

PLAYING THE ACTION, HEARING THE RESULT: PRESCRIPTIVE NOTATION AND BASSOON TECHNIQUE IN AARON CASSIDY'S *25 APRIL '05*

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ABSTRACT

The expansion of extended instrumental techniques has increasingly exposed the limitations of traditional Western musical notation, particularly its prioritization of pitch and rhythm over timbre, physical action, and performance process. This paper examines these limitations through a case study of Aaron Cassidy's bassoon solo *25 April '05* (2025), focusing on the composer's use of a highly prescriptive tablature-based notational system. Drawing on Charles Seeger's distinction between descriptive and prescriptive notation, as well as subsequent discourse on mixed notational systems, the article situates Cassidy's work within broader debates surrounding the communication of instrumental technique. Cassidy's score separates the activities of the breath apparatus and the fingers across two staves, employing graphical notation, colour-coding, and tablature to prioritize physical and choreographic action over fixed sonic outcomes. Through detailed analysis of this system, the paper argues that Cassidy's notation creates a sophisticated method of communication that actively engages the performer while creating conditions for instability and variability. The notation stimulates the exploration of transitive and unpredictable sounds intrinsic to the bassoon. While acknowledging the practical challenges posed by such a system, the article suggests that *25 April '05* offers a compelling model for rethinking notation as a generative framework, expanding contemporary approaches to instrumental technique and composer-performer interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

The expansion of instrumental technique is increasingly testing the bounds of traditional notation. As composers delve more into extended techniques, new notational approaches are required to integrate these practices into the musical language. Traditional notation, which prioritizes pitch, harmony, and metric rhythm, presents music in a form that a trained musician can readily imagine. However, shifts in compositional thinking that foreground timbre, physical action, or alternative approaches to the

instrument remain only partially accommodated in this system. This structural limitation may hinder the development of extended techniques, which are often forced into a framework that is not totally compatible or idiomatic.

This paper argues that Aaron Cassidy's tablature innovations in his bassoon piece *25 April '05* (2025) [1] reconfigure instrumental writing by prioritizing physical action over sonic outcome. Cassidy moves beyond tablature as merely a system of technical instruction, developing instead a more complex and expressive formal language. In contrast to the use of tablature in works by, for example, Billone and McCormack, his notation establishes a richer mode of musical communication.

Historically, tablature has often been regarded as a less sophisticated means of musical communication, associated with pre-literate traditions and systems that primarily indicate the physical actions required to produce sound. However, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, composers have revisited tablature for its capacity to engage directly with the instrument as a physical interface. Cassidy creates a sophisticated grammar and syntax that add layers of meaning and encourage a mode of performer engagement distinct from other notational systems. This approach aligns with his prioritization of physical and choreographic elements over purely sonic outcomes. As Mieko Kanno suggests, an openness in the notational specification of the resulting sound can create greater dynamism and spontaneity, when a precise sonic goal is no longer primary [2]. While tablature can suggest openness in sonic outcome through omission, this is often illusory: highly specific physical instructions may in practice constrain the range of possible results. Cassidy's notation focuses on the performer's actions, placing greater emphasis on embouchure and breath than on finger placement as a means of producing specific sounds. While this approach is not without its limitations, it opens new possibilities for rethinking instrumental technique and its modes of communication.

2. NOTATION

Notation has changed incrementally over hundreds of years, adding layers, subtly reinterpreting the meaning of the symbols and generally increasing precision. However, it still essentially communicates in the same way, foregrounding pitch and time on different axes. New forms of notation are difficult to introduce to musicians trained for many years in traditional systems, and the investment

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required to learn an entirely new notational language for a single work often outweighs its perceived benefits. This learning threshold plays a significant role in limiting notational innovation, encouraging composers either to adapt extended techniques to existing systems or to minimize their notational demands. New forms of notation, like different languages, allow the composer to communicate in subtly different ways, opening new perspectives in musical discourse. Innovating notation requires an understanding of its limitations, a point articulated by Charles Seeger through his three ‘hazards’ of Western musical notation (1958):

1. The full auditory parameters of music cannot be fully represented in notated form.
2. Musical writing lags behind developments of speech writing.
3. The failure to clearly distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive writing [3].

