Songs, Scores and Prints

by Jasmine Lovell-Smith

Advisors: Paula Matthusen and Anthony Braxton

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What interests me is to find the degree of conditioning (of conception, of notation, of realization) which will balance the work between the points of control and non-control. There is no final solution to this paradox...which is why art is.

Earl Browne

The longer I go on, the more I detest the sort of intentional disorder whose aim is merely to deceive the ear. The same goes for bizarre, intriguing harmonies which are no more than parlor games...How much has first to be discovered, then suppressed, before one can reach the naked flesh of emotion...pure instinct ought to warn us, anyway, that textures and colors are no more than illusory disguises.

Claude Debussy, 1911

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1 Nyman, Michael. *Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond*, p. 56
2 Nichols, Roger. *The Life of Debussy*, p.139
Introduction

The following thesis outlines my musical and artistic interests and concerns during my time in residence at Wesleyan University between 2012 and 2014. The music presented here reflects the development of my pre-existing compositional style, and the influence of my experiences at Wesleyan with improvisation, conduction, and 20th century Experimental Music. The title of the thesis, *Songs, Scores and Prints*, represents a new stage in the integration of my various creative interests; describing not only my compositions, but also my love of literature and visual art, and the way in which those other art forms inspire my work.

I arrived at Wesleyan as a jazz-educated saxophonist and composer, with the primary goal of finding here the time, space and stimulation to develop my work in two different directions. First, towards new ways of incorporating improvisation into my music, and second, towards writing fully scored orchestral and chamber works. I had the opportunity to work with Anthony Braxton and a variety of other improvisers in the Wesleyan Community, exploring different compositional constructs for improvisers, conduction systems, and graphic scores. Concurrently, I was working on developing my skills in writing fully notated, through-composed music. My final thesis concert included pieces from both of these streams of my work, as well as pieces that lie somewhere in the middle. Through the course of this thesis, I hope to illustrate the ways in which I have explored these territories through recent works, which both reveal and expand upon my previous musical education.
The poet and essayist Jane Hirshfield has described two different aspects to the concept of originality: the first being “…the aspect of novelty or innovation, that which hasn’t been seen before,” and the second, “the aspect of what can be called authenticity or genuineness, that which is unique not because it is necessarily different in topic or technique, but because it embodies one person’s experience with a deep particularity.”

Though the question of authenticity is one that is argued, I find the second aspect of originality to be one that resonates with me strongly. I have no particular interest in pushing conceptual boundaries with my work for the sake of imagined progress, as I feel able to express myself in an original way within the realm of possibility of what has been done before. For me, music is both a sensory experience that stimulates emotion and sensory pleasure, and a means of subtle (not literal) communication. I hope to write music that is both personal and personable. Though I find systems for composing music intriguing, I primarily relate to the pleasurable or emotive experience of listening. If the sensory result is not compelling, the theory or concept behind it is often not enough to keep me interested.

As a composer, melody has always been one of my highest priorities. The music that moves me most strongly tends to be melodically driven and singable – the kind of music that creeps into your head while you are walking to school, or washing the dishes. I enjoy the random aspect of creativity that defies analysis or explanation. Tapping into intuition is an important part of my creative process,

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3 Hirshfield, Jane. ‘The Question of Originality’ p.7
and learning to listen to my inner voice and trust my instincts without criticism has been crucial to my personal development as a composer.

I came to graduate school in order to explore a variety of models and strategies for composing, and to receive external input and new ideas about how to grow and develop my music. This proved challenging at times, as I was exposed to musical values systems that seemed opposed to my own and led me to question the validity of what I was doing. In other ways, it was hugely eye opening and enriching. I still feel that my aesthetic values are in transition and will likely be so for much of my musical career – however, part of what I have learned has been to trust in the validity of my own existing compositional strategies.

I was once in a workshop on free improvisation given by J. Granelli, where he posed the question “why, when we sit down to play free music, does no one ever play Louie Louie?” If all choices are equally valid, then why not do something that has been done before? The world of 20th century composition has often seemed concerned with the idea of progress, and what is new. In his famously controversial 1958 essay ‘Who Cares if You Listen?,’ Milton Babbitt compared contemporary composition with advanced research in scientific disciplines, leading to a situation in which this music becomes isolated from the general public.

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4 Babbitt’s original title for the article was ‘The Composer as Specialist’ – the title was changed by an editor
Deviation from this tradition is bound to dismiss the contemporary music of which I have been talking into “isolation.” Nor do I see how or why the situation should be otherwise. Why should the layman be other than bored and puzzled by that which he is unable to understand, music or anything else? ....After all, the public does have its own music, its ubiquitous music: music to eat by, to read by, to dance by, and to be impressed by.\(^5\)

Though it is certainly possible to take a scientific, research driven approach to composition, music and the arts in general have long served to satisfy human needs that sciences cannot. Arts and music in particular are excellent forums for asking questions, expressing a wide range of emotions, and communicating things that cannot be easily expressed in other ways. The power of metaphor, of subtle and non-specific communication and evocation, has long been a primary source of music’s power and affect. This 1906 quote about Debussy by Louis Laloy, a music critic and friend of the composer, describes Debussy operating from a realm that is intuitive rather than scientific.

\textit{What will be needed here is something other than science, and more than taste; an instinct so delicate, an intuition so certain and deep, that we can fearlessly speak of genius. Its author draws directly on nature; no rule guarantees him the unity of the effectiveness of his composition, but a diving power reveals to him at every moment the secret affinity which links}

note to note, chord to chord, melody to melody. Thus understood, music is the art of mysterious relations and unexplained correspondences…

It is something akin to these “mysterious relations and unexplained correspondences” that I find so compelling in Debussy’s music, and which I feel is not adequately accounted for in Babbitt’s description of composition.

Moving on to the distinction Babbitt draws between serious art music, and the public’s “own” music, it is thankfully true that the current climate of contemporary composition involves more fluidity than the situation he describes. Composers such as John Zorn or John Williams include elements of popular and serious music in their works, and are able to move between the concert hall and different types of performance environments. I’m seeking a similar type of flexibility. Babbitt describes a situation in which serious music is diametrically opposed to, and thus isolated from, anything the ‘layman’ might listen to for pleasure. Though I believe attempting to work across and between distinctions of genre and musical scenes is not without its challenges, I want my music to function both as art, and as a part of everyday life. Though I do aspire to write music that can be at home in a serious concert hall environment, I would also like my music to be at home in a jazz club, as part of a film soundtrack, or playing as a recorded accompaniment to a group of small children playing in a garden.

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6 Priest, Deborah. *Louis Laloy (1874-1944) on Debussy, Ravel and Stravinsky* p.77
So, returning to the original question, why not play *Louie Louie*? Or rather, when so many things have been done, why not draw from a wide range of sources, using whichever materials feel most applicable to that which you would like to create or express? When I sit down to write a piece of music, I feel free to use whatever materials I have on hand in the creative reservoir of my brain. This can mean combining known elements in a way that, while unique to me, also feels intuitively correct, familiar and relatable; or being open to the moment of surprise when things combine in a way that I had not foreseen. I want to create work that can speak to people and that has nothing to prove. It has been my experience that when my work is most true to my own intuitive and musical instincts, people hear that quality and respond positively to it.

It is for this reason that “the naked flesh of emotion” which Debussy speaks of is a concept that resonates with me so strongly. It is interesting to hear Debussy espousing this doctrine, which seemingly elevates restraint, since his music certainly does contain decorative flourishes and “intriguing harmonies.” Yet, I believe his purpose in saying this is not to forbid the use of color or texture or “intriguing harmonies,” but rather, to encourage their use when in the service of achieving the intended emotional affect. A letter written by Debussy to a fellow composer in 1893 seems to back up this interpretation, as Debussy advises his friend to “find the perfect expression for an idea and add only as much decoration as is absolutely necessary.” I appreciate this reminder of the importance, when composing, of keeping an editing eye on elements that may work well or seem

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impressive in isolation, ensuring that they are serving the overall intent of the work.

Still, even when every attempt is made to prioritize the emotional content of a piece, the emotional responses of the audience are of course not guaranteed. As Anthony Braxton has said:

> I’ve always wanted my music to communicate: it was a question of priorities. The most important thing to me was my music: if it could communicate, great; if it couldn’t, OK I accept the verdict, but I’m not changing my music in order to communicate. Because what would I be communicating? I mean, if you have to become somebody else to communicate, what is that?”

For this reason, honesty and honouring one’s own vision as a composer are extremely valuable tools for conferring the identity of the work.

