Note: Listening Groups

We are focussing at the outset on listening to instrumental music and the HARK project has been influenced by a number of key writers in this area, in particular Lawrence Kramer, Jean-Luc Nancy, Julian Johnson, Michael Spitzer, Gemma Coradi Fiumara, Lydia Goehr and Emma Sutton. Lawrence Kramer is associated with the emergence of Critical Musicology – hermeneutic/interpretive listening modes – Fiumara and Goehr with the philosophy of listening, Nancy with the resonance of the listening body and aspects of ‘selfhood’ and Sutton with the interpenetration of literature and music. Here are a few quotations from these writers to stimulate and encourage you to consider participating in the HARK project:

Alfred Brendel in his book **Music, Sense and Nonsense**wrote:

“I shall start with the fact that a piece of music does not just consist of form and structure but also of character, atmosphere, ‘psychology’, ‘expression’ (as Rousseau called it) or the ‘affections’ (as C.P.E. Bach would have said). This is not an either/or situation but rather a constellation of non-identical twins…..there is in music the allotment of intellect and feeling”.

"Something can ‘speak’ if it is listened to, rather than being something it might say, that one would subsequently attend to ‘by means of listening’. It is true that ‘no genuine human relationship’ exists without the radical and reciprocal openness of listening, this openness exists ultimately not only for the person to whom one listens, but anyone who listens is fundamentally open ….in the dizzy affirmation of our logos there is hardly any ‘logical’ space left for the ‘hidden’ but essential tradition of listening… the problem of listening might be considered the shadow dimension of the epochal development of our culture." **(Gemma Corradi Fiumara)**

"The soundscape, the context for the practice of sonography, is an acoustic field of study, where we are earwitnesses. We may speak of a musical composition as a soundscape, or an acoustic environment in nature and culture. We can isolate an acoustic environment as field of study just as we can study the characteristics of a given landscape." **(Murray Schaffer)**

"We must never stop asking ourselves what exactly the content of music is, this intangible substance that is expressible only through sound. It cannot be defined as having merely a mathematical, a poetic or a sensual content. It is all those things and much more. It has to do with the condition of being human." **(Daniel Barenboim)**

"In listening to music the same experience takes sound as its object, and also something that is not and cannot be sound – the life and movement that is music. We hear this life and movement in the sound, and situate it in an imagined space, organised, as is the phenomenal space of our own experience." **(Roger Scruton)**

"It is only after the action of striking a chord (a visual, physical act in a single moment of time) that one can really listen to its reverberation, hanging in the air indefinitely (invisible, without physical form, out of time). This is the key to the power of music in its sounding out of modernity, that its physicality as sound is both urgently and bodily of the world, here and now, but quickly vanishes in order to leave an imprint, that survives its own absence. It is precisely into the silence, it the absence that follows it, that music projects the promise of it continuing presence, the resonant space between language and sound." **(Julian Johnson)**

"To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in the edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were precisely nothing else other than this edge, this fringe, this margin – at least the sound that is musically listened to, that is gathered and scrutinised for itself, not merely as an acoustic phenomenon but as resonant meaning, whose sense is found in resonance." **(Jean-Luc Nancy)**

"Open interpretation is the vehicle of subjectivity in a strong sense, not of private sensation or idiosyncrasy, but of intelligent agency, it is fundamentally the capacity to interpret: subjects make interpretations; interpretations make subjects." **(Lawrence Kramer)**

We created 4 Listening groups of 8-10 persons per group in early 2017 called ‘Chorus’, ‘Priory’, ‘Friends’ and ‘Headphones’. In total 38 people were in Listening Groups and attendance at sessions was high. The names of the groups reflect the primary source for the membership, two choirs, a group of Quakers, and a mixed group of interested supporters.

All UTREC requirements we fulfilled. All participants were given a Participant Information Sheet and all signed a Data Consent Form. The Ethical Application Form was completed and accepted.

Each group met for 6 meetings of 1.5 hours, except the Headphones who listened in their own time. The groups were comprised the listening public who attend concerts in the Music Centre, those who sing in local amateur choirs, and those with interests in the general field of listening. No students took part as agreed with the School. No professional musicians were included. The groups were balanced for gender with an average age estimated at 55.

The researchers (BW/JHLR) determined a curriculum of pieces that we wished all groups to listen to:

1. *In Earth.* Errollyn Waller (from album *Photography)*

2. *Upon One Note.* Oliver Knussen.

3. *Fantasia after Henry Purcell.* George Benjamin.

4. *Ritual Melodies*. Jonathan Harvey. (from album *Tombeau de Messiaen)*

*5. Photography, Errollyn Wallen.*

These were relatively challenging modern compositions with some link or reference to an earlier source. All other pieces were chosen by the members themselves. In total 40 compositions were listened to (see full list of pieces attached). The sessions were structured so that our pieces started the session and after discussion members’ pieces followed. We gave little initial information about our pieces, whereas the members frequently introduced theirs and explained why they wished the group to listen to it. All sessions were taped and the proceeding transcribed. We therefore had extensive documentation of the discussions of the 5 pieces above from all groups and group/piece specific documentation thereafter. All group members were given an introduction to the HARK Website. All pieces listened to were copied for each group member so they could build up a discography, copies were noted as being for research purposes only. Further researchers choices were also later added, see full list below.

**One-to-One Interviews.**

15 members of the Listening Groups came to a one hour taped interview focussed on two questions:

How do you listen to music?

How does music have significance for you?

These interviews have been transcribed and are currently being content analysed.

**Performative Listening. (2017)**

The first was a participative performance by pianist Joseph Fleetwood. Some of the pieces chosen, Liszt’s St Francis of Assisi's Sermon to the Birds, and St Francis de Paulo walking on the water reflected the tendency seen within the Listening Groups to use rich visual metaphor, image and word-pictures even about abstract music. Here the programmatic and narrative elements were foregrounded, and a useful discussion and exchange between listeners and performer took place. The setting: on the stage and surrounding the performer created a new perspective for listeners. The event ended with the playing of Bloch’s ‘Prayer’ scored for cello and piano with Madhavi Navader, cello. This event was attended by all the members of the Listening Groups.