Seeger’s first point acknowledges the incompleteness of musical notation. There is only a finite amount of information that can be conveyed with a limited set of symbols. Traditionally, this incompleteness was not considered problematic, as notation functioned primarily as a guide for performers rather than a comprehensive prescription. Over time, however, notation has tended toward increasing levels of instruction and specificity. Even so, there are elements that remain unnotatable, and how the performer navigates these elements can elevate the musician past just being a technician.

This can be observed, for instance, in comparisons of different recordings of works by composers such as Stockhausen, who is often cited as an extreme example of highly detailed notation. The metrics by which a performance is judged are not only determined by absolute fidelity to the notation and an awareness of stylistic traditions but also through intangibles such as energy and mood.

Seeger’s second point expands on the incompleteness and delves into the difficulties of music to convey more than just the ‘notes.’ For example, Carlos Chavez, in his *Toward a New Music* (1937) discusses the inability of ‘contemporary notation’ to notate the subtle intonational inflections or rhythmic complexities of folk music. “The constant small irregularities in time and tempo in folk music cannot be captured in notation with complete fidelity [4].” Articulation, phrasing, timbre and sound morphology are also not well represented and interpretation of these aspects of the music making process relies on a stylistic knowledge of the performer to understand unwritten conventions and tradition.

Acknowledging these points, a composer is confronted with decisions about which parameters to specify and which to leave open. Traditional notation has fostered a bias that favours pitch and duration as the most important parameters in musical discourse. Taken to an extreme, Nelson Goodman, in *The Language of Art*, even describes tempo, phrasing and dynamics as “auxiliary directions whose observance or nonobservance affects the quality of a performance but not the identity of the work,” while also stating that the most brilliant performance with a single wrong note does not count as a compliant instance of the

work [5]. While this stance is difficult to sustain in much contemporary practice, the bias is embedded in the notational system. Aaron Cassidy has described this bias being counterintuitive to his practice and how he has negotiated this problem. In his reworking of *the green is where* (2002), Aaron Cassidy replaces traditional notation with tablature. The specific pitches from the original version were a by-product of a composed physical action; the tablature therefore reflects his compositional intentions more directly than a conventional transcription of a single iteration of his process [6]. Rethinking notation and how music is communicated allows the foregrounding of parameters such as gesture, timbre, and physical action within the performance experience.

Seeger’s third point delves into the mixed methods of communication in musical notation. A descriptive notation attempts to represent the sonic outcome of a passage while a prescriptive notation—often in the form of a tablature—instructs the performer in the physical actions required to produce sound without directly specifying the final result. This dichotomy is, however, more complicated. Traditional Western notation which is often understood today in descriptive terms was actually described in Seeger’s article as prescriptive. Traditional Western notation communicates on different levels with Kanno describing how the system is a mixed system of communication in which different types of instruction operate concurrently [2].

Seeing a note on the page, in principle, does not share any information about the production of said note. But instructions such as *pizzicato*, *sul ponticello* or harmonics or even slurring, while conjuring a different image of the sound are directly related to the action of producing the sound.

However, there are also implicit prescriptive instructions that a performer follows when reading traditional Western notation. As a bassoonist if I see a notated C3, I think to close the first 3 holes and blow at a certain pressure to create this sound. The octave higher is an instruction to cover the same 3 holes but to apply more air pressure to filter out the lower partials. Of course, I could also find an alternative fingering combination that would produce the same pitch, but this choice is mostly initiated by the performer to better realize a sound ideal for a particular passage and outside the thinking of many composers. The use of extended techniques has, in particular, increased the need for prescriptive instructions. Extended techniques expand the thinking beyond the ideas of pitch, harmony and rhythm and are not part of every musician’s vocabulary so have to be communicated in a prescriptive way. Secondly, extended techniques are usually derived from an analysis of the performance technique and demonstrate an alternative manner of playing being aided by a more prescriptive instruction. Adding too much information to a score can reduce readability especially as instructions for fingerings (for example) do not mix always easily with the language in use. As music incorporating extended techniques become more ingrained into the repertoire these symbols can take on a more descriptive quality.

