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Music

Translating Comedic Materials into Music

James Oldham

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Faculty of Arts and Humanities

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Translating Comedic Materials into Music

James Oldham

This commentary is an engagement with comedy through the translation of comedic materials into music. The written commentary is an accompaniment to, and analysis of, selected works I composed from 2019-22. As a response to lack of existing framework for comedy in music, I develop a new one intended for use in my own practice as a composer and performer. By looking at existing writings on humour in music and general humour theory, I identify criteria for an original framework for the translation of comedic materials into music. I devise three categories for this enquiry, which offer three distinct perspectives. Each 'lens' draws on theory stemming beyond the field of musicology (semantics, aesthetics, psychology), analyses of comedy examples (jokes, comedians, clowns), examples of comedic materials in existing music works, and contextualisation of my own work. I have made the framework deliberately broad with the intention of accommodating the practice of other composers and performers working with similar materials. I also offer new terminology specific to these translations, with some applicable more generally to humour, that may be utilised in the study of humour by musicologists.

Each 'lens' comprises a different chapter of the commentary. The first is on *pun mechanisms*, where I outline a comic mechanism from the field of semantics for the translation of puns into music. The lens of *interruptions* is a focus on improvised timing through the translation of an everyday device. I consider terminology from Interruption Science and explore its applicability to comedy and music. The final chapter on *comic archetypes* is a consideration of *music specific comic roles* that contribute significantly to the performance of comedic music. I draw upon ideas from aesthetic theory and modernist philosophy to outline four *music specific comic roles* and plot music works within the diagram I devise. Works are assessed throughout for their humorous effect and for their merit beyond humour, with both scored instrumental works and intermedial compositions.

Table of Contents

List of Works	vi
Table of Figures	vii
Table of Examples	viii
Declaration of authorship	xi
Acknowledgements	x
Introduction	1
General Introduction	1
Research Questions	4
Methodology	4
Structure of chapters	6
<u>Chapter 1</u>	
Creating a framework for the translation of comedic materials into music	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Theories of humour	
<i>Three prominent theories</i>	8
<i>Benign violation theory and play</i>	10
1.3 The lack of music specific methodology for humour in music	11
1.4 ITPRA theory of expectation and musical surprise	15
1.5 Summary of theories	17
<i>Music specific reception of comedy</i>	19
1.6 Three lenses for the translation of comedic materials into music	20
<i>A consideration of objects</i>	21
<u>Chapter 2</u>	
The pun mechanism (double meanings in music)	23
2.1 Introduction	23
2.2 The script-based semantic theory of humour (the pun mechanism)	24
2.3 Barlow puns	25
2.4 Tonal puns	29
2.5 Function puns	32
<i>Sky Macklay's Many Many Cadences</i>	34
2.6 Further analysis	36
2.7 In my work	38
<i>DURATION DURATION and</i>	39
<i>Part A + B: Medieval Retro (for flute, knight, and objects)</i>	45
<i>Human Scene from Syrup Tracing</i>	48
<i>A dramaturgical function pun</i>	49
2.8 Conclusion	50

Chapter 3

Interruptions (an everyday object as compositional device)	51
3.1 Introduction	51
3.2 The interruption (background and theory)	53
3.3 Interruptions in comedy	56
3.4 Interruptions in music	
<i>Bill Dietz's L'école de la claque</i>	61
<i>Tim Parkinson's Time with people</i>	62
<i>Laurence Crane's Gli Anni Prog</i>	63
3.5 Interruptions in my work	
<i>Catastrophe I: Assassins from Dead Cat Bounce</i>	65
<i>Human Scene from Syrup Tracing</i>	66
<i>Interruption Duet #1</i>	
<i>Preparation/open score process</i>	68
<i>Workshop/devising</i>	70
3.6 Conclusion	71
Appendix score	73

Chapter 4

Comic Archetypes (music specific comic roles)	74
4.1 Introduction	74
4.2 A structure for comic character in music	77
<i>The musician</i>	77
<i>The fool</i>	78
<i>Highbrow and lowbrow</i>	79
<i>The mechanical</i>	80
<i>The zany</i>	83
4.3 A study of comic roles in music	86
<i>PDQ Bach's "New Horizons in Music Appreciation" (Beethoven Symphony No.5 Sportscastr)</i>	86
<i>Arco/Neil Luck's MenCon</i>	90
4.4 In my work	
<i>Number three from number two and three</i>	92
<i>Jeremiah from Dead Cat Bounce</i>	94
<i>Human Scene from Syrup Tracing</i>	96
4.5 Conclusion	97
General Conclusion	99
<i>The future of the research</i>	102
References	103

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List of works

number three from number two and three (2019)

String quartet and stagehand

c. 11 minutes

Score (standard notation)

Video (documentation of workshop at University of Southampton, Quatuor Bozzini)

Human Scene (2019-20)

Two performers, video, backing track, and lights

c. 15 minutes

Treatment (explanatory notes and premise of work)

Video (Waste Paper Opera performance at Ideas of Noise Festival)

Part A + B: Medieval Retro (for flute, knight and objects) (2020)

Video piece with recorded flute, alto saxophone, and track

13 minutes

Score (treatment, standard notation + scores for recording session)

Video (Riot Ensemble commission)

DURATION DURATION and (2021)

clarinet, electric guitar, cello, piano and sampler

c. 12 minutes

Score (standard notation)

Audio (documentation of workshop at University of Southampton, Plus Minus Ensemble)

Interruption Duet #1 (2022)

Soprano saxophone, synthesiser, and sampler

c. 5-12 minutes

Score (open score)

Video (documentation from workshop at University of Southampton with Laurent Estoppey and Antoine Françoise)

Dead Cat Bounce: Assassins + Jeremiah (2022)

Countertenor, soprano, two speakers, synthesiser, violin, viola, chorus

c. 20 minutes

Score (text score and standard notation)

Video (two scenes from Waste Paper Opera performance at Somerset House)

All scores and documentation can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ZWJcxaug8xqKoLSjruuvhWsqUtPPLAy0?usp=drive_link

If there are any issues accessing portfolio materials, contact jamesoldhamcomposer@gmail.com

Table of Figures

Figure 1.1	Benign violation Venn diagram (McGraw & Warren, 2016)	p. 10
Figure 1.2	Hanlon's categories for comic technique (Hanlon, 2013, p. 35)	p. 13
Figure 2.1	Raskin's examples of script oppositeness (1985, p. 127)	p. 24
Figure 2.2	Clarence Barlow's homophonic musical pun in the context of a perfect cadence	p. 26
Figure 2.3	'Barlow' pun in Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor (Taylor, 1991).	p. 26
Figure 2.4.1	Melody without accompaniment in B major. Stevie Wonder, <i>Sir Duke</i> (1976)	p. 27
Figure 2.4.2	Implied melody alteration in <i>Sir Duke</i> (1976)	p. 26
Figure 2.5.1	Examples of tonal puns in Bach Cello suites (Baker, 2009, p. 14)	p. 30
Figure 2.5.2	Beethoven Bagatelle in C Major, op. 119, no. 8. The chords discussed are highlighted in green and the B-flat octave is highlighted in yellow.	p. 30
Figure 2.6.1	Macklay's <i>Many Many Cadences</i> . Bars 1-3, demonstrating the opening cadence section (2016)	p. 34
Figure 2.6.2	Bars 125 -131 show some of the slow section of <i>Many Many Cadences</i>	p. 35
Figure 2.7	Zupančič's (2008) diagram of the joke and the comic sequence (p. 141)	p. 37
Figure 2.8	Opening bars of Webern's Quartet op. 22	p. 44
Figure 3.1	'Anatomy of an interruption' by Deborah A. Boehm-Davies and Roger Remington, (2009, p. 1125)	p. 54
Figure 3.2	Transcription of Frank Foucault interruption sequence from <i>Shoes</i> (2018)	p. 57-8
Figure 3.3	From <i>Time with People, opus 1</i> , by Tim Parkinson (2012-13)	p. 62
Figure 3.4	Excerpt from <i>Gli Anni Prog</i> by Laurence Crane, showing the scored desk bell cues following indeterminate vamped phrases (2014, Crane, p. 12)	p. 64
Figure 4.1	Charlie Chaplin being drawn through the machine that he has become part of in <i>Modern Times</i> (1936) (Raghuramaraju, 2021)	p. 82
Figure 4.2	Venn diagram of two simultaneous mechanical roles resulting in a zany role	p. 83
Figure 4.3	The archetypal Zanni of the Commedia dell'Arte (n. d.)	p. 84
Figure 4.4	Original diagram showing how the roles, characteristics and statuses relate.	p. 85
Figure 4.5	The referee firing the starting pistol for the PDQ Bach performance of Beethoven's 5th Symphony Sportscast [YouTube screengrab] (nnhjake, 2011)	p. 87
Figure 4.6	How the comic roles of the PDQ Bach performance relate.	p. 89
Figure 4.7	The comic roles Arco play in <i>Mencon</i> .	p. 92
Figure 4.8	The comic roles of <i>number three</i> from <i>number two and three</i> .	p. 94
Figure 4.9	The comic roles of Jeremiah from <i>Dead Cat Bounce</i> plotted to represent the duality of characters and performer.	p. 96

Table of Examples

Example 2.1	Opening phrase of <i>DURATION DURATION and</i> (bars 1-2)	p. 39
Example 2.2	'Homonymic Barlow pun' in <i>DURATION DURATION and</i>	p. 39
Example 2.3	'Homophonic Barlow pun' in <i>DURATION DURATION and</i>	p. 39
Example 2.4	Cadence catalogue	p. 40
Example 2.5	'Pointillist section' chord progression	p. 43
Example 2.6	Extract of 'pointillist section' from <i>DURATION DURATION and</i>	p. 43
Example 2.7	<i>Barlow puns</i> in the opening 'Dice World intro' section of <i>Part A + B: Medieval Retro (for flute, knight, and objects)</i>	p. 46
Example 3.1	Score provided to visualise the story to symbolise the entangled nature of the anecdote.	p. 66
Example 4.1	Knocking zone 1 from number three for string quartet and stagehand.	p. 93

Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

Print name: James Oldham

Title of thesis: Translating Comedic Materials into Music

I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission.

Signature:

Date: 20/07/25

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Introduction

General Introduction

During my first year as an undergraduate composition student at Royal Birmingham Conservatoire in 2009, I was determined to write the most serious music I could. This approach felt like the natural and expected path for a composer. That was until my composition teacher, Joe Cutler, made a simple yet profound statement: music is allowed to be funny. This revelation struck me deeply, as I had grown up immersed in the comedy of 90s television, from the surreal sketches of *The Fast Show* and *The League of Gentlemen* to the dry wit of sitcoms like *Father Ted* and *Spaced*. It was not the music of these early comedy influences, but the comedy itself that piqued my fascination. Although not all my compositions over the years have been overtly comedic, there has often been a subtle, wry humour woven into the fabric of my work.

In 2018, my creative practices took an even more direct turn towards comedy when I began performing as a clown with my performance group, *Waste Paper Opera*. I also hosted *Whole Punch*¹, a variety show series in London, and later attended a clown-and-music workshop with Toby Park of the comedy theatre group *SpyMonkey*². As I delved into clowning, comedy moved from a peripheral interest to a central focus in my work, even when humour was not the primary intention.

Through these experiences, I became particularly interested in the precision of timing used by comedians and clowns for maximal effect — both in terms of structural pacing and improvisation. I began to see parallels between comedic timing in performance and the timing found in music. Frustrated by the lack of scholarship or discussion on comedy in music, I chose to make this a focused research interest, and it exists now as a central theme of this thesis.

Comedy has recently been the subject of deeper reflection in the public sphere. In *Nanette* (2018), comedian Hannah Gadsby shifts the boundaries of comedic performance by

¹ *Whole Punch* was the output of a year-long curatorial *Waste Paper Opera* residency in 2018. Culminating in a monthly variety show series, *Whole Punch* programmed clowns, composers, poets, performance artists, and other interdisciplinary practitioners to perform short routines on the stage of the Rosemary Branch Theatre.

² *SpyMonkey* is a theatre company run by Gaulier-trained clowns including clown and musician Toby Park, who regularly runs the *Clown, Music and Comedy* workshop in Berlin, Brighton and London.

announcing her retirement from comedy in the middle of a live show³. This defies the audience's expectations of 'tension and release'⁴ and turns the comedy into an act of serious engagement. Similarly, comedian Joe Lycett made headlines in 2022 for his satirical treatment of the soon-to-be Prime Minister Liz Truss, **using humour to challenge political narratives in ways that blurred the lines between comedy and serious discourse. These examples highlight the complex and transformative power of comedy, something I seek to explore in my own work by examining its potential within music.**

This PhD project explores the intersection of music and comedy, focusing on how comedic materials can be translated into musical composition. The aim is not simply to understand how to be funny, but to **examine how comedy can function as a creative tool within music. By adapting specific comedic strategies into the language of music, I intend to expand the compositional process, offering a fresh perspective on musical material that is not only original but may also be effective in its humour.**

A key objective of this research is to **1) identify and isolate specific elements of comedy,** (such as the mechanisms of puns and references to the everyday) and **2) to incorporate them into the musical process.** This includes examining musical processes that may not appear overtly comedic but exhibit mechanisms that mirror comedic strategies, such as sudden shifts in harmony, tonality or style (schema). By doing so, **I aim to generate musical material that conveys a sense of unpredictability and surprise,** enriching both the comic potential of the work and its broader compositional scope. These techniques, although primarily explored in a comedic context, also provide new ways of thinking about traditional musical forms, from scored concert works to experimental music theatre.

Another important aspect of this research is **the development of new terminology to describe the processes and devices involved in creating comedic music.** By defining these elements, **I aim to create a practical toolkit for composers and a new framework for musicologists to analyse music through a comedic lens.** This lexicon will not only help

³ In a typical comedy performance, the comedian will deliver humorous material throughout the show to elicit as much laughter as possible. Gadsby, instead, stopped delivering jokes for laughs by a certain point in the show and instead turned to a serious subject matter. The establishing of expectation of laughter was essential to this routine to create the impact necessary for the discussion.

⁴ 'Tension and release' is a well-established principle in comedy, which is outlined and defined in chapter 1 (1.2)

articulate how techniques, mechanisms, and principles from comedy (comedic materials) can be embedded within musical works, but also how they can be interpreted and utilised in interdisciplinary performance contexts.

While the primary focus of this PhD is on **music's potential for comedy**, it also considers how comedic materials can inform broader approaches to experimental music theatre, multimedia, and performance practice(s) – i.e. intermedial approaches. In this context, comedy exists within and extends beyond the music itself to influence the dramaturgy, physicality, and interactions between performers and non-musical elements. By exploring these intersections, I aim to challenge traditional boundaries between music composition and performance, demonstrating how these fields can inform and enrich one another.

The final aspect of this research reflects on my intermedial practice, where **traditional music composition serves as a foundation for creative experimentation across different media**. The portfolio accompanying this commentary includes works that blend musical and theatrical elements, illustrating the potential for music, comedy, and performance to be intertwined in ways that offer new creative possibilities.

The study of comedy and humour is notoriously difficult. In conducting this research project, I do not seek to provide a complete taxonomy, understanding, or framework for comedy in music. Instead, I have aimed to find a few lenses through which comedy in music can be practiced and studied, which have been derived from my composition practice. **In doing so, I seek to contribute useful terminology for the study of comedy in music.**

In conclusion, **this PhD is an exploration of how translating comedic materials into music can shape and enhance the practice of composition, providing new ways of thinking about musical structure, performance, and intermediality.** By developing a framework for the study of comedy in music, I hope to contribute both to the theory of music and comedy and to the evolution of compositional techniques that bring humour, surprise, and subversion into experimental music theatre.

Research Questions:

- How can comedic materials identified from comedy (such as puns, interruptions, and comic archetypes) be translated to music composition and performance, particularly in terms of subversion of expectation, original music material, and approaches to performance practice?
- What unique roles and dynamics emerge in the interaction between comic performers and musicians, and how do these roles inform both the execution of comedy in music and the broader relationship between music and comedic material?
- In what ways can the integration and understanding of comedic materials in music challenge and influence traditional music composition, experimental music theatre, and interdisciplinary performance practices?

Methodology

The portfolio of work was written, performed, and documented in 2019–2022. My practice consists of composition, devising, workshopping, live performance, comedy and music performance attendance, and clown training.

Some of the portfolio consists of compositions written for workshops at the University of Southampton. These works were composed and workshopped with the intention of exploring specific comedic materials: *number three from number two and three* (2019), *DURATION DURATION and* (2021) and *Interruption Duet #1* (2022).

I composed, devised and performed music theatre works for public performance with Waste Paper Opera with an embedded understanding of certain research findings: *Syrup Tracing* in 2020 had minimal specific research aims but *Dead Cat Bounce* (2022) was an intentional exploration of certain research foci identified in the commentary. Working closely with Waste Paper Opera artistic director Klara Kofen, I was able to integrate research aims and findings into the process of composing, devising, and performing for public performance. This differed from workshop pieces where the main intention was solely to investigate comedic materials.

For Waste Paper Opera, the comedy and music research is merely one element within a much larger process involving artistic research, dramaturgy, storytelling, and technical staging. Where applicable I outline the significance of incorporating comedic materials into experimental music theatre (intermedial) processes.

I attended clown training with Giovanni Fusetti in Padova, Italy in December 2021, which added valuable insight to my reflections and understandings of comedic performance. Working with Object Collection as a performer in 2022-23 was an opportunity to learn about how a New York experimental performance group cultivates humour in an embedded and subtle way. This enabled me to place an understanding of comedic materials and process in the context of other experimental music theatre groups working in similar ways to that of my own compositions and work with Waste Paper Opera.

Much of my work is intermedial, incorporating elements of classical composition, devised studio work, live performance, video, movement, acting, stage direction, dramaturgy, and collaboration. I work freely across these forms but with a grounding in classical composition. I implement rigorous composition process whether the work is a scored instrumental work or a devised experimental theatre work. Where possible, I demonstrate how intermedial implementation has been achieved. In some cases, I reflect upon my experiences learning from clown pedagogue Giovanni Fusetti and experimental performance group Object Collection.

I identify theoretical frameworks to understand the different phenomena and materials found in my own work with a constant feedback loop between my practice and theoretical research. Having discussions with industry peers, fellow composers, artists, performers, and friends throughout was also continuous and integral.

I attended a lot of comedy and music concerts during this process, which is essential for real world reflection and contextualisation of this research, though this was restricted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Structure of chapters

Each chapter follows the same general structure: theoretical framework, examples from comedy, examples from composers, and examples within my own output. The reason why I refer to the content of each chapter as 'lenses' is loosely based on Mary Overlie's *Six Viewpoints* (2016), where her theoretical framework for the practice and study of theatre and movement is divided into six perspectives which can be explored separately and practiced as individual or combined elements.

In chapter 1, I summarise theories of humour as a foundational understanding of humour's function. I look at existing writings on comedy or humour in music, reviewing the two most applicable contributions to date, and assess what may inform my framework. Then I outline my *three lenses for the translation of comedic materials into music*, which comprise the remaining three chapters.

Chapter 2 is a translation of Victor Raskin's *script-based semantic theory of humor*. Drawing on this mechanism of double meaning, I focus on the pun and consider how it can be translated to music, using existing ideas of musical puns as a starting point. My three categories of musical puns are *Barlow puns*, *tonal puns*, and *function puns*.

For Chapter 3 I focus on interruptions, which are everyday occurrences, comic staples, and a highly applicable device for working with music. I draw on theory from Interruption Science and cross-examine its applicability with comedy and music.

Chapter 4 is an offering of a framework for the roles and relational dynamics that may be present in when performing comic music⁵. I draw on the aesthetic theory of Sianne Ngai, philosophical principles of Henri Bergson, and consider ideas found in clown training to delineate four roles of: *total musician*, *foolish musician*, *musical fool*, and *total fool*.

⁵ By comic music, I simply refer to any music performance or composition where music is the primary focus, but elements of comedy are present. This could be intentionally comedic or a by-product of another intention.

Chapter 1

Creating a framework for the translation of comedic materials into music

1.1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to outline the framework I use for the translation of materials from comedy into music, which comprise the remaining chapters of this commentary. I do this by surveying a general background in humour theory, reviewing relevant existing studies on comedy and music, and introducing the ‘three lenses’ that comprise the main structure of my research.

I summarise release theory, superiority theory, incongruity theory, and benign violation theory, incorporating ideas of play (1.2) to extrapolate general principles for the understanding of the effects of comedy. In doing so, I aim to highlight significant attributes of comedy and humour that can benefit the music composition process beyond theories of why we laugh.

I then review studies of humour in music, starting with Ann-Marie Hanlon’s (2013) questioning of why there is a lack of music-specific methodology and terminology, and consequent offering of categories for a general study of humour in music (1.3). I look at David Huron’s (2006) study the psychology of expectation in music, in which he outlines a general theory of expectation as a framework for the study of expectation in music. He uses psychological analysis to understand subversion of listener expectation, a substantial part of which addresses laughter caused by musical surprise (1.4). Both reviews provide valuable points of departure for creating a framework for translating comedic materials into music.

The final part of this chapter is a proposal of my own theoretical framework in the form of three ‘lenses’ that structure the remaining chapters of the commentary (1.5). My *three lenses for the translation of comedic materials into music* have been derived from a combination of theoretical research from music and other fields (commentary) and observations from my practice as a composer and performer (portfolio).

1.2. Theories of humour

Three prominent theories

In the study of humour, there are many theories of why we laugh and what process occurs in a laughter eliciting moment. The three most prominent theories are incongruity theory, superiority theory, and release theory⁶. They address different aspects of humour giving different perspectives on why we laugh. Sheila Lintott (2016) suggests that “the incongruity theory focusses on the cognitive aspects, superiority the emotive, and the relief the physical of comic amusement” (p. 347). In order to understand what makes materials (such as widely established techniques, mechanisms, and devices) from comedy interesting for translation into music, I outline a general understanding of what a response to humour means. In doing so, I highlight aspects of humour which are more broadly applicable to music than the inducing of laughter.

Superiority is the oldest of the theories. Cate Watson’s (2015) definition suggests “the superiority theory holds that we find humour in the misfortunes of others”⁷, and remarking on its origins, adds that “[m]any accounts trace the antecedents of this theory to Plato and Aristotle, who warned of the ethical dangers of such causes of laughter” (p. 409). Such views of ancient philosophers may also have led to the omission of humour from mainstream philosophical discourses. John Morreall concludes “the most that any notable philosopher wrote about laughter or humor was an essay, and only a few lesser-known thinkers such as Frances Hutcheson and James Beattie wrote that much” (2012). In *Leviathan*, Hobbes (2008) talks of ‘sudden glory’, which places the theory in the fleeting experience of laughter, albeit within the emotional tenet of superiority. This theory may be useful for discussing the ‘in-joke’ which “appeals to the vanity of its listeners” (Duff, 2001, p. 81). This definition continues, stating that “the fact that many people are reluctant to admit that they do not understand a joke is proof enough of this phenomenon” (Ibid., p. 81). Superiority theory may not account for all bouts of laughter as it focusses on its hostile form, yet it can provide valuable insight for the

⁶ Release theory is sometimes known as relief theory.

⁷ A situation in which *schadenfreude*, the “feeling of pleasure or satisfaction when something bad happens to someone else” provokes laughter, could be understood in terms of superiority theory (Dictionary.Cambridge.org, 2023).

understanding of laughter in certain music performance settings, such as the concert hall (4.2)⁸.

One of the most significant accounts of the release theory is in Sigmund Freud's (1963) *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, in which he situates humour in the context of the naïve, where, through the lowering of inhibitions, surplus psychic energy can be spent on laughter. In remarking that "only when we are sure of [the person producing is without internal inhibition], will we laugh instead of being indignant", Freud adds an element of safety as a criterion of laughter (1963, p. 182). While discussing the works of Dr. Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, John Wright (2006) depicts an ancient scenario where "the sound of laughter would dispel the hunters' aggression and reassure everyone [...] that everything is ok" (p. 7). Wright's discussion adds a pre-historic implication to Freud's representation of laughter. An example Ramachandran gives is "a portly gentleman striding purposefully along, only to slip on a banana skin and be sent sprawling on the floor" (ibid., p. 19). Wright adds that were "the portly gentleman to get up again with no apparent harm being done, then we would probably laugh in order to reassure each other that everything is OK" (ibid., p. 19). The mechanism described by release theory might also be simplified into the idea of 'tension and release', a well-known principle in comedy, where comedians deliberately create tension (often with a joke setup) and release that tension (often with a punchline).

John Morreall suggests that of the three theories, incongruity is "now the dominant theory of humor in philosophy and psychology" (2012). Although the term *incongruity theory* came later, Immanuel Kant wrote that humour "posits laughter (which he seems to conflate with the perception of humor) as a reaction to a situation or utterance that is unexpected, absurd, illogical, or otherwise inappropriate in some way" (Straus, 2014, p. 27). Ian Jaeger Straus's (2014) definition suggests that "[t]he term 'incongruity theory' refers to a group of philosophical accounts of humor that posit the perception of incongruity as the source of amusement" (ibid., p. 6). Straus provides two ways in which the theory operates, indicating that "it explains why people react with laughter in a very wide range of situations" and "it provides

⁸ For example, in Bill Dietz's *46 Instances* (3.3) where the prefacing of concert hall etiquette is central to the subversion. Or in the music of Peter Schickele, where his comedy routines are composed for classical orchestras and concert hall audiences.

an explanation of what makes a situation itself funny” (ibid., p. 6). In short, incongruity theory argues that something is funny because it subverts expectation.

Benign violation theory and play

The release theory may include elements of safety, and incongruity theory accounts for cognitive subversions of expectation, but there are still aspects of humour that remain unaccounted for. First published in 2014, the benign violation theory is a recent addition, incorporating ideas of ‘play’ with reference to the three prominent theories. Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren (2016) outline that “humor occurs when and only when three conditions are satisfied: (1) a situation is a violation, (2) the situation is benign, and (3) both perceptions occur simultaneously.” (ibid.) This theory describes why acts such as play-fighting elicit laughter and not just comedy and cognitive subversion of expectation. McGraw adds that “play fighting and tickling cease to elicit laughter either when the attack stops (strictly benign) or becomes too aggressive (malign violation)” (ibid.). The theory is appealing as it simultaneously accounts for why we have not laughed. If an offensive joke is told, it is likely only a violation, or a malign violation, and not simultaneously benign. Similarly, a joke that fails to violate will be strictly benign. The theory is built on the idea of simultaneity – McGraw and Warren (2010) suggest that “humor requires that two contradictory ideas about the same situation be held simultaneously” (p. 1142).

