

Composition portfolio: approaches to a pop-  
derived musical language

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**Declaration**

I Thomas Wilson hereby declare that the compositions and accompanying commentary comprised in this submission are entirely my own work.

Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signature.....

Name.....

Date.....

## Abstract

The focus of my PhD is the artistic inheritance of the classic pop songwriting tradition, as characterised by what I see as its core aesthetic values — tunefulness, conciseness and the use of clear sectionalised structures. My research explores the combination of these priorities with features not usually associated with pop, such as periodic variation, polyrhythmic layering, harmonic ambiguity and melodic counterpoint, with the aim being to create complex and unpredictable music imbued with pop's directness of communication.

The result of this research is a portfolio of four contrasting projects: *I.D.*, a full-length album of songs, *Down The Tubes*, an instrumental piece designed for private listening, *Malicious Insomnia*, a concert work written for the new music ensemble Sudden Junction, and *Terse*, a four-song E.P. These were chosen to demonstrate the wide applicability of my pop-derived musical language, and feature collaborations with established performers from pop, folk, jazz and classical backgrounds.

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## **List of illustrative material contained on accompanying USB stick**

### **Composition portfolio**

#### **I.D. — 41'20" (2012-2016)**

Performers — James Ashdown: drums (tracks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12). Raph Clarkson: trombone (tracks 9, 10). Steve Haynes: bass guitar (tracks 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12). Kat Hattersley: violoncello (tracks 5, 12). John Hinchliffe: viola (tracks 5, 6). Jonny Mansfield: vibraphone (track 1). Peter Yarde Martin: trumpet (tracks 4, 7, 9). Joe Murgatroyd: clarinet (track 2), synthesizer (track 11). Jin Theriault: soprano saxophone (track 8), alto saxophone (track 9), violin (tracks 4, 5). Steve Troughton: piano (tracks 1, 3, 4, 8), electric piano (track 2), synthesizer (track 11), accordion (track 3), harpsichord (track 10). Tom Wilson: vocals (all tracks), classical guitar (track 10), electric guitar (tracks 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12), Wurlitzer (track 2), synth programming (all tracks), drum programming (track 6), sampler programming (track 12). Engineered by Kit Wilson, with additional engineering by Joe Murgatroyd. Mixed and mastered by Joe Murgatroyd.

#### **Down The Tubes — 12'15" (2012-2013)**

Performers — Yuiko Asaba: violin. Matt Butler: flute. Chris Frost: alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone. Kat Hattersley: violoncello. Steve Haynes: bass guitar. Robin Langdon: euphonium. Peter Yarde Martin: trumpet. Jin Theriault: soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, violin. Steve Troughton: accordion, piano. Tom Wilson: classical guitar, electric guitar, synth and drum programming. Engineered, mixed and mastered by Kit Wilson, with additional engineering by Tom Wilson.

#### **Malicious Insomnia — 5'22" (2015)**

Performers — Emily Anderson: clarinet. Jason Anderson: piano. George Barton: drums. Jemma Freestone: flute. Geerte de Koe: violin. Andrew

Power: violoncello. Conducted by Peter Yarde Martin. Filmed by Joe Burns and Freya Clarke, with sound by Joe Burns. Edited by Joe Burns.

**Terse** — 12'27" (2016)

Performers — Laila Woozeer: vocals (all tracks), hand percussion (tracks 2, 4). Tom Wilson: vocals (all tracks), electric guitar (all tracks).

Engineered, mixed and mastered by Kit Wilson.

**Appendix A**

**Hirakud** — 10'07" (2013)

Performers — Lucy Harrison: clarinet, treble recorder. Preti Taneja: narration. Tom Wilson: classical guitar, sampler and drum programming.

Engineered and mixed by Tom Wilson with additional mixing by Kit Wilson. Mastered by Kit Wilson. Text by Preti Taneja.

## Introduction

The pieces in my portfolio were written between 2012 and 2016. During this period, the scope of my research evolved considerably. My initial focus was the relationship between pop and classical music. I was interested in taking creative techniques from modern classical composition — by which I mean post-War Western notated music intended for concert performance — and incorporating these into my own musical language, which is rooted in the pop-derived values of melodic clarity and careful control of small-scale form.<sup>1</sup> I felt this would enable me to create music that balanced pop’s immediacy with contemporary classical composition’s ability to produce surprising textural, timbral, rhythmic and harmonic effects, things I value tremendously as a listener.

While my research continued to focus on combining pop aesthetic traits and non-pop elements, I eventually decided to widen my scope to take in ideas from a greater range of sources. This was because several of my key influences lay outside the worlds of either classical or pop: the Congolese band Kasai Allstars, for example, sparked my interest in polyrhythmic layering, a technique that I went on to explore in “Give Yourself Some Credit”. Stylistic features drawn upon in the resulting portfolio include timbres from electronica (*Down The Tubes*), jazz rhythms (*Malicious Insomnia*), contemporary classical harmonic gestures (“Home is Where”), and traditional pop song forms (*Terse*).

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<sup>1</sup> While the most common usage of the word “pop” is as a synonym for “popular”, it has an alternative use as shorthand for a particular set of aesthetic principles — conciseness, melodic directness, and clear sectionalised structures — that emerged out of the work of Tin Pan Alley songwriters such as George Gershwin and Jerome Kern, and that influenced generations of subsequent artists, from the Beatles to Blur. It is this alternative use of the term that I will be employing throughout my commentary.

While there was a danger that this stylistic range could produce a sense of incoherence, I sought to counterbalance this by ensuring that my core musical priorities — conciseness and melodic/structural clarity<sup>2</sup> — were present in each work. I then set out to combine these priorities with higher levels of musical complexity than that found in mainstream pop, resulting in the development of a cohesive musical language that expanded upon several of pop’s most consistent features. The hallmarks of this language include: diatonic harmony augmented by unusual chord extensions and frequent modulation, constant pulse being subjected to multiple changes of metre, and clear melodic ideas offset by rhythmically contrasting countermelodies.

To explain how this language emerged and evolved, Chapter 1 of my commentary will outline my research context, focusing first on how my music relates to the genre of experimental pop, before moving on to consider how artists from other fields, particularly contemporary classical composition, have also influenced my work. In Chapter 2, I will discuss my methodology and methods in greater depth, including my aesthetic criteria, the ways I chose to present my work, the equipment I used, and my attitude towards lyrics. Chapter 3 will discuss the main compositional features of the submitted portfolio. Finally, in Chapter 4, I will evaluate the outcomes of my research.

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<sup>2</sup> “Conciseness” does not necessarily mean “short”. Rather, it is a commitment to the principle of nothing being longer than it *needs* to be, which guided me in composing the longer instrumental works in my portfolio, as well as the rather more standard-length songs.



## **Chapter 1 — Research Context**

The roots of my aesthetic lie in the classic pop songwriting tradition, which I first became aware of through my parents' appreciation of 1960s songwriters such as Burt Bacharach, Ray Davies of the Kinks, John Lennon and Paul McCartney of the Beatles, and Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys. These figures placed great importance on craftsmanship, and their influence can be detected in later artists as stylistically varied as The Police, Madness, Nirvana,<sup>3</sup> Catatonia, Garbage and Elliott Smith. The common denominator between these acts is not the *sound* of their music,<sup>4</sup> but its core artistic priorities, namely the use of concise, sectionalised structures and a strong emphasis on melody.

My desire to explore the combination of these priorities with compositional techniques less commonly associated with the mainstream pop songwriting, connects my work with a long-standing progressive strand within pop, which has been brought into particular focus in recent years with the emergence of the genre known as experimental pop. I have taken considerable inspiration from this music, both as a source of techniques, and as a way of describing my work. However, the way in which I have chosen to respond to it compositionally also highlights several differences in my approach, especially with regards to structure.

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<sup>3</sup> The fact that a band like Nirvana were clearly indebted to other musical traditions as well, such as hardcore punk and heavy metal, in no way diminishes the high levels of pop songcraft present in their work. For a discussion of the influence that the Beatles had on the group, see <http://www.digitalspy.com/music/news/a365526/beatles-were-huge-influence-on-nirvana-says-dave-grohl/>. Accessed 15th August 2017.

<sup>4</sup> As Timothy Warner has pointed out, timbre is one of the few features of pop that has evolved considerably from generation to generation, often as the result of technological developments. See Timothy Warner, *Pop Music: Technology and Creativity: Trevor Horn and the Digital Revolution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.11.

To illustrate this, I will begin this chapter with a brief survey of how experimentation within pop has developed since the 1960s, detailing both implicit and explicit influences on my work. I will then move on to a comparison between my music and that of three contemporary bands with particular relevance for my research: Everything Everything, Villagers and Dirty Projectors. Finally, I will discuss how artists from other traditions, including contemporary classical composition, electronica and jazz, have also influenced the character of my music.

### Experimentation in pop

Among the artists mentioned at the start of this chapter, The Beatles and The Beach Boys are particularly notable for representing what Bob Stanley has called an “ever changing, forward-thinking” conception of pop,<sup>5</sup> in that they consistently sought new ways of presenting the pop song, whether through the modular structure of The Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations”, or the unusual instrumentation and tape manipulation heard on The Beatles’ *Revolver*.<sup>6</sup> The extent to which it was possible for such artists to pursue continual musical innovation within the pop mainstream was historically rare — Peter Doggett has even suggested that it was unique to the years between 1965 and 1968.<sup>7</sup>

That is not to say, however, that the exploratory impulse within pop vanished entirely: merely that after the late 1960s it tended to exist *outside* the mainstream. Occasionally, chart-orientated artists employed experimental devices for one-off tracks — examples include Queen’s through-composed single “Bohemian Rhapsody” (1975), the tempo fluctuations on Dexy’s Midnight Runners’ “Come On Eileen” (1982), and

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<sup>5</sup> Bob Stanley, *Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!: The Story of Modern Pop* (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p.360.

<sup>6</sup> “Eleanor Rigby” was the first pop song to be backed solely by a string quartet, while “Taxman” and “I’m Only Sleeping” were notable for their use of backwards guitar sounds.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Doggett, *Electric Shock: From the Gramophone to the iPhone — 125 Years of Pop Music* (London: Vintage, 2015), p.372.

the novel use of auto-tuning technology on Cher's "Believe" (1998).<sup>8</sup> For the most part, however, experimentalism in pop in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s was pursued by isolated figures whose uniqueness of vision made it difficult to form any broader cohesive movement.<sup>9</sup> Representative artists include Frank Zappa, whose innovations in a pop context encompassed the use of musical collage, jarring dissonances, and extreme instrumental virtuosity;<sup>10</sup> Robert Wyatt, whose sophisticated harmonic language on albums such as *Rock Bottom* (1974) was influenced by jazz

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<sup>8</sup> The distinctive vocal sound on "Believe" was achieved by applying an Antares pitch-correction device at too high a speed for the corresponding audio. See

<http://courses.gregoryweinstein.com/historyofrecording/records/chers-believe>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>9</sup> While these artists sometimes achieved considerable commercial success — each of Björk's first six albums featured in the UK Top 10, for example — they are not considered "mainstream" artists in the same way that the Beatles and the Beach Boys were, as can be seen by the use of terms such as "avant-garde", "outsider", "cult" or "eccentric" in media discussion of their work. One *possible* example of an act continuing the tradition of experimentation within pop while achieving mainstream cultural visibility is the band Radiohead, and certainly their single "Paranoid Android" (1997) is remarkable for the levels of structural and harmonic sophistication it brought to the UK pop charts. Yet their ambivalent relationship to melody — deliberately eschewing it altogether for several tracks on their albums *Kid A* (2000) and *Amnesiac* (2001) — and the fact that their commercial success rests partly on the personal identification fans feel with frontman Thom Yorke, make it difficult to label them a "pop" act in the musical sense outlined in Chapter 1. For examples of media discussion of Frank Zappa, Robert Wyatt, Tom Waits and Björk, see:

[http://creators.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/original-creators-avant-garde-rocker-frank-zappa](http://creators.vice.com/en_uk/article/original-creators-avant-garde-rocker-frank-zappa). Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

<http://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2007/oct/14/wherearetheheirstoawkward>. Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

<http://www.getintothisthis.co.uk/2015/01/the-cult-world-of-tom-waits-30-years-of-rain-dogs/>. Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> May 2017.

<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2007/jul/08/popandrock2>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth highlighting that Frank Zappa's early work coincided with The Beatles' most experimental period, which he openly satirised on his 1967 album *We're Only In It For The Money*. However, his lengthy subsequent career makes it easier to place him in the "fringe" experimental tradition that followed mainstream pop's mid-1960s creative heyday.

and twentieth century classical composition; Tom Waits, whose long career has seen him employ a variety of non-pop instruments (such as marimba and accordion) while broadening pop's lyrical subject matter with an empathetic focus on societal outsiders; and Björk, who has sought to make each of her albums a break from its predecessor, resulting in a body of work that ranges from the kaleidoscopic *Debut* (1993), in which every song is in a different style, to the more focused *Medúlla* (2004), which consists largely of a capella vocals.

All these figures can be considered implicit influences on my work, in that they demonstrated it is possible to make music that delivers the pleasures of pop while confounding some of the expectations of the genre — to give just one example, Robert Wyatt's "Sea Song" (1974) combines appealing melodic hooks with abrupt chord changes that subvert any sense of a tonal centre. Since the mixture of accessibility and surprise in such a gesture is similar to the dynamic I am aiming for in my music, artists such as Frank Zappa, Robert Wyatt, Tom Waits and Björk are likely reference points for anyone engaging with my work.

In terms of more *explicit* influences on my research — artists whose approach I consciously looked to for inspiration when creating my portfolio — the majority come from the contemporary genre of experimental pop, which I will cover in the next section. There is, however, one important pre-21<sup>st</sup> century exception to this rule, namely the band Talking Heads, who had a tremendous impact on my compositional language, particularly in their use of rapid harmonic change and unusual song construction. A good case study is their 1977 song "Don't Worry About The Government", which, after a brief instrumental introduction, consists of five contrasting sections, as shown below:

Name of section	Time reference	Opening lyric
A	0:08-0:39	"I see the clouds that move across the sky"
B	0:39-0:43	"It's over there, it's over there"
C	0:44-0:59	"My building has every convenience"
D	0:59-1:15	"Loved ones, loved ones"
E	1:16-1:31	"Don't you worry 'bout me"

*Ex. 1: Structural diagram for Talking Heads' "Don't Worry About The Government" (1977).*

This scheme is then repeated one more time, after which the song comes to an abrupt end. Since the A section is the only one whose lyrics are changed for the second statement, one *could* hear the A section as a verse, and sections B-E as a very long chorus.<sup>11</sup> However, the modulations that occur between these portions of the song mean that the listener is likely to hear them as separate sections: for example, what I have labelled as the C section is clearly in D major, while the D section centres around the chord of E major.

What I find interesting is that even though the song's ABCDEABCDE form is unusual, it operates according to many of the same principles as a more conventional pop song. Firstly, it achieves interest through balancing contrast and repetition, since it consists of exact repetition of a musical sequence subdivided into contrasting sections. Secondly, the way that lyrics are repeated helps the listener to identify melodic hooks (i.e. "it's over there, it's over there" and "loved ones loved ones"). Finally, this process is made even easier by the fact that the majority of melodic information in the song is given to the lead vocalist.

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<sup>11</sup> Here I am using Jimmy Webb's definition of a chorus as "a repeated section with identical words" (Webb, 1998, 118).

On the other hand, “Don’t Worry About The Government” is considerably more complex than the average pop song, containing far more individual sections, and a vastly increased rate of harmonic change. These ideas had a direct impact on the works in my portfolio: both “Here And Now” and “The Wagon”, for example, create drama by introducing new sections at surprising moments, and the majority of my music features an extended diatonic harmonic language clearly indebted to the unexpected harmonic shifts on 77.<sup>12</sup>

At a deeper level, the goal of combining a pop sensibility with high levels of musical complexity remained a constant throughout my research, and Talking Heads were the band that kindled my interest in this compositional approach. In addition, their influence on subsequent generations can be regarded as a key factor in the growth of a community of artists, fans and critics drawn to both musical experimentation and the traditional pleasures of pop.<sup>13</sup>

### Experimental pop

David Heetderks (2015) has defined experimental pop as music that mixes traditional pop songwriting values with “projection of a progressive ethos through means other than overt displays of virtuosity”.<sup>14</sup> This might include any or all of the following: rhythmic

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<sup>12</sup> By “extended diatonic” I mean that while my music usually revolves around tonal centres, I often use chords outside of the diatonic scale. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

<sup>13</sup> Prior to the 21st Century, the most high profile act influenced by Talking Heads was Radiohead, who took their name from a track on the band’s album *True Stories* (1986). Talking Heads’ impact in this century has been even more noticeable, audible at a stylistic level in the bright guitar sounds and melancholy chord progressions adopted by commercial indie-rock bands such as The Strokes and Vampire Weekend, and at a conceptual level in the forward-thinking ethos of experimental pop acts such as Dirty Projectors and St. Vincent, both of whom have collaborated with Talking Heads’ former frontman David Byrne.

<sup>14</sup> David Heetderks, “Hipster Harmony: The Hybrid Syntax of Seventh Chords in Post-Millennial Rock”, *MTO* 21 (2015): Introduction.

irregularity, unusual harmonic progressions, timbral innovation and, to a lesser degree, formal experimentation.<sup>15</sup> As we have already seen, there were always artists operating at the fringes of pop for whom musical progression was paramount: what is notable about contemporary experimental pop, however, is the degree to which it exists as a cohesive movement.

