5-2022

TELLING STORIES: AN ANALYSIS OF SPEECH-MELODY COMPOSITIONS AND AN ORIGINAL SPEECH-MELODY COMPOSITION FOR WIND ENSEMBLE

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Stephen F. Austin State University

School of Music

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AND AN ORIGINAL SPEECH-MELODY COMPOSITION

FOR WIND ENSEMBLE

By

KEVIN M. CHEEK, Bachelor of Music

A thesis submitted to the School of Music

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Music

May, 2022

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AND AN ORIGINAL SPEECH-MELODY COMPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the compositional technique of speech melody and provides a brief historical overview of speech in music. This thesis also examines recent works (2005-2014) that have sourced their melodies from the spoken word and in turn creates an original composition for wind ensemble consisting of melodies sourced from recordings of members of United States military forces speaking about their lived experiences. In conjunction with the analytical and compositional aspects of this thesis, I also conducted an interview with Dutch composer Jacob ter Veldhuis (Jacob TV).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents for always being supportive of my musical endeavors. They have been by my side in that regard for the past 25 years, always encouraging me along this journey.

I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Lias. His mentorship has proven invaluable to me throughout my experiences at Stephen F. Austin State University. Under his tutelage, I have been consistently challenged both musically and philosophically, and have learned so much about music as well as myself through this process. It has been an incredible joy to have studied with him these past two years.

Many thanks to my committee members, Dr. Inman, Dr. Stevens, and Dr. Weaver. You have taught me so much over the years, and I am so appreciative of your time and willingness to serve your students and to be a part of this process.

Thanks to Stephen F. Austin State University. I could not have found a better fit for my graduate studies. I have enjoyed my time with the school and have learned so much.

Thank you to the veterans of our armed forces and to those who participated in the interview process. I do not always agree with the reasons for why we fight, but I will always support our troops.

Thank you to Dr. Yiorgos Vassilandonakis for your mentorship in music theory and composition during my undergraduate studies.

Thank you to both Barry Montoya and Timothy Otis for instilling in me a love of music and to Tim for reminding me where my heart could be found when I began to stray from the path.

Extra special thanks to Colonel John Nerges for helping out when the chips were stacked against me. Forever grateful.

Many thanks to Jacob TV for allowing me the opportunity to speak to him about speech melody.

A final thanks to some very dear friends for always being vocally supportive and encouraging of my endeavors and acknowledging the hard work I have been putting in, Ashley Lawson, Gregory James, Ian McAllister, Autumn Bennett, Mike Baum, Stuart Moore, Erik Perez, and Holly Hazelwood Simons.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Speech and music have been linked for centuries. It was not until the 1980s however that speech became the basis for entire compositions. With the technique of speech melody still being relatively young, and the body of literature on the subject gradually expanding, the aim of this project is threefold: to contribute to a growing body of knowledge regarding a rather youthful compositional technique by way of musical and narratological analysis, to document the ideas and opinions of a well-respected composer (Jacob TV) working primarily with this technique, and to gain a better understanding of the technique by way of an original composition.

This thesis had its genesis during my time in undergraduate studies shortly after first being introduced to Steve Reich's work *Different Trains*. I was immediately fascinated by the technique of speech melody. Soon after, I began to formulate an idea for a work featuring speech melodies sourced from interviews I conducted with veterans of the United States Armed Services, which culminated in this thesis and the composition contained within, *A Soldier's Story*.

Chapter two provides a brief historical overview of the history of speech and melody. It looks at possible theories regarding the evolution of speech and melody, early "sound-languages," and imitation of speech patterns. It then turns to examine declamation beginning in the 16th century, *stile rappresentativo*, and recitative. After, there is a brief discussion of melodic contour of speech with commentary on how this is affected by mood. It examines technological advancements in recording and the rise of the *musique concrète* movement in the mid-twentieth century. Lastly, it looks at the arrival of compositions generated entirely from speech, the documentary nature of speech melody, and compositional approaches to speech-melody works.

Chapter three features analyses of Jacob TV's *Able to Be*, Steve Reich's *WTC 9/11*, and Robert Davidson's *Not Now, Not Ever!* These analyses focus on the many ways in which speech melodies are manipulated within their respective pieces as well as the narrative structure of the works in question.

Chapter four features the score for my original work *A Soldier's Story*, while chapter five includes an analysis of this work. Analysis focuses on the impetus for this work, my interview and transcription process, some context behind the interviewees responsible for the speech fragments included in my

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work, compositional techniques I incorporate and ways I manipulate speech melody, and the narrative of the work.

Appendix A includes a transcription of an interview I conducted with Jacob TV in January of 2022, where we discuss speech melody, his works, and composition in general.

Lastly, Appendix B includes transcriptions of the many speech melodies I sourced from my interviews before narrowing them down to the six I chose to use in my original composition.

CHAPTER TWO: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SPEECH MELODY

Early Music and the Evolution of Music and Language

I have been fascinated with the spoken word, stories, and story-telling my entire life. These powerful tools are used to preserve the histories of individuals and entire civilizations, both fictional and non-fictional, safeguarding moments in time. When set to music in song, ballad, or chant, these texts or recorded speech fragments have their meaning amplified in a powerful way.

Speech and melody have been inexorably linked since the first melodic utterances were vocalized. It is clearly evident that language and music have much in common. Though consensus about how they evolved has not yet been reached, "archeologists are confident that both music and language were present in all prehistoric societies of *Homo sapiens*."[1]

This chapter will offer a brief look at the history of the relationship between speech and music. It will examine their evolution, the use of declamation, types of information conveyed in speech, the external factors that

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[1] Steven Mithen, *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 12.

affect speech, speech transcription, technological advancements, mid-twentieth century works incorporating speech, recorded speech as a basis for entire compositions, the documentary nature of speech melody, compositional challenges of working with speech melody, and techniques central to speech-melody compositions. It is important to address how speech and music developed historically and the impact human speech has had on instrumental music.

There are many prominent theories regarding the evolutionary relationship of music to language. Linguist Steven Pinker has posited that music is a byproduct of the development of language, while some his detractors state the reverse—that language is a byproduct of music.[2] Steven Mithen notes that other possible theories state that music and language have evolved simultaneously together in parallel as two separate communication systems, or that there was a single precursor for both music and language.[3]

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[2] Stephen Pinker, *How the Mind Works* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1998), 529-39.

[3] Mithen, *Neanderthals*, 26.

"Sound-languages" (as ethnomusicologist Marius Schneider calls them)

existed in various ancient cultures throughout the world.[4] These are languages

wherein the "meaning of a syllable depends on the pitch at which it is uttered,"

so that intonating vocalizations at a higher, rather than lower pitch, can change

the meaning of a phrase entirely.[5] Steven Mithen believes that it is likely that

"musi-languages" were the precursor for both music and language, each

developing into its own system with its own syntactical ruleset.[6]

Early instrumental music makers have also shown an interest in

replicating human speech. For centuries, West African talking drums "effectively

mimic the meter and intonation of spoken language [and] were traditionally

used to convey complex linguistic messages across great distances."[7] There are

even whistled languages found on every continent except Antarctica that mimic

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[4] Egon Wellesz, ed., *Ancient and Oriental Music*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), 6.

[5] Ibid., 6.

[6] Mithen, *Neanderthals,* 26.

[7] Frank J. Oteri, "Scott Johnson: The Cultural Version of DNA Mixing," NewMusicBox, April 1, 2018, https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/scott-johnson-the-cultural-version-of-dna-mixing/.

human speech melody and cadences to communicate over vast swathes of land because "whistled speech carries much farther than ordinary speech or shouting."[8]

The development of music and language throughout history is certainly fascinating but is far too broad a subject for the purpose of this thesis. For this study, it is most appropriate to start with the moment in Western art music history when speech declamation had its most significant manifestation in melodic writing: recitative.

Declamation, Recitative, and Instrumental Imitation

Rules regarding the usage of declamation began to be codified in the 16th century. Beginning in the later 16th century, recitative began to spread throughout the European art music tradition.[9] In a letter from 1634, Pietro de' Bardi writes that Giulio Caccini and Jacopo Peri "brought the enterprise of the

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[8] Bob Holmes, "More Than 80 Cultures Still Speak in Whistles," Smithsonian Magazine, August, 2021 https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/studying-whistled-languages-180978484/.

[9] Don Michael Randel, ed., *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 1st ed., s.v. "Recitative," (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1986).

stile rappresentativo to light," finding "a way of imitating familiar speech by using few sounds."[10] Recitative was praised for being an effective means of highlighting dramatic action, as it "attempts to mirror the natural rhythms of everyday speech."[11] For these reasons, it remains mostly associated with dramatic musical genres such as the opera, oratorio, and cantata.[12] The Italian singer Giambattista Mancini, writing in the 18th century about operatic vocal delivery, notes that "the manner with which [a word] is uttered diminishes or increases its power."[13] This power, it seems, arises from the musical composition being perfectly complementary to its text, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau notes that music should "enhance the energy of the poetry by that of harmony and

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[10] Pietro De' Bardi, "Letter to Giovanii Battista Doni," in *Source Readings in Music History*. Rev. ed., Oliver Strunk, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), 524.

[11] Craig Wright, *Listening to Music* (Boston, MA: Schirmer, Cengage Learning, 2011), 105.

[12] Ibid., 105-106.

[13] Giambattista Mancini, "Practical Reflections on Singing," in *Source Readings in Music History*. Rev. ed., Oliver Strunk, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), 867.

melody."[14] Writing directly about recitative, Mancini observes that "not only are the simple notes that constitute it placed in the natural range of each voice, but they are articulated and shaped in such a way that they perfectly imitate a natural discourse."[15] This imitation of a natural manner of speaking was not, however, limited solely to vocalists.

Instrumentalists often tried their best to replicate the expressive nature of the voice's speech patterns; Joseph Machlis has noted the "human voice has served as a model for instrument builders and players" for centuries.[16] Composers such as Johann Kuhnau (1660-1722) and C.P.E. Bach (1714-1788) "occasionally transferred [recitative style] to instrumental music, sometimes producing an effect of inarticulate instruments striving to speak" in the 17th and

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[14] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Letter on French Music," in *Source Readings in Music History*. Rev. ed., Oliver Strunk, ed., (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1998), 904.

[15] Mancini, *Reflections*, 871.

[16] Joseph Machlis and Kristine Forney, *The Enjoyment of Music* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 43.

18th centuries.[17] The desire to model the human voice seems only natural due to the immense amount of expression and emotion contained in vocal utterances.

Emotional Content and Melodic Contour of Speech

Linguists assert that there are "two kinds of data [in an utterance] – the words and syntax, and the 'tone of voice'…[and] that the latter information is considered more important."[18] This is most easily observed when thinking about the way interrogatives differ tonally from simple declarative sentences. Taking a simple sentence such as "We need food" and comparing it to the interrogative version "We need food?" shows the common occurrence of the melodic contour rising at the end of the sentence. Neuroscientist Claire Tang shows in her research that a group of neurons within the brain indeed reacts independently to

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[17] Don Michael Randel, *New Harvard*, s.v. "Recitative."

[18] Howard R. Martin, "The Prosodic Components of Speech Melody," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67, 1 (1981): 81, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638109383553.

the melodic contour of speech and not the actual syllables or semantic

implications.[19]

The melodic contour of speech fragments has long been an area of

interest to composers. The Czech composer, Leoš Janáček (1854-1928), was

intensely interested in speech melody and documented his ideas on speech-

melody theory, producing more than ninety printed documents over the span of

approximately forty-three years.[20] Paul Wingfield writes that Janáček believed

> …the spoken word itself comprises four interconnected components:
> speed of delivery, register, rhythm and intonation. The precise
> combination of these elements making up an individual utterance is
> determined not only by the actual words of and the emotion behind that
> utterance, but also by the nature and mood of the person (if any) to whom
> it is spoken, and by environmental factors such as place, time, state of the
> light and prevailing temperature.[21]

Janáček's ideas on speech melodies being affected by a person's mood and

environment are also echoed by modern composer Scott Johnson (b. 1952).[22]

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[19]C. Tang, L.S. Hamilton, and E.F. Chang, "Intonational Speech Prosody
Encoding in the Human Auditory Cortex," *Science*, 357, no. 6353 (August 2017):
797-801, https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aam8577.

[20] Paul Wingfield, "Janáček's Speech-Melody Theory in Concept and
Practice," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4, no. 3 (November 1992): 281-301.