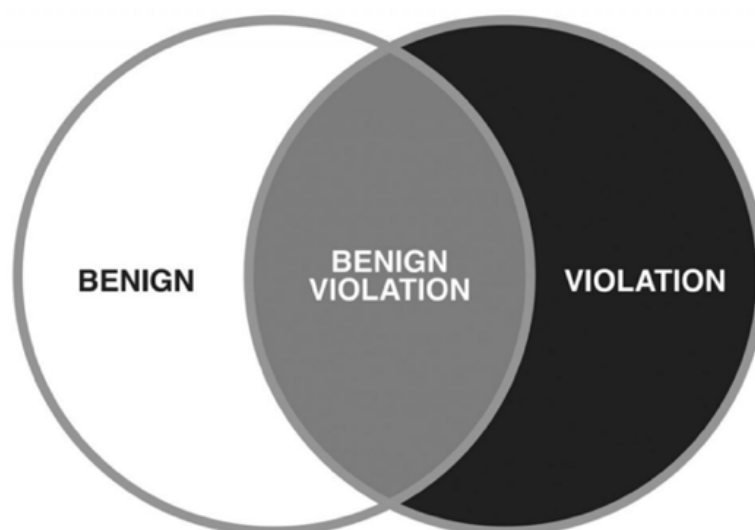


Figure 1.1 – Benign violation Venn diagram (McGraw & Warren, 2016)

As suggested by the benign violation theory, another prominent aspect of the study of humour is play. In play, there are theories speculating that we train for the unexpected. This is a reason ethnologists attribute to why infant acts of play-fighting, stone throwing, and handstands can be witnessed in apes as well as humans (Morreall, 2012). We are training our ability to expect threats of danger through play and develop our ability to cope (see Gadsby in 4.1). Morreall summarises that “According to many ethnologists, mock aggression was the earliest form of play, from which all other play developed” (2012). In play fighting there is a signalling that both parties are playing and not really fighting and therefore a signifier of harmless play. Brian Boyd describes play as a “harmless jolt to expectations” as he muses on its instinctive function (2005, p. 10). McGraw and Warren conclude, that “Simultaneity, moreover, provides a way to interpret the threats present in play fighting and tickling as benign” (2010, p. 1142).

The play signal is also present in comedy, where we respond to the signals of harmless play to gain maximum enjoyment from a comedian – a condition outlined by Freud. Morreall (2012) separates the instinctive function of play from the human social function. He suggests that a “parallel with humor here is music, which we typically play and listen to for pleasure, but which can boost our manual dexterity and even mathematical abilities, reduce stress, and strengthen our social bonds” (2012). The developmental play for pleasure of music is a useful analogy for understanding the pleasure of play in adults. Furthermore, it alludes to the compatibility of music and comedy.

1.3. The Lack of Music Specific Methodology for Humour in Music

In the chapter “Satie and the meaning of the comic”, Ann-Marie Hanlon (2013) discusses the importance of humour in the music of Erik Satie and how his reception in early-modernist France was disproportionate to the radical impact of his work. Hanlon discusses why there is a lack of terminology for the study of humour in music with Erik Satie as a case study. She delineates that “the barrier to engagement with Satie’s music was inextricably linked to the concept of the musical canon and its ideological opposition to humour,” proposing several reasons for this (Hanlon, 2013, p. 19). The chapter addresses the fact that “Scholarly engagement with humour has been hindered by an uncertainty surrounding possible methodological approaches and the lack of a music-specific vocabulary for dealing with this subject” (p. 19).

Hanlon questions the role of the musical canon and its ideological aversion to humour in the early 20th century when modernism was becoming established as a presence in music. She notes that this ideology contributed to a low view of humour and that “Satie’s reception was strongly influenced by the humanist-Romantic perception of the comic that dominated French society at this time: in music in particular, humour was viewed as a subversive form of expression and intellectual resistance” (ibid., p. 19). Furthermore, the role of Satie’s humour actively moved in opposition to the expectation of his contemporaries:

The materialism of humour means that it possesses a particular ability to challenge or even attack symbolic structures such as the canon. Humour can transform an abstract normative (such as the canon) into a concrete, visible subject, and remove it from its comfortable hegemonic position: humour can ‘radicalise’ the norm. (ibid, p. 21)

The targeting of the symbolic canon is central to Hanlon’s arguments that “Satie’s pivotal role as an avatar of musical modernism will never be adequately acknowledged or valued unless the issue of humour in his music and the truly revolutionary role it played in his contribution to those discourses is understood” (ibid, p. 20).

Hanlon seeks to increase understanding of Satie’s role as a comic with Henri Bergson’s 1900 writing, *Le Rire* (Laughter). For Hanlon, *Le Rire*’s “three critical essays on the meaning of the comic are insightful in their elaboration of *a priori* attitudes towards humour in art” (ibid., p. 22). In Hanlon’s consideration of *Le Rire*, there is substantial discussion of the social role of humour:

Humour serves a range of functions in society, from the maintenance of the status quo to its deconstruction; however, it is not a universal language, and its range of meanings is socially, historically and culturally specific. In the words of Bergson: “To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one... Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social signification.” (ibid., p. 21)

Another issue raised is the ageing of humour. Hanlon depicts how the lack of universality and timelessness of humour narrows the reach of humorous music due to its cultural and temporal specificity. Unlike serious classical music which may explore universal emotions, nature or

religion, humorous music composed in reference to contemporary discussions, public moods, local references, and current affairs, may age quickly. The use of humour may also restrict the geographical reach of music due to local references.

Hanlon addresses the lack of appropriate methodology for worthwhile understanding of the study of humour in music. A reworking of Enrique Alberto Arias's taxonomy of '20 principal techniques of comic music' (**Figure 1.2**) is used as a starting point. Hanlon removes overlaps in categories and makes additions such as 'repetition' and 'exaggeration'. Arias's (2001) is perhaps the only entire book devoted to comedy in music and a useful resource, but I believe that Hanlon paraphrases his most useful arguments within her chapter on Satie. Parody and irony are of particular significance to the music of Satie and Hanlon explores these two 'comic sub-genres' in greater detail.

HANLON'S TAXONOMY OF HUMOUR IN MUSIC

1) Explicit reference to the comic:

- Setting music to comic text
- Alluding to a well-known comic character
- Performing the work in an overtly comic manner

2) The employment of comic sub-genres:

- Such as satire or parody
- And the use of comic modes such as irony

3) Musical surprise:

- The juxtaposition of incongruous syntactical elements
- Exaggeration
- Repetition
- Unusual effects of texture, rhythm and melodic design
- Unexpected or distant modulations, sudden switches from diatonic to non-diatonic tonalities, the harmonisation of diatonic melodies with a non-diatonic accompaniment
- The use of chance

4) Comic labelling:

- The use of comic titles
- Comic genre designations (e.g. *opera buffa*, *opéra comique*, *scherzo* (which means 'joke')).

5) Alterations/additions to the musical score:

- Visually curious notation
- The use of *sogetto cavato* ('the substitution of solmization for letters' in notation)
- The addition of texts to instrumental works
- Tempo instructions that indicate mood and style in addition to pace

6) The existence of the double:

- The use of programmatic musical description
- Reference or allusion to a particular style, genre, structure or convention
- Quotations of extant musical material
- Inversion
- The reproduction of sonorous or visual effects in a precise or allegorical fashion

Figure 1.2 – Hanlon's categories for comic technique (2013, p. 35)

In the sections on irony and parody, Hanlon discuss the expression of intent within the works of Satie. Complexities of these comic sub-genres are discussed – separating parody from mere imitation and irony from antiphrasis⁹. Hanlon provides three categories of irony: verbal, situational, and dramatic. Naturally, verbal irony is not possible without text and appeared in Satie’s writings but not his music. Situational irony involves establishing a stable context for listener expectation and subverting it. Finally, *dramatic irony*, in Hanlon’s own words, “occurs when the protagonist does not comprehend the situation in which they find themselves, while the audience does” (ibid., p. 43).

Hanlon laments that definitions on parody are lacking, suggesting that “many attempts at defining parody in music are deficient as they do not account for the cultural and historical specificity of musical parody” (ibid., p. 43). Yet parody was central to Satie’s output, using it to “challenge traditional romantic notions of genius, transcendence and originality through borrowing and the non-discrete incorporation of elements of the everyday into his music” (ibid., p. 43). The use of borrowing and lack of originality was a contributing factor to low opinion by critics. Satie’s lack of sentimentality in the treatment of parodied reference works was an anti-Romantic statement to create cultural distance from the ideological canon. It is worth noting that this is the reception of Satie’s contemporaries and does not hold true in the same way today. Although there may be some stigma around parody, it is common practice in 21st century Western music.

In the conclusion to this chapter, Hanlon advocates for researchers of Satie to “look beyond the discipline of musicology in order to find suitable methodologies and terminologies with which to analyse humour” (ibid., p. 47). In Hanlon’s proposed framework for humour in music, the tools for studying Satie are applicable to music generally. A move beyond musicology to substantiate the terminology and contextualise humour in music beyond the classical music schema¹⁰ is necessary.

⁹ Antiphrasis is “the usually ironic or humorous use of words in senses opposite to the generally accepted meanings (as in “this giant of 3 feet 4 inches”)” (Merriam-Webster, 2024)

¹⁰ When using the word schema, I suggest the meaning of “the basis by which someone relates to the events they experience” (Dictionary.com, 2024)

1.4 ITPRA Theory of Expectation and Musical Surprise

In *Sweet Anticipation*, David Huron (2006) studies the psychological process of listener expectation in music. Huron's thesis is that music expectation functions on a kind of 'folk psychology' based on "a combination of intuition and tried-and-true techniques" which he seeks to contextualise with psychology proper (2006, p. 2). In doing so, he proposes a general theory of expectation he calls the **ITPRA** theory, which "attempts to explain how expectations evoke various feeling states, and why these evoked feelings might be biologically useful" (ibid., p. 1). The acronym expands to the five responses involved in expectation: **I**magination, **T**ension, **P**rediction, **R**eaction, and **A**ppraisal. Imagination and tension are both experienced in anticipation of an event and are described as pre-outcome; while prediction, reaction, and appraisal comprise the post-outcome emotional responses that follow an event. This is a theory for expectation in general but forms a basis for Huron's study of expectation in music.

The ITPRA process is a complex one, with emotions occupying different timescales and levels of consciousness. There can be foresight of personal experience in the imagination response, like bringing an umbrella when it might rain. The appraisal response is also one of conscious reflection following initial knee-jerk reactions. More immediate are the tension response – bracing oneself in anticipation – or the 'fight, flight or freeze' reaction response. The prediction response pertains to the accuracy of expectation prediction leading to an emotional response that may not align with the reaction, appraisal, or general affect. Huron (2006) outlines the 'primary affect' of the situation, positing that "when the stimulus is expected, the emotional response is positively valenced; when the stimulus is unexpected, the emotional response is negatively valenced" (ibid., p. 13).

Huron writes extensively about the negative valence of the surprise. Since surprises are always inaccurate predictions, there is a 'contrastive valence' where the "magnitude of the emotional response is amplified when there is a large contrast between predicted and actual outcome." (ibid., p. 22). Huron identifies 'three flavours of surprise' for the different magnitudes of emotional response to music. These are laughter, awe, and frisson and despite their differences they align on general properties. A clear distinction is made between humour and laughter rendering humour not a necessary context for laughter any more than laughter may be absent in humour. Huron suggests that "In generating musical humor, composers are taking advantage

of the biology of pessimism” where there is a necessary negative prediction (ibid., p. 30). He continues, the “ensuing contrastive valence results in a broadly positive experience” (ibid., p. 30). The psychological function of musical surprises eliciting laughter is made clear despite Huron determining laughter a rare response to music.

Huron poses three main types of musical surprise, which are: schematic, dynamic, and veridical. Schematic surprises rely on the listener having a general understanding and expectation of the musical style to recognise a subversion. Dynamic surprises subvert expectations established within a musical duration and are not reliant on schema. A veridical surprise will reference a specific music work and play with the expectation of that reference.

In his discussion of laughter in the chapter on ‘creating surprise’, Huron analyses a four-CD compilation of live recordings of Peter Schickele’s work that includes “over 600 moments of audible audience laughter”, which he uses to identify “nine kinds of devices that form the basis of his musical humor” (ibid., p. 284). The devices described are solely musical and do not include visual or text-based humour, which is also present in Schickele’s work. Here is my summary of Huron’s ‘nine devices that form a basis for Schickele’s musical humor’:

1. *Incongruous sounds* – Including sounds from invented instruments and non-classical instruments such as bagpipes and kazoos, performed in contrast with orchestral or chamber music.
2. *Mixed genres* – Schickele’s output contains many references to genres outside orchestral repertoire including jazz, blues, folk, marching band, tango and pop. The mixtures are intended to create maximal “high art” / “low art” juxtapositions.
3. *Incongruous quotation* – Mixing a musical quotation with a style incongruous with its origin. This might include Wagner’s *Tristan and Isolde* as a tango (for four bassoons), or Bach’s Prelude No. 1 as a Philip Glass parody.
4. *Misquotation* – Taking a musical quotation and deliberately misquoting it. When quoting from Beethoven, a phrase that originally moves into a new key is brought (by Schickele) to a stereotypical close.
5. *Drifting tonality* – This attains to the use of unconventional key changes. The ‘pump-down’ is a notable mention which is a reference to the pop music ‘pump-up’ – modulating up a tone or semi-tone – but Schickele modulates down.

6. *Metric disruptions* – What Schickele refers to as “peg-leg” rhythms, these disruptions are used to skew the musical character rather than add complexity. The specific approach of metric disruption is in the context of schematic rhythmic phrasing, resulting in the implication of slapstick characters or ‘tumbling’.
7. *Implausible delays* – This device aims to sustain an unresolved tension far beyond a fathomable duration of its musical context. The humour here is from the stubbornness or unwillingness to change. The example provided by Huron is an appoggiatura that remains unresolved for several bars.
8. *Excessive repetition* – The use of repetition that goes beyond the “musical norm”. Another way of looking at this is through Bergson’s principle of mechanical inelasticity (see chapter 4), perhaps reducing the orchestra to that of a ‘broken record’. (Bergson, 1900)
9. *Incompetence cues* – This creates the contrast of amateur playing within a competent musical framework including “obnoxious” or “crude” timbre, bad intonation and “implausibly loud sounds”. The incompetence of musicianship is relatable to slapstick characters who are unable to manage simple tasks.

(ibid., p. 284-286)

These nine devices all involve a subversion of listener expectation, which Huron attributes to all laughter in Schickele’s work, and as a general principle for laughter-evoking music. An important point is made about the distinction between “high” and “low” culture in their respective likelihood to evoke laughter. ‘Highbrow’ music interrupted by a ‘lowbrow’ music reference is much more likely to induce laughter than the other way around, something regularly explored in Schickele’s work. The result is a granting of permission for the audience to laugh due to the presence of playfulness or parody. Similarly, the use of absurd sounds suggests intention of “light-heartedness or a lack of seriousness” (ibid., p. 288), signalling a playful situation (play signal). Finally, like Hanlon, Huron deems laughter as an inherently social phenomenon.

1.5. Summary of theories

Huron’s ITPRA theory is structured in a similar way to release theory, where both involve a pre-outcome and post-outcome element. The ITPRA theory of expectation offers greater detail with the inclusion of imagination response prior to tension, indicating the importance of context and foresight. Rather than a simple ‘release’, Huron’s theory includes two immediate responses, which may be of opposite receptions (contrastive valence), and a conscious follow up with an appraisal response. The superiority theory might be more of a question of appraisal than

reaction or prediction responses, as it involves judgement. Though the ‘sudden glory’ aspect implies an immediacy – at least in terms of the cause of laughter. The contrastive valence of surprise aligns with the notion of simultaneity of the benign violation theory where two simultaneous responses must occur.

Ideas of ‘high’ and ‘low’ are discussed in both texts (1.3 and 1.4) and are likely the concern of appraisal response in the sense that something is judged as ‘low-brow’ within a ‘high-brow’ context. In Huron’s discussion, this is a question of schematic surprise (genre, style) or veridical surprise (quotation) where the audience’s laughter is at the surprise of a low-brow reference. For Hanlon, ideas of ‘high’ and ‘low’ include parodied Romantic music quotation (lowering through imitation), or the **general presence of humour in a music context** (chapter 4). Humour, here, has the appraisal response of *lowering* and materialising the otherwise symbolic and transcendent schema of the classical concert.

The materialising or *lowering* of classical music may also incorporate references to the everyday. Hanlon outlines Bergson’s presentation of laughter as a social phenomenon, where laughter’s social function is placed within society. The implication is that there is a significant departure from the concert hall to return the audience to their everyday lives. Gestures such as incongruous sounds or amateurism from Huron’s categories may account for some of these interventions. Furthermore, *dynamic surprise* is an area for further exploration of everyday references – something that could register to anyone and not just those in the know (see chapter 3 on interruptions).

Hanlon’s discussion of irony offers many useful insights into how the ‘comic sub-genre’ functions. The simultaneity of mock aggression is an inherently playful idea to those who can determine the aggression as non-threatening. The idea of *dramatic irony* has a veil of tragedy as the character cannot see something that the audience can (I discuss this idea in chapter 4). Parody, on the other hand, is reliant on the audience understanding the reference. Huron’s categories of mixed genres, incongruous quotation and misquotation are related to imitation, yet all nine categories are either schematic or veridical surprises and rely on a prior knowledge of classical music. Although I will be considering certain forms of parody/schematic surprises (particularly in chapter 2), I also seek to find examples of and create *dynamic surprises*, which only depend on expectation established within the performance (chapter 3).

Huron's nine devices for musical humour are all considerations of musical surprise, of which there are three types. Musical surprise is just one of Hanlon's six categories, but elements of parody and 'reference or allusion to a particular style, genre, structure or convention' link Huron's devices to another two categories. There is not a clear alignment between these two taxonomies, largely due to the difference in research aims and fields of study.

Music specific reception of comedy

As Huron points out, laughter is an uncommon response to music. He also separates humour and laughter, where laughter can occur without humour, and humour without laughter. Some humour found in music can be subtle and notably humorous despite not eliciting laughter.

Laughter is a physical manifestation of the broader "mental state" of comic amusement. Noël Carroll (2014) debates whether comic amusement is an emotion, where the mood has an 'infectious' quality, like how anger might build towards action in large groups, which psychologists refer to as an "emotional contagion" (p. 15). The idea that comic amusement is the intended affect, instead of laughter, is relevant to what might be described as 'comic' or 'comedic' in the context of music. This is partly because of music specific presentations and audience behaviours that might make laughter inappropriate or unlikely. It also allows for the consideration of very subtle humour.

In the absence of laughter, comedic materials in music may possess characteristics such as *playfulness* or *weirdness*. The characteristic of *playfulness* may act as a play signal to permit comic amusement – a characteristic discussed in chapter 2. Huron's notion of *weirdness* is where the "recognisable becomes distinct through the composer's treatment and distortion of found material" (2006, p. 290) – this may relate to either schematic or veridical surprise. Certain treatments may render the music 'weird' in the way it subverts expectation rather than eliciting laughter, but this might still be amusing.

1.6. Three lenses for the translation of comedic materials into music

As outlined, there are useful points of departure for the study of humour, and humour in music. In developing a framework for the translation of comedic materials into music, I begin by clarifying what I mean by *comedic materials*.

In short, I use the term ‘comedic materials’ generally for the techniques, mechanisms, principles, and devices that can be extracted from examples in comedy and discussed in isolation when translated into music. More specifically, when discussing *materials*, I refer to Mary Overlie’s (2016) Six Viewpoints terminology where each categorising theme is described broadly as a material. The Six Viewpoints materials are space, shape, time, emotion, movement, and story which provide a framing for deeper study and focus on each individual material. Overlie bases the first six chapters of *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice* on these six materials allowing each to be explored in isolation with examples of, and approaches to, their practice.

The comedic materials I translate into music comprise the remaining three chapters of the commentary:

- The pun mechanism (double meanings in music)
- Interruptions (an everyday object as compositional device)
- Comic archetypes (music specific comic roles)

Throughout the commentary, I return to ideas and theories from this chapter. I use the notion of subversion of expectation as a general principle which can be means tested with the benign violation theory. A general principle of tension and release, expanded by Huron’s ITPRA theory, is another theme within my research and general understanding of how comedic materials can translate into music. I explore forms of schematic and veridical surprise, considering schema beyond classical music with examples from pop, jazz and hip-hop in chapter 2 on the pun mechanism. An exploration of schematic surprise similarly involves principles of imitation and parody that Hanlon articulates in the radical context of Satie’s piano works. I use elements of parody in my own work which I frame as *function puns* in chapter 2. Veridical surprises also feature in chapter 4, as I examine the work of Peter Schickele (as his alter ego PDQ Bach) and

Neil Luck/Arco as they base original performances on subversive performances of canonical works. I discuss them for their treatment of material and referencing, but in the context of performers and the respective roles they play.

Hanlon calls for a departure from musicology and an engagement with other fields of study to develop a better understanding and more useful terminology for humour in music. The following 'lenses' incorporate research and theoretical frameworks from a multitude of fields outside musicology.

A consideration of objects

Some comedic materials might be discussed as "objects"—recognisable elements from everyday life that can be isolated and recontextualised, including inanimate objects (e.g., chairs, keys), text (e.g., words, phrases), actions (e.g., sitting, moving), and musical elements (e.g., cadences, instrumentation, clichés). In postmodernism, intertextuality refers to the recontextualising or borrowing of objects across different media, such as referencing or quoting works in music, literature, or art. For example, in *Drowning by Numbers* (1988), Michael Nyman uses Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante as a musical "object", reinterpreting it through reharmonisation, reorchestration, and direct quotation, while keeping it recognisable yet open to transformation.

This concept of "objects" aligns with David Huron's framework of surprise, where musical objects can reference familiar elements (dynamic, schematic, or veridical surprises). In my work, I explore how musical objects can function within a comedic framework, particularly through the violation of expectations—especially when subverting their intended purpose for comic effect (see 'object misuse' in chapter 2).

The concept of objects is also relevant to my clown training with Giovanni Fusetti, where humour arises from isolating unique personal traits (e.g., a particular way of standing or walking). This self-awareness and exaggeration of one's natural idiosyncrasies can generate humour through vulnerability and rigorous practice. Similarly, in my work as a performer with Object Collection, everyday items, actions, gestures, text fragments and sounds from punk bands or film soundtracks are repurposed to create a composite "opera" that incorporate these objects, intermedially, into complex and often humorous scenes.

The repurposing of objects has been central to Waste Paper Opera's process since its founding in 2012, where reusing both musical and non-musical elements (e.g., costumes, research data) is key to our approach. This object-driven method will be explored through two specific projects, *Syrup Tracing* and *Dead Cat Bounce*, created in collaboration with Klara Kofen.

Chapter 2

The pun mechanism (double meanings in music)

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the comedic material I focus on is the semantic mechanism of the pun and I consider how this mechanism can be translated into music. I begin by looking at Victor Raskin's (1985) *script-based semantic theory of humour*, which provides useful criteria for understanding the mechanism of jokes, generally, and provides an explanation of how the pun functions. Though intended for verbal humour, the theory can be translated into music in a variety of ways for humour and for the generation of interesting musical material.

I give examples of types of puns and how they might be translated into music. As a starting point for outlining music-specific categories I use Clarence Barlow's description of a hypothetical music pun. Then I look at Michael Baker's 'Tonal Pun' theory, assessing its applicability beyond his study of Bach Cello Suites. Finally, I propose a category of the 'Function Pun', a type of music pun which has intermedial, object-driven, and comedic potential. I use musical examples from Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Sky Macklay, Stevie Wonder, Clipping, and Fiona Apple.

As I examine in the next section, the pun is based on a principle of simultaneity, which surfaced in chapter 1 in terms of the benign violation theory and the contrastive valance of surprise. I explore 'pun-like' structures and techniques utilised by comedians and composers to achieve interesting and comedic effects, demonstrating the scope for translation and application of this comedic material.

The Victor Raskin mechanism is referenced throughout the musical analysis and keys terms extracted from the theory are applied to music accordingly. I consider Sky Macklay's *Many Many Cadences* as a work that follows pun-like principles in several simultaneous ways. By looking at the micro-macro manifestation of double meanings, I draw a comparison with comedian Tim Vine, indicating how both structure and individual jokes can be simultaneously

comedic. This chapter begins with a more conventional music theory-led analysis and moves towards intermedial approaches which are relevant to my practice. Examples of both approaches can be found in the final section of this chapter where I analyse my own compositions through this lens of this comedic material.

2.2. The *Script-based Semantic Theory of Humor* (the pun mechanism)

In his 1985 book *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, Victor Raskin proposes the *script-based semantic theory of verbal humour* (SSTH). Raskin outlines how “a text can be characterized as a single-joke-carrying text if both of the conditions [...] are satisfied” (1985).

- (i) The text is compatible, fully or in part, with two different scripts
- (ii) The two scripts with which the text is compatible are opposite (ibid., p. 99)

‘Script’ here refers to a way in which a text can be understood. For example, the phrase “the house had 3 rooms” seems to have a singular meaning. In contrast, while the word “dizzy” in the phrase “she was dizzy with joy” is probably being used to amplify the degree of ‘joy’, it could refer to the physical sensation of dizziness. At the heart of a double meaning is ambiguity of meaning and a mutual compatibility therein. The terms ‘compatibility’ and ‘ambiguity’ are useful for the application of this mechanism as the *compatibility* of multiple *scripts* relies on the text’s meaning being sufficiently *ambiguous*. The word ‘opposite’ is used in a conventional way and Raskin (ibid., p. 127) allocates pairs of opposites from jokes, such as ‘church vs. sex’, ‘ordinary week vs. death’, ‘wise vs. foolish’, and ‘justice vs. corruption’. He also provides types of opposites for his “real/non-real” dichotomy:

	If Script (Scenario) 1 is:	then Script (Scenario) 2 is:
(i)	actual	non-actual
(ii)	normal	possible
(iii)	possible	impossible

Figure 2.1 – Raskin’s examples of script oppositeness (1985, p. 127)

The term ‘opposite’ is also used for the understanding of incongruity, which Raskin (1985) articulates as addressing the issue of “deliberate ambiguity of the text of the joke, the availability of two interpretations and, to a certain extent with some theorists, the unreal

nature of one of the interpretations” (p. 13). ‘Unreal’ is used as a description of something farfetched in comparison to a more likely meaning implied by the first script.