I believe that my intuitive sense for the elements of music I’m interested in composing and exploring is related directly to my musical upbringing, and exposure to a wide range of genres. For this reason I will briefly discuss my musical background, from childhood up until the present day. Following this, I will enter into a more specific discussion of works by Anthony Braxton and

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8 Lock, Graham. *Forces in Motion: The Music and Thoughts of Anthony Braxton*, pp. 88-89
Claude Debussy, the works of whom have served as inspiration for focusing my creative attention during my time at Wesleyan.

My first musical experiences were with singing. The soundtrack of my childhood consisted of Methodist Hymns, Beatles songs, Italian arias, folk music, Carly Simon, barbershop quartets, the pianola, and listening to my mom teach singing lessons (lots of Gershwin and other Broadway composers). This upbringing left me with a strong immersion in functional harmony, intuitive command of standard forms, a feeling for counterpoint, and an internalization of melodic structures.

I continued to sing as I picked up a succession of instruments, eventually settling on the saxophone in high school. Part of the reason I feel such an affinity with the instrument is due to its similarity to the human voice, connection to breath, and its expressive, personal vocal quality. My first compositions were songs, and when I began to write instrumental music later, I often did so by singing as I played the piano, creating intrinsically lyrical melodies.

I became interested in jazz in high school, attracted to it in part by a desire to understand the mysterious, wordless communication that occurs between jazz musicians. I went on to complete my undergraduate degree in jazz saxophone performance and composition. As I became increasingly interested in jazz and composition, it was natural for me to explore the more experimental aspects of jazz - that of ‘free jazz’ or improvised music.
I continued to explore composing and performing my own music in one way or another from the time I graduated from my undergraduate degree, until I relocated to New York City in my mid-20s. At this time, I found a group of musicians with kindred aesthetics to play with, and began to pursue my career as a bandleader, performer and composer more seriously. I released my debut album, *Fortune Songs*, with this ensemble (which I named *Towering Poppies*) in 2012.

It was during my time in New York City that I started to learn more about musicians who had emerged out of the Association for the Advancement for Creative Musicians (AACM), including the work of multi-instrumentalist/composer Anthony Braxton. This sector of American music history, largely unknown to me at the time, provided a missing link between my combined interests in composition, jazz, free improvisation, and the concept of being a composer/performer while making music as part of a community.

I feel some reservations about using the term “jazz” to describe my work, as I think musical genre descriptions are frequently limiting. In my experience, they often serve as a way for people to disregard large sectors of music based on arbitrary criteria such as timbre, instrumentation, or external cultural artefacts surrounding the music. Despite the existence of “jazz” as a genre, there is a long tradition of musicians from this lineage who have thought similarly about the term. Many people nowadays who come from a similar jazz-based lineage but prioritize the performance of original, non genre-restrictive music use the term “Creative Music,” which I believe was popularized by the membership of the
AACM.⁹ This strikes me as a helpful way for these musicians to self identify, and, though it is perhaps not particularly descriptive as far as an uninitiated audience is concerned, the term can certainly serve to avoid any unwanted associations that come with the label “jazz.”

Within the realm of jazz and improvised or “creative” music, musicians often have a wide skill set that includes reading notated material, outlining chord changes, playing by ear, playing free (improvising without harmonic, rhythmic or formal guidelines), accompanying soloists and soloing themselves. With these skills, diverse outcomes are certainly possible – yet, somehow, when most people hear music performed by an acoustic bass, drum kit and saxophone player, they call it “jazz,” whether the material being performed is a 12 tone contemporary composition, a cover of a folk song, or a bebop tune.

Genre descriptions have been inadequate or downright unhelpful for many of the musicians whose work I most admire. Anthony Braxton, for example, has constantly had to contend with being criticized because his music “doesn’t swing,”¹⁰ yet has not always been embraced by the contemporary composition scene.¹¹ Joni Mitchell, a songwriter and composer whose ambitious projects have included collaborations with numerous jazz musicians including Charles Mingus & Jaco Pastorius, is still pigeonholed as a folk musician, though her use of

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⁹ The term “creative music” appears frequently in George Lewis’ history of the AACM, A Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and Experimental Music
harmony has never been typical of folk, and since the mid 1970s her releases have traversed wide ranging musical territory, from pop to jazz to more experimental work. Genre descriptors are reductionist, allowing people to tune out without paying attention to what materials a piece of music is made of, what it is about and how it is working.

As a composer, rather than thinking in terms of genre I prefer to think of the specific skill sets of the musicians performing my music, and to write with that in mind. A large part of my interest in writing fully notated music stems from a desire to be able to write for a variety of ensembles and contexts. If all my music consists of lead sheets to be interpreted by improvisers, clearly I cannot put it in front of a string quartet and expect them to interpret it in a similar fashion, unless I know that string quartet has the training to interpret jazz chord symbols. As I would like to write string quartets and orchestral pieces, it makes sense for me to write fully scored music – yet, this in no way lessens my interest in working with improvisers. I simply wish to have more options and contexts in which to present my music.
Considering degrees of control, and the evocation of emotion in the works of Anthony Braxton and Claude Debussy

Though a discussion of all of the composers who have influenced me is beyond the scope of this thesis, the following section of the thesis will be devoted to a discussion of two composers who have been influential for me over the past two years, and who exemplify, albeit differently, some of the issues I have been thinking about while composing the music that appears in this thesis.

The first is multi-instrumentalist/composer Anthony Braxton (who I’ve had the good fortune to study with during my time at Wesleyan). One of the most unique and interesting aspects of Braxton’s work is the sheer quantity of approaches to music making that he has explored, catalogued, defined and systematised over his extensive career. Coming, as he does, from a composer/performer tradition, much of his work involves improvisation, and he utilizes many different strategies for defining the amount and type of control the composer will (or will not) exert over the performers at any given time. In his words:

...there’s no one piece that characterizes how I use integration; each has it’s own laws...I try to, in the various processes, create musics that give more control or less control to the performer – again it depends on the composition. Remember, the people who influenced me most were restructuralists and what I learned from them was not to write the same
Learning about a variety of strategies for composition and improvisation that Braxton has explored has been inspirational for me, providing me with many new ideas about how music can be structured, and different ways in which musicians can be prompted to interact.

The music of Claude Debussy is not something I was introduced to at Wesleyan, but I have nevertheless spent a lot of time thinking about it during my time here. I feel a strong sense of aesthetic kinship with Debussy’s music, both because of his use of melody, and his painterly approach to harmony, which often feels dreamlike and intuitive. On learning more about Debussy’s life and work, I find that many of his quotes and aesthetic positions also ring true for me.

Perhaps the music of Claude Debussy and that of Anthony Braxton seems like an unlikely juxtaposition, but both composers have captured my imagination with their creative projects and the scope of their ambition. Both composers have produced large-scale interdisciplinary projects, such as Debussy’s opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* and his ballet *Jeux*, and Braxton’s *Trillium* Series of operas. Both have been inspired by the work of artists in other media (Braxton dedicated his

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Composition No. 10 to the abstract expressionist painter Kandinsky, and Debussy had a strong association with the French symbolist poem Stéphane Mallarmé).

For many years, Debussy’s music has frustrated the attempts of musicologists to analyse it, and his works vary dramatically one from another. Still, if I am to generalize, I would characterize Debussy’s output as music that sounds fluid and expressive, in the service of the emotional and sensual aspects. This is supported by this passage from a letter he wrote early in his career:

*I don’t think I shall ever be able to cast my music in a rigid mold...I would always rather deal with something where the passage of events is to some extent subordinated to a thorough and extended portrayal of human feelings.*

Both Debussy’s emphasis on the “portrayal of human feelings,” and Braxton’s search for new modes of expression, have been relevant for me in this recent period of my work. In order to demonstrate my interaction with these two systems of musical thought, I am going to talk about Anthony Braxton’s work and my experiences playing some of his compositions. I will then discuss these experiences in relation to my visceral response to and subsequent investigation of Debussy’s String Quartet in G Minor, a piece I’ve been fascinated with because of its idiosyncratic harmony and fluidity of arrangement.

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*13 Nichols, Roger. *Ibid. *p.30*
When considering the question of balancing control and non-control as a composer, I’ve had the profound good fortune to work with Anthony Braxton and engage with a number of scenarios he has created that enact this balance. I’ve been fortunate to participate in his student ensemble (playing his compositions exclusively) for two semesters while at Wesleyan, to spend one of those semesters as his Teaching Assistant, and also recently to have an opportunity to perform with Braxton’s *Falling River Nonet* as part of the 2014 Tri-Centric Music Festival at Roulette in Brooklyn, New York. I will speak here based on those experiences.