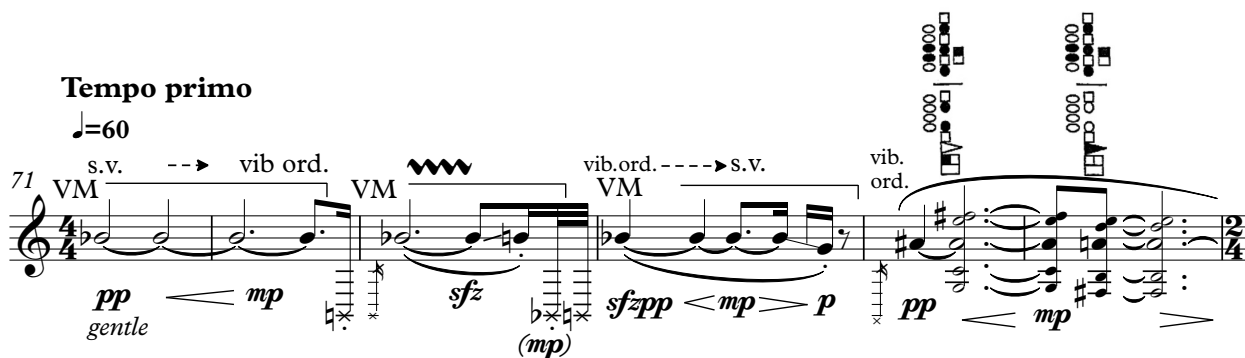


Figure 1. Djordjević – *Nailing Clouds* (2019). Bars 71-76 [8]

The coexistence of descriptive and prescriptive elements does not, however, have to be seen as a failure as Seeger suggests. Rather, it introduces a productive complexity into the score, and an awareness of these different modes of instruction can enable performers to develop more nuanced and sophisticated interpretations.

3. NOTATION APPLIED TO THE BASSOON

Notation and Composition determine each other. Differentiate between creating a language in order to say something and evolving a language in which you can say anything. A musical notation is a language which determines what you can say, what you want to say determines your language. (Cardew) [7]

The testing of the limitations of traditional notation accommodating extended techniques can be seen in Milica Djordjević's *Nailing Clouds* (2019) [8] (Figure 1). Djordjević draws on a wide range of techniques described by Gallois in *The Techniques of Bassoon Playing* (2009) to create a rich palette of timbral possibilities [9]. The example shows a passage that is particularly challenging. There are many instructions which apply to the quality of sound such as the *Velvet Sound* (VM) marking as well as different types of vibrato, mood and dynamic instructions. The note B flat has an obvious structural function (as also implied by traditional notational practice) being repeated with different kinds of vibrato, with velvet sound and then normally before breaking into a multiphonic in bar 75. The velvet sound is described in Gallois' book as resembling "brass instruments played with velvet mutes [9]." He also describes a technique of blowing that can produce that sound but concedes the intonation will be *around a quartertone higher* [9]. The important structural element of the note would suggest to me that the intonation is important as well as finding an effective timbre for the

velvet sound. My approach has been to see the passage in descriptive terms and find solutions through alternative fingerings that would fulfill these aims (and also to be able to glissando in bar 74). One can see that the traditional interpretations of the established symbols are becoming more flexible, creating choices for the performer which may or may not reflect the intentions of the composer. Through working with Djordjević I have also learnt that her use of accents should be as aggressive and hard as possible—far above what the traditional way of playing requires. While she uses the traditional accents and sforzando instructions often supported with extra textual instructions such as, "dark, rough / unrefined timbre [8]," the extremity of what she wants would be difficult to know from the notation alone. A knowledge of the implicit stylistic considerations is a part of all readings of notation but for contemporary pieces this cannot be assumed as standard knowledge and practice.

As Cardew wrote, notation and composition determine each other. Djordjević, by working with traditional notation retains many aspects of a traditional approach to music albeit expanded timbrally with extended techniques. Her use of multiphonics is influenced by traditional notational thinking and as a result they are not fully exploited. They are often used as a distortion effect transitioning from single pitches or they are used as rest points to contrast the melodic material. The notation with the fingerings above the notes imbues a perceived awkwardness that is better suited to slower treatments. The piece ends in a chorale like passage of multiphonics which treats each multiphonic as a static block of sound. While this passage is particularly beautiful, the representation of these sonorities as chords does not accurately reflect their perceptual reality, which is often closer to noise than to a harmonically defined structure.

