separate strips of wood, like a very elongated pyramid. Because each strip would be tapered, when they were assembled as a box, the bore would have a tapered section too. But I didn't really like the idea of something that was made with four continuous joints all the way along the body. It would have been functional, but I much preferred having the integrity of an instrument being made from one solid piece and the only way to do that was to treat it as a milling job. So it's machined from a square section length of padauk. That's an African hardwood, with a fine grain and a sort of orangey brown colour, and with enough density and consistency to do the job, although obviously in an ideal world, I would have preferred something like an African ebony. I feel that, in many ways, it would have been worth going the extra for the ebony, but at the time, as I could not be sure of the final result, we played safe.

So it was essentially a process of milling a tapered channel in this square section. But of course, the sequence of operations is what made it really an engineering job. You have to think the whole operation through from beginning to end because if you don't do that you find that you've reached a certain point where you realise you should have done something much earlier that you can't do now.

The starting point was to take the length of padauk, three inches square by about 30 inches long, and reduce its square section radially to about two inches square for most of the length, and leave the full three inches for the bell. Everything to do with the bell was done first. The cut-down section was chucked through the lathe spindle and I turned the bell’s exterior shape. I then bored the internal shape of the bell which was quite complicated, as I had to make a template for the tool to follow so that it would create a profile to match the exterior.

MW So how long did that take?

HD That's very hard to say, but it was just a small part of the custom tooling needed; the biggest part was the milling jig which allowed me to adjust the vertical and horizontal taper angles, and rotational angle being machined in the main bore. Probably several days at least. Part of turning the bell included turning and fitting the stainless steel ferrule, which has a very functional aspect, it's not just decoration. It reinforces the bore while a 3-jaw chuck is gripping it internally during each milling and turning operation, like while the main body is being finally turned on the lathe from square to round section.

MW, I only gave you, what was it? £1200, if that, which is nothing, when you think of all the work you put in. It wasn't anywhere near a commercial rate. And it seems like that's the thing with instrument making and designing; it's not a well-paid avenue of work. And that's surprised me.

HD It's a fact of life well known to everybody who develops new instruments. They have to have some way of funding their own operation most of the time, because there ain't no money in the business, that's the truth.

MW It was very much a real act of kindness on your part, doing that for me.

HD It was an interesting challenge. As ever, it's when you get into the details that you realise, oh… this is far more than you bargained for… but it was useful experience, and I hope it will attract a good level of public interest both in your work and in the possibilities of the instrument.

MW I sometimes wonder whether I should have been a cellist. Part of the appeal of the gliss anglais is the range of gestures I can use on the 'string'.

HD I wasn't given a choice of instruments by my parents. I was told what I'd play and made to practice. For me as a schoolboy, it felt more in the category of homework than my activities in electronic sound and music. It did give me a very agile left hand and a good ear for pitch, so it has helped my later work to some extent. I don't see why you couldn't take up the cello yourself now if you wanted to, although you probably have the best of each with the gliss anglais.

8 Mark Holmes and Maureen Wolloshin in conversation. 10.30am Wednesday January 24th, 2024. Dining room table, Faversham.

MH I saw an advert in the local paper for beginner's ukulele classes in Graveney 12 years ago. I was hitting 50 and I'd never played a musical instrument. My daughter was 12 at the time and she had a ukulele from school. I went along to the class run by the legendary Keith and Janet. We were complete beginners.

We would sit in a circle and, Keith would play. His ukulele was amplified so he was definitely leading. He was a teacher and leader. He would print out a particular set of songs each week, and we'd all be given them. He would play and we'd all struggle to improve our technique together. It was great, because at the end of the first week, we had learnt to play one song. The group made progress together but never moved much beyond doing the same few chords with the same types of songs.

MW So you were all learning the ukulele together; different people progressing at different speeds. Didn't you mind practising together? Making mistakes together?

MH No. We didn't mind at all. Often you couldn't hear others-it was a giant circle. Janet kept time and Keith's sound covered ours because he was amplified. They were very encouraging. He was a great player, but he used the same repertoire he'd been practising for years.

Most of the initial group that became *The Market Strummers* met there as beginners. When we first started to get together it was over a pint in The Market Inn after these rehearsals. There were about six or eight of us and then after three weeks four weeks Steve, who was primarily a clarinettist rather than a ukulele player, said, he'd rather just do the bit we were doing in the pub and dispense with the class beforehand. I agreed so we started doing that once a week.

MW What was it that you preferred about the pub?

MH We could play different music. We started to find songs that we wanted to play. We also enjoyed the degree of independence from the teacher it gave us. I think we were just people who wanted to play together. We'd got to the point where we could play half a dozen chords or so and were becoming bored with the repertoire and repetition of the class given the mixed ability nature of it. I wanted to play punk and new wave stuff and so did others. Over the 12 years since some people have practiced much more than others and their techniques have advanced as a result. I think the ukulele functions as a tool for getting this group of people together to have a nice time more than anything else.

MW I think that too. How did you come to be the leader? I that's not a word that sits comfortably with you.

MH I think that discomfort comes from a combination of things. I've always been politically involved in all sorts of unusual groupings. For example, the labour club bar in Lewisham was a community, voluntary group. In political groups there are all sorts of people of many different persuasions brought together by the politics they have in common. For *The Market Strummers* it was the ukulele that brought us together. From my labour club experience, I felt I knew what a group of people like that needed to keep going and that was someone to set up a mailing list and keep in touch with everyone about our activities. So that's what I did, and I effectively became the group secretary. Over time that developed into choosing and collating our material. People started to sit and let that happen, so my role developed over time. I was used to managing stuff, and probably just drifted into leadership and management *Strummers*, by osmosis.

MW What about during rehearsals? You've put the song catalogue together and done all the administration. and so on. Yet you rarely want to 'lead' the group in the traditional sense.

MH I don't want to take a role as a teacher/ leader of a group. That then makes a distinction in performance and rehearsal between me and the others. I have started doing that during our monthly 'open to all' sessions when we've got newcomers. People are coming along to join a session, and they're not part of the regular group. They want to play songs with other people so it helps to have me give slightly more structure. In our regular rehearsals I don't want to be seen by my friends as seeking to manage them. I'm also very aware that from a musical perspective, I'm not as skilled as and don't know as much as, others in the group. In terms of musical ability, I think I'm a plodder and I'm quite happy with that these days. I'm happy to sing and oblige in that regard though. I wouldn't have thought if you'd have asked me 15 years ago, that I'd be singing in public and enjoying it.

MW Are you operating more consciously in that way now than you were at the start?