Heetderks has traced the genre's emergence to the start of the Twenty-First Century, a time when artists such as Animal Collective and Dirty Projectors were experimenting with ways of expanding the possibilities of pop's internal musical syntax.<sup>16</sup> With growing numbers of acts starting to explore similar terrain,<sup>17</sup> publications such as Pitchfork, Consequence of Sound and Stereogum began to refer to their music as experimental pop, a term which, as Heetderks points out, now has widespread critical acceptance.

Experimental pop combines elements of pop's standard practice — its emphasis on vocal melody, and its division of material into clear sections — with musical features that are unusual in a pop song context. These can take many forms. Some artists, such as Everything Everything, Dutch Uncles or Max Tundra, employ sophisticated rhythmic schemes made up of unusual phrase-lengths, complex time signatures, and abrupt changes of metre. Others, like Villagers or These New Puritans, are more adventurous harmonically, exploring chromatic melodies and dissonant chord progressions. There are also acts who experiment timbrally, whether through the use of extreme studio processing, as in the case of

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<sup>15</sup> I am taking as my definition for “experimental” that formulated by Joanna Demers, i.e. music that “takes risks through running counter to musical conventions” (Demers 2010, 7). It is important to note that, as she points out, this is always relative to the expectations of a particular genre, and that what is considered “experimental” in pop might not seem so to adherents of other forms of music.

<sup>16</sup> Heetderks, *Hipster Harmony*, Introduction.

<sup>17</sup> Other acts named by Heetderks include Mew, St. Vincent and Grizzly Bear, all of whom came to prominence in the first decade of the Twenty-First Century.

Animal Collective, or via the creation of new instruments, such as the “gass”, a hybrid bass/guitar created by the duo Buke And Gase. Finally, a number of artists have explored new ways of structuring pop songs, be that Dirty Projectors’ transformative processes, or the modular approach found on Of Montreal’s *Skeletal Lamping* (2008). Familiarising myself with these developments was crucial, as it introduced me to techniques that would inform my own work.

Particularly significant was Everything Everything’s *Man Alive* (2010), which suggested an approach to rhythm that informed my entire portfolio. The underlying principle is that metre should respond to the flow of a melody in interesting ways rather than imposing a static time signature. This is best illustrated by the opening track, “My Kz Ur Bf”. The verse and pre-chorus sections (0:45-1:03 and 1:04-1:12) are complex and unsettled, oscillating between several contrasting compound metres. The pulse eventually settles into 4/4 for the chorus (1:13-1:35), but even here the effect is not entirely stable, with the lead vocalist’s irregular phrasing pushing against the beat of the rhythm section. However, the rhythmic complexity is not the focal point of the track — rather it is used to add interest to, and delineate, each portion of the song. I was inspired by this example to approach decisions about metre in terms of what would be most interesting at any given moment, and for this reason none of the items in my portfolio maintain the same time signature throughout.

Another key influence was the band Villagers, especially the tracks “The Waves” and “Passing A Message” from their album *Awayland* (2013). Both feature vocal melodies that harmonically clash perceptibly with the consonant instrumental backings. This is compounded by the way lead vocalist Conor O’ Brien deliberately holds the most dissonant notes. Take for example, the word “passing” in “Passing A Message” (0:44-0:45): the opening syllable forms a tritone, and is held for twice as long as the rest of the word. This creates a sense of disquiet that is extremely unusual in a pop context — as Thomas Shave (2008) has pointed out, pop singing



tends to complement, rather than subvert, tonality.<sup>18</sup> The influence of Villagers' approach to harmony can be heard both in "The Ones", which pits a complex vocal melody against a static harmonic backing, and in *Malicious Insomnia*, where I use tritones to mirror the anxiety of sleeplessness.

As with most experimental pop acts, Everything Everything and Villagers work predominantly within the traditional verse/chorus pop song structure, even if their tracks sometimes contain additional elements — the first verse of "My Kz Ur Bf" is preceded by two introductory sections for example, yet there is still great emphasis placed on recognisable verses and choruses that are reprised several times. Within my portfolio there are a couple of projects that do not fit this traditional model — the narrative requirements of *Down The Tubes* and *Malicious Insomnia* meant that adopting a verse/chorus approach would not have been appropriate. Yet even *I.D.*, which is ostensibly a collection of pop songs, contains more transformation of material than most experimental pop albums.

This structural aspect of my work reflects my interest in Dirty Projectors, one of the few experimental pop acts to have fundamentally reconsidered pop form. Although several of their songs — such as the title track from their E.P. *About To Die* (2012) — follow a standard verse/chorus pattern, they have also explored more oblique structural relationships, as with "Useful Chamber" from the album *Bitte Orca* (2009). At one level it is highly fragmented, made up of abrupt changes of tempo, texture and mood, and although there is a chorus that occurs twice (2:44-3:05 and 5:57-6:17), each statement of it is preceded by several sections that have seemingly little in common. Yet repeated listening reveals unexpected connections between these intervening sections: the *a capella* vocal glissandi that occur at 3:10-4:12 articulate the same harmonic pattern as the track's instrumental introduction, while the brief guitar interlude

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Shave, "Communicative contract analysis: an approach to popular music analysis", *Organised Sound* 13 (2008): p.43.

heard from 0:55-1:09 is brought back to accompany a falsetto lead vocal melody at 1:39-2:09.

What I like about this approach is the way it balances alteration of material with the clarity of traditional, sectionalised pop song structures: there is enough repetition of memorable hooks to give the track an appealing pop sensibility,<sup>19</sup> yet the transformation of the material keeps the music unpredictable. This was a prime influence on the periodic variation technique I explored on *I.D.*: here, material is broken down into small sections and varied at intervals, rather than existing in a state of continual development.

It is interesting to note how many experimental pop artists have had academic training in composition: examples include Dave Longstreth of Dirty Projectors, Annie Clark of St. Vincent, Robin Richards of Dutch Uncles, and Mica Levi of Micachu and the Shapes. This has several significant implications for the music they write, the first being that it makes it easier for them to compose for classical musicians. Dave Longstreth and Annie Clark have written pieces for classical ensembles,<sup>20</sup> and Micachu and the Shapes' album *Chopped & Screwed* (2011) was produced in collaboration with the London Sinfonietta. Such willingness to work across different fields inspired the scope of my own work, as I decided not to restrict myself to a single type of composition, such as songwriting, but instead to pursue a range of projects, including one piece — *Malicious Insomnia* — that was written for the contemporary classical ensemble Sudden Junction.

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<sup>19</sup> I am taking as my definition of “hook” Monaco and Riordan’s (1980) — “a musical or lyrical phrase that stands out and is easily remembered”. Quoted in Gary Burns, “A Typology of ‘Hooks’ in Popular Records”, *Popular Music*, 6:1 (1987): p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Annie Clark’s *Proven Badlands* (2011) for yMusic and Dave Longstreth’s *Michael Jordan* (2015) for Ensemble LPR.

Equally pertinent is the way these artists' classical training has impacted on their more pop-orientated work. Although Dutch Uncles operate as a band, Robin Richards writes all of their music himself, scoring parts out on Sibelius which he then takes to the other members of the group.<sup>21</sup> Annie Clark worked in a similar way for her album *Actress* (2009), creating elaborate instrumental parts for each song within Garage Band prior to recording the material.<sup>22</sup> Both treat pop music *as* composition,<sup>23</sup> and this results in an immensely detailed form of pop — particularly in the areas of texture and timbral pacing — that rewards repeated listening. Since I was striving for comparable levels of detail in my own music, it made sense for me to adopt a similar approach, and I therefore produced computer mockups during the composition process, specifying exactly how I wanted each work to unfold.<sup>24</sup> This was especially useful when developing the more pointillist portions of the portfolio, such as *Malicious Insomnia* and “Home is Where”, since the success of these works depended on careful co-ordination between instruments, which was mapped out fully beforehand. More detail on my working methods will be given in Chapter 2.

### Other influences

While my project evolved beyond its initial focus on the relationship between pop and classical music, I continued to take inspiration from post-War classical composition. This is a huge field, encompassing

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<sup>21</sup> As explained at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6wu42Rb3rw>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/268838/st-vincent-annie-clark-acts-out-for-second-album>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>23</sup> This is not, of course, to say that pop acts working in a more traditional “topline” manner (melody and chords only) do not also see themselves as composers or deserve to be considered as such. It is simply that the methods adopted by writers such as Robin Richards or Annie Clark give them a level of control more akin to classical composers who seek to specify every detail of their scores.

<sup>24</sup> The software I was using for this was *Logic Pro Audio* and *Sibelius*, both of which enable parts to be typed onto a digital score and then played back by virtual instruments.

everything from the radically non-expressive work of American experimental composers such as John Cage to the emotive sacred music of Eastern European composers like Avo Pärt and Henryk Górecki, and clearly my study could not hope to reflect all the developments within modern classical music. Nor was I looking to produce a fusion of pop and classical in which both elements were equally dominant — while I greatly enjoy much contemporary classical music, my core aesthetic priorities come primarily from pop. Nevertheless, there were a number of classical composers whose work contained features I wanted to explore in my own music, since I felt this would expand the expressive potential of my material.<sup>25</sup>

One such figure is the British composer Michael Finnissy, whose harmonically complex music, very little of which could be described as tonal, is capable of expressing an extremely wide range of emotions. Perhaps best known for the overt dissonance of works such as *English Country Tunes* (1977, revised 1982-1985), his output also contains moments of extreme tenderness, such as the choral work *Vertue* (1993). While my own music is more diatonic, I have nevertheless been inspired by Finnissy's work to experiment with various iterations of non-triadic harmony. In "Home Is Where", the harmonic relationship between the melody and bass-line changes from bar to bar.<sup>26</sup> Here my intention was to draw upon the constant tonal flux found in Finnissy's music,<sup>27</sup> so as to create an ambiguous mood mirroring the unreliability of the song's

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<sup>25</sup> The influence of classical music on pop composers has a long history stretching back at least as far as the Beatles' interest in Karlheinz Stockhausen, and reflected today in artists like Mica Levi, who has spoken of her admiration of Harry Partch — see for example [http://drownedinsound.com/in\\_depth/4136256-emmy-meets-mica-levi-of-micachu-amp-the-shapes](http://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/4136256-emmy-meets-mica-levi-of-micachu-amp-the-shapes). Accessed 15th August 2017.

<sup>26</sup> For the most part the song avoids the use of full chords, and the melody and bass-line are therefore the only pitched elements.

<sup>27</sup> This is a preoccupation that dates back to some of his earliest work. See, for example, the analysis of *Polskie Tance Op.32* (1955/62) in Henrietta Brougham, Christopher Fox and Ian Pace (eds), *Uncommon Ground: The Music of Michael Finnissy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997), p.44.

narrator. I enjoyed the unusual harmonies produced in the process, and this inspired me to write a number of other songs emphasising particular non-triadic intervals, such as the secundal harmony in “A Plan” and the clashing semitones in “Cavenia”.

Another aspect of my work influenced by classical music is timbre, though here the inspiration comes more from minimalist composers such as Steve Reich, Marc Mellits and John Adams.<sup>28</sup> One of the key sonic signatures of minimalism is the dominant role played by tuned percussion, evident in pieces like Steve Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* (1976) and Marc Mellit’s *Tight Sweater* (2005), and references to this soundworld appear in many places throughout my portfolio.<sup>29</sup> While it is most noticeable in songs like “Here And Now”, which contains a vibraphone, it also influenced my own playing technique: the use of guitar harmonics in “A Plan”, for example, mimics the chiming bell-like quality of tuned percussion instruments. My enjoyment of these composers’ music has also resulted in a general preference for bright, treble-heavy sounds, most noticeable in “Southern Compass”, where bass frequencies are held back until the climactic final section of the song (2:23 onwards).

In the case of John Adams, I was particularly influenced by the way his clarinet concerto *Gnarly Buttons* (1996) combines traditional orchestral instruments with sampling keyboards and a variety of what Adams calls “vernacular” string instruments<sup>30</sup> — banjo, mandolin and guitar. Although

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<sup>28</sup> The label “minimalism” is a problematic one, as it has not been embraced by the majority of composers to whom it has been applied, yet even Steve Reich has reluctantly acknowledged the usefulness of the term as a shorthand — see for example his interview with Bruce Duffie at <http://www.bruceduffie.com/reich.html>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>29</sup> My interest in Steve Reich’s music is something I share with many other experimental pop musicians, most notably Dutch Uncles, who not only make similar use of tuned percussion on their albums *Out of Touch in the Wild* (2013) and *O Shudder* (2015), but also include a direct quote from Reich’s *Electric Counterpoint* (1985) in their song “X-0” (2011).

<sup>30</sup> This description is taken from the sleeve-notes to the London Sinfonietta’s recording of the work (Nonesuch, 1998).

I subsequently became aware of the way that chamber pop acts such as Belle And Sebastian blended pop and orchestral instruments,<sup>31</sup> *Gnarly Buttons* was the piece more than any other that made me interested in combining sound sources from different musical traditions. As well as using instruments that are unusual in an orchestral context, Adams modifies the instrumentation with each movement,<sup>32</sup> an effect compounded by two sampling keyboards that present an ever changing sequence of timbres, from clavichord to cow noises. This gives the music an exhilarating sense of structural progression, and I wanted to create something similar for *Down The Tubes*. The piece mirrors the trajectory of a London Underground tube journey, and I decided to score each section for a different set of instruments, in order to create the sense of passing between different stops. *Gnarly Buttons* also influenced my arranging choices for *I.D.*, encouraging me to augment my regular live band with guest musicians from a range of backgrounds — including classical string players and a jazz clarinetist — and to ask my keyboard player Steve Troughton to double on accordion and harpsichord. This ensured there would be enough timbral variety over the course of the album, which at just over 40 minutes is the largest element in my portfolio.

In addition to my pop and classical influences, I was inspired by a number of artists operating outside either category. Of particular importance were the band Kasai Allstars, a collective of musicians representing several distinct traditions from the Congolese region of Kasai. I have long been interested in their use of polyrhythms — tracks such as “Quick As White” (2008) are fascinating for the way in which different metres come in and out of focus, giving the listener the opportunity to feel the pulse in multiple ways. This was the inspiration behind “Give Yourself Some

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<sup>31</sup> Chamber pop is defined by Last FM as music “characterized by an infusion of orchestral arrangements or classical style composition generally within an indie or indie pop setting” - <http://www.last.fm/tag/chamber%20pop>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>32</sup> The piece calls for a string player who plays banjo in the first movement, mandolin in the second, and guitar in the third.

Credit”, which is based around a set of overlapping ostinatos in different time signatures, each of which alternates between the roles of melody and accompaniment. There is also a polyrhythmic feel in much of the contrapuntal vocal writing in my portfolio, with tracks such as “Southern Compass” and “Everybody’s Eyes” featuring backing vocals that cut against the pulse of the lead singer.

Other artists whose music had an important impact on my research include: the electronica act Daedelus, whose blend of programmed beats and samples of acoustic instruments inspired the soundworld of *Down The Tubes*; the jazz composer Thelonious Monk, whose angular approach to melody influenced the thematic writing in *Malicious Insomnia*; and the progressive metal group Nitkowski, whose aggressive style shaped the sound of “Southern Compass”.

## **Chapter 2 — Methodology and compositional approach**

I chose to adopt for the methodology of practice-based research, which has been defined by Linda Candy as work in which “claims of originality and contribution to knowledge may be demonstrated through creative outcomes”.<sup>33</sup> In my own case, “creative outcomes” refers to the portfolio of compositions submitted alongside this commentary. As a creative practitioner, I am used to assessing the value of compositional discoveries in terms of the aesthetic quality of the music they produce. Applying the same attitude to my doctoral work gave me a framework for testing whether the techniques I explored had practical application for creative practice. Thus, the items in my portfolio stand not simply as *documents* of my research, but, more significantly, as *embodiments* of the kind of music I hoped would result from it. To ensure cohesiveness across the portfolio, all the music submitted was produced according to a clear set of aesthetic criteria.

Firstly, I wanted to maintain pop’s directness of musical communication, and determined that every project should be grounded in the core priorities of pop songwriting. These are:

*Tunefulness* — the creation of melodies whose interest lies primarily in their individual character, as opposed to the processes they are subjected to.

*Conciseness* — the principle of no idea lasting longer than it needs to in order to produce an intended musical effect.

*Sectionalisation* — the division of structure into clearly identifiable segments.

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<sup>33</sup> Linda Candy, “Practice Based Research: A Guide”, <http://www.creativityandcognition.com/resources/PBR%20Guide-1.1-2006.pdf>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.



Secondly, I wanted each work to produce a far wider range of compositional effects than mainstream pop, by which I mean the music found in the top 40 pop charts. This is not to say that I think such music is deficient; however, I do feel that the pop aesthetic has a capacity for surprise and emotional scope that has yet to be fully explored, and this was the aspect of the music I was particularly keen to emphasise.

To achieve this, I decided to employ musical complexity as a deliberate compositional choice. Thomas Shave (2008) has highlighted the degree to which pop songs are expected to conform to certain musical conventions, including durations of between three and five minutes, use of a 4/4 time signature, and lack of substantial modulation.<sup>34</sup> Pop audiences are likely to interpret any music that departs from these conventions as being musically complex. While this could have a potentially disorientating effect, it is precisely the quality of not knowing what to expect next that I, and many others, find so exhilarating about experimental pop.<sup>35</sup>

I therefore consciously set out to depart from certain of pop's conventions, specifically with regards to what Gary Burns has called the "textual" elements of music: rhythm, harmony and melody.<sup>36</sup> Pop acts have traditionally treated these less radically than stylistic features such as instrumental lineup or production, although as we have seen from the discussion on experimental pop in Chapter 1, this is starting to change. I chose them partly because I thought they would have the most interesting impact on my musical voice, and partly because I wanted to avoid pastiching other forms of music. Thus, while my use of polyrhythms on a

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<sup>34</sup> Thomas Shave, "Communicative contract analysis: an approach to popular music analysis", *Organised Sound* 13 (2008): p.43.

