

Alternative models of contemporary composition

My question is; if one starts by considering an ensemble as a collection of *performers* rather than a collection of *instruments*, and the performance area as an undiscovered space, what musical consequences follow? Or, more concretely, can alternative models for musical composition be sought in contemporary devised theatre, performance art and visual art?

'A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted'. (Oddey 1994:1) The conventional conception of the role of the composer is akin to that of the playwright in text-based theatre; a single individual who produces the score (text) which must then be faithfully interpreted by the musicians (actors) to reproduce the work of art.

A form of collaboratively devised music is to be found in the world of rock and pop; yet still one of the group is the 'songwriter'. Similarly, in devised theatre there will still often be a single writer or director who holds the overall vision for the piece. Even if we largely accept the score-based premiss of contemporary classical music, is there anything to be gained by thinking of the composer as a *facilitator* of musical activity rather than a dictator?

Devised theatre merges into performance art, installation, and other forms of contemporary visual art. A fundamental consideration for any such work is the space which the art is to inhabit; yet, aside from perhaps the acoustic, composers generally blind themselves to any such concerns. Would it not be interesting to make a music which started by considering *where* the players are? And then, if ways be found of freeing them from their music stands, could they perhaps move?

Other possibilities emerge. The performers are manipulating strange and wonderful objects for the sake of producing sound. What other silent or sounding objects might there be? What about video, or recorded sound? Can the players - gasp - speak?

Yet, the primary aim here is still to make music for performance by classically trained musicians in a concert context. The deepest question is whether the modes of thinking outlined above can produce successful and interesting work even when circumstances dictate that the surface of the work remains substantially conventional. I believe that they can.

References

Oddey, Alison *Devising Theatre* Routledge 1994