MH I think, as a group of people, we have all got slightly different ideas about what we want to do and how we want to do it but there's a general, core feeling, of enjoying playing together. We like performing together even though it's quite stressful leading up to it. It's always fun to do. We mostly get on together as well. I've always consciously tried to resolve tensions and difficulties. That's one thing I do bring directly from my work and life

experience. I've sought to resolve things as best as possible. I haven't always been successful, and I don't know whether I am also the source of difficulties because I haven't analysed my thinking about that. I do the admin, set up the stage, and coordinate with people about playing a gig or whatever because part of me feels if I didn't then it probably wouldn't get done. That's a bit of a selfish, self-centred point of view. I do it in part because I for quite enjoy it. I've always, ever since I worked on a community newspaper when I was 20, quite liked coordinating things.

MW Did you pick up your approach to rehearsals from your time co-ordinating things for the labour party?

MH I think it's partly a life experience thing. You learn from seeing other people who do things well. I certainly learned good things from people who I saw as good managers and leaders and learnt also from people I didn't think were that great. I adapted my work style accordingly. I've taken note of feedback from people I've worked with and adapted my approach when necessary. I learnt that I don't like discord and neither do most people. I don't like arguments particularly. When you have people bickering in a group (and that has happened in Strummers) it can be tricky. But at the end of the day, we're a group of adults who come together as adults who have and who have had quite a lot of life experience which needs to be respected. If someone tried to impose their own set of expectations for how the group should operate, I think it would just create rather than dissipate any friction that might occur.

MW In *The Market Strummers* you have a group of people who have all enjoyed a degree of success in their working lives, whether that be in social services, art, architecture, or computing and so forth. They come together having, in many cases, never played a note on a musical instrument. There are people with significant musical skill yet those people never, ever, are asked to or choose to give direction to the group. You're not giving direction and nobody's teaching. Yet, that group have achieved a significant degree of, for want of a better description, musical sophistication, such that they end up on a stage at the Hop Festival, and they don't do a bad job. So how has that happened?

MH I think part of it is that we lost a lot of people along the way, who, for whatever reason, didn't fit the mould either musically, temperamentally, or just because of life circumstances. What we're left with, in the main, is a bunch of people who want to play together, stick with it, and get on well enough to keep coming back, week in and week out.

MW A group of people with a shared view. We don't want to bicker–we want to go to the pub to enjoy ourselves playing music, and we want to move forwards almost by osmosis, without conventional leadership?

MH I think so. Although I think most people in the group are quite happy for me to send out mailings and so forth because it means they don't need to worry about it and that's okay. There must also be an element of people practising on their own. Many of us have improved our techniques far beyond what's possible if we only play at our weekly get togethers.

MW Do people mind making mistakes in rehearsals?

MH One of the benefits of a ukulele group is that the way it sounds masks a lot of personal mistakes. So, you don't feel you're on show. You just carry on knowing you will get better. People do develop muscle memory from playing through the songs many times. The fingers do get tougher, and you do get an idea of how to do a different sort of strum. I think we do, from time to time, learn from the musicians in the group. It also helps that we have a bass player. Without that I think we'd struggle.

MW For me another factor is that this group of people have come to this instrument that they've never played before and 12 years on, they're getting paid gigs as an ensemble, without any of the conventional teaching. They're managing to sustain themselves at an increasingly high level in performance and one of the things that is most fascinating for me is the beginnings of songs. We still are not at a point where you will count in with any degree of accuracy. You even do it really quietly, and it's never at the speed that you want it to be. And yet, how is it that we play that song in time. How does that happen? It's fantastic.

MH In the first two lines of the song, if we're going twice as far as we should we do really slow it down and we all slow down together. You can just start to sing it slightly slower to slow it down. I don't think it matters as much because we're doing this for our own entertainment not for an audience, but I don't know how. I think there must be a shared thing. Do we look at one other reasonably well?

MW Do you think it comes from prioritising social relationships first and getting this shared culture of respect?

MH I think it does. Because I think if we were to go the other way It would be extremely hard. I think if I was to advertise for people to play ukulele with us, I think it would probably take like 50 years for them to get the feel for it. I probably perform well with all of you

because it's you. With you, definitely. I quite like seeing other ukulele bands because they're not necessarily playing as we do. I think I could play along with them, really enjoy it but it wouldn't be like playing with our group.

MW Are we performing the social almost, are we performing a friendship group?

MH I think so. I think that's we do. Take Mike's birthday party. He had his friends and family there. We were playing and were part of that group of friends and family but we're performing as well. We're trying to play in a way that makes him the centre of attention. We're doing it for him but we're also playing with him. So yeah, I think there it is. I also think if it wasn't enjoyable I wouldn't do it.

MW What are you enjoying? When I was a classical oboist, I enjoyed all of the rituals and coded behaviours and formalities that go with rehearsing in and performing in an orchestra. You play this instrument that you have practised for six, seven hours a day, to the highest level, and you do not make a mistake. That's not what's going on with Market Strummers.

MH The opposite of that in the sense of the virtuosity. Though I do like it when we sound good. There are some bits of a couple of videos taken from the festival and bits of it sound really quite good. But I think if it sounded good, but I felt completely stressed out on stage and I found the need to rehearse and practice; I don't want stress I want enjoyment.

MW Also, when we have performed people love it and people who don't know us love it, so I get that we can enjoy it. I get that we don't always sound polished far from it. And yet, when we're on stage and we perform people love it. So what is it that they're loving? What are they getting?

MH I think it's a combination. I think it's the silliness of it. We play recognisable songs, in a different style. Playing Queen on ukuleles and kazoo and we look as though we're enjoying ourselves as well. People warm to that.

MW

I think there are quite important lessons to be learned about what your experience in social services and the Labour Party has brought to this music group. That way of being as opposed to the corporate capitalist music making classical oboists undertake. It drives the way you include everyone.

MH Yes. I'm still managing. I'm still sort of seeking to manage that process. We want to be a social group and play on stage so we can't have endless people. But equally, we're public,

working in a pub. We can't say no to people coming in. We're not in a private rehearsal space.

MW There is a creative, artistic culture in the group. We don't seem to be saying that we challenge anybody whose musicianship isn't up to scratch. And yet we do challenge them socially.

MH Yet who do we let sit on the drums? If somebody's playing ukulele badly or slowly it doesn't really matter that much but hitting the drum out of time makes things very difficult.

MW So, you could almost think of the drummer or the bass player as having something like musically your role socially, where they're the guide?

MH I think so yes. We need that to be the right.

MW Drums and bass as givers of support. It's almost like a swarm. That's what it feels like to me with drums getting us into this a groove, like at a football match….

MH….where you're carried along by the crowd. We are a murmuration that is what we are.

