Intuition and reason: decision making in compositional processes

PhD Thesis by Neil John Carey

Research question

Can I differentiate between reasoned and intuitive decision making in my own compositional processes? Has my increasingly conscious application of this changed my compositional output?

Abstract

My aims for this PhD are to define intuitive and reasoned decision making in my own