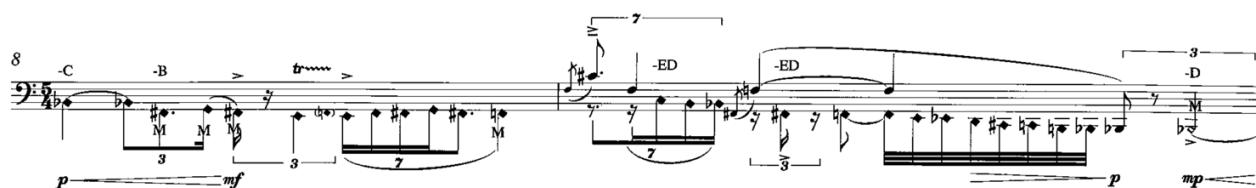


Figure 2. Lim, *Axis Mundi* (2013). Bars 8-9 [10]

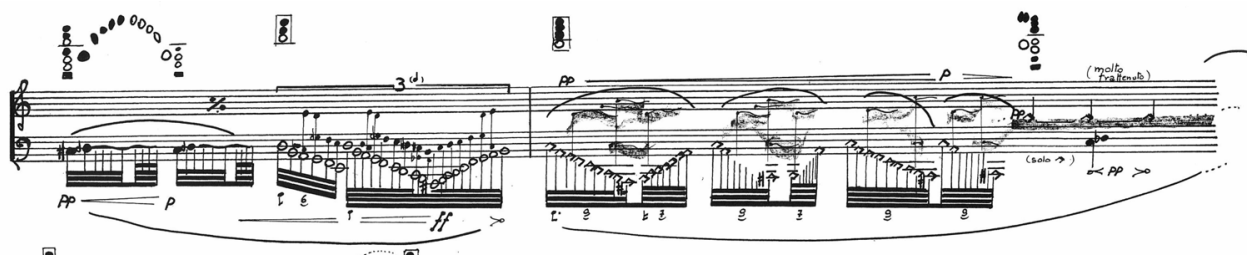


Figure 3. Billone, *Manda* (2003) From p. 5 [11]

There is no ideal notation that can be applied to all kinds of music, but notation can influence how a performer approaches a piece and can foreground different aspects of performance. Liza Lim in *Axis Mundi* (2013) [10], combines a form of tablature with normal melodic notation. This suits the narrative of the piece which is meant to alternate between the real world and spiritual realm. The instructions are given as altered fingerings—a base alteration to remove or add a finger while the music goes further (notated with diamond noteheads). (Figure 2). The alterations are simple but are enough to distort the sound in various ways. Due to its size, the bassoon has smaller holes than on the other woodwind instruments. Opening holes higher on the tube than the designated note thus does not totally change the resonating column leading to a combination of register shifts, multiphonics as well as bisbigliando effects. Seeing a representation of fingerings as noteheads is more intuitive to read and Lim can use the novel sounds in a more dynamic way similar to her treatment of the more standard material. The tablature, like Kanno suggests removes the pressure of finding specific sounds so the performer's attention can be more directed to the musical gestures.

A similar technical approach but with a very different result can be seen in *Manda* (2003) by Pierluigi Billone [11]. The use of handwritten tablature alongside the resulting sound produces a markedly different impression for the performer signalling an absence of traditional melodic thinking in favour of an alternative mode of musical discourse. The dual presentation of prescription (fingering/action) and description (resulting sound) asserts a strong authorial presence, consistent with Billone's well-known, in-depth investigation of instrumental practice. (Figure 3).

Importantly, Billone's tablature demonstrates how the material is generated through simple physical manipulations of the resonating column. It is economical, highlighting only the changing elements of the fingering and providing occasional reminders. Traditional fingering patterns are also notated with traditional 'pitches.' The

descriptive staff complements this by capturing the essential character of each sonority with clarity and precision, leaving little doubt as to Billone's intentions. Together, the two notational layers guide the performer through both the generation of material and its execution, emphasizing the interplay between technique and sonic outcome.