[21] Ibid., 282.

[22] Oteri, "The Cultural Version of DNA Mixing."

Unsurprisingly, other composers tend to believe just the same. Similar in relation to Janáček's beliefs, Paul Brody (b. 1961) states that it is a "more emotional, heartfelt response which leads to a better composition."[23] Jacob TV believes that "When people get emotional, the musical quality of their speech is often increasing."[24] In the interview I conducted with Jacob TV, he also alludes to this: "If there would be more excitement in these voices like people having sorrow or angry people or aggressive people or people in all kinds of emotional situations, then you would have more melody, you will have more rhythm, etc."[25]

Janáček habitually transcribed the speech of those around him. He called these bits of recorded speech *nápěvky mluvy*, which translates roughly to "melodies of speech" or "speech tunelets." However, there does not seem to be any concrete proof that Janáček actually utilized these in any of his vocal works;

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[23] Kevin Barz, "Paul Brody on Speech-Melody Composition," video, 12:04, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GN98KmyoFIc.

[24] Andrea Aguzzi, "Avant Pop Composition: Grab It! The Music of Jacob Ter Veldhuis on #NEUGUITARS #BLOG," NeuGuitars, February 15, 2021, https://neuguitars.com/2021/02/15/avant-pop-composition-grab-it-the-music-of-jacob-ter-veldhuis-on-neuguitars-blog/.

[25] Jacob TV, interview by author, online, January 24, 2022.

Paul Christiansen believes he was instead "sharpening his ear and concentrating on the melodious aspects of his language."[26] Janáček's preoccupation with notating human speech was so pronounced that he transcribed his daughter's dying words as she drew upon her last breaths (see Fig. 2.1).

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[26] Paul Christiansen, "The Meaning of Speech Melody for Leoš Janaček," Journal of Musicological Research 23 (2004): 241–63.

Poslední slova mojí ubohé Olgy
ležela na pohovce

*The last words and sighs of my poor Olga
lying on the sofa*

Ptám se jí, jestli ji něco bolí?
Ne prý, má jen úzkost.

*I ask her if anything hurts?
She says no, she's just anxious.*

1.

lhavě: já ne - chci   u   - mřít,   já   chci   žít!

She is lying: I don't want to die, I want to live!

2.

ta-   ko   -vý   strach!

Such fear!

,,ubráním se!"

"I will resist it!"

„Já jsem si vzpomněla, že mám umřit"

"I just remembered that I am supposed to die"

3.

u-mřu,   u   - mřu

I am dying, I am dying

Figure 2.1 - Janáček's Transcription of Olga Janácek's Dying Words[27]

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[27] Ibid., 256.

Not only do the melodic contours of speech seem to convey emotion, there also seems to be a connection between major and minor-mode tone collections and speech utterances spoken within particular emotional states. Spectral analysis experiments have revealed that tonal collections in major are more closely associated with speech in an excited state, and that minor collections are reflective of speech in a more subdued state.[28] Technological advancements of the 20th century would finally allow for faithful reproductions of the human voice and all of the raw emotion contained within.

Technological Advances, Rise of *Musique Concrète*, Speech as a Basis for Entire Compositions

Several compositional and technological advancements took place in the twentieth century that fostered the inclusion of and emphasis on speech in music. Early in the twentieth century, Arnold Schoenberg utilized a style of text-setting called *sprechstimme*. This is "the use of the voice midway between

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[28] Daniel L. Bowling, Kamraan Gill, Jonathan Choi, Joseph Prinze, and Dale Purves, "Major and Minor Music Compared to Excited and Subdued Speech," *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America* 127 (January 5, 2010), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1121/1.3268504.

speech and song."[29] *Sprechstimme* is often used for "creat[ing] exaggerated declamation," adding to dramatic tension and highlighting extreme states of emotion.[30] It would not be long after that recorded speech would make its way into musical compositions.

By the mid-twentieth century, more technologically advanced societies saw the advent of many crucial recording and audio production technologies. Pierre Schaeffer began to manipulate recorded sounds on shellac disc, founding the *musique concrète* movement in 1948. *Musique concrète* sourced sonic material from recordings of the real world: speech, natural and technological sounds, and instruments, all arranged in a sonic collage. The invention of magnetic tape during World War II also had a profound impact on the conception of new compositions as well as on the process of composing itself. Previous examples of musical mirroring of speech were either instrumental or vocal melodies shaped like speech. For the first time, the manipulation of recorded speech allowed speech *itself* to now be a viable source for sonic material. Snippets of speech make appearances in several *musique concrète* pieces of the 1950s. Pierre

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[29] *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*, s.v. "*Sprechstimme.*"

[30] Wright, *Listening,* 345.

Schaeffer and Pierre Henry's *Symphonie pour un homme seul* (1949-1950) and

Edgard Varèse's *Poème électronique* (1958), for example, make use of

vocalizations in the construction of their sound worlds. A pioneer of the

technique of speech melody, Steve Reich (b. 1936) produced early phase works

such as *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966). Reich's early tape pieces

were founded on the principles of phasing and music as a gradual process.

Phasing involves two or more voices beginning together synchronously and, over

time, slowly moving out of sync. This act of multiple voices moving out of sync

creates a gradual process of producing various differentiations of melody,

harmony, and rhythm over time. Though these early Reich works utilize speech,

they are solely grounded in speech with tape loops, featuring no accompanying

instrumentation. It would still be some time, however, before recorded speech

fragments coupled with instruments doubling or accompanying the speech

formed the basis for entire compositions.

Although speech had been an important part of music since its inception,

it was not until the 1980s that speech sources began providing melodic,

harmonic, and rhythmic impetus for entire compositions. Several late

twentieth-century composers had a profound impact on the development of

speech-melody composition. Scott Johnson is often credited with developing

speech melody; he defines it as "taking a fragment of recorded speech and

Approximating it with music notes."[31]

Johnson pioneered this new technique with his work *John Somebody*

(1980-82) for electric guitar and tape, on which were recordings of fragments of

speech, electronics, additional electric guitars, winds, and percussion. Inspired

by dance music and rock and roll, *John Somebody* was the first composition in the

era of recorded music to derive melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic content fully

generated from speech material. For *John Somebody*" Johnson "went over to a

friend's house and had her call someone up on the phone, and [he] recorded her

side of the conversation."[32] Listening back to the recording, Johnson realized the

speech was quite melodic, and "[he] realized...these sound really good on

guitar...so [he] wrote them down."[33] These transcriptions are melodic and

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[31] Jonathan Maltman and Lindsay Vickery, "The Foundations of Speech Melody Composition and the Dawn of the Digital Music Era," Paper presented at the Australasian Computer Music Conference 2018, Edith Cowan University, December 6-9, 2018.

[32] Oteri, "The Cultural Version of DNA Mixing."

[33] Ibid., 22.

rhythmic approximations (see Fig.2.2). The "pitches of speech are rarely stable

or exact…but when surrounded by instrumental doubling…the power of

suggestion will create a strong sense that the approximate rhythms and pitches

of the speech are in time and in tune."[34]

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[34] Scott Johnson, "John Somebody," ScottJohnsonComposer, accessed February 11, 2021, https://scottjohnsoncomposer.com/compositions/johnsomebody.html.

Figure 2.2 - Scott Johnson's Sketches for *John Somebody*[35]

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[35] Oteri, "The Cultural Version of DNA Mixing."

Johnson says, "although in some of those early concrète things the voices appeared within a pitched context, they didn't do the transcription thing...transcribing the pitches and turning it into instrumental music."[36] Johnson believes this technique provided "rigorous compositional techniques [but] still allowed him to reference popular culture."[37] He has also noted that working with speech melody advanced his harmonic palette as he was having to modulate constantly, "[leading] to harmonic events that [he] might not have otherwise come up with."[38] Johnson comments, much like Janacek did many years earlier, that people's moods affect their speech patterns. He says that "[he] got better melodies due to people's nervousness."[39] This ability to reference pop culture and truly capture the moods of the individuals speaking lends a documentary nature to speech melody, making it one of the foremost reasons why composers choose to work with speech as a basis for entire compositions.

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[36] Oteri, "The Cultural Version of DNA Mixing."

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

Documentary Nature of Speech Melody, Compositional Approaches, and

Narrative

Many composers believe that the documentary nature of working with

speech melodies is one of the most important aspects of this technique. Reich

believes that "The *only* way to deal with events like this, in [his] view…is to go to

the documentary sources that participated in that event…and the tone of voice,

the speech melody, contains within it the *true* intensity of the event, not a

dramatization thereof, not a fantasy thereof, but a retelling of a witness."[40]

Cathy Lane writes that in her music the "main function of the spoken word

material is as a signifier to historical authenticity, a voice of authority or

verité…it signifies a witness and it is a carrier of the past."[41] Even in the interview

I conducted with Jacob TV, he comments that "the beauty is the reality of life

and I don't want to touch that. I want to preserve the reality."[42]

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[40] Music Weekly Podcast, "Steve Reich," produced by Scott Cawley, The Guardian, August 12, 2011, podcast, audio, 10'53''-11'-55'' https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/audio/2011/aug/12/music-weekly-steve-reich-audio.

[41] Cathy Lane, "Voices from the Past: Compositional Approaches to Using Recorded Speech," *Organised Sound* 11, no. 1 (2006): 9.

[42] Jacob TV, interview by author, online, January 24, 2022.

Reich began to experiment with recorded speech, working with tape in his

works *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966), "…desir[ing] to tell stories of

real people, and the effects the world had on them."[43] Unlike Reich's early tape

pieces, he later worked with purely digital means via sampling techniques. Reich

launched the use of this speech-melody technique into the public eye with his

1988 work *Different Trains*, for which he used the recorded speech of Holocaust

survivors as the basis of his composition. In *Different Trains*, "the recorded

speech melody formed the basis for melodic material to be played by the

strings," merging speech as a sonic material with instrumental concert

tradition.[44] It was at this moment that "the unity between the speech melody

and the music became complete," according to Reich.[45] Since then, the technique

of speech-melody compositions has grown exponentially and is exemplified by

such notable composers as Jacob TV (b. 1951), Paul Brody (b. 1961), and Robert

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[43] Maltman and Vickery, "The Foundations of Speech Melody," 34.

[44] Steve Reich, *Writings on Music: 1965-2000,* ed. Paul Hillier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 198.

[45] Ibid., 198.

Davidson (b. 1965), as well as Reich and Johnson, who are both still working in this field as of this writing.

Maarten Beirens highlights the compositional process of Reich as illuminated by personal journals.[46] Beirens also discusses in great detail the structural organization of Reich's seminal works *The Cave* and *Different Trains*. He differentiates between a narrative structure and a harmonic structure. The narrative structure begins with the selection of speech fragments that provide the melody and narrative drama. Beirens writes that the harmonic structure in *Different Trains* was not readily apparent to Reich and goes on to note how the composer struggled with how best to set the sampled voices. Much like Johnson's work, the harmonic language on display demanded creative fluency and intelligent problem solving, as Reich would often require frequent shifts of harmony and tonal centers of gravity to navigate the demands of the speech melodies (see Fig. 2.3).