The variety of strategies employed by Anthony Braxton for balancing control and non-control in his ensembles is very broad (and would take multiple theses to discuss). Some of the strategies I’ve experienced and found to be of particular interest include Braxton’s classification of language music types, his graphically notated *Falling River Musics*, and his methods for combining indeterminate and traditionally notated material in compositions such as No. 100 and No. 91. – among these, the use of the diamond clef and tracing logics. I’m also attracted to his openness to reinterpreting his compositions with different instrumentations and transpositions than those originally specified. Speaking more generally, I find it refreshing that Braxton’s worldview and musical systems allow room for the input of intuition and the unknown.

In an interview with Graham Lock, Braxton describes how he arrived as his system of language music classification through ‘conceptual grafting’: 17
I would tape my concerts, go home and dissect the music, find out what fascinated me about a particular area; what did I call good, what bad; what sustained my interest, what didn’t. Conceptual grafting was the process of dissecting sound by which I would build up my language music, cataloguing over 100 different types of sound relationships…. I began to separate sound elements so that I could find my own vocabulary.\textsuperscript{14}

In the contexts in which I have worked with Braxton, he has used a subset of 12 language music types as a basis for conducted improvisation (each language type has a number and descriptive title, as well as an accompanying diagram. For example: “#1: long sound,” “#3: trills,” “#4: staccato line formings”). This concept was influential for me when developing visual material for my \textit{Intaglio Scores}, discussed later in the thesis.

As well as taking inspiration from Braxton’s sound classification concepts, the example of his \textit{Falling River Musics} was influential for me when working on my \textit{Intaglio Scores}. The \textit{Falling River Musics} are graphically notated compositions, using color, expressionistic gesture and various symbols as prompts for musical exploration. This categorization of Braxton’s music is notable in that as far as I am aware, Braxton has not explicitly explained the meaning of these scores, at least in a public forum, or provided a systematic method for interpreting them. This is affirmed by this excerpt from the liner notes of the 2005 recording \textit{2+2 Compositions}, by Anthony Braxton and Matt Bauder:

\textsuperscript{14} Lock, Graham. \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.167
Braxton writes, “Falling River Musics is the name of a new structural prototype class of compositions in my music system that will seek to explore image logic construct ‘paintings’ as the score’s extract music notation.” Falling River scores consist of large, colorful drawings (reminiscent of the titles of Braxton’s earlier compositions) alongside much smaller writings.

These smaller writings are accompanied by an intentionally vague legend that begins near the top of the page with a quarter note. Subsequent drawings in the legend look less and less like musical notation, and they quickly become unrecognizable as such. Braxton refuses to assign any specific meanings to the notations of his Falling River scores, since part of their purpose is to allow each performer to find her own way through them. He explains, “I am particularly interested in this direction as a means to balance the demands of traditional notation interpretation and esoteric inter-targeting.”¹⁵

Further discussion of how my Intaglio Scores relate to Braxton’s Falling River Musics will occur later in the thesis.

When playing in Braxton’s Wesleyan ensemble, I was particularly intrigued by the way in which Braxton combined indeterminate and traditionally notated material in two of the compositions that we performed, No. 100 and No. 91. Composition No. 100 made use of the diamond clef, and both compositions used

¹⁵ Wilmoth, Charlie. Accessed from the Tri-Centric Foundation website, on April 28, 2014
tracing logics. The diamond clef can be read as any clef the performer desires (treble, alto, bass, etc), in any transposition (B flat, concert pitch, E flat, etcetera). The ensemble texture that results from the use of the diamond clef will be predetermined in terms of the contour of the melodic line (which is notated in standard western notation), but the resulting harmony will be variable, dependant on the ensemble membership.

![Figure 1 The diamond clef, as it appears in part No. 15 of Braxton’s Composition 100](image)

Braxton also writes music that uses traditional treble and bass clefs, but, when we performed this music in his Wesleyan ensemble class, usually seemed happy for the performers to read the parts as though they were in the diamond clef (which made it much easier for a guitarist to interpret a trombone part, for example). I am intrigued by the flexibility of this approach, and the way it results in a very organized sound, yet one that is unique to the moment – a sound that can be entirely harmonically altered by the addition or subtraction of any instrument.

Another of Braxton’s tools for communicating musical gesture is the use of tracing logics. Tracing logics are shapes or contours drawn on the musical staff. The musicians are expected to improvise a phrase with a similar contour or shape
to that which is traced on their part. As well as specifying shape or gesture, the notation allocates it a duration and placement in time, through the use of a line extending out on the right side of the shape (if, as in compositions No. 91 No. 100, it is used within an otherwise metric and traditionally notated composition). In this case, duration and contour or shape (sometimes some pitches as well) are notated, but harmony and rhythm remain relatively unspecified. In compositions No. 91 and No. 100, tracing logics are used as contrast and counterpoint to traditional notation, creating a complex, blended texture.

Through use of both the diamond clef and tracing logics, pitch and harmony are flexible, while rhythms or durations are more directly specified. Again, the result is a sound that is in some respects tightly organized, and in others, unpredictable.
sounding. With the use of tracing logics, rhythms may also become indeterminate. Yet, because of the anchoring in metric time, members of the ensemble can move seamlessly between the freely improvised space and the metrically specific space (this requires improvisers to count and follow a conductor while improvising freely, which is quite a specialized skill).

Braxton’s strategies for combining indeterminate and traditionally notated material were influential for me when writing my composition *While Waiting In Winter With Trees*. I tried to achieve a similar blend of specificity and non-specificity, but pertaining to different musical aspects. I chose to work with rhythmic flexibility and open time durations, while harmony remained specific.

Braxton’s willingness to reinterpret his compositions with different instrumentations than those originally specified is an extremely pragmatic strategy, and seems related to his roots in the jazz performer/composer tradition, in which composers often need to create their own ensembles and contexts for performance. This differs drastically from the ‘classical’ model, whereby the instrumentation of every piece is an integral part of the performance due to the concerns of orchestration, timbre, balance, and honoring the original intent of the composer.

I like this quality of Braxton’s work because I feel similarly open to rearrangements or reinterpretations of my own music (though Braxton carries this concept further than I have so far done, with his flexibility relating to
transposition and clefs). I think there should be something essential in any piece that stays the same regardless of the instrumentation, which is part of the reason I find the lead-sheet format so effective as a means of communicating a composition. Further on in the thesis I discuss my piece *i carry your heart with me*, which has been realized by both a trio and a large ensemble, and two compositions with intrinsically flexible notation (*Sketches* and *Song for May*).

When considering the aspects of music that Braxton’s systems involve, the music that I have encountered tends to be the most open in the realm of harmony. Harmony is one of the areas of music that I have felt most attached to retaining control over. However, during my time at Wesleyan, I’ve looked at different strategies for inviting change and flexibility within specific harmonic boundaries.

While I find Braxton’s systems completely fascinating, I have not directly adopted or imitated them in my own writing. For me, influence does not usually translate into direct imitation, but occurs metaphorically as in osmosis, with small concepts or aspects of other’s work creeping into my own work, rather that acting as large-scale direct models for my compositions. In the work that follows, I see more of Braxton’s influence in the music of mine which give the performers more agency, such as the *Intaglio Scores*, *While Waiting In Winter With Trees*, and *Sketches*. Yet, even when the influence is not immediately apparent, that doesn’t mean it is not there. Throughout the last two years, conversations I’ve had with Braxton and lessons I’ve learned from his music have been regularly on my mind.
Lying elsewhere of the spectrum of specificity, we can find the work of Claude Debussy, whose harmonic palette has been one of things that has attracted me to his work. This discussion will be focused around Debussy’s String Quartet in G Minor, my favourite of his pieces, and the one that inspired me to write String Quartet #1 (discussed later in this thesis).

He was of the opinion that one should create slowly and with minute care the special atmosphere in which a work has to evolve; one should not rush to write things down, so as to allow complete freedom to those mysterious, inner workings of the mind which are too often stifled by impatience.

Raoul Bardac on Debussy.\textsuperscript{16}

When Debussy refers to the “naked flesh of emotion” (see page 1) as well as to “the mysterious inner workings of the mind,” these concepts seem highly relatable to his String Quartet in G Minor, completed in 1893. Upon its premiere by the Ysaya quartet, the work was largely met with a “cautious silence”\textsuperscript{17} from critics, though one listener described it as “baffling,” yet “full of originality and charm.”\textsuperscript{18}

Upon first listening to this piece, I was immediately enamored with the harmony, a complex mix of the traditionally tonal, modal and non-tonal, and also the forms used, which were clearly not completely regular.