<sup>35</sup> Consider, for example, Paul Thompson's assessment of the Dirty Projectors song "Useful Chamber": "It's pure bliss, tension that results in glorious release". <http://www.pitchfork.com/reviews/albums/13159-bitte-orca/>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>36</sup> Gary Burns, "A Typology of 'Hooks' in Popular Records", *Popular Music*, 6:1 (1987): p.1.

track such as “Give Yourself Some Credit” was directly inspired by Congolese music, I felt no need to incorporate Congolese instruments such as likembes into the song. This is not to say that I *never* worked with non-pop timbres, simply that doing so was not my principle focus:<sup>37</sup> rather, I looked to ideas from outside pop to trigger interesting internal shifts in my own musical language, with the most significant being increased rates of metric and harmonic change, the use of more pointillist and contrapuntal textures, and the discovery of periodic melodic variation. These will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

### Choice of presentation

The fact I have chosen to present the items in my portfolio predominantly as recordings reflects my general attitude — very typical among pop musicians<sup>38</sup> — that the sequence of events contained on a master recording, rather than the instructions inscribed on a score, represents the definitive document of a work. While each of these projects employed musical notation, this was a device for enabling specific performers to play my work, rather than a guide for future interpretation, and in most cases there was no full score:<sup>39</sup> instead, I produced an individual part for each of the musicians, who overdubbed their performances rather than recording them simultaneously. This was both a practical response to the fact that the performer’s schedules rarely overlapped, and a way of ensuring that the performances could be mixed separately during post-

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<sup>37</sup> As already mentioned, I was inspired by minimalist composers to use tuned percussion instruments on *I.D.*, and *Hirakud* features a treated sample of an Indian tambura, as per the brief given to me by my collaborator Preti Taneja.

<sup>38</sup> As Timothy Warner puts it, the audio recording functions as pop’s “primary artefact and basic term of reference”. Timothy Warner, *Pop Music: Technology and Creativity: Trevor Horn and the Digital Revolution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p.xiv.

<sup>39</sup> The exception is *Malicious Insomnia*, which was the only work intended predominantly for live performance.

production.<sup>40</sup>

More significantly, my choice of presentation reflects how I intended the work to be consumed. *Down The Tubes* was designed for listening to on headphones in a specific environment: a London Underground carriage traveling on the Piccadilly line. In this instance, my role was to create a recording that could blend with extra-musical stimuli taking place in the real world, which I, as a composer, could not control.<sup>41</sup> As such, it is the only item in my portfolio that was not performed live, relying instead on a very specific interaction between the private and the public, a dynamic quite different from being part of an audience gathered for the collective purpose of watching a concert.

In the case of *I.D* and *Terse*, several songs from these projects contributed to my regular live repertoire.<sup>42</sup> However, I regard their fullest expression to be the fixed form heard on the recordings, since the textural intricacy and structural complexity of the music was conceived with repeated listening in mind. They therefore fit David Byrne's designation of records as finished artworks that are *reinterpreted* in live performance.<sup>43</sup> My focus during the creation of these works was purely on their musical and lyrical content, and I did not deem it necessary for this to be accompanied by additional visual information such as album artwork or music videos.

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<sup>40</sup> More information on the production of the work will be given later in this chapter.

<sup>41</sup> Of course, this is to some extent true of any digital recording, since portable media devices mean that the composer cannot predict the conditions in which their music will be listened to: indeed, there is nothing to stop people listening to *Down The Tubes* in a completely different environment from that for which it was intended. I am open to such a possibility, and have striven to make the musical content artistically satisfying irrespective of the degree to which the audience reflects upon the location that inspired it.

<sup>42</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017, for example, I curated a concert at Café Oto in London, in which my four-piece band performed songs from *I.D.*, and Laila Woozeer and myself performed songs from *Terse*.

<sup>43</sup> See David Byrne, *How Music Works* (Edinburgh/London: Canongate, paperback edition 2013), p.92.

This does not preclude artwork or videos being produced to accompany these works at a future stage: however, my purpose for doing so would be as a promotional tool rather than as an inherent part of the artistic conception.<sup>44</sup>

With *Malicious Insomnia*, I have decided to submit a video, in order to illustrate the specific context for which the piece was written. It was composed for a one-off concert given by the ensemble Sudden Junction in St. Peters', Notting Hill, a large church whose natural reverb lent additional power to the crescendos heard throughout the work, as well as providing a ringing quality to the piano for the more delicate sections. The video for *Malicious Insomnia*, produced by the filmmaker Joe Burns, moves between close-ups of the different musicians in the group, much in the same way that an audience member might shift their attention throughout the piece. While watching a video is not the same thing as attending a concert — indeed, the close-ups get us much *nearer* to the performers than would be possible for a live audience, making the film occupy an interesting position somewhere between a concert and a music video — I feel this dynamic approach comes closer to capturing the spirit of the event than would have been the case if he had just used a static camera shot. In addition, being able to see the expressive way in which the conductor Peter Yarde-Martin engaged with the music offers an insight into the performance that would have been absent on an audio recording.

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<sup>44</sup> While I generally listen to recorded music unaccompanied by visual stimuli, I recognise that such stimuli is still an important part of the way significant numbers of people engage with music. In acknowledgment of these differences, contemporary albums are often provided in a variety of formats — Everything Everything's *Get To Heaven* (2015), for example, is available as a digital download, a deluxe edition CD accompanied by bonus tracks, and a vinyl LP featuring artwork by the illustrator Andrew Archer, with several of the tracks also being available on Youtube as standalone music videos — and this is something I will consider once the music in the portfolio comes to be commercially released.

### Equipment and work pattern

The two main pieces of software I used were *Logic Pro* and *Sibelius*, both operated via my own Macintosh laptop. *Logic Pro* was my main compositional aid, and I found it useful both for generating and editing material. *Sibelius* I treated mainly as a notational tool, using it to produce all the scores I presented to musicians.

My choice of software was guided by the fact that I like to make compositional decisions by creating audio demonstrations of my ideas, which I then listen back to in order to identify areas for improvement.<sup>45</sup> This was primarily done via *Logic Pro*. In instances where pieces contained vocal and/or guitar parts, I recorded myself performing them, while in the case of instruments I could not play, I created digital approximations. *Logic Pro* allows users to type notes onto a virtual score, and to have them played back through synthesizer voices emulating particular instruments. There is an obvious danger in this approach, in that there are huge differences between acoustic sound sources and their virtual equivalents, and a composer too reliant on the latter could end up writing parts that are impractical,<sup>46</sup> or that do not take full advantage of a particular instrument's expressive qualities. However, I was not trying to create a substitute performance: rather, I was merely looking to get a sense of the textual elements of the music.

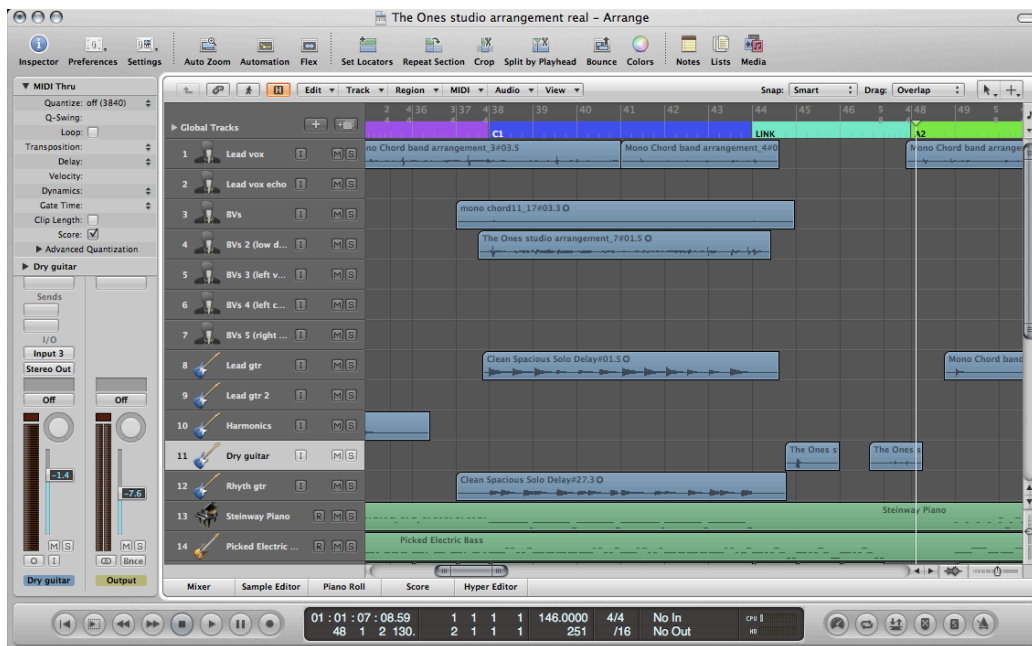
Since conciseness and formal clarity are such important elements of my work, I spent a lot of time redrafting these audio demonstrations, playing them back regularly to identify areas that could be improved. These consisted largely of sections that required extending or shortening, as well as moments where the texture needed additional elements. For this I

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<sup>45</sup> Since my early experience of music consisted almost entirely of listening to recordings, my compositional process reflects the way in which I originally learned to evaluate other peoples' work.

<sup>46</sup> *Logic Pro* effectively ignores instrumental ranges, for example, allowing you to hear instruments playing notes they never could in real life.

used *Logic Pro's* Arrangement display, which represents the constituent parts of a musical arrangement with coloured blocks. These can be chopped into smaller portions which can then be deleted or moved anywhere along a horizontal timeline, with the changes subsequently being reflected in the audio playback:



Ex. 2: Logic Pro's Arrangement window, from an early demo of "The Ones".

Only when I was happy with the basic compositional structure did I move on to consider performance elements such as dynamics, articulation and rhythmic feel. Wherever possible this was done with the input of the musicians I was collaborating with, firstly because this gave me a clearer indication of how the music would sound, and secondly because the musicians often had suggestions for how particular lines should be performed. In the case of *I.D.* and *Terse* I was fortunate enough to have regular workshop sessions in which different interpretive options could be tried. Examples of ideas that emerged during these sessions include the staccato articulation of the bass guitar during the opening of "The Ones", and the sudden drop in vocal dynamics in the final section of "Everbody's Eyes", both initiated by the musicians themselves. Even in instances where I had less face-to-face contact with musicians, however

— *Malicious Insomnia* was premiered without me having been present at rehearsals for example — I maintained regular e-mail contact, asking practical questions to ensure that the music was tailored to the strengths of each participant.

For recording and mixing my work, I collaborated with two professional sound engineers. Kit Wilson engineered most of the recording sessions,<sup>47</sup> and mixed *Down The Tubes* and *Terse*, while Joe Murgatroyd did the mixing for *I.D.* My willingness to share these responsibilities reflects the fact that while my project relied on computer technology — not least because of my chosen compositional process — extending the application of such technology was not my principle aim. This sets me apart from more production-orientated experimental pop acts such as Animal Collective, who have said that part of their motivation is the desire to create new timbres.<sup>48</sup> My own interest lies more in experimenting with textual elements such as rhythm, harmony, melody and form, and I generally favour a more naturalistic sound, both because this makes the textural processes easier to focus on, and because I like the intimacy of unprocessed vocal lines and clearly identifiable sound sources. While several of my main influences take a more high-fidelity approach — such as Max Tundra, whose rhythmic and harmonic inventiveness is combined with a glossy, polished studio aesthetic — my own production values have more in common with comparatively “live” sounding acts such as Deerhoof and Dirty Projectors.<sup>49</sup>

I therefore tended to treat production as separate from the composition

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<sup>47</sup> These took place at Unwound Recordings, based in Hoxton, London.

<sup>48</sup> See

<http://pitchfork.com/features/interviews/7585-animal-collective>. Accessed 15th August 2017.

<sup>49</sup> I say “comparatively” because these bands’ albums are still studio constructions, a point made by Dirty Projectors’ track “Unto Caesar”, which incorporates edited excerpts of studio chatter. Where they differ from Animal Collective and Max Tundra is in the lesser degree to which they transform their sound sources through studio processing.

process, although I occasionally incorporated a measure of digital processing in order to provide timbral contrast, as was the case with the slowly-accumulating delay applied to the synthesizer in “Groundhog”. In these instances I created a mockup of the effect using *Logic Pro’s* inbuilt audio editor and software plugins, which was then given to the mixing engineer to demonstrate the kind of sound I wanted.

The fact that the sound engineers were also working with *Logic Pro* meant that elements from my original demos could be carried over into the final recordings, as was the case for all the programmed drumbeats in *Down The Tubes*. More importantly, the software’s editing flexibility enabled us to treat performances much as I had treated my initial material, with sections from different takes being chopped up and edited together to create the versions heard on the final mix. My role in the editing and mixing process was to offer feedback on work in progress, whether by suggesting we search for an alternative take of a particular performance, or by identifying areas where parts needed to be more prominent in the mix.<sup>50</sup> I found this an extremely effective approach — my collaborators’ specialist knowledge allowed them to achieve a level of sound quality I could not have accomplished on my own, while my clear sense of how I wanted each track to unfold, developed during extensive redrafting at the composition stage, allowed me to help the engineers choose between different production options.

### Lyrics

Pop songwriters have approached lyrics in a wide variety of ways. While it is beyond the scope of this commentary to identify all of them, it is worth highlighting two broad categories of songwriters. At one extreme are those who seek to make their meaning completely transparent. A

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<sup>50</sup> As an example, after hearing the initial mix of “Groundhog”, I asked Joe Murgatroyd to make the lead vocals more prominent during the choruses. This was achieved by using *Logic Pro’s* automation feature to raise the volume of the lead vocals for just those portions of the song.



good example would be Darren Hayman of the band Hefner, who has stated that he aims to be “emphatically clear”: he wants his listeners to know exactly what he is singing about.<sup>51</sup> Others hold that the meaning of lyrics cannot be tied down by their author, and that, as Michael Stipe of the band R.E.M. puts it, “it’s up to the listener to interpret and...pull what they *need* from the music”.<sup>52</sup>

My own attitude lies between these poles. While I agree with Michael Stipe that a song’s power relies to a large degree on how it resonates with listeners’ own life experiences, and that this often occurs in ways the songwriter cannot predict, my lyrics are nevertheless rooted in specific subject matter taken from my own life. This is partly because I have a clear emotional investment in such material, and partly because I am interested in how real life subject matter can be transformed in the process of writing a song. This could simply be a case of changing small details — “The Ones” was inspired by a coach journey, yet I decided to transplant the action to a trans-Atlantic flight, since I liked the unusual dynamic of a narrator who commutes across continents. Yet I am also intrigued by how music can transform the significance of words that might otherwise seem prosaic. The chorus of “The Wagon” — “oh since you left the scene, my life feels pretty lean” — relies substantially on its melody for emotional impact, consisting of two ascending phrases, each preceded by a sustained high note.

Additionally, while the subject matter of my songs is important, I am equally concerned with how words *sound*, and I tend to agree with David Byrne who says that the sonic properties of song-lyrics “will inevitably trump literal sense, although literal sense doesn’t hurt”.<sup>53</sup> This means that I sometimes write phrases with unusual sentence construction: in

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Keith Negus and Pete Astor, “Songwriters and song lyrics: architecture, ambiguity and repetition”, *Popular Music*, 34 (2015), p.239.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Paul Zollo, *Songwriters on Songwriting* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, fourth edition 2003), p.634.

<sup>53</sup> Byrne, *How Music Works*, p.209.

“Groundhog” for example, the lines “tick it till it tocks and count to ten, oh talk me till we click again” were chosen primarily for musicality, not grammatical accuracy. However, I always take care to restrict such moments to particular sections of a song, and to provide enough details to suggest a concrete experience — in the case of “Groundhog” this means references to location (“city on the horizon”) and occasion (“So you’re gonna go, this’ll be our last sunset”).

I also had to consider the voice I was writing for. While my own voice tends to work best with relatively fast material — hence the number of songs on *I.D.* whose lyrics contain lots of consonants in quick session — the lead vocalist on *Terse*, Laila Woozeer, is able to sustain much longer notes. This meant I could experiment with choruses more reliant on held vowel sounds, such as those in “Vicarious” and “Everybody’s Eyes”. Since I knew I would not be the lead vocalist, and because I had confidence in Laila’s ability to lend the words emotional significance, I was also encouraged to explore subject matter less closely related to my own experience, and to leave greater room for listeners’ own interpretations. This is most marked in “Cavenia”. Here I came up with an entirely fictional scenario — a daughter playing the part of her departed sister Cavenia in order to console their mother — but decided to leave elements of the lyrics ambiguous: the family roles in the song are not explicitly named, and it is never made clear whether Cavenia is dead or merely living elsewhere.