I use the following joke as an example to demonstrate this theory:

“The first thing that strikes a stranger in New York is a big car” (ibid., p. 77)

This ‘joke-carrying’ text exploits the double meaning of the word “strikes”. It is compatible with two different meanings, which are opposite: collision vs. impression. Until hearing ‘big car’, the listener likely presumes that the ‘stranger’ is seeing something they have never seen before. The big car exposes the second script: ‘strikes’ = collides (the stranger is physically hit by a car). The oppositeness of the internal thought of the ‘stranger’ vs. a potentially fatal accident is a significant violation. Both scripts are fully compatible with “the first thing that strikes a stranger in New York” and the ambiguous wording allows for the two scripts to remain simultaneously compatible until the punchline ‘is a big car’. The word ‘strikes’ functions as what Sally O Reilly refers to as a ‘hinge’ to move from one meaning to another (2016).

This joke is a pun, as it exploits the double meaning (compatibility) of a single word to hinge between two different scripts. It is specifically a homonymic pun, where the word is spelt and pronounced the same in both scripts but has a different meaning. Other principal types of puns include homophonic, where the word sounds the same but is spelt differently, and homographic, where the word looks the same but sounds different. An example of homophonic is “you can tune a guitar, but you can’t tuna fish”. The ambiguity of a homophonic pun works best when spoken as the reader can see that a different word is being used, while a speaker can hide it within the implication of a different word. A homographic pun is more effective in its written form: an example can be added to the previous joke “you can tune a guitar, but you can’t tuna fish, unless you play bass”. The fish, bass, and bass guitar are pronounced differently so reading it creates a greater disparity than if it is spoken.

2.3. Barlow Puns

I begin with Clarence Barlow’s idea of how a pun might translate into music. In a 2008 interview, when asked if he had attempted a musical pun, he suggests:

Clarence Barlow (CB): well, a musical pun would be something like a chord...

Interviewer (I): taken in two senses

CB: yes exactly, C7, the B-flat could be regarded as an A# and that would give it another meaning.

I: which Beethoven did

CB: yes, exactly (UCTV, 2008, 42:25)

Barlow's pun might look something like this:

The image shows a musical score for five chords: C7, F, C+, B, and E. The C7 chord is in the first measure, with a flat sign above the C. The F chord is in the second measure. The C+ chord is in the third measure, with a sharp sign above the C. The B chord is in the fourth measure, with a sharp sign above the B. The E chord is in the fifth measure, with a sharp sign above the E. The notation is in treble and bass clefs.

Figure 2.2 – Clarence Barlow's homophonic musical pun in the context of a perfect cadence

In this example, the voice leading of the B-flat pulls down towards A natural, but the A# pushes up towards B natural. Despite not being the only possibilities for the resolution of each chord, these are two of the most likely. With puns, it is all about the suggestion of where it goes. The B-flat/A# acts as a hinge allowing for two compatible *scripts*, or cadences. One direction is more expected than the other. In the context of a musical phrase, this may play a trick on the ear as with this Neapolitan sixth chord from Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor:

The image shows a musical score for Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor, marked Allegretto. The notation is in treble and bass clefs. The first measure shows a C minor chord. The second measure shows an F major chord. The third measure shows a C minor chord. The fourth measure shows an E major chord. The notation is in treble and bass clefs.

Figure 2.3 – 'Barlow' pun in Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor (Taylor, 1991).

As with Barlow’s suggestion, the E-flat 7 chord (with a D-flat) in the first bar will sound the same as the E-flat augmented 6 chord in the second bar (with a C#)¹¹. To the listener, these two bars are a direct repeat, with an E-flat 7 chord setup to resolve to the A-flat chord at the start of bar 2. The C#, however, has a different function to the D-flat and leads to a second inversion G chord, followed by a perfect cadence into the key of G.

This example parallels the homophonic pun. “Tune a” and “tuna” sound the same, but in our retrospective appraisal response, we realise the difference. Similarly, the E-flat 7 and E-flat augmented 6 chord sound the same, but their different spellings have different meanings. It is worth taking care when using the term ‘homophonic’ when considering music specific terminology for humour, as homophonic is already a specific musical term¹².

Stevie Wonder uses the tonal ambiguity of pitches in a different way. In the chorus of the song *Sir Duke* (1976), he uses a basic doo-wop style chord progression with a simple diatonic melody over the top. The chorus, which is in B major, has a vocal line using six of the seven pitches of the within the key.



Figure 2.4.1 – Melody without accompaniment in B major. Stevie Wonder, *Sir Duke* (1976)

The second bar of the melody features diatonic pitches from the key of B, but Stevie Wonder uses tonal ambiguity as a hinge for another compatible script by harmonising this bar with the chord of F minor. While the melody and chord are congruent with one another, F minor is unexpected as it is foreign to the key of B; a G# minor chord here was a more obvious harmonisation (within the schema of a pop chord progression). If scored, the second bar could

¹¹ This is a hypothetical understanding of the two pitches being the enharmonic equivalent of each other. On the piano keyboard, or as MIDI, these pitches will be identical. However, string players are likely to play a flat or its enharmonic sharp in a different way – the sharp will be sharper and the flat will be flatter. Similarly, in just intonation or natural harmonic pitches on a brass instrument the pitches will not sound the same, there will be frequency discrepancies between the two pitches. For the concerns of this chapter, this is irrelevant.

¹² Homophonic is the adjective of homophony, a style of “polyphonic music in which all melodic parts move together at more or less the same pace” ([Grove Music Online, n. d.](#)).

be changed to B-flat and A-flat to fit harmonically with the F minor, but then it would be an awkward line to read as it remains comfortably in the key of B. Unlike the previous Barlow pun, this leaves the vocal line intact and briefly borrows from another context, the ambiguity of an entire bar is used as a kind of phrasal pun hinge rather than a single pitch.

The image shows a musical score for the song 'Sir Duke' (1976). It features a vocal line in treble clef with the lyrics 'they can feel it all_ o - ver_ they can feel it all_ o - ver_ peo-ple'. Above the staff, chords are indicated: B, Fm, E, C#m7, and E/F#. A bracket spans the Fm and E chords, indicating a melodic alteration or phrasal pun hinge.

Figure 2.1.2 – Implied melody alteration in *Sir Duke* (1976)

These examples may follow the basic mechanism of Raskin’s *SSTH*, but are they funny? Do they carry any comedic value? Were they intended to be funny?

It is likely that Mozart’s re-interpretation of the dominant-seventh chord into a Neapolitan sixth chord was intended to be playful. He was known for his playfulness and occasional humour in his works, created through playing with listener expectation. An extended analysis of musical play by Roger Moseley (2016) acknowledges that “Mozart’s enthusiasm for ludic pursuits, at once perpetuated and distorted by the historiographical trope of the “immortal child,” has been comprehensively documented by Günther G. Bauer” (p. 140). If it did provoke laughter then, it is unlikely now as the ‘trick’ of re-interpreting a dominant-seventh chord is commonplace to modern ears. Nonetheless, the effect may still be enjoyable.

In the Stevie Wonder case, I suggest that there was not a humorous intention as much as a joyful one. In Jacob Collier’s (2019) analysis of *Sir Duke*, he discusses the interplay between Wonder’s passion for pop music and jazz as the song is an homage to Duke Ellington. As well as the harmonic ‘Barlow Pun’ that we hear in the chorus, there are two compatible *scripts* for the musical idiom that the song fits into. Collier demonstrates the subversion of the pop staple ‘doo-wop’ progression with a chord substitution akin to a jazz harmony (Vox, 2019, 4:50). The same music pun as indicated above is a simultaneously a harmonic and stylistic one (or schematic surprise). I suggest that to the modern ear, this registers as more of a subversion of expectation than the Mozart example because the trick is less familiar. This example is

therefore useful for signposting comic potential of the mechanism due to its higher level of *script oppositeness*. The registering of a surprise, albeit not a humorous one, is what might provoke a more joyful reception to the listener than in the Mozart example. The element of surprise is an important factor when considering subversion of expectation and here we can see what extra musical functions may attribute.

2.4. Tonal Puns

In another take on the music pun, Michael Baker (2009) outlines six criteria for the ‘tonal pun’ for analysis of a specific type of tonal ambiguity occurring in Bach solo cello suites. The premise is that the repetition of a section beginning and ending in different tonalities can lead to a double meaning between first and second hearings. The six criteria are as follows:

1. Minor key, exhibiting typical common-practice harmony and tonality
2. Binary form/at least one repeat section
3. Modulation to and cadence in relative key by end of first section; to tonic minor by end of second section
4. Unaccompanied/*unisono* texture at beginning of one or both sections (this could imply that sections begin in a contrapuntal/imitative manner)
5. Melody emphasizes 3 and 5 of overall tonic at beginning of one or both repeated sections
6. Harmony not explicitly determined at beginning of the piece/beginning of each section (i.e. 1 not emphasized at beginning of each section (Baker, 2009, p. 8)

Examples from Bach cello suites appear throughout Baker’s article to show how the six criteria can but utilised for tonal puns (**Figure 2.5.1**). Another example where a similar type of pun occurs is in Beethoven’s Bagatelle in C Major op. 119, no. 8 (**Figure 2.5.2**). Here the B-flat octave at the beginning of the second section will sound different depending on the chord (and tonality) that precedes it. The first time it succeeds a G major chord, implying a G minor, but the second time comes after a C major, which gives the impression of a C7 chord. As this example ‘looks’ and ‘sounds’ the same it could be considered a homonymic pun. Unlike Barlow’s example, this is a B-flat in both instances, but the meaning changes depending on what chord comes before it.

EXAMPLE 13. Bach, BWV 1009, Bourrée II, beginning of second section

EXAMPLE 14. Bach, BWV 1009, Bourrée II, end of second section and repeat

EXAMPLE 15. Bach, BWV 1009, Bourrée II, end of second section and *Da Capo*

Figure 2.5.1 – Examples of tonal puns in Bach Cello suites (Baker, 2009, p. 14)

Figure 2.5.2 – Beethoven Bagatelle in C Major, op. 119, no. 8. The chords discussed are highlighted in green and the B-flat octave is highlighted in yellow.

Baker's examples are useful for thinking about longer phrases than in the *Barlow pun*. A similar tonal ambiguity can be found in the song *Hot Knife* by Fiona Apple (2012). The first verse is sung with no harmonic accompaniment. The melody is in the B-flat blues scale, which is tonally ambiguous due to being compatible with different keys. Apple adds in one extra note to the melody, which is a G-natural. This raised sixth implies a major harmonic sonority. It might also be considered a Dorian scale with an added blue note. The unaccompanied melody sets up expectations of what an accompaniment could sound like, but the tonal ambiguity allows for many harmonic directions and compatible accompaniments. The unaccompanied blues scale melody also has schematic implications of style, genre, and even cultural history, with tempo, rhythm and phrasing. A stylistic comparison might be the a cappella spirituals of Bessie Jones.

The second verse of *Hot Knife* is accompanied with a chord progression that features a G-flat half diminished chord resolving to B-flat, then F7 to B-flat minor. This harmony is compatible with the melody yet not as obvious as the implied schema. The playful midrange piano arrangement sounds like it is from a different musical style than the initial musical implication (*script*). It is closer in style to music hall, ragtime, or the music of George Gershwin, where the mood is lighter and more playful than the spirituals of Bessie Jones. We have departed from the blues now and Apple is taking the listeners in a different direction. In terms of content this makes sense, as the song is about conflicted romantic feelings between her and a supposed male partner. But, as for the mechanism, it provides a second meaning. Like *Sir Duke*, the style of the song has two *scripts* in terms of harmony and schema.

I do not suggest that the unexpected harmony and stylistic shift of the second verse is humorous, but while this shift may not induce laughter, I do think the manoeuvre 'tickles' the mind. This tickling seems to be a result of playfulness and the removing of weight from the song (a play signal of light-heartedness). The tinkering light piano is more subversive than the Mozart example as it contains more *script oppositeness*. Like in *Sir Duke*, the 'pun' represents a departure of style or genre as well as a hinge on which the harmony can pivot.

The playfulness with ambiguity and the affordances of the function of material are what is really at stake here. In the music of Fiona Apple and Stevie Wonder, I have demonstrated that they offer more *script oppositeness* than the starting point of this section.

2.5. Function Puns

Simon Critchley's discussion of 'changing the situation' is an important principle for the distinguishing of comedy that does more than merely subvert expectation. In his 2002 book *On Humour*, Critchley articulates the concept of 'changing the situation', which can help explain *function puns* as a meaningful comic principle. Musing on a sentiment from the play *Comedians* by Trevor Griffiths, Critchley proposes that "a true joke, a comedian's joke, suddenly and explosively lets us see the familiar defamiliarized" in what Griffiths' character calls "changing the situation" (2002, p. 10). The familiar/unfamiliar dichotomy is reminiscent of Raskin's *opposites*, but also elevates the importance of knowing what is being subverted. He adds that "This idea of a change of situation can be caught in Mary Douglas's claim that, 'A joke is a play upon form that affords an opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity'" (ibid., p. 10). The changing of situation in Mary Douglas's claim is that a comedian will render a general understanding as a mere option. With this principle in mind, I look at examples where the 'accepted pattern' is being formally realised in a different capacity – i.e. changing the situation. Rather than a 'play on words', this is a 'play on function'.

Comedian Andy Kaufman, in a 1976 routine at the Improvisation in New York, changes the situation from 'being a bad stand-up comedian' to 'being a good musician' (rejectedburrito, 2009). The routine begins with Kaufman telling low-quality jokes that receive a cold reception of awkward laughs, boos, and jeers. As the jokes continue, he reacts increasingly to the audience's disdain, eventually confronting them for not laughing at the jokes and instead laughing *at* him when he gets confused. He leaves the room mid-set, but then returns to tell the audience that he was only trying to make them laugh and now they have really upset him. Becoming increasingly emotional, Kaufman starts crying. The audience seem confused as to whether the comedian is truly offended or if this is just part of the act. Finally, the crying becomes a rhythmic loop which Kaufman accompanies with a competent conga solo before taking a bow and thanking the audience with a big smile.

The routine follows the criteria of *SSTH*. The *text* is Kaufman's fake crying, which is simultaneously *compatible* with three *scripts*:

1. The audience have upset him because they did not laugh at his joke,
2. He is pretending to cry which has become gratuitous,

3. The crying is the rhythmic material for a musical performance.

The third script is sufficiently opposite and ‘unreal’ enough to get laughs. The elaborate ‘misuse’ is what is so effective here. The function has changed from communication of emotion to a musical object, which is a ‘function pun’.

The song *Get Up* (2014), by experimental hip-hop group Clipping, begins with an alarm clock sound that becomes irritating as it continues. The irritation is partly resolved as Daveed Diggs starts rapping over it. Lyrically, Diggs’s text aligns with the waking up theme established by the alarm. The resolution of irritation is arguably partly achieved through a comedic aspect: ‘alarms are not usually the backing track for rapping’. Musically, the rhythmic simplicity of the alarm provides a foil for the increasing virtuosity of the rapping. The continuation of the alarm creates a *function pun* in two ways: (1) the alarm should have stopped as its function of waking was achieved, and (2) the function of the alarm was not designed to be a backing track for an entire song. In the chorus, the function of the alarm changes again, it transforms from a pulse or beat to rap over into a harmonic progression for Mariel Jacoda to sing over. This irritating sound has become beautiful, which is another *compatible script* function of this sound. This song is not laugh out loud funny, but there is a cynical humour and the effect of defamiliarising the alarm is clear.

Tim Vine's stand-up comedy is a good example of *function puns* in comedy. He is known for his one-liners¹³ which are predominantly pun-based and often considered ‘dad-jokes’. These one-liners are delivered relentlessly throughout a 60-minute show, with some inclusion of props and songs. One of Vine’s approaches is interpreting a figure of speech (e.g. “I had a bone to pick with him”) literally, removing the nuance and socially accepted oddness of it. This is what can be found on an individual joke level. On the macro, structural level there is a misuse of objects (jokes), functioning in an unexpected way, where we are not concerned with the individual jokes but the sheer quantity and speed is what is now making us laugh. This is not specific to any one of Vine’s shows, but a principle he adopts throughout his career.

¹³ One-liners are very short jokes that can literally be delivered as a single line or sentence.

Sky Macklay's Many Many Cadences

There are connections between the comedy of Tim Vine and Sky Macklay's 2016 string quartet *Many Many Cadences*. The opening section is fast, which is followed by a slow middle section, then a final section returns to the faster opening material with variations. As the title suggests, the first section features a long and frenetic succession of short phrases that each present a cadence (**Figure 2.6.1**). The function of cadences is to resolve or subvert resolution at the end of a longer musical phrase. If the musical cadence was considered a type of punchline, then this piece could be considered a series of punchlines without the a setup. In this sense, the function of the cadences is stripped and removed from their established context (changing the situation). In the description on her website, Macklay notes "I stretch the listeners' perception of cadences by recontextualizing these predictable chord progressions in very fast cells that are constantly changing key and register" (n. d.). David Huron (2006) might describe this stretching of listener perception as schematic surprise (as discussed in 1.4) where "the music is constructed so that it violates some existing schema that listeners have brought to the listening experience" (p. 269). Cadences are a good example of schema and have been well studied by musicologists. Huron adds that "in the chorale harmonizations by J.S. Bach, V-I cadences are fifty times more prevalent than V-vi" and that "there does not appear to be any natural affinity between V and I apart from learned exposure" (ibid., p. 271).

frenzied, staccato notes
are non vibrato

about ♩ = 120

Many Many Cadences

Sky Macklay

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

C Eb A eb G E Db bb D

sempre *f*

CV I EbIV I Avii⁴ I ebvii⁴ i Gii V I Evi IV I Dbii vii⁴ I bbiv V i Dii V

sempre *f*

Figure 2.6.1 – Macklay's Many, Many Cadences. Bars 1-3, demonstrating the opening cadence section (2016)

A reason for departure from Huron's criteria is that *Many Many Cadences* at once also showcases examples of *schematic surprises* and *dynamic surprises*, yet this can also be discussed as a single comedic mechanism, as a *function pun*. *Dynamic surprises* (where the expectation is established within the piece) can describe the playful stop-starting characteristics of the piece, where the audience does not need to understand the schema of musical cadences to be amused.

Macklay's use of the cadence shows a *script oppositeness* in terms of function. The musical cadence is considered a staple of functional harmony. The speed in which Macklay scores these consecutive cadences is also relevant. In the opening fast section, there is a defamiliarising effect from the quantity and high speed at which the listener may attempt to comprehend these functional harmonies. At this speed it can be very difficult to process the harmony for its musical function – the function which can be considered *script 1*. And instead, a defamiliarisation renders the cadence a musical object, where we may know it is a cadence, but it is a dysfunctional cadence, a misused object – *script 2*. This is similar in the slow middle section, where the cadences are too slow to be perceived as functional harmony. A chord change in the middle section (**Figure 2.6.2**) may last several bars at a slow tempo.

The image shows a musical score for four staves, likely representing different instruments or voices. The score is divided into two main sections. The first section, starting at bar 125, is in 3/4 time and features a variety of dynamic markings: *mf*, *p*, *ff*, *pp*, and *mp*. The second section, starting at bar 131, is in 4/4 time and includes a section labeled 'M.S.P.' (Musical Score Page) with a 'normal' tempo marking. This section features dynamic markings of *ppp* and *mf*. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and slurs, indicating a complex and dynamic piece of music.

Figure 2.6.2 – Bars 125 -131 show some of the slow section of *Many Many Cadences*

Macklay openly signifies intentional humour (play signal). The title *Many Many Cadences* is a literal description of what the listener will hear. For any listener possessing knowledge of what a cadence is, there might be amusement when hearing the opening phrase of high-speed consecutive cadences. This setup is reinforced by the work's commissioner, the Spektral

Quartet, who released the work on their album *Serious Business*. On the album cover one of the quartet members has fallen over making it clear that *Serious Business* is a comic title. The comic prefacing of the piece is aided by the erratic and playful characteristics of the music from the beginning.

There are comic dualities in *Many, Many Cadences*. I have already mentioned how *script oppositeness* occurs between sections with the defamiliarising of established musical function. Underlying is an ‘object misuse’ of a functioning resource (the cadence). In clowning, we might imagine a chair used in many comical ways, but not as a seat. For example, the clown Charlie Rivel performs a routine where he walks on stage holding the chair in an unconventional way, and eventually his attempt to sit on the chair is long-winded and irrational (drflummox, 2009)¹⁴. Macklay is ‘misusing’ cadences in a similar way removing them from their tried-and-true music function.

There is a duality between the composer who ‘misused’ the cadence, and the composer who achieves something more virtuosic than using the cadence correctly. Noël Carroll (2014) explains how a character played by Buster Keaton is far beyond inspiring feelings of pity or superiority as he provokes laughter in a highly acrobatic and physically skilful sequence (pp. 12-13). The duality here, is between the character who managed to find themselves in this situation, and the artist behind this calamity who is demonstrating a high level of skill in their discipline (this is discussed further in chapter 4). This is another *script oppositeness* where the clowny misuse is a virtuosic execution. A composer looking at Macklay’s score will see how complex it is. This is evident in Zane Gillespe’s (2018) *An Analysis of Triadic Post-tonality in Sky Macklay’s Many Many Cadences for String Quartet*, where Macklay’s use of harmony is studied in great depth and with high praise.

2.6. Further analysis

Alenka Zupančič’s (2008) dichotomy of the joke and the comic sequence provides another useful understanding of the pun mechanism, which can be applied to Macklay’s work. For Zupančič, “a joke is always situated (exclusively) in the *instantaneity* of the moment at which its

¹⁴ Charlie Rivel’s chair routine can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9hK_G5EdmAk

point passes” (p. 134). The joke’s punchline marks the end of the sequence, everything that is setup is serving the punchline, and consequently the setup will die away after with the laughter. Conversely, in “comic sequences we can observe how a master-signifier that pops up in comic sequences is immediately transformed into a comic object [...]. It becomes an object of stretching and of other different manipulations which constitute the comedy of the sequence” (ibid., p. 147). Zupančič’s diagram (**Figure 2.7**) of the two *schema* illustrate how the effects differ. The joke schema appears similar to Raskin’s *SSTH* where there are two simultaneous paths (the vertical lines) and a signifier (S_1) which takes the listener from one path to another, resulting in ‘a’, which is the reaction. The comic sequence schema shows how the packaged contents of the joke/comic object ($S_1 - a$) can be a starting point to manoeuvre between different points of departure within the ‘One’ whole that makes up the sequence. In Bergsonian terms, it is a snowball effect (building continuously) rather than a jack-in-a-box (a single moment of surprise) (Bergson, 2005).

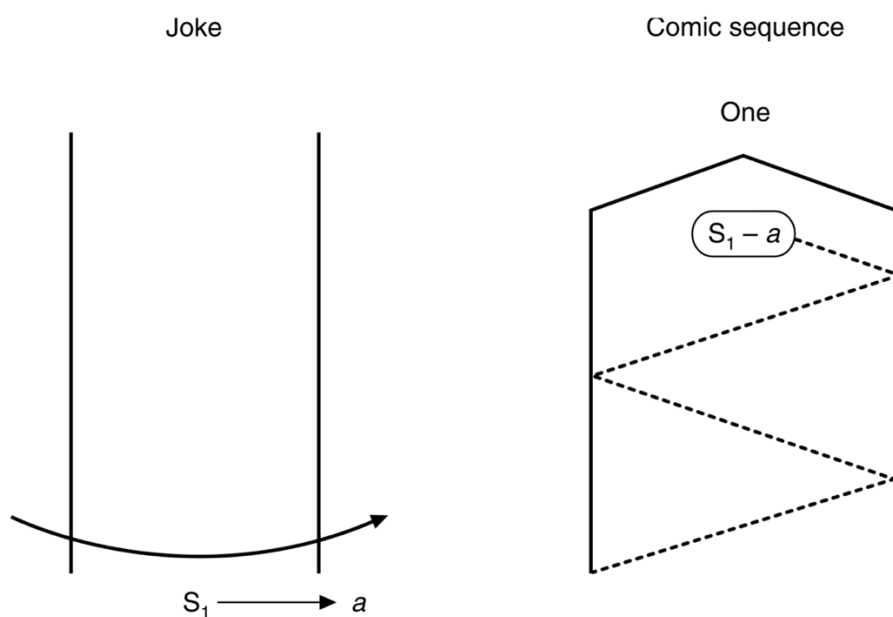


Figure 2.7 – Zupančič’s (2008) diagram of the joke and the comic sequence (p. 141)

The departure from framing comedy as single jokes and instead considering larger object-based comic sequences is useful for the general translation of comedic materials into music. Due to its non-verbal form, humour works in a different way in music. As demonstrated in this chapter, the pun mechanism can be applicable on varying levels to music. As indicated with latent examples such as *Many Many Cadences*, it is the repurposing of function that may allow

for a more substantial structural approach to the application of this mechanism (comic sequence).

The characteristics of the music can also be an important factor when translating comedic materials. As Raskin outlines, the signification of intention is important when communicating humour. In music, this works differently as we cannot directly communicate in the same way as in verbal artforms. Stephen Davies (1994) argues that “there need be no describing, or representing, or symbolizing, or other kinds of denoting that connect the musical expressiveness to occurrent emotions, for the expressive character of the music resides within its own nature” (p. 228). Instead, Davies outlines how the resemblance to emotional characteristics are enough to convince of the emotion. Davies also speculates “since music cannot literally be sad and given the acceptability of talk of musical sadness, there must be some connection between the sadness of music and the emotions felt by a person (or people); perhaps the most plausible connection to posit is a referential one in which the music functions as a (nonlinguistic, nonpictorial) symbol of the emotions it expresses” (ibid., p. 165).

