

My work is concerned with developing strategies to exploit the movement qualities of performance. Historical examples of this type of work include Stockhausen's *Harlekin* (1975) for dancing clarinet soloist and Kagel's theatrical *Match* (1964) where a percussionist referees a competition between two cellists. Of course, there is a pre-existing visual layer in live performance and I am particularly interested in how the visual elements of performance can affect the meaning of aurally-received musical material. At its simplest level: too little movement can give the impression of a performance that is lacking in expression; too much heavy breathing or swaying about can prove distracting. My work seeks to attain a balance between visual and aural materials such that one complements the other in order to create a synthesised performance line. *Concerto* (2009) is by no means my first exploration into these concerns so I will first briefly discuss two earlier works that formed particularly key stages in the development of these thoughts.

*Piece for twelve clarinets with several movements* (2005) focussed on the addition of choreographical elements to pre-composed musical material, for example, the players were asked to: swing their clarinets left and right in unison and in Mexican wave patterns (see **Figure 1**), bob up and down in unison and in smaller groupings (see **Figure 2**)

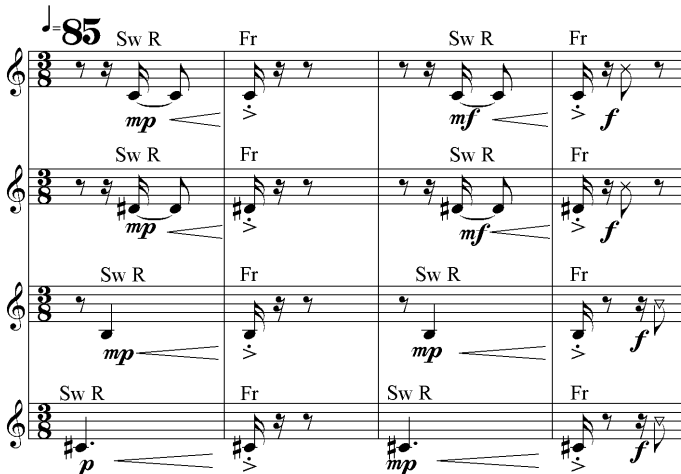


Figure 1 shows a musical score for four staves in 3/8 time, marked with a tempo of 85. The score includes dynamics such as *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and *p*. Above the notes, performance instructions are written: "Sw R" (swing right) and "Fr" (return to front). The instructions alternate between staves and measures, creating a rhythmic pattern of movement.

Sw R = swing right  
Fr = return to front  
diamond notehead = tongue-click

**Figure 1:** *Piece for twelve clarinets with several movements*

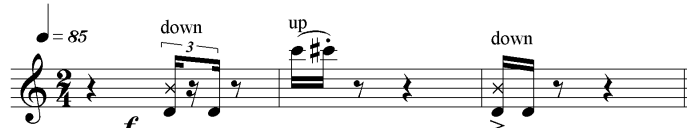


Figure 2 shows a musical score for a single staff in 2/4 time, marked with a tempo of 85. The score includes dynamics such as *f*. Above the notes, performance instructions are written: "down", "up", and "down". The instructions are placed above specific notes, indicating when to bob up or down.

x = stamp right foot

**Figure 2:** *Piece for twelve clarinets with several movements*

and stamp their feet and even jump at one point.

Much of this visual layer was largely superimposed onto the musical material but even here I was already searching for multi-functional material: creating combined gestures where the choregraphic elements contributed to the musical results. The piece was conceived to be performed in the round with the clarinetists standing in a large circle around the audience so where an entry is passed canonically around the circle the swinging of the clarinets in turn should result in a more fluid result heightening the illusion that the sound is travelling autonomously. The foot stamping is another example of such synthesised material whereas the 'knee bends' don't have any musical impact.

In *Bridges* (2008) I explored the possibilities of

creating musical material for string orchestra that would naturally generate the maximum of performance movements. The piece is structured as four variations and a final theme with each variation exploring a different string playing technique: playing on the wooden body of the instrument, *pizzicato*, down-bows and up-bows in turn. **Figure 3** shows an excerpt from the *pizzicato* movement at which point the players are all asked to maintain a *fortississimo* dynamic while playing quadruple-stopped chords and glissandi. A maximal physical gesture is demanded in order to attain the required dynamic and duration.