A final important aspect of my approach to lyrics is my use of repetition. This is a crucial element in pop songwriting — Negus and Astor (2015) have described it as a “prerequisite”<sup>54</sup> — not only because it helps to clarify form, but also because of its rhythmic potential. I often repeat lyrics to provide rhythmic emphasis: a good example would be the phrase “in the morning light” which is delivered several times in quick succession in “Give Yourself Some Credit”. I also follow the standard practice of

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<sup>54</sup> Negus and Astor, *Songwriters*, p.236.

bringing words back for choruses, since this helps to reinforce the musical structure. However, the lyrics sometimes have to be adapted to take into account transformations in the melody. Where melodic lines have been expanded, this requires additional words, and I feel that these should serve a narrative purpose, even if they were originally included for musical reasons.<sup>55</sup> In “Half Love”, for example, the phrase “the pain I faint would feel” in the first chorus is replaced by “the pain I’m finally learning how to feel”, allowing an expansion of the melodic line *and* providing an insight into the progression of the narrator’s feelings.

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<sup>55</sup> I generally write the music — including vocal melodies — before the lyrics. This is because I find, like many songwriters, that music is a powerful stimulus for lyrical subject matter. See for example, the discussion with Andy Partridge in Daniel Rachel, *Isle of Noises: Conversations with great British songwriters* (London: Picador, 2013), p.215.

### **Chapter 3 — Features of submitted works**

The items in my portfolio were composed between September 2012 and September 2016. Since *I.D.* was created over a long period — often at the same time as other projects — it would be impractical to arrange this chapter entirely chronologically. In addition, while each of the pieces presented individual conceptual challenges, there was also considerable overlap in the compositional issues I chose to explore, and this is best illustrated by comparing how I approached these issues in different works. Thus, after a brief overview of each project, which will provide context for the discussion that follows, the majority of this chapter will be presented thematically, focusing on the compositional questions that occupied me throughout my PhD, and using the works submitted as exemplars of the techniques and aesthetic principles developed in the process.

#### Overview

***I.D.*** is a full-length album of experimental pop songs, with the title referring to the main compositional question I set out to explore on it: the extent to which melodic material can be transformed while maintaining a recognisable identity. This is expressed in a variety of ways across the album, including rhythmic displacement, abbreviation and extension, and the swapping of vocal and instrumental roles. The title *I.D.* is also reflective of the lyrical content, and while there is no overlying narrative, the songs are all in some way concerned with personality traits, dealing with a number of common song themes — romance, travel, ageing and addiction — from unusual and/or unreliable perspectives.

While I spent a great deal of time determining the correct sequence of tracks — up-tempo songs are grouped together to build up momentum, while slower and/or more delicate tracks are evenly distributed to

provide breathing points for the audience — much of the material also featured in my band’s live sets, where it was performed in a different order and interspersed with older work. It was important, therefore, that each track should work as a standalone piece of music, and *I.D.* functions both as a unified album, and as a collection of “case studies” exploring individual compositional techniques not usually associated with pop music. These include polyrhythmic layering (“Give Yourself Some Credit”), pointillist textural relationships (“Home Is Where”, “A Plan”), and rapid alternation between different modal scales (“Groundhog”).

***Down The Tubes*** is a through-composed instrumental work designed to be listened to privately while travelling on the London Underground; specifically on the stretch of the Piccadilly Line that runs south from Finsbury Park to Covent Garden.<sup>56</sup> The biggest musical influence on the piece was Daedelus’ 2002 album *Invention*, which mixes programmed drumbeats and synth-lines with samples from old acoustic recordings. I wanted to do something similar with *Down The Tubes*, but using newly scored instrumental lines instead of samples:<sup>57</sup> with greater control over my pitch-material I could employ frequent harmonic modulation to suggest the forward motion of a journey. The other major influence was Igor Stravinsky’s music for the ballet *Le sacre du printemps*. The high levels of metric change in the score greatly appeal to me, and I have long wanted to apply the same technique to a work featuring electronic

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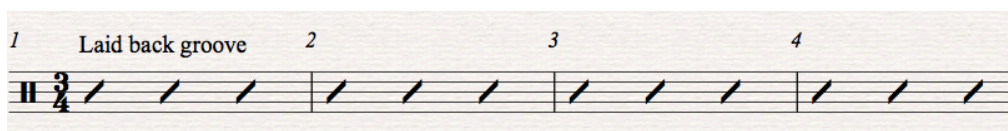
<sup>56</sup> This route was one that Igor Stravinsky — one of the main musical inspirations for the work — could theoretically have made on his first trip to London in 1912. The occasion of his visit was the British premiere of his ballet *Le Oiseau de feu* at the Royal Opera House, located less than 5 minutes’ walk from Covent Garden Tube. See E. W. White, *Stravinsky: The Composer and His Works* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) p.38.

<sup>57</sup> The piece has a rather different sound from *Invention* largely due to the fact that no samples were used, hence the lack of vinyl static. While I could have artificially added this sound to create the *illusion* of something more antique, I felt this would have been an unnecessary distraction. In any case, it was the general principle of combining strong instrumental melodies and electronic beats, rather than any specific production techniques, that I was most interested in.

drumbeats, since I felt the resulting rhythmic friction would be extremely energising.

The piece consists of an introduction and seven short movements, each based on a different Tube station: “Finsbury Park”, “Arsenal”, “Holloway Road”, “Caledonian Road”, “King’s Cross St. Pancras”, “Russell Square” and “Holborn”.<sup>58</sup> There are several geographical references in the work, with the connotations of different stops inspiring several of my compositional decisions. The increasingly dissonant harmony in “Holloway Road”, for example, was inspired by the tragic life of one of the area’s most famous residents, producer Joe Meek, while the high density of notes in “Holborn” reflects the fact that this is one of the busiest stops on the line. While audiences do not need to recognise these references in order to enjoy the work, I hope the resulting musical variety creates a strong sense of passing between distinct locations.

***Malicious Insomnia*** is a concert piece written for the contemporary music ensemble Sudden Junction, whose sets typically combine contemporary classical compositions with new instrumental arrangements of pop and electronica tracks, and whose lineup features a jazz pianist — Jason Anderson — alongside five classical players. I was inspired by the group’s mixed musical background to experiment with flexible scoring in two of the parts: the drum score consists largely of text descriptions of what kind of feel to play, while the piano part allows the player to choose their own chord voicings:



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<sup>58</sup> These occur as follows: “Finsbury Park” 0:13-1:07, “Arsenal” 1:08-2:42, “Holloway Road” 2:43-4:14, “Caledonian Road” 4:15-7:20, “King’s Cross St. Pancras” 7:21-9:16, “Russell Square” 9:17-10:57, “Holborn” 10:57-12:15. Since the journey *ends* at Covent Garden rather than passing through it, I decided not to write a section based on this stop.

Ex.3: An extract of the drum part from *Malicious Insomnia*.

The image shows a musical score for a drum part in 3/4 time, spanning measures 15 to 18. The notation is on a grand staff with a treble clef on the top staff and a bass clef on the bottom staff. The top staff contains rests in all four measures. The bottom staff contains a single diamond-shaped note (representing a drum) in the first half of each measure. The notes are labeled with chord symbols: Bb in measure 15, D in measure 16, Eb in measure 17, and F in measure 18.

Ex.4: An extract of the piano part from *Malicious Insomnia*.

The title was inspired by an interview I read with the writer Marilynne Robinson, where she describes having “benevolent insomnia” that allows her to be productive late at night.<sup>59</sup> *Malicious Insomnia* is about a less welcome form of wakefulness where worries stack up in between bouts of half-sleep. The principle textural device mirrors this: each of the three sections in the piece begins with a thin, pointillist texture, which becomes thicker as instruments develop their own independent lines.<sup>60</sup>

***Terse*** is a four-track E.P. written for Laila Woozeer — an extremely versatile singer with experience in the worlds of jazz, contemporary classical and indie music — plus myself on electric guitar and backing vocals. I was inspired by Regina Spektor’s album *Mary Ann Meets the Gravediggers and Other Short Stories* (2006), in which most of the songs feature just voice and piano, with the accompaniment often consisting of little more than isolated staccato piano notes. I wanted to try something similar on guitar, but with the added textural possibilities of a second vocal line. The sparseness of the musical setting places the emphasis on two key elements, texture — how the two voices interact, and how the articulation of the guitar part evolves as each song progresses — and harmony. Three of the four songs are based on non-triadic intervals,

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<sup>59</sup> See <http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/5863/the-art-of-fiction-no-198-marilynne-robinson>. Accessed 15th August 2017.

<sup>60</sup> The piece consists of a loose ABA structure, with the second A consisting of material recycled from the first. On the video recording, these sections occur at 0:13-1:35 (A1), 1:36-3:00 (B) and 3:01-4:29 (A2).

while the remaining track, “Vicarious”, is in a more traditional extended diatonic idiom, functioning as a breathing space for the audience.

As with *I.D.*, *Terse* has no overriding lyrical concept. Discussing the project with Laila beforehand, she mentioned that a lot of her previous singing work had involved subject matter that was clearly fictional/fantastical, such as Tom Green’s setting of Lewis Carrol’s poem “Jabberwocky”.<sup>61</sup> However, she also mentioned that she was interested in interpreting material with a more personal connection to my own life, and I therefore decided to adopt a range of approaches for writing the words to the E.P. “Cavenia” is an entirely fictional scenario, while the other three tracks build upon my approach of translating real-life experiences into song.

### Tunefulness and sectionalisation

The most consistent aesthetic feature across the portfolio is the quality I described in Chapter 2 as “tunefulness”. This refers to melodic phrases whose arresting effect is achieved by balancing the expected and the unexpected, so as to be surprising enough to grab a listener’s attention, yet accessible enough to be easily assimilated (Webb, 1998).<sup>62</sup> Take, for example, this phrase from the opening section of “Malicious Insomnia”<sup>63</sup>:



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<sup>61</sup> Tom Green is a London based composer who runs his own ensemble, Tom Green and the Lungs. The group’s performance at my night *Pop Composition* on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2015 featured Laila Woozeer on lead vocals.  
<sup>62</sup> “The key to writing interesting — even brilliant — melody is to lead the ear in a path which is both *pleasant* and to some degree *unexpected*.”

Webb, Jimmy, *Tunesmith: Inside the Art of Songwriting* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), p.168.

<sup>63</sup> Although the melody is split between flute, clarinet, piano, violin and violoncello, it is notated here as a single line for ease of analysis.



*Ex. 5 – the opening melody of Malicious Insomnia.*

Here, the unusual gesture of a major 7<sup>th</sup> leap, heard at the start of bars 1, 2 and 5, is set against more conventional stepwise intervals. The use of sequences, with bars 2 and 4 echoing bars 1 and 3 respectively, lend the phrasing of the melody a measure of regularity, while the introduction of new material at bar 5, and the use of a new time signature at bar 6, prevent the passage from becoming overly predictable. The combination of these factors results in a sequence of pitches possessing what I term a *concrete identity* — a distinctiveness of character that helps a listener to re-identify the theme when it is repeated later in the work. While the desire to compose such melodies springs from my love of pop songwriting — a field in which, as Steve Jones has argued, the ability to produce the “instantly memorable musical phrase” is paramount<sup>64</sup> — this need not be restricted to vocal melody, as the above example from *Malicious Insomnia* demonstrates.

In order to maintain such tunefulness across the portfolio, I drew upon another pop-derived aesthetic value: sectionalisation. As Timothy Warner has written, the verse/chorus song form aid’s pop’s accessibility by delivering content in “small, easily followed portions” (Warner, 2003), breaking the material up into sections wherein the individual character of each melody can be easily grasped. Each of the works in my portfolio relies on this underlying principle, even in instances where I wasn’t working within a verse/chorus format. *Down The Tubes*, for example, is not only instrumental, but also requires a sense of continual forward motion, which would have made a typical pop song structure inappropriate, since the amount of repetition required would have held up the musical journey. Yet the piece is still highly sectionalised, with each of the seven main portions of the work being identified through the

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<sup>64</sup> Steve Jones, *Rock Formation: Music, Technology, and Mass Communication* (Newbury Park; California: Sage, 1992), p.12.

introduction of a new tempo and timbral palate:<sup>65</sup> the intention here was to “reset” the listeners’ ears so that they could hear each section as a distinct entity. Within the sections, the material was then further subdivided into a number of contrasting melodic ideas, each meeting my required standards of tunefulness. Here, for example, is the opening theme of “Arsenal”:



*Ex. 6 – the opening theme of “Arsenal”.*

This is immediately repeated, but with a modulated ending:



*Ex. 7 – answering phrase from “Arsenal”.*

The modulation paves the way for an entirely new secondary theme:



<sup>65</sup> At 2:43, for example, the bright, trumpet-led sound of “Arsenal” (131bpm), is abruptly replaced by “Holloway Road” (185bpm), which is a gentler movement based around violin, piano and classical guitar.

*Ex. 8 – secondary theme from “Arsenal”.*

Again, these melodies contain concrete identities resulting from a combination of stepwise motion alternated with larger leaps, plus careful balancing of rests and longer/shorter note values to ensure rhythmic vitality. Their deployment side by side is typical of the piece as a whole, with each of the sections reprising and contrasting melodic material in a manner somewhat akin to the way repeating verses and choruses are alternated in a pop song. What prevents this getting in the way of the piece’s sense of continual change is the fact that themes are not repeated *between* sections. Instead, each section contains its own unique set of melodic material. I took this decision so as to aid the impression created by the temporal and timbral contrasts that the music is moving between different locations: *Down The Tubes* remains a through-composed piece, even if at the micro-level it proceeds according to the pop-derived principle of balancing contrast and repetition.

This balancing principle is applied in a slightly different manner in *I.D.* and *Terse*, where it takes the form of *periodic variation*. Here, melodies are periodically reprised in subtly modified forms and interspersed with other material, rather than existing in a state of continual evolution. I first explored this technique in an earlier work, *Hirakud*, which is included as an appendix on the USB stick accompanying this commentary.<sup>66</sup> The piece was created in 2013 to accompany a live reading of a prose poem by the writer Preti Taneja, and the music is largely through-composed, moving between passages in contrasting Indian scales to match the sequence of moods in the text. However, I wanted to include a few recurring elements to provide a degree of symmetry, and for this I decided to use an ascending clarinet theme, which is interspersed several times throughout the piece in altered forms. Here is the theme as it is first introduced (0:33-

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<sup>66</sup> Although *Hirakud* was written during the period of my research, I felt it did not match the aesthetic criteria described in Chapter 2 closely enough to warrant inclusion in my main portfolio. It is included as an appendix to illustrate how my use of the periodic variation technique first emerged.

0:55 on the recording):




*Ex. 9 – first clarinet variation from Hira-kud.*

The second statement of the theme is abbreviated, and includes a minim pause in the fourth bar to provide rhythmic surprise (2:25-2:34):



*Ex. 10 – second clarinet variation from Hira-kud.*

The third statement is more radically different, having been transposed and augmented, with several of the intervals also having been altered: the gap between the first two notes, for example, is now a semitone rather than a tone. However, the broad shape of the melody — a stepwise ascent followed by a larger leap upwards then downwards — is maintained (4:16-4:33):





modified material — separating the individual phrases of the melody and interspersing them with new countermelodies in the second verse of “The Ones” (1:06-1:24), for example, or overlapping the closing portion of the chorus melody with the opening portion of the chorus harmony halfway through the final chorus of “Vicarious” (2:46-2:48) — there was always enough of the original melody remaining to enable listeners to identify it.

### Sectionalisation and musical process

Periodic variation is one instance of a broader tendency within my portfolio whereby musical process — the transformation of material — is explored on a section-by-section basis rather than unfolding over an entire work, as might be the case in a piece of classical composition.<sup>67</sup> Of course, there are huge advantages to allowing a listener to follow a particular compositional technique in a logical, linear fashion: in the most extreme examples, such as Steve Reich’s *Clapping Music* (1972)<sup>68</sup>, one can feel swept up in an organic process, and knowing the likely end point only adds to the sense of propulsion. Yet it is also the case that such pieces become *about* their processes — Steve Reich wrote in 1968 of wanting “pieces of music that are literally processes”, with an initial concept governing every aspect of the “note-to-note detail”, i.e. the material. I am strongly drawn to the kinetic energy of such processes,<sup>69</sup> yet as a

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<sup>67</sup> This characterisation of classical composition is, of course, a generalisation, and I certainly do not mean to suggest that *all* classical works proceed in this way. Yet a great number of classical composers — certainly a greater number than the pop equivalent — mould their material in order to communicate a particular compositional process. The composer Seán Clancy puts this very succinctly: “my pieces tend to start with a musical concept that I will try and articulate through the musical object” (Clancy, 2017).

<sup>68</sup> This piece consists solely of a single musical process — two rhythmic patterns start in unison, after which the second is moved forward by a quaver every few bars, until they are once more in unison.

<sup>69</sup> Reich’s attitude to process represents just one of many within the world of post-War classical composition. I use him as a case study because I find the results of his musical processes aesthetically pleasing. The rhythmic patterns of *Clapping Music*, for example, strongly appeal to



*Ex. 21 - the opening of Malicious Insomnia.*

When a version of this theme is brought back at Bar 15 (0:28 on the video recording), the pianist is now playing sustained chords:

The image shows a musical score for five instruments: Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), Drums (Dr.), Piano (Pno.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The score is in 3/4 time and covers measures 15 to 19. The Flute part begins in measure 17 with a melodic line marked *mf*. The Clarinet part has melodic lines in measures 15 and 19, also marked *mf*. The Drums part consists of a steady rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, marked *mf*. The Piano part features sustained chords in the bass clef: Bb in measure 15, D in measure 16, Eb in measure 17, F in measure 18, and Bb in measure 19, all marked *mf*. The Violoncello part has a melodic line in measures 15 and 16, marked *mf*, and then plays a pizzicato (pizz.) line in measures 18 and 19, also marked *mf*.