Serious characteristics and contexts are abundant in contemporary art settings. This is what Sally O Reilly (2016) reflects on when she dissects the pun in her essay *Unhinged*. For O Reilly, the pun is a question of placing ambiguities into jokes, suggesting that “contemporary art, when it aims to complicate or transgress norms and reflect back to us cognitive or emotional paradoxes and gaps, shares this tendency” (p. 105). The transgressive and experimental aspects of contemporary art and music share the principle of ‘subversion of expectation’ with comedy. Furthermore, the context of contemporary art or music can be a serious and highbrow one and therefore incorporating comedic materials can be a highly subversive, ‘lowering’ tool.

2.7. In my work

In this section I explore the comedic material of the pun mechanism in my own compositions. In some examples, I deliberately applied this theoretical research to my composition process, while in other examples the process and musical output has informed the research. Whether intentional or not, the mechanism works in the same way.

DURATION DURATION and

The opening section is a highly concentrated series of puns that are simultaneously *Barlow puns* and *tonal puns*. The initial unaccompanied phrase (**Example 2.1**) follows the simple rules of Raskin's *SSTH*, where the idiosyncratic scalic passage ends on an A# instead of a much more predictable A. *Script 1* is a resolution of the phrase onto the tonic, *script 2* avoids resolving it by ending a semitone higher, which is outside the key. In the microcosm of this phrase, it can be considered as *script oppositeness*.

1 ♩=100 (Sibelius default) #1 - repetitive phrases
straight

Violoncello

mf

Example 2.1 – the opening phrase of *DURATION DURATION and* (bars 1-2)

The phrase is then repeated many times with different harmonisations. Each harmonisation shows how the ‘unresolved’ phrase can resolve. It is only by script implication that the phrase does not resolve – in a characteristically annoying way. The alternative *scripts* in the section that follows are all compatible. As with the Barlow’s example, the final pitch of the phrase deviates between A# and B-flat depending on the harmonic context or ‘meaning’. In this series of harmonisations, I demonstrate both ‘homophonic’ (**Example 2.2**) and ‘homonymic’ *Barlow puns* (**Example 2.3**).

2

2 clean, constant
mp sim.

Example 2.2 – ‘homonymic Barlow pun’
in *DURATION DURATION and*

3

Vc.

3
Pno.

Example 2.3 – ‘homophonic Barlow pun’
in *DURATION DURATION and*

This opening section also operates as a *tonal pun*, as demonstrated in section 2.4, where the tonal ambiguity of the melody allows for different harmonic possibilities (of varying *oppositeness*). The implication of the idiosyncratic melody is firmly rooted in one tonality but is revealed to be *compatible* with different tonalities, subverting expectation. Intentionally, the unaccompanied melody is unambiguous, due to the nature of the idiosyncratic material, while simultaneously allowing for a multitude of *compatible scripts*.

Like in Macklay's opening section, there are many consecutive cadences, and similarly, I devised a system of possible cadences as part of the process. My 'cadence catalogue' (**Example 2.4**) is a list of all the compatible cadences within designated criteria. The cadences are variations of the final two chords of the phrase. As shown in **Examples 2.2 and 2.3**, the final pitch of the melody may be written as an A# or B-flat depending on the accompanying harmony. The pitches in the melody are harmonised as 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, or 9th notes of the accompanying chords. I used specific chord types, which are major, minor, dominant 7, minor 7, minor 7 flat 5 (half diminished), and add 9. The 'catalogue' is every possible iteration within these criteria. For each line the first chord remains the same and the second cycles through the different *compatible scripts*. The catalogue is a comic metadata allowing for effective comedic sequencing of this section. By having all the *compatible scripts* available, I could freely collage the material into an order that I think is effective by ear, rather than in theory. The process of selecting a 'pun' order is less systematic and instead freer, and more playful.

The chord catalogue returns in its entirety in the final slow section of the piece in a 'pathetic shift'. The musical material is the same as in the beginning section (using the cadence catalogue) but a different *compatible script* for the material results in a different characteristic. In this section there is a shift from playful and light, to an increasing level of pathos. Relating back to Stephen Davies (1994) on resemblance, it is the evoking through such characteristics that is possible in music. In part, it carries weight because of the *script compatibility* with the opening cadence section. The material is the same, but we now hear a melancholic version in a slow arpeggiated form.

In the 'pointillist section' of *DURATION DURATION* and, in b. 56-105, I translated the pun mechanism of Andy Kaufman's 'improvisation' routine (a *function pun*) as described in section

1-x

Musical notation for cadence 1-x. The top staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The middle staff shows a chord progression with fingerings: 1 3, 1 5, 1 5, 1 7, 1 7, 1 7, 1 9. The bottom staff shows the corresponding chords: B7, Gm, B7, Eb, B7, Ebm, B7, C7, B7, Cm7, B7, Cm7(b5), B7, Ab(add9).

3-x

Musical notation for cadence 3-x. The top staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The middle staff shows a chord progression with fingerings: 3 1, 3 1, 3 3, 3 3, 3 5, 3 5, 3 7, 3 7, 3 7, 3 9. The bottom staff shows the corresponding chords: G7(b9), Bb, G7(b9), Bbm, G7(b9), F#, G7(b9), Gm, G7(b9), Eb, G7(b9), Ebm, G7(b9), C7, G7(b9), Cm7, G7(b9), Cm7(b5), G7(b9), Ab(add9).

5-x

Musical notation for cadence 5-x. The top staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The middle staff shows a chord progression with fingerings: 5 1, 5 1, 5 3, 5 3, 5 5, 5 5, 5 7, 5 7, 5 7, 5 9. The bottom staff shows the corresponding chords: E7, Bb, E7, Bbm, E7, F#, E7, Gm, E7, Eb, E7, Ebm, E7, C7, E7, Cm7, E7, Cm7(b5), E7, Ab(add9).

7-x

Musical notation for cadence 7-x. The top staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The middle staff shows a chord progression with fingerings: 7 1, 7 1, 7 3, 7 3, 7 5, 7 5, 7 7, 7 7, 7 7, 7 9. The bottom staff shows the corresponding chords: C#7, Bb, C#7, Bbm, C#7, F#, C#7, Gm, C#7, Eb, C#7, Ebm, C#7, C7, C#7, Cm7, C#7, Cm7(b5), C#7, Ab(add9).

9-x

Musical notation for cadence 9-x. The top staff shows a melodic line with eighth notes and rests. The middle staff shows a chord progression with fingerings: 9 1, 9 1, 9 3, 9 3, 9 5, 9 5, 9 7, 9 7, 9 7, 9 9. The bottom staff shows the corresponding chords: Bb7(b9), Bb, Bb7(b9), Bbm, Bb7(b9), F#, Bb7(b9), Gm, Bb7(b9), Eb, Bb7(b9), Ebm, Bb7(b9), C7, Bb7(b9), Cm7, Bb7(b9), Cm7(b5), Bb7(b9), Ab(add9).

Example 2.4 – Cadence catalogue

2.5. Kaufman creates extended sections of ambiguity through his increasingly distressed response to the audience. As his upset rant builds to the point of an emergent rhythmic pattern it becomes clear that this is no longer a staged or real tantrum. At the same time the directness and virtuosity of the rhythmic section is not clear until he begins playing the conga. In this final moment the tantrum becomes a mere backdrop for the musical performance.

I extracted a series of key events from the Andy Kaufman sequence and reduced them to generic events to demonstrate how they were translated (through *compatibility*) into the 'pointillist section':

Generic events	Kaufman routine	Pointillist section
1. Establish something that goes on for too long	Tell bad jokes that provoke a hostile response from the audience	Establish opening section with repeated phrases using the cadence catalogue
2. Establish a contrasted material with significant ambiguity	Act upset and confused about the audience's reaction	Shift to 'pointillism', which sounds convincing enough as Klangfarbenmelodie
3. Increase intelligibility to the point of almost doing something new	Objectify the upset response to transform into rhythmic material	Fill texture to reveal that there is a chord progression present within the tonal ambiguity
4. Make a sudden gear shift (hinge) to change the function of material	Introduce a clear beat to change the function of the rhythmic crying to a musical one	Add guitar solo to ambiguous harmony to render it entirely functional as a backdrop for the guitar solo

Like how a comedian constructs a joke, I came up with the 'punchline' of this sequence first, which is the resulting melody of the guitar solo. The harmony for the solo has a descending chromatic baseline which allows for implied atonality when arranged in a sparse pointillist style. The chord progression is as follows:

Eb⁷ Ab⁷ Db Dbm Ab Bb⁷ Db^{°7} Ab G Eb F Ab^{°7}

Example 2.5 – ‘Pointillist section’ chord progression

This harmony is present from the beginning of the section but is obscured through a pointillist treatment. I used principles of the Second Viennese School¹⁵ to imply tone rows by creating angular melody lines. The intervals of 7ths, 2nds and tritones were prioritised for their tonal ambiguity (atonality). I was seeking to emulate Anton Webern’s style of Klangfarbenmelodie, which utilises atonal serial techniques to prioritise the colour of the instrumental sound. The use of different registers, timbres, time signatures, sparse orchestration, and dynamics can be seen in both *DURATION DURATION* and (Example 2.6) and Webern’s *Quartet op. 22* (Figure 2.8).

Upon repetition of this material the texture becomes denser, which makes the function of the chord progression clearer. The section sounds less like serialism and more like functional harmony as it progresses.

ff

pp

Example 2.6 – Extract of ‘pointillist section’ from *DURATION DURATION* and

¹⁵ The Second Viennese School was a movement of serialist composers in the early 20th Century in Vienna, consisting of Arnold Schönberg, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg.



Figure 2.8 – Opening bars of Webern's Quartet op. 22

Eventually, the guitar enters, for the first time in the piece. The guitar part is a distinct melody line to be played in a style reminiscent of 80s 'hair metal', such as Van Halen. The style is significant as it is *opposite* to pointillism in a variety of ways, including respective typical audience – leading to a significant violation and subversion of listener expectation. While this happens, the pointillist material continues underneath. The result is that the dominant material is forced to function as a mere harmonic accompaniment for the foregrounded guitar solo. As well as changing the functionality of the material, there is now a substantial stylistic shift (schematic surprise) that can also be heard in the examples of Stevie Wonder and Fiona Apple. This *function pun* is a translation of Andy Kaufman's climactic moment where he plays a drum solo over his crying rhythm.

A final consideration of *DURATION DURATION and* is the expression of humorous intention (play signal). I preface the listening with the title *DURATION DURATION and*. There is no expectation that the listener will know what the title means, but the use of repetition, cases, and ending on a conjunctive is deliberately chosen to suggest that the work has a level of absurdity to it. The title is in reference to Simon Critchley's description of the joke structure. For Critchley, instead of using the terms 'tension and release' or 'setup and punchline', the comic structure is 'the duration and the instant', where time is stretched as the comedian leads us down a certain path, then accelerated or snapped (like an elastic band) as the joke element is revealed (2002).

Part A + B: Medieval Retro (for flute, knight, and objects)

In the opening 'Dice World Intro' section I use a series of Barlow puns and metre changes to create a general characteristic of playful ambiguity. This is a less intentional use of music puns than in *DURATION DURATION and*. Instead, I imbue the piece with the pun mechanism in a more freely expressive way. Although there was a playful approach to the musical material, I was not actively seeking to use music puns, and this composition pre-dated the theoretic framework of this comedic material. A retrospective logic here is that no matter how adept one may become with the theory of comedy, it does not strictly necessitate effective use of material. Many comedians work with established comic techniques without actively being aware of it. I now discuss this piece as one that works with pun mechanisms but in a discovered, rather than intentional, way. The application of these mechanisms I explore in this chapter are useful for making interesting music, but not necessarily for making amusing material.

I began with the melody, which hinges between simultaneously *compatible* tonalities. If unaccompanied, it would be unclear what the harmony is due to the unsettled nature of the melody. The use of harmony has a continuously playful effect on the melody, in part due to the freedom of the harmonic rhythm, which is irregular. The highly decorative piano accompaniment aids the ambiguity here, as it allows for a certain amount of 'slippage' between chord changes. In the opening bars (**example 2.7**) there are several *Barlow puns*.

In bar 1, the F# is established as the third of a D major chord. By the end of bar 2, the tonality is securely grounded in D major with an A major chord as the dominant. In bar 3, the same melodic entry occurs but as a G-flat. Even though this is harmonised by a D major chord (suggesting an F# in the melody), this is the start of a descending pattern involving a C diminished accompaniment. The A in bar 4 is the route note of an A major chord that is held over the barline to become a major 7th of B-flat major. This is not only an unrelated chord, but also a hinge into a different tonality.

The image displays a musical score for 'Dice World intro' in Part A + B: Medieval Retro. It is written for Alto Saxophone and Electronic Piano. The score is divided into three systems, each with annotations highlighting tonal puns.

- System 1 (Measures 1-3):** Chords are D, A, and D. An annotation 'F# first time' in red points to the first measure of the Alto Saxophone part.
- System 2 (Measures 4-5):** Chords are C°, Am7, and A. An annotation 'G-flat second time' in red points to the first measure of the Alto Saxophone part. Another annotation 'A changes meaning from 1. to 2.' in red points to the final measure of the system.
- System 3 (Measures 6-8):** Chords are Bbmaj7, Bb°7, G, E, and F#+. An annotation '2.' in red points to the first measure of the Alto Saxophone part.

Example 2.7 – Barlow puns in the opening ‘Dice World intro’ section of *Part A + B: Medieval Retro* (for flute, knight, and objects)

Tonal puns appear between part A (dice world) and part B (knight world). Part A consists mainly of unaccompanied Baroque flute melodies, which I extracted as found objects for their *schematic* qualities. The repetitive unaccompanied melody becomes familiar in part A and is reprised in part B in an accompanied version. The part B harmonisation [8:55] is a pathetic shift as well as a stylistic shift (*schematic surprise*), with the Seinfeld bass synth and the Roland R-8 drum machine used to accompany this hitherto Baroque melody. It is possible to discuss the ‘self-interrupting’ qualities of the unaccompanied melody in Part A, which is covered in

chapter 3, but there are other examples from my portfolio that are analysed through the lens of interruptions.

Although there are more similar examples of *Barlow* and *tonal puns* throughout, I will now look at intermedial *function puns* which are specific to the audiovisual pairing of this piece.

The use of dice in the video has a referential relationship to John Cage's chance/aleatory music. The experimentalist composer is known for using dice in his composition process to find unpredictable sequences. Events determined by dice result from the numbers rolled, i.e. from the intended function of the dice. In *Part A + B*, I use dice to make unpredictable rhythms through the way they bounce on a glass surface. There are two *compatible scripts* to the text: 'rolling dice to make chance music'. Cage's approach is to record the numbers rolled and allocate their values accordingly, while my approach is to use the look, sound, and motion of the dice to make unpredictable music. This intermedial departure explores the possibilities of filmmaking with objects rather than scored processes. On the one hand this is a very specific 'in-joke', where the audience are required to possess knowledge of the music and practices of John Cage (*schematic surprise*), which then relies on registering a relationship between the video and the functional disparity with the reference – and 'object misuse'. But on the other, this is just a way of making playful and unexpected music, like a Tim Vine joke that subverts expectation to appropriate a literal meaning over a more likely figurative one. Instead, this *function pun* is a composing tool, where I used the comedic material of the pun mechanism to make an intermedial composition. Acknowledging the *function pun*, let alone finding it funny, is of not important here.

Another example of a *function pun* is when the dice bounces [3:11] on the glass brick and a synthesised sound replaces the real sound of the bouncing dice. The synthetic sound is *opposite* to the recorded one previously heard, but simultaneously *compatible* as the timing is accurately synced with the action. The expectation for this moment is established in a micro-macro way. The dice-bouncing sequence appeared in two previous iterations [2:00 and 2:41], which only differ in the resulting rhythm of the respective bounces. By the third time, there is a familiarity with this sequence – i.e. the dice will bounce on the glass brick, and we will hear the dice clanging against the glass with a relatively abrasive sound. The familiarity established in the first two iterations makes the third subversive one a *dynamic surprise*. This may also relate to

the ‘rule of three’, which is often used by comedians in joke writing. Defining this device in *Teach Yourself: Stand-up Comedy*, Logan Murray affirms that “you *introduce* the subject or example; you *reinforce* the subject; then you *subvert* our expectations by offering us a surprise twist” (2007, p. 96). This tried and tested structural device can be used in conjunction with music puns to establish expectation effectively before subverting it.

Similarly, the expectation is established within each iteration of the dice-bouncing sequence as the falling dice clearly provokes a *tension response*, where we brace ourselves (albeit subtly) for impact on the glass. After the impact, the *prediction response* of the lighter synthesised sound was inaccurate (as the original harsher sound was expected), resulting in a contrastive valance of affect where we simultaneously had a positive surprise and a negative prediction – or *surprise*. The violation here was the markedly gentler sound, which simultaneously renders it benign. Laughter may not be a response of this sequence, but enough criteria have been fulfilled for it to be successfully humorous. The musical material, in conjunction with the visual incongruity mean the subversion of expectation is more legible and blatant.

Human Scene from Syrup Tracing

Syrup Tracing was an opera in two acts developed collaboratively with Waste Paper Opera in 2019-20 and commissioned by Ideas of Noise Festival. The *Human Scene* in particular was devised and composed with Ellie Westbrook, who portrays Dodder Rodgers alongside myself as Dodder Pillinger.

In the interest of creating original musical material, for the ‘moon croon’ section [10:26], a series of *Barlow puns* were used. This is another example of intuiting the process rather than employing the theory. Found music and text objects were threaded together to make short phrases that told the story of an attempt to fly to the moon. The music was gathered from jazz standards recorded by the likes of Nat King Cole, Ella Fitzgerald, and Bing Crosby, and crooners such as Frank Sinatra and Bobby Darin. Fragments of phrases were chosen for their syllabic compatibility with the texts chosen. The text was yielded from transcripts of NASA’s Apollo 11 moon landing mission in 1969. Ellie and I collaged sentences out of this source material to create an appropriate text for the scene.

The process of collaging the text is like approaches used by Object Collection, for example, in their 2022 production *Look Out Shithead* where the texts of Eric Romer films were cut up and collaged together to make new texts. The result of the newly assembled texts is a play text that sounds uncannily logical, yet it does not actually make any sense. In the rehearsal process, director Kara Feely devised a meaning or intention for every line, adding a second simultaneous meaning compatible with the text¹⁶. The music/text combination in the *Human Scene* works in a similar *function pun* way, where the text is a vehicle for rehearsal room exploration in experimental theatre.

I sampled big band 'stabs' which I used throughout the *Human Scene* as a type of punctuation (a deliberate object misuse), which I see as more of a worlding tool (to create a general other-worldly atmosphere collaged out of recognisable objects). This may also be considered a kind of *schematic surprise* due to its subversion of expectation through stylistic referentiality. While the cramming of syllabic text section [8:24] forces a functional text (explanation significant to the narrative) to a repetitive rhythmic uniformity that removes it of its shape and nuance. In that sense, this section operates very similarly to Macklay's *Many Many Cadences*.

A dramaturgical function pun

The Jeremiah scene of *Dead Cat Bounce*, works in a similar way to the 'pointillist section' of *DURATION DURATION and*. It begins with an idiosyncratic (schematic) music performance, which changes function as it becomes a mere backdrop. In this case, *Le Lamentazioni del profeta Geremia* by Niccolo Jommelli is performed by a countertenor while a banal conversation between two bankers (characters) is spoken over it. The effect is somewhat different from the 'pointillist section' of *DURATION DURATION and* where the two contrasting musical schema work surprisingly well together. Instead, the bankers chat which forces the lament into the background is a jarring addition to the sequence. The compatibility here is in the dramaturgical relationship between the conversation and the Baroque lament. In the scene, the prophet Jeremiah is weeping over the burning city of Jerusalem (his home), which the bankers reflect on as an insurance claim and appraise the accuracy of their prediction.

¹⁶ This is a personal first-hand account of the process of Object Collection. I was an original cast member of *Look Out Shithead*. This process has no formal documentation.

2.8. Conclusion

I have outlined ways in which the pun mechanism can be translated from comedy to music, and I believe there are more avenues for exploration of this comedic material in the future. Through explanations and examples in alignment with semantic and music theory, I have outlined ways in which music can utilise the pun mechanism for humorous and non-humorous effect. I have highlighted some terms that are translatable to music but might not be useful for use in the field of musicology due to sharing meanings with existing musical terms (such as homophonic). I have instead offered a new set of terms for musical and intermedial application: *Barlow pun*, *tonal pun*, and *function pun*. Through this translation process, I believe that this comedic material is of value for the practice and analysis of composition through the lens of puns.

From Victor Raskin's *script-based semantic theory of humour*, I employ the terms *script compatibility* and *script oppositeness*, which relates back to ideas of simultaneity outlined in chapter 1. David Huron's ITPRA theory and surprise categories were also useful for contextualisation and analysis of pun examples throughout this chapter.

Using this framework, the *Barlow pun* and *tonal pun* could be adapted to include double meanings of metre, rhythm and other music-centric approaches to composition. The general idea is that the *Barlow pun* exploits the semantic ambiguity of a 'single unit hinge' and the *tonal pun* exploits the ambiguity of a 'phrasal hinge'.

Possibilities for application of the *function pun* may have greater scope for further use due to its isolation of intended function and *object misuse* – rendering it useful for intermedial composition and experimental theatre. I will continue to use this in the work of Waste Paper Opera and I believe it is useful for the analysis and practice of experimental music theatre.

I suggest that the translation of the pun mechanism comedic material is a way to practice and theorise composition through the lens of some approaches to comedy but does not imply that it is comedy. The lens is useful for focussing on effective approaches to making music that are shared with comedy. I am isolating an effective set of principles used in comedy, theorised by Raskin and Zupančič, and applicable to music.

Chapter 3

Interruptions

(an everyday object as compositional device)

3.1. Introduction

Interruptions are the comedic material I translate in this chapter. This is a device commonly used in comedy and something that can be used effectively in music. Interruptions are also an everyday frequent occurrence that manifests in many ways. In this chapter, I consider the composed and improvisational possibilities of interruptions as a comedic material applicable to music, and the effectivity of the device. I seek to further the impact by identifying variables and understandings from the field of interruption science, which I delineate as useful terminology and criteria for interruptions in music.

Timing is an important aspect of this comedic material. For a comedian, the right time to act may be what is considered the ‘wrong time’ – acting at the most unlikely, incongruous, irritating, or stupid moment. Alenka Zupančič (2008), in communicating this comic principle articulates that “discontinuity (the erratic object-sense) is the very stuff of comic continuity” (p. 137). She adds that comedy “has a marvellous way of starting on one track and continuing on another, as if this were completely natural” (ibid. p. 137). Subversion of expectation is something that, for Zupančič, may appear intuitive. For a successfully comic moment, the wrong time is the right time. ‘Wrong’ here is used hyperbolically in a similar way to *oppositeness* in Raskin’s *SSTH* (2.2).

Knowing when to act in a live performance is a combination of training (discussed in greater detail in chapter 4) and personal experience. In her chapter on ‘time’, from her *Six Viewpoints*, Mary Overlie (2016) outlines a general principle of drawing on real life experiences as a basis for time-based experimentation. She asserts that a “vital component of this experimentation was the retraining of the dancer, actor or musician to develop and maintain their own perception of time without relying on the underlying beat” (Overlie, 2016, p. 22). For the performer improvising with a material derived from the everyday (actions, gestures, text, or

behaviour), there is a combination of conventional music timing, interacting with what one hears, and what Overlie calls “Natural Cognitive Timing” (ibid. p. 22).¹⁷

On the contrary, the impact may also come from the conditions, rules, or contexts established by the composer. In such instances, the composer can interact with the performers through open scored processes where performers are not required to have specific skills or experience. Instead, it may be desirable to incorporate unique candid reactions or responses from performers by establishing the right conditions. In this chapter, I look at examples of working with performers who act at the right/wrong time and works composed to stage genuine reactions.

In isolating a comic device to focus on, I return to the idea of *dynamic surprise* as outlined by David Huron (1.4). The dynamic surprise subverts expectation established in the performance and does not rely on knowledge of musical style (schematic surprise) or specific music references (veridical surprise). For a surprise to register, the benign violation theory stipulates that there must be a violation. I suggest that for *dynamic surprises*, magnitude of violation may be attributed to relatability of the material.

In this chapter, I apply the terminology and principles of interruption science to examples of interruptions in comedy. Examples of comic interruptions can also be found in music works and I employ the theory derived from interruption science to Tim Parkinson’s *Opus 1* from *Time with People*, and Laurence Crane’s *Gli Anni Prog*. Both works possess aspects of comedy, but balance this with the effectiveness of the interruption as musical material. This is significant as neither example work has a specific intention of humour. Finally, I look at examples of interruptions in my own work and discuss the scope of this device. I cross examine three of my works containing this device in contrasting and intentional ways.

¹⁷ In *Standing in Space: The Six Viewpoints Theory & Practice*, Mary Overlie provides exercises in how to explore this kind of timing. There are also many short courses on the Six Viewpoints method taught around the world, but mainly in New York.

3.2. The interruption (background and theory)

A stalker running onto the playing arena of a sports game is an interruption that stops play. It usually provides a bit of excitement and a cheer from the audience. The game continues after the interruption, and this is sometimes accepted as an informal tradition that could happen at any time in a major sporting event. Spectators often welcome the interruption of a stalker as a moment of joviality.

Environmental activists Just Stop Oil do not get the same reception, whose interruptions of sports games receive a largely negative reception from sports fans. They have a specific political intention and are not interrupting for mere attention. The interruptions may last longer than the duration of a stalker if they 'deface' the sporting arenas with (usually orange) paint, powder, or puzzle pieces. Though they both share a likely intention of interrupting for as long as possible.