9 Maggie Nicols in conversation with Maureen Wolloshin. **Midday Saturday November 19th, 2022. Dining room table, Faversham.**

MW one of the things that fascinates me about your work is that you seem to be the only woman who has absolutely stayed true to the principle of social virtuosity over the last 45 years. Talking to you I get the impression that you have probably been thinking the same thing and practising in the same way for all that time.

MN That's right. Ever since working with Spontaneous Music Ensemble (SME) and coming across Oval House. Peter and Joan Oliver who ran it had that philosophy. They turned it from a Church of England youth club into a radical fringe theatre location and kept the local youth and community involved. They didn't have much music going on, so they brought us in to do it. They were very positive–if somebody said 'I would like to start one of these groups' they said 'there's the room.' Their bottom line was that everybody is creative– that is actually non-negotiable. John (Stevens) had that – Peter and Joan had it too, and I think that looking back that was a huge influence on me.

I don't know how they did it but it was a phenomenal place. Joan and Peter, Rose and Alfie empowered so many people local people. They were supportive when my ex-husband Harry (Vince) asked them for a room to rehearse. They said yes and asked us to run a workshop in return. I love that they didn't ask us for any qualifications or evidence of

teachers training. To them it was musicians skill sharing. That philosophy has informed my work because I saw that it worked–everyone was creative.

I believe everybody is powerful and creative in their own way. Each unique being contributes to a stronger collective and those who came to those initial workshops; wow! The very first one was a load of men with saxophones and trumpets and that was terrifying; they just made a lot of noise.

I tried to do the *Sustain* piece. After about half an hour, when they had exhausted themselves, I said, 'all that that's lovely. Now do you think we could try again? And this time could you hold the notes for longer?' Something must have worked during those sessions because one day Peter came to me and said 'some actors would like to do some singing. Will you run a voice workshop?' I agreed and got myself a teach yourself singing book, one of those black and yellow teach yourself books. I did a mixture of John Stevens altered states meditational pieces and exercises out of the book. Various people that came also showed me things so I was really a bit of a magpie. I just drew from lots of different sources and gradually built my own approach. I was 21 when I did the first workshop ; I didn't go to music college, nothing like that. No teacher's training, no formal musical education.

MW So where did your sustenance come from then? You were in your late teens going into that. Where did you find strength to do that?

MN I haunted Ronnie Scotts from the age of 15. I was abused by some, but I was also mentored by a bebop pianist called Dennis Rose who just took me under his wing. I was desperate. Nobody helped me when I was being abused. A lot of the men were quite predatory. I'm just so glad that I came across people that were kind. One of the predators told me to talk to Dennis. I'd seen Dennis wandering round Ronnie Scotts. He told me to come along to the Duke of Wellington pub. So I did. It was so kind of him. I turned up and I'd sung along with records but had no experience.

MW Where were you living?

MN In a Peabody Estate with my parents then later my mum and stepfather. I turned up and Dennis asked me what I wanted to sing. I began and Dennis just found me. I sang and he played it. He mentored me into musicianship. He was incredible.

MW Contemporary parental sensibilities would judge the freedom you were given harshly I think?

MN Oh yes. My parents separated when I was 15. I was going to other clubs in Soho which were more dangerous but the villains treated me like a kid sister and the women working the streets looked out for me. Musicians on the other hand had no morals like that. It was ironic. My mum would send my Dad or stepdad out to look for me.

I started going to Ronnie's because one of the Windmill girls I was sharing with had a boyfriend who was a musician and I wanted to impress her cos she seemed so sophisticated I was invited by one of the gangsters from the clubs. He said he could get me in for nothing and told me to wait outside and I heard him telling Ronnie that there was someone outside who knew him and wanted to come in. Ronnie probably thought it was someone he'd had a one night stand with and should let them in! That wasn't a great start.

Even though I was only 15 when I started at The Windmill because we hardly wore any clothes on stage it seemed to be expected that I would be sexually available.

MW That's my experience too. I was 15 when I went to Leeds and my normal was that girls had to have relationships with tutors. The boys didn't. But you had protectors along the way?

MN Yes Dennis and then John Stevens. I could still get into difficult situations more like reluctantly participating in one night stands. There was some sense of feeling something there rather than being forced or manipulated into giving sexual favours to men I didn't even fancy

MW Where does your inner strength come from?

MN It was an obsession with the music. The first person I had a crush on was a trumpet player who didn't take advantage. I heard him play and loved it. I also had a crush on John Stevens but Dennis was a father figure. I did John's *Sustain* and *Click* pieces with such commitment and devotion!

MW What an interesting way to think about the music. I wonder whether formative musical relationships, regardless of gender, have an almost sexual attraction within them.

MN For me certainly. Musicians like Evan (Parker) on the other hand probably got fed up with some of what they might have seen as John's restrictive approach. For me my devotion led me to understand the pieces viscerally because my devotion to John led me to explore the depth of them in a way that didn't appeal to people like Evan.

MW And you were devoted to the music?

MN Yes-the first time I performed *Sustain* I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. Years later I was participating in an improvised drama group. We had to improvise our first experience of something and the group had to guess what it was. I did the first time I performed with John and Trevor. The group thought it was my first orgasm!

Laughter from both

MN It was the sounds of the music. John had played a gong and Trevor played very lightly on the alto. John had said it didn't matter if your voice wobbles, wavers or croaks. This was reassuring because my voice did all three. But after a while it settled. I listened to the gong and to Trevor. The sum total of these sounds meant the vibrations started to shift and the next thing I knew I was improvising. I didn't know what to expect. It was one of the most phenomenal, profound experiences of my life. It blew my mind.

I was singing in a strip club in Old Compton Street at the same time-singing jazz standards. I had my first embryonic taste of how free improvisation enhances every type of music. I sang those songs in a new way-as I'd never sung them before.

MW The sensuality of the sounds and experience you describe was also present. Perhaps there's a traditionally masculine way of performing which is unconscious and unintentional. There were few women involved in improvisation, yet what you describe is also sensual, perhaps in a feminine way.

MN Yes. It was as though I was receiving and then channelling information from the other musicians, but also from something bigger. It wasn't until a few years later, when Trevor explained it, that I found out how what I'd done had affected them. I'd thought it was all one way, but the quality of surrender I'd brought had influenced them.

MW I'm imagining the scene; a beautiful young girl in this unusual sonic duel with these men. Their experience must have been odd; perhaps uncomfortable. Perhaps your presence was challenging to them in some way. A member of the women's quartet I play with has suggested we try to improvise our orgasm experience together. We found the idea fascinating.

