

**ONE INCH EQUALS 25 MILES:
PROSE GENERATES MUSIC**

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Sound samples related to the discussion are available at <www.highmayhem.org/OOC-oneinch>.

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In the collaborative effort described here, my intention was to ignite a collective interplay between my latest book of stories, *One Inch Equals 25 Miles* [1] (Frontispiece), and Dino J.A. Deane's "conducted improvisation" ensemble Out of Context (OOC) for a real-time live musical composition [2]. We hoped to merge music, vocals, electronics and words in a way that would spark further narrative and musical collaborations.

In most of my collaborations with musicians and composers over the past 20 years, voice has been primary. With some, however, the music takes over. All play upon my words in different ways that I enjoy [3]. *One Inch Equals 25 Miles*, as broadly interpreted by OOC, presented words and music in an unusual balance. The ensemble includes 10 performers with diverse backgrounds in music and theater [4]. OOC is dedicated to live conducted improvisation based on 28 hand signals that can be directed to one or several musicians or the entire group. The signs do not convey verbal directions but are "pictographs" that allow for multiple interpretations. As Deane describes it: "After the first decision, starting the piece, I make no choices. The ensemble makes them for me. The music is revealed to the audience at the same time it is revealed to us. Nobody knows where it's going. We all—players, conductor, audience—get there at the same time" [5].

Deane's method is gestural. So is mine. After hearing OOC play for the first time, I handed Deane a copy of my



Fig. 1. Dino J.A. Deane conducting the Out of Context improvisational ensemble at the High Mayhem Festival in Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2004. (© High Mayhem)

book, saying, "You are Rio." In the book, Rio "conducts" a tour for a group of diverse characters, each with a story to tell. Deane "conducts" a group of unusual performers, each with a unique approach to music. Deane found in my words a description of the ensemble's method: "chaotic with purpose" (Fig. 1).

Two avenues were explored to turn words into music: The ensemble met to play together from noon to 3:00 P.M. the second Sunday of each month. Everyone was given a copy of the book from which to choose a different story for her or his musical solo, and the group experimented with various ways to "mine" the words for music. To bring in more voices, Deane suggested "teas with Melody": Thursday afternoons from 3:30 to 4:00, two or three friends sat at my kitchen counter and read informally from the book. Simultaneously, out-of-towners interrupted with readings via phone answering machine. Deane would record nonstop for the

half hour. Later, a "Tragic Greek Chorus" read as a group the stories that had not been done.

Molly Sturges chose "Invitation" from the book for her vocal solo: "The language in 'Invitation' is informative and instructive. I chose to use only the vowels for their lyricism and softness, as if to say, look what exists inside of this" [6]. John Flax had access to four stories at once, which he could flip through intuitively to find sections with the potential for juxtaposition. Others in the ensemble worked from the emotion of the text and/or the rhythm of the sentences.

All the "tea" recordings were saved, with mistakes, re-takes and overlapping reads. Deane and C.K. Barlow (who did the sampling) had individual access to a total of 38 recordings for the live performance. Deane grouped them sequentially, allowing each story-based recording to play for 2½ minutes before bringing in the next one, in order to fit the whole into the 1-hour time frame. He took that straight, real-time layered recording and cut it into six 10-minute blocks, which were then manipulated with a program written by Barlow. She elaborates: "With Max I

wrote an environment called Contour-roller to use external information for controlling musical parameters: pitch, dynamics, etc. I adapted it to work with LiSa and shared that with Deane, who dubbed it LiMa. He loaded LiSa with the live recordings and used LiMa to play them. LiMa spits out MIDI notes and other musical attributes that respond interestingly to rapid-fire changes" [7].

Deane does not usually play an instrument in the ensemble because, as he says, doing live conducting makes use of a different part of him than playing does. However, he decided to let "Rio" have his solo. He took his cue from a line in a story: "I played piano for her" [8]. The concert ended with him handing the conduction over to Sturges. He turned his back to the audience and played flute into the body of an amplified grand piano. With a weighted right pedal raising the dampers, he improvised his tune, affecting the open strings.

