

Institution: Birmingham City University
Unit of Assessment: UoA 35 Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts
Title of case study: Case Study 3: Composing Beyond Concert Practice
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Birmingham Conservatoire has established a leading reputation in the UK and Europe for the composition and dissemination of new music outside of concert hall conventions, including: site-specific work; concept pieces; contesting genre boundaries; and re-framing the relationship between composition, performer and audience. Through their award-winning compositions and performances, notably for the Cultural Olympiad, the Conservatoire's composers have played a key role in changing understanding of the experiences that new music affords (wit, entertainment, spectacle, theatre, surprise), and in effecting public discourse through media coverage, audience reach, participation and audience co-creation. Their influence on curricula of other HEIs has similarly expanded through an Erasmus programme with nine other European bodies.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Joe Cutler, Michael Wolters, Howard Skempton, Ed Bennett and Simon Hall have established an open, critical, and conceptual school of composition, emphasizing performance context and humour, and changing conventional hierarchies between music and audience. Skempton is a central figure in English experimentalism; Cutler and Bennett draw on Dutch post-minimalism and Irish experimentalism; Wolters uses post-dramatic theatre (having studied with Heiner Goebbels); and Hall is experienced in experimental music technology.</p> <p>Skempton's example, historically through the Scratch Orchestra, of artistic self-determination has been particularly important. Wolters established the New Guide to Opera in 1996, Cutler founded his trio Noszferatu in 2000, and Bennett formed the ten-piece ensemble Decibel in 2003, each as vehicles for their own work and those of like-minded composers. The impact of these groups in defining a recognised space for alternative forms of composition has consolidated their position within British and European new music, making possible the work outlined through indicative examples here.</p> <p>Cutler's <i>Ping!</i> (2012, Warwick, Birmingham, London), for the Coull Quartet, four table tennis players and video (Tom Dale), was commissioned for New Music 20x12. His work for young audiences has also been similarly inventive and slyly witty, as with the kaleidoscopic funfair of <i>Pulpable Music</i> (BCMG 2011) and <i>Chanticleer and the Opera Fox</i> (2011), written as the Roald Dahl Museum's first composer-in-residence. <i>The Greatest Hits of Prince Consort Road</i> (2012), a downloadable collage for the Proms, was commissioned for the Cage centenary.</p> <p><i>BBC FOUR World News Today</i> (2008, Birmingham) by Wolters was performed to a live broadcast of the day's news, which in a feedback loop included a story on its own performance. Other pieces have featured: roles for 'audience' and self-reflective performers (<i>I see with my eyes closed</i>, 2010, Birmingham); musical deconstruction and physical dismantling of the <i>Well-Tempered Piano</i> (<i>Große Mengen Bach</i>, 2008, Rostock); wheeled seating for audience to follow a 'tracking shot' (<i>The Voyage</i>, 2012); a re-imagining of culture without TV (<i>Wir sehen uns morgen wieder</i>, 2009, Düsseldorf); mixing audience and performers on an ice rink (<i>wahnsinning wichtig: on ice</i>, 2012, Düsseldorf) and in theatres (<i>Danserye</i>, 2013, Hamburg, Berlin, Antwerp, Zürich, Basel, Bern, Freiburg, Utrecht); and musicians turning a concert hall into a thoroughfare (<i>Monsterwalzer</i>, 2012, Birmingham).</p> <p>Wolters now leads an Erasmus exchange programme involving nine other EU universities from Berlin, Bratislava, Cork, Göteborg, Izmir, Porto, Verona, Vilnius and Vienna. For each project, 30 participants in five groups are paired with a community group and space (e.g. a pub, bus station, factory, and hospital), with ten days to create and perform a project.</p> <p>Skempton's importance has been recognised in a BCMG portrait concert featuring <i>Only the Sound Remains</i> (2010), and in <i>September Songs</i>, a two-day show at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham (2010) giving a retrospective of his chamber music from the 1960s to today (<i>Whales Weep Not, Guitar Interludes, Dictionary Songs</i>, 2010). <i>Five Rings Triples</i>, commissioned by the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers for New Music 20x12 (CCCB, 2011), treads a fine line between heeding and breaking the strict method ringing regulations.</p>

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Bennett maps the 'grey area' between fixed composition, jazz and improvisation, regularly using: amplified *ensemble* (*Stop-Motion Music* 2010, Dublin, hcmf, Birmingham; *Organ Grinder*, 2012, Amsterdam; *Heavy Western* 2013, London, Birmingham); free jazz saxophonist Paul Dunmall as soloist (*Noise Machine*, 2008, Malmö, Birmingham; *Dzama Stories*, 2009, Paris, Birmingham); and double ensemble with improvisers (*Islands*, 2012, Istanbul). Bennett also writes for dance (*E!*, 2010, Netherlands; *Even*, 2012, Belgium / Netherlands), whilst NI Opera commissioned his 'mini-opera' *Jackie's Taxi* (2012, Belfast; London).