MN How wonderful. Our orgasm experience is so different to men's. We are capable of multi-orgasms. I remember saying to Fred Frith when I was doing a residency with some students that for a lot of men there's a little foreplay and then a single ejaculation. Our experience is multi-dimensional. It's much more erotic, and to do with touch and the entirety of the experience. Of course, each man is different, but my experiences with men

would support this description of their sexual experience. I think this is reflected in the music sometimes. Especially in larger groups; in smaller groups there's much more interplay. Perhaps that's why a lot of men think it's impossible to improvise in large groups without serious control from a conductor.

MW That leads me to consider your determined approach to your voice as an instrument. There are many female jazz vocalists but I can't think of anyone other than Norma Winstone who shares your approach.

MN Julie Tippett of course. And there are more, younger women coming through now. For me it was because I didn't see women playing instruments. If I'd seen that I might well have done so. My piano playing came later. Before the Women's Liberation Movement I honestly thought women weren't biologically suited to playing an instrument. I bought that idiotic myth. I didn't know anything about classical music. When I was involved with the *Musicians Union* I got the impression that there were many women string players but not really any playing big instruments like timpani. That was what was so incredible about when we passed a motion, put forward by the women who were classical musicians, to have screened auditions. Suddenly all these women were being appointed and the unconscious bias those men had been applying was laid bare. It was brilliant.

For me I'd felt humiliated and of a lower status than the men. Dennis helped with that. It's why I wanted to use my voice as an instrument. It felt good. I wanted to sound like Bill Evans and John Coltrane. They were some of my influences.

MW Did you have lessons?

MN I had one. The experience was so traumatic! He just kept saying 'open your mouth, open your mouth!' I thought I'd get lockjaw! It wasn't pleasant. I went to a stage school for a while and did musical comedy and dancing but that was very much, Fascinating Rhythm, showgirl stuff. At *The Windmill* I didn't get to sing solo. I taught myself. I came across exercises that I used. There was one which Pete Nu taught me. Amazing pianist, now in New Orleans. He lived in a squat in South London. He shared a great exercise with loads of musicians He'd got it from a Jamaican saxophonist called Derek Gibbs who had got it from an African American tuba player who'd learnt it from Sonny Rollins. I met Sonny Rollins. He's a wonderful man; a gentleman. I met him with Dennis. We stayed on after a gig and Dennis got me to sing for Sonny. He was so encouraging and told me I must carry on. He was very much into yoga and Indian music. The exercise I was doing came from that source

I think. You sing one note, find the lowest everyone can make, and sing it for about 5 minutes. Then you can add rhythm. Different harmonics appear but you're not improvising you're putting all your energy into that one note.

MW I guess that's a natural throat opener?

MN It's beautiful. It's good for breathing and tone. When you've done one round you go back to the long notes and up a semitone. It can take 3 hours to do the whole range. By the end of it you're tripping. We did that collectively with all these musicians, horn players.

MW I love that about listening to you. You're virtuosic but without classical training.

MN You realise there are different techniques. It's like jazz dance and classical ballet. They're very different techniques. That's why so many classical dancers find it hard to get in and out of the nooks and crannies of jazz. It's the same with classical singers. It's about extending rather than moving. You have to be flexible so you need a technique for that. I found my own.

MW There's something about the taught range of gestures for instrumentalists and vocalists that restricts, in a really basic way, the ability to speak with a true voice in the way that you do.

MN That's an interesting thing. I suppose there must be classical teachers who have a different approach, but my impression is that there's a standard, particular approach, and that's it. The man trying to make me open my mouth is an example of that. When I sing, I hardly open my mouth at all. I might open it but it's not a prerequisite.

MW Is it about projection? I have the impression that you could project a huge sound if you wanted to, but you choose not to?

MN Oh yes, absolutely. I feel it comes from the body, from my back. Doing those long note exercises at Pete's was massive for me. At first, I tried to compete with the saxes and of course I couldn't; I lost my voice. One day I thought no, I'll sing within my energy. And lo and behold my voice got stronger until eventually I could hold my own. But it wasn't until I'd let go of trying to be as loud as them. It's a brilliant exercise. It's the one I'd take with me if I was stuck on a desert island. Because it's chromatic you're spending so long on each note it means you can do these big leaps because you've been there. I do these big chromatic leaps because I know every part of my voice through that exercise.

MW I enjoy that sort of singing. You and Norma have that same quality-all over your range, in the way that Evan (Parker) is too. With a singer it's hard to do that.

MN Yes it is. I've been doing it for so long that forget that. It's why I think it's so important to help people. We spoke about how long it's taken us pioneers to get to this position as improvisers and feminists and whether younger women can short cut that. I think it's the same with technique and why things like *Sustain* or other things we've introduced are important. They help you to do things with your voice that you might not be able to do 'cold'or rationally.

MW It's a beautifully simple idea. It's 2022 now. You've managed throughout your career to retain this quality. I think it's been easier for men who have had the gigs and the visibility. Evan Parker for instance told me that Derek Bailey would be irritated by Evan's fame and Derek's lesser visibility. Those guys got the fame and stayed true to what they presented on stage. It's only quite recently that you've enjoyed the same visibility and recognition.

MN It's been insane. Suddenly in my 70s in this country it's happened. Abroad there was more recognition for me. In this country no. I was really insulted, for example, by the programme *Jazz Britannia.* They interviewed Keith and Julie Tippett. Julie wasn't particularly happy with the interview. They looked at Paul Rutherford and I and said that what we'd done had killed jazz. How ridiculous. I was steeped in jazz. They hadn't done their research properly. They'd taken a tiny extract where I was being humorous as the sum total of my work. I appeared to be some sort of freak to them. It is extraordinary. Sarah Gail Brand helped me. She interviewed me and we put on a whole *Les Diaboliques* gig. It was lovely. She played some standards I'd sung too. *Café Oto* have been incredible. They've adopted me! During lockdown they asked me to do a solo recording. I had to get to work hard with the technology but I did it. I rediscovered it and taught myself. Oto promoted it and I got an interview in *The Wire* front page photo! I didn't expect that. I got a three day residency. I'd dreamt of being able to do that. It is weird that it's taken me until being in my 70s. There's something about women with elder status. I sometimes think we need to be older to achieve what Evan calls *gravitas.* People often speak of his gravitas and he mocks it but I do think there's something about needing to be older for us to achieve that. It's frustrating because there are so many women doing amazing things but it's still not recognised.

MW Do you think that's changing? Women your age fought so hard for recognition.

MN Yes and we got such stick from the men. They treated us as though we were some sort of novelty act. Lindsay (Cooper) got so fed up with journalists asking 'why only women?' She would say why don't you ask the men, 'why only men?' Why are we being asked that? The recent debate around trans men and women is interesting. My friend Bryony is a performance artist from the younger generation. We were doing one of her projects. She said that for her trans women are expanding the definition of what it is to be a woman. I think that's beautiful. Why do we need to be threatened by them? Am I not strong enough in my identity as a woman to call trans women sisters? One of the things that really expanded my consciousness was a series, 'Pose' about working class black and Latino trans and gay men and women and the alternative scene they created in New York during the 'eighties and the A.I.D.s It's brilliant; it doesn't sanitise the competitiveness of the balls they hosted but it shows the solidarity and joyousness as well as the challenges.