Just Stop Oil generally get booed by many as, unlike the stalker, they are not part of the sport sporting practice. The effect of such an interruption is substantial. The profile and extent of such a disruption is what gets Just Stop Oil campaigners the media attention they seek. The title of Al Gore's 2006 film about climate change *An Inconvenient Truth* clarifies that climate campaigning 'providing an unwelcome challenge to the status quo' is nothing new. In politics, the term 'business as usual' is used, where what is being interrupted through political activism is the ordinary function of the workplace.

In the field of Interruption Science, researchers study the impact of interruptions in the workplace. In a 2004 study, Victor González and Gloria Mark found that "people spend an average of three minutes working on any single event before switching to another event" (Gonzalez & Mark, 2004, p. 113). The switching from one task to another is a key factor in interruptions – involving an arduous cognitive process, which can be seen in **Figure 3.1**. Interruptions in the workplace can be frustrating, tedious, or even dangerous (e.g., being interrupted while operating heavy machinery). Interruptions are, however, rife. From the study of interruption science, I have found that the criteria and findings are not only applicable to life outside the workplace (including 'business as usual' and protest), but also to the use of interruptions as comedic material applicable to music.

Interruption science is a branch of Human Factors Psychology, which is “the scientific study of the relationships and interactions between products, processes, and people” (Online Psychology Degree Guide, n. d.). Interruption scientists have defined interruptions as “the suspension of one stream of work prior to completion, with the intent of returning to and completing the original stream of work” (Boehm-Davis & Remington, 2009). The intention of the returning to the task, to complete it, is an important criterion and a consideration throughout this chapter. For theorists of interruption science, there is a process in place for all interruptions regardless of magnitude. Deborah Boehm-Davies and Roger Remington’s ‘anatomy of an interruption’ shows the psychological timeline of an interruption:

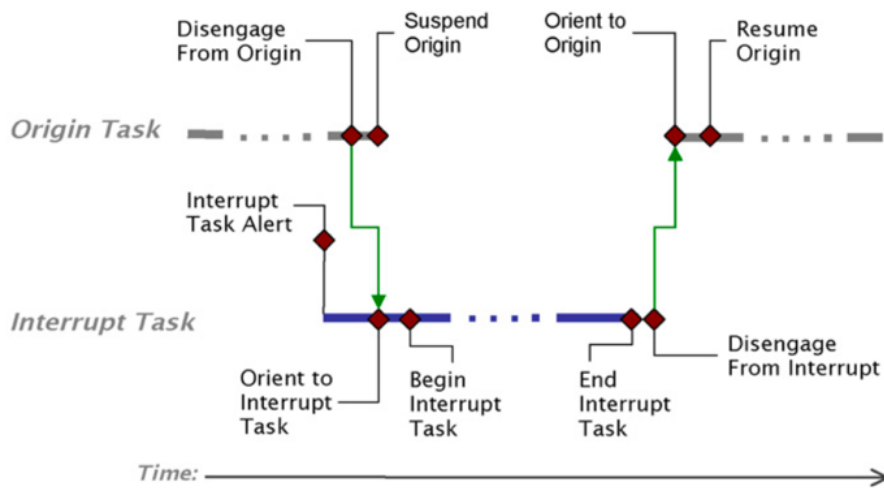


Figure 3.1 - ‘Anatomy of an interruption’ by Deborah A. Boehm-Davies and Roger Remington, (2009, p. 1125)

The process begins with the interrupt task, which provokes an alert. Once aware of the interrupt task there is a disengaging from the origin task, and one must orient oneself to the interrupt task, which will simultaneously suspend the origin task. The interrupt task will then begin and once it is completed, and subsequent disengagement from the interrupt task has taken place, a reorientation back to the origin task will allow for the origin task to continue. The time taken to disengage, orient and resume tasks is a contributing factor to what makes interruptions irritating or frustrating.

As well as the general cognitive process, there are factors that can contribute to the ease or difficulty of moving between tasks, including:

- **Task similarity to the primary task** (how much we must adjust our thinking to adapt to the interrupt task and return to the origin task)
- **Interruption complexity** (how much concentration is required to shift to the interrupt task – the level of complexity will correspond to the ability to seamlessly orient back to the origin task)
- **Interruption duration** (like with the interruption complexity, interruption duration will have a direct impact on the ability to resume the task effectively before returning)
- **Availability of primary task retrieval cues** (if one was typing a sentence on a computer and, upon returning, the sentence was still on the screen, it may be easy to return to that task. Trying to return to a spoken anecdote after a long interruption may be difficult as it is reliant on memory)

In addition to these four factors, there are two types of interruptions:

- **Exogenous:** external interruption (for example, someone entering the room and asking a question while you are working, or receiving an instant message alert)
- **Endogenous:** internal interruption (such as looking up a reference while you are writing sentence; or daydreaming) (Boehm–Davies and Remington, 2009, p. 1125)

Interruption science provides useful categories and criteria for understanding the impact and scope of the interruption. There is a complex cognitive process involved, which means interruptions can be a considerable violation, even when seemingly insignificant. In comedy, according to the benign violation theory, as well as a significant violation occurring, the situation must simultaneously be benign. By staging interruptions, the frustration or danger of an interruption is curbed as the audience, through play signals of live performance, acknowledge the interruptions are staged. Audiences may question the authenticity of the interruption. A possibility, implied by release theory, is that the contentiousness of the realness of the interruption builds tension, and once confirmed as a performative device, that tension will release, with laughter.

There must be an intention of returning to the origin/primary task. This is another contentious aspect, when the stakes of the routine are raised by the suspension of continuity, rather than a full discontinuation.

Gaining an understanding of how certain factors disrupt 'business as usual', via the study of interruption science, can benefit the execution of the interruption as a comedic material in music. It is also plausible that a study of interruption science could provide strategic information for activists seeking justice through public disruption. In the case of Just Stop Oil, 'business as usual' is the political rhetoric that champions the 'right not to be disturbed' as a worker or business owner, at the expense of the cause itself. For comedy, interruptions will disrupt 'business as usual' through the subversion of expectation often by changing the situation of a familiar reference, but also through the suspension of musical continuity.

3.3. Interruptions in comedy

A substantial example of the interruption material can be found in the 1999 film *Blue Streak*. If we were to identify an origin task, it is that Martin Lawrence's character, Miles Logan, is stealing a diamond from a vault and getting away with it. The intention of completing this task is clear throughout the duration of the film. During the robbery, however, there is an altercation between Logan and his accomplice. Logan flees to a building site, which promptly becomes surrounded by the police. Knowing he will get caught, he tapes the diamond to the inside of an air vent and gives himself up for arrest. After a substantial interruption where he is imprisoned for two years, he goes to retrieve the diamond from the building site, but the building has since opened as a police station. After failing to enter the building as a pizza delivery man, he fakes his identity and enrolls into the police force. Every attempt to enter the air vent is interrupted as he is sent on another mission, and he is in high demand due to his impressive, faked accolades. He is eventually successful in retrieving the diamond and flees across the Mexican border.

The film is a 93-minute series of *exogenous interruptions* within a single interrupted *origin task*. The extent to which the interruption is utilised for comic effect demonstrates the way this material can be stretched into a long *comic sequence*. The interruption factors vary in a diegetic/non-diegetic way. For Logan, the two-year prison sentence is a substantial *interruption duration*, but for the audience this interruption lasts for a matter of seconds as the caption communicates the elapsed time. The distance between the audience and the character renders this two-year prison sentence benign, and applicable for comedic material.

Interruptions can also be used in live performance. Comedian Frank Foucault¹⁸ performs a sequence in which he struggles to say, “to tell you the truth, I wanted the show to be about the difference between intimacy and affection, but it’s quite hard to communicate”, which only takes about 6 seconds to say. This is turned into a 1 minute 43 seconds sequence through a series of “umming”, tutting, and farcical slapstick gestures, reinforcing the comedic aspect of it being “hard to communicate”. The interruptions are *endogenous* as Foucault repeatedly interrupts himself before continuing or starting again.

This works effectively as a *comic sequence* for several reasons. Foucault is attempting a simple phrase that is easy to follow for the audience, establishing expectation and intention of continuation. If the *origin task* does not register, then there is no interruption for the audience. To begin with, Foucault’s self-interruptions (*endogenous*) may even be convincing due to the authenticity of delivery and lack of significant violation. The subtlety keeps audience laughter relatively curbed at this point. A comedian genuinely forgetting what they are saying is typically not funny and instead awkward and uncomfortable. As the routine progresses, Foucault’s interruptions become more farcical as the phrase repeats and barely progresses (**Figure 3.2**). The more staged and less believable the interruptions are, the more the audience laughs.¹⁹ The increased absurdity (violation) of the gestures is a play signal (benign) for the audience.

The phrase that is Foucault’s origin task:

Right, to tell you the truth, I wanted the show to be about the difference between intimacy and affection, but it’s quite hard to communicate...

The phrase with Foucault’s interruptions:

Er... right, to tell you the truth, um...

I, um, so I, [sigh] [pause]

I, I wanted the show to be ab... about, er, um...

Er, the, er, er...

The difference, um... er... the [pause]

The difference between in... intimacy... er...

¹⁸ The stage name of performer Luke Smith

¹⁹ I am referring to the footage of a specific documented performance. Both the audience’s laughter and Foucault’s timing will vary in different performances.

a... a... a... a... a... I wanted the show to be about the, er, the differe...

Er... er... er... er... er... er... er... I wanted... [pause]

I wanted the show to be about the difference between in... intimac... [excessive raspberries and finger clicks]

Intimac... [rhythmic howling sound]

I wanted the show to be about, uh, the difference between intima... [yelp with gurn]

I wanted it to be about the difference [pause] between intimacy, er, and [mouth clicks and head shake]

And a, and a, and affection, um... [pause]

Er, but it's quite hard to communicate, um...

Figure 3.2 – Transcription of Frank Foucault interruption sequence from *Shoes* (2018)

Drawing on terminology from interruption science, the intention of returning to the task is always clear. *Interruption duration* increases throughout the routine starting with brief hesitation and tuts, developing into physical and expressive gestures gratuitously articulating the frustration. The *interruption complexity* increases as the gestures become more extreme, perhaps leading the audience to question why this is happening to him. The level of virtuosity of the performance may also be considered an increase in complexity. As the farcicality increases, the contrast between the *origin task* and *interrupt task* increases, decreasing the *similarity to origin task*. The *availability of task retrieval cues* stays the same throughout, which requires the audience to remember what he is saying, but the repetition makes the task/phrase easy to retrieve.

In summary, increases in *interruption complexity* and *interruption duration* have a direct correlation with audience laughter, providing the *origin task* remains intact. *Similarity to origin task* appears to relate closely to incongruity, where the greater the violation or incongruity of the interruption, the more it will receive laughs. However, these subversions are still related to Foucault's speech. The interruptions are exaggerations of struggling to finish a sentence and not random gestures.

Foucault's routine is from his 2018 Edinburgh show *Shoes*. Like many Edinburgh Fringe shows, it was written and developed in dialogue with many public work-in-progress performances.

Foucault's timing for this routine is something that was developed in correspondence with audience reception. In this way, the comedian is honing their timing constantly – in the live performance and improving from show to show. Foucault's routine is refined, yet also spontaneous and improvised. By this point, he knows how the interruption works and how to play with it, even if entirely intuited.²⁰

The kind of humour of interruptions might be described as 'maddening humour'. Humour can be considered as attributing to either of the following receptions: laughter, in the context of stand-up comedy, theatre, and other types of performance in which laughter is an accepted response; or 'comic amusement', defined by Noël Carroll (2014) as "the mental state that humour is meant to provoke" (p. 25), in contexts where a response to humour may not be externalised, perhaps in formal instances of classical music concerts and performance art. Both laughter and comic amusement may be considered as joyful responses to performance. To be maddened, on the other hand, is to become angry. Cambridge Dictionary Online simply defines 'maddening' as "making you angry" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Maddening humour, therefore, is an oxymoronic term, which is what makes it interesting, as simultaneous contrasting receptions are implied by the term. As discussed in 1.4, the contrastive valence of surprise is a simultaneous positive and negative response, and this contrast does not hinder laughter.

The humour may result from foreseeing the inevitable and knowing it is going to happen. We might become maddened at the presentation of the inevitable through the staging of an irritating device. A staging of inevitability is also the central idea to *dramatic irony* (1.3). But empathy with the performer might also be a contributing factor, understanding how maddened they are becoming – when seeing someone bang their head, we know how much it hurts. The audience response may also develop throughout a routine, something might be funny the first time, but through its incessant repetition becomes maddening. Alternatively, we could go through the reverse process where something that is initially maddening, for example an obnoxious loud sound interrupting a Baroque cello solo – after repeating the gesture and it is signalled that we are not trying to enjoy the pleasant Baroque music, we may find the absurdity of the situation humorous.

²⁰ The performance I analyse was filmed in February 2019, six months after Luke Smith's (Frank Foucault) Edinburgh Fringe run.

There is likely correlation of these mixed simultaneous responses attributed to the ITPRA theory of expectation. A *tension response* of bracing oneself for an interruption may irritate as the interruption occurs at a different time (right/wrong time) to when one expected, triggering a negatively valenced *prediction response*. Being surprised by an interruption also irks our *reaction response* as a significant violation jolts our expectation of *task*/phrase continuation in live performance. Once acknowledging the staged safety and deliberate execution of the interruption, we can laugh.

Stand-up comedians 'playing the room' in response to interruptions is a regular occurrence. Live comedy is always susceptible to hecklers, where someone shouts something from the audience during the performance. Often a heckle is hostile, showing a disdain for the show, and sometimes it is an attempt to make the audience laugh. It is always a violation of continuity and the suspending of the rehearsed performance (*origin task*) renders it an interruption. Some comedians have practiced responses to hecklers, but it is generally considered best to respond in the moment, i.e. playing the room. As part of his *Teach Yourself Stand-up Comedy* guidebook, Logan Murray (2007) conducted several interviews with stand-up comedians asking how they respond to hecklers. A consistent theme was the importance of live responses:

- **Richard Herring:** "though it's good to have a few prepared lines, I think it's generally best to deal with each situation as it comes. You will look clever and sharper if you are responding honestly and instinctively to what is going on, rather than falling back on stock lines. It's risky, of course, as you might not come up with stuff, but ultimately it doesn't matter too much what you say as long as you remain in control." (Murray, L. 2007, p. 132)
- **Katy Bagshaw:** "Don't try to be funny – say whatever comes into your head and it'll mostly be funny. See them as 'people in a pub' – that's all they are." (ibid., p. 138)
- **Marek Larwood:** "You can always learn stock heckle put-downs, but the best thing to do is to think of something on the spur of the moment. It doesn't even have to be that funny and you get more credit for it." (ibid., p. 140)
- **Mark Maier:** "Use what they say as opposed to coming up with a standard heckle put-down you have heard before. Chances are, someone else in the audience will have heard the standard line and heckle you for being unoriginal." (ibid., p. 141)

3.4 Interruptions in music

L'école de la claque

Though less common in concert hall performances, heckling can appear in music events. 'The claque' refers to when a planted audience reacts overtly positively or negatively and/or interacts with the performance in a highly demonstrable manner. This is the theme of Bill Dietz's 2017 concept publication *L'école de la claque*, which is constructed around a log of '46 instances' of clagues from historical performances from the Donaueschingen Musiktage Festival. For Dietz, there is a direct comparison between the paid 'claqueurs' from historic music performances and those paid to clap in attendance of Donald Trump speeches during his 2016 presidential campaign. Donaueschingen, according to Dietz (2017), has "a lingering odour of cultural pessimism" in its criticality of programming (p. 9). Dietz is interested in the "materiality of intervention – in its form" suggesting that he sees the interruption as an interesting material for composition (ibid., p. 10). Dietz engages with the clagues in a conceptual way and as live performance – restaged as a live performance with planted claqueurs in the 2017 Donaueschingen Festival. His use of interruptions is to make a statement about the socio-political representation of classical music and the behaviours of its audiences.

The documented (46) instances are *exogenous interruptions*, and unplanned. They are not something the composers or event organisers had planned for. Many of them provide no surprise or violation, such as coughs, premature applause, and murmurs of laughter. More significant are instances of 'boos', heckles (shouted words or phrases) and even an instance where the composer stopped the event to start their piece again. In Dietz's live restaging performance, the reception was, like Foucault's, divided.

Instance no. 10 is an account of a Helmut Lachenmann's 1980 world premiere of *Tanzsuite mit Deutschlandlied*. During this very quiet piece, the audience becomes increasingly louder and "like uneducated children, until the composer himself interrupted the audible performance and demanded in rather dictatorial way that the performance start over from the beginning" (ibid., p. 32). The second attempt was met with booing from the audience. This reception may have been because of the way the audience were treated, but it may be due to the interruption of the music performance itself. Even in an already disrupted performance, the violation to the concert audience of an intentional stop is substantial and controversial. Although the piece was

not a recognised work, the formality and etiquette of the concert performance is standard in such an event. What was being interrupted was the *continuity* of the event as much as the music itself. For Lachenmann, the interruptions from the audience removed the possibility of continuing – in this sense, there were no *task retrieval cues* available, so the task had to restart. For the audience waiting for the piece to finish, the restarting of the piece is maddening and a malign violation.

Tim Parkinson's Time with People

Tim Parkinson uses everyday conversational responses as musical material and layers it up with everyday physical gestures and background music. The timing of the performers is what Overlie refers to as “Natural Cognitive Timing” (3.1). The familiarity of this material is important for the audience to register the interruptions.

Time with People is a 2012-13 experimental music theatre work by Tim Parkinson consisting of seven sections, some of which are written to overlap. The first section, *opus 1*, is an open scored sequence for two soloists and two backing tracks. Each soloist answers questions written on cue cards and couples the responses with actions as according to the score (**Figure 3.3**). Contained within the backing tracks are cues for each soloist to start and stop, indicated by loud ‘beeps’ from two localised speakers.

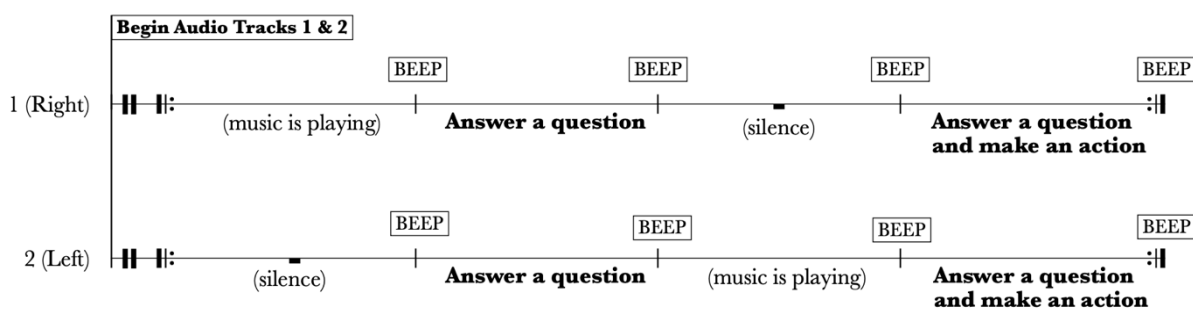


Figure 3.3 – From *Time with People, opus 1*, by Tim Parkinson (2012-13)

The intermittent music in the backing tracks is classical music by Berlioz and Rossini. The use of such music means the audience will easily recognise when it is interrupted; unlike something containing deliberate discontinuity as part of its composition. The recognised *continuity* of the music therefore functions as a clear *origin task*. There is a similarity to the violation of *music continuity* as outlined in the *instance 10* example, yet this interruption

sequence is staged. The spoken responses are also sufficiently recognisable as *origin tasks* due to their ordinariness, registering in a similar way to Frank Foucault's *endogenous* sequence. The performers answer the questions in a relaxed and conversational tone. The interrupting beeps are a violation for both the listener (audience) and the performer. No knowledge of schema (*schematic surprise*) or specific reference (*veridical surprise*) is required for a violation to register.

In the score, Parkinson (2012-13) instructs that "to ensure spontaneity of response, performers should not know when the next beep will happen" (p. 3). Like the comedians' heckler advice, this helps to elicit a more genuine reaction from the performers. To avoid performers learning the sequence of beeps in rehearsals, "Rehearsal Audio Tracks which will have a different set of durations to the ones used for performance" are provided (ibid., p. 3). This is crucial to getting a genuine reaction and *dynamic surprise* for the performer as well as the audience. Using the performance track for rehearsals would allow the performers to better prepare themselves for the unexpected, but the genuine reaction and interruption as musical material is a clear intention of Parkinson. This allows for 'contrastive valence' for the performers and audience. The unpredictability of the interruptions in this sequence is central to its composition and therefore understanding it through the lens of this comedic material is worthwhile.

Laurence Crane's Gli Anni Prog

Comparatively, the use of interruptions in Laurence Crane's *Gli Anni Prog* (2014) functions in a different way. Here, the interruptions in this duet are cued by the performers so the timing of the interruptions is interactive and live. In this piece for bass flute and piano, a desk bell is struck at different times to interrupt the *music continuity* (**Figure 3.4**). The players are always expecting the next interruption as they are written in the score, but the respective player decides, in the moment, when to ring (which may be the 'wrong time' if the result is comical). The physical action of ringing the desk bell as well as its sound is incongruous with the scored instrumental music that precedes it. This makes for a very recognisable interruption.

The first desk bell interruption occurs over halfway through the piece. This is followed by the flautist saying the Italian title line "Gli Anni Prog", and the pianist replying with "the years of prog" (the English translation). The bell signifies a significant textural shift in the piece by cuing

speech as well as being a violation in the *music continuity*. Until this moment, the desk bell is present on the piano creating an expectation and tension for its pending use.

Throughout the section containing interruptions, the tempo and dynamic increases, while the flute line ascends in register. The odds are stacked unfairly against the flautist as their lines are much harder to play on flute than on the piano. In addition, switching between playing and speaking is also more difficult for a flautist than a pianist. By the time the piece is at its climax, the desk bell interruptions seem welcome as the flautist is furiously playing what is written. The shift in quality of the interruptions changes their central role in this section as musical material. They become more intermedial and physical towards the end of the performance.

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system, starting at measure 225, features a piano part in the lower register and a flute part in the upper register. A red arrow points to a 'Desk Bell' cue at the beginning of the system. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 96. The second system, starting at measure 226, shows the piano part moving to a higher register (8vb) and the flute part continuing. A second red arrow points to another 'Desk Bell' cue. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 144. Both systems include 'Prog' markings and various musical notations such as rests, notes, and accidentals.

Figure 3.4 – Excerpt from *Gli Anni Prog* by Laurence Crane, showing the scored desk bell cues following indeterminate vamped phrases (2014, p. 12)

In both *Gli Anni Prog* and *Time with People: Opus 1*, the interruptions generate interesting musical material through application of this comedic material. In the Parkinson, the spontaneity and conversational quality contributes to the humour of the section. The Crane, on the other hand, is perhaps more playful than funny, but interruptions is used effectively to create interesting music. Additionally, neither work strictly follows the criterion of ‘intention of the returning to the task to complete it’. In both cases, the interruptions cue the next action or phrase. The point here is that the *music continuity* is interrupted whether the player returns to the same phrase or not. The *origin task* is *music continuity*.

3.5. Interruptions in my work

Catastrophe I: Assassins from Dead Cat Bounce

The entire 'assassins' scene from Waste Paper Opera's 2022 oratorio *Dead Cat Bounce*, is an interruption to the dramaturgical continuity and *music continuity* of the performance. It is also composed using interruptions as a comedic material. The context in which this section begins is about 8-minutes into the live performance. The audience enter the space with the stage fully lit and the houselights already low to establish an atmosphere from the beginning. The show begins with a relatively intense musical sequence which becomes increasingly harmonious as the chorus begin to sing. The chorus then sing a lively musical round which contains stamping and clapping, the stage is lit with blue and green lighting throughout. Before the 'universal round' (by this point, only stamping and clapping) has ended, the chorus master picks up a microphone and says, "can we get the houselights up?". The plain vocal instruction is incongruous with the music to this point, and subsequent illumination of the houselights is a significant violation and interruption in the dramaturgical continuity of this theatrical performance. This marks the beginning of the 'assassin' scene, in which I (the chorus master) begin telling a news story to the audience from a 2016 article about five hitmen involved in a conspiracy. At this point, the rules for the scene become active.

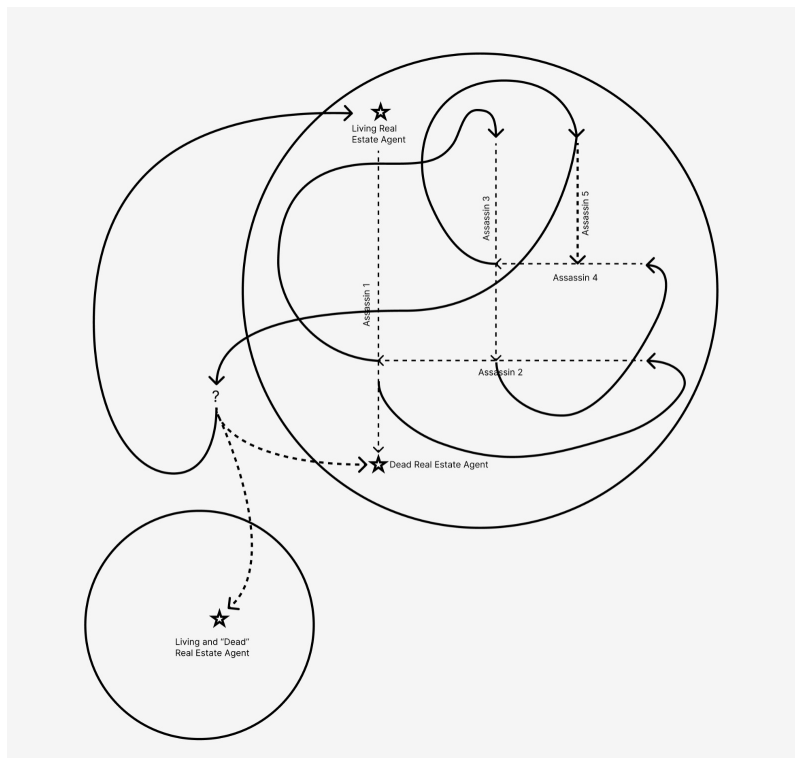
The aim of the scene is to tell the story, but there is no script, and no one has the same knowledge of the story. The storytelling can be anecdotal, factual, through metaphor or analogy at the discretion of the performer in the moment. Like *Time with People*, I deliberately underprepared performers for this task by not rehearsing this scene with the chorus. The chorus heard me improvise the story at the dress rehearsal, then only heard the rules of the scene on the evening of the performance. They were also only told that evening that they may participate in this part of the performance. Although involvement is voluntary, a tension is created among the performers as they consider participating.