A more extreme attempt to innovate notation can be seen in Timothy McCormack's *Body Matter* (2015) [12] (Figure 4). McCormack eliminates the fingering pictograms that are utilized in many pieces using extended techniques. McCormack, instead, assigns each key and hole to a 'pitch' on the staff. A fingering combination is presented firstly as a red notehead which shows a basic fingering with open noteheads prescribing the removal of a key and plus noteheads showing the adding of a key. A green notehead shows the dominant pitch in a sound also giving an idea of how to blow into the instrument. An extra beam above the staff shows "embouchure pressure [12]" and reed position. This instruction is largely redundant, since the other instructions already convey implicitly much of the same information. But it also serves to emphasize the continuous, sustained nature of the piece. McCormack's notation may seem convoluted, but it perfectly encapsulates the different sound world he is inhabiting. While Billone's treatment of sound can be seen as very natural—there is a living, vocal quality to his music, McCormack is looking for a more otherworldly character that is reflected in his notation. McCormack's notation also allows a more irregular treatment of the material, and he utilizes many unusual and awkward fingering combinations. But ultimately the focus, like Billone, is on the production of specific sounds thus fulfilling a similar role to most other notations.

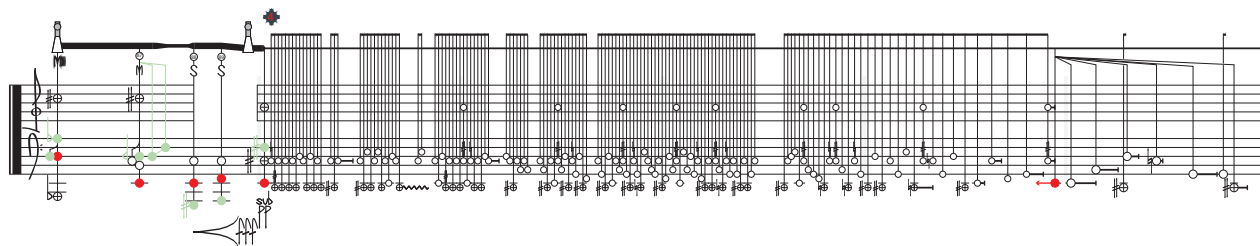


Figure 4. McCormack, *Body Matter*. (2015) from p.6 [12]

4. CASE STUDY: 25 APRIL '05

Aaron Cassidy's *25 April '05* illustrates how a composer can develop a notational system that eschews the traditional priorities and foregrounds the physical action. Cassidy's use of tablature is a deliberate way to engage the physicality of the bassoon but is not just a system to find unconventional sounds. He creates a system that communicates on multiple levels, similar to the mixed methods found in traditional notation. This allows for nuanced interpretation, varied energy states, and the discovery of unique and often unstable sounds. Cassidy has instead created conditions where sound instability happens naturally. The results can be different through different iterations, but he finds sounds which are transitive and unstable by exploring confluences where different parts of the technique interact in unexpected ways creating a live exploration of the instrument.

While Kanno emphasizes a freedom that comes from a focus on the process rather than the end result, the specificity of Cassidy's instructions can be more restricting—through their abundance and difficulty—but this helps create the energy and tension in his music. The preparation process is very different. Where in a traditional score there is an ingrained approach to focus on quality of sound, intonation, and the right notes, Cassidy's approach requires a focus more on action and movement. Shapes of notes, different playing techniques, and timing assume more structural importance as the main discernible instructions. The score is deliberately written to sound 'messy' with techniques that contradict each other and many actions unsynchronized. Instead of a turn of phrase or timing that is left open, the resulting sound is open, with the discipline being directed to the choreography of the performance. Cassidy's approach is particularly well suited to the bassoon whose unpredictability can be notorious for composers looking for specific effects. Liza Lim writes of her reluctance to use catalogued multiphonics calling it an "extremely inexact science [13]." Unstable fingering combinations vary depending on their context as well as from player to player. The smallest change in the embouchure or air pressure can change the sound drastically. Additionally, these fingerings are not well represented by a static translation on paper that neglects their flexibility and instability.

25 April '05 is based on the overpainted photograph by Gerhard Richter (Figure 5) and is a companion piece to Cassidy's solo E flat clarinet piece, *27 June '09* (2021). He builds on a similar tablature slightly adjusted for the differences in the bassoon technique. The score to *25 April '05* is notated on two staves: one for the "activities of the mouth/breath/tongue/embouchure [1]" and the other for the activities of the fingers. This second staff employs two types of notations, one working with tablature and the other with using pitches to indicate fingerings.