MW You had many different mantles too; feminist, socialist, singer, working class, lesbian. How did you carry that?

MN The Women's Movement gave us the strength. It was a new movement in Britain. There was a sense of liberation. I loved the word and the idea. For me I felt other women were amazing. Before the women's movement, many of us suffered from what Mary Daly calls 'mad' ' male approval desire.' The idea that unless a man validates me I'm not worthy and if a man likes what I do it must be okay. I was plunged into a radical feminist, lesbian community, living in squats and so on. I met a woman and fell in love with her. She was an androgynous feminist and this was new to me. She was living in a squat in Vauxhall where I was plunged into the separatist scene. There was so much militancy and joy in women loving one another. Of course there were problems because within any identity is difference but it was extraordinary. That's what gave me the strength. I was singing 'she' in all my songs and coming out with a vengeance. FIG was deliriously liberating in the playing with other women. I'd sung with Julie which had been and still is a deep, wonderful experience. But in FIG I was singing with women who played instruments. I'd never done that before. It felt really provocative then!

Both laugh

MW It was, yes it was in the way it was received too.

MN Oh my God did we get some flak!

MW My memory of the scene was the scathing discussion about FIG among the men. This seems to have changed so quickly. Women are making a difference now.

MN I hope it's not a blip. I work more with women than anyone else and they are amazing.

MW Lots of these women are consciously socially virtuosic in their approach and credit you for that. What a wonderful accolade for you.

MN It is. For someone who had no self-esteem or confidence to now have that respect is wonderful.

MW When did the idea of social virtuosity become clear to you?

MN very early on. I remember doing a workshop in Germany and Paul Lytton telling me he'd learnt from it how not to do things. I felt absolutely humiliated and traumatised by that. Right from the first workshop in my naivety I knew that's what I wanted to do. I picked it up from John Stevens who was obsessively inclusive. He worked a lot with people with disabilities. It came from him, and I went deeper and further with it. I coined a phrase in desperation; 'nurturing warrior', because what I do works and it's not just being nice. There was that ethos too in theatre and performance art-it was incredibly community oriented. People were encouraged to just start things. You weren't crushed in the way you were in some male dominated scenes where it was awful, awful, awful.

We needed the strength of the women's movement. One of the reasons FIG separated was that men were giving different messages to each of us, saying some of us were ok, more hip, or could play better than the others etc and others not. We eventually became a pastiche of ourselves. Our defiant spirit was dented. Also, one or two wanted it to be a closed group where I had wanted it to be a pool open to all women. That's where the biggest split came. Koryne and I went on to form *Contradictions* which was open and then other women's groups started across Europe which were open pools of women which FIG had seeded. We all kept playing.

My motivation was social rather than some abstract aesthetic. I've always had a problem with the word aesthetics. I felt I didn't understand what it was. My mate Shirl exclaimed to me when I carefully positioned a brooch on our colleague's lapel in our group *No Rules Okay before going on stage* 'That's aesthetics Mag ' and then I understood!

10 The development of the gliss anglais; diary extracts 2021-2022

Friday October 29 2021; upcoming meeting Henry Dagg

It will be really helpful to talk to Henry about any preparations that may be possible to increase the sonic range available from my oboe without resorting to electronic manipulation. I think this will move my improvisation beyond the limited range I'm using at the moment into spatial and social realms as well as hopefully providing a broader sonic palette. Why am I so determined to limit my sound world to that I can produce acoustically on an oboe? A vestige of elitism from my training? I think it more likely that if the oboe is my voice, with which I speak, then I need to extend and broaden that voice. I can't have another one. That would be like functioning as a human in a different body. Is this a musical decision or a personal one? I think it's an expression of my persona. The oboe can be seen as an additional limb perhaps.

Thursday November 4th 2021 11am; coffee with Henry Dagg in his kitchen

On the way to see Henry, walking past the traffic jam that has become Whitstable Road, I bumped into Evan Parker. I like having these people living so close to me-while their talent and experience far outstrips mine, their conversation is exactly the sort I enjoy and that I missed for many years before I came back to music[199].

Henry is fascinating and extremely open and talkative. I brought my oboe-very keen to discuss possibilities with him. I have concluded that I want to make acoustic sounds (or sounds generated by some sort of physicalisation) because this seems to me the only authentic way to improvise-I will be creating the sounds intellectually and physically.

It becomes clear within 30 minutes that Henry shares my views on sound production and he has spent his life creating the most eccentric, brilliant instruments. Conversation moves back to my oboe and Henry is clear that the instrument itself cannot be adapted but the reed can be attached to something else-and he invites me to see his 'obone'! One of the first instruments he made it is essentially a small trombone like mechanism with a fitment which holds an oboe reed. It's wonderful-and he won't part with it-we discuss how to create something similar with a greater pitch range. Henry tells me about his Mum who was an oboist[200] -and I then get to play Muriel's old marigaux oboe and cor anglais which is a privilege-her tools and reeds are as they were last time she played them -and the instruments blow beautifully. Muriel Dagg was an oboist in Ireland with two children and a

[199] I spent many years working as a school leader; rewarding and interesting but for me lacking in creative breadth.

[200] See his interview earlier in this appendix for more information about Henry's upbringing.

husband who was a clarinettist. Because she was married she was not allowed to have a full time position in an orchestra in Ireland. Her story fits with my experience of the oboe, the position of women, and oboists. Oboists are anxious perfectionists-every single time we approach a note we do not know for sure what will happen because of the delicacy of the reed.

I now think, having seen Henry attending to the detail of his instruments, that I can secure an oboe reed to any piece of pipe and make it sound. Henry is busy but will give thought to our obone plans-we will see how they progress.In the meantime, it seems there is no solution to the limitation of my instrument. Henry concurs that the superior air of the oboist is down to their position in the orchestra and the challenge the instrument itself presents.

Friday 5th November 2021; Evan Parker's electro-acoustic ensemble with Matt Wright. The Hot Tin[201] (HT) and Hamburg

Mike and Romana the owners of HT, Evan, and Matt invited me to this. A livestream performance in which Evan and Matt were at the HT and the others on stage in Hamburg. Live video link for the picture using zoom and software for audio which reduced the latency too 11 milliseconds.Henry Dagg at the front of the photo and three other invited friends also listened in. Aside from Romana who owns and runs the venue I was the only woman present. It appeared to be the case in Hamburg too though I couldn't see all of the audience clearly. Much humour filled discussion pre-performance about Henry's plans for my *obone* , reed construction, Evan's synthetic reed, Chris Redgate's oboe. General agreement among Evan, Henry, Matt and I that the pursuit of multiphonic precision was creatively pointless-much more interesting to consider what Henry is working on. He described an idea which would give me full gliss and microtone control using a wooden slide and magnetic rubber.