\textsuperscript{16} Nichols, Roger. \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.32

\textsuperscript{17} Nichols, Roger. \textit{Op. Cit.}, p.75

\textsuperscript{18} Nichols, Roger. \textit{Op. Cit.}, p. 75. The quote is from “Willy – Collette’s husband & chronicler of the Paris Music scene”
Structurally, the form was enigmatic to me. The piece is in four movements, and on first listening I could hear very little relationship or connection between them. There was something intuitively attractive about it that just “worked,” but nothing about the form felt intrusive or obvious in any way. I couldn’t hear the rules, the guidelines, the effort, it all just flowed beautifully and effortlessly. I was sure there must be some structuring elements at work, and began to analyze the piece.

The *String Quartet in G Minor* utilizes a mixture of functional and non-functional harmony, with a large amount of harmonic movement by tritone or minor third intervals. Phrase lengths are often unequally divided. A variety of modes and scales are used, including phrygian, whole-tone, double harmonic major, and the 5th mode of the melodic minor. Melodic motives do recur frequently throughout the piece and are extensively developed and combined in interesting ways.

Formally this piece seems to exist in dialog with conventions for string quartet writing – utilizing some conventions and forsaking others. For example, the first movement of the piece is in sonata form, as was traditional for String Quartets. However, the second movement has an unconventional theme and variations structure, and conventional modulation patterns within the sonata form and overall throughout the piece are not observed. I was fascinated when examining the harmony to see how similar it was to jazz harmony due to the presence of 7th and 9th chords, tritone and minor third chord substitutions, and quartal and chromatic harmonic movement.
I was struck by the mysterious, intuitive architecture of the work. As described by Pierre Boulez:

"Varese and Webern were the first to learn the lesson of Debussy's last works and to 'think forms,' not – in Debussy's words – as 'sonata boxes' but as arising from a process that is primarily spatial and rhythmic, linking 'a succession of alternative, contrasting or correlated states' – that is to say, intrinsic to its object but at the same time in complete control of it." \(^{19}\)

There is something in this integrated balance of structure and intuition in Debussy’s music that I find immensely attractive. While highly specific and fully notated, his choices cannot all be explained according to some standard, pre-

\(^{19}\) Nichols, Roger. *Op. Cit.*, p.166
existing form. The structures he uses also have implications for his use of harmony, which is also often difficult to categorize. In Debussy’s own words: “You must drown the sense of key….There is no theory. You have merely to listen…pleasure is the law.”

I do not see the approaches of Braxton and Debussy as opposed, but rather as representing different musical aspects that I have been considering while working on developing my own music. Both composers wrote (or write) highly imaginative works, often relating their creations to sensory and visual experiences. Much of Braxton’s music has flexibility and change built into it; Debussy’s music is less flexible in a literal sense, but has an organic, illogical fluidity embedded in its very structures. It is also evident that both composers prioritize the importance of intuition in their work: it seems to be a process of intuition which Debussy is invoking in the preceding quote, and Braxton holds this quality dear as well:

"It’s so important for American creativity to be unleashed. It’s important to teach our kids that there is something called creativity, something that calls for knowingness on one level, unknowingness on another level, and intuition on another level. It cannot be canned and one-size-fits-all; you

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21 Debussy lived from 1862-1918, Braxton is still very much alive and actively composing!
I find myself with an interest in all of these states that Braxton invokes: knowingness, unknowingness and intuition. I am drawn both to flexible models for composition, which involve improvisation or some element of indeterminacy, and to very specific, fully notated methods, which nevertheless have room for the unknown and potentially illogical embedded in their very structures. And I am drawn to finding new combinations and a middle way between these two approaches as well. I think all of these approaches can serve to reach the “naked flesh of emotion” that I am so interested in. In some cases, reaching this state involves inviting an element of unpredictability, flexibility, or collaboration; and in others, carefully notating and rehearsing a faithful rendering are the best way to achieve that aim.
**Works**

The following section contains descriptive essays about the thought process behind ten compositions I created during my time at Wesleyan, relating them back to the issues of balancing control and non-control and the evocation of emotion. I will discuss both works that I presented in my thesis concert, and some compositions that were performed in other contexts. These other works were *Sketches*, for improvising ensemble (the instrumentation is flexible); *The Bells*, for carillon and participatory singing; and *Love, Love, Love, Lo-o-ove*, written for *Loadbang* ensemble (baritone voice, trumpet, trombone and bass clarinet).

For my thesis concert, presented on Sunday April 13th in Wesleyan’s World Music Hall, my program was entitled *New Music for Large and Small Ensembles*. I presented seven works that had been composed during my time at Wesleyan University. They ranged in scale from a trio to an 11-piece mixed ensemble with vocalist, and in approach from fully notated, through composed, structured pieces; to more stream-of-consciousness, contemporary notation; to graphic scores created through intaglio printmaking. It was important to me that I show the range of my composing at Wesleyan and the different approaches I had been experimenting with, as well as creating something that felt truly representative of my aesthetic. I have grouped my compositions in order from the least to the most specific. I will begin first with a discussion of my *Intaglio Scores*.
Intaglio Scores

When I discovered it was a requirement at Wesleyan to take a course outside of the music department, I immediately knew I wanted to take a Printmaking class. I had a wonderful experience in the class, discovering an entirely different and refreshing type of creative engagement through a medium in which I could work independently yet in community with other people. I was fortunate to work with Kate Ten Eyck, a wonderful teacher who shared my interest in interdisciplinary collaboration between visual art and music, and who was very supportive of my interest in combining music and printmaking. As far back as 2010, I had an idea that I would love to create scores that could exist as works of visual art in their own right, and would be as at home hanging on someone’s wall as sitting on a music stand. I had many ideas of the forms these works could take, from a traditional, old-fashioned illustrated sheet music format through to a fully graphic score. The latter route is the one I ended up choosing to explore.

When considering how to create my own graphic notation system, I was initially rather overwhelmed, having never attempted anything of the kind before. While unsure of the specific details of how my notation system should operate, I felt strongly that the musical effect created by the notation should be something quite different than that achieved by traditional Western notation, in order to justify the use of a different system. I also felt strongly that whatever system I devised should highlight the advantages of the printmaking medium, and thus I knew I
wanted to use color, texture and various qualities of line as parameters in my notation system.

Figure 4 Anthony Braxton’s Composition No. 364a (one of his Falling River scores)

I encountered a variety of graphic scores in my time at Wesleyan, including those by Earl Browne, Cornelius Cardew, John Cage, and the *Falling River Musics* of Anthony Braxton. I had the opportunity to do some playing from Braxton’s *Falling River* scores while participating in his ensemble class. This experience informed my ideas about what graphic notation can and should be, as did my discussions with Braxton about my process of developing the work at an early stage. I showed him some sketches when I was first formulating my ideas, and he encouraged me to think about my notation in relation to his concepts of language music. This suggestion to envisage the different types of sound, or “sonic
geometrics,” that I wanted to be represented in my system was a useful jumping off-point as I began to generate my imagery.

As well as taking inspiration from Braxton’s sound classification concepts, the example of the *Falling River Musics* was influential for me in its opacity. As far as I am aware, Braxton has not explicitly explained the meaning of these scores, or provided a system for interpreting them. This is affirmed by this excerpt from the liner notes of the 2005 recording *2+2 Compositions*, by Anthony Braxton and Matt Bauder:

"Braxton refuses to assign any specific meanings to the notations of his *Falling River Scores*, since part of their purpose is to allow each performer to find her own way through them. He explains, “I am particularly interested in this direction as a means to balance the demands of traditional notation interpretation and esoteric inner-targeting.”"23

Knowing of this example inspired me to think of my notation in terms of evoking a personal response from the performers, rather than trying to create a code of direct musical equivalency. The system I came up with is more suggestive than specific, and can either be interpreted intuitively or can rely on spoken or written explanation to the performers. It invites the musicians to use their intuition and to

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23 Wilmoth, Charlie. *Liner Notes of 2+2 Compositions by Anthony Braxton and Matt Bauder*
listen to each other. In that sense, it is a guide for improvisers rather than a score that could easily be realized by a classically trained musician.

When deciding on the specifics of how my system would be printed, I discussed several options with Kate, and adopted one of her suggestions of using a number of small, 4 x 4 inch zinc plates. I used these to create a modular system, which I felt would allow me the most flexibility to combine the elements of my system in a variety of ways. Using this format, I could print multiple plates on top of each other in layers, or placed them next to each other in a grid or a line, and they also could be printed in any orientation (rotated 90, 180 or 270 degrees – or on a diagonal as well). I thought about filling these 4x4 squares with textures, with lines, and with shapes that could be interpreted as melodic gesture. I also experimented with creating empty space by using paper stencils to block out sections of the prints.

