

**On stage are three musicians** – a pianist, guitarist and marimba player. Behind them a video screen shows a different pianist, guitarist and marimba player. The videos are edited from dozens of YouTube clips, and the trio are mimicking them: whenever the video pianist slides his hands across the keyboard, so does the live one.

On another stage at another time, three more musicians are responding to a video. We can't see it but this time it's of themselves. Having played an enigmatic 15 second gesture, the trio re-enact the same movements at glacial speed, following the video, which has been time-stretched to last nine minutes.

Another stage: two musicians wearing headphones. One of them is describing sounds: "It's a car passing from my right to the left, and the – meep – it's sort of like a chicken..." The other appears to be listening to the same track, her voice wordlessly mimicking what she hears – in a sense, she's mimicking what we can hear being described by the first performer.

It's almost a defining feature of Western art music that it involves a written, notated score enacted and realised by a performer. Because it is written, the score is paramount, an almost dictatorial authority. The performer's job is to follow its instructions without letting the physical limitations of their bodies get in the way. But increasingly composers are turning those presumptions around and using bodies as a source of musical material itself.

The pieces described – Celeste Oram's *XEROX ROCK*, Michael Baldwin's *this is not natural* and Louis d'Heudieres's *Laughter Studies 1* – all belong to the contemporary/experimental wing of that art music tradition, even as they invert its instruction-giving conventions. The performers, insofar as they are 'reading' anything at all, are reading real-time body movements or sounds, via technologically mediated systems. Their responses are fallible, and that lag between score and realisation takes on an aesthetic dimension.



Michael Baldwin

Baldwin, meanwhile, who studied at Bowling Green State University and Huddersfield and now lives in Manchester, also uses media scores to force his performers to rethink what they are doing. At times they must lengthen their movements to follow a time-stretched video. The issues for them now are not quality of tone or accuracy of notes, but: how must they distribute their weight and tense their muscles so they can hold this pose for a minute or more?



they are doing at that time – chatting with members of the audience, playing another piece – with that emotion. Since all the performers are responding to the same emotion track, the performance space becomes charged with unpredictable pulses of communal affect. “The idea is that the emotional tenor of the space is subtly changing in the background... like performed programme notes,” says Baldwin.

Tellingly, the sounds produced – especially those from double bass and horn – bear very little resemblance to the originals. The bass is almost silenced, as its snail-paced bow produces barely enough friction to vibrate its strings; without a sufficiently tightened embouchure the horn's sound splits into breath-filled multiphonics. Unlike a video, in which visual and audio tracks can be slowed via a single mechanism, slowing your movement with an instrument radically changes the sound it makes.

In 2014's *a kind of nostalgia* for two guitarists, bodies become a different distorting prism. First guitarist Diego Castro Magas plays four repetitions of one of Fernando Sor's *24 Exercices Très Faciles*, a short piece of early 19th century guitar repertoire. He plays while watching a second guitarist sit facing him. This guitarist (who need not be proficient on the instrument) slowly moves their body while holding the gaze of the first, who attempts to mirror these movements while continuing to play. “In other words,” Baldwin writes, “the ‘moving guitarist’ is read like a living score that modulates the movements, and thus the sounds, of the other guitarist.”

The beautiful result is a slow dismantling of Sor's melody, a distortion not only heard but seen and empathetically felt in the movements of the two guitarists. As their bodies sway around each other in mirror form, eyes locked, and fragments of Sor drop away like items of clothing, this odd exercise in musical deconstruction takes on a strikingly intimate, even erotic dimension.

More recently Baldwin moved his interest in physical feedback into a more internalised, emotional sphere in perhaps his most radical work, *Affective ... hopes of being moved to feel ... Ripples*. This piece begins before a concert starts and runs throughout, laying itself over whatever other else might have been programmed for the evening. Its performers wear earpieces which periodically transmit an affective cue, either a word or associated sound, based on emotions of happiness, fear, disgust and sadness. When a cue is heard, the performers must overlay whatever it is