While the stage lighting was on and the houselights were off, the performers had limited visibility of the audience. Once the 'assassins' scene begins and the houselights are on, the audience can be seen very clearly, and the only sound is what a solo performer says into the microphone – and the desk bell that interrupts. For the audience, some of these *exogenous interruptions* may be unwelcome as they begin to follow the story (*continuity*). For the

performers, the interruptions may be welcome if they struggle to fill time in the high-pressure situation – which is deliberately reminiscent of a stand-up comedian standing with only a microphone and the audience staring at them. The timing of the interruptions is improvised from the performers. In essence, everyone is ‘playing the room’ throughout the sequence.

[CATASTROPHE I – ASSASSINS]

(adlib. anecdote of assassin story*)



Original diagram by Gary Zhexi Zhang

*Optional participation

Example 3.1 – Score provided to visualise the story to symbolise the entangled nature of the anecdote.

Human Scene from Syrup Tracing

Like *Opus 1* from *Time with People*, a backing track is used to cue interruptions during this scene – as well as employing a similar buzzer sound to interrupt. The interruptions of loud buzzers are coupled with flashing red lights to increase the violation. Ellie Westbrook and I, who were performing the two roles, always know there is an interruption coming, but not

exactly when. Like the Parkinson, the track was adjusted throughout the process and during rehearsals to ensure the interruptions seemed unpredictable. However, the final iteration of the interruption track became fixed, and a new kind of live performance improvisation emerged as we tried to predict when we thought the interruption was coming – this adds a constant *tension response* to the performance.

A deliberate representation of frustration through the staging of interruptions was also central. The characters needed to be sufficiently dissatisfied with their lives for the main premise, of wanting to go to the moon, to be conveyed. The text delivered by each character is improvised as the character. In the Parkinson, the performers are asked to respond as themselves. In *Human Scene*, the performers are improvising within a developed character profile. The additional concentration required raises the level of difficulty of the origin task and task switching.

In the live performance, the audience laugh during this section. In stand-up comedy, a comedian will generally wait for laughter to subside before continuing. In *Human Scene* the timed backing track will not wait so the performer must counterintuitively continue with their improvisation, ignoring the audience. The added distraction increases the level of surprise for the performer when they are interrupted.

In addition, some of the interruptions require the performers to ‘count down’ from 10, this action-based interruption increases the *interruption complexity* and *interruption duration* of the *interrupt task* and adds a level of stress to the performer making the *origin task* harder to retrieve. The stress is partly due to the unstoppable nature of the backing track.

However, the performance shows how the performers are playing with these characteristics of the interruptions in a *comic sequence* rather than experiencing genuine stress. This is an emergent duality between performer and character. (Character is the focus of chapter 4, and this duality is a discussion). Like Foucault’s self-interruptions (*endogenous*), the audience do not believe that the performers of *Human Scene* are genuinely stressed, rendering it benign. The stress the characters portray is relatable and easy to read, meaning there is significant violation.

A dramaturgical interruption also takes place at the end of the *Human Scene* when the houselights are turned on. This device is used in a very similar way in the ‘assassins’ scene in *Dead Cat Bounce*. Here, a convention of theatrical performance is interrupted to violate the *continuity* on a dramaturgical level. This intermedial application of the comedic material experiments with the audience expectation in a similar way to the experimental theatre approaches of Object Collection. In their 2023 show *HOUSECONCERT*, the character Fred is given improvisational agency to interrupt a delicate music performance in various ways. Throughout the rehearsal process, director Kara Feely and performer Nicolas Noreña explored a vocabulary of interactions with this piece of music. The result is that Fred violates the performance conventions by speaking to members of the audience over the music. Furthermore, he arrives to the show late, makes phone calls, goes backstage knocking over large metal objects, and accidentally turns the houselights on. Like with the Frank Foucault’s sequence, the interruptions begin subtle and become increasingly gratuitous and obvious in their staging.²¹

Interruption Duet #1

Preparation/open score process

For this work, I intentionally addressed the terminological framework from interruption science to create a piece. The exploration of the comedic material of interruptions and various factors of interruptions is what lead the composition process.

The basic premise is that one player attempts to play a solo repertoire piece, while the other player interrupts. Prior to the workshops, I asked saxophonist Laurent Estoppey for a list of repertoire pieces. I selected Telemann’s Fantasia No. 1 in A major for its idiomatic traits that establish a *music continuity* to the listener – in a similar way to music works selected by Parkinson (3.4). The aim was to make it abundantly clear that Laurent is returning to the *task*. By selecting a recognisably continuous piece, the interruptions register very clearly.

To experiment with *availability of task retrieval cues*, I asked Laurent if he could recite the piece from memory. The reason for this, is to test what effect the other three factors have on his

²¹ This is another first-hand anecdote from my performance work with Object Collection where my accounts are original and undocumented. I was a cast member in *HOUSECONCERT* so I experienced this rehearsal room and performance process in person.

ability to resume, and whether the interruptions could make the piece stop entirely – like the Helmut Lachenmann story of having to start the piece again (3.4). A score is a *task retrieval cue*, aiding the musician's ability to return to the *task* or note in the phrase. For this session, Laurent was unable to prepare a piece to be recited from memory, so this aspect of the experiment is for future exploration.

The interruptions for Antoine Fraçoise (player 2) vary in sound, interactivity, duration, complexity, and magnitude (incorporating extra performers and lighting cues). I categorised the interruptions in the following way:

1. Keyboard phrases (group 1)
2. Sampler sounds (group 2)
3. Instructions
4. Big moments

The keyboard interruptions, due to their *similarity to the primary task* (they are both music), result in a kind of 'weird' music, in the David Huron sense, with unresolved modulations and pauses within long flowing phrases.

The sampler sounds are incongruous with the repertoire performance of the piece (music object/origin task). The sounds are from an everyday context and are chosen for their specifically interruptive connotations including a buzzer, a game show jingle, a voicemail message, and a car horn. The reduced similarity to the melodic solo results in a more considerable violation. 'Group 2' interruptions make it much clearer that one musician is interrupting the other.

The 'instructions' are designed for excessive levels of interruption that increases the *interruption duration* and *interruption complexity* of the interruptions, with varying levels of *similarity to origin task*. There were three instructions that could be used. One is based on counting and arithmetic, one instructs variations of the repertoire piece, and the other involves physical actions around the room. The instructions interrupt in different ways. Counting and arithmetic are cognitive tasks that are simple but could become difficult when trying to maintain focus on the *origin task*. The task is not particularly like reciting a saxophone piece,

but the player can remain in the same physical position and therefore have their *retrieval cues* intact throughout. The music variations task has greater *similarity to the origin task*, and the *retrieval cues* remain intact throughout. However, the instruction for physical actions requires the player to leave their playing position, moving themselves and objects around the room. The tasks may be simpler, but when the player cannot see their score, retrieving the task may take longer.

Finally, the idea behind the 'big moments' is to create a tangent or parenthesis (of significant *interruption duration*), where the audience may even forget that the player is intending to finish the piece. 'Big moment 1' is an expressive synth solo from which the 'group 1' interruptions are derived, and 'big moment 2' is a verse from an original synthpop song, which I sing from the audience. Both 'big moments' involve a lighting cue to add to the parenthetical nature of the interruptions.

Workshop/devising

The structure of the workshop session was as follows:

- a first playthrough of the piece
- a devising session experimenting with different approaches and variations of structure
- a second playthrough incorporating the variations from the devising process

In the first playthrough, the interruptions started immediately and were very frequent. The result was that the *continuity* of the Telemann piece is not established enough to register a violation. Consequently, what is heard is not an interrupted piece, but 'weird' music. This is an interesting by-product, and interruptions could be used in this way to make 'weird' or interesting music.

Player 1 (Laurent) found the counting instructions difficult while trying to maintain focus on *task retrieval*. After returning to the *origin task*/Telemann, he took a while to adjust back, even deviating from the rules. This was the intention of the longer and more complex interruptions. In addition, this is a benign experience as he laughed during several moments of this difficult *task*.

Like in *Gli Anni Prog*, there is a moment of role reversal during ‘big moment 1’ while player 1 eagerly awaits the ending of player 2’s solo so he can continue the Telemann. This shifts the tension and is an interesting moment for the dynamic of the duo.

Some key decisions emerged from the devising process, in which there was an extended period of trial and error of specific sections and iterations of the comedic material:

- There should be a longer period before the first interruption to establish the *music continuity* of the *origin task*.
- The ‘instructions’ should be followed by both players, raising the stakes for player 2.
- The ‘instructions’ should always be a surprise to the players in live performance and rehearsal tracks could be used – like in Tim Parkinson’s *Time with People*.
- There could be some kind of resetting gesture for player 1 to make returning to the *origin task* more difficult.
- To avoid ‘weird’ music and establish violation, the keyboard sounds can be comparatively harsher in relation to the saxophone.

A final run of the piece allowed these decisions to be put into action. Another effective role reversal moment emerged when player 1 adjusted his mouthpiece before returning to the Telemann, this *endogenous interruption* added another unexpected layer of interruptions to the piece. A role reversal took place when player 2 was waiting for player 1 to continue, which is an interesting idea for further exploration.

3.6. Conclusion

The comedic material of interruptions when translated into music can result in humorous performance and interesting composition alike. The effectivity and impact of this material can be utilised and understood using terminology and criteria from interruption science. This includes the four factors of *similarity to origin task*, *interruption complexity*, *interruption duration*, and *availability of task retrieval cues*. A general application of the terms *origin task* and *interrupt task* is also useful when exploring this comedic material.

The successful comedic potential of interruptions in music is largely due to the recognising of interruptions as an everyday occurrence. An interruption must be a significant enough

violation in *continuity* to register as an interruption. In staging interruptions there can be a safe distance between the audience and the interruption, rendering the *comic sequence* benign. However, irritation may still be experienced in mixed receptions such as maddening humour.

Interruptions can be used effectively in intermedial composition incorporating visual, text-based, and dramaturgical elements. I believe that this material has proven to have a lot of scope for structuring entire works or sections as well as being the basis of musical material. In the experimental theatre of Tim Parkinson and Object Collection, interruptions have been used effectively in devised and improvised ways with carefully controlled conditions to make impacting and comedic performance works²².

This chapter merely opens the door to many more possibilities for exploration of interruptions, including the role reversal discovered in the *Interruption Duet #1* workshop.

²² The comedic effects of these artists are a by-product and not a primary intention.

Appendix score – transcription of Frank Foucault’s routine from *Shoes* turned into an open score for music performance.

INTERRUPTION SCORE #1: ‘FRANK FOUCAULT’

James Oldham

INSTRUCTIONS:

Source material can be one sequence of 25 decipherable elements (ie notes of a musical phrase, words of a sentence, movements of a choreography)

Timings may be the decision of the performer; or to be determined by the limitations of the source material

The letters are to be interpreted freely, but the greater the contrast the greater the effect.

SOURCE MATERIAL: 1 - 25
 INTERRUPTIONS: A: pause
 B: arbitrary filler
 C: exhale/flump/sigh
 D: tangents

A B 1 2 3 4 5 6 B C C
 7 B A
 7 C A
 7 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 13 B B 14 B 14 15 B B C
 14 C A 14 C 14 15 16 17 17 C B C A
 B 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 B
 14 14 C D C D C D C D C D C D C D C
 7 8 A
 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 17 C D D 17 D D
 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 B 14 15
 14 15 16 17 D D
 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 A
 16 17 B D B B D C B B
 18 19 B C B
 20 21 22 23 24 25 B

Chapter 4

Comic Archetypes

(music specific comic roles)

4. 1. Introduction

In this chapter I outline roles and archetypes from comedy and translate them to music performance. I look at selected criteria for the performance of comedy and apply it to music, fundamentally considering how different roles relate in comic music performance. I consider what features performers may have that contribute to performing comedy in a music context. In seeking to categorise different roles, I identify the following perspectives:

1. Characteristics (*mechanical / zany*)
2. Status (*highbrow / lowbrow*)
3. Four music specific comic roles

Characteristics have been discussed in terms of music, but now I consider the characteristics of music specific roles performers might play. The characteristics I identify are chosen for their breadth and applicability across a wide range of characters. The *mechanical* and the *zany* are both based on comic archetypes, and I explore how that might be translated into music. Status of *highbrow* and *lowbrow* has been discussed in terms of music schema, but I plot comic roles as a spectrum from comedy (*lowbrow*) to music (*highbrow*). Ann-Marie Hanlon's ideas of humour's lowering and materialising properties is a useful starting point here. Once I plot the characteristics and status onto an x and y axis, the four quadrants represent four *music specific comic roles* for performance (**Figure 4.4**).

Comic character can be just as important as content in comedy. For example, some comedians can say almost anything, and the audience will laugh, as demonstrated by comedian Peter Kay telling a well-known 'dad joke' to receive thousands of laughs at his live show (Kay, 2003). There is an idea that some performers are simply funnier than others. Simon Critchley paraphrases a sentiment from the 1994 film *Funny Bones*, where Jerry Lewis's character confesses "there are people who aren't funny, right, there are people who can talk funny, who

get people to write gags for them. I'm one of those people... and then there are people with funny bones. Those people with funny bones, whatever material they have you'll find funny" (2008). In this sense, those comedians who are particularly funny are born with that ability.

Conversely, comedian Hannah Gadsby suggests that her comic ability developed as a means of survival. In her 2018 Netflix special *Nanette*, while discussing the importance of 'tension and release' in comedy, Gadsby asks:

Do you know why I'm such a funny fucker? It's because I've been learning the art of tension diffusion since I was a child. Back then it wasn't a job, it wasn't even a hobby. It was a survival tactic. I didn't have to invent the tension – I *was* the tension. (Strong, 2014)

Gadsby's ability to be funny was not something she was born with, but a skill she learned in response to personal hardship. The release of tension to signify that everything is ok is an inherent part of the release theory of humour (1.2). Gadsby's difficult upbringing and her acclaim as a comedian are proportionate. There is a nature/nurture dichotomy between developing the skill through childhood and being born funny, and although they may provide two options, they are also not exclusive. Whether the reasoning is grounded in nature or nurture, some are more versed in comedy than others.

Seemingly unfunny people can also learn to be funny. There are schools where people can learn to be clowns such as École Internationale de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq and École Philippe Gaulier. In these institutions, performers receive a full-time education tailored towards clowning. For Jacques Lecoq, it is a holistic actor training providing performers with technique in mime, dance, and acting – this might resemble the training of a conventional acting school. Philippe Gaulier, on the other hand (a former student of Jacques Lecoq) opts to train aspiring clowns in 'finding your idiot' through a much looser approach. Gaulier has trained known actors/performers such as Sacha Baron Cohen, Emma Thompson, Helena Bonham Carter, Roberto Benigni, and Simon McBurney, highlighting the breadth of comedian benefiting from his unique clown training. For Gaulier "[i]f you want to understand the poetry of an idiot, it is a long journey" (n.d.). These courses are to being funny what conservatoires are to making music

with ‘finding your inner clown’ equating to ‘finding your musical voice’.²³ Clown training may incorporate different games, exercises, tasks, and character work to help the performer find ways to be funny without actively trying. The clown practises clowning so that when they improvise, they do not think-then-act, they just act.

In one interview, cellist Yo-Yo Ma claims “if I can decrease the amount of brain real estate on the playing aspect of the cello, I can focus on what it’s about” (Rubinstein, 2023, p. 26). This is a desirable feat of musicianship resulting in the audience experiencing the music in a way that transcends the labour. There is an affinity here between the clown and musician. If the classical musician strives to isolate the music, then the clown strives to isolate the stupidity. Stupidity to a clown is the poetry of emptying their head and being present with the audience, in an unadulterated way. Clown pedagogue Giovanni Fusetti tailors his *Sublime Stupidity* short course in Padova to exactly this. For Fusetti:

*There are as many clowns, as there are human beings.
There is one way to stand, and infinite ways to fall.
Intelligence is limited. Stupidity is infinite. (Fusetti, n. d.)*

When I studied red-nose clown with Giovanni Fusetti in Padova in 2021, we spent much of the first day experiencing ‘stage time’ as an isolated object. In turn, performers would take to the stage and simply exist in front of their classmates (the audience), not actively trying to be funny. The only two things we were actively required to do was maintain eye-contact with the audience and breathe. Only if we broke one of these rules would Giovanni intervene. The exercise is alarmingly difficult and not something that many performers will have experienced.

Then we added entering and exiting the stage, learning that to walk straight to the middle of the stage is a waste of so much clowning opportunity. Through this exercise we learnt to savour and respond to every possible offering, noticing everything, but not through observation, but through breathing and seeing. The result of these initial exercises was a freedom to improvise and simply respond rather than thinking about what to do next.

²³ Finding your inner clown is a contentious debate and every clown teacher will have a different idea of what that means. Gaulier believes that not everyone has a true inner clown despite training clowns. While Giovanni Fusetti believes, instead, that your body is being borrowed by the muses for the duration of a performance – it is more about letting go.

When a classical musician reaches a desired level of competency, the audience can trust the musician to play uninterrupted music and ‘lose themselves’ in a safe space for performance to take place. The clown may do the opposite. Their skill is to convince of utter incompetence, that they do not know what they are doing, and that carrying out any simple task could go wrong. Incompetency is a sought-after skill for a clown. Although both roles may achieve a similar level of training, their abilities are not viewed in the same way. The virtuosity of one is acknowledged as a peak of sophistication (*highbrow*), and the other may have accidentally wandered in from the street (*lowbrow*). Jacques Lecoq summarises:

Clowning also demands a feat, one that often defies logic; overturning a certain order it thus allows one to denounce the recognised order; he lets his hat drop to the ground, goes to pick it up, but, clumsily, puts his foot inside it, and without doing it on purpose, walks on a stick which springs into his hand. The clown fails where you expect him to succeed and succeeds where you expect him to fail. (Lecoq, 2006, pp. 115-116)

An aim of this chapter is to map out relationships between different performance practices in music contexts, working towards configuring what different roles they may play in a comic music performance. Although some of this may apply to music within comedy performances, the focus is on comic roles as a comedic material for translation into music and therefore music contexts are an exclusive line of enquiry.

4.2. A structure for *music specific comic roles*

The framework I outline here is based on the relationship between the comedian (*fool*) and the *musician*. After defining how I apply these terms, I consider how they relate.

The musician

For the sake of this chapter, I focus on classical musicians to keep the research concise but suggest the same criteria could be translated to musicians working in other practices. Classical music concerts are a significant factor here as it comes with its own preconceived notions of etiquette, behaviour, formality, and skill (discussed in relation to interruptions in chapter 3). I also use the term ‘classical music’ as a widely recognised and encompassing term for Western ‘art music’ including concert hall performances, recitals, orchestral concerts, and opera.

Henceforth, in this chapter, I use the term *musician* to express one of these contexts and it can be assumed that the musician is a trained classical musician of some description.

The fool

I use the term *fool* as a broad term for various comic roles within music. This could include comedian, clown, mime, or actor. In short, someone who is representing a role contrasting that of a *musician*. *Fool*, in this sense, is the antithesis of *musician* in terms of certain functions and representations.

The *fool* has origins in the role of the medieval court jester, which was not a stage character but a full-time 'licensed' position. As Conrad Hyers (1985) notes, the jester provided a monarch with a "comic alter ego, a less serious, more human, and more flexible self to step into" (p. 113). He elaborates that "the king was prevented from pretending to be what he was not and permitted to be what he really was: a human being like everyone else, who participated with all his subjects in the frailties and follies of the human condition" (ibid. p. 113). The jester addressed the need to humanise the monarch, who otherwise had a 'divine right to rule'.

As discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais engaged extensively with the role of the *fool*, which was a central aspect of his grotesque realism. According to Bakhtin, grotesque realism's function is to "degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 20). These traits were continued as Bakhtin argues that laughter "which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes" (ibid. p. 20). In the Rabelaisian sense, "[d]egradation and debasement of the higher do not have a formal and relative character in grotesque realism. "Upward" and "downward" have an absolute and strictly topological meaning. "Downward" is earth, "upward" is heaven" (ibid. p. 21). The term degradation is used here as the pull to earth of the *fool*, which is a key characteristic. The idea of upward and downwards is an important distinction for my framework.

As articulated by Anne Marie-Hanlon, music's relationship with the humanist-Romantic notions of the transcendent experience lies in contrast with the role of the *fool*, and laughter. Placing the perceived opposition of humour to the sentiment that "the artwork should be unique, original and elevated above the realm of the everyday" (Hanlon, 2013, p. 24). In clowning and

the work of the *fool*, materialising and returning us to earth is the outcome. However implied, imagined, or symbolic this relationship may be, the *highbrow/lowbrow* split is a present one and something that can be explored in comic music sequences.

This first relational role is the *musician* and the *fool*.

Musician ↔ Fool

Highbrow and lowbrow

As discussed in chapter 1, one of the key considerations of humour in David Huron's *Sweet Anticipation* is the dichotomy of *highbrow* and *lowbrow*. For Huron, "there is an asymmetry with respect to "high" and "low" culture. The interruption of a "high-brow" minuet by a "low-brow" popular tune is more likely to generate laughter than vice versa" (Huron, 2006, p. 287). Adding the contrasting examples of 'upward' and 'downward' trajectories, where an "interruption of a string quartet by a bagpipe is funnier than interrupting pipers with a string quartet" (ibid. p. 287). Furthermore, he identifies this effect as a play signal in a "high art" context. Huron's examples apply to genre and instrumentation (*schematic surprise*), but I would go further to say that this is an internal hierarchy within music. As Hanlon recounts, humour has a materialising and lowering effect in music contexts – to that extent, the role of *the fool* lowers. In an exclusively music performance without extraneous elements, this will likely be the case. However, if there is music *and* comedy, I think that all types of music will likely assume the *highbrow* role in relation to comedy.

In 2023, Gaulier-trained clown Viggo Venn won the television contest Britain's Got Talent. His routine was based on the repetition of removing a hi-vis vest to reveal another one below to the tune of *One More Time* by Daft Punk (Ramsey, 2023). The winner of the show is decided by public vote, but despite this, Venn's victory sparked controversy among viewing audiences, some of whom questioned whether he had talent. Viewers of the show took to Twitter and even reported their disappointment to Ofcom. In a Guardian interview, Venn stated that "Clown is the lowest form of entertainment," (Logan, 2023) and proceeds to rank "opera singer, actor, standup, and then you have magician, stripper and then clown at the bottom" (ibid.). Some of the show's runners-up were in this list – Venn (bottom of the list) beat a choir, a dancer, an opera singer, and a magician in the competition.

Winning a national talent show after graduating from a prestigious clown school is hardly a demonstration of a lack of skill. Instead, this is about perception and the presentation of the skills. For a clown, a skill is to show they are failing and are somehow beneath the audience. In a *comic music sequence*, the *fool* has a *lowbrow* role in relation to the *musician*. The *musician* represents a sophistication and cultural capital. Their skill is widely recognised.

The *fool* may evoke a reception of superiority in the audience where the audience laughs due to feeling superior. Hobbes refers to this principle as *sudden glory* and defines it as:

the passion that causes those grimaces called LAUGHTER. It is caused either by some sudden act of the person's own, that pleases him, or by his awareness of something wrong with someone else, by comparison with whom he suddenly applauds himself. (Hobbes, 2008, p. 52)

'Applauding oneself' can apply to the feeling of superiority above those who are being laughed at, or at the 'glory' of self-elevation in that moment. The latter here could be because of an 'in-joke', where the laughter is a signifier of understanding the joke. In a classical music performance, an 'in-joke' may require some knowledge of music history or even music theory, and therefore the laughter-as-comprehension may be an exhibition of cultural capital. Simply knowing that something was not supposed to happen in a *highbrow* context might be enough to spark laughter in those seeking to express this. It could be viewed more favourably by suggesting that the loud laughs of those familiar with the protocol are communicating that it is OK to laugh (like release theory), inclusively signifying to those unfamiliar. Either way, the presence of *highbrow* and *lowbrow* is an important relationship for humour in classical music.

The next relation in the framework is *highbrow* and *lowbrow*.

Highbrow ↔ Lowbrow

The status of the *musician* and the *fool* in classical music might set them apart, but they can also bear resemblance in terms of the *mechanical inelasticity*.

The mechanical

The *fool* responds to what they observe rather than what they know. In their inability to imitate, they have drawn attention to some truth in their imitation. Bergson (1900) asserts that

“our gestures can only be imitated in their mechanical uniformity, and therefore exactly in what is alien to our living personality” (p. 16). In the Bergsonian sense, the *musician* is separate from their living personality to the extent to which they are a *musician*. The *fool* adopting *musician* qualities has isolated what makes them *mechanical*.

An imitation exercise during Giovanni Fusetti’s course had clowns imitating each other’s walks. Everyone walks around the room normally, while three clowns observe and begin to adopt the walk of another clown. After a while Giovanni asks everyone else to sit down leaving only the three imitators walking around the room. This moment generally gets a laugh as three clowns imitating normal walks is revealed. In one instance, a particular walk seemed absurd in its high level of exaggeration. Giovanni asks the seated clowns to guess whose walks are being imitated – some guessed their own walk immediately, recognising their own characteristics (that which is *mechanical*). Finally, the one clown remained on stage receiving consistent laughter. One says: “that better not be me!”, which made everybody laugh as they realised that it was their walk. They claimed this was ‘not their walk’ as the imitator clown walked around the room. Giovanni says: “OK then, show us your walk...”. Their real walk was identical to the absurd imitation. This was immediately realised by the imitated clown, who, while walking says “ah, fuck!” as they realise that their normal walk is already funny. To a clown, this is rich material and was the aim of Giovanni’s exercise – to isolate that which can be imitated (that which is *mechanical*).²⁴

The principle of *mechanical* imitation is well established in comedy and is taken to an extreme in *Modern Times* (1936), when Charlie Chaplin, portraying a factory line worker, becomes part of the machine he is working with. In this example of the *mechanical* principle, it is funny to the extent Charlie Chaplin is not a human and instead *is* a machine. He has been working so mechanically as a machine that even when leaving the factory he continues the same machine-like actions – attempting to ‘tighten-up’ a police officer with a wrench as if they were a bolt. The clown who did not realise how comical their walk was experiences a version of this principle in their everyday life – to them, they are just living, but the observer sees a funny walk or a man becoming a machine.