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[46] Sumanth Gopinath and Pwyll ap Siôn, eds., *Rethinking Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 75-92.
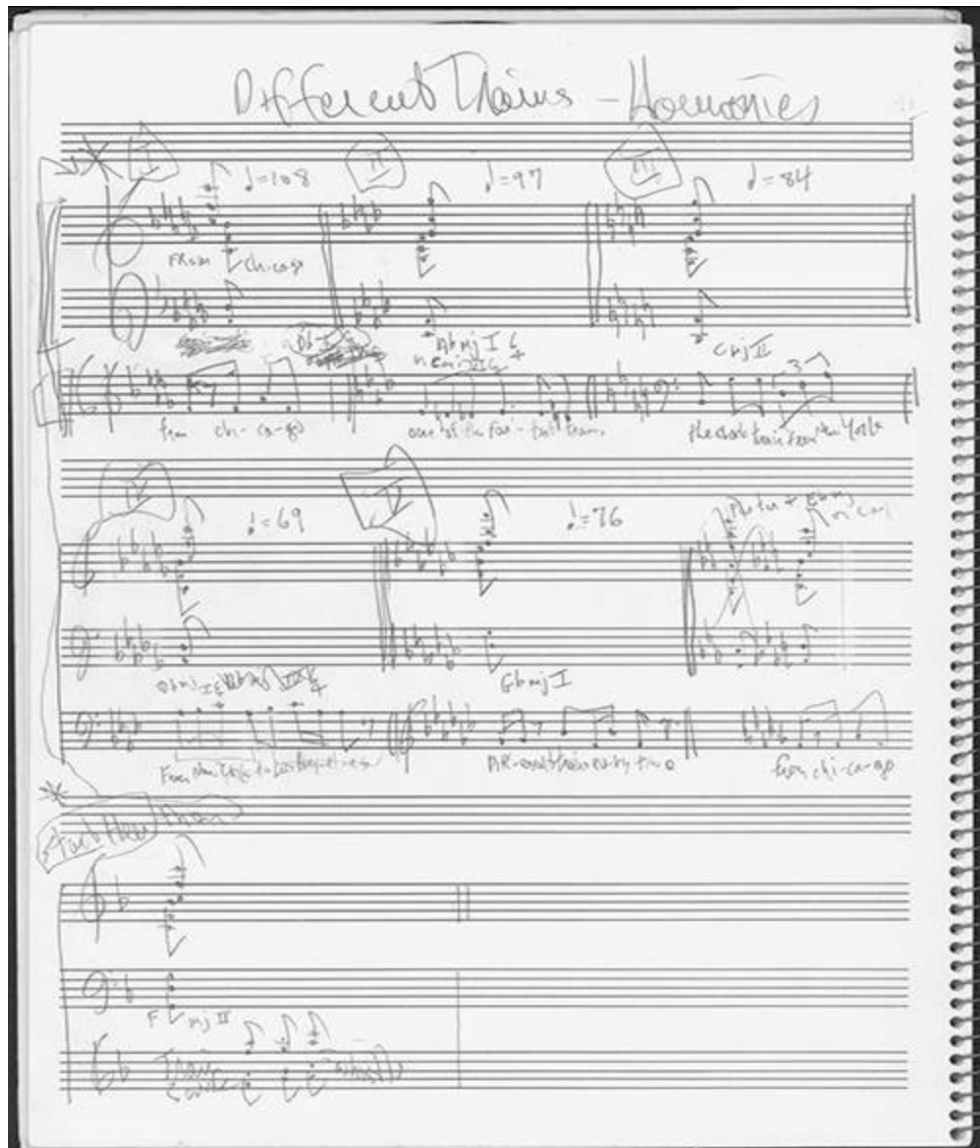
Figure 2.3 - Steve Reich Sketches for *Different Trains*[47]

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[47] "Steve Reich: Different Trains (1988)," Music in the Holocaust, May 17, 2012,
https://musicintheholocaust.org/2012/05/17/steve-reich-different-trains-1988/.

Continuing in regard to compositional processes, Joanna Miklaszewska believes that two techniques are absolutely central to any works that utilize speech melody. Miklaszewska writes that speech-melody works incorporate the "repetitions of a spoken phrase (with its melody doubled simultaneously by an instrument)...[and] repeated instrumental imitation of the melody of this phrase." She believes these are at the heart of Reich's speech-melody works.[48] Other ways in which speech melody may be manipulated are as follows.

Cathy Lane lists nineteen compositional techniques used in spoken word work.[49] For the sake of brevity, the following list includes only those that feature heavily in works analyzed in the subsequent chapter.

1. "Dissolution of semantic meaning through deconstruction. Words are split into their component syllables or smaller units."

2. "Accumulation of meaning by sonic association. Semantic meaning of words is reinforced by the additional use of other sounds relating to the text."

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[48] Joanna Miklaszewska, "Contemporary Music Documenting the Nazi Terror: Steve Reich's *Different Trains*," *Polish Journal of the Arts and Culture,* No. 8 (May 2013): 23.

[49] Lane, "Voices from the Past," 5-6.

3. "Accumulation of meaning through performance. Human expression is the focus of the work and the dramatic narrative."

4. "Accumulation of meaning by structural association. Meaning is reinforced by the way that the text is manipulated and structured."

5. "Accumulation of meaning by massing of voices or montage."

6. "Melodic or rhythmic extraction, translation and elaboration. The melodies or rhythms of the spoken word are extracted and taken up by other elements in the work."

7. "Nonsense juxtaposition and permutation including the inventing of new words."

8. "Computer-generated and synthesized speech."

Having established a general overview of speech melody and some common parameters for the use of speech-melody fragments, the next chapter turns to examining several relatively modern works for various ensembles (composed between 2005-2014) that utilize speech-melody fragments as the basis for their construction.

CHAPTER THREE: ANALYSES OF *ABLE TO BE* (2005)*, WTC 9/11* (2010)*,*

AND *NOT NOW, NOT EVER!* (2014)

Chapter three focuses on the analysis of three recent (2005-2014) works featuring speech melody as the basis for the entire composition. Analysis focuses on the various ways speech melodies can be manipulated to create narrative structure or to enhance the narrative implicit within the speech melody itself.

JACOB TV - *ABLE TO BE* (2005)

Able to Be was composed by Dutch composer Jacob TV in response to a commission by Elektra. This piece is structured in eight sections, is twelve minutes in duration and is written for soprano, violin, flute, percussion, and soundtrack. The composer describes the work as an opera in miniature, with live actors intended to portray the role of Marilyn Monroe on stage. TV states that it was written "in an attempt to show something of the real person behind the icon."[50]

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[50] Jacob TV, *Able to Be* (Doorn, The Netherlands, 2005).

In the score for *Able to Be,* composer TV notes that "The soundtrack contains two sorts of speech: the real voice of [Marilyn Monroe] from audio recorded interviews, quotations from published interviews with Marilyn reproduced by an artificial voice."[51] TV also notes that "the soprano part represents both the ego and the alter ego of [Marilyn Monroe]."[52] The prominent compositional techniques used in this work include: the dissolution of semantic meaning, harmonic generation from speech-melody sources, metric displacement, use of mixed and asymmetrical meters, structural association, nonsense juxtaposition of the spoken word, accumulation of meaning through performance, and narrative structure. I analyze how these elements create the narrative structure presented; one which highlights the "real" and its juxtaposition with the "artificial."

The work opens with the speech-melody fragment of the nonsense word "petidelee," (see Fig. 3.1). This opening is quite playful in character and can be seen as perhaps being representative of Norma Jeane Mortenson in her youthful innocence before her transformation into Marilyn Monroe.

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[51] TV, *Able to Be*.

[52] Ibid.

Figure 3.1 - TV, "Petidelee" Speech Fragment

The opening measures establish an ostinato featuring single-syllable speech fragments used percussively (see fig. 3.2). This illustrates the technique Cathy Lane has described as the "dissolution of semantic meaning through deconstruction. Words are split into their component syllables or smaller units and used acousmatically." This ostinato is sourced from recordings of Marilyn, which TV reduced to single-syllable fragments, completely obliterating any semantic meaning the speech may have contained. This speech deconstruction can also be viewed as a metaphor for the deconstruction of Norma Jeane. The structure of the work evokes the chronology of her life, readying herself for her transformation from Norma Jeane Mortenson into her alter ego Marilyn Monroe.
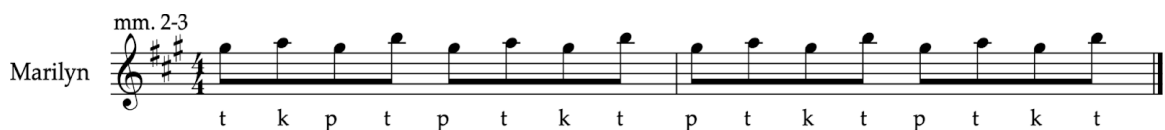
Figure 3.2 - TV, Opening Ostinato Figure

In order to adopt her new persona, Norma Jeane Mortensen has to say goodbye to love and in mm. 10-11, Marilyn says "Bye bye, love love," (see Fig. 3.3). She does not love herself and thus adopts a new identity in order to restructure her life around this new persona. Ironically, she will (perhaps) also be unable to be loved truly, as those who attempt to love her are in love with the false identity of Marilyn and not the real individual. There follows in m. 19 a descending glissando that may represent her initial descent into the chaotic world and persona of Marilyn Monroe (see Fig. 3.4).

Figure 3.3 - TV, "Bye bye, love love" Speech Fragment
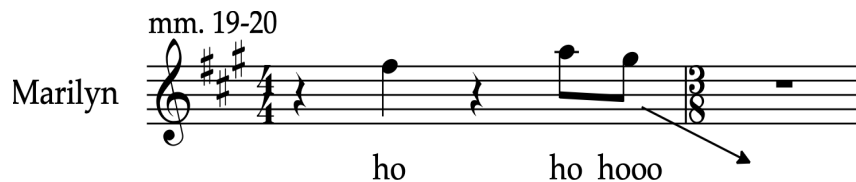
Figure 3.4 - TV Descending Glissando

In mm. 24-36, Marilyn states "My spine turns to custard I get goose pimply all over," (see Fig. 3.5). The pitch content of this speech fragment (E, F#, B, G), is also the impetus for harmonic material and accompanying lines.

Figure 3.5 - TV, Impetus for Accompaniment

Given this melody and its pitch content (E, F#, B, G), these notes are utilized almost exclusively by the flute, marimba, and violin in the same measures, mm. 24-28 (see Fig. 3.6). The only notes that may be considered out of place by way of not being generated from this speech melody are the D naturals found briefly in the flute and marimba part.

Figure 3.6 - TV, Accompaniment Generated by Speech-Melody Content

Another common compositional tool utilized within *Able to Be*, and found frequently when dealing with speech melody, is that of metric displacement. Varying the metric placement of a melody changes perception of a melody and provides interest in what would otherwise be rather static melodic speech motives. In m. 29, an artificial voice presents the speech melody "It was a mistake…my mother didn't want to have me" (see Fig. 3.7). This corresponds with Cathy Lane's compositional approach (from her taxonomy of compositional approaches to working with recorded speech) of utilizing computer generated or

synthesized speech and also has interesting narrative implications that will be examined shortly. This same fragment appears again in m. 34 (see Fig. 3.7), this time metrically displaced. Instead of appearing on the second 16th note of beat two, it is displaced to now appear on the last 16th note of beat three.

Figure 3.7 - TV, Metric Displacement of "It Was a Mistake"

This type of metric displacement appears again in mm. 74 and 85 (see Fig. 3.8) as a means of providing variation and also a sense of uncertainty by subverting expectations of where the phrase will fall. The phrase "There was this movie house and I saw my name in lights" makes its initial appearance in mm. 74-75, first entering on the last 16th note of beat one. Later, it is displaced to appear at the beginning of beat one (mm. 85-86).
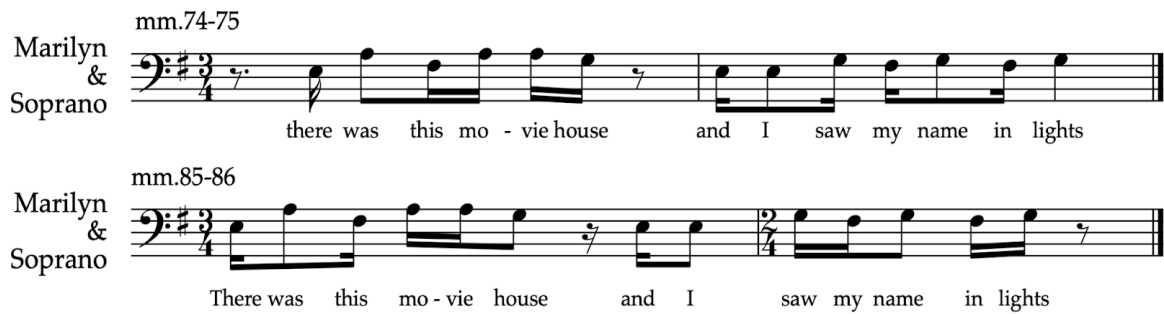
Figure 3.8 - TV, Metric Displacement of "There Was this Movie House"

Jacob TV uses mixed meter and asymmetrical meter to create a "sense of unevenness, and irregularity."[53] Composers tend to utilize frequently changing meters as a means to extend or shorten thematic fragments through elision. Thematic extension provided by mixed meters is evident in the violin part in mm. 2-5 (see Fig. 3.9).
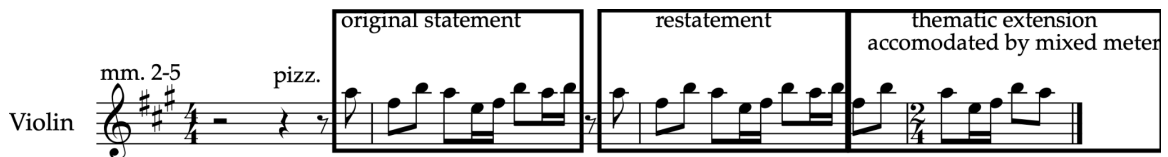
Figure 3.9 - TV, Thematic Extension by Means of Mixed Meter