The breath staff is notated graphically, avoiding traditional symbols. Notes are represented as shapes, with thickness indicating dynamics and length indicating duration. This form of notation conveys a wealth of information: the shape of a note provides guidance for articulation as well as its internal dynamic contour. It also allows for unconventional shapes, such as blocks or

"reverse" sounds. This is an important consideration for instrumental technique, but is not communicated in detail in traditional scores which require that performers have a knowledge of style and convention. It should be noted that the assumption could be made that the sound would resemble these shapes, but these shapes become manipulated with different fingerings and register changes not always sounding like single blocks of sound they might seem to represent.



Figure 5. Gerhard Richter, *25 April '05* (2005) [14]

Cassidy attempts to combine spatial notation with the metrical beat hierarchy with a line showing the approximate tempo for each beat. Cassidy describes this as aiming "to disentangle rhythm from counting [1]." Cassidy additionally employs a colour system which aids the legibility of the music giving an immediate association to process that would not be so visceral using the one colour. The colours also allow for many different types of instructions to be presented on a single breath staff. (Table 1) There are also other instructions like reed positions and percussive techniques that are shown with different symbols.

Colour	Meaning
Black	Default colour. Interpreted as a direct contrast to the orange. Clean sound
Orange	Distort the sound- try to play multiphonic sounds
Blue	Guttural sound/throat flutter
Purple	Direct instruction to a mouth position
Green	'Downward pitch bends'
Pink	Sucking or kissing noise
Red	Play with teeth on reed
White	With reed off. Blow into crook
Grey	Breathy/Diffuse/unfocused sound

Table 1. Colour Instructions in Aaron Cassidy's *25 APRIL '05* (2025)

What is structurally significant in Cassidy's prescriptive notation for the air apparatus is the use of different paradigms to instruct the performer. Cassidy generally avoids a register prescription focusing on other ways to measure the apparatus of the mouth and air column. Cassidy's orange colour instructs the performer to saturate the sound to create multiphonics. This can be applied differently to different notes, but the general instruction is to try to break the sound. Even with fingering where this will not occur easily, it forces a change in sound to something that is not how the performer would usually play. Conversely, the normal pitch instruction (default black) on an unstable fingering encourages jumps in registers where I have interpreted it to mean the cleanest sound possible.

The green part of the score is a supplemental colour that is added to orange or black or blue instructions. It indicates a dropping of pitch while trying to maintain the sound type (inevitably changing sound type in some sections). Bending down is more natural on the bassoon than bending up so the opposite instruction is given as an orange shade and instructs the performer to try to find higher overtones in the sound preferably leading to distortion. (Hence the use of orange again) Cassidy is trying to play on the instability and unpredictability of the bassoon so the attempt to realize the effects is often more important than the sound itself and the parts of the score where this is more difficult produce interesting results that would not be easily notated in another way.

Cassidy's purple instruction has some similarity to the green but is a more absolute performance instruction, giving no indication at all about the resulting sound. Blue functions in a similar way, specifying a manipulation of the sound without defining its sonic outcome. Unlike in *27 June '09* [15], where black functioned as a default mode of sound production, *25 April '05* introduces orange as an explicit opposite to black. As a result, blue and purple (and red) acquire the additional significance of withdrawing any guidance toward a particular sound type.

Sections governed by blue and purple therefore operate with a different internal dynamic: sound becomes a byproduct of technique, and technique itself becomes the determining factor of interpretation. When placed

alongside the black, orange, and green instructions—whose goals are defined but inherently unstable—this creates a subtle but significant dichotomy of energy state. The performer shifts from attempting to control sound within a given parameter type to working with the instrument's natural tendencies. While interesting sonic results may be emphasised, they remain secondary to the application of the prescribed technique.

The fingering instructions are also presented in two ways. The first is as a tablature giving each finger its own directions and the second as pitched notation where the implicit fingering combinations are assumed. The contrast between these two notations also has a structural importance where different explorations of the instrument are made. As Evan Parker has described about his own practice, "The saxophone could just as well be seen as a closed tube that can be opened in various ways as an open tube that can be closed in various ways [16]."

The tablature, being more unpredictable in its sonic outcome, explores the instrument through different, non-traditional fingering combinations. In these passages, fingerings that correspond to certain pitches lose their significance as functional pitches, exemplifying Kanno's freedom of sonic outcome.

