

***motion+form* – a reflection 20 years later**

If we were to imagine a life of a musical work represented as a graph, we would see a long little zigzag at the bottom of the graph to represent the creative process: months, or years of the composers' work on the score. Then, the long little zigzag continues: months, or years of the performing organisation's planning and preparing the work for performance. Suddenly, a tall spike appears: the performance! This is the point towards which all the effort has been directed, where the work finally comes to life. Of course, this is just one type of graph shape, typical for one specific kind of compositional practice, namely, fully notated exploratory (complex, avant-garde) composition. In the case of *motion+form*, a trio for percussion, harp, and double bass, the spike of the first performance has been followed by a few more such spikes, and at this point in time the graph has registered the greatest spike: the release of a filmed performance by ELISION, exactly 20 years after the work was written. Besides the

anniversary, it is a special occasion for two reasons:

- Professionally filmed videos are very rare on the new music scene. Recordings of live-streamed concerts are abundant on YouTube, with many of them also professionally filmed. However, this is different, as ELISION's videos are filmed at dedicated recording sessions and full production ahead of release.
- The musicians – Peter Neville (percussion), Marshall McGuire (harp), and Kathryn Schulmeister (double bass) – have performed the work a number of times over the years, and again, this is not a usual “life of a musical work”. This is important because the video brilliantly captures their absolute mastery over this challenging score, as they truly own every sound!



The filming session: Kathryn Schulmeister, Peter Naville, Marshall Mc Guire, and Agatha Yim of Polyphonic Pictures (photo: Dominik Karski)

20 years ago, I wrote *motion+form* in response to the first double-commission from ELISION (the other work was *open cluster M45*). At that time, I was reading James Gleick's *Chaos*, a popular science book on chaos theory, and I came across a sentence that I thought captured the essence of the complexity of chaos theory in a beautifully simple way: motion plus form equals flow. For example, a tree looks like a tree because it has a form of a tree, but no two trees are identical – the form is in motion. This idea has become very inspiring, and not just for

this piece. The work on the score progressed with this idea in mind and as a completely intuitive process of searching, which is my approach to this day. Upon finishing the work, I remember thinking “this is an important step”, and also “but what is this?”. When Chaya Czernowin heard the recording of the work's premiere in 2005, she said that this music was very specific. Recently, on the occasion of ELISION's performance and film recording, I have been asking myself: so, how exactly is this specific?

The image shows a handwritten musical score for three instruments: st. dr. (steel drum), h. (harp), and db. (double bass). The score is written on three staves. The top staff is for the steel drum, the middle for the harp, and the bottom for the double bass. The music is complex, featuring many slurs, dynamic markings (f, mf, ff), and performance instructions such as "jato' cal legno (III)", "wood on string", and "tremolo with mid. finger". There are also some mathematical-like notations like "EIV" and "EIV" with wavy lines above them. The score is marked with "51" at the top left.

Besides the uncommon combination of instruments, one answer I can think of is that the specificity lies in the connections that happen between the highly diverse instruments, and how these connections relate to the concept of forms in motion. For example, at the beginning, Peter bows a crotales while holding a brass mallet, so that it bounces as the crotales vibrates. The idea (or “form”) is that of metal on metal. Later, Marshall scrapes the metal-wound harp strings with a coin – again, metal on metal. The idea is in motion; it travels between the instruments. Another example: the opening sounds of the double bass include glissandi after pizzicato or left-hand finger tap; the pluck-and-gliss/tap-and-gliss sounds are answered by the hit-and-gliss

sounds of the timpano at the end. However, just before the end, the double bass wants to sound like the crotales: it climbs to its uppermost register to produce very high and distorted harmonics, which bring about the re-entry of the crotales. I do not recall consciously planning these connections, as my thinking during the process of writing was intuitive – not analytical – and directed at the physicality of producing sound, which in turn informed the pitch structures, rhythm, and other parameters. It is thanks to the recent conversations with the musicians at the rehearsals that these links became highlighted.

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the musicians – Peter, Marshall, Kathryn, and

also Joan Wright, the double bassist who premiered *motion+form* in 2005 – for being an inspiration and for all the hard work they have put into this piece. A huge THANK YOU goes

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also to Daryl Buckley, ELISION Artistic Director, who made it all possible. The *motion+form* life-graph continues to zigzag!