In mm. 59-66, Jacob TV uses mixed meters frequently, producing a sense of irregularity, unevenness, and unpredictability (see Fig. 3.10). Despite this

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[53] Roig-Francoli, *Post-Tonal*, 246.

sense of unevenness, cohesion is provided by the consistent underlying pulse

with the sixteenth note remaining constant.
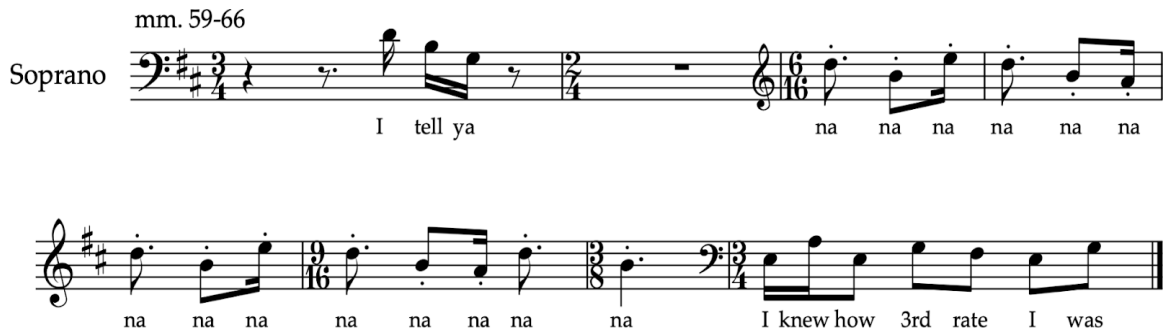
Figure 3.10 - TV, Mixed Meter

In regard to readings of musical narrative within works, Byron Almén

writes, "It is the observer that ultimately makes connections between events.

There can be no unequivocally true or false explanations, only more or less

convincing ones."[54] Speech melodies themselves certainly contain individualized

threads of narrative, but the order in which they are presented within a work can

create a larger, overarching narrative structure designed by the composer, not

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[54] Byron Almén, "Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Music Theory* 47, no. 1 (2003): 7. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041082.

those individuals who originally uttered the phrase. Lane writes about the "accumulation of meaning by structural association," how meaning is reinforced by the way that the text is manipulated and structured.[55] The work opens with the nonsense word "petidelee" and is followed by statements made by a computer-generated voice reproducing phrases from printed interviews with Marilyn. These phrases include: "It was a mistake, my mother didn't want to have me," "I guess she never wanted me," "I probably got in her way," "I still wish she had wanted me," "I could actually feel my lack of talent," and "I knew how third rate I was." The structure of this work represents the chronology of Marilyn's life, as well as a metaphor for the "real" versus the "artificial."

The statements made by Marilyn herself may represent the "real"—real personalities with real desires and real aspirations—whereas fragments of speech reproduced via computer may represent the "artificial"—artificial beliefs, artificial feelings, and an artificial alter ego. The preceding computer-generated statements are all founded in negativity and self-doubt—the words of someone seemingly suffering from imposter syndrome. *Medical News Today* states that people with imposter syndrome have a sense of "being a fraud, fear of being

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[55] Lane, "Voices from the Past," 6.

discovered, [and] difficulty internalizing their success."[56] This negative

self-doubt is often not founded in truth, so this artificiality of self-doubt gives

rise to an artificial persona to compensate. Thus Marilyn Monroe is born from

Norma Jeane Mortenson.

Continuing to trace the narrative arc of *Able to Be* as a reflection of

Marilyn's life, the next few lines, again spoken via computer generation, are

"There was this movie house and I saw my name in lights and it was all very

strange to me." At this point in her life, Marilyn has become a star, but her new

life is based upon artifice that is itself rooted within the artifice of Hollywood.

The following section presents speech fragments spoken by Marilyn herself that

may represent her true hopes and desires as an actress, and honestly depict her

mourning her previous life. She says "What I would like to accomplish, I would

like to…be a good actress." She states that she is "grateful for everything that's

happened" while simultaneously lamenting her inability to be her true self. She

goes on to say "You do in a way miss sometimes…just being able to be

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[56] Jennifer Litner, "How to handle impostor syndrome," *Medical News Today*, Updated on September 29, 2020, https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/321730#symptoms.

completely yourself in some place and people just know you as another human being."

As the work progresses, the statements become more and more incoherent, often utilizing nonsense syllables within a rather chaotic musical setting. Lane identifies "nonsense juxtaposition and permutation" as one of the compositional techniques used in spoken word work.[57] The composer also simulates a stuttering effect by repeating the same word several times (see Fig. 3.11). This effect parallels Monroe's claim that she developed a stutter due to her trauma. Her stuttering "would affect her life in her final days…the troubled actress was under so much stress from her personal life, not to mention the abuse of prescription drugs, that her stuttering returned, sometimes forcing her to not be able to deliver her lines at all."[58]
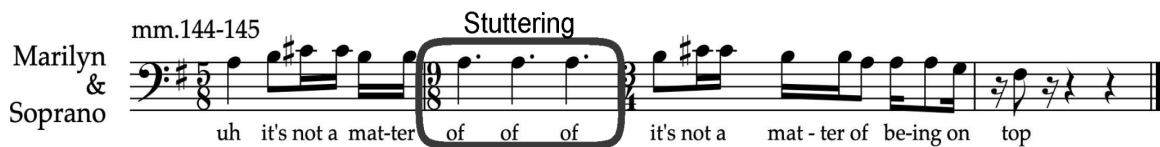
Figure 3.11 - TV, Stuttering Imitation

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[57] Lane, "Voices from the Past," 6.

[58] Edward S. Herrington, "Marilyn Monroe," The Stuttering Foundation, https://www.stutteringhelp.org/famous-people/marilyn-monroe.

Marilyn, as voiced by computer generation, laments the fact that she believes "it would be easier to avoid old age…to die young…but then you'd never complete your life, would you?" These appear to be artificial thoughts, presented by an artificial Marilyn who even questions the validity of such thoughts at the end of this statement. Perhaps this is Norma Jeane trying to break through the surface and return to the "real."

Meaning can be enhanced by various compositional tools and the way speech melodies are presented and juxtaposed with one another, but it can also be enhanced via the medium in which an artwork is presented. Cathy Lane also writes about the "accumulation of meaning through performance." As noted in the introduction, Jacob TV describes the work as a "mini opera" and fully intends for it to be performed on stage with a live actor portraying the role of Marilyn, thus adding new dimensions of meaning via the intricacies and emotion that a stage actor can bring to the already impactful speech fragments that have been chosen.

Much like Marilyn in her own life, the work ultimately leads to an explosive finale. The trajectory of the work parallels the narrative of Norma Jeane Mortenson, her transformation into Marilyn Monroe, and her ultimate

downfall. Through "meaning [being] reinforced by the way that the text is manipulated and structured," and the use of recorded speech fragments of Mariliyn Monroe juxtaposed with computer-generated voice fragments, Jacob TV creates a damning portrayal of the "real" versus the insincerity and the artifice of fame and Hollywood.

STEVE REICH - *WTC 9/11* (2010)

Much like *Different Trains*, Steve Reich's *WTC 9/11* utilizes speech melody to document historical events, specifically the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. It was an event that resulted in the loss of nearly three thousand lives—a tragedy that the entire world watched unfold and has since never forgotten. Through archival recordings of first responders on that fateful day made available within the public domain and interviews with friends and neighbors conducted by the composer himself, Reich crafts an intimate, horrifying, and tragic work of documentary music recounting the events of that day.

WTC 9/11 was published in 2010 in response to a commission for the Kronos Quartet. It was written for string quartet and pre-recorded voices and

strings or three string quartets and pre-recorded voices. The work is in three continuous movements (9/11/01, 2010, and WTC) and lasts fifteen and one-half minutes. The main idea for the compositional approach utilized in this work originated with Reich in 1973. He had an idea for what he calls "stop action" sound, a technique wherein he "elongate[s] the speaker's final vowels or consonants" to build up the harmonies throughout his work.[59] Reich also wished to use this as a means of "connecting one person to another - harmonically."[60] This technique is first clearly evident in mm. 12-17 (see Fig. 3.12a). Reich adds a sustained D natural to the previously established chord halfway through beat two in m. 13 in the statement of "L.A." Not soon after, he adds a B♭ to this chord on the offbeat of beat two, on the word "south" in m. 17. Reich uses this technique throughout the work as a way of building up new harmonies. Another example of this is taken from mm. 477-478 (see Fig. 3.12b). Reich adds a C natural to the previously established harmony on the entrance of the word 'lives.

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[59] Steve Reich, *WTC 9/11* for String Quartet and pre-recorded Voices and Strings or Three String Quartets and pre-recorded Voices, (New York: Hendon Music Inc., 2010).

[60] Ibid.

Figure 3.12 (a) - Reich, "Stop Action" Sound

Figure 3.12 (b) - Reich, "Stop Action" Sound

Reich also builds harmonies by composing canonic textures. Lane writes

that meaning can be "reinforced by the way that different voices come in saying

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either the same words or different things which build up and reinforce a total

picture."[61] In the notes that precede the score for *WTC 9/11*, Reich discusses the

Hebrew funeral practice of *Shmira* in which people "[sit] near the body and

[recite] Psalms or Biblical passages" from after death until the body can be laid

to rest.[62] These passages are layered and repeated in canon to build up the

harmonies (see Fig. 3.13). The final act in Reich's narrative design sees the

faithful brought to their knees in collective prayer.

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[61] Lane, "Voices from the Past," 6.

[62] Reich, "WTC 9/11."

Figure 3.13 - Reich, Canonic Textures

Reich incorporates mixed and asymmetrical meters in the first two movements (see Fig. 3.14), providing a sense of instability and unpredictability, further emphasizing the narrative events as they unfold. Cohesion is maintained through the frequently changing meters by an unwavering, underlying pulse. It is likely no accident that the use of mixed and asymmetrical meters is absent in

the third movement. The first two movements deal directly with the horrifying

events of that day, through audio recordings of people as they experienced them

or via individuals recalling the events of that day from the depths of their

memory. The sense of unease and uncertainty they felt is clearly paralleled

through the use of mixed and asymmetrical meters. The third movement,

however, consists mostly of the recitation of prayer and Psalms, where the use of

such metrical techniques would not quite fit given the subject matter.
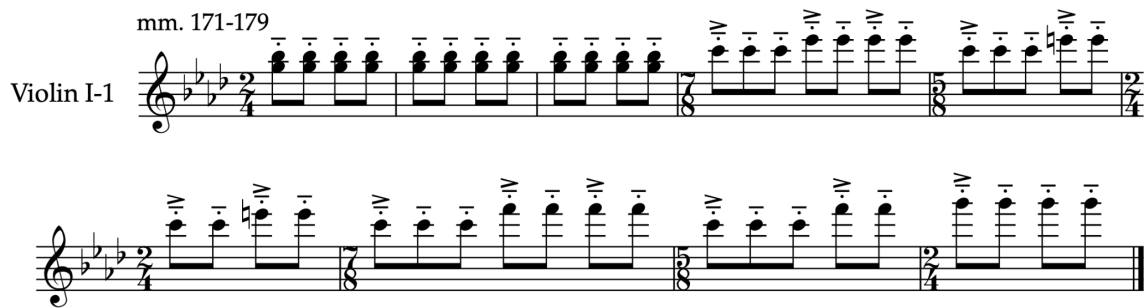
Figure 3.14 - Reich, Mixed/Asymmetrical Meter

Celia Casey makes it clear that, from the start, Reich possessed

"precompositional aims related to content and style, which he achieved through

directing," much in the same way a film director edits and orders a sequence of

images.[63] Not only did his technique of "stop action" sound and the ordering of speech fragments allow him to exert directorial control over the content of the work to shape the narrative, the composer had a list of specific questions he asked interviewees in the hopes of obtaining content worthy of molding into a work of art. For the third movement, Reich also "provided nine interviewees with prepared scriptural readings and psalms."[64]

Of course, meaning is enhanced through structural association, but this work also utilizes what Lane describes as "sonic association...[wherein] meaning of words is reinforced by the additional use of other sounds relating to the text, or by morphologically similar material."[65] Perhaps the most striking utilization of this technique is at the very outset of the work. *WTC 9/11* begins with a howler tone, the sound a phone makes when it has been disconnected. From the opening moment, the disconnected phone line sound creates a sense of urgency that is doubled by the strings and heightened by adding to it a minor second harmony. This distressing sound highlights the uncertainty of those events and

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[63] Sumanth Gopinath and Pwyll ap Siôn, eds., *Rethinking Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 159-176.