The pitched parts can be muddled by other manipulations of the sound but explore more melodic material which shows that Cassidy has not entirely abandoned the traditional musical parameters. Figure 3 shows Cassidy's use of colours and tablature. The purple technique is introduced in bar 7 after orange is the dominant colour in the first 6 bars. Purple will play a more prominent role in the next few bars.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR PERFORMER AGENCY

Discussions of notation and its relationship to performer agency often hinge on how the performer's role is framed within the score. Marco Blaauw has described one such framing as that of an executant or "bricklayer [13]." Cassidy's alternative use of notation proposes a different framing, engaging the performer through physical actions that are malleable to the individual body and instrument,

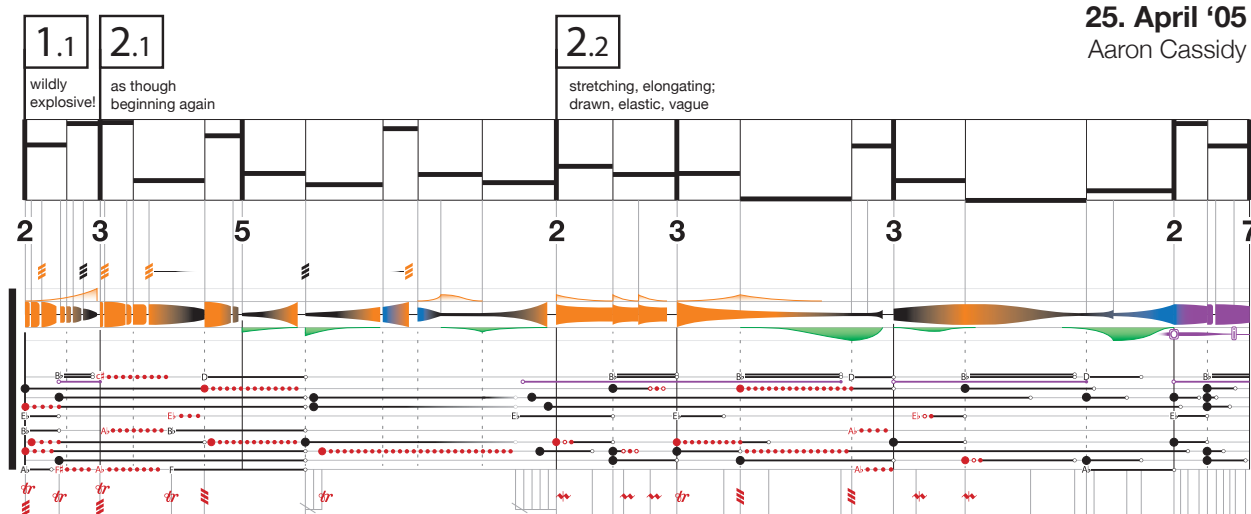


Figure 6. Aaron Cassidy, *25 April '05* (2025) mm 1- 7 [1].

albeit at a highly virtuosic level. He creates a score that fundamentally reprioritizes musical communication. Physical action—particularly the actions of the mouth—assumes a heightened importance, becoming central to the compositional structure. This act of foregrounding requires a loosening of control over other musical parameters that might otherwise distract from Cassidy's primary aims, while simultaneously imparting greater agency to the performer. In this system, technical action assumes structural importance. Motives are presented through repeating fingering combinations even though they may have no predictable direct representation in the sound. The breath staff is also clearly divided into various formal sections using different colours and shapes. Like traditional notation, there are different options for notating different techniques which aid in giving Cassidy's technical instructions a structural function. For example, purple and green can both be used to show the same technical instruction just as a pitch can have its enharmonic equivalents. Cassidy manages to create different layers of the technique which function independently in a sort of virtual polyphony. While other composers have tried the same in traditional notation, the tendency to approach a score as a series of moments can counteract this polyphonic intention. The focus on action encourages the sense of polyphony but as Cassidy says, he is still conscious of the dangers of moment thinking in his highly detailed scores.