Figure 5 A 4 x 4 square from my Intaglio Scores. When viewed in the orientation, I think of this as being similar to Braxton’s Language Music Type #4 (staccato line formings). When rotated 90 degrees, I think of it being similar to Braxton’s Language Music Type #1 (long sound).
I worked on each grouping of plates without too much preplanning. My process became very improvisatory – I would select my plates for the first layer, mix my inks, ink the plates, then arrange them in whatever orientation struck my fancy. Once I had printed these plates, I would examine the image and see if there were certain places where I might want it to be denser or more layered, or to have more color or anything I could add through continued printing. It was interesting to me to note how I was drawn to create in an improvisatory fashion, which felt very comparable to many of the musical tasks that I engage in, while others in the class tended to work in a more predetermined manner.

Figure 6 A 4x4 square from my Intaglio Scores. This is printed in two layers, and represents an ensemble dynamic – if performed in a duo, one person should play the black material, and one person the red.

Something that became apparent to me about the process of creating this notation was my feeling that, while I had conceptualized the elements of my system with relationship to sound, I had also conceptualized them visually and, when creating my final “composition,” I was evaluating it visually rather than through imagining
how it would sound. It was an intriguing problem - I had created this work wanting it to be both score and art, but was ultimately working on it as though it was just a piece of art, aiming to make it as aesthetically satisfying in a visual sense as possible. I found myself wondering whether shared aesthetic principles or pleasing ratios might translate from one medium to another, or whether each was distinct enough that what worked visually might not work musically.

The first finished series I created was a triptych of prints which each consisted of a row of five of the 4x4 squares, in most cases printed in multiple layers. An initial performance of this work, by myself and New York based pianist Cat Toren, took place on November 23, 2013 at Russell House, as part of the Wesleyan Experimental Music Festival. We performed the triptych as a work in three movements. For the purposes of this performance, we read the scores from left to right, treating each square as a distinct sonic event. We discussed in advance an approximate duration of 30 seconds per square, but relied on auditory cues from each other to know when to move from one square to the next. We briefly discussed my associations between sounds and the various visual elements, but I also left things fairly open for Cat to interpret as she wished. I found that the colors in particular seemed to have a large impact on what we were playing, and our interpretations of them were well aligned.

The performance was generally well received, and the audience was very interested in examining the scores. Still, I was unsure on completion of the performance how to evaluate the success of our realization of the prints as musical
compositions. It felt so unfamiliar to me to attempt something visual according to my own system, without having clear criteria for success to compare it to. Though I am an improviser, as a composer I am accustomed to remaining more in control of the final shape of the composition, particularly the melodic and harmonic aspects.

For my final project for the printmaking class, I continued to work with combining and layering the 4x4 plates, but this time I also included a couple of larger plates, and experimented more with printing squares on the diagonal. I selected a color palette of mostly very dark blues and greys, with some red, green and turquoise accents. I also experimented with some different techniques, including a paper collage technique called chine-collé, crayon ground etching, and creating embossing without printing (by putting unetched, uninked plates through the press). My finished product was a collection of two long accordion-folded scores, stored together in a folio, which I imagined could be joined and read as one long musical piece, or interpreted separately.

I was very happy with how my scores came out as a finished piece of visual art (almost more like book art), but did not have the experience of performing them with other musicians until my final thesis concert. I decided for the concert that I wanted the graphic scores to be performed by members of the large ensemble that I had assembled to perform two of my notated works. Initially I was thinking of having each half of the score performed by a subset of the large ensemble, as two separate pieces. I had a few ideas and questions about how the piece should operate, and workshopped several of them at the first rehearsal of the large
ensemble for my concert. One of the things that was immediately most successful was the interaction created by alternating between the two groups, which had very distinct timbres, so at that point I felt it would be most effective to have one large ensemble piece and orchestrate a variety of different strategies for interpretation and group interaction to make sure the piece would be varied enough.

In this initial reading, I found that it was important to make decisions about who would play or not play at any given time, as it was easy for the texture of 11 musicians playing at once to create a somewhat static timbre. To adjust this, I decided to create a simple text score/instruction sheet outlining three basic sections that would occur in the music and the processes that would be operating in each one. I then conducted the transitions between these sections. It was interesting to try to find the right balance between conducting and allowing room for people to interpret the score. In an early rehearsal, it seemed that I leaned towards doing too much conducting and giving people so many cues that they either couldn’t actually focus on the score and get into the graphic materials, or missed the cues.

By the time of the final performance, I felt that I had achieved a better balance, conducting the piece in a more minimal way that allowed the performers to focus more attention on interpreting the graphic material. Overall I thought this performance was very successful. Both my text instructions and my conducting effectively served as additions to the composition, and allowed me to sculpt it in a way that felt pleasing, effective, and left me feeling more ownership of the
composition. At the same time, it was a collectively created work by the 11 people that performed it. I was lucky to have a dedicated crew of improvisers to interpret the work (many had been stalwarts of Braxton’s ensemble), and the performance felt like a truly communal experience.

**Sketches** (for improvising quintet)

I composed *Sketches* in November of 2012 for my New York based quintet, *Towering Poppies*, an ensemble that I formed in 2010 while living in Brooklyn, NY. At the time when I wrote *Sketches*, I was interested in creating some new structures for improvising with this ensemble. Previously, most of my compositions for the band had taken the form of leadsheets, which we tended to perform in the standard jazz fashion of “head, solo, head.” Typically, we used improvisation in our music either in the middle of pieces (solo sections), or sometimes in group introductions or outros. I wanted to find a way of incorporating improvisation throughout the piece, creating an open form, but one that still had direction and shape, due to cues embedded in the music.

Rather than using chord symbols, I chose instead to define sonorities or collections of notes, which I thought of as being like colors that the musicians could draw from as a basis for their improvisation. These colors were more specific than jazz chord symbol notation would be, but also created more openness, by avoiding the set of associations jazz musicians are trained to have.
when looking at chord symbols (one example of this might be that when a jazz
musician sees a D minor 7 chord, they are likely to think of improvising using a
dorian scale). These colors/sonorities were combined with melodic motives,
usually two or three for each color, the last of which acted as a cue to transition to
the next color. Each color, and each melodic motive, could be played for any
length of time, and could also serve as the basis for improvisation.

In performance, the piece had a different trajectory and less obvious form than our
usual repertoire. The melodic cues worked well to transmit some sense of
organization and coherence throughout a piece that drifted into many different
spaces. There were moments of aimlessness, but also moments of fortuitous
alignment, and overall the piece felt structurally refreshing to me.

When I played the recording of the performance to Anthony Braxton his response
was positive, but he also said that it sounded as though we hadn’t quite figured out
how to play the piece yet. He said something along the lines of “you need to teach
these people how to play your music.” This was interesting to hear as, at that point
in time, my model for working with that particular band was often not to give
them much direction, as they had been very successful in the past in intuiting what
I was looking for (or coming up with other interpretations that I liked even better).
However, with this piece I was moving outside of the realm we had collectively
explored as a band, and Braxton’s comment was a good reminder that I was
ultimately the one who knew how to best realize my creative vision for the piece,
and that I needed to communicate that to my musicians.
The particular combination of specificity and non-specificity utilized in this piece did challenge some of our habits of playing together as a band, which I think was a very useful thing. I plan to continue to explore this type of compositional structure, wherein all of the composed sections of the piece can serve as materials for collective improvisation.

A Breath Canon

_A Breath Canon_ was composed while I was in residence with the composer/pianist Marilyn Crispell at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in February-March of 2014. I was part of a group of 9 participants, one of whom was a drummer and a practitioner of Sound Healing. He led our group in a number of exercises that included singing together as a group, some toning on random pitches, some chanting people’s names. I enjoyed the experience of standing in a circle together as a group, singing and accepting whatever came out. A rich, chaotic counterpoint occurred as the chance harmony was created and everyone breathed and shifted notes in their own time.

When Marilyn asked me to compose something for the group to perform, I thought of writing a vocal piece in which the aim would not be to sing in time, but rather to diverge from each other, each singing according to the rhythm of our own breath. This would create a beautiful overlapping texture reminiscent of that
from the group exercises, but more specific. Another point of reference for the piece was Morton Feldman’s *Piece for Four Pianos* (1957), which I helped perform for Paula Matthusen’s Music109 class. I was intrigued by the combination of harmonic specificity and non-specificity that existed in this piece, though mine ended up involving multiple points of deliberate alignment, unlike the Feldman.