Sunday November 21st 2021; prototype 1 The portamentoboe

I went to Henry's studio today to try out his first protype. This has a conical bore and an oboe reed mouthpiece holder. An open narrow incision at the front of the bore is covered by a strap of plastic which can be pushed and slid along or fingered on. This varies the

[201] The Hot Tin is an experimental music venue at the end of my road. It's run by Romana Bellinger and Mike Eden. Mike is a talented sound engineer.

length of the pipe and consequently the pitch. We agreed it needs to use a cor anglais bocal and reed so it can better play the fundamental and allow more air to be pushed through. It also needs some sort of handle so it can be steadied and a support strap.

Playing without the tyranny of fingering precision was completely liberating. One can experiment freely with the sensation and sound world you can experience while still 'playing like an oboe' with the muscle memory and satisfaction that brings. The sound is akin to a Star Trek band instrument/BBC radiophonics sine wave creator and I love it-it's exactly what I'm looking for and will allow me to do what I was looking for-explore the sensation and soundworld it opens up free from the tyranny of precise technique.

Photograph by Henry Dagg November 21st 2021

Sunday January 23rd 2022

Isidora Edwards (cello), Khabat Abas (skin cello) and I performed at Wintersound Festival[202] on Friday. I played the gliss anglais prototype as well as the cabart oboe Evan gave me and it was wonderfully enriching and very well received. The sound world we inhabit has a material texture and a delicacy and fragility that I very much enjoy. Playing with them is like weaving patterns-and I can find gestures and soundscapes that haven't appeared to me

[202] I co-curate the annual Wintersound Festival at Canterbury Christchurch University with Matt Wright.

before this. The audience all thought it was wonderful-Henry Dagg, Jonathan Impett,[203] Evan Parker, Matt Wright-everyone in fact. Henry's gliss anglais prototype was extremely well received and works well in this trio. Evan's friendship and gift of the oboe is inspiring. I and Khabat spoke of the warmth, community, and inspirational soundscapes that come from that. They both feel the London scene lacks this warmth and spontaneity-I completely agree and think more needs to be done to further the theme of creative community this conference had at its heart.

Monday May 2nd 2022

This week I am looking forward to sourcing wood for my gliss anglais with Henry Dagg who is turning out to be a kind and helpful friend-donating fence parts as well as inventing new instruments for me. Henry pointed me to an instrument invented in Hungary recently which works on exactly the same principle as the instrument he's making for me; the Glissotar[204]. He asked whether I wanted to commission its makers instead-no I certainly don't. Very interesting to listen to this instrument and see how it is being used in improvisations which fall under the 'free jazz' umbrella I think.

Wednesday May 4th 2022

Henry now has time to complete my new instrument–I hope it will now be done in the next few weeks. We drove to Horam in Sussex to visit David Dyke[205] and select a piece of wood from which he will create my Gliss Anglais. This is an extraordinary place. David and his wife Jilly have been working and living there for 43 years. The drive there and back was an hour and a half each way. Plenty of time to chat about the detail of the instrument construction, Henry's life and work, and to propose his involvement in some way with *Wintersound Festival*. I am lucky to have such a talented and kind neighbour.

[203] See chapter two virtuosity for reference to Impett's 2023 publication on virtuosity.
[204] Available at https://www.glissonic.com/ (accessed 12.2.23)
[205] See http://www.luthierssupplies.co.uk/index.htm (accessed 10.6.22) for information about this luthier supplier.

Friday May 6th 2022

Yesterday the bocal for the gliss anglais[206] arrived and Henry came over to discuss the design. We agreed on a spike rather than a stand, with a swivel mechanism attached to the bell. Again social interaction is driving the success of this project. The tea, pizza, driving and good humour we share, for me, are central to working with him. On the one hand I know he is the expert for the job. On the other, if he were less fun and engaged I would not be pursuing it.

Wednesday May 11th 2022

I collected the steel for my gliss anglais with Henry-from a local metal worker. £35 for a piece. It makes me wonder about rust if the steel is to line the sides of it.

Photographs Maureen Wolloshin at S and A Steel Services, Faversham. May 11th 2022

Thursday July 7th 2022

The gliss anglais is complete. I've hardly had time to think about it during the last two months but it's here and my anxiety about the steel has proven to be silly. Not only does it do everything I wanted-it's beautifully finished. And just in time for the Lossenham project happening in a couple of weeks.

11 The Lossenham Project; diary extracts; July 2022

Monday July 11th to Thursday July 14th 2022; The Lossenham Project

[206] I purchased a marigaux bocal from Ian Crowther.

Paul Cheneour[207] is artist in residence for the year and arranged for us to record and perform his music. Paul and I have been discussing our plan for this chamber ensemble for some time. We recorded each day; seven pieces composed by Paul and four freely improvised sets. We stayed on location, and performed at the local pub on the Wednesday evening, to the surprise and bemusement of many of the visitors.

Tuesday July 12th 2022

Day 2 at Lossenham which is beautiful. Great conversations with David Leahy and Benedict Taylor about the lack of women in improvisation. Benedict feels venues should book more women/ people of colour. David is writing a book about how music and dance are forms of communication and virtuosity -how the quest of it gets in the way.

For me,the camaraderie, positive language, support and humour helped us forge relationships quickly and helped me relax and be confident in my improvisings. The beautiful surroundings, accommodation, high quality studio equipment and excellent playing and engineering of the others made the experience joyful. My lip held up well and we managed to record all day on Wednesday then perform in the evening.

Benedict has spent the last 12 years building a performance and recording career in London. His professionalism, and initial approach in trying to establish exactly what Paul wanted are manifestations of that. We had really helpful conversations about this, his training at the RNCM and the contribution his parents as creatives made to his upbringing and current motivation. David, a fellow Faversham resident, and I are a similar age and both wish to move away from the boundaried tyranny of genres in improvised music. These men are all feministing free improvisation and bring a *feminine* in character to the improvisings we undertake.

[207] Paul is the flautist in Trio CZW, a member of Free Range Orchestra, and a close personal friend. I am grateful to him for thinking and talking with me throughout this research about the ideas and arguments I have been formulating.

