

The Given Note: Music, Attentiveness and the Enactment of Meaning

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Presentation format: performance-paper (performance features two hurdy-gurdies, great bass recorder, voice and electronics).

Proposal:

This collaborative paper and performance (thirty minutes) will focus on a setting by Jason Dixon of *The Given Note* by Seamus Heaney. It explores the piece's structural features, demonstrating how these facilitate not only attentive listening but the enactment of musical meaning, which in this instance is concerned with the process of experiencing and attempting to render experience intelligible.

Attention will be paid to the multivalence of the poem's meaning: the story is recounted of a fiddler who retrieves the *Port na bPúcai*, a tune barely perceptible to others. The poem gestures towards Heaney's attempts to translate his experiences into words in order to communicate them. It embodies a particular attentiveness to experience, one of perceiving the world afresh and striving to articulate this.

Thereafter, the music will be considered. Herein, there is a sense both of straining to perceive and of articulation of that which is perceived. A wash of sound issues a call to attention; a substantial period elapses before the live hurdy-gurdies enter, encouraging focused attention and anticipation of what follows. The live line is fractured and there is a sense of straining to hear, perceive and make intelligible; any clarity is diffused by the resonances of the pre-recorded material.

The voice is embedded within the music, vocalising the attempt to perceive that is enacted by the music. It is only towards the end that the *Port na bPúcai* surfaces, sitting above the previous hurdy-gurdy melody and giving sense to the initial apparent incompleteness of its line.

Biographies:

Jason Dixon is an Irish composer currently completing his PhD in composition at the University of East Anglia. His work explores issues of language, perception and memory in music. More recently he has been focusing on the Irish storytelling tradition and its place in contemporary Ireland.

Férdia Stone-Davis holds a doctorate from the University of Cambridge and a Masters in music performance from Trinity College of Music, London. She is an inter-disciplinary academic working in music, philosophy, and theology. Her recent book is *Musical Beauty: Negotiating the Boundary between Subject and Object* (Cascade, Wipf and Stock, 2011).