I composed this piece sitting at the piano and singing in the resonant theatre space at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, playing the piano with the sustain pedal down and letting the different pitches resonate together as I composed each of the three parts. The finished piece was both specific and non-specific in a way that felt fruitful and true to my own aesthetic. I was able to include harmonic specificity but allow for a certain amount of chance and for people’s individual voices to emerge in their own way.

**While waiting in winter with trees**

I have loved reading for my entire life, and poetry specifically since an influential creative writing class I took in high school. I had my first experiences at setting poetry to music for composition assignments in high school, and continued to do so throughout my undergraduate jazz program and also for creative projects afterwards in New Zealand. I greatly enjoy combining my interests in poetry, vocal music and composition, and I find it easy to create music in relation to
poetry – much easier than without it, as I have a jumping off point for inspiration as far as mood and emotional affect.

I had always meant to write more vocal music, but had been focused on seeing what I could achieve within the parameters of instrumental writing over the last several years. When I thought of the concert I wanted to present for the culmination of my thesis, it seemed like a good time to return to the song form, and I was also encouraged by the presence of an excellent undergraduate vocalist on campus, Jessica Best, who I knew would do a fine job of realizing my compositions. This inspired me to write *While Waiting In Winter With Trees*, for voice and 11 piece mixed ensemble.

The text of *While Waiting in Winter with Trees* is an excerpt from a longer poem (entitled *Traces of Hope*) by New Zealand poet Dinah Hawken. When searching for poems to set, I am usually drawn to those that have short lines, and that I imagine contain room for pauses and breathing. I want to have space to insert music, or simply silence, into the gaps in the text, to allow the audience time to take it in. Both the understated, clear writing style and the subject matter of *While Waiting in Winter with Trees* appealed to me, and I had a sense that it would work well as a song.

While attempting to sing the poem, it took me a while to latch on to a melodic shape. I like to find natural points of repetition when setting poems, so I can create them into something more similar to a traditional song form. Things came
together quickly once I came up with a simple pentatonic ascending melodic line for the first line of text, which served as a unifying factor for the piece. From there I simply sang the piece and wrote everything down. I made some minimal alterations after the fact, but for the most part my first attempt to write the melody captured the dreamlike feeling I sought.

While composing this piece, I had been very focused on writing *String Quartet #1* (discussed later in this thesis), for which I was using a compositional approach very different from my modus operandi, trying to write within an existing structural and formal mold. In contrast, while composing *While Waiting In Winter With Trees* I decided simply to follow a typical functional chord progression or formal structure. In this manner, I think of the melody and harmony of the song as being written in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. Thinking back to my undergraduate jazz education, I remember using a similar process of composition to come up with melodic ideas and chords, but afterwards bending and manipulating them until they fitted what I thought of as a more acceptable, conventional harmonic and structural pattern. In contrast, this exercise in just trusting my instincts felt very validating. I was ignoring my analytical brain more than I usually do while composing, and what I was doing felt very coloristic and organic. I ended up feeling that this piece was the most pure representation of me of anything on the program for my final recital.

While the basic melodic and harmonic framework of the piece flowed fairly organically, the orchestration process was more laborious. I started with a
concept, which was that the piece would be *rubato*, led by the vocalist, accompanied by undulating strings and woodwinds (this instrumentation was inspired by Maurice Ravel’s *Soupir*). Everyone would follow the singer, creating an interesting textural bed for the voice to glide over the top of. In the end, this was very successfully achieved through a notation system that involved a series of conducted cues, but no specific metric time. The only musician in the band for whom I did not notate a specific part was the drummer, who I asked to improvise his own part based on the score of the piece. As he was an experienced improviser, I thought this would be the best way to utilize his talents, as well as providing a rogue element to the texture I had carefully planned. He interpreted the piece very successfully, playing texturally with a variety of hand percussion as well as the drum kit.

In my creative process, I find it interesting to consider the relative merits of trying to develop in areas where I am technically weak, or going with areas where I am stronger and trying to develop those further. In one sense this piece felt very effortless as I just let the melody and then the harmonization of it flow out of me without criticism or analysis. In another sense, it was a departure from my previous compositions in the manner in which it was orchestrated, and the way everything happened on cue and could be played at any pace, forming a fluid interaction with the singer. Overall, I would describe *While Waiting In Winter With Trees* as both very specific (harmonically) and quite open (in terms of velocity, rhythm, and percussion part), achieving what was, for me, a new formula for combining composition and improvisation (determinacy and indeterminacy),
while still allowing for harmonic specificity. I was pleased with the expressiveness of the end result, and believe that this is a fertile area for further exploration.

**Song for May**

*Song for May* is a folk-like melody in c minor, which I composed at the piano, and notated in leadsheet form with chord symbols written above the melody. This piece was written in one sitting, springing from an emotion that I felt the urge to communicate musically, rather than from any conceptual or compositional goal. It is a simple piece that works well when performed in an understated and heartfelt way, and doesn’t require decorative or flashy execution to get its point across.

For my thesis concert, I performed *Song for May* in a trio with two other jazz-trained improvisers: Sam Dickey on guitar and Bill Carbone on drums. We experimented with a couple of different ways of improvising on the tune: firstly, we collectively improvised a free chorale that drew from the tune harmonically and melodically without sticking to the form or the changes; and secondly we played through the form in a standard jazz fashion, improvising on the chord changes. The arrangement we decided to perform incorporated both of these improvisational strategies.
It came together fairly effortlessly, as lead-sheet compositions tend to do when played with the right musicians. This piece was more in line with the compositional work I was doing immediately before coming to Wesleyan than anything else on the program, and it was nice to include something like this in which I got to play saxophone and improvise, and which served as a good contrast to some of the more fully notated pieces. It was very enjoyable to play it with Sam and Bill, who are both excellent performers and improvisers and were able to get to the heart of the piece very quickly.

**i carry your heart with me**

*i carry your heart with me* is a setting of an e.e. cummings poem with the same first line, which I premiered at a Wesleyan Composers Concert in the Center For the Arts Hall in the Fall of 2013. My initial setting of the text was something I had been subconsciously working on for several years, but finally decided to finish for the Wesleyan performance. I had a concept of the shape I wanted each melodic line to have, but somehow had written the melody across an unrealistically large vocal range, so the bulk of my time spent composing was in exploring different ways of modulating between lines, to maintain the contour over a smaller vocal range.

My initial arrangement of the piece was for voice, clarinet and guitar. The guitar played a continuous, fully-scored, arpeggiated accompaniment, while the clarinet
served as a counterpoint and melodic interlude to the voice. The vocal line was of primary importance in this piece, and I constructed it in my usual intuitive fashion, trying to facilitate the delivery of the lyrics, and honor the meaning of the poem (which is one that I love) as well as I could with my interpretation.

I decided to perform the piece again in my thesis concert, but this time to reorchestrate it for the large ensemble that I was configuring to play While Waiting In Winter With Trees. The large ensemble I had assembled had the somewhat unusual instrumentation of violin, viola, flute, clarinet, bass clarinet, 2 trumpets, French horn, trombone, guitar and drums. For this particular piece, I thought of the ensemble as being a cross between a small orchestra and a medium-sized jazz ensemble.

My rearrangement of *i carry your heart with me* remained the same in the guitar and vocal parts, but included considerable new instrumental accompaniment, including an instrumental interlude. I think of this song as being sweetly pretty and heartfelt, so I wrote a sweetly pretty accompaniment, which occasionally sounded quite lush. I worried a little that the effect might be too saccharine, but once I heard the piece realized with real instruments, I was very happy with the emotional effect that was being communicated. This is one example of a composition of mine that I think could work equally well with a variety of different sized ensembles.
Quiescence

*Quiescence* was composed for a wind quartet made up of myself on soprano saxophone, Nathan Friedman on clarinet, Sean Sonderegger on bass clarinet and Jeremy Webber on bassoon. I originally wrote it for the introductory composers concert that took place on Election Night in 2012. I had been thinking for a while that what I wanted to develop or change in my music was to reach beyond tonality to a wider harmonic vocabulary, or a sense of other harmonic systems for organizing my work. I had an interesting conversation about this with my colleague Cristohper Ramos Flores while cycling to the Portland Reservoir, in which he explained some basic concepts about how he composed using post tonal theory. Using a basic and incomplete understanding of these ideas, I sat down to write a new piece for the concert and came up with the opening bars of *Quiescence*. However, soon my ear took over and I was hearing the rest of the composition, so I reverted to my usual pattern of composing first based on my ear, leading to a composition that is mostly tonal but not quite. Another aspect of the piece is that it changes time signature quite frequently in a way that I think feels very fluid, natural and unforced – something I had been exploring quite a lot in recent work for my jazz quintet before arriving at Wesleyan.
The Bells (for carillon, and sight-singing, outdoor chorus)

*The Bells* is a piece for Wesleyan’s carillon and a sight-reading vocal chorus, which was premiered on December 11, 2012 both inside and in front of the Wesleyan University bell tower.