Hall has created pieces for BBC Radio 3 (*Playing The Form*, 2011) and Radio 4 (*Hearing Ragas*, 2012) that systematically blur the carefully-marked distinctions between electroacoustic composition, sound design and narrative-driven documentary. Commissioned as compositions, Hall's approach is highly unusual for BBC programming, and rare even for artist-led internet radio such as Resonance FM, which tend not to be documentary-led productions.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Joe Cutler, *Ping!* (2012), New Music 20x12 commission:

<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/Partnerships/Flagship-Programmes/New-Music-20x12/Meet-the-New-Music-20x12-Composers/Joe-Cutler>

Howard Skempton, *Five Rings Triples* (2011), New Music 20x12 commission:

<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/Partnerships/Flagship-Programmes/New-Music-20x12/Meet-the-New-Music-20x12-Composers/Howard-Skempton>

Michael Wolters, *The Voyage* (2012), New Music 20x12 commission:

<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/Partnerships/Flagship-Programmes/New-Music-20x12/Meet-the-New-Music-20x12-Composers/Michael-Wolters>

Michael Wolters, *BBC FOUR World News Today* (2008):

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/7438904.stm>

Ed Bennett, *My Broken Machines* (NMC), *Time Out Chicago* 'Albums of 2011':

<http://www.timeoutchicago.com/music-nightlife/opera-classical/15053555/best-classical-albums-2011-in-review>

Simon Hall, *Hearing Ragas* (2012): <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01mf7nd>

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Our composers have played a key role in bridging the gap between new music and mainstream culture. Their works have reached new audiences and changed expectations, amplified by extensive media coverage, critical success and now a growing influence on advisory panels and HEI curricula.

Cutler, Wolters, and Skempton (with previous Conservatoire colleague Richard Causton) were commissioned for [New Music 20x12](#) – a fifth of the Cultural Olympiad's total new music commissions. Bennett's *Jackie's Taxi* was also commissioned for the Olympiad's Southbank Festival (2012), with NI Opera. The initiative, led by the PRS for Music Foundation (PRSF) with all the major commissioning funders, won the [RPS Award for Festivals \(2013\)](#). The PRSF Executive Director has written: 'The [Birmingham Conservatoire] commissions delivered very strongly on this objective [to engage new audiences], retaining artistic integrity whilst composing works which employed ingenious ways of extending the music's appeal and relevance. ... The [Birmingham Conservatoire's] contribution has also confirmed to PRSF how important our commitment to stimulating audience engagement is to the future development of our programmes ... [including] the New Music Biennale.'

Cutler's *Ping!* featured in a 10' documentary broadcast by the BBC World Service and CNN, and was highlighted in Channel 4 and BBC1 Cultural Olympiad coverage, as well as a 20x12 preview in [The Telegraph](#) (10 October 2011) and [The Guardian](#) (22 December 2011); Skempton's *Five Rings*

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Triples was profiled in *The Telegraph* (29 December 2011), highlighted on BBC Online and Guardian Online, and even gently parodied in the BBC2 sitcom *Twenty Twelve*. Our presentation of the pieces by Cutler, Skempton and Wolters (*The Voyage*) received widespread regional coverage (*Birmingham Post*, *Birmingham Mail*, local radio, etc) and 280 attenders. All were broadcast by Radio 3's 'Hear and Now' (70,000 audience), with Skempton's *Five Rings Triples* bringing in New Year's Day [2012](#) and [2013](#). All were recorded and made available for download via [NMC Recordings](#) (*Five Rings Triples* was the 'best seller' of New Music 20x12 with 500 downloads).

The Director of Creative Programmes, Birmingham Hippodrome, has said of our Birmingham showcase: 'The key change was the attitude to new music which the style of presentation engendered – the works attracted a very broad and varied audience including families and people attracted by the theatrical elements of the programme – and that audience is now more likely to attend contemporary music events [in] the West Midlands.'

Hall's [Hearing Ragas](#) won the [Sandford St Martin Radio Award 2013](#); audiences for the broadcasts of this work were c. 1,000,000. Feedback received by the BBC from the listening public included comments such as: 'I just want to say thank you for the most beautiful piece of radio in *Hearing Ragas*. Astonishingly moving. Fabulous content. And just put together so well. Thank you.'

With Wolters' [BBC FOUR World News Today](#), extensively covered on BBC TV, and *Wir sehen uns morgen wieder* featuring across WDR radio, TV and German print media, and Joe Cutler's *Guardian* piece on [Greatest Hits of Prince Consort Road](#), alongside the [BBC Online feature](#) in the context of the 2012 Proms Cage centenary celebration (Cage Music Walk), this collectively marks a substantial public engagement with new music, especially considering mainstream media's usual indifference (if not hostility) towards new music.

Our composers also involved new audiences directly. The President of the Central Council of Church Bell Ringers reported that c. 200 groups (1,600 performers) took up Skempton's *Five Rings Triples*, each performing it about five times. Wolters' *Wir sehen uns morgen wieder* involved over 300 participants presenting more than 100 pieces in 21 days, whilst *Danserye* had 1,373 audience-participants on its international tour of Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands. Cutler's works for family audiences have been acclaimed: *Chanticleer and the Opera Fox* was shortlisted for a [British Composer Award \(2012\)](#), and *Pulpable Music* reached a significant family and schools audience of 463.