[64] Ibid.,166.

[65] Lane, "Voices from the Past," 5.

further emphasizes the fact that communication systems were quite simply overwhelmed on that fateful day.

Another spoken-word technique that Lane describes is "melodic or rhythmic extraction, translation and elaboration. The melodies or rhythms of the spoken word are extracted and taken up by other elements in the work."[66] Reich manipulates speech samples with the strings through exact imitation (see Fig. 3.15), fragmentation, or augmentation/diminution (see Fig. 3.16). In most cases, speech melodies initially appear in exact imitation or in a call and response exchange, but there are some instances in which Reich foreshadows speech melody by presenting the melody first without the accompanying speech fragment (see Fig. 3.17), before introducing the speech melody later (see Fig. 3.18)

Figure 3.15 - Reich, Exact Imitation

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[66] Lane, "Voices from the Past," 6.

mm. 50-51

Cello & Speech

Bos - ton
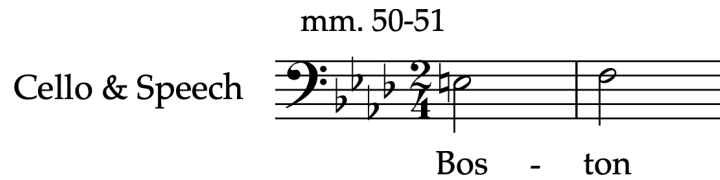
Figure 3.16 - Reich, Fragmentation and Augmentation

m. 576

Cello

Figure 3.17 - Reich, Foreshadowing Speech Fragments

m. 583

Cello & Speech

To - tal - ly si - lent

Figure 3.18 - Reich, Realization of Speech Melody

To summarize, Steve Reich makes use of various compositional techniques to help present a narrative account of the events of September 11, 2001; "stop action" sound, canon, mixed and asymmetrical meter, structural and sonic associations, imitation, fragmentation, augmentation, and diminution. Very much like a film director, the composer exerts compositional control and

directorial shaping to craft a cohesive narratological retelling of those events. One last narrative tool utilized by Reich in *WTC 9/11* is the idea of a cyclical narrative. The piece begins and ends with the sounding of howler tones, a signification that something is not quite right. Despite this cyclic form, the world is not left unchanged. The events of 9/11 have molded the new world we now inhabit, a reality that an interviewee states was soon to be "the world to come," giving double meaning to the title *WTC 9/11*.[67] Reich places the final punctuation mark on his narrative: a disconsolate view of the cyclical nature of violence and the inevitable large-scale violent acts that continue to shape our reality.

ROBERT DAVIDSON - *NOT NOW, NOT EVER* (2014)

Composer Robert Davidson writes that his music is mostly centered around "telling stories" and states "when we listen to the music behind the words, we can get inside someone's emotions and deeper unspoken meanings."[68] *Not Now, Not Ever!* is a 4'15'' choral setting of a now-famous speech from

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[67] Reich, "WTC 9/11."

[68] Robert Davidson, "Multimedia Works," Robert Davidson Composer, https://www.robertdavidson.org/multimedia.

Australia's former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, in which she passionately rails against misogyny within government. Davidson's intention with what he calls "voice portraits" is to "enhance perception of the melody and rhythm often unnoticed."[69]

A primary focus of any text setting is that of declamation, "the relation between verbal stress and melodic accent."[70] Davidson expertly crafts his work to accommodate such textual, syllabic, and melodic accents in a manner that seems completely natural.

From the very opening, there is a clear utilization of declamation in action. The composer sets the following speech fragment (see Fig. 3.19):

The **ques**-tion is that the **mo**-tion be a-**greed** to.

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[69] Ibid.

[70] *The Norton/Grove Concise Encyclopedia of Music*, s.v. "Declamation."

Figure 3.19 - Davidson, Declamation

Figure 3.19 illustrates how Davidson accommodates the syllabic

accentuations, as well as the melodic accentuations, of the speech melody. The

anacrusis allows the strong syllable (and highest point of the initial melody) of

"**ques**-tion" to coincide with the downbeat. The same is true of the strong

syllabic emphasis on the word "**mo**-tion," again ensuring that it coincides with a strong beat in measure two.

Davidson employs mixed meters, extending the phrase and accomodating rhythms to allow the natural melodic accent on the word "not" to coincide with metrically stronger beats (see Fig. 3.20). The emphasis here is heightened both by the nature of the word "not" being a tonic accent—that is, being higher registrally than the other pitches in the melody—as well as being supported by the full choir accompanying in homorhythm. This repetition underscores the defiance heard in Gillard's impassioned speech.

Figure 3.20 - Davidson, Declamation Ex. 2

Call and response further emphasizes that this communal act (in the context of this piece) may show that the community at large will not stand for these misogynist remarks (see Fig. 3.21). Not only is this emphasized by the choir, which picks up fragments from the speech and other members of

parliament, but the idea of community is reinforced by both the original video of
Gillard's speech in which parliament members are heard agreeing with Gillard
and the music video of this work in performance by Australian Voices where
cinematography places focus on the ensemble as a whole.[71]

Figure 3.21 - Davidson, Call and Response

[71] ABC News, "Julia Gillard's 'misogyny speech' in full (2012)," YouTube
video, October 9, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihd7ofrwQX0;
AustralianVoices, "Not Now, Not Ever! (Gillard Misogyny Speech)," YouTube
video, March 16, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tpavaM62Fgo.

When writing about compositional approaches to speech works, Lane writes of "the accumulation of meaning by massing of voices or montage."[72] Davidson reinforces meaning throughout the musical work by including shouts of "hear, hear!" and "order!" that are heard from parliament in the recording of Gillard's speech. This inclusion helps to enhance the narrative of an impassioned fight against misogyny, one that is fought at the individual level, but must also be fought at the communal level.

To summarize, Davidson enhances the narrative of the fight against misogyny through several means. Declamation, accents and mixed meters preserve the natural syllablic accentuations of the text. He also utilizes call and response to highlight the communal nature of the thematic elements at play (which are in turn supported by the music video of Australian Voices singing Davidson's work). Again, we can never be sure of a composer's intention, but this seems to be done to emphasize the communal aspect of such an important fight.

The previous chapter shows how varied compositional approaches to handling speech melody can help contribute to the narrative design of a composition. In the forthcoming chapters, I present the score for *A Soldier's*

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[72] Lane, "Voices from the Past," 6.

Story as well as examine how these techniques are implemented throughout the

course of the work.

CHAPTER FOUR: *A SOLDIER'S STORY*

Instrumentation:

Piccolo
2 Flutes
Oboe
4 Clarinets in Bb
Bass Clarinet
2 Alto Saxophones
Tenor Saxophone
Baritone Saxophone
Bassoon
4 French Horns
3 Trumpets in Bb
3 Tenor Trombones
Bass Trombone
Tuba
Timpani
3 Percussionists
Marimba
Vibraphone
Recorded Speech
Piano
Double Bass

Duration:

7 minutes and 07 seconds

A Soldier's Story

Kevin M. Cheek (b. 1985)

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CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF *A SOLDIER'S STORY*

I completed *A Soldier's Story* in March of 2022, though the impetus for the work can be traced back to 2016 during my undergraduate studies. It was at that time that I was introduced to the technique of speech melody via Steve Reich's *Different Trains* while attending a music composition seminar that focused on music of the 20th and 21st centuries. I was immediately fascinated by the use of recorded speech fragments to craft a compositional work. My entire life I have been drawn to narrative within various mediums, so speech melody seemed to me to be an amazing, and wholly original, blend of music and narrative. Works that make use of speech melody really pull the listener into the drama, filled with the honest and raw emotion of the spoken word.

I decided I would try something similar, with little knowledge that this would become one of the most challenging projects of my life from a musical and philosophical perspective. I interviewed ten veterans about the experiences they lived through during their time in service. These ranged from musicians and cooks to nurses and frontline warriors. The interview questions came from the Library of Congress Veterans History Project sample questions, of which I used

all of the questions provided during my interviews.[73] I collected many hours of

raw interview material that I then spent many weeks poring over. When

beginning this project, I did not initially have any idea as to what shape the final

piece would take, especially in regards to narrative. From veterans I interviewed,

I was left with hours of audio recordings. From these recordings, I tried to sift

through them and find speech fragments that fit all three of my criteria.

1. They had to be melodically interesting.

2. They had to be rhythmically interesting.

3. They had to be interesting from a narrative point of view.

I then partitioned these segments into a digital audio workstation and

went through the process of transcribing them, after which I had 62 extremely

interesting speech-melody fragments to work with (included in Appendix B).

Before I set pencil to paper to begin composing my work, I decided that I needed

to narrow my focus greatly and settled on choosing only a select few fragments

to work with as my raw material for the piece. I finally settled on the six speech

melodies (drawn from interviews with four individuals) ultimately used in the

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[73] Library of Congress, "Veterans History Project Sample Interview
Questions: General Questions," Library of Congress, April 25, 2018,
https://www.loc.gov/vets/kit-generalquestions.html.

piece: "Nine eleven had just happened," "Deployed overseas," "Nightly attacks," "I'm real sorry that your friend got killed," "We lost some guys," and "The war was always with me." I thought that these fragments of speech melody, presented in the order in which they appear, would create an interesting musical narrative that is reflective of the experiences of many members of our armed services, especially from those of my generation.

The phrase "Nine eleven had just happened" was pulled from an interview with a U.S. Army soldier. The interviewee stated that, like many, he was in high school when the twin towers were attacked. September 11, 2001 seemed to be the impetus for many men and women my age to enlist in the military, so I tried to make this section somewhat chaotic to reflect the events of that day. As a result, the texture is very thick with many contrapuntal lines, as well as mixed and asymmetrical meters contributing to the sense of chaos and uncertainty. Using this speech fragment seemed like an appropriate place to start the work.

The speech melody "Deployed overseas" originated from an interview with a flight medic. This individual was tasked with first responder duties. His daily goal was to ensure the safe arrival of wounded service members evacuated from combat zones, applying his medical knowledge to help the wounded as they

were flown out of areas of intense combat en route to the nearest hospital facility. Being deployed overseas to combat zones is a risk service members are aware of upon their enlistment. The speech melodies "deployed overseas" and "nightly attacks" highlight the risks these brave men and women face simply by signing up to serve. Not only is this risk apparent from the outset of service, but these experiences are also reflective of many of those that served and were subsequently deployed to combat areas where daily attacks were a way of life. I used the Stravinskian technique of juxtaposition, the "abrupt process of interruption," to further highlight the idea of uncertainty in the face of combat or remaining on standby to deploy at a moment's notice.[74] The sudden shift from one section to another without any notice or smooth transition is quite jarring and evocative.

The phrases "Nightly attacks" and "We lost some guys" were sourced from interviews with a high school friend of mine. We both graduated the same year and went into the Marine Corps roughly around the same time. This friend, however, was Marine Corps infantry and saw heavy fighting on the front lines,

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[74] Roig-Francoli, *Post-Tonal*, 31.

engaging in dozens of missions and raids on enemy strongholds. This gentleman received the Purple Heart for being wounded in action. I was always aware that he had gotten "blown up" during one of his tours. When I heard the news, and that he survived, my mind initially thought perhaps he was in a convoy that got struck by an improvised explosive device (I.E.D.). It was not until I conducted the interview with him that he shared the story with me and the fact that he literally stepped on an I.E.D. and lived to tell the story, suffering shrapnel damage to much of his body and face, resulting in the loss of vision in one eye. While not as dark musically as "I'm real sorry your friend got killed," the section "We lost some guys" contains one of the climactic moments of the entire piece, symbolizing the ultimate sacrifice an individual can make for their country and fellow service members. I also quote several other melodies here that I thought were fitting. Heard within the section "We lost some guys" are fragments of "Taps" and "Amazing Grace," the former being heard ubiquitously at military funerals and the latter heard at both military and civilian funerals. Also within this section, I quote the "Marines' Hymn" to honor my branch of service, those I served with, and friends who gave their life in service to the Marine Corps.