In 2012, the topic for Wesleyan University’s annual *Shasha Seminar*, was ‘Music in Public Life.’ I was a part of the course taught by Mark Slobin on this topic. For the final assessment of this course, we had the option to do a creative project, or write a paper, engaging with the topic of music and public life. I immediately knew I wanted to compose something, and my first thought was to write...
something for an instrument that was intrinsically part of Wesleyan’s public life –
the Wesleyan Carillon. I was fortunate to have as a co-member of my class an
experienced Carillonist, Hallie Blejewski, who agreed to be a part of the
performance of my piece.

My concept for the piece was that it would involve a mass of singers assembled at
the base of the carillon. This was the first time I had composed something in
which the setting in which it would be performed was, in my mind, an integral
part of the piece. I decided audio recording would be inadequate to document this
experience, so I engaged the help of a filmmaker friend to document the project.

Musically, I wanted to create something that could be fairly easily realized and
would not require a large amount of rehearsal, so I wrote a two part vocal melody
and carillon part (in consultation with Hallie about the capabilities and
particularities of the instrument), which I believed would present few challenges
for sight reading. I didn't have a particular effect in mind for the music, other than
wanting the vocal parts and carillon part to complement each other, but what I
came up with has a slightly haunting, processional quality, perhaps due to my
association of church bells with various social and religious rituals.

Due to the general difficulties of wrangling people at the end of the semester (and
the fact that not everyone in the music department likes to sing), the group I
assembled on a cold December day to sing at the base of the carillon was a fairly
small one. Still everyone showed excellent dedication to the cause and, while the
chorus was not as rousing as would have been ideal, we managed an accurate and pleasant rendering of the piece.

It was an interesting experience to perform with our accompanist in a separate location (at the top of the tower). The group of singers down below could hear the full intended effect of the piece, but Hallie couldn’t hear us singing, and cues to start and stop had to be given by cellphone. From a distance, only the carillon would have been audible, as the group of singers were unamplified. Perhaps, if it had been a warmer day and a better publicized event, an audience would have gathered at the base of the carillon, but as it was the (shivering) chorus was the only audience that was able to experience the whole of the piece live. The video does capture the event quite well, with a number of different camera angles and some atmospheric footage of the view from the top of the tower.

This was a positive experiment and I felt very supported by the members of my Wesleyan community who came out to participate in the performance (including Professor Paula Matthusen!). The final video can be viewed on the internet at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KJc4M8M-X_c
Love, Love, Love, Lo-o-ve

In the Fall Semester of 2013 I and the other graduate composers had the opportunity to compose a new work to be premiered by the new music ensemble Loadbang. The instrumentation of the ensemble was very unusual, consisting of baritone voice, trumpet, bass clarinet and trombone. Around this time, I had been giving a lot of thought to my status as a jazz-educated composer, and the manner in which I was trying to re-invent myself in more of a classical mold. I was thinking “how can I utilize my jazz background in my music instead of trying to work against or hide it?” Following this line of reasoning, I had the idea of writing a composition constructed out of material from the American Songbook (in this case, defined by me as the tunes from Broadway shows and Tin Pan Alley, with a
couple of iconic vocal jazz compositions thrown in for good measure). I would take fragments of all of these songs, and combine them all to create another song with a similar overall form, a kind of meta-standard.

I initially began to work on the piece by assembling lists of songs I wanted to include, and then isolating specific lines from these songs that either appealed to me or seemed particularly iconic. At this point I was working in a text-editing software, trying to figure out an overall song-form assemblage of fragments. I immediately discovered that if I was going to fragment the text (by, for example, changing from one song to another mid-phrase) I had a choice of either making a non-sense song, or trying to fit together fragments of text in ways that made some degree of sense. The latter immediately seemed more interesting, and from there I proceeded to construct a kind of found poem out of fragments of these songs, looking for songs with similar topics, constructing rhymes, or figuring out “pivot points” where I could change from one song to another.

I was already familiar with, and could sing the melodies of, all of the material I was working with, so I sang as I worked, to get a sense of which lines could naturally flow into each other (which often necessitated changing key).

*Ask me how do I / hear singing / cos I feel so well*

*I’d sacrifice anything, come what might / If I were a bell*

*You are/a somebody I’m longing to / Love for*

*I’ve got a crush on / Embraceable you*
The overall form I arrived at for my composition had a formal construction inspired by the typical “verse, chorus, chorus” structure of a song by Cole Porter or George and Ira Gershwin, but extended. My piece started with a “verse” section (for which most of my text was also harvested from “verse” sections of the origin compositions), then two different sections that were more chorus-like. These were followed by an instrumental interlude, a reprise of the second chorus, and a tag or ending section. The function of the interlude was similar to that of an instrumental solo in a jazz tune, but it was fully notated rather than being improvised. I constructed the interlude out of layered melodic fragments of songs used in the piece, creating a contrapuntal texture.

Thematically, all of the songs dealt with love, and read as a somewhat nonsensical internal monologue of someone in love, with some very humorous juxtapositions created at points where the lyrics from different songs intersected. I was unsure how this piece would be received, but gratified when the general result was laughter (especially from my mother, who, as a singing teacher with lots of exposure to Broadway show tunes, was a perfect audience for the piece). Though it is a funny piece, it is affectionate rather than satirical, and I think of it as my tribute to the American Songbook, which has been one of my important musical influences.

I was pleased with the way in which the piece was both a successful execution of a concept, and a demonstration of my craftsmanship in putting it all together.
Though it was constructed of so many small constituent parts, the composition maintained a sense of fluidity, instead of feeling like a bizarre patchwork. This was also one of the first times I had started composing with a concept of what the piece would be constructed of and how it would operate, rather than just a vague aesthetic impression of the mood I wanted to create. It was satisfying to conceptualize something intellectually and then realize it in a way that was also aesthetically pleasing.

Verse:

*What’s the use / when the little blue bird / says that love is blind*

*I never cared much for / hiding what’s on my mind*

*There’s a saying old / leaves me totally cold*

*Like the beat, beat, beat of the tom tom / the melody lingers on…….*

Chorus 1:

*Ask me how do I / hear singing / cos I feel so well*

*I’d sacrifice anything, come what might / If I were a bell*

*You are/a somebody I’m longing to / Love for*

*I’ve got a crush on / Embraceable you*

Chorus 2:

*Who cares / why I spend the lonely / Summertime*

*All I do is pray / I’ll Know that moment divine*

*Wherever you’re going / on the axis of the wheel of life*
String Quartet #1

I have harboured an ambition to write for string quartet for several years, and I decided that it would be a satisfying experience to do so for my final thesis concert. The piece that most inspired me in this regard was Debussy’s *String Quartet in G Minor*, which I was introduced to by my colleague Cristohper Ramos Flores. I worked on an analysis of Debussy’s String Quartet while composing my own, and I learned a lot about the development of themes and the specifics of writing for this ensemble from Debussy’s String Quartet. I really enjoyed the harmony of this piece, and this was something I would have liked to spend more time analysing. However, it became apparent that thinking about the development of the piece, and how it was structured and arranged for the different
instruments, was more clearly applicable to my composition, so that was what I ended up focusing on.

I began writing my String Quartet, as I begin many of my compositions: with a melody. This melody had two main sections – A and B. From this point, the challenge was to figure out how to work with and develop this material into a longer, through composed piece. It was a huge learning experience and required a certain amount of discipline for me to generate material that was clearly related to what I had already composed, to ensure the cohesiveness of the piece.

I was inspired by the way in which Debussy brought back certain themes again and again in the piece, sometimes with more and more variations until they were almost unrecognizable. For example, the opening theme from the 1st Movement reappears numerous times in different harmonic contexts, different time signatures, and with added chromaticism (see some examples below).

![Figure 9 Opening theme from Mvmt. I (Violin I Part)](image1)

![Figure 10 A variation on the opening theme from Mvmt I – b. 151-152 (Cello part)](image2)
I took inspiration from this when I was composing a central theme for the second section of my String Quartet. I used theme A, which I had already composed, as a basis for the new theme, but changed the meter to common time, the tonality to minor, and enlarged or inverted some of the intervals.