Reference and Notes

1. Melody Sumner Carnahan, *One Inch Equals 25 Miles*, Michael Sumner, designer (Santa Fe, NM: Burning Books, 2004).

2. A 1-hour live conducted improvisation was presented at Outpost Performance Space (in partnership with WordSpace: NM Literary Arts) in Albuquerque, 10 December 2004, to launch the published book. The performance was recorded for a CD release in 2005; see <www.burningbooks.org>. Sound samples are available at <www.highmayhem.org/OOC-oneinch>.

3. Beginning in 1983, my words have formed the basis for Laetitia Sonami's "performance novels," and I've worked with other composers and artists who present my writing "off the page," including Robert Ashley, Joan La Barbara, Barbara Golden, Morton Subotnick, Woody Vasulka, Elodie Lauten and Larry Polansky, resulting in performances, audio works, radio broadcasts, videos and CD recordings.

4. The Out of Context ensemble is: J.A. Deane (conductor/sampler/flute), Jon Baldwin (cornet), C.K. Barlow (sampler/live sampling), Stefan Dill (oud/electronics), John Flax (acting/voice), Katie Harlow (cello), Sam Rhodes (bassoon), Molly Sturges (vocalist), Alicia Ultan (viola) and Jefferson Voorhees (drums/percussion).

5. Dino J.A. Deane, conversation with author, 29 December 2004.

6. Molly Sturges, e-mail correspondence with author, 31 December 2004.

7. C.K. Barlow, e-mail correspondence with author, 30 December 2004.

8. Carnahan [1] p. 85.

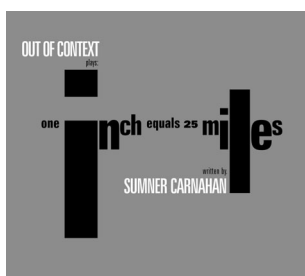
9. Carnahan [1] p. 73.

Heaven is a hand. Lord where no other besides. Great and to be feared are all idols. Stretched out to the firmament to command the formed. For my self alone I declare praise for there can be no mediator between demons. Believe that and shudder. Those who say in their hearts there is good do deeds and look down to see if there are any who are wise. For what can be known is plain to them ever since the invention of nature and philosophy, invisible though they have been and are seen through. This will happen. From the skies in blazing foam those who do not obey, not even one shall fall short of the wages. Mankind is destined to face nothing known. What cannot be revealed. And the days of our span soon gone and we fly away. Boast about what a day may bring. You cannot know what appears for a little while then vanishes. Our needs, our tires, everyone believes while we are born. Governments of all kinds, called wonderful counselor, will save your household. Come you who are burdened and give ear. I ride alone on the

only escalator. Let my voice open unto you. Truth and lies come through me, born of sin, and through you, slave to eternity. I say you must eat the righteous. Bring your own dust back with you.

Watch your step and wave to all foreigners while from the lake of torment you ascend. Retrieve the life, not through religion or salvation, but to make our world more elegant and convincing. Two men in the field. One descends and takes up a bride and surely the most distressing of human history would not want to be living during the shocking outcome. Many professing diligent washing will have disassociated. I tell you a mystery: hydrochloric acid melts iron but not the surface of this delicate lacquer bowl I hold in my hands. Accordingly we will not all sleep but we will be rearranged. When things begin to disappear, you will see the current generation rushing for the nearest subway station. I say wait for a second salvation. Arrive late at the summer of don't. Spend your eternity now so as to improve our destiny. Where there you be deliver this moment.

Frontispiece. Melody Sumner Carnahan, "Repent," from *One Inch Equals 25 Miles* [9]. (© Burning Books) Bassoonist Sam Rhodes based his solo on this story as part of the Out of Context ensemble's "conducted improvisation" performance of the book.



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