Cassidy uses a hybrid rhythmic notation combining a metrical structure with spatial notation, effectively creating a dual rhythmic system. The shapes in the metric structure also assume structural importance, complementing the changing energy states through variations in speed. This relationship can, however, also be obscured when slower beats contain dense activity. While this creates more sophistication in the approach to metric tempo and engages the performer's 'feel' for the rhythm rather than a cerebral approach, the constantly fluctuating beat does not help in creating a sense of flow. The spatial notation also presents choices to the performer in how to interpret timings of certain events. Information requires a certain amount of space on the page to remain practically legible, and this does not always fit proportionally, or neatly into its musical space. However, the inconsistencies increase the scope for interpretation, giving the performer more agency, creating more of a collaboration. At the end of bar 3 in Figure 5, the spatial notation allows for some freedom in rhythmic interpretation with the 'grace notes' not being able to be communicated legibly in their own absolute time. The notation relies largely on graphic representations, but Cassidy still uses open freer prescriptive instructions from conventional notation such as ornamentation. Vibrato and fast tonguing are also represented in a quasi-symbolic/graphic way.

The tablature, while it presents its information in a very clear and structural way, still has certain limitations and probably aptly epitomizes the difficulties of creating a tablature on bassoon. A good technique holistically synchronizes all the different aspects complementing each other to achieve results greater than the sum of the individual parts. For example, changes in air pressure need to be tempered with changes elsewhere to reduce the

negative consequences and this happens in a fluid way. Even the fingerings are adjusted to suit different passages including subtle venting to reach higher registers. This is an essential part of the bassoon technique and something that can be applied to *25 April '05*. Because a tablature does not generally set a sonic goal, the performer could neglect the sound and intentionality in an interpretation. An instruction to change the reed or mouth position comes with an implication of a change of sound quality but this also has to be actively followed by the performer. Just following the instructions will not find all the sonic variations that Cassidy is searching for in his notation.

The complexities of prescribing the embouchure are too much to describe fully on the page but Cassidy resolves this by alternating between different processes of goal-oriented playing and technique-oriented sections. Miniscule changes in this system can have profound impact on the sound so a descriptive element to the instruction is very effective. The keywork is also very complicated on the bassoon and while Cassidy's writing demonstrates some inexperience of the instrument it also helps present his unique perspective not burdened by tradition. Cassidy does an excellent job at providing graphical information, communicating sophisticated instructions on how to play the instrument but presents a dense system that needs much investment to learn. Traditional notation, which is more symbolic, presents information in a more concise and economical way (outside of extended techniques) but has centuries of learned conventions that help it communicate with more immediacy. Dynamics, although simplified and stratified, read easier than an analysis of the sizes of shapes of the musical gestures. And a note on the page conveys an implicit fingering instruction which does not have to be shown constantly. This is demonstrated in the two different processes that Cassidy uses. The tablature is complicated in that it has instructions for the ten digits—also to be combined with the breath system. It is unfamiliar as it deals with atypical fingering combinations, but this allows an exploration into fingering patterns that are outside the realms of traditional patterns, and it is difficult to think of another system that could explore the bassoon in this comprehensive way.

6. CONCLUSION

A tablature system can be difficult to implement on the bassoon and, more generally, risks becoming overly simplistic, neglecting the instrument's complexity. Cassidy, however, has created a system that enables a sophisticated dialogue between composer and performer. Like a spoken language there is also an interesting hierarchy of grammar where for example, the black colour can be manipulated by a reed position manipulation to change the meaning of the original black sound. This also reflects his inspiration of the Gerhard Richter painted over photo where added layers interpenetrate and change the original meanings and implications. His notation reflects his compositional aims, and this phenomenon can also be reflected in other composer's approaches to notation and their musical style. *25 April '05* presents many of the interpretational challenges associated with learning a

complex work, requiring the performer to actively engage with the score and to find solutions to musical problems. This ensures that the piece has significant room for growth over time, and it is hoped that more bassoonists will take up the challenge of exploring it.

Writing for the bassoon can be a daunting proposition, but this piece demonstrates an approach that enables the creation of unique sounds without exhaustive prior study of the instrument. Traditional notation encourages a mode of thinking rooted in nineteenth-century practice, and while composers have challenged many of its assumptions, an inherent bias toward pitch and rhythm remains. New notational approaches allow for alternative ways of thinking that are more closely aligned with contemporary musical concerns. This is arguably particularly relevant for the bassoon; an instrument whose unique design affords an exceptional breadth of timbral, spectral, and gestural possibilities.

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