I made a further variation of the minor theme after I decided I needed a less energetic transition to lead into the second section of the piece. The relationship
between these two minor themes is less explicit, but I began by augmenting the rhythm and simplifying the melody. I then took the resulting material and developed it into a longer melody.

I found that composing in this ‘theme and variations’ manner was an interesting change from my usual way of doing things. I enjoyed the challenge of spending more time working with my compositional material, and observing the relationships that developed and emerged between the different variations.

I also took inspiration from some of the textures Debussy created with his string ensemble. The first of the two examples below shows a vigorous passage from the end of the first movement of the Debussy, in which all four string players are playing harmonized triplets. I used a similar vigorous, descending triplet figure in the viola and cello parts at the climax of the 2nd section of my quartet, in this case using it as a counterpoint to the thematic development that was occurring in the violins.

![Descending triplets outline a minor sonority in Debussy's String Quartet Mvmt I, b 113-114](image)

Figure 15 Descending triplets outline a minor sonority in Debussy's String Quartet Mvmt I, b 113-114
As mentioned before, my process of assimilation tends to be somewhat non-linear or indirect, so there were many subtler and more minute ways in which Debussy’s quartet influenced my own. I was very interested in the ways he transitioned between sections, themes, and key centres. I tried to achieve a similar sense of organic growth and fluidity as I moved from one section of my piece to another. I also hoped to achieve a similar sense of unity throughout my piece to that which I sensed in Debussy’s, through consistent connections in the thematic content of the piece.

While spending so much time with Debussy’s String Quartet, I really came to love it, and to despair of doing anything comparable. However, though the institution of the String Quartet is a formidable one, I am very glad I took on this challenge. I am happy with many aspects of my piece and feel that I grew and learned a lot in writing it – I hope to repeat the experiment again very soon.
Conclusions / Envisioned future projects and trajectories

As I come to the close of my Wesleyan experience, I have a sense of an ever-increasing number of options and approaches to music-making that lie at my disposal. Through the process of reflecting on my music while writing this thesis, I’ve also become more aware of what my default modes of composing tend to be, which is useful information to have going forward. Many of the pieces I’ve written at Wesleyan have been very different from each other, yet in most cases elements of my voice remain consistent between them, which is something I am pleased about.

I find myself with an abundance of compositional dreams and visions, and a desire to do everything. I plan to continue my experimentation with form, timbre, levels of disorganization and organization – and also to create harmonious, beautiful, idiomatic and accessible music. I also plan to continue the exploration that I began at Wesleyan of creating graphic scores through printmaking.

I plan to keep writing songs, to continue to explore composing chamber music, and to keep thinking of new strategies for combining specificity and non-specificity in my composition. I would also like to take on some larger projects going forward, writing orchestral music and film scores.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to play and study Anthony Braxton’s music, and to meet with him and gain valuable advice. I am also grateful for the time I have spent absorbing the music and pithy remarks of Debussy. I am sure I
will continue to learn from both composers for many years to come. One of the ways in which I believe I can profit by their examples is not by direct imitation, but rather by self-exploration. Both Braxton and Debussy have written such unique and personal work, and their examples inspire me to do the same.

I see no conflict in pursuing multiple aesthetic paths, except perhaps in knowing what to do first, how to handle the logistics of all these different things, and hoping that people will be open to hearing such a variety of works from me. But I am optimistic that I can find a public that will be open enough to listen to a wide spectrum of my work. Regardless, I cannot control how my work will be received, only whether it will get made. I return now to the quote with which I opened my thesis, from Earl Brown:

“What interests me is to find the degree of conditioning (of conception, of notation, of realization) which will balance the work between the points of control and non-control...There is no final solution to this paradox...which is why art is.”

As relevant as this passage is to the creation of music, it is also relevant to the creation of a career in music. As I look towards the future, I have numerous goals and dreams in mind, but I am paradoxically both in control and not in control of whether these dreams will ever be realized. I must continue to do my work, to “fight for my music” as Anthony Braxton would say, and put myself in the best position to get my music out there; then hope that the forces I cannot control will
assist me in finding musicians to play it, organizations to present it, audiences to listen to it and money to pay for it all. These issues are challenging for many artists, but I have seen firsthand from Anthony Braxton and others who have inspired me that solutions are possible.
Bibliography


Appendix:
Scores
Intaglio Scores
**Intaglio Score Piece for Double Ensemble**  
Jasmine Lovell-Smith

**Section 1.**  Ensemble A, then Ensemble B

Choose a panel

Play each of the four squares on cue

**Section 2.**  Members of both ensembles in various configurations

Choose one aspect of the visual notation (for example: color, shape, line, density) and play that aspect. Draw from any part of your score that you like.

Individuals play on cue, when pointed to. Stop, when cued to stop.

**Section 3.**  Ensemble A & Ensemble B, alternating

Choose a different panel. Play texturally as a group (conductor will cue back and forth between groups). The piece will end with everybody playing together.
Sketches
A Breath Canon
A Breath Canon

J. Lovell-Smith
While Waiting in Winter
With Trees
While waiting in winter with trees

Poem by Dinah Hawken

Slow diminuendo al niente

Chord can be played in any position. Hold chord for a few seconds and then improvise arpeggio

Tremolos can vary in speed

Tremolos can vary in speed

Tremolos can vary in speed

Tremolos can vary in speed

Why am I standing here

G\textsuperscript{sus2}
dreaming and enraptured

Tremolos can vary in speed
Voice:

Gtr.:

Fl.:

Cl.:

Tpts:

Hn.:

Trb.:

Vln.:

Vla.:

know nothing precise.

G(sus2)

Tremolos can vary in speed
Were we born to be like them? So stark. so outstanding.
Voice

Gtr.

Fl.

slowly

Cl.

B. Cl.

Tpts.

Hn.

Tbn.

Vln.

Vla.

E

very free, with movement

How they flare at the tips and re-

81
Voice turn to an emptiness covered

Gtr.

Cl.

Cl.

B. Cl.

Tpts.

Hn.

Tbn.

Br.D.

Br.D.

guitar comes to the forefront
queer-ly by a sky that is stunned,
might slack-en and fall.
If I continue here with them making

Voice

gtr.

Fl.

Cl.

B. Cl.

Tpts.

Hn.

Tbn.

Vln.

Vla.
Voice:

dark intense arrangements

they'll
wind me in their branch-es

they'll curve me with birds
I'm standing out among them the
great black dancers sway-ing as they are in the weird grey

with the singer

with the singer

with the singer

with the singer

G² sus2

Gm⁷
wheel of the sky.
Song for May
Song for May

J. Lovell-Smith

Concert
i carry your heart with me
i carry your heart with me
i carry your heart with me, i carry it in my heart,
i am never with
is your doing, my darling. i fear no fate, for you are my fate, my
always meant, and whatever a sun will always sing is you.
here is the deepest secret nobody knows,
here is the root of the root and the bud of the
and the sky of the sky of a
A little faster

tree called life that grows higher than soul can hope or mind can hide, and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars a-
Quiescence
The Bells
The Bells

Sing in any octave that is comfortable

J. Lovell-Smith

Voice 1.

Voice 2.

Chimes

V 1.

V 2.

Chim.
Love, Love, Love, Lo-ove
A Tribute to the American Songbook

J. Lovell-Smith

Baritone

Trumpet in C

Bass Clarinet

Trombone

What's the use when the little blue bird says that love is blind?

I never cared much for hiding what's on my mind.
There's a saying old, leaves me totally cold: 

"Like the rich, swelling vibrato beat beat beat of the tom-tom the melody lingers on."

Ask me
how do I hear singing cos I feel so well? I'd sacrifice anything, flutt.

come what might if I were a bell.

You

are a somebody I'm longing to love for I've got a

Faster
crush on embrace-able you.

Who cares why I spend the lonely summer

time?

All I do is pray
I'll

know that moment divine.

Wher-ev-er you're go-ing
on the ax-is of the
Who cares why I spend the lonely summer time?
a tempo

All I do is pray
I'll know that moment divine.

Slowly

Ever you're going on the axis of the wheel of life,
I've got you__

Slow

my funny valentine__
you are the angel glow you're the coliseum the promised kiss of

spring-time the Louvre museum, you're the mate that fate had me created for

You are a somebody I'm longing to see so darn that dream,
the memory of love's refrain:

Love,

love, love, love, Love love love love love love love love
String Quartet #1