²⁴ This is an original recount from Giovanni Fusetti’s red-nose clown course *The Sublime Stupidity*. I attended this course in December 2021 at Helikos Studio in Padova, Italy.

Bergson continues, “it need only be noted that a comic character is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself. The comic person is unconscious” (1900, p. 16). In that sense, the *musician* who does not notice their surroundings and continues to perform a concert piece no matter what, unquestioning of the foolishness surrounding them, is a comic character.

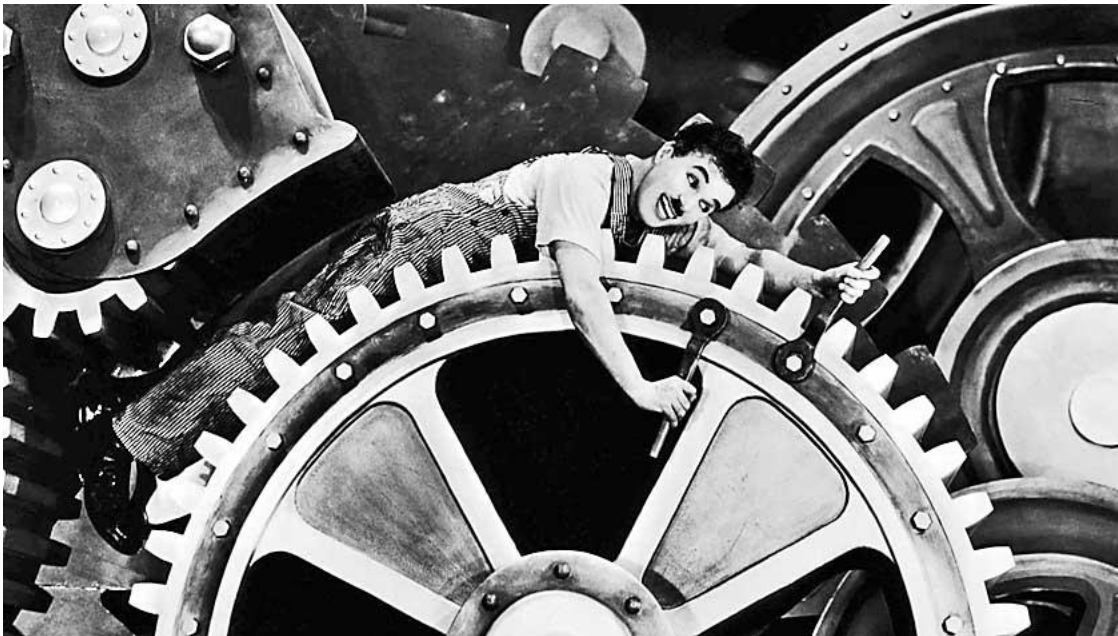


Figure 4.1 – Charlie Chaplin being drawn through the machine that he has become part of in *Modern Times* (1936) (Raghuramaraju, 2021)

For the purposes of a *comic music sequence*, I refer to this role as the ***total musician***. The role of the *total musician* only exists in the context of a *comic music sequence*, otherwise they are simply a *musician*.

The *fool* can also be totally absorbed in their own world. A classic example of this is an archetypal ‘fall’ of Don Quixote or Buster Keaton where it is the extent to which they are gazing upon a star, or hopelessly fixed on an object of desire, that they fall. This can also be found in the John Wright example of a man falling over while purposefully walking down the street (1.3) or in the cliché of slipping on a banana skin²⁵. As with the *musician* so engrossed in the music they express, the *fool* is a deeply romantic character, and their stupidity and lack of elasticity is human and relatable. I call this type of *fool*, the ***total fool***.

²⁵ Bergson attributes slipping on a banana skin to *mechanical inelasticity* and failure to adapt to one’s surroundings.

Now I have outlined the role of the *musician* and the *fool* in their *total, mechanical* form, I consider what happens when the roles are performed simultaneously:

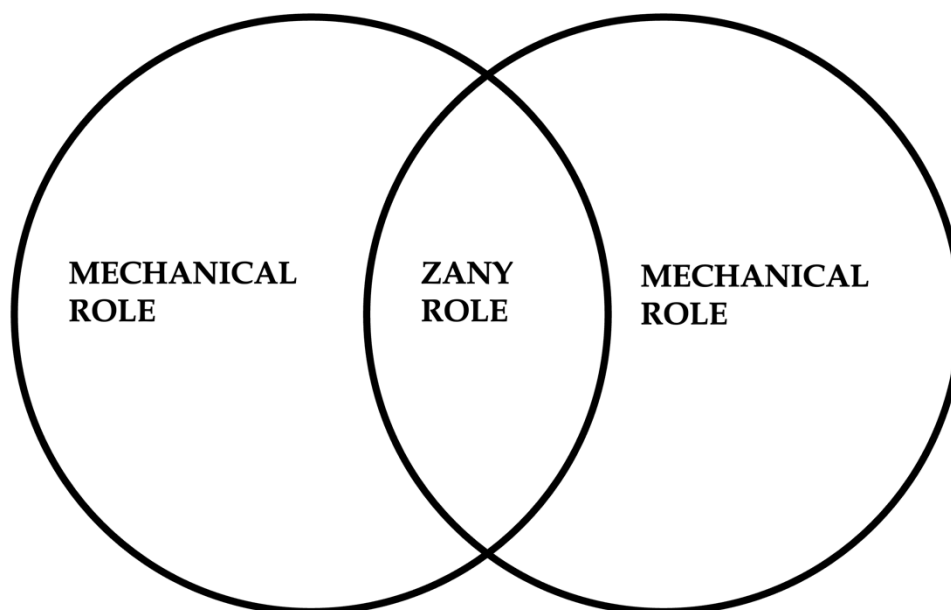


Figure 4.2 – Venn diagram of two simultaneous mechanical roles resulting in a zany role

The zany

The interdisciplinarity of playing two roles at the same time is fundamentally *zany*. In *Our Aesthetic Categories*, Sianne Ngai (2016) outlines the role of ‘the zany’ as a dominant contemporary aesthetic that can be found in both industry and art. It is inherently borderline and “is the only aesthetic category in our contemporary repertoire explicitly about this politically ambiguous intersection between cultural and occupational performance, acting and service, playing and laboring” (Ngai, 2016, p. 182). The *musician* who performs a comic role, or the *fool* acting as a *musician* is a move away from the *mechanical* singular focus towards the labour of the interdisciplinary. Ngai expresses that “[i]ntensely affective and physical, it is an aesthetic of action in the presence of an audience that bridges the gap between popular and avant grade practice across a wide range of media” (Ibid. p. 182). This suggestion is that the *zany* aesthetic, and consequently its character trait, can expand across the *highbrow/lowbrow* duality.

Zany originates from the Commedia dell’Arte archetype Zanni (**Figure 4.3**), who was “an itinerant servant, modelled after peasants forced by droughts, wars, or other crises to emigrate from the hills near Milan to Venice in search of temporary work” (Ibid. p. 192). This role is one

that is relatable, exhausting, and interdisciplinary. They need to be able to switch to wherever their labour can be utilised.



Figure 4.3 – The archetypal Zanni of the Commedia dell'Arte (n. d.)

When staged, this trait encompasses simultaneous multiple roles. In the article *Music in the Expanded Field*, there is an inherent zaniness of the interdisciplinary composer/performer, who autodidactically learn new skills and disciplines to extend what it means to practice 'music'.

Marko Ciciliani suggests that, in doing so, composers from academic backgrounds are seeking "to acquire a number of abilities apart from this educational frame, which also distances them from the typical academic discourse" (Ciciliani, 2016, p. 33). The distance from the academy is what might also be considered as a move away from the *total musician* and towards an interdisciplinary hybrid. He concludes that such approaches "are relevant because they form a particular response – though certainly not the only possible one – to the situation we live in today" (Ibid. p. 34). There is a link between the gig economy, 'modern day Zanni', and the *musician* practicing in the expanded field through their adaptability to today's cultural and economic landscape.

The *zany* describes two more comic music roles, which are interdisciplinary and hybrid:

- The **foolish musician** (the *musician* who simultaneously performs a comic role)
- The **musical fool** (the *fool* who simultaneously performs a musical role)

Both roles are *zany* in their inability to focus entirely on a single role. According to Scott McGehee’s contribution to the Routledge Companion to Commedia dell’Arte, the Zanni’s “unique and crucial role in the comedy is to subvert the various symbolic orders by creating havoc” (McGehee, 2015, p. 15). If the *total musician* is to uphold the status of music, and the *total fool* is to continuously pull downwards towards a grounded bodily materiality, then these *zany* roles are to subvert these continua. The creation of an ambiguous push and pull is what is introduced through the two *zany* hybrid roles.

This diagram shows how the four roles align and are qualified by the characteristics and statuses outlined.

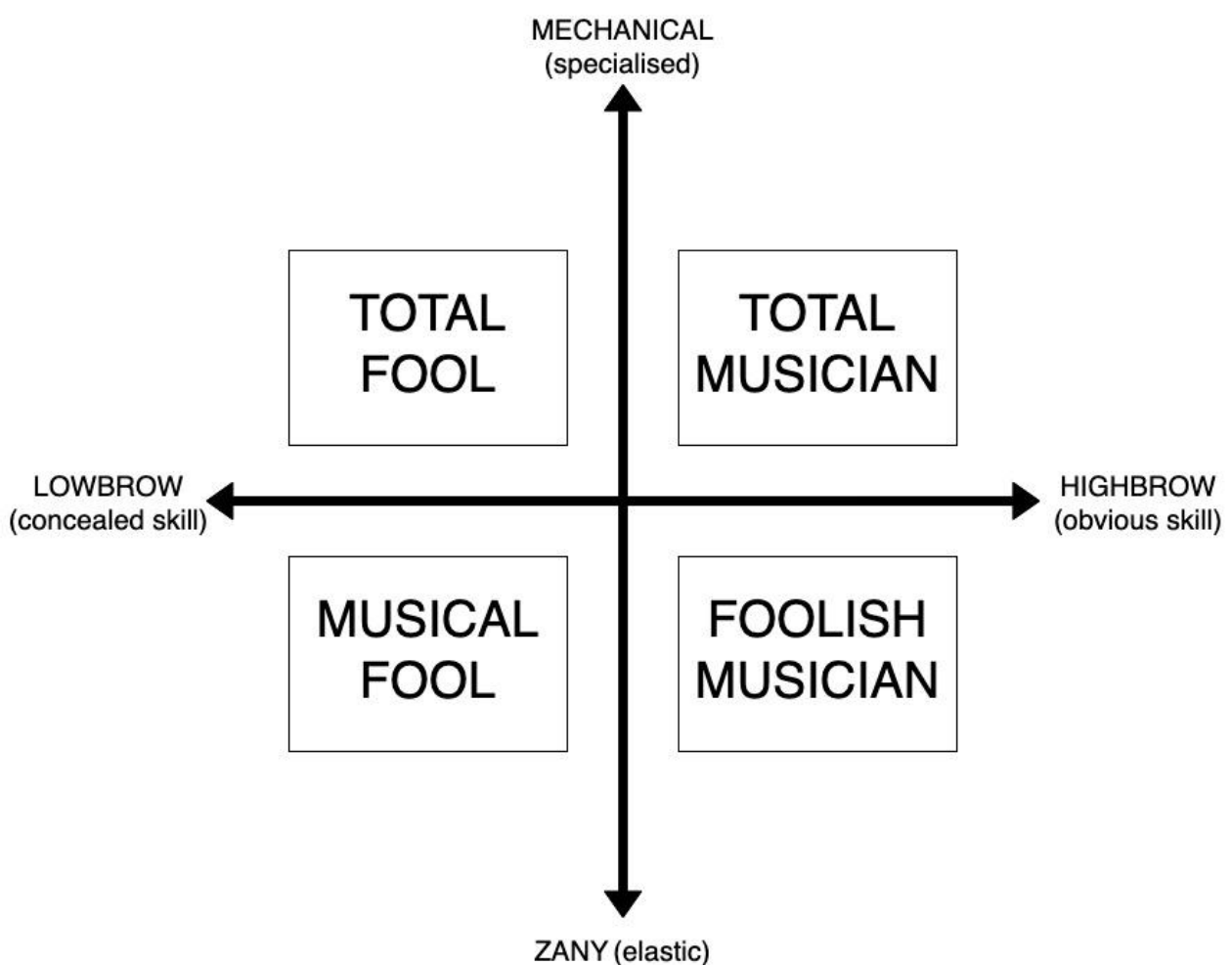


Figure 4.4 – Original diagram showing how the roles, characteristics and statuses relate.

Lowbrow to *highbrow* and *mechanical* to *zany* are axes where various examples of roles can be plotted to indicate their placement within the diagram as demonstrated in the following sections.

4. 3. A study of comic roles in music

This section is an analysis of two comparative music performances, drawing on the roles presented in the comedic material framework above. The first is a performance of composer Peter Schickele's rendition of Beethoven's 5th Symphony, credited to his alter ego PDQ Bach. The second is experimental music group Arco's 2021 Café OTO performance of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto. Both works are good examples of all *music specific comic roles* I have outlined but are also contrasted in certain fundamental approaches despite being hypothetically very similar.

PDQ Bach's "New Horizons in Music Appreciation" (Beethoven Symphony No. 5 Sportscast)

This performance takes place in a conventional concert hall setting as part of a programme of the music PDQ Bach. PDQ Bach is a para-fictional 'failed' Baroque composer created by Peter Schickele. 'Professor Schickele' is the downbeat academic who 'researched' his music – both roles are played by Peter Schickele. In general, there is a comic duality within the output of Peter Schickele. Compositions and performances by Schickele are simultaneously a disaster and a feat of virtuosity in both senses outlined in the introduction (4.1). Schickele's musical proficiency and clowning stupidity are both of a high level of practice and experience. Schickele's abilities as a comic performer are learned through live stage performance, but he received formal training in composition at The Julliard School. As a composer the attention to detail in orchestration, pastiche, and parody is of a notably high level. The affordance is that the audience trust his chaotic stage persona due to a clear musical competence. Perhaps at the same time they do not have to think about the competence level and can simply enjoy the performance due to its refined execution.

In the 2006 live concert *Houston We Have a Problem!* which was released on record in 2006, there is a performance of Beethoven's 5th Symphony. The orchestra perform the Beethoven symphony but framed as a sports game with live commentary by 'Professor Schickele' and his co-commentator Giff Nielson. From the beginning, the orchestra are all *total musicians*, playing the piece as it was composed – the only difference being that they have numbers round their necks²⁶. The commentators provide real-time musicology but in the style of a sports

²⁶ The numbers imply that they are players on a team rather than musicians in an orchestra. This also allows the referee to call out their number as if they are a penalised sports player.

commentary. This assumes them the role of *musical fools*. They are *fools* in the sense that they are performing comedic non-musical roles but with a musical awareness. There is a *zany* elasticity to delivering a parody of a sports broadcast while timing the delivery with events in the music score. There is a dynamic between Schickele and Nielson, who is a former NFL player and as such is very convincing as a commentator. The credibility of Nielson is a 'straight-man' to Schickele's 'fool', yet they are both still *fools*. In terms of sports, Nielson is the professional, but in terms of music, Schickele is the professional. There is a mutual borrowing of skills, but this extends the zaniness even further due to the adaptability of both roles.



Figure 4.5 - The referee firing the starting pistol for the PDQ Bach performance of Beethoven's 5th Symphony Sportscast [YouTube screengrab] (nnhjake, 2011)

There is also a referee character on stage who, until blowing their whistle, does not seem to be playing any part other than standing extraneously on stage in a referee costume. At this point, the character could be perceived as a *total fool*, oblivious to the music. Continuing the sports game theme, the referee blows their whistle when a horn player plays a (written) wrong note. Now the referee is a *musical fool*, playing a knowing part in the performance of the music and responding to a wrong note. The orchestra stops and the commentators announce there will be an instant replay. In this slow motion re-performing of the error, the orchestra are more

actively in on the joke. To some extent, they are still *total musicians* as they perform exactly what Peter Schickele has scored.

The Beethoven score acts as another kind of 'straight-man' role. They are performing the Beethoven score as written, and PDQ (Schickele) has simply 'changed the situation' to make this piece a sports event. The narration part, delivered by the commentators, is listed in the instrumentation, however the role of referee, and the cheerleaders who are onstage throughout, are not. The cheerleaders seem to have no interaction with the music, instead they only respond to the behaviour of the players and the referee's decisions. The lack of engagement with the music – as if oblivious to it – makes them *total fools* in this sequence. They are there in a sports capacity only, meaning they are acting convincingly in the wrong situation.

As the sequence progresses there is increasingly more acting from certain musicians in the orchestra and the conductor. For these *musicians*, the role has shifted from *total musician* to *foolish musician*. The role of the *foolish musician* is not simply a *total musician* breaking character. The *foolish musician* is one who has developed their performance ability beyond music training – maybe they are born funny, maybe they have developed comic ability through childhood, or maybe they have taken the time to develop their skills as a comedian or clown. The *total musician* can be a very funny role and should be treated as such. The *total musician* is a status-upholding ignorant character who we cannot look down on due to their level of skill, but we may find laughable due to their *mechanical* commitment to the role. The *total musician* breaking character can be as problematic as any performer breaking character. Any *musician* may simply not be a comic performer. If they assume the role of *foolish musician*, they are held to a different standard than if they remain a *total musician*.

Below, is the diagram of *music specific comic roles* with the PDQ Bach Beethoven Sportscast roles plotted on it (**Figure 4.6**).

Apart from the three soloists, the orchestra *musicians* consistently play the role of *total musician*. They are playing the scored music conventionally and without adding any comic performance to the role, even when being stopped by the referee, playing in slow-motion, or during a bout of laughter. I have plotted the orchestra at a high *mechanical* level and of obvious skill. The oboist, conductor, and bassist similarly play their parts as *musicians* to a high

standard, so I have plotted them at the high end of obvious skill. The comedy these three engage in an extension to their *musician* role and not extraneous, I have therefore placed them on the *mechanical* end of *foolish musicians*. Peter Schickele's role could equally be described as *fool* or *musician*, which balances on the *zany* end of the spectrum, giving the impression of Schickele holding the whole performance together. The roles of referee, cheerleaders and sports commentator are all non-musical roles, yet I have plotted them in different places. The referee's interaction with musical timing – blowing the whistle at the right time and signalling to the conductor to restart the piece – renders them a *musical fool*, but the relentless whistle blowing, and comic acting gives his role a lowering quality. The cheerleaders, though not acrobatic in this instance, have obvious skill and almost interact with the music, but ultimately their role is to be a cheerleader of a sports game. There is a *dramatic irony* when the character believes they are at a sports game, but the audience is watching an orchestra perform in a concert hall. I plotted Giff Nielson (Schickele's co-commentator) in a completely different place to Schickele as they play very different roles. The audience knows that Schickele is also the composer, but Nielson is a convincing sports commentator at the wrong event. He is almost a *musical fool* and though his sports commentary skills are evident, the irony of applying it to the wrong event is *mechanical*.

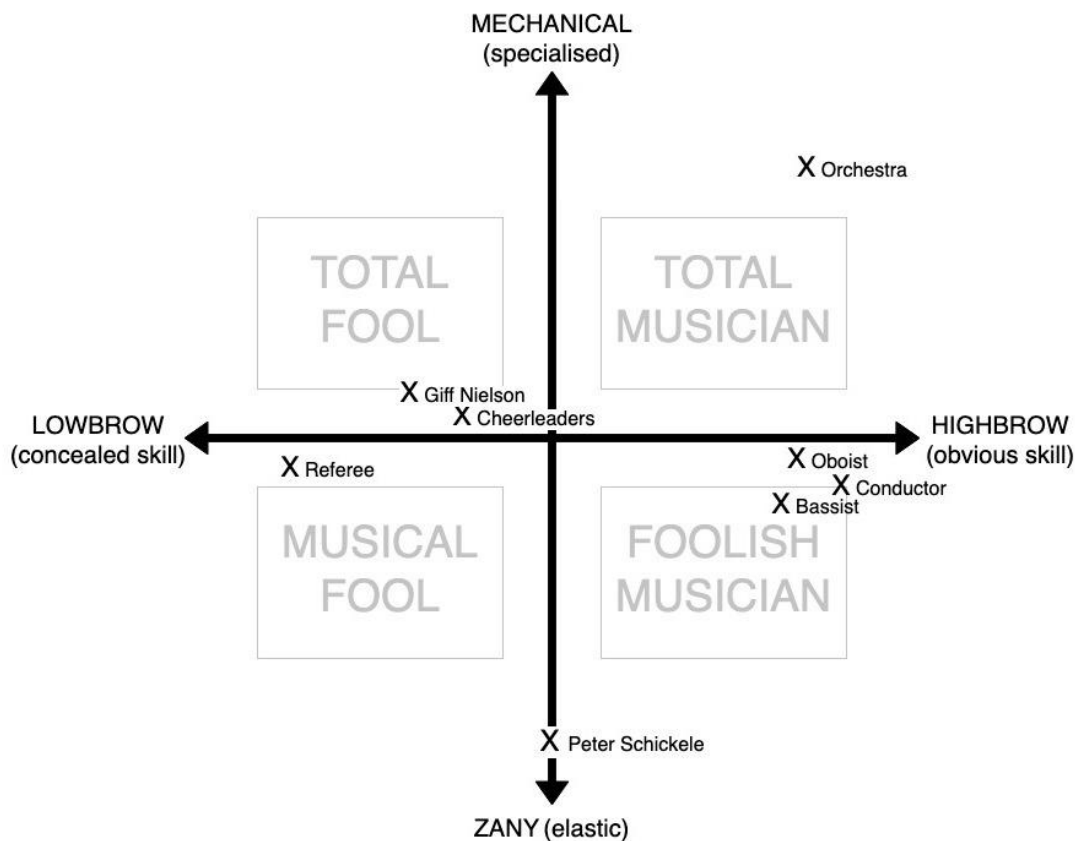


Figure 4.6 – How the comic roles of the PDQ Bach performance relate.

Arco/Neil Luck's MenCon

Hypothetically, this work is very similar to PDQ Bach's Beethoven performance. It is a performance of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto (a canonical 'masterpiece') with a change of situation²⁷. In this instance, the ensemble, Arco, do not have the instrumentation required to be able to perform the piece. Composer Neil Luck's instruction score states the "solo violin part remains almost completely, traditionally intact, accompanied by an orchestra of creative musicians" (2022). The setup is already different from the PDQ as it deviates from the original work through creative agency rather than scripted comedy. Though they both use the original scores as material for the musicians, the way the reworkings depart are different.

In the instructions, Luck provides ample guidance for the performers to choose a level of score fidelity, though it is requested that the decisions are informed through engagement with the original piece. The aim is to perform the entire concerto. Developed in collaboration with solo violinist Chihiro Ono, Luck states that it is less of a parody and more of a 'weird' and 'contemporary' perspective on the original, which is valued very highly by the artists (ibid.). This links to Huron's characteristic of 'weirdness', where the subversion is a *veridical surprise* resulting not necessarily in laughter, but in a unique musical language. The extent to which it is different to the original is what makes it original (or even funny) – a principle reminiscent of *mechanical* imitation as outlined by Bergson and explored by Fusetti in clown training.

Although the intentions of the performance are not comic, the situation created is a comic one: a group not resembling a symphony orchestra are going to play a symphonic work anyway, with the conviction of being a symphony orchestra (*total/mechanical*). The instrumentation includes orchestral instruments: clarinet, viola, cello, and double bass; non-orchestral instruments: synthesiser/objects, live electronics; non-instruments: carpentry; and live musicology. The kind of misfit instrumentation and incompatibility of forces is comparable to the Portsmouth Sinfonia who, like Arco, did not have comic intentions (Cairns, 2004). The Portsmouth Sinfonia consisted of performers with no musical experience or musicians playing an instrument they had no experience of playing. For Arco and Portsmouth Sinfonia, the intentions are artistic, and comedy is a byproduct.

²⁷ The video of the performance can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jph-xscXPIg&ab_channel=neilluck

The cellist (Gaia Blandina) and double bassist (Samuel Rice) opted to use the Mendelssohn score, whereas clarinettist (Tom Jackson) and violist (Benedict Taylor) performed without scores. These roles are all different types of *foolish musician*, with the viola and clarinet being *foolish* for not using scores, and the cello and bass being *foolish* for using scores. However, in the performance the cello and bass roles read more like *total musicians* – playing as if they are part of a full orchestra. The comic element comes from the fact that they are then in this misfit ensemble that is ill-equipped (a *mechanical* role).

Neil Luck on the synthesiser/objects is trying to play accurately from the score, seemingly switching between parts and instruments/objects. In doing so there is a *zany* energy, not just from the performance persona of Luck but from the sheer amount of work to switch between tasks (a theme that could be explored in conjunction with the switching of tasks from the comedic material of chapter 3 on interruptions). The commitment to playing the orchestral part in juxtaposition with the sounds he is making is comical, to the extent that soloist Chihiro Ono even laughs as a direct result of Luck's performance.

In **Figure 4.7** the roles are plotted for *MenCon*.