The Artistic Director of Birmingham Contemporary Music Group has written: '...[their commissioned works,] because of the interdisciplinary interests of the composers have achieved a marked impact for us in reaching new audiences, including families, visual arts, dance and experimental theatre communities. The Conservatoire's composition department is a key partner in our ongoing work to offer unique experiences to diverse audiences.'

Critical response to the composers has been compelling. This acts as a grapevine by which composers, musicians and music managers gauge developments in the sector, including prevailing aesthetics and emerging practice, leading to further commissions and performances. Bennett's *Dzama Stories* was acclaimed in [The Guardian](#), [Jazzwise](#), and [Musical Criticism](#) (5-stars), whilst *My Broken Machines* was [Time Out Chicago's](#) No. 1 Contemporary CD 2011. This success led to a Philip Leverhulme Trust Prize of £70K, and an Akbank Jazz Festival commission.

Skempton's music was profiled for [The Guardian](#) and [Tempo](#), both linked to the [BCMG Portrait Concert](#) and Ikon Gallery show (1,305 attenders), and well reviewed in [The Telegraph](#).

A well-respected music critic for *The Telegraph* and Radio 3 broadcaster has written: 'from the perspective of a critic Birmingham's [composition department] stands out in two ways. Firstly the four principal teachers collectively display a fresh and unusual aesthetic stance, open to many things beyond orthodox modernism. Secondly, the department puts on enticing public events which break open the mould of new music, in terms of both format and content.'

The impact of Skempton's work can also be seen through the success of German DJ Pantha du Prince's unlicensed (now deleted) 'techno' version of his orchestral work *Lento* (500,000 YouTube hits and c.100,000 sales). A prominent professional composer unconnected with the Conservatoire has commented: 'Howard's pioneering work ... has opened up the field for other less 'classical' composers, myself included, which has led directly to more opportunities to have works performed

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and commissioned. As I have also begun writing for larger ensembles, from writing 'miniatures', Howard has been a model to follow.'

Our composers are increasingly called upon to advise organizations looking to reach beyond concert practice. Cutler is Advisor to the PRSF (2012–), supports the artistic planning of the Park Lane Group (2010–), and sits on two Sound and Music steering groups (British Music Collection, with Wolters, and Composers in HEIs). He was External Examiner for the RAM (2009–12), RNCM (2011–) and TCM (2005–), and composition consultant for the Royal Hague Conservatory and Rotterdam Conservatory merger. Skempton is on the NMC Artistic Panel (2013–), SaM's George Butterworth Memorial Prize panel (2013), and one of four Institute of Composers Fellows (2013); he was selection panellist for BCMG's Apprentice Composer-in-Residence (2008–12). Of Cutler, the Chief Executive, Sound and Music, writes: 'Joe has been a valued member of the steering group which has helped us develop a brand new programme of work with a cohort of 12 exceptionally talented composers studying at HEIs.'

The Erasmus programme, led by Wolters with over €130K funding, is making a significant impact on curricula and teaching programmes across the European partner institutions. The Verona Conservatory, Bratislava Academy of Performing Arts, and University of Music and Performing Arts (Vienna) all specifically cited the experience of Wolters and Bennett in shaping their plans to introduce programmes on collaboration, community and interdisciplinarity (testimonials available). (See also Interdisciplinary Involvement and Community Spaces project, [Cork 2013](#).)

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. New Music 20x12 media coverage:
<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/Partnerships/Flagship-Programmes/New-Music-20x12/New-Music-20x12-in-the-News>.
2. Testimonial, Executive Director, PRS for Music Foundation: impact of works by Cutler, Wolters and Skempton within New Music 20x12 (text available upon request).
3. Profile of Howard Skempton for *The Guardian*, 18 February 2010:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/feb/18/howard-skempton-composer-james-weeks?INTCMP=SRCH>.
4. Profile interview of Howard Skempton in *Tempo*, vol. 66 (October 2012), pp. 13–26:
<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayAbstract?fromPage=online&aid=8720351>.
5. Testimonial, independent professional composer: impact of Howard Skempton's music (text available upon request).
6. Ed Bennett, *Dzama Stories* (2009) and *My Broken Machines* leads to Leverhulme Prize:
<http://journalofmusic.com/radar/ed-bennett-wins-major-prize>.
7. Testimonial, Director of the Conservatorio di Verona, Erasmus Project partner (text available upon request).
8. Testimonial, Artistic Director, Birmingham Contemporary Music Group: impact of Birmingham Conservatoire composers (text available upon request).
9. Testimonial from *The Telegraph* music critic and BBC Radio 3 broadcaster, regarding the distinctive contribution of the Birmingham Conservatoire Composition Department (text available upon request).
10. Grouped email testimonials from (i) Director of Creative Programmes, Birmingham Hippodrome; (ii) Chief Executive, Sound and Music; (iii) Senior Lecturer, University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna; (iv) Vice-Dean for International Relations, Academy of Performing Arts, Bratislava (full texts available upon request).