

Jonathan Pitkin

Raising expectations: a composer's perspective on the relationship between creative practice and music psychology

This paper will examine some of the ways in which the composition of a piece of music might be informed by detailed consideration of how the listener is likely to experience it. It will argue that it is possible for a composer to conceive of his work not only as a series of acoustic events, but also as a series of perceptual and cognitive operations to be carried out by the listener.

The author will explain how his own compositions invite the listener to form expectations of what he or she will hear next; to recognise when these have been met or confounded, and, informed by these outcomes, to revise or form new expectations of what is to follow. The author's intention is that this should give the listener the sense of being engaged in dialogue with the composer, who will appear to respond to each expectation as it arises.

In several respects, the assumptions about listening behaviour which these compositions imply (and upon the veracity of which depends the likelihood of their being experienced as the composer intends) accord with the conclusions of recent work in the field of music psychology; in others, they raise questions which have yet to be subjected to the same degree of critical debate and scrutiny. In this way the music on the one hand reflects and creatively exploits our current understanding of the psychology of musical listening, and on the other points out new directions in which we might seek to expand it.

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Jonathan Pitkin is a composer and a member of the Academic Studies staff at the Royal College of Music. He was brought up in Edinburgh before going on to study at Christ Church, Oxford, the Royal Academy of Music, and finally for a DMus in composition at the Royal College of Music. His principal teachers have been Christopher Brown and Guy Reibel.

His music has been performed and commissioned internationally as well as across the UK, including at the Huddersfield and Spitalfields Festivals. Performers have included the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Singers, and amongst recent works to have received BBC Radio 3 broadcasts are the orchestral pieces *Mesh* and *Borrowed Time*, as well as *Con Spirito*, for piano and Yamaha disklavier, which was shortlisted for a British Composer Award in 2008. Two of his choral pieces are published by Oxford University Press as part of the *New Horizons* series.