Saturday September 10th 2022; dinner with Paul Cheneour

Virtuosity and ensemble; towards a language that separates female and male practice

Paul Cheneour came over for dinner yesterday evening. As ever, we talked about our practice.Free Range Orchestra[208] was a large part of that as was our shared affinity for improvised chamber music. He feels Lossenham was his best work. We listened to *entanglement* and he felt it represented this.

In our conversation about the quest for individual virtuosity common to classical and jazz musicians in the UK, I came to the view that what other cultures share-Mexico, Brazil, Cuba-in their music making is that it is the music which comes first not the individual mastery of one's part in it. (Paul spent five years living and performing in Mexico). Musicians support one another in order to achieve the best musical outcome. This may be by supporting rhythmically, taking over melodically or harmonically if needed, and stepping out when someone else has something stronger to say.In so doing, musicians learn by doing within the ensemble. And it is the community, the social, the ensemble which is most important in enabling the musical output. This was Paul's experience in Mexico.This is the opposite of *masculine* behvaiours in capitalism, jazz, classical music, where individual virtuosity is brought to a situation and individual error is rejected. As such only the best can participate and the quest to be the best creates anxiety, isolation, and a loss or lack of trust in one's ensemble.

Listening to our Lossenham track I am struck by how closely we listened to one another-this is heard in the picking up, riffing on, and supporting, ideas presented by others-without which collaborative improvisation like this wouldn't work. There is no dominant soloist-there is an interwoven tapestry through which ideas shift and constantly develop.

Capitalist/dominant/ male/ solo/virtuoso (highly skilled in a craft that is artistic)

Socialist/collaborative/female/ ensemble/ altruist (unselfish regard for the welfare of others)

There is a problem with the definition or virtuoso in which the skill is taken to mean individual mastery of an instrument not mastery of ensemble technique. Though to be a virtuoso musician really does require the ensemble technique.

[208] See chapter two for a discussion of their work.

12 Space 21 Festival Sulaymaniyah, Iraq; diary extracts September 2022

Monday September 26th2022; Sulaymaniah, Iraq

Yesterday was spent recording and playing the Saray building[209]. I improvised with the sounds of the building and the others. It felt very natural to allow gestures to come to me on flageolet and gliss anglais. Dror Feiler and I had a great prolonged play and were joined by everyone. I am hugely inspired by the sound world and these people.

Tuesday September 27th2022

Today we went to the Red Prison The morning was slow and chaotic and we didn't get there until nearly midday. The whole thing was overwhelming. I've never been so close to such horror before, and it was difficult to process. I I became determined to honour the people who lost their lives in that place. In the end I chose to play in the women's room with the door closed for a while. When I opened the door Khabat was sitting outside with her bombshell cello. We played together, others joined us, our improvisation lasted for over two hours. Our playing was visceral.This evening I am very tired, I am very drained. However,I think in many ways this day may be one of the most powerful and meaningful days as an improviser I have ever had or may ever have again.

My gliss anglais explorations were interesting and fulfilling-I now have a set of percussive sounds I've been using to extend it-across the stand and with knitting needles. My flageolet was also really interesting to play and opened up a new way of using and playing with breath-the purity of its tone is a good counter to that of the gliss. It was extremely hot and difficult to play my oboe, which was incongruous in this setting-its precision had no place in our sound world-I feel I have abandoned it and its music -but there is a place for it in a different repertoire. I begin to see why the oboe is so rare in free improvisation. It is too precise and tonal in this sonically broad environment. It can play multiphonics but even they, in comparison to what Dror can do on sax, seem limited in what they offer. The gliss anglais and flageolet on the other hand are much more versatile.

Feminism in art is alive and well in this country but there is only Khabat in the whole city exploring sound art from this position-as a result she refers to herself as a multi-disciplinary

[209] An abandoned cultural centre in the heart of the city.

artist rather than a musician. I think this is a better label for me-it will clarify the confusion around the oboe and what I might be doing with it. How do I move away from the words music and feminism. They are inadequate and increasingly unhelpful.

I need to articulate the need for gesture to be intuitive rather than learnt in my improvisations. Dror Feiler said that in order to keep in touch with the imagination you had to change instruments, because even intuitive gesture becomes learnt behaviour after a while. I am already finding this to be true on the gliss anglais.

Improvisation as activism-improvising in Kurdistan, in particular in the Red Prison, clarified my practice as political, beyond feminism. Sounding free improvisationally offered us all a way through the horror of the place and the events it witnessed. It connected our listeners to the pain, anger and anguish of that in a visceral way. The liminal space between us,them and the horror, was navigated in a way that felt cleansing and easing.

Thursday September 29th, 2022

Today we played at the Saray building, Red Prison and Tobacco Factory. Mid-morning at Saray, I, Hardi and Dror played Khabat's piece with recordings of the words read by others woven into our improvisings. There was improvisation by others audible around the building. I could hear Mo and Leith making beautiful ambient sounds with saz and electronics.

We then moved to the Red Prison and again it was very hot. We played outside the women's cell again and this time Khabat played her body cello. I, Dror and Khabat set up together and again the improvisation was strong.

After this we ate and drank in the Red Prison café and I had the best coffee I think I have ever tasted. I was very tired but refreshed by the eating, drinking and conversation.

When we got to the Tobacco Factory in the early evening it was unclear initially where we were going to play. In the end I played under what looked like an aircraft hanger while others played opposite. Lighting was set up and Hardi played a large metal dustbin and the sounds were surprisingly strong. Again Dror and I had five minutes of beautiful quiet gentle improvisation together and we listened very well I think. I enjoy playing with him. I think in many ways, despite the length (playing all day and into the evening) and heat, this day was one of the best improvising days I have ever had.

Monday October 3rd 2022 Space 21 Festival reflection

Out of the project came solo and collaborative improvisations with my gliss anglais, the spaces we occupied, and, with the people I met. Improvisations emerged from the unfamiliar auditory, spatial, experiential and pluralistic settings we inhabited. These were both performative on the last day of the project, and process driven, in the spaces across the period of residency.

In doing this, I was asking whether making and being in a free improvising practice might help us to navigate the indeterminate, emotional and unpredictable. In the new improvising formations which emerged, we incorporated and navigated both the sonic lines we produced, and the unpredictable and emotional nature of the exchanges occurring between us and the sound objects we used. In this way we were puzzling together through entangled unknowns. We were including and building on the precarity (Fragkou 2020,6) inherent in our new relationships, the instruments we used, and the unknown which emerged from our improvisations.

The indeterminate, unpredictable, and unstable are features of all new relationships. They emerged in my work with my instrument, my location, and the collaborations I formed. In investigating them, I was puzzling together with the landscape and community how to better sit with and grow from such precarity in our evolving improvising interrelationships. I undertook these improvisations using the sonic and physical materials available including the buildings and landscape I inhabited. My gliss anglais contributes to these.