*Ex 22. – the entry of the piano chords in Malicious Insomnia.*

As A1 progresses, first the violoncello, then the violin, then finally the clarinet switch to playing long-held notes, so that by Bar 60 (1:12) the flute is the sole melodic instrument:



Ex. 23 – an extract from the later stages of A1 in *Malicious Insomnia*.

Rather than being presented as a single process extending across the entire piece, this device is employed in stages. Steps in the textural process coincide with the start of particular themes — as with the entry of the piano chords at bar 15 (Ex. 22) — and the entire process is “reset” at the opening of B and A2 (1:36 and 3:03 respectively on the video recording), wherein the melody goes back to being split between instruments before once more thickening into a homophonic texture. This allows the piece to preserve the sense of discrete sections, so as to help listeners engage with the unique melodic material contained in each. The sectionalisation is aided by several abrupt dynamic shifts — at the start of B, for example, the music drops from *fortissimo* to *piano*, to signal that a new portion of the piece has begun — and the fact that the A1 and A2 sections revolve around staccato notes, while B is much more legato. Unlike in *I.D.* and *Terse*, which were designed for repeated listening, the process here occurs much more on the “surface” of the music — it is clear from watching the musicians perform the piece live that each section moves from pointilism to homophony, whereas, say, the exact nature of the melodic variation in “Home Is Where” might not be audible on a first

listen. Yet the principle of melodic signaling — dividing the material into portions easily assimilable by an audience— is the same. In this sense, the work contains several instances of the experience of organic change, while retaining a pop-derived relationship between tunefulness and sectionalisation.

### Structural pacing

One possible criticism of sectionalisation is that it assumes listeners have a very short attention span, with even the longest work in my portfolio, *Down The Tubes*, being divided up into movements lasting the length of pop songs or less, which are then further subdivided into a series of contrasting melodic themes. Yet the fact that I want listeners to be able to engage with sections individually does not preclude these sections also being considered as part of a larger musical whole.

At a micro-level, while moving between sections replaces one type of musical material with another, part of the effect of the new material relies on the listener's memory of what came before it. In "Everybody's Eyes", for example, although the build section, which first occurs at 0:14-0:23, has several individual aesthetic characteristics — a melancholy feel resulting from extensive use of major 7ths, for example, and a rhythmic hook consisting of two semiquavers followed by a crotchet<sup>70</sup> — it also achieves its emotional impact partly because its tonal centre of B major marks an abrupt shift from the D major tonal centre of the preceding verse. A similar thing happens at a more macro-level, in that individual songs or movements have their own identities, yet can also introduce striking contrasts into a larger structural scheme: examples include "Holloway Road" from *Down The Tubes* and "A Plan" from *I.D.*, both of which mark quiet moments of respite in otherwise frenetic works, an effect made more noticeable by the higher pace of what precedes them ("Arsenal" and "Dale At 39").

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<sup>70</sup> This occurs on the words "disappear" and "run away".

A composer's sense of how long to stay with their material depends on the type of experience they want to create for their listener, and my own structural pacing — which I would term “concise” — is derived from a desire to keep the listener in a suspended state of tension between contrast and repetition. As Gary Burns has stated, managing this balance is a key part of how pop music achieves its “meaning and emotion”,<sup>71</sup> a factor written into the design of the verse/chorus song form, which alternates contrasting elements at repeated intervals, and which contains a structural feature — the bridge — specifically intended to introduce new material at the exact point where a song would otherwise become repetitive.<sup>72</sup>

I have rigorously stuck to this principle, and have determined that no structural unit — which includes the combination of a verse followed by a chorus, since this pairing is so standard within pop as to feel like a single entity — should occur three times in a row without the introduction of new material. In songs where I follow a second chorus with a bridge, as with “Southern Compass”, this is unlikely to strike a listener as particularly unusual, since it is a common enough practice within pop-songwriting, though not universal.<sup>73</sup> The majority of the tracks on *I.D.* and *Terse*, however, contain a greater number of structural features than the

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<sup>71</sup> Gary Burns, “A Typology of ‘Hooks’ in Popular Records”, *Popular Music*, 6:1 (1987): p.2.

<sup>72</sup> Jimmy Webb has said that that “no matter how beautiful the melody or how clever and moving the lyric, when the same musical pattern is repeated over and over, auditory boredom occurs” and that the purpose of the bridge is to avoid this happening. See Jimmy Webb, *Tunesmith: Inside the Art of Songwriting* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), p.113.

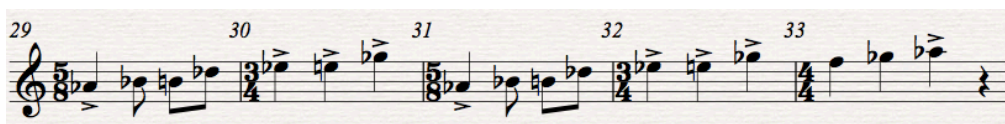
<sup>73</sup> Even the Beatles occasionally followed a song's second chorus with a third verse, as with “Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds” from *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967). Here, the additional repetition results in a flattening of intensity, which in this one instance is precisely the effect required, since the lulling, hallucinogenic quality of the music is aided by its repetition. In most cases though, a contrast is required at such a point to avoid monotony, as, for example, the charming instrumental interlude in The Beatles' “In My Life”.

average pop song, and/or an unexpected ordering of events. In the case of “Here And Now”, for example, a “bridge” is introduced at 1:06-1:28 where one would normally expect the second chorus, and although this is followed by two variations on the chorus — a modulated version with different lyrics at 1:28-1:50, and an instrumental variation at 1:51-1:56 — the chorus proper does not return until 2:17-2:42. Meanwhile, the “bridge” is introduced for a second time at 1:57-2:16, and since the bridge sections in pop songs generally do not occur more than once, we might instead regard this section as a competing chorus.

This is an example of *modified pop structural pacing* — the sense of how long sections should be sustained before a contrast is introduced is clearly derived from pop, yet the ordering and quantity of these sections is highly atypical. Because it does not rely on *exact* adherence to the verse/chorus form, this approach can equally readily be applied to instrumental music. In *Malicious Insomnia*, for example, there is extensive repetition of material broken up by contrasts, and within the first and third sections there is even the coupling of two contrasting themes — labeled below as theme A and B — in a manner similar to the traditional verse/chorus relationship:



Ex. 24 – theme A from *Malicious Insomnia*.



Ex.25 – theme B from *Malicious Insomnia*.

Yet as with “Here And Now”, the piece contains more than two repeated elements — both the first and the third sections conclude with a

homophonic theme unrelated to either theme A or B<sup>74</sup> — as well as a contrasting middle section with a completely different temporal and dynamic character.<sup>75</sup>

Again, we have an example of structural pacing that is derived from the verse/chorus form, but not confined to it. My wish to keep the listener constantly suspended between repetition and contrast — a more sustained version of the “meaning and emotion” Gary Burns has identified as resulting from successful deployment of pop’s structural principles — meant that I was keen to avoid it ever feeling like I was using the verse/chorus form *habitually*, since this would have dulled the sense of urgency in the music. We have seen the main ways in which I avoided this problem at the macro-level, through the use of additional structural elements, atypical ordering of sections, and the application of modified pop structural pacing to the unfamiliar context of instrumental music. I now turn to the ways in which I avoided habitualness at the more micro-level of musical material.

#### Musical complexity: rhythm

Throughout this chapter I will be referring to aspects of my musical material as being *musically complex*. This term is always relative to the expectations of a particular genre:<sup>76</sup> in my own case, the expectations I

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<sup>74</sup> This occurs at 1:20-1:35 and 3:40-4:19 on the video recording.

<sup>75</sup> While one could conceivably regard this section as the piece’s “bridge”, the contrast it strikes with the sections that surround it is much starker than that found in the majority of pop bridges, particularly in terms of its half-speed pulse. The nearest equivalents to such a gesture in the pop canon are found in through-composed songs like The Beach Boys’ “Good Vibrations”, Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody” and Radiohead’s “Paranoid Android”, all of which feature radical drops of tempo. The structural complexity of these songs highlights the point that such contrasts are not readily compatible with a *strict* adherence to the verse/chorus form, even if all three maintain a *connection* with this form via their use of repeated hooks.

<sup>76</sup> A good case study of this phenomenon is the use of a string quartet on The Beatles’ “Eleanor Rigby”. Here, an instrumental lineup that had been

have chosen to play with are those associated with the pop songwriting tradition from which my core aesthetic values are derived, and relate predominantly to rhythm, harmony and texture. Within the pop tradition, for example, it is normal for songs to revolve around a steady pulse and to follow a single metre (Shave, 2008). My music departs from this norm through the use of two different types of rhythmic complexity.

*Horizontal rhythmic complexity* is the use of contrasting metres occurring in sequence. During portions of verse 1 in “The Ones”, for example, the time signature changes once per bar, progressing through multiple compound and simple time signatures — 4/4, 3/8, 4/4, 2/4, 3/8, 2/4, 3/8, 4/4 — in the space of eight seconds (0:20-0:28). Because I wanted to allow the melody to flow in interesting ways rather than making it subservient to a static time signature, the metre is applied in a linear manner, responding to the needs of the melody at any given moment. Here, for example, is the song’s opening vocal line:

The image shows a musical score for the opening vocal line of the song "The Ones". It consists of three staves of music, each with a different time signature. The first staff (measures 11-13) is in 4/4 time. The second staff (measures 14-16) starts in 3/8 time, changes to 2/4 time in measure 15, and returns to 3/8 time in measure 16. The third staff (measures 17-21) starts in 2/4 time, changes to 3/8 time in measure 18, 2/4 time in measure 19, 3/8 time in measure 20, and finally 4/4 time in measure 21. The lyrics are: "A - no - ther mor - ning on the plane to work A - no - ther o - ver - crow - ded down - er I don't know why I ne - ver spend the night there And treat my - self to some ho - tel with de - cent views".

one of the most perennial groupings within classical music for over two centuries, was suddenly applied to a context with an entirely different set of timbral expectations, namely that a pop song would be backed by combinations of drums and guitars, with keyboards and “guest” instruments from the orchestral family being treated as optional extras. The mixed messages that “Eleanor Rigby” represented for a 1966 audience — a pop vocal backed *solely* by a classical ensemble — meant that that same audience would likely have regarded the song as being musically complex.

*Ex.26 – the opening vocal line from “The Ones”.*

The use of the 3/8 bars in the context of a predominantly non-compound sequence of metres allows the melody to “fold in” on itself, creating rhythmic friction when the line “I don’t know why I never spend the night there” comes earlier than we would expect if it were a straightforward answer phrase to “Another overcrowded downer”. The energy of the song relies on many such instances, with conventional question and answer phrasing being subverted by the constant shifting of metres, giving the verses a deliberately disorientating effect that builds up tension before the relative release provided by the more four-square choruses:

38 39 40 41 42 43 44

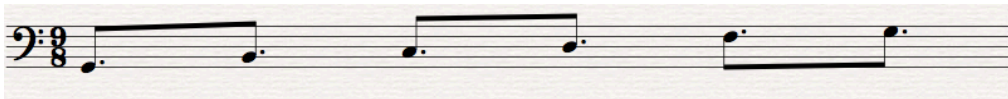
Thank you for the time kill 'scuse me while I take this call

*Ex.27 – The opening vocal line of chorus 1 from “The Ones”.*

The other type of rhythmic complexity employed in the portfolio is *vertical rhythmic complexity*, i.e. the use of contrasting metres occurring at the same time. During the “Holborn” section of *Down The Tubes*, for example, there is an instance where the kick drum articulates a 3/4 pulse while the other instruments maintain a 4/4 feel (11:32-11:33). This pulls the body in two directions at once, but *only for that moment*: when the kick drum returns at 11:40, it is to provide a more straightforward 4/4 accompaniment. Such moments contain a concrete identity that functions somewhat like a melodic hook, drawing the ear to an arresting musical event that occurs for a brief amount of time. I generally restricted this technique to portions of the music that contained less melodic information, so as to provide an ear-catching effect without having to compete with a lead melody for the listener’s attention: examples include the intro to “Here And Now” (0:00-0:08) and the outro to “A Plan” (3:23-3:44) — non melodic-passages designed to lead the listener in/out of the

main body of the music — both of which contain triple metre phrases laid on top of a duple metre.

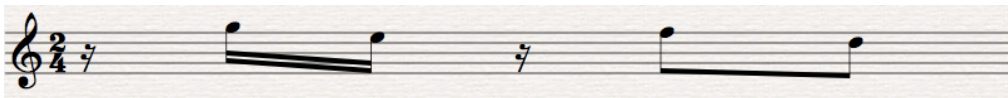
The one portion of the portfolio in which melodic and rhythmic hooks appear at the same time — in which, in fact, each generates the other — is “Give Yourself Some Credit”. The song is based around three riffs, each initially allotted to a single instrument:



Riff A (bass guitar)



Riff B (electric guitar)



Riff C (synthesizer)

*Ex.29 – the three main riffs in “Give Yourself Some Credit”.*

In the early stages of the song the instrumentalists play these riffs as repeating ostinatos, while the vocalist sings variations on each in turn. With each new variation, the instrument referenced momentarily breaks off its ostinato to double the vocal melody, before returning to its repeated pattern. The pitch profile of each riff determines the general shape of the vocal melody, while the metre imposed by each vocal variation results in a series of different polyrhythmic clashes: 7/8 against 2/4 for the line “smart adverts go for my eyes” (0:08-0:11), for example, followed by 2/4 against 9/8 for “in the morning light, in the morning light, in the morning” (0:12-0:14).

My aim here was to create an exhilarating experience for an experimental



pop audience, to whom musical surprise and accessibility would be equally appealing. Yet I still had to ensure that the quality of surprise would not *override* that of accessibility. My solution was twofold. Firstly, for much of the opening half of the song I decided to include a steady 8/8 drumbeat in the background for listeners to use as a reference pulse. Secondly, I decided not to sustain the polyrhythmic technique detailed above for the entire track, hence the sections from 1:37-1:49 and 1:50-2:11, in which the metres articulated by each part are vertically aligned. Yet even these sections do not maintain the same time signature throughout, and the song therefore contains *relative degrees of rhythmic complexity*: the sections at 1:37-1:49 and 1:50-2:11 are horizontally more complex than the average pop song, but more straightforward than the sections that precede them, since they contain less simultaneously conflicting information.

This idea of relative rhythmic complexity extends to my overall rhythmic approach. My desire to make choice of metre respondent to the flow of melody means that all my music has a “base level” of rhythmic complexity in comparison with the static metres found in the majority of mainstream pop songs. Beyond this, however, rhythmic complexity is applied to varying degrees according to the expressive needs of the material. “Give Yourself Some Credit” exists at one end of that scale, as the most rhythmically complex work in the portfolio — while the two middle sections represent brief moments of respite, the song is ultimately concerned with information overload, and concludes with a continual slowing of tempo as the lead vocal comes unstuck from the underlying pulse.

At the other end of the scale is “Vicarious”, where I decided to employ a simpler metric scheme to aid the song’s soothing quality: it was intended as a gentle tonal interlude between two spikier tracks based around non-triadic harmony (“Everybody’s Eyes” and “See Through”). Rhythmically, relative stability is achieved through the use of a predominantly 4/4

metre, with the track only occasionally switching to 2/4 at particular moments of emphasis: near the end of the build sections, for example, a single 2/4 bar extends the vocal phrase and allows an auditory drawing of breath before the emphatic melodic and lyrical hook of the chorus:

13 14 15 16 17  
 I guess you must be cur- ious They're for a friend they're not for me - e - e -  
 18 19 20 21  
 e - e - e John gets the guil- ty pleas ure - s  
 22 23 24 25 26  
 Eve gets the de- cent stuff I get vi-car - i - ou - s

*Ex.30 – The first build section and chorus from “Vicarious” (the chorus begins at bar 20).*

The fact that even a song specifically designed to act as a stable musical “buffer” contains occasional changes of time signature, illustrates how ingrained my sense of metric flexibility is: in fact, “Vicarious” was written intuitively at the guitar, and I only became aware of the exact metres being used when I came to transcribe the lead vocal line. Clearly for something as complex as “Give Yourself Some Credit” the temporal scheme had to be more carefully mapped out,<sup>77</sup> yet even here I relied on intuition to guide the general rhythmic feel I wanted to create at each instant. Choice of metre has thus become an internalised part of my moment-to-moment compositional decision-making.

<sup>77</sup> I used Logic Pro’s MIDI scoring function to mock up what I wanted each instrument to play — this enabled me to see the vertical relationships between the parts on the screen, and then play back a rough approximation of what they would sound like.

### Musical complexity: harmony

In common with a lot of pop music, much of my material is in an extended diatonic idiom, i.e. it clearly revolves around a particular tonal centre, but also includes chords existing outside of the diatonic key. The first verse of “Re Preston”, for example, which is orientated around F major, contains the non-diatonic chords of Ab major and A major 7. Examples of extended diatonicism within pop are too numerous to name, yet as a particularly effective example, consider the song “Forget” (2012) by Lianne Le Havas: here, while the non-diatonic chords are an original and extremely striking part of what gives the music its character, they do not seem overly atypical of what we might expect in a pop song.<sup>78</sup>

One could say something similar for much of my music, save for the high rate at which the tonal centre changes. Modulations usually occur at the start of each new section, but sometimes within sections as well — in “RE Preston”, the first verse revolves around F major, the choruses around D major, and the second verse begins with a tonal centre of Eb major, but switches to C major halfway through (at 1:10). Using the analogy of vertical and horizontal complexity that I developed for discussing my rhythmic language, the chords in “RE Preston” are not vertically complex, consisting for the most part of straightforward triads. The diatonic relationship *between* the chords, however, and the pace at which the tonal centre changes, exist at the upper levels of how much complexity one can incorporate into an extended diatonic framework. What prevents such gestures from straying *outside* this framework is the fact that the chorus returns the listener to the same tonal centre each time. Since the chorus is traditionally the focus of the pop song, in the sense of being where the most important musical and lyrical hooks lie, I found it useful to keep this as a harmonic anchor, both in terms of the slower rate at which chords change, and the fact that its chord progression remains the same each

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<sup>78</sup> The song is in Gb major, but the chorus contains the non-diatonic chords of F major, A major and G major.

time. This serves to reassure listeners that the harmonic restlessness within and between the verses will never last so long that one can no longer identify the song's structural components.