Ono, who was playing the original violin solo part, plays a crucial role in the commitment to the original. This is a kind of straight-man role in its immovable *mechanical* function. The strict *total musician* role of Ono is essential for packaging the comic elements of this performance. George Haggett's live musicology role is verbally funny throughout, and timed to the music, which would suggest a kind of knowing musical performance. Haggett's commentary is bound to the Mendelssohn concerto and in no way references the Arco version, which is a blatantly 'weird' version. I suggest that this makes Haggett a *total fool* with obvious skill as he is not performing a musical role and is interacting with the 'wrong' performance (dramatic irony). Despite being a *musician*, I would argue that Adam de la Cour's carpentry role is one of a *musical fool* as it could be interpreted as an extraneous character who is not supposed to be there, and with no instruments available. Somehow, against the odds, de la Cour is playing along with the orchestra and has found his way through the score. This is a Keatonesque stumble, where the audience cannot feel wholly superior in their laughter due to the level of virtuosity.

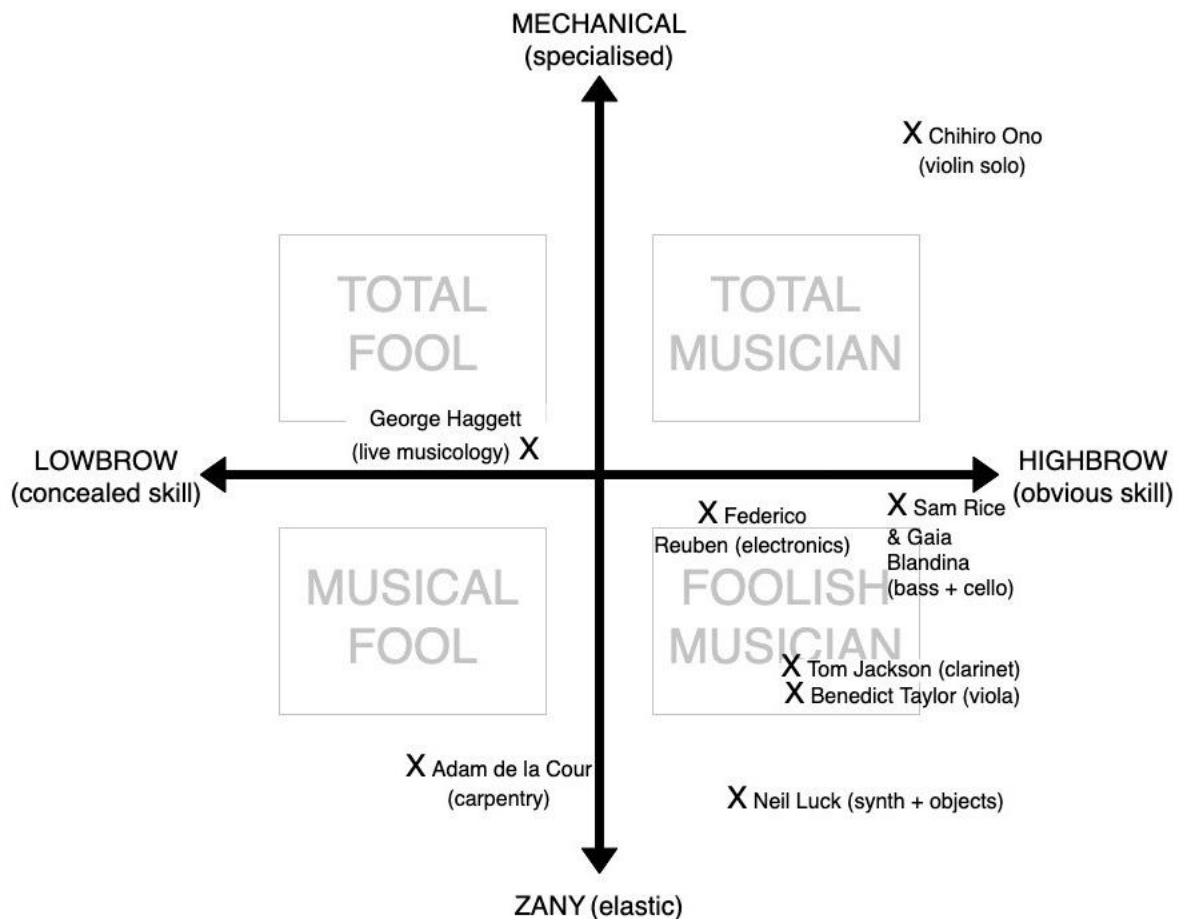


Figure 4.7 – The comic roles Arco play in *Mencon*.

4. 4. In my work

number three from number two and three

I wrote a series of short pieces for Quatuor Bozzini for a 2019 workshop at the University of Southampton, each exploring a different comedic idea. In the workshop only *number three* was explored, which was useful because it is a meaningful study on comic roles in music.

The premise of the composition is that the string quartet play a simple piece of notated music while a stagehand role places various objects around the quartet. The objects include empty fizzy drinks cans, crisp tubes, tennis ball tubes (open with the tennis balls inside), a clothes rack, and a broken music stand. In the middle section or ‘knocking zone’ the players may knock over the objects. While the items are being placed, the quartet *musicians* are adopting the role of *total musician*, where they pay no attention to the person walking around the stage placing objects around them. There is already a character relationship here, with the *highbrow* string

quartet gradually becoming surrounded by domestic items placed around them by a non-musician bringing a downwards pull towards a *lowbrow* status.

The stagehand role is musical in a minimal way, where they are a *barely musical fool* as they only place objects in between ‘knocking zones’. The quartet are between roles, where they function as *total musicians* and *foolish musicians*. The following of scored instructions to knock over of domestic items is a *total musician* role. There are, however, some knowingly subversive knocks, where the players are deliberately playing with the timing and delivery of the knocks, seemingly depending on the item – this suggests that they are almost *total musicians*, and almost *foolish musicians*. Similarly, the engagement with the domestic items has a lowering impact on the quartet role. The stagehand role, on the other hand is an oblivious clown role, they have entered the wrong situation and are placing objects in a place where they do not belong. The role’s situation could also be considered as ‘object misuse’ as discussed in the section on *function puns* in chapter 2.

knocking zone 1
 - If an object is placed within reach of your hands or feet, you can push or kick it over at a time of your choosing.
 - Objects only need to be knocked gently, but the timing and speed of the knocking over is at your discretion.
 - You can knock over an object during a rest, or while your playing - you can even miss a note in order to knock something over.

knocking zone 1

The musical score is titled 'knocking zone 1'. It is written for a string quartet and a stagehand. The score is in 4/4 time, C major, with a tempo of quarter note = 50. It features four staves: Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello. The Violin I part starts at measure 6 with a pizzicato instruction and a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic. The Viola part has a mezzo-piano (mp) dynamic in measure 7. The other parts (Violin II, Viola, and Violoncello) have rests in measures 6 and 7.

Example 4.1 - Knocking zone 1 from *number three* for string quartet and stagehand.

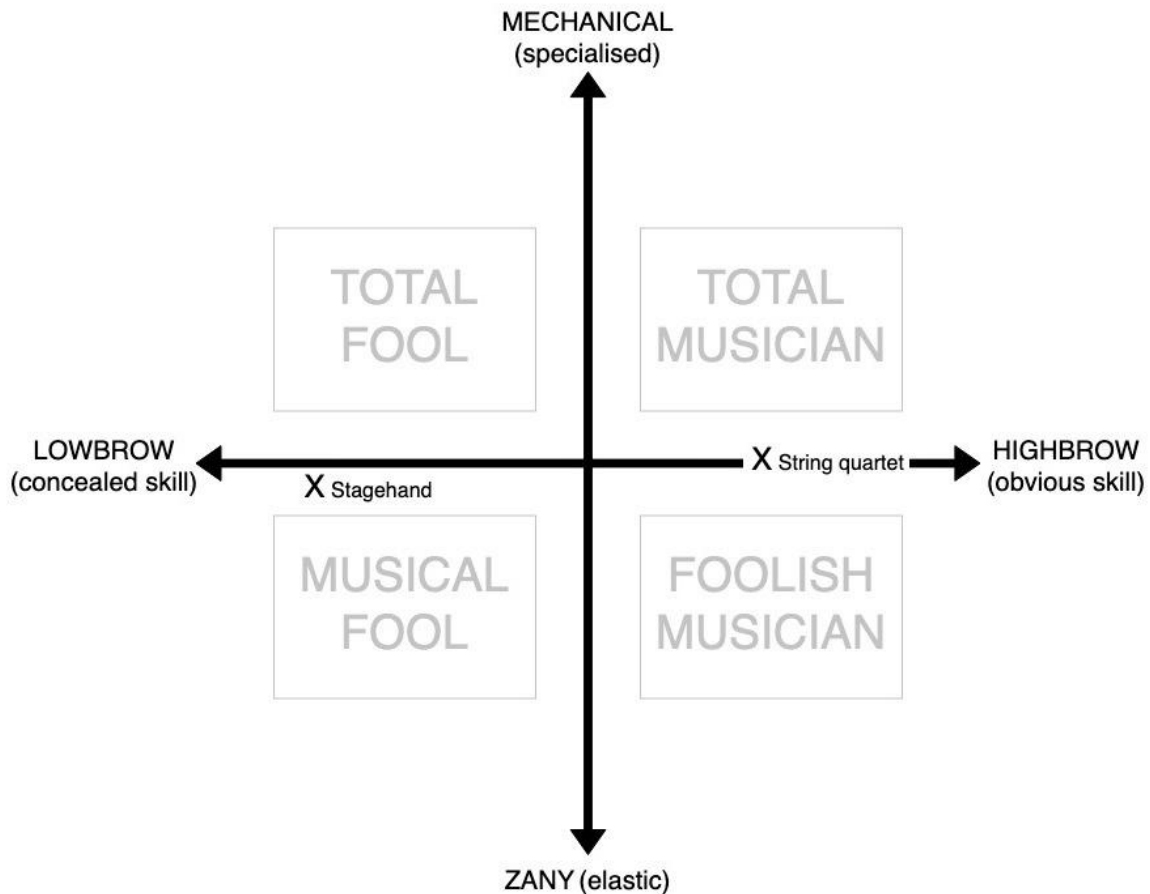


Figure 4.8 – The comic roles of *number three* from *number two and three*.

Jeremiah from Dead Cat Bounce

The premise of this scene is simple. Jeremiah stands on a plinth, singing a Baroque lament while two banker characters speak over it. The countertenor (Meili Li) is performing a *musician* role: singing the aria from start to finish, without any external interaction. They are in character, which means that there is a split between the character and the performer. The singer is a *total musician*, while the character is a *total fool* since the portrayed character does not know they are singing. Though the duality is *zany* in its simultaneity, the *total fool* character is unaware they are being portrayed by a singer and therefore it remains a mechanically singular role. The bankers are *total fools* in relation to one another as they speak over each other, and their texts are misaligned (this exchange could also be discussed as *exogenous interruptions* in the context of the comedic material of chapter 3). They also make no attempt to interact with the music and they continue after it stops. We can understand that the performers know when to enter the stage, but the characters do not. They do however come in at the right time, and thematically there is an alignment with the song Jeremiah is singing. The banker

characters are *total fools*, while the performers (Klara Kofen and Gary Zhexi Zhang) are *musical fools*.

The humour of this scene is complex and to explain it I reflect on a passage on double consciousness from Anca Parvulescu (2008). In a reflection on the writings of Ralph Ellison and Baudelaire, Parvulescu writes about the 'big fall' and the 'little fall'. The big, as Ralph Ellison describes Baudelaire's 'ancient fall', where "only the fallen laugh" (Parvulescu, 2008, p. 75).

The fall has two interrelated dimensions: a little, literal fall (the familiar example in theories of the comic: we laugh at the person falling in front of us on the sidewalk, slipping on a banana peel); and the big fall, the fall from paradise, the failure to amount to the requirements of the grand design. But any fall is also a fortunate fall, a fall into something. Ellison would say that he laughed and he trembled and therefore gained "a certain wisdom" (ibid. p. 75).

Laughter may be because of the cold reality of the bankers speaking with no regard for Jeremiah and no empathy for the burning city he weeps over (their *mechanical* rigidity). For the character, this is a genuine tragedy. The *dramatic irony* here is that Jeremiah cannot see what the audience sees, which is two people speaking over him singing. For Jeremiah, he is in front of the burning city. The *dramatic irony* of the *total fool* contributes to the borderline placement of this comedy – at once aggressive and playful.

Like the discussion of maddening humour (3.3), this is simultaneously funny and not funny. We know that this is not real, rendering it benign, while the violation of the lowering banal conversation over the *highbrow* Baroque aria is significant. The fact that we may be aware of people who trade in the wake of catastrophe is however a truth, so we also cannot feel truly detached from reality. This complexity is what I might refer to as *big fall humour*. The comedy is layered, and we do not know whether to laugh or show empathy – we may similarly marvel at the ignorance as a kind of virtuosity.

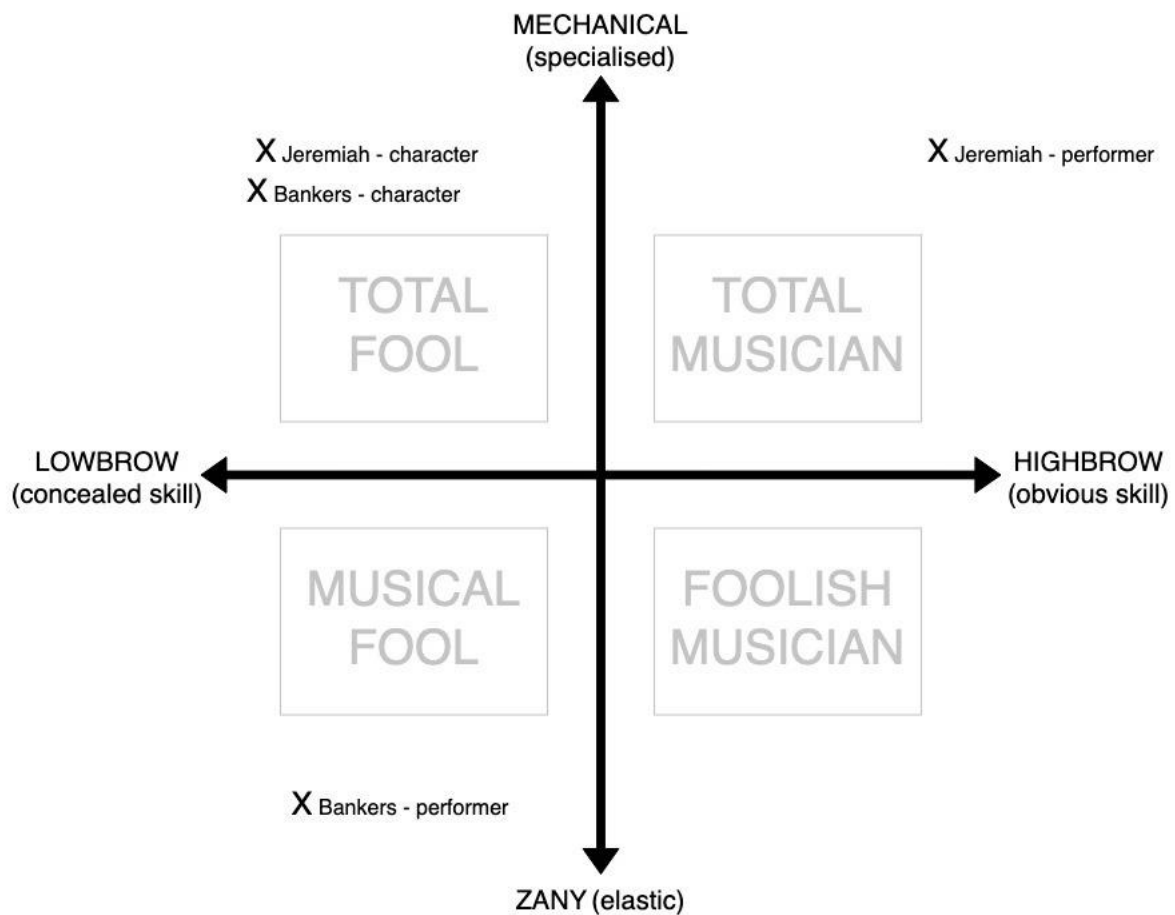


Figure 4.9 – The comic roles of the Jeremiah scene from *Dead Cat Bounce* plotted to represent the duality of characters and performer.

Human Scene from Syrup Tracing

The *Human Scene* from *Syrup Tracing* contains a general characteristic of clowny exaggeration in its performance. Everyday gestures, references, and speech comprises the musical material for this scene, but these objects are distorted to become stylised. The recognition of everyday objects was discussed in chapter 3 in terms of establishing expectation. In the context of the comedic material of *music specific comic roles*, the exaggeration of everyday objects is a result of clown training in the performance. Ellie Westbrook and I have received formal clown training as well as gaining experience through fringe comedy performance. The combination of our clown training and music training was fundamental in the devising of this scene. It is music-driven, yet it is a character-based scene that heavily incorporates comedic improvisation. Consequently, the *music specific comic roles* of performance are inherently *zany* and perhaps on the line between *musical fool* and *foolish musician*.

However, the characteristic of *mechanical* is used in a different way. Both characters perform material that has a *mechanical* quality throughout the scene, for example:

- They are in sync with very tight lighting and sound cues
- They perform *mechanical* gestures, which are performed in time with audio samples of machinery
- Their character profiles are specialised in their respective professions of taxidermy and dentistry
- There is an entire section of monosyllabic text delivered simultaneously and monotonously

The characters being portrayed are therefore *total fools*, as they are not *musicians*, and they have no awareness outside their characteristically *mechanical* existence.

4.5. Conclusion

The translation of the comedic material of comic roles offers means for understanding how different performers function in the performance of comic music. It is useful for my practice as a composer and hopefully for the practice of other composers aiding the understanding of how to balance roles in comic performance. The framework and diagram may also be useful for how the roles function and how to troubleshoot if a comic performance is ineffective.

The element of unintentional comedy is also relevant. In *Mencon*, the comedy was a byproduct of a performance intended to be 'weird' and exploratory. This differs from Schickele's rendition of Beethoven's 5th, which is composed as a comedic concert hall performance. A framework of comic roles is only of significance for intentional comedy or for an understanding of why it was in comedic in hindsight. This line of research can be developed further, but I have aimed to provide a useful starting point for theorising performance that is specific to comedy in music, whether intentional or a byproduct. Furthermore, the comedic material of clown training, *mechanical*, *zany*, and the lowering of *highbrow* can all be explored as musical material, as shown in the section on *the mechanical* in *Syrup Tracing*.

There are many performers and composers who could be discussed for their unique approach to comic performance. Notable omissions such as Kathryn Williams, who commissioned and

performed a series of one-breath flute solos; Andy Ingamells, who explores the use of everyday objects in *highbrow* performance contexts, leading the audience to question whether it is music or not; or Jennifer Walshe, whose high energy vocal performances, and ‘new discipline’ comprises a *zany* balancing of simultaneously obvious skill and comedic subversion in equal measure. I selected the two works of 4.3. for their alignment with the basic concept, which differentiate in intention and outcome.

It would have been possible to analyse examples from other chapters (chapter 2 and 3) through this lens of comedic material. The dynamic of performers during interruptions has implications on comic roles; similarly, the performer who is transplanted obliviously into the ‘wrong situation’ could be discussed in the context of *function puns*. This lens is a little less applicable to entirely scored works, though a composer may find it useful to consider the relationships of roles between the composer exploring comedy (*foolish musician*) who is heard but not seen, and the musicians performing (*total musicians*) who remain deadpan.

General conclusion

The main aim of this practice-based research project was *Translating Comedic Materials into Music*. I addressed this aim in the following ways:

- Outlining general principles of comedy extracted from studies of humour
- Reviewing existing studies of comedy in music to summarise useful terminology and identify gaps to be addressed by my own research
- The identification of new terminology and theoretical approaches from fields outside of music(ology)
- Using new terminology to translate, analyse, and practice approaches and techniques used in comedy for original composition of concert, and intermedial, music
- Reflecting on the effective application of the materials translated from comedy in my work and examples from other composers

In chapter 1, prominent theories of humour were summarised before outlining general consistent themes. I highlighted common themes such as *simultaneity*, which is equally central to David Huron's 'contrastive valence' of surprise and Caleb Warren and Peter McGraw's benign violation theory. Simultaneity, not only featured in the general framing of *subversion of expectation* from humour theory, but became a central thread throughout the original framework of this thesis. In chapter 2, Victor Raskin's theory requires simultaneously *compatible* meanings of two or more *scripts*, which I extend to the exploration of multiple meanings in music. By expanding on existing lines of enquiry from Clarence Barlow and Michael Baker's *tonal puns*, I studied examples of music, from different genres, that exemplified Raskin's theoretical criteria. The categories of *Barlow puns* and *tonal puns* work in different ways that are practical for traditional Western music composition and pop music alike. The third category of the *function pun* opens possibilities for intermedial practice of the *pun mechanism* in music through the principle of 'object misuse', akin to the deliberate misusing of a household object in clowning. Through the cross examination of Tim Vine and Sky Macklay, I presented the versatility and scope for *subversion of expectation* of this comedic material. As demonstrated in chapter 2, the *pun mechanism* adopts many manifestations in my own compositions in both score-based and intermedial ways.

In chapter 3, an everyday, identifiable object was foregrounded for its relationship to listener expectation and potential for *dynamic surprise*. I introduced *interruptions* as an impacting and relatable phenomena, unavoidable in the workplace, at home, and in political activism. Theory and terminology from Interruption Science provided parameters for the identification and means testing of the impact of *interruptions* in live performance. Alenka Zupančič's account of comic *continuity* and discontinuity proved an essential recurrent theme within the functionality of the interruption. *Continuity* was similarly identified by David Huron in chapter 1 and anecdotally on Helmut Lachenmann by Bill Dietz in chapter 3. In doing so, I could draw comparisons between the relevance of discontinuity in both comedy and music, where the simultaneity of intention of *continuity (origin task)* and impacting discontinuity (*interrupt task*) are present.

In *Interruption Duet #1*, I used the four factors of interruptions as variables for experimentation with the comedic material. While in *Dead Cat Bounce* and *Syrup Tracing*, I reflected on the integrated role of interruptions as material for intermedial composition. In doing so, I was able to frame *interruptions* in music as a comedic material for isolated study under controlled conditions, and dispersal within an expansive and collaborative practice where *interruptions* served a dramaturgical purpose.

The relationship between *highbrow* and *lowbrow* is relevant throughout this thesis, from the judgemental nature of superiority theory to the interjection of bagpipes in a classical concert hall. The duality of *highbrow* and *lowbrow* is outlined by David Huron as a general principle in Peter Schickele's comedic compositions. In chapter 4, I made central to my framework on *music specific comic roles* the simultaneous interplay of *highbrow* and *lowbrow*, assimilating *highbrow* with the obvious skill of trained music performance and *lowbrow* with the intervention of comedy within this context. The roles of *the fool* and *the musician* are discussed for *mechanical* traits they have in common; while the interdisciplinary notions of the *zany* focusses on the hybrid roles that stem beyond mere entertainment and even highlight the precarity and strain of gig economy workers. Once establishing the four-way diagram of roles, I analysed and plotted respective roles occurrent within comparative works by Neil Luck and Peter Schickele, where the balance of roles across the diagram was proportionate to the comedic subversion within each work. Finally, in reviewing the roles within *number three* and my intermedial

compositions, I demonstrate how these comedic materials are functional and relevant to my practical work even when unintentional.

The three comedic materials I translated are *the pun mechanism, interruptions, and comic archetypes*. The ways I translated each material was broadly the same but with some variation. Consistent was the awareness of the humorous or non-humorous effects of each material once translated to music. Rigour/virtuosity, level of violation, and surprise were emergent factors that contributed towards comic amusement. Discussions of characteristics and resemblance provided explanations for humour adjacent receptions or qualities of non-humorous translations. Instead of seeking solely to translate the humour, I aimed to outline a general set of lenses for the interpretation of comedy processes as music processes.

The impact of such interpretation and translation processes on my creative output has been significant. Through the intentional translation of puns and interruptions I have assembled an expansive toolkit of techniques for utilisation within concert and intermedial composition contexts. Dramaturgical applications have resulted just as fruitfully as conventionally scored processes. For example, in *Part A + B: Medieval Retro (for flute, knight, and objects)*, scored *Barlow puns* were abundant in the opening 'Dice World intro' section, which was followed by a series of audiovisual *function puns* working in multiple simultaneous ways.

The Covid-19 pandemic led to significant restrictions in practice-based research methods, which impacted some aspects of this project more than others. Audience reception studies were less dominant in my methodology than from the outset due to considerable restrictions on live performance events. This notably hindered exploration into the comic roles of chapter 4, which could have synergised my practical training with Giovanni Fusetti with my original categories through live performance experimentation.

In general, I believe that the research produced in this thesis can be cross-fertilised with my performance experience with Object Collection and as a clown. Though appearing in this thesis, such experiences are an intrinsic aspect of my practice as a composer and future articles threading together the adjacent disciplines may be the subject of future studies.

The future of the research

This thesis is the beginning of a continuing largescale research project. I would like to make the findings of this research available for composers, performers, and musicologists with an interest in translating comedic materials into music. Perhaps as an online platform which can be updated and even open to other contributors.

During the PhD, I considered a fourth 'lens', which is an understanding of performance context and comic spirit. By starting with the categories 'crypto comedy' and 'dysfunctional comedy' from performance artist Olav Westphalen (2016), new categories for 'high art' specific comedy that could be applicable to music could be identified. The basic premise of Westphalen's categories are: performances with all the hallmarks of comedy that are not funny (dysfunctional comedy), and comedy that "lays low" (crypto comedy). Ideas of meta-comedy and anti-comedy are already widespread in alternative comedy circuits and could be assessed alongside examples from music. Alenka Zupančič (2008) has written substantially about comic spirit which could be another starting point for this lens. I would like to explore the possibilities of this lens in the future.

Waste Paper Opera has a 2024 UK tour of *Dead Cat Bounce*, which is undergoing research & development before future performances. A new show commissioned by Lancaster University will come to fruition in 2024, in which we respond to the ecosystems of the Morecambe Bay area. Throughout 2023, Klara Kofen and I led Waste Paper Opera workshops at London Performance Studios and Goldsmiths University on our interdisciplinary practice. My research framework has been important to my role in this, in particular exploring interruptions as an open scored process.

I have already been hired as a comic timing in music consultant by Joz Norris for his show *Blink*, which was performed at EdFringe 2022 and received a run at the Soho Theatre.

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