At the heart of this is free improvisation, by an oboist on a unique, unstable new instrument in and with the environment and others. Autotheoretical free improvisations emerged from this which of themselves are a commentary on and expression of our situation and our emotional response to it. They encompassed the development of new and therefore unpredictable collaborative relationships. This process may be described as '…..passing on and receiving, making and unmaking, … it is becoming-with each other in surprising relays; it is a figure for ongoingness…' (Haraway 2016,3). In this way, this improvisation is an example of how the practice of 'making with' rather than self-prioritisation, may enrich the community of which I am part and the practice I undertake.

13 The gliss anglais with London Improviser's Orchestra; diary extract June 2023

Sunday June 4th 2023; LIO performance

Today was the first time I rehearsed and performed with London Improvisers Orchestra at St Mary's Church Stoke Newington. Georgina Brett[210]was also playing- I interviewed her on Wednesday May 31st. This is the first time that two female oboists played with the orchestra. A surprise presence was Kat Peddie[211] who came along to the performance. It was good to talk with her briefly afterwards.

I was glad that Georgina was there and that Charlotte Keefe[212] was friendly when I arrived; it helped with my nervousness about joining the group. My first impression was of a group of men my age-who looked like free improvisers and clearly knew one another well, along with a small number of young men and an even smaller group of women of mixed ages.

Adrian Northover was confident and directive during his conduction. He's worked with the orchestra for many years. There were other conductions and two entirely free improvisations during the evening. In one of these a wall of noise settled into a quiet moment which was shaped into a conduction by Julian Woods and taken over by Adrian to become this conduction.

Performing with LIO was very like being in a classical orchestra. The hierarchy is defined by the behaviours of the people who have been doing this for some time and affirmed by the conductions, during which a specific response is demanded of you. This is not free improvisation as I usually undertake it. Faradena Afifi was the only person to enter familiar territory for my when rehearsing her conduction, asking that her gestures were to be interpreted like a graphic score and that she would move away from traditional conduction.

Gaining a position in this orchestra is competitive (saxophinist John Eyles told me he'd waited three years for his) and the social media response to my participation in it suggests that there is a tacit perception of prestige and status for those involved and associated. I wonder whether this comes in part from Steve Beresford's detailed cataloguing and website of performers past and present and the nature of conduction. FRO[213] membership holds no such perception yet they are arguably as sensitive an improvising orchestra. Is it

[210] Another oboist. See earlier in this appendix for a full transcript of this interview.
[211] A member of Free Women and Free Range Orchestra formations discussed in chapter two.
[212] A member of Noisy Women and ONe_Orchestra New discussed in chapter two
[213] See chapter two for a discussion of the work of Free Range Orchestra (FRO)

something about London as a hub, in particular Stoke Newington? Does the action of having this as a profession in London, the capital city, drive the perception of enhanced status for these musicians? Alistair Zaldua spoke of his trepidation about our London Vortex gig a few months ago stemming from that misguided perception.

14 Trio CZW and my cabart oboe; diary extracts 2021-2023

Sunday December 5th 2021

On Thursday evening I went to Free Range[214] to hear Evan Parker and Henry Dagg[215].Evan is warm and engaging and wants to give me an old oboe he has so that it can be played and brought back to life. Henry is making progress with my new instrument[216] and we will go to visit the person supplying the rosewood at some point.

Tuesday December 7th 2021

Yesterday morning Evan came round with the oboe- an old cabart in a terrible state which he found in a pawnbrokers 20 years ago and played once or twice. We talked about repairers and Paul Dunmore's insistence along with that of others that his repairer was the best in the country. Evan talked warmly about a beautiful silver 1930s soprano and its keywork. He also said that most people like him to talk in anecdotes about people he knows and has worked with. Why do we feel so subjectively connected to our instrument- and by default their repairers- whom we deify?

Thursday January 20th 2022

I collected Evan's oboe from Ian Crowther[217] today. He has done an excellent job. It's an open hole, conservatoire, with a third trill key from C to Eb. The key work is solid silver and it's a Cabart dating from 1955. A one off instrument made by the man who sold Cabart to Lauren, current owner of Loree. Lauren says that this man would not sell his collection of bass and other one off oboes along with the company for the price offered. Instead he burnt

[214] See chapter two for a description of my work with Free Range Orchestra and Free Women, both offshoots of Canterbury based Free Range of which, as I write in July 2024, I am Chair of Trustees.
[215] In the introduction I explain my friendship with both these men who live less than a mile from my home in Faversham.
[216] The gliss anglais discussed in chapter three.
[217] Ian Crowther runs The Oboe Shop in Canterbury and sold me my instruments and maintains them. His presence in Canterbury is important to the maintenance of my practice.

them along with the factory in which he'd made them. This instrument had a lucky escape.It is remarkably easy to play-Ian spent a great deal of time on it, repairing many cracks and pins. Ian, it turns out, repairs and services saxes for Iain Ballamy[218], John Surman and John Harle. It is a very small musical world indeed and the connections spanning out from my new location[219] and into my past life never cease to surprise me.

I collected the portamentoboe[220] from Henry on Monday. His enthusiasm appears to have stalled a little under the weight of his renovation project. But he will be there on Saturday and was happy for me to use the instrument as a display prop for explanation purposes. It will be good to introduce him to Khabat (Abas) I think.

Sunday November 26th 2023 (see chapter four for a further diary extract describing the rehearsal and context regarding the invitation score we performed)

Trio CZW played at Mopomoso at The Vortex in London. We played 3 improvisations in a 30 minute set. The middle one was *(O)de to Jonas* for Jonas Mekas. I had felt empowered after our rehearsal. When we began I closed my eyes and listened. This is how I have approached improvising on a number of occasions this year. With eyes closed, the result is physical as well as sonic. I am somehow better able to control breath and embouchure. I am using a limited palette which includes long sustained tones, multiphonics, short rhythmic stabs, fluttering fingers, growling and breath sounds, and occasional melodic motifs which build into sustained chords. Being in The Vortex doesn't work for me though. I really don't like the exclusionary masculine boys club atmosphere that pervades it.In this Trio we are exploring something new both musically and socially. We are using the tension between us as a positive and treating it musically. While we each have or have had outstanding conventional instrumental techniques[221], our intention is not to use this but to explore our instruments in timbral combination. Where there is good humour like this, kindness and curiosity, and a shared will to create together rather than weave together then I will always be pleased with the result. This is a positive outcome of feministing free improvisation perhaps.

[218] I have known Iain Ballamy for over 40 years.
[219] At this stage I had been living in Faversham, close to Canterbury, for five years.
[220] The name Henry gave to the first gliss anglais prototype he made.
[221] All of us are classically trained; see chapter one.