More immediately unusual are the portions of the portfolio where I have chosen to explore non-triadic harmony. I first became interested in this idea during the writing of *Down The Tubes*. One of the few recurring elements in the piece is a chord built up of stacked 7ths, first heard at the opening of "Finsbury Park" (0:13):



Ex.31 – The opening chords of "Finsbury Park".

Transposed versions of this chord occur in each of the subsequent sections in the work. Although, as previously noted, I wanted the piece to have a feeling of continual forward motion — and did not, therefore, opt to reprise melodic material between movements — I was interested in including some textual feature that would give it an overarching character marking it out from my previous works. The stacked 7<sup>th</sup> chord, seemed like an appropriate choice: since it had no associated temporal or timbral characteristics, it could be applied to many different contexts, reappearing, for example, as part of a gentle guitar accompaniment at the opening of "Holloway Road" (2:43-3:01), and as a series of dissonant interruption chords that clash with the underlying harmony in the coda to "Russell Square" (10:22, 10:36, 10:40). At the same time, the chord has a harmonically ambiguous character quite different from my customary use of extended diatonicism — at the start of "Finsbury Park", for instance, it is hard to say whether the music is orientated towards C#, B or A.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> To talk of "major" or "minor" in this context would be meaningless, since the chord does not contain a triadic interval.

While I liked the aesthetic effect of using unusual stacked intervals, I worried that too many harmonic surprises could draw the listener away from the melodic content of my work, with the strangeness of the harmony becoming the focus of their attention. In *Down The Tubes*, I overcame this problem by moving to triadic harmony for the more tuneful portions of the piece — the guitar in “Holloway Road” starts by playing stacked 7ths, but switches to a Bb major triad with the entry of the piano theme at 3:01.<sup>80</sup> This seemed appropriate in the context of *Down The Tubes* because of the piece’s through-composed character, with several other aspects of the music — notably tempo, timbral lineup and metre — changing extremely rapidly. Part of the point of using non-triadic chords, however, was to explore the individual harmonic colour of particular intervallic relationships, and I was interested in whether I might be able to highlight this over longer periods of time without abandoning the tunefulness of my work, which prior to this point had always relied on the support provided by triadic harmony.<sup>81</sup>

For *Terse*, I determined that each track should be based upon a different type of chord, with three of the songs — “Cavenia”, “Everybody’s Eyes” and “See Through” — revolving around non-triadic intervals.<sup>82</sup> Here the individual flavour of the chosen interval combines with the lyrical content to imbue each song with a very specific character: the minor seconds in “Cavenia” create an unsettling feeling in keeping with the lyrical sense of

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<sup>80</sup> The guitar accompaniment to this theme begins one bar later, at 3:03.

<sup>81</sup> If we return again to Jimmy Webb’s description of brilliant melody needing to be both “pleasant” and “unexpected” (Webb, 1998), the unexpected component in my previous work relied on triadic harmony to create the expectations for it to depart from. One can hear something similar in the chorus of “RE Preston” where the largely consonant melody is peppered with occasional major 7ths sung on strong beats of the bar, intervals that can only be heard as such in the context of the underlying triadic accompaniment.

<sup>82</sup> “Vicarious”, which, as already noted, was intended as an interlude in a more musically complex sequence of tracks, uses more traditional triadic harmony, albeit sometimes with major 7<sup>th</sup> or major 9<sup>th</sup> chord extensions.

loss, for example, while the happy/sad ambiguity of the narrative in “Everybody’s Eyes” is underscored by the use of major seconds. At the same time, there is a sense in which one can still hear this music as being orientated towards particular key centres. Take this extract from “Cavenia”:

The image displays a musical score for the opening of verse 1 from the song "Cavenia". It consists of two systems of staves. The first system covers measures 12 and 13, and the second system covers measures 14, 15, and 16. Each system includes three staves: Voice (f) in the treble clef, Voice (m) in the bass clef, and E. Gtr. in the treble clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "So you go to ti - dy up her room no more no more your care won't bring her back". The guitar part features a sequence of chords: F, D, F, D, C, Eb, Ab, Bb, and C.

Ex.32 – the opening of verse 1 from “Cavenia”.

Despite not containing any triads, one can still discern a root note for each chord, as labelled here above the guitar part:

This image shows the guitar part of the same musical extract, with chord labels placed above the notes. The labels are: F, D, F, D, C, Eb, Ab, Bb, and C, corresponding to measures 12 through 16. The notation is in treble clef with a 4/4 time signature.

Ex.33 – the guitar part for the opening of verse 1 from “Cavenia”.

This is enabled through the use of parallel chords, a practice extended throughout the majority of the E.P. In traditional harmonic theory, use of parallel motion is regarded as something to be avoided. However, the setting of the songs for *Terse* is deliberately stark, with the uncluttered timbral palate allowing the listener to focus on the interplay between the two voices. In this context, I wanted to avoid overly sophisticated chord voicings. Indeed, the vocal melody is able to produce its unusual expressive effect precisely *because* the guitar part always places the root note on the bottom of the chord. In bar 12, for example, the E natural sung on the words “So”, “go” and “to” forms a discernable — and tensely dissonant — minor second against the root F, in a way that would not have been possible if, for instance, I had used a chord inversion where the F was placed above the E, since this would have created a more muddy harmonic effect.

Elsewhere in the portfolio, my approach to vertical harmony is rather different, with traditional chords being placed against extension notes that colour the harmony in interesting ways. A particularly extreme example of this is “The Ones”, where the same chord of E6 — albeit in different inversions — is sustained for the vast majority of the song, with a climactic chord change to F#m delayed until 3:28. Placing the burden of harmonic interest on to the melody allowed me to change the mood of the music almost on a note-to-note basis. Here, for example, is the vocal line from the first build section:

The image shows a musical score for the vocal line of 'Cavenia', spanning measures 30 to 37. The score is written in bass clef and features a variety of time signatures: 8/8, 7/8, 2/4, 4/4, and 3/4. The lyrics are: 'day Where they come from why they're hea-ding that way when they've had their say You've still half a con-ver-sa tion left and don't know how to fill it oo-oo oo'. The notation includes various rhythmic values, accidentals, and phrasing slurs.

*Ex. 34 – The vocal line from the first build section in “The Ones”.*

Pitting this vocal line against an unvarying E6 results in several very different harmonic effects in quick succession – the sense of a tension needing resolution with the A in bar 30; the pleasant diatonic descending scale in bar 31; the jazzy warmth of the major 9<sup>th</sup> created by the F# in bar 32; and the melancholy dissonance of the D# occurring in bars 33 and 37. Whereas I had previously allowed chord changes to dictate the general trajectory of a melody, in “The Ones” the situation is reversed, with the melody triggering the way the listener perceives the underlying harmony.

I built on this idea further in “Home Is Where”, by avoiding the use of full chords altogether.<sup>83</sup> Instead, I decided to use a bass line as the sole harmonic support, allowing the melody even greater freedom to determine the colour of the music. The intervallic relationship changes each time a bass note occurs, and while this sometimes results in a traditional 3rd, instances of neutral or dissonant intervals — 5ths and minor 2nds respectively — occur just as frequently. In addition, major and minor 3rds in the melody are often closely followed by notes that clash with the implied triadic chord, such as the augmented 6<sup>th</sup> that occurs on the word “of” at bar 16:

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<sup>83</sup> The one area where full chords are used is in the piano part during the middle section from 1:58-2:40. Yet here there are no straightforward triads, and the extensive use of minor 2nds in this passage gives it an extremely dissonant character.



12 Minor 2nd 13 5th 14 15

Lead Vox  
This ci - ty does-n't feel like my own Man I con-fess I con-fess

Bass Guitar

16 Minor 3rd 17 5th 18 Major 3rd 19

Lead Vox  
A part of me would still ra-ther be fur-ther west fur - ther west

Bass Guitar

Ex. 35 – an extract of the vocal and bass lines from the opening verse of “Home Is Where”.

This creates a very different harmonic soundworld from that of every other work in my portfolio. Even “Cavenia”, its nearest equivalent in terms of favouring dissonance over consonance, maintains a regular connection with tonal centres, whereas the intervallic relationships in “Home Is Where” move so rapidly, and with such infrequent regard for triadic harmony, that the song comes close to atonality.

In this regard, although I like the individual flavour it contributes to the broad range of styles represented on *I.D.*, “Home Is Where” is an exception within my work, since I generally prefer maintaining a connection with tonality in order to provide a harmonic reference point for listeners. Most of the dissonances in the portfolio achieve their expressive effect by being set against a tonal background. In “The Wagon” for example, the pedal note of Ab sustained by the trombone at 1:31-1:35 produces a harmonic ripple against the Eb chord played by the electric organ.

Such moments can have tremendous emotional impact, and throughout my portfolio, the choice of how much to play with tonal expectations is

closely connected with extra-musical factors. These might be lyrical — in “Here And Now” the giddiness of the words are underscored by abrupt modulations, such as the shift from C major to Eb major to B major at 1:02-1:07 — or they might be programmatic. The restlessness inspired opening section of *Malicious Insomnia* begins with an angular, chromatic melody, not unlike the near-atonal soundworld of “Home Is Where”, except that at bar 15 (0:28 on the recording) it is joined by a series of straightforward triads on the piano, against which its dissonant character is even more jarring. My general preference for tonal centres, which is derived from an extended diatonicism inherited from pop songwriting practice, does not preclude expressive range: in fact, of the textual features of my musical language, harmony is the one I regard as most important for investing my music with emotional urgency.

#### Musical complexity: texture

Early on in the PhD I made a decision that timbral experimentation would not be a principle focus of my work, for the reasons noted in Chapter 2: firstly that I wished to avoid using unusual (for a pop context) instruments as signifiers of other musical traditions,<sup>84</sup> since I feared that this could result in pastiche, and secondly because I felt it would be more interesting to work with textual elements that pop has traditionally treated less innovatively. In particular, I was interested in restricting myself to easily identifiable sound sources, but experimenting with the hierarchical relationships that existed between them. A good example of this approach is *I.D.*, in which the majority of tracks are built around the core instrumentation I use for my live performances — lead vocals, backing vocals, electric guitar, bass guitar, keyboard/piano and drums —

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<sup>84</sup> Where I have used instruments with potentially strong stylistic associations, I have done so in a deliberately unidiomatic fashion. The accordion part in “Home Is Where”, for example, is treated in a pointillist manner rather than articulating a polka rhythm or playing expressive sustained notes, as, say, in a French chanson. Its inclusion is intended as a source of pure tonal colour, rather than as a stylistic quote.

sometimes augmented with additional instruments for timbral variety. A traditional way of writing for this core lineup within pop is to treat it more or less homophonically, as follows:

<b>Part</b>	<b>Role</b>
Lead vocals	Principle melodic content
Backing vocals	Harmonic pads, occasional countermelodies
Electric guitar	Chords and/or arpeggios, occasional solos
Bass guitar	Maintaining a pulse and emphasising root notes
Keyboard/piano	Chords and/or arpeggios, occasional melodies during instrumental intros/links
Drums	Maintaining a pulse, occasional fills

*Ex. 36 — a summary of traditional vocal/instrumental roles within pop.*

As with most generalised analysis of pop practice, one can find plenty of exceptions to this rule, although in most cases it is a question of degree not kind.<sup>85</sup> With I.D. however, I determined that all of the tracks would depart substantially from this model, so that, in effect it would be an album of exceptions. This was partly a natural consequence of my working methods — since I was giving each player individual scores rather than asking them to create their own parts, I was able to specify the exact textural relationships I wanted to occur in each song, which encouraged me to think in terms of textural complexity. In addition, with the core rhythm section being present throughout much of the album, texture became one of the main ways I was able to create contrast across the 42 minutes. The “exceptions” I came up with varied from song to song, but can be divided up into several broad categories.

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<sup>85</sup> To give just one example, Elastica’s song “2:1” (1995) features both an instrumental chorus where the melody is provided by electric guitar, and a second verse in which two independent lead vocal lines are presented at once. The use of the drums in the song is more conventional, consisting mainly of a repetitive 4/4 quaver pattern that sets the pulse the other instruments follow.

First are the songs in which I explored pointillist texture. In “A Plan”, for example, I decided that no two instruments should start at the same time. At the start of the second verse, 0:39, for example, the guitar plays on the first beat of each bar while the piano plays on the fourth – later, at 0:44, it is the piano that plays on the first beat, with guitar, drums and bass guitar playing on the second, third and fifth beats respectively. This gives the music a sense of space that is particularly useful in the wider context of *I.D.* — coming at just over the halfway point it offers a moment of pause in an album that is otherwise fairly dense with activity. Yet pointillist texture can have precisely the opposite effect, as is the case in the first chorus of “Home Is Where”, in which the vocal melody is doubled by splitting it equally between electric guitar, bass guitar, electric piano and accordion (0:40-0:51). Because of the rate at which this happens, the effect is deliberately cluttered, forcing the listener to switch their attention rapidly from instrument to instrument. With the atonal language of “Home Is Where” precluding any sense of modulation, I was forced to rely on changes in texture to signal the start of each section, and the hyper-detail of the first chorus marks a clean break from the minimal preceding verse, in which the vocalist is backed by a piano playing staccato notes. Both functions of pointillist texture — as a source of space, and as a producer of claustrophobia — were later incorporated into the cumulative technique I developed to represent the twin states of sleeplessness in *Malicious Insomnia*.

After thus exploring the shift of focus between instruments at a localised level, I became interested in ways that instrumental and/or vocal roles might be transferred on a larger time scale, i.e. from section to section. The most substantial example of this is “Dale At 39”, where I was interested in melodic responsibility being swapped between the vocalist and the instrumental ensemble. Each section represents a different response to this concept. At times, portions of the vocal melody are replaced by instrumental lines, such as in the second verse, where

trumpet phrases occur in place of some of the vocal phrases from the previous verse:

Ex. 37 – fragments of the trumpet line from verse 2 of “Dale At 39” (concert pitch).

Ex. 38 – fragments of the vocal line from verse 1 of “Dale At 39”.

Elsewhere, the reverse process occurs. In the second build section (1:11-1:17), the backing vocals provide a variation on a counter-melody previously played on electric guitar:

Ex. 39 – the vocal counter-melody from the second link section of “Dale At 39”.

Ex. 40 – the electric guitar counter-melody from the first link section of

*“Dale At 39” (concert pitch).*

Similarly the vocal melody in the outro (2:42 onwards), which consists largely of sequences based around a descending triadic pattern, is an extended variation on similar shapes prefigured earlier in the song by the guitar part.

2:42-2:47

I'd stake a claim on bon - ding with na - ture

*Ex. 41 – the first vocal phrase from the outro of “Dale At 39”.*

0:46-0:51

*Ex.42 – the electric guitar melody from the first link section in “Dale At 39”.*

1:30-1:35

*Ex. 43 – the first electric guitar phrase from the instrumental/spoken word interlude in “Dale At 39”.*

Here we can see how textural complexity can impact other aspects of the music. We might consider the swapping of instrumental roles as a structural device, in that there is pleasure to be gained from identifying previously unsuspected links between sections in the course of repeated listening. Yet it also has a knock-on effect for timbre: the second link section has an audibly different sound from the first due to the backing vocals replacing the electric guitar. Similarly, the final type of textural complexity explored on *I.D.* — vocal counterpoint — cannot be considered a “pure” textural device, as it frequently results in vertical rhythmic complexity. In the choruses of “Southern Compass”, for example, the backing vocals’ strong beats frequently overlap with the lead vocal’s

weak ones, and vice versa. This leads to a series of interesting rhythmic “ripples”:

The image shows a musical score for the first chorus of "Southern Compass". It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (measures 17-21) includes a "Lead vox" staff with a pitched melody and a "Backing vocals (unpitched)" staff with a rhythmic pattern of 'x' marks. The second system (measures 22-26) includes a "Lead" staff with a pitched melody and a "BVs" (Backing Vocals) staff with a rhythmic pattern of 'x' marks. The lyrics are written below the staves.

Ex. 44 – the vocal lines at the start of the first chorus in “Southern Compass”.

Note, however, that there is also a textural division of roles here, since the lead vocal is pitched and the backing vocal unpitched. While the polyrhythmic relationship between the two voices has a concrete identity — the same sequence of rhythmic values is repeated at each chorus — this is subjugated to the lead melody: in essence we have a concrete melodic idea and a concrete rhythmic idea occurring simultaneously, with the melodic idea being foregrounded. This hierarchy is maintained throughout *I.D.*, and in rare cases where the backing vocal provides a pitched counterpoint — as with the chorus to “Re Preston” (first heard at 0:36-0:52) — I took care to stagger the entries so that the lead vocal predominantly came first, thereby establishing it as the primary focus for melodic information:

The image shows a musical score for the first chorus of "Re Preston". It consists of three systems of music, each with a Lead vox line and a BVs (Backing Vocals) line. The lyrics are as follows:

32 I - so-bel don't be put out if your Pre - ston Doe-sn't say the  
 33 I - so-bel don't be don't be put out Does-n't say the  
 34  
 35  
 36 word out loud And if Pre - ston speaks in  
 37  
 38 punch - lines Just give him time  
 39 punch lines Just give time  
 40

Ex. 45 – the vocal lines at the start of the first chorus in “Re Preston”.