With *Concerto* (2010)<sup>1</sup> I wanted the soloist's musical and movement material to exist as one layer rather than two simultaneously occurring lines of activity. In order to avoid it seeming cartoonish and to permit as great a level of difficulty in

<sup>1</sup> A video performance of *Concerto* is available on Youtube, and can be viewed at the following URL:  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A\\_KLtHzhyQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A_KLtHzhyQ)

The image shows a musical score for string orchestra, Variation II, part 3. It consists of eight staves: Violin 1 (1a, 1b), Violin 2 (2a, 2b), and Viola (2.1a, 2.1b, 2.2a, 2.2b). The music is in 3/4 time and marked 'all pizz.' (all pizzicato). The dynamic is 'sempre fff' (sempre fortississimo). The score shows quadruple-stopped chords and glissandi. The tempo is marked '♩ = 160'.

**Figure 3:** Bridges for string orchestra, “Variation II, part 3”.

both the musical and movement elements I created different types of material: theatrical gesture, naturally-occurring performance movements, movement concurrent with music and movement as response to music.

Everyone in the ensemble is required to act at various points and make theatrical gestures be it the horn player and pianist shaking their heads or shrugging their shoulders (bars 83–84) in response to the soloist's pleas for help, the quartet standing up and looking at the soloist with concern (bar 129) or the soloist raising her hand to take control and quiet the quartet at bar 160.

In the passage from 161–167 I played with the idea of naturally-occurring performance movements. The quartet is playing in unison and they are asked to rise up on a glissando up-bow, sit with a down-bow chord and then re-take the bow for a further down-bow chord with accompanying foot stamp. These are all natural movements observed in my studies of various chamber musicians in performance. I wanted to have the quartet engage with the choreography here in order to express the idea that they were finally ‘singing from the same hymn sheet’ as the soloist and no longer working against them.

In the sequence where the soloist travels along the back wall of the stage (bars 70–75) the musical material is exactly concurrent with the choreographic material: each musical gesture is coupled with a physical gesture reflective of the character of the music such that the one enhances the meaning of the other. In the passage from 95–106 each musical gesture is again coupled with a physical one but now the movement also continues between the gestures to better express an increasingly frantic emotional state.

At bar 86 however the movement is delayed and occurs as a response to the musical material. The soloist responds to a sudden brief increase in dynamic from the ensemble with a musical ‘shriek’ but only turns away to hide once the musical material has been completed. This serves to enhance the overall meaning implied by my narrative through acknowledging the role of choice in dealing with difficult situations: we may be shocked or surprised at an occurrence but nevertheless we

do actively choose how to proceed. I am therefore employing music and gesture to enhance a possible interpretation of the narrative.

These are just a few examples of how I've tried to incorporate the visual performance layer to create a musical theatre and dance work with a solo line combining aural and visual material. Howard Skempton was particularly encouraging about the ideas I was exploring in the work and he also suggested that I might create a choreographed solo work for violin. Everything I write is influenced by movement in some way so it was particularly pleasing to hear that where I pushed my movement ideas to what felt like an extreme extent that the result was musical material that worked better. I am inclined to agree and I think there's a lesson here not only about the need to explore ideas to a greater extent to see just how far they can be taken, but also about having the confidence and self-belief to do so.

---

**Jac McKeigue** was awarded a fee scholarship to fund her current PhD studies with George Nicholson at the University of Sheffield. She has been commissioned by a variety of groups including the University of Sheffield's Elgar String Orchestra, Dance Initiative Greater Manchester and Ad Hoc Contemporary Dance Group. The University of Sheffield's Symphony Orchestra will be premiering her new work *A4* in May 2011. Her research focuses on movement as both stimulus and material with her most recent work *Concerto* successfully achieving an integration of the visual performance layer into the solo violinist's musical material. She has also created various multi-media projects and group-devised work exploring improvisation, chance procedures and audience participation. She is the Creative Director of the improvisation ensemble Collective Impulses, a student-run ensemble at the University of Sheffield giving performances and workshops.