Finally, the phrases "I'm real sorry your friend got killed" and "The war

was always with me" originate from an interview conducted with a friend of

mine who was a high-ranking officer within the U.S. Army. This gentleman was a

nurse and directly oversaw the actions of a field hospital in a combat area,

leading a team of medical personnel and overseeing the hospital's operations. He

worked tirelessly to help the injured, and was subject to mortar fire from enemy

personnel. As a result of his service, he unfortunately suffers from PTSD and has

confided in me that music has saved his life. A stark reality of service is

confronting loss and risking one's own life. When introducing the speech melody

"I'm real sorry that your friend got killed," I knew I wanted to keep things sparse

texturally and utilize silence to underscore the somber seriousness of the

statement.

Seen in Fig. 5.1 are early harmonic sketches from just a handful of speech

melodies I was initially working with. Working with these speech melodies

proved to be quite challenging. I was forced to think quite creatively in terms of

harmony and accompaniment, as well as how to provide cohesion throughout a

work that could be considered mostly a series of disconnected musical vignettes.

A recurring theme works as connective tissue, linking various sections together.

Figure 5.1 - Cheek, Melodic Transcriptions and Harmonic Brainstorming

From a philosophical and psychological point of view, this piece was also quite challenging. How does one deal with these stories in a respectful manner that conveys them without trivializing them or turning them into kitsch? I had to navigate through some really emotionally taxing material, some of which found its way into the piece while other speech melodies did not make the cut for being far too graphic, despite the emotional heft they carried that would have added much deeper meaning to my work.

One particular speech melody absent from the work is one that will likely stay with me for a long time. One of the interviewees, a combat nurse, when talking about some people he served with, said that some had "used their nine millimeters for lipstick." While this is an incredibly powerful statement that shines a light on the veteran suicide epidemic, and was indeed a beautiful speech melody, I wrestled with the thought of including it for quite some time. Jacob TV, when speaking with me, said that "if you use [speech melodies] respectfully…you can turn [them] into a beautiful piece, so why not?"[75] I was unsure if I could include this particular speech fragment in a way that does

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[75] Jacob TV, interview by author, online, January 24, 2022.

justice to the semantic meaning of the phrase respectfully, ultimately deciding to leave it out.

A Soldier's Story is written for a concert band comprised of the following instrumentation: Piccolo, two flutes, oboe, four Bb clarinets, bass clarinet, two alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, baritone saxophone, bassoon, four french horns, three Bb trumpets, three tenor trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, three percussionists, marimba, vibraphone, recorded speech, piano, and double bass. The piece is in seven separate sections and runs for 7'07''.

Throughout the work, I used fragmentation and augmentation as a way to vary the speech melodies, as well as refer to them. The first instance of this is in m. 6 where I isolate the words "nine eleven" from the phrase "nine eleven had just happened" and metrically displace it to begin on the second half of beat two (see Fig. 5.2).

I do the same later in the A section, long after the initial introduction of the "nine eleven" motive and well into the development of section A; in measure 28, the horns and trumpets allude to the "nine eleven had just happened" motif by fragmenting it, stating "nine eleven" on the second half of beat two (see Fig. 5.2).

Figure 5.2(a) - Cheek, Fragmentation/Metric Displacement

Figure 5.2(b) - Cheek, Fragmentation/Metric Displacement

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Figure 5.2(c)- Cheek, Fragmentation/Metric Displacement

Another example of fragmentation comes in mm. 55-56. I introduce the phrase "nightly attacks" and immediately fragment it to emphasize the word "nightly," so the complete phrase becomes "nightly attacks, nightly, nightly attacks," (see Fig. 5.3). I do this for multiple reasons; to emphasize the semantic meaning of daily threats, as well as for declamatory purposes. Fragmenting the motive allows for the word "nightly" and the stronger, second syllable of "attacks" to fall on strong beats.

Figure 5.3- Cheek, "Nightly Attacks" Fragmentation

In regard to declamation, I place speech melodies metrically so that strong syllables or high points within a melody tend to appear on strong beats, much like in the following example. In mm. 45-47, an anacrusis highlights the natural syllabic stress of "de-**ployed**" in "deployed overseas," allowing it to coincide with a stronger beat (see Fig. 5.4).

Figure 5.4 - Cheek Declamation Example

I use rhythmic augmentation throughout as well. An example of this comes in mm. 113-115. Both flutes and oboe quote the earlier established "I'm real sorry" with the original pitches being heard in flute 2, augmenting the rhythmic duration by an undefined amount (see Fig. 5.5). This rhythmic augmentation helps to reinforce the solemn nature of the speech melody, while flutes and oboe harmonize it in such a way that further emphasizes the somber tone of the statement's allusion to death.

Figure 5.5 - Cheek, Rhythmic Augmentation in A Soldier's Story

I take a similar approach in measure 119. The clarinet section rhythmically augments a fragmented statement of "that your friend got killed," (see Fig. 5.6). Again, this augmentation is not determined by any clearly defined ratio, the goal of increasing these rhythmic durations being to highlight the somber tone of the speech melody and its semantic meaning. The exact pitch material of the original melody is mostly contained in the first clarinet part, although clarinet 3 picks up the C on beat four of measure 120.

Figure 5.6 - Cheek, Rhythmic Augmentation in A Soldier's Story Ex. 2

I mostly generated harmony via the implied harmony contained within the melodic speech fragments. I usually began by trying to see if there were tertian harmonies implied within a melody. Oftentimes, tertian structures could be completed if one imagined a particular note was missing. For example, in mm. 56-57, the pitch content (A D C#) of the speech melody "nightly attacks" (see

Fig.5.7a) can imply a few different harmonies if one imagines a particular pitch class is missing. In this case, the Dmaj7 harmony (see Fig. 5.7b) in the horns and winds in m. 57 is a result of thinking of this melodic line as a chordal structure missing its third.

Figure 5.7(a) - Cheek, Generation of Harmony From Speech Melody
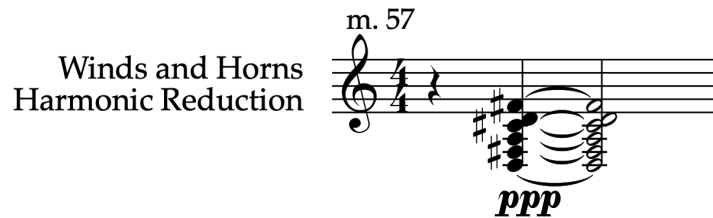
Figure 5.7(b) - Cheek, Generation of Harmony From Speech Melody

Another example of harmony resulting from speech melody is seen in measure 100. An Ab major harmony is the strongest candidate here harmonically, since the melody begins on Ab followed by C and Eb notes subsequently falling on downbeats (see Fig. 5.8a). Given the nature of the

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semantic meaning behind the speech melody ("I'm real sorry that your friend got

killed"), it only made sense to me from a narrative standpoint to start this

section instead with the Eb minor chord, whose pitch material is also contained

in the speech melody (see Fig. 5.8b). The accompanying harmony in this section

is provided by the clarinet section.

Figure 5.8a - Cheek, Generation of Harmony From Speech Melody Ex. 2

Figure 5.8b - Cheek Generation of Harmony From Speech Melody Ex. 2

Harmony is also generated from counterpoint, mostly within the "Nine eleven" section. I wanted to make this section very dense, active, and chaotic to help reflect the events of that day, so having many contrapuntal musical lines is the approach I took here (see Fig. 5.9).

Figure 5.9 - Cheek, Contrapuntal Generation of Harmony

Mixed and asymmetrical meters within the first section not only provide variation, but to function as a narrative tool, highlighting the uncertainty and chaos behind the phrase "nine eleven had just happened," (see Fig. 5.10).

Figure 5.10 - Cheek Mixed and Asymmetrical Meter

I implement a recurring theme that links the sections together, providing much of the cohesion in *A Soldier's Story*. This theme first appears in measures 9 and 10 (see Fig. 5.11a). I alter this theme both rhythmically and tonally throughout its many appearances in the work yet still maintains its melodic contour and most of its character.

Figure 5.11(a) - Cheek, Recurring Motive

Figure 5.11(b) - Cheek, Recurring Motive

Figure 5.11(c) - Cheek, Recurring Motive

Figure 5.11(d) - Cheek, Recurring Motive

Figure 5.11(e) - Cheek, Recurring Motive

Figure 5.11(f) - Cheek, Recurring Motive

Figure 5.11(g) - Cheek, Recurring Motive

Focusing each section on a singular motive made it quite difficult to utilize Reich's technique of "stop action sound." However, I thought it would be an interesting way to recapitulate the motives heard throughout the work before the final section by utilizing this technique. In measures 152-64, the final syllable of each phrase is elongated to form the climactic chord heard in m. 160 (see Fig. 5.12).

Figure 5.12 - Cheek, "Stop Action" Sound

My goal when implementing various compositional techniques was to highlight the narrative. It was always at the forefront of my mind, both the narrative threads contained within individual speech melodies, and the narrative resulting from my "directorial shaping" of the structure by sequencing the speech melodies in the order they are presented.

I close out the piece with the phrase "The war was always with me" to emphasize the lasting effects war has on both the individual and society. Much like with the abrupt changes in the opening sections, I decided to make this a rather abrupt ending. This sudden ending is intended to highlight the jarring effects of war and the memories that linger, reverberating in the silence of peacetime long after the war has ended.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Speech melody is an effective and interesting way of combining narrative and music. This technique is also an effective means of documenting various aspects of historic events and the lived experiences of individuals all over the world.

This thesis traces some of the major musical developments that eventually led to the creation of speech melody in the late 1980s and the various ways in which they can be applied. Though this technique is still relatively young, given the grand scheme of music history, there are a number of devotees creating new and exciting works.

I learned many different things about music history, composition, and myself throughout the course of this project. Most importantly, I learned how one can enhance semantic meaning and narrative via various musical manipulations of speech melody such as fragmentation, augmentation, mixed and asymmetrical meters, structural association, and declamation.

Although I was not actively involved full-time through the entire process, this piece has lived within my mind for six years now. I have matured as both a composer and an individual these past six years thanks to graduate school and confronting life head on, which has given me the proper insight to complete a task I once thought monumental.

I believe in peaceful resolution to conflict whenever possible, but fully support service men and women everywhere when called upon to fight the good fight. While "good" is entirely subjective, I know in my heart what is good and just and will support all those who fight for it. Their stories deserve to be shared whenever possible.

Thank you veterans.

-Kevin M. Cheek, March 1st, 2022, Charleston, SC.

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INTERVIEW WITH JACOB TER VELDHUIS

Jacob TV was gracious enough to grant me a little bit of his time for an interview for my project. I conducted this interview with Jacob, who was in Holland, from the comfort of my own office in Charleston, SC via the Zoom video conferencing app. The interview was conducted Monday, Jan. 24th at 10 a.m. EST.

<u>Interview Transcript</u>

Kevin Cheek: What composers working with speech melody today do you admire?

Jacob TV: Um…that's a tough question. I first have to think about recent pieces that I've heard or older pieces that I loved. I can't really answer that question. What I can tell you, however, is…and this is, I think, typical for an artist in

general. In 1988, I was attending a concert given by Kronos Quartet here in Utrecht Amsterdam, Steve Reich mixing the audio and it was *Different Trains*. It was the very first performance of *Different Trains* in the Netherlands. I think it was 1988. I was blown away. I was blown away totally, but I also realized that what Steve was doing there was something I had in mind when I was 24 still studying composition in Groningen, a university city in the north of Netherlands. At that time I wrote an electronic piece called *Passion*...about mankind. I mean, I was 24 years old and I wrote a piece about mankind, about the suffering of mankind, that was the idea. Not the suffering of Jesus, but the suffering of...mankind. And, um...in that piece I used a couple of voices and I didn't really know what to do with it...It's the voice of Robbie Roberts, uh, Robertson, of The Band. The guitar player of The Band. And, uh...he said some very interesting things, and I loved his voice and the way he pronounced it. So I quote him, but I didn't know what to do with it. I wasn't happy with the results, because all I knew was just grabbing the audio, using it in the piece, and that's it. So, it was just a voice over, not more than that.

Then, 33 years later in Utrecht I heard *Different Trains* for the first time and I said "This is it," but at the same time I realized "Steve, you're not doing a

good job here." I mean, he is doing a good job, but in a way I thought…I said to myself "You can do more with speech melody than this." First of all, the audio quality used, and Steve is a generation older than I am, and I probably am more used to working with audio equipment than he is. I think he used an American sampler, I don't remember the brand, but very low audio quality sampler. But at the same time, I heard that the audio samples he used weren't so very interesting at all from a musical point of view. They were very interesting from a semantic point of view, but not musically. And so I realized "Wait a minute!" If there would be more excitement in these voices like people having sorrow or angry people or aggressive people or people in all kinds of emotional situations, then you would have more melody, you will have more rhythm, etc. So that's where Steve helped me on my way, and I will never forget when I wrote that *Heartbreakers* which is a piece based on the Jerry Springer shows, on dialogue from the Jerry Springer show I sent it to him, and much to my surprise he replied, and he gave me a big compliment. He said "I can clearly hear that you are using my technique and you are having benefit from doing that but you turn it into something of your own." It was the most beautiful compliment I could

get because he in a way is one of my heroes. So that was very nice. So I learned from that.

And then…a good friend of mine is Scott Johnson. Scott Johnson who himself…who says of himself that he's the real inventor of speech melody and that Steve stole it from him. He's quite frustrated about it as you may know. And Scott is a dear friend of mine, but if I listen to what Scott is doing with speech melody, and this is very personal…I think he uses way too much words. He uses way too many…he wants to put so many meaning in his piece that it's more…it's very intellectual in a way. Also the subjects that he's picking…You know, like, I think it's Dawkins and other philosophers and the result is quite, quite captivating. You know I attended several concerts of his music. Once there was a concert of the music of Steve, Scott, and me in New York City. It was quite interesting. Three pieces altogether. But again, the technique that Scott was using, for me, it was too intellectual. It wasn't serving the music so much. For me it's very important, and I think I've never told this to anyone but your question brings up these ideas. I think for me, what is very, very important is I try to find a catchy melody as if I am trying to write a pop song. So when I wrote *Able to Be* for instance, there has to be something very catchy in these one liners

spoken by Marilyn Monroe. If not, I can't use it, you know, umm…So I'm always

focusing on a leitmotif, just two words maybe. Like in *Grab It!*, it's very obvious

that this single moment where somebody is shouting "Grab it! Grab it,

motherfucker!" That line in every…rhythmical, musical, the expression, the

violence in those words…you feel the violence, you feel the power, you feel the

despair also. That is so…that gave me so many thrills at the same time and it's

not my language. English is not my native language, so for me it is exotic also.

What is exotic? The dialect, the slang, the American slang…it's very, very

beautiful and for me I can look at it from a distance and see the beauty of it, hear

the beauty of it. So, yeah…but I haven't answered your question, but this is more

or less…I'm very, very picky, like every artist should be very, very picky.

KC: In an interview with Zach Herchen you state that "The meaning of the words

[you choose as a melodic source] [are] very important to [you]…the semantics are

almost just as important as part of the composition."[76] Maarten Beirens writing

about Steve Reich in his essay "Voices, Violence and Meaning" believes that a

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[76] "Intervew with JacobTV," Interview by Zach Herchen, ZachHerchen.com, August 6, 2009, https://www.zachherchen.com/2009/08/06/interview-with-jacobtv/.

prominent feature of speech melody is that there are "various ways of distorting and alienating the vocal sounds...in a sense, it is music that more or less destroys the very material that it draws upon."[77] How do you as an artist respond to Beirens' assessment and how do you navigate these obstacles while still being respectful of the original speech-melody sources and their semantic meaning during the compositional process?

JTV: Good question. I respect...what I learned from Andy Warhol is the readymade object, and he didn't invent the readymade object, it was a French invention, *objet trouvé*. Like there's a French poet called Guillaume Apollinaire who invented...I think he's the first one who used soundbites that he heard in the streets of paris. People talking. Just one liners or words that he used in his poems. Guillaume Apollinairae in the early 20th century wrote poems where he more or less uses samples, I mean not audio samples, but words that he heard. So this gives new chance effect, and getting back to your question...I never...no,

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that's not true...I respect the samples I'm using. I don't want to manipulate the samples. I do stretch them sometimes, yes, but I do not use Melodyne. I've had Melodyne for 10 or 15 years. I love...it's a beautiful application , but I don't use it because if the pitch is not right, so be it, then I will make a modulation. I will have to adapt myself to the pitch of the piece and so some of my pieces have many modulations, and these modulations should not be too artificial. They should fit in a musical pattern. That's the difference with Scott Johnson's for instance. When I listen to Scott's music, sometimes his modulations are so artificial I think "Wow, why do you do this? You don't go from F major to F# major...that's ugly!" Ya know? There's a long way from F major to F# major. So these are aesthetics. These are very, very personal. These are my aesthetics. Scott Johnson has his aesthetics and you have your aesthetics and this is the way I am ticking, you know? I believe in readymade objects and I don't want to harm them...like a picture, it's like a picture. If I would be a photographer and I would take pictures of people in the street, why would I have the brutality to change their faces? No. I mean, the beauty is the reality of life and I don't want to touch that. I want to preserve the reality, and I do that always. Practically always.

In the beginning, my first pieces were on the voice of Chet Baker. His

voice was totally unsuitable for speech melody because he almost whispers. His

voice is not clear, there is no attack. He is always drunk or drugged out. Even

that, I like about him. Still, if you listen to my early pieces like *Pitch Black* or *May*

this Bliss Never End they are very difficult to play, especially for a saxophone

quartet if you want to play *Pitch Black*. The voice is so unclear. For instance,

Grab It! is perfect for speech melody because these are shouting guys behind

bars, you know? There's so much "punch" in those samples.

KC: In an interview with musicologist Robert von Bernewitz, you comment upon

how hard writing music is.[78] Many accomplished composers still find the blank

page quite daunting. Do you still find it difficult and what, do you think, is the

most difficult thing about the writing process?

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[78] Robert von Bernewitz, "Jacob TV - An Interview with Dutch Composer
Jacob Ter Veldhuis, 'I Was Aware of Aspects beyond Music but Music Can Say
Things That Words Can't Do. That's the Magic of Music,'" Musicguy247, August
1, 2016, https://musicguy247.typepad.com/my-blog/jacob-tv-dutch-composer/.

JTV: The most difficult thing is…waiting for that magic moment to come, and

you can only…you cannot force it. It's like…it's like mercy. It's like, umm…what

you have to do is you have to be focusing on what you want to do in some way

and this focusing can be sometimes very dreamy. At least that's how I work.

When I…when I do my 6K run in the morning when it's still dark, I'm already

thinking about a piece that I want to write about a certain subject. I'm already

thinking about the samples, but it's not concrete yet, so I have to wait for this

magic moment where all of a sudden just one sound bite has this magic effect on

me where I think "Oh, this is so beautiful." The same thing for a painter, or a

writer, this is the moment where you start making art, I think, and it starts with a

discovery. The discovery of the beauty of audio or something visual, and

that…you can't force it. I cannot force it, I have to wait until it comes to me.

KC: Do you believe that working with speech melody is more or less difficult

than traditional writing approaches?

JTV: For me, no. For me it's easier to write…uh…to use speech melody. Why?

And I think this goes back to my composition lessons in the late 70s when I had a

professor who said to me "Jacob, if you want to write a piece of music and you have no inspiration, find a good poem," and he was so right. That's...that was such a discovery. So, when I was in my early twenties I started doing that and the piece wrote itself. If I loved the poem...you know...and it's still the case, if I find one line in a Shakespeare piece it can be so, uhh...it's so beautiful that the music just writes itself. And, um, if you compare what was the poem in the 70s and 80s were the sound bites in the 90s and later on for me. The use of sound bites, I think it saved my career to be honest, because I'm writing...I'm also writing a cello concerto or a piano concerto, which is okay. But I think...I just turned 70, so I can look back on my career and I love my abstract pieces, my music pieces without samples, but I think, umm...my music with sound bites, with speech melody are more...in a way more interesting...because, I mean my abstract instrumental music is not...it's okay, but it's not so special as my speech-melody-based pieces. I think...there is more originality in it.

KC: How do you respond to the speech melodies you choose in terms of your timbral approach and instrumentation in general?

JTV: If, for instance, you use Melodyne, you can change the formant of a voice, which means you can change the color of a voice and the fact that your voice has a different sound and that people recognize your voice as being your voice has to do with the formant. A formant is a complex structure of overtones that is different for everybody, that's why everybody has a different voice, and umm…so in a physical way the term formant is quite interesting to be aware of it…but, anyway…the timbre is very, very important for me. Especially when I…when I'm rehearsing with musicians on a speech-melody-based piece, I always try to…I always ask them to be aware of that fact. To…whatever instrument you play…to try to communicate with the speech melody and with the sound of the voice, the timbre and this is something you can hardly…I mean you can say to a cellist "sul ponticello, please" or "sul tasto" or "pizzicato" or whatever or "tremolo." So you can approach, more or less, the timbre of the voice. There are all kinds of ways, and sometimes a miracle happens. Sometimes a miracle happens that the cello and the voice meet one another in a beautiful way….and…but this is something a composer cannot…you can prepare yourself for it, but you cannot write it down if it's something you have to do live when listening to the music. It has to do with acoustics as well. That's another very important thing with all

speech-melody-based pieces. Where are you performing? The more reverb a hall

has, the worse it is in general for speech-melody-based pieces. I like..I like dry

pieces for my, uh…for my speech-melody-based works, because acoustics destroy

a lot of, you know…they destroy a lot of, um…quality. I don't need the acoustics,

it's too complex.

There is something else I'd like to tell you, by the way, before you go to

your next question. One of the reasons I also started writing speech melody

based pieces is I was always frustrated as a composer about acoustics…about the

experience that wherever your piece is going to be played it sounds…horrible in a

church, or it sounds beautiful in a church. It depends on what it is, but then I

realized… and *Grab It!* is a good example. No matter where you play *Grab It!*,

Grab It! changes the acoustics…because of the…*Grab It!* contains the acoustics of

a prison. The reverb of a prison is in that piece, so even if you play *Grab It!*

outside or on a platform of a subway station, there's…*Grab It!* has the quality of

forcing the acoustics to adjust itself to *Grab It!*. Of course this is not true but this

is how it feels. This is how it feels, and uh…maybe it's the only piece I wrote

where this is the case. So, in a way what you do…yesterday somebody sent me a

performance of *May This Bliss Never End* somewhere in Siberia. Two Russian

musicians were playing it, and it sounded so beautiful, although the recording

was bad. It was overly acoustic, but the piece...the piece determined the

experience even though it sounded bad. It's hard to explain this...

KC: In an interview with Robert Von Bernewitz, you stated that your father

insisted you avoid a life in music and instead become a teacher to "have

insurance and other things" and that you already knew that you wanted to be a

composer. At what point did you know that you wanted to become a composer

and were there ever moments of self-doubt along your path and if so, what kept

you on the path?

JTV: When I was 10, I attended a performance of the *Eroica* and I...I was moved

to tears and I asked my mom "Can I buy this record?" and my mom said "You are

way too young for that kind of music!" But I got it on my birthday when I turned

11, I think. But I attended it and I saw the conductor and my flute teacher was in

the orchestra, which was also...a very thrilling experience. My teacher in that

orchestra! But the guy in the front...the conductor, I thought "He is the

magician!" Of course, I understood this music had been written by somebody in

Austria 200 years ago...but, I mean Beethoven...Of course, I knew Beethoven, but

I didn't really understand the whole process. But before that...a year before that I

was singing in the boys choir of the *St. Matthew Passion* which was another

experience where I...I mean I couldn't believe it that this music had been

written. So these very early experiences made me...and the very first experience

with a barrel organ when I was four or five years old. We have...in Holland we

have this tradition of street organs. Barrel organs. They're huge and they have

mechanical puppets that move in front of it. It's very beautiful. When you go to

Amsterdam you can hear them. And I was so small, and this sound was so loud

and...intense. So that was an experience and then there was a marching band

with a [unintelligible word] we call it. The guy in front who is throwing his stick

up in the air and catching it again. That guy...I thought "Oh my god, I want to be

that guy!" and I was way too shy for becoming a conductor when I...when I was

in my teens, etc. So I think that's how it all started. The magic of who is in

charge here...who is that, the guy with the stick or the conductor? No, the

composer. Oh my god! That's interesting. And then I started to improvise when I

was around 16 I discovered blues music and jazz, but especially blues was simple

and easy. So I found out how easy it was to improvise on a three chord blues, and

I thought if I can do that, then I can maybe write something down, you know?

And uhh…yeah, so that's…all these discoveries helped me on my way to start

composing. But I was so naive. I mean…thinking back on those years…who

was…I mean…where did I get the guts to start composing music? It was nothing

special about what I was doing. Nothing. It was very mediocre.

KC: Were there moments of self-doubt along the way?

JTV: No. No. I mean…no self doubt about being a musician because I played in

rock bands, I played free jazz…I tried everything. I also studied french horn

which was very, very boring. I studied percussion, I studied flute. Singing

because I was studying school music so I had to train my voice as well, so I had to

sing Schubert. I hated it. So I sang Schubert like Bob Dylan would sing Schubert.

But I…music for me was the only way to express myself. I think I was a shy kid

and through music I could be somebody. Also on stage, you know…girls were

watching me. I was on stage playing bass guitar and they looked at me! I could

see in their eyes they were…in a way impressed by what I was doing. At least

that's the feeling I got. This is something that many, many kids experience, of

course, but it helped me on the way. Being able to express yourself...that was so important. Instead of writing a diary like many people do...I did that, too...but more important was being able to discover music first through improvisation and then through composition.

KC: You've spoken before about your parakeet concerto and about having it performed for the first time. How did you fare during the early days of trying to secure performances of your own work and what advice would you give aspiring composers in regard to securing performances early on in their careers?

JTV: That's a tough one. I was lucky in a way. I was just lucky that I had the chance to be performed. Umm...I think it had to do with the students that I was studying with, you know I wrote for them. That's how it started. I wrote for the percussion guys, I wrote for the clarinet players. So we were friends and they played my music. And then, for instance, those were the days of the Vietnam war. So the city where I studied was adopting a city in north Vietnam called Thái Bình. I still remember the name. Thai Bin. So we were doing a free concert and people paid for it...no, not a free concert, but people paid for it and the money

would go to this Thai Bin city. People were starving there from hunger and from war and bombardments, etc. So…and that was…those were my first experiences in watching how the audience would respond to what I had written, you know? And, umm…that was another important moment, but we just organized it ourselves, we just set it up because the school wasn't doing anything. And I even remember that in 76 I wanted to write an opera about a composer. The life of a young composer who is not accepted by society. And this opera…had to be performed. So what I did was, I went to the art school and I said to the students of the art school "Hey, we need costumes. We need, um…we need a stage setting. We need beautiful images on stage." And the art school they were surprised there because there was no connection between this conservatoire and the art school. And…so I was in a way a pioneer bringing these two institutes together. Not me, we were two composers. We were writing the opera with two composers. And then I went to the…uh, I don't know the english word for that…not the mayor of a city, but the vice mayor so to speak. In Holland, a major is the boss of the city, but then there are four or five ministers, so to speak. One minister for healthcare, one for education, you know, and there was one for culture as well. So I went to this guy. He was a communist by the way. At that time we still had

communists in politics. And I said to him "I'm a composer" and you know what

he said? He said "Composers? They are dead, aren't they?" I said "What do you

mean?" He said "Composers…Mozart, Beethoven, they're all dead!" I said "But

I'm alive!" It was such a crazy response from that guy. And, umm…I said "But

I'm alive, and I'm writing an opera with my friend here." And then he said

"Okay." He said "We'll give you 6,000 guilders you can spend on building the

stage and everything. So I got a bunch of [unintelligible] which was a lot of

money at that time, 6,000 guilders. So we could do the whole opera with

students and it was fun. It was fun, but we had to do it ourselves. The school was

totally not interested in those kind of things. Yeah, it was our initiative, and

there's nothing wrong with that. I don't blame the school for that. I mean…at

the time…this was also the time of rock and roll and jazz where people just

started bands. I mean, rock music was still very interesting at the time. There

were so many new developments. Miles Davis. *Bitches Brew*, etc. So, yeah…it was

a nice time to grow up, the 70s, in a way.

KC: You have of course dealt with hard-hitting subject material in many of your

works. Is there any subject material you would consider to be off-limits, perhaps?

JTV: Yeah, there are…there are certainly taboos. Umm…let me think.

Umm…well this is an example. This is a good example. Two years ago when there

was so much turmoil going on in your country, with the death of George Floyd,

etc. Umm…and January 6th, that whole year 2020 was a disaster in your country.

And I got a commission to write a piece for a band here and I called it "Nuts."

"Nuts" because I thought the world was going nuts. And I'm speechless, but I

used all kinds of quotes from demonstrations in your country. Uhh…and also,

somebody shouting "Black lives matter!" combining that with "Love thy

neighbor" so you hear "Black love lives thy neighbor matter" because I

knew…I'm a white guy, I have to be careful with shouting "Black lives matter."

And last week, I was rehearsing with the band, and the band consists of a string

quartet, a double bass and a percussionist. The band is called Fuse. It's a

fantastic ensemble. They're on Dutch television every week with new pieces, and

umm…anyway, the bass player said to me "Jacob, I can't do this. I will be on

stage…you won't be on stage, but I will play this. I can't be on stage playing

double bass and hearing this voice 'black lives matter.'" I said "Why not?" He

said "I can't." And then I told him that I had written a cantata about Martin

Luther King's last speech, *Mountaintop*, which was performed several times, even in Chicago. At symphony hall in Chicago. In front of an entire Afro-American audience. I will never forget that moment. And I was so nervous at the time because I thought "Here's this white old guy coming from Europe. What do I know about segregation? What do I know about racism?" But I grew up with Martin Luther King. He was on Dutch television every day. I believe in freedom. I believe in equality. And at that time, I thought "Why have I done this? Why have I written this piece?" Out of compassion and out of feeling for justice and empathy, etc., etc. This is very deep…I can't say that in few words. But anyway, I told this to the bass player and he said "Yeah, but I don't care." He said "I'm not going to play this piece with black lives matter." I said to him "It's only 10 seconds." He said "I don't care." And then on the spot, I muted those words, and I still kept "Love thy neighbor." These words all came from a demonstration I think in D.C. where it was a very interesting demonstration where very right wing Proud Boys met with Afro-American people and they tried to understand each other. This was…it was very moving, also. But…I decided to keep it out, and I respect the opinion of the bass player. I don't want him to feel uncomfortable, and also, for myself, I find this is a very complex thing. It has to do…I mean the

word "woke" is now even a Dutch word. It comes from your country. It originally

comes from the black culture as you know, but the meaning of the word "woke"

is changing all the time. It's already an ugly word, but this…you know we are all

children of our time, and sometimes you cannot be topical. Sometimes it's too

difficult to be…I mean, when I wrote *Mountaintop*, Martin Luther King had died

30 years…he was murdered 30 years before that. There's a distance, but there's

no distance yet between "Black Lives Matter" and us. It's still…and in a way I felt

discriminated by the bass player because he didn't allow me to express myself. I

had just written *Grab It!* which contains voices of Afro-Americans, of Asian

people, of white guys all in prison, you know? They're all inmates. I had just

finished it and I played it at the Other Minds festival and DJ Spooky came to me

and he said "You are a racist!" and I said "Why?" He said "You remind me of

blackface." I said "What?!" Yeah. He said "You remind me of white people

painting their face black in the thirties and playing jazz…quasi-jazz. And I was

so…not insulted…shocked at the time. And David Lang was there, too. And this

was an interesting moment. David Lang…I said to David "Oh, I am so

embarrassed. What do I know about American culture?" And then David Lang

said to me…"oh no," I said to David Lang "I am like Vincent Van Gogh who

traveled to the south of France to paint the French landscape, which is more

colorful than the Dutch landscape because of the climate." And then David said

to me "Yeah, but the French are not embarrassed about their landscape." And

this was such a...David is a smart guy...this was a such a moving remark by him,

and DJ Spooky, who is an African American...I could suddenly understand DJ

Spooky's annoyance and his anger at me. Although, the voices in *Grab It!* are

absolutely not...I mean it's 50/50. There are white guys, there are black guys.

And DJ Spooky said to me "You are showing the dirty laundry of Afro-Americans

and I hate that." Anyway...this is just a sideline I have to tell you. There are

taboos, you know? There are taboos of fascism. Would I write a piece about the

Proud Boys? Would I write a piece about the right wing powers in your country at

the moment? I don't know. I tried to write a piece about the former president...I

did. I wrote two arias on his voice. It was...impossible because he is a clown

and...as an artist, he is so over-the-top and disgusting that there is nothing I can

do with that. It's very strange. I think the same would be...I don't want to

compare him with Hitler, but same thing with...I mean, Charlie Chaplin made a

fool of Hitler at the time, but he did it in a funny way. But I couldn't...I can't do

it. I think John Adams said the same thing...Somebody asked John Adams "Could

you write an opera about this president?" and he said "No I can't," because it would be…well, anyway…it's impossible. So, also…don't give attention to things we shouldn't pay attention to, we should ignore…one of the reasons that that guy became president is because he got way too much attention. And still gets attention.

KC: It's definitely a very fascinating question and it's something that sprang to mind because from those hours of interviews I did with veterans, I sourced probably 150 speech melodies that I thought were workable and then from there I narrowed it down to six, but there is one that stands out in my mind…where a good friend of mine…one of my heroes, actually…he was working as a nurse in combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan literally putting people back together and he said something in his interview…it was "Using their 9 millimeters for lipstick." And it was just such a hard-hitting fragment of melody from a semantic point of view but also the melody itself was beautiful. And I wrestled with that for weeks at a time…"Should I use this, or should I leave it out?" and finally I opted to leave it out, but it's still just a very haunting fragment of

speech, I think. So that's where that question came from, but it's definitely a very interesting topic for sure.

JTV: Yeah. I would find this suitable, by the way...what you just mentioned, the 9 millimeter used for lipstick, in a way. Because I wrote a couple of pieces about the craziness of war, like a trombone piece called *I Was Like Wow* and also *White Flag* which is a suite about...a 5 piece suite for rock band about American soldiers in Iraq, so I wouldn't be too careful with that. I mean, this is personal, of course. For everybody this is different...but I think this is very beautiful. Very poetic, and if you use it respectfully in a respectful way, you can turn it into a beautiful piece, so why not?

KC: Austin Kleon in his book *Steal Like an Artist* writes that when "people give you advice, they're really just talking to themselves in the past." What advice would you give your younger self?

JTV: And you mean, by "younger self" the guy I was 50 years ago?

KC: At any point…I guess your younger self that was just discovering themselves as an artist or discovering themself as somebody who really loves music.

JTV: I would probably advise myself to…to be aware of my ego…and I think the ego…the older I become, the more I realize that the ego is causing so much pain and trouble in the world. And, of course, we can't live without our ego, but if we are aware of…the way the ego, uhh…the way the ego is, umm…in our Western culture, the ego is way too powerful. It's way too…it causes way too much damage, and we should be taught already as kids in education, I think, about…about meditation. There are schools I know, all around the world where kids…very small kids…five, six years old, they learn to meditate for instance. I think, if I look back especially on when I was 15-16, that's a very difficult age for a kid to grow up…and if you are aware that you have an ego and what the ego really is, that would, I think…would have been very helpful for me to realize, because as an artist, now that I can look at my ego and see what my ego is doing…the beautiful things, but also the ugly things…I feel more…I can look at myself from a different point of view, and smile. And smile upon my struggles because of my ego and everything that comes along with the ego. So yeah, I

think...I think that in general it would be good for Western societies to...to

educate...our kids about the existence of...what is an ego? It could make the

world a little better, I think, and could make art maybe more interesting, as well.

Appendix B

Original Speech Melodies

Speech-Melody Sources For Untitled Project

Kevin Cheek

VITA

Kevin Cheek is a multi-instrumentalist, songwriter, and composer. After touring the United States extensively with the Marine Corps Band, Kevin began studying music theory and composing at the College of Charleston where he graduated in 2017. He started work at Allegro Charter School of Music in Charleston, SC in 2019. Kevin began work on a master's degree in music theory and composition in 2020 and is expected to graduate in 2022. Kevin has composed for many different ensembles, and his first orchestral work, *Return to Me*, was performed by the Charleston Symphony Orchestra in 2016. His research interests include composition, orchestration, folk music, speech melody, film music, musical narrative, and ludomusicology.

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Style Manual: A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, Kate L. Turabian, 9th Edition.

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