More complex forms of vocal counterpoint are explored on *Terse*, where the timbral setting is deliberately restricted to a single guitar so as to place the burden of textural interest on vocal interplay. In the case of “Cavenia”, I even blur the lines between lead and backing vocals by presenting two entirely independent vocal melodies at the same time, in the section that runs from 1:33-1:53:



73 74 75 76 77

Voice (f) see Some-thing form-ing on my face you thought was gone for good Her

Voice (m) see Three fre-ckles on the cheek - bone Five years left

78 79 80 81 82

Voice (f) mem - ory ta - king flesh and blood I'm so - fly sway-ing in the

Voice (m) lo - nely in her ab - sence but wait You'll see a li - ttle

83 84 85

Voice (f) night She's do - ing just the same we're

Voice (m) mo - tion and more She's

86 87 88

Voice (f) dan - cing dou - ble in the light co - ming off your

Voice (m) mo - ving to the bea - ting of your chest

Ex. 46 – the two vocal lines at the most advanced point of vocal counterpoint in “Cavenia”.

Here the entries are *not* staggered, and in isolation it is difficult to say which is the lead vocal and which is the backing vocal, although given that the female voice has taken the lead line up to that point, it is probable that the listener will still hear her part as the primary one, an impression easy to maintain since the section is relatively brief: as with the opening of “Give Yourself Some Credit”, I felt the high density of simultaneous melodic information would be best experienced as a short burst of

musical intensity.

Elsewhere on *Terse*, counterpoint is used less as a localised aesthetic effect and more as a structural strategy, as with the track “See Through”, where I discovered it could be used to produce a kind of auditory optical illusion. In the first verse, the female vocalist sings the melody while the male vocalist sings a counter melody:

The image displays a musical score for the first verse of the song "See Through". It is written in 4/4 time and features two vocal parts: a female voice (f) in the treble clef and a male voice (m) in the bass clef. The score is divided into three systems of two staves each. The lyrics are: "I'm re-ady with your name Go-tta let it Uh oh Uh oh out I'm Got to share the love... a-round but Uh oh al-ways in a crowd Loo-king for a chance chance Uh oh". The female voice carries the main melody, while the male voice provides a counter-melody. The lyrics are placed below the corresponding vocal lines.

Ex. 47 – the two vocal lines in the first verse of “See Through”.

In the second verse, the counter melody is transferred to the female vocal, leaving the male vocalist free to add a harmonic pad:

The image displays a musical score for the second verse of "See Through". It consists of three systems of music, each with two staves: Voice (f) in the treble clef and Voice (m) in the bass clef. The time signature is 4/4.

- System 1 (Measures 42-45):**
  - Measures 42-43: Voice (f) sings "Babe uh - uh"; Voice (m) sings "Ah".
  - Measures 44-45: Voice (f) sings "pe-nny for your thoughts uh - uh Pe-nny for the"; Voice (m) sings "ah Ah".
- System 2 (Measures 46-49):**
  - Measures 46-47: Voice (f) sings "guy who is o - ver whelm-ing them"; Voice (m) sings "Ah".
  - Measures 48-49: Voice (f) sings "and o - ther things I want to"; Voice (m) is silent.
- System 3 (Measures 50-54):**
  - Measures 50-51: Voice (f) sings "hear hear hear"; Voice (m) sings "Ah".
  - Measures 52-53: Voice (f) sings "But I ne-ver do uh - uh No-one e-ver"; Voice (m) sings "ah ah".
  - Measure 54: Voice (f) sings "digs digs"; Voice (m) sings "Ah".

Ex. 48 – the two vocal lines in the second verse of “See Through”.

This gives the sense that the ensemble has expanded (since an extra part has been added), even though we are still only listening to two people and a guitar. “See Through” is thus a particularly clear example of the general tendency described at the start of this section, in which I said that I had decided not to focus on timbral experimentation, but instead to explore interesting ways in which different parts could relate to each other. This is the case throughout most of the portfolio, with the solitary exception of *Down The Tubes*. Here, the structural roles played elsewhere by texture — delineating sections and creating a sense of progression — are fulfilled instead by timbre. Each of the seven sections in the piece contains a different instrumental lineup, resulting in abrupt timbral contrasts: when

the classical acoustic guitar enters at the start of “Holloway Road” (2:43), for example, the sound of the music becomes much more mellow in comparison to the brash brass tones heard in “Arsenal”. This, in combination with a change in tempo, is what helps the listener identify that a new section has begun.

The *textural* contrast between these sections, however, is much less stark. Both have brief contrapuntal moments,<sup>86</sup> but for the most part the music focuses on one melodic line at a time, backed in the case of “Arsenal” predominantly by sustained chords, and in the case of “Holloway Road” the more broken-chord style of the guitar. Where the piece differs from traditional homophony is that the melodic line is swapped between instruments very quickly, often with different combinations of unison doublings: in the course of the first minute of “Holloway Road”, for example, the melody switches between being played on piano and bass guitar (2:47-2:51), electric guitar, electric piano and bass guitar (2:54-2:58), electric guitar, electric piano and violin (3:10-3:15), and electric piano, violin and flute (3:25-3:33). Yet because the timbre does not change in the *middle* of phrases, the texture is not pointillist, and is not intended to produce a striking localised effect. Instead, maintaining the quick pace of timbral change across the entire piece was a way of aiding the impression created by the similarly restless tempo of moving rapidly between Tube stops. With this process in place, I felt I need not rely on textural complexity to produce additional musical interest.

Yet it is also the case that, as this was the first work written for the portfolio, I had not yet developed the repertoire of textural devices that would inform the later projects. As we have seen, *I.D.* was especially important in instigating these, and several of the textural ideas I explored on the album played a much greater role in other works, with pointillist

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<sup>86</sup> At 1:49-1:54 in “Arsenal”, for example, a rapid chromatic phrase momentarily overlaps with the start of the next melodic theme. In “Holloway Road” meanwhile, a very short piano counter-melody is played over the string melody at 3:24.

texture being the starting point for each of the sections in *Malicious Insomnia*, and *Terse* relying on counterpoint to provide textural interest in a sparse timbral setting. In addition, *I.D.* is also the clearest example of how I feel texture can be used to enhance the pop song form, both in terms of producing effects that are satisfying in their own right — the playful friction between the vocal lines in the choruses of “Southern Compass”, for example — and as a means of creating variety across the entire length of an album. With a few exceptions,<sup>87</sup> my rhythmic and harmonic approach remained relatively constant throughout *I.D.*, with most of the songs being based around an extended diatonic harmonic scheme and flexible metre. Texturally, however, there are far more compositional devices that are unique to particular tracks. These include, along with those already noted: a melody doubled by piano arpeggios in which each note is in a completely different register (“Home Is Where” 0:52-1:12); the swapping of articulation between instruments from section to section (“Re Preston”); stacked backing vocal chords that are extended by one note at a time (“Half Love” 0:20-0:26); and a single melodic line placed against scalar patterns that vary in length every few bars (“Groundhog” 0:04-0:40). Each of these departs from the model given at the start of this section (Ex.36), making *I.D.* a sustained exploration of textural complexity that offers several distinct types of textural experience.

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<sup>87</sup> Rhythmically, “Give Yourself Some Credit” is far more complex than the other songs on the album: harmonically, the same is true of “Home Is Where”.

## **Chapter 4 — Conclusion**

My PhD documents four years' work combining the core values of pop songwriting with non-pop compositional techniques. Across the portfolio, tunefulness — the creation of melodies that are ends in themselves — is supported by dividing the material into clear sections, wherein the melodies can be engaged with as individual entities, and by maintaining a constant structural tension between repetition and contrast so as to reinforce melodic ideas without them becoming monotonous. Combining this pop-derived compositional approach with material that is rhythmically, harmonically and/or texturally complex has allowed me to create music that is both accessible and surprising. The result is a portfolio that contributes to the field of experimental pop in the following ways:

Firstly, I have incorporated transformative processes into my music while maintaining its melodic concreteness and structural clarity, thereby suggesting new possibilities for the verse/chorus song form. This is best exemplified by *I.D.*, in which every song contains recurring sections that are modified with each restatement. Repeating the basic pitch profile makes the melodies easier to assimilate, while modifying the material — whether through rhythmic displacement or expanding/contracting the durations of individual notes — keeps it unpredictable. This works most effectively when one element remains relatively stable: in “Re Preston”, for example, the second verse departs substantially from the first, yet the choruses are nearly identical.<sup>88</sup> The stable element provides a basic level of familiarity, making it possible to identify a verse/chorus structure. This in turn enables the composer to explore techniques that might otherwise be unfamiliar to a pop audience, while retaining a recognisable link with

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<sup>88</sup> The second chorus of “Re Preston” (1:20-1:41) is slightly longer than the first (0:36-0:51) yet no new material is added. Instead, the closing portion of the chorus is extended as a transition to the bridge.

the pop song form: in my own case, these techniques have included polyrhythmic layering, pointillist textures and non-triadic harmony.

Secondly, I have shown that the core aesthetic values of pop songwriting can be applied to a wide range of vocal and non-vocal music. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this is comparable to the way in which artists such as Mica Levi and Dave Longstreth have broadened their compositional range by writing for classical ensembles, often attracting attention from critics who do not usually cover classical music in the process.<sup>89</sup> However, while such artists' instrumental pieces often explore an entirely different aesthetic from their song-orientated work— Mica Levi's soundtrack for *Under The Skin* (2014), for example, is much more abstract than her pop albums, built as it is around unpitched string textures influenced by twentieth century composers such as Giacinto Scelsi and Iannis Xenakis<sup>90</sup> — my own intention has been to transfer exactly the same principles that lie behind my songwriting to my instrumental music. I have done this by consistently following the compositional priorities outlined in my abstract. With regards to tunefulness, the instrumental melodies in *Down The Tubes* and *Malicious Insomnia* are ends in themselves, just as much as the vocal hooks in *I.D.* and *Terse*. Likewise, in terms of structure, even my most through composed work, *Down The Tubes*, is highly sectionalised, delineated by contrasts in tempo and timbre. Hence I have demonstrated that the pop aesthetic need not be confined to the pop song form.

Looking beyond my research, the next step I want to take is to learn to better harness the expressive potential of computer technology. During the mixing of *I.D.*, Joe Murgatroyd added effects that enhanced what I

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<sup>89</sup> A recording of Dave Longstreth's orchestral piece "Michael Jordan", for example, was hosted on Stereogum, one of the most popular online publications for experimental pop music. See <http://www.stereogum.com/1787450/listen-to-dave-longstreths-new-orchestral-work-michael-jordan/mp3s/>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> August 2017.

<sup>90</sup> See <http://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/mar/15/mica-levi-under-the-skin-soundtrack>. Accessed 15th August 2017.

wanted to do compositionally — the short delay on the vocals from 3:07-3:23 of “Home Is Where”, for example, added power to the song’s climax — and in the future I want to incorporate the choice to use such effects directly into my compositional process. Yet however much my music evolves, it is likely to continue the overall approach of my PhD. At a time of ever-increasing engagement between pop and other forms of contemporary music,<sup>91</sup> I feel that my aesthetic, shaped by a background in pop songwriting, but also by the additional compositional techniques explored during my PhD research, is a viable starting point for continuing to create surprising, accessible and emotionally complex art.

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<sup>91</sup> To give two recent examples: the 2011 *Congotronics vs Rockers* tour featured Congolese bands Kasai Allstars and Konono No1 playing with members of the experimental pop groups Deerhoof, Wildbirds & Peacedrums and Skeletons, while Nico Muhly’s 2013 festival *A Scream And An Outrage* featured pop Villagers’ Conor O’Brien collaborating with the Britten Sinfonia.



## **Appendix A — Lyrics for I.D.**

### **All lyrics by Thomas Wilson**

*N.B. – Lyrics for the backing vocals are indicated with brackets: however, where they merely repeat the same words as the lead vocals, these repetitions have been left off the lyric sheet. Similarly, I have opted not to transcribe sung vowel sounds such as “ah” or “mm”. In both cases the intention is to avoid the lyric sheet looking cluttered. The same applies to the lyrics to Terse provided in Appendix B.*

#### **Here And Now**

Could it really be  
Half an hour  
Since you got the call from medicine?  
Looking at you now  
Can't imagine  
You were ever one for giving in

We should get away  
Celebrate the fact that you're still with us  
We should go and see  
Where the world's at

And so we go we go again  
Looking for the here and now  
Looking for the here and now  
The pop up pulse beating on the edge of town  
Neon lights purple feet  
People in the prime of high times we can't hope to understand  
Still we'll try

Good to feel the buzz  
Of the city

Funny how it used to bother me  
Good to feel the heat  
Of the summer sticking to our limbs

All it took was nearly losing you  
To suscite  
My whole stake in life  
I can't cry for relief now  
I'm better off running round  
Heady with being then trying to come down  
From the moment  
Better better

Half asleep what is that? I don't sleep  
Better that I never try better that I never try  
Every night  
Waiting by your better side  
Telling you if you only make it  
Say I'll play  
We'll go find the kind of night that once made our day

All it took was nearly losing you  
All it took was hard to bear  
Now there's  
Now there's something to see here  
Something to see

And so we go we go again  
Looking for the here and now  
Looking for the here and now  
The popup pulse beating on the edge of town  
Neon light purple feet  
People in the prime of high times we can't hope to understand

Still I'm glad we're here to try  
This feels like the moment to break into life

### **Give Yourself Some Credit**

Smart adverts go for my eyes  
In the morning light in the morning light in the morning  
Hard to ignore but I try  
In the morning light in the morning light in the morning  
While I'm usually quite resistant I've been failing of late

Take heart A.I  
While I'm not the kind of guy  
Who does things on impulse  
Don't lose your grip  
Keep a note of where I click  
Bit by bit you'll build a picture up of how I  
Spend my time  
Then you'll find  
You can read my mind

In the morning light in the morning light in the morning  
I've been distracted by how to get rich  
In the morning light in the morning  
Gain perfect pitch  
Shed a pound a day or learn to speak a language with ease

Take heart A.I  
While I've yet to click on buy  
You're not far off  
You will reach the  
Soft spot in my heart and if you plant a dart there you will find I'm  
Really not that  
Hard to turn

Once you learn  
What it is I yearn for

Imitation watches  
No dice  
Medication, cheap vacations  
Snake eyes  
These are not my style at all but one more roll might reveal  
My vice

Take heart A.I  
Take heart A.I  
While I'm not the kind of guy  
Who does things on impulse  
Don't lose your grip  
Watch where I click  
Bit by bit you'll  
Build a picture up of how I like to  
Get my kicks and with that info at your  
Fingertips it won't be long until your dice read  
Six six

(Give yourself some credit x9)

In the morning light  
I am giving in  
Clicking on the side  
And typing in my pin

### **Home Is Where**

This city doesn't feel like my own  
Man I confess, I confess  
A part of me would still rather be

Further west, further west  
The pace of life is different out there  
Slower for sure, slower for  
And trying to get around doesn't seem  
Such a chore, such a chore  
Pull up a chair and I'll tell you some more

Places are easy to face when not  
Standing there in front of you  
Faces are fonder when not in your own  
Wait until they slide from view  
Then you'll miss 'em

Picture a town where nobody tries  
Hard to impress, hard to impress  
And you're considered fine if you just  
Do your best do your best  
The people there don't care for career  
Status or pay, status or  
But if you have a great big idea  
That's OK, that's OK  
No-one will bother to get in your way

Places are easy to face  
When they're not in front of you  
Faces are fonder when not in your own  
Sayings always ring true  
Letters are lovely to read  
Photos are simple to show  
Home is where the head is not  
Home is where the  
Home is where head is not  
Home is where the head is not

Home is where the  
Home is where the head is not

Wait, who is that I see  
With his head on the bar?  
Someone from my distant past  
My he's come far  
I turn around I'm in no mood to catch up with someone who knows me  
from  
Way back when  
He's from the same town as me and I don't want him meeting my  
New found friends  
I've been dishonest in claiming that world as my own though it's where I  
was  
Born and bred  
(I soon fled)

Places are easy to face when not  
Standing there in front of you  
Faces are fonder when not in your own  
Sayings always ring true  
Letters are lovely to read ah but  
Baggage is hard to unpack  
Home is where the head is not  
(Home is where the)  
Home is where the head is not  
Home is where the head is not  
(Home is where the)  
Home is never walking  
Back

### **The Ones**

Another morning on the plane to work

Another overcrowded downer  
I don't know why I never spend the night there  
And treat myself to some hotel with decent views  
I'd ended up behind the thing I dread  
A stranger keen on interaction  
I must admit  
I can't see the attraction  
Cause though you get  
The time of day

Where they come from why they're heading  
That way  
When they've had their say  
You've still half a conversation left and don't know how to fill it

Thank you for the time kill  
'Scuse me while I take this call

But as the morning turned to afternoon  
She still had her neighbour  
Manhattan charm was clearly what he wanted  
That I understand  
Closing my eyes  
Opening my ears  
Suddenly wanting to hear

Where they'd take it after all the  
Gap years changes of career  
After all the brothers and the sisters and the cousins and beyond  
After what they thought about the H bomb  
After favourite songs  
After love and politics and what we're doing here if we are

Thank you for the time kill  
We should grab a drink some day  
We might be the ones who  
Don't run out of things to say

Once upon a once upon a once upon a once upon a  
Once upon a once upon a once upon a time

By the middle of the flight  
He was Andrew  
By the middle of the flight  
She was Angeline  
By the middle of the flight  
He was Andrew  
She was Angeline  
By the middle  
Good  
By the middle  
By the middle of the  
By the middle of the flight  
They were laughing  
They were holding hands by the middle

Once upon a time I thought I knew my mind I thought I knew my mind I  
thought I knew my mind I thought I knew it  
Once upon a time I thought that life was better spent was better spent on  
auto-pilot  
Then upon a time I started looking round I started looking round and  
found I liked it now  
She's called Angeline  
He's called Andrew  
They make quite the team



And we're getting off the flight (he's called Andrew now) and we're  
getting off the flight  
And we're getting off the flight and we're getting off the flight  
We should grab a drink someday  
And they're gonna make a life (she's called Angeline) and they're gonna  
make a life  
And they're gonna make a life and they're gonna make a life  
Not run out of things to  
Say say say say say say say say  
(By the middle of the flight  
He was Andrew  
By the middle of the flight  
She was Angeline  
By the middle of the flight  
He was Andrew  
She was Angeline)

**RE Preston**

As predicted  
He is getting into you  
And he's learned your language  
And your friends all approve  
Fearing you would do much worse  
But I see you're  
Still a little ill at ease  
And I think I know why  
So allow me please

Isobel don't be put out  
If your Preston  
Doesn't say the word out loud  
And if Preston speaks in punch lines  
Just give him time

Charming banter  
When the beer is in his hand  
Courteous manner  
When you need a man to take your friend  
To her stop at night  
Conversation on the way  
Back in time to down  
Anything to hand and say "why the frown"?

