

Improvisational explorations of Twentieth-Century Classical Music: Notation, Representation and Musical Metaphors

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This paper presents findings from the artistic research project *Expanding Horizons: Improvisational Explorations of 20th-Century Classical Music* (NTNU, 2021-2024), in which I explored how works by composers such as Debussy, Ravel, Lili Boulanger, Beach, Hindemith, Crawford Seeger, Dutilleux, and Takemitsu might be reimagined through improvisational practice. Central to the project was the question of how compositions rooted in Western art music traditions can be adapted to support improvisation while retaining salient musical qualities of the original works.

To address this challenge, I developed and tested a range of score formats spanning a continuum from relatively fixed to highly open. These included working from original scores with added improvisational passages, lead sheet and extended lead sheet adaptations, scores incorporating indeterminate notation, sketch scores, and collage scores. Together, these approaches explored different ways of balancing compositional identity with performer agency and moved progressively from viewing the composition as a fixed object toward understanding it as a dynamic field of possibilities.

The paper further examines how musicians conceptualize their improvisational engagement with such works through musical metaphors. Drawing on literature, interviews, and practice-based reflections, I focus particularly on the metaphors of *storytelling* and *room*. The storytelling metaphor foregrounds improvisation as the shaping of meaningful musical trajectories within a larger compositional context, while the room metaphor frames the composition as an aesthetic space that both constrains and enables action. The latter is discussed in relation to Otto Friedrich Bollnow's concept of *Handlungsraum* (space of action), emphasizing how musical agency emerges through the interaction between a structured environment and a performer's scope for action.

By bringing together alternative score formats and metaphorical frameworks, I argue that improvisational engagement with composed works is not primarily a matter of reproducing musical texts, but of creating conditions for exploration, negotiation, and co-creation. I further suggest that metaphors can function as productive artistic tools, offering improvisers imaginative ways of relating to musical materials and opening new perspectives on the relationship between composition and improvisation.