Isobel don't be put out  
If your Preston  
Doesn't say the word out loud  
And if Preston speaks in punchlines  
Just give him time  
You can change him though it's hard when  
Preston's not even trying

So don't you go for public praise  
His story will be you're mates who can take a joke  
Along the way  
You may well get a dance if the soundtrack's old enough  
A story of love sung proud  
Signalling to the crowd this is for  
Show signalling to you  
This is for real

Isobel don't be put out  
If he can't quite say out loud  
What you know he's feeling now  
And if Preston speaks in punchlines  
Just give him time  
You can change him though it's hard when

Preston's not even

### **This Is The Future**

T-t-ten she wakes on Sellafield Way  
Too late for the break of day  
On the way to meet with a friend in town  
She can see the streets where I used to play  
Play till the sun went down

We would've been neighbours if dad had got the house he went for  
We would've been classmates if I'd been born a little late  
But this is the future now  
And it has taken all these years for  
Fate to look our way

T-t-ten I wake on Sellafield Row  
Too late for the day to show  
On the way to wait for the westbound train  
I can see the bus she would sometimes take  
Take to avoid the rain

We would've been neighbours if dad had got the house he went for  
We would've been classmates if I'd been born a little late  
But this is the future now  
And I will be learning

How my housemates knew her back in college  
Not close but friends for sure  
How the world that lies outside my window  
Means just as much to her  
As the season breaks into bloom bloom  
(One left leg turning around turning around too slow slow)  
(One right leg turning around turning around too soon)

10 in December  
10 in the spring  
I wake too late to  
Rise with the sun and  
She does the same  
Life lets us lie lie

We would've been neighbours if dad had got the house he went for  
We would've been classmates if I'd been born a little late  
But this is the future now  
And I will be learning how  
You're never the hero you thought you'd be and that's OK but  
You're never the neighbor you thought you'd be and that's a shame  
But this is the future now  
And it has taken all these years for  
Fate to look our way  
Even though we passed it twice a day  
Passed it twice a day day day day day

### **Dale At 39**

Dale my man is for the roadtrip  
Taking off alone  
We've all been saving to help him  
Saving to help him go  
Dale my man is for the diner  
Dale is for the dime  
That buys the coffee that makes you  
Feel like you're in your prime

Or at least it used to do  
When the world was young

Man I really hope you find yourself (turn turn 40 in November)  
Just like you found me (turn turn 40 in the fall)  
Man I really hope you find the calm you crave  
Save a bit save a bit and hey then  
You can sleep easily

Deep enough to dream  
Of all the good in the world the  
Good in the world you'll see  
Love the open  
Love the open road  
And it will love you in turn and show you a landscape  
Bigger than the one you're from  
Bigger than you dared  
Dared to long for

Man I really hope you find yourself (turn turn 40 in November)  
Just like you found me (turn turn 40 in the fall)  
Man I really hope you find the calm you seek

(Mired in local legend  
You might find  
Trying to spend a week there  
Is taxing to body and soul  
However a quick drive  
A little further  
Along this stretch of well-provisioned desert  
Will soon yield a wealth of wonders  
Without wishing to play favourites  
We must admit  
We have been trying to improve on  
Buddy B for years  
But having been unsuccessful with each new attempt)

Dale will come back to the flat  
(We've given up)  
Line every surface with snapshots of places he stayed at  
The tricks of the light  
Captured for all time in black and white  
Kept there to show to his family and his friends  
Coming in to say  
Happy returns

Turn one year on  
Tell tell what went down

I'd stake a claim on bonding with nature  
I'd place a bet if I could  
He'd be the kind for the open air  
Stars in the sky there  
Sprung from their shell  
Lend him our ears as he comes downstairs in time to tell the tale

### **A Plan**

The day should start with stretch and sprint  
Clearly  
The day should start with sweat  
Or so they say but I can't swear to it now  
Swear to it now  
Swear to it now  
The day should end with light relief  
Empty your head and then get to your teeth  
The day should end like that  
Or so they say but I can't swear to it now

Maybe the order's out

Maybe the front is where the back should be  
How am I to know?

Better take it slow  
Better take it slow

I can't function function  
Till there's a plan but  
I can't pick one pick one  
What if I'm wrong?

A life in bits  
Deserves a list make one  
Take the tasks in turn  
And hope the sense sticks

I can't function function  
Till there's a plan but  
I can't pick one  
Since they're all  
Close to call

Maybe the order's out  
Maybe the back is where the front should be  
How am I to know?  
Nothing looks right on the page now

No use starting  
Until you're clear  
How long to take  
How long to  
Spend on one thing  
Before you stop

No use sleeping  
Until you're sure  
When to wake up  
When to wake up

I can't function function  
Till there's a plan but  
I can't pick one  
What if I'm wrong?  
What if I'm wrong?

### **The Wagon**

Another stick to light  
Sadly I'm not paid to push them  
But if they call I'll bite  
I don't need to quit I just need to do less of it  
Though I'm having second thoughts

Since you left the scene  
My life's been pretty lean  
The wagon doesn't seem untenable  
Now that you're on board

Just do the best you can  
Bad bad times are bound to come that weren't part of the plan  
Tearful nights outside friends with cigarettes in their hands  
Passing them around like joints

Since you left the scene  
My life's been pretty lean  
The wagon doesn't seem so dreadful  
Now that you're on board but  
Even if I don't get on I



Hope you plan to stay the course

Once in a while you'll feel a phantom forming (April)

In between your fingertips

And then

Pick up a pen

Or failing that a toothpick (your make believe)

You might even put the end to your lips

Now and then

Fire without a flame

No need to fret

That's how it works

Some people need a patch

Some people need a goal

You need a tube to fill the U

Something to roll

Turkeying can take a toll

Cutting out at once

Trying to play the big man big man

Hours spent in front of the mirror

Trying not to hear

Buddy in your ear

Telling you to crack

Everybody's coming to see

The wagon as it passes

Be there and I'll give it a wave

And maybe then a smile to wish you well

Once in a while (April)

You'll feel a phantom forming

In between your fingertips

And then

Pick up a pen (reach for the pack)  
Or failing that a toothpick (your make believe)  
You might even put the end  
To your lips  
Now and then  
Even though  
It's not the same as smoke  
Monday  
Tuesday  
Sing songs of struggle

### **Half Love**

Here's a photo of Grace  
Hair in front of her face  
Never one to play the beauty queen  
Every photo I have  
Shows her looking like that  
Even so I think I'm falling in

Half love, it's unrequited with a twist  
Namely that if she should ever  
Turn around I know instead of saying yes  
I'd let left brain set the pace and turn her down

Not that I'm proud of it  
Not that I'm glad

Here's a photo of us  
Each one leaving the crust  
As we gossip through our favourite meal  
She's been talking bout Tim  
Least I think it was him  
Either way I know just how she feels

OK I guess I've forfeited the right  
To feel envious when she finally  
Ends up with someone special by her side  
Even so I wish we were meant to be  
Which is why these

Pictures of where we've been are needed here tonight  
Not ideal but  
They help fuel the pain I fain would feel  
Feel

Half love it's unrequited with a twist  
Namely that if she should ever  
Turn around I know instead of saying yes  
I'd pull back then feel let down

OK I guess I've forfeited the right  
To feel envious when she finally  
Ends up with that someone special by her side  
Even so I wish we were meant to be  
Which is why these

Pictures of where we've been are needed here tonight  
Not ideal but  
They help fuel the pain I'm finally learning how to feel

### **Southern Compass**

After the lights out of November  
After the cut to the cold  
I'm left feeling twice as old  
Pin all my daydreams to a liner  
I feel the need for a change

Head for someplace more humane

Lisbon is the compass point for me

Barca bakes my being and leaves it happily making friends beside the sea

Francis leads my yearning to Assisi

Tell me why the magnet in my soul

Always draws me to the south and

Never to the Pole

Pulling with a force I can't control

(This is where I thought I'd find myself I thought I'd find myself in  
someone else's shoes

I don't need I don't need to find their feet

Make believing barely helps the health but rarely causes early death and

I've no use I've no use for their boots)

Tempered my temper (roll!)

Just for a time there

Tempered my temper

Just for a while just for a

Down from the mainland

Came a drama

Cool as a mouthful of ice

Bloodshot and precise

Though all my friends are keen to go there

I won't be there by their side

Far too late to change my mind

Lisbon is the compass point for me

Barca bakes my being and leaves it happily making friends beside the sea

France can be the spirit guide to

Tell me why the magnet in my soul

Always draws me to the south and  
Never to the Pole  
Pulling with a force I can't control

(This is where I thought I'd find myself I thought I'd find myself in  
someone else's shoes  
I don't need I don't need their feet  
Make believing barely helps the health but rarely causes early death and  
I've no use I've no use for their boots)

Tempered my temper  
Just for a while there

But if I go there  
I can't help but harm it  
(Acting like the glass is always fuller on the other side)  
If I want to see the sights  
If I want to sing the songs  
I can't help but change the  
Parts I get wrong  
(Acting like the glass is always fuller on the other side)

(Over the way)

Lisbon is the compass point for  
Lisbon is the compass point for me  
Barca bakes my being and leaves it happily making friends beside the sea  
France can be the spirit guide to  
Tell me why the magnet in my soul  
Always draws me to the south  
Never to the Pole  
Always to the dream in me  
Never to the real in me

Always to the fantasy

Far too faint to hold

(This is where I thought I'd find myself I thought I'd find myself in  
someone else's shoes

I don't need I don't need their feet

Make believing barely helps the health but rarely causes early death and

I've no use I've no use for their I've no use for their I've no use for their)

### **Groundhog**

So you're gonna go

This'll be our last sunset

Taking in the red

Taking in the gold

I can't believe it

Cider on the hill

City on the horizon

And all around the sounds of life dancing

We could learn the steps tonight

I want I want to keep this

Moment

Perfect

And if I could have a groundhog

Then I'd want it to be this one

Spend my every evening here with you

In the cradle of the world made new

Did you

Did you ever know

I was paying attention?

Taking in the clothes

Taking in the hair

Each hint of perfume  
All of them are here  
Doubling the horizon  
While all around the sounds of life beckon  
We could join the dance tonight  
Perfect  
Moment

And if I could have if I could have a groundhog  
Then I'd want it to be this one  
Spend my every evening here with you  
Wrapped up in time time wants you

Wind it up again  
Tick it till it tocks and count to ten  
Talk me till we click again

If we had some empties here  
You could take a spin  
Maybe stick a dare in there  
If we had some empties here  
I could take one too  
Maybe stick a dare in there  
Maybe stick a dare in for you

And if I could have a groundhog  
Then I'd want it to be this one  
Spend my every evening here with you  
You're becoming the view  
You're the sum of all I long to see  
And you're looking at me  
Fonder than you used to do  
And I'm looking at you

Light fades and night draws near  
Tell me  
Can't we just stop right here here?



**Appendix B — Lyrics for *Terse***

**All lyrics by Thomas Wilson**

**Cavenia**

So you go to tidy up her room  
No more no more  
Your care won't bring her back  
Given which I'll  
Try to fill the gap  
I can be Cavenia  
I can be Cavene  
I can be Cavene  
With lipstick on her laugh  
When you need to see her  
I can be Cavene  
I can be Cavene with lipstick on her laugh  
Laugh

As you know we look a lot alike  
We both take after you  
Given which there's  
So much I can do  
I can be Cavenia  
I can be Cavene  
I can be Cavene  
With lipstick on her laugh  
When you need to see

I can pull a dress out of the cupboard  
I can pull a hairband from the pile  
Hidden there hidden there  
And smile like the apple of your eye

To bring your bonnie back  
I'll bring back your bonnie back watch me  
(Far away)  
You'll get your bonnie back trust me  
I'll bring your bonnie back watch me you'll see you'll see  
Something forming on my face  
(Three freckles on the cheekbone)  
You thought was gone for good  
(Five years left lonely in her absence but wait)  
Her memory taking flesh and blood  
(You'll see a little motion)  
I'm slowly swaying in the night  
(Then more she's moving to the beating of your chest)  
She's doing just the same  
We're dancing double in the light  
Coming off your eyes  
(Take her hand and lead her through the nest)  
I can make her smile

You can see Cavenia  
You can see Cavene

Say if you ever want to stop  
Say if you ever want to  
You can tell me  
But when loss calls

I can be Cavenia  
I can be Cavene  
I can be Cavene  
With lipstick on her laugh  
When you need to see her

I can be Cavene  
I can be Cavene  
With lipstick on her on her laugh

Say if you ever want to stop  
Say if you ever want to

### **Everybody's Eyes**

I've seen pictures of you  
Looking like a million dollars  
I've seen pictures you've shared

And I have felt the sun disappear  
Out of my life  
I have felt the sun run away  
I have felt the sun disappear  
I have only made things worse

They're for everybody's eyes only  
When I want them to be for mine  
For everybody's eyes only  
When I need them to be for mine

I've seen things that you've said  
Rattled out in lower cases  
I've seen things that you've said

And I have felt the tongue disappear  
Out of my mouth  
I have felt the tongue run away  
I have felt the tongue disappear  
I have only made things worse

They're for everybody's eyes only  
When I want them to be for mine  
For everybody's eyes only  
When I want them to be for mine

I was told to own my anger  
But told nothing 'bout  
Jealousy  
Guess I'll have to learn to own that too  
As you turn from a text in the night  
To a snapshot of you with your new baby boy  
I don't know why  
I look

Jealousy full in the face now, jealousy  
Jealousy full in the face now, jealousy

They're for everybody's eyes only  
They're for everybody's eyes only  
There when  
I can't bear them to be for mine

### **Vicarious**

I'm Ok to wait  
And since you're clearly working late  
You can take your time  
But please don't laugh at what I'm buying

I guess you must be curious  
They're for a friend they're not for me

John gets the guilty pleasures  
Eve gets the decent stuff

I get vicarious

What a day for rain

Spent by myself inside again

So I call for help

I need some time with someone else

I see my friends at weekends

Prefer my world as seen through theirs

John gets the guilty pleasures

Eve gets the decent stuff

I get vicarious

I run away run away from my tigers tigers

And try to hide try to hide from my panthers panthers

I run away run away from my lions

John gets the guilty pleasures

Eve gets the decent stuff

I get vicarious

Prefer my world as seen through theirs

So while the weather's rough

I'll stay vicarious

### **See Through**

I'm ready with your name

Gotta let it out

(Got to share the love around but)

I'm always in a crowd

Looking for a chance chance

This'll be the night

This'll be the this'll be the night

This'll be the night I say

But I don't ever talk about you

Don't know how I'll do but I'll have to learn

Cause if I can't talk about you

Every little feeling's gonna shoot to kill

Dunno how I'll do it but I'll learn to be more see-through still

Babe penny for your thoughts

Penny for the guy

Who is overwhelming them

And other things I want to hear hear hear

But I never do

No-one ever digs digs

Everyone is sweet

Everyone is everyone is sweet

Everyone is hard to beat

But I don't ever talk about you

Don't know how to do it but I'll have to learn

Cause if I can't talk about you

Every little feeling gonna shoot to kill

Dunno how I'll do it but I'll learn to be more see-through

See-through

See-through

Don't know why I do it but I'll cultivate the crush

Don't know why I do it but I'll cultivate the crush

Don't know how I'll do it but I'll let it take me over over

Don't know how I'll do it but I'll learn to show the blush

Don't know how I'll do it but I'll learn to share the rush

Everyone is everyone is sweet

But I don't ever talk about you

Don't know how I'll do but I'll have to learn

Cause if I can't talk about you

Every little feeling gonna shoot to kill

Don't know how I'll do it but I'll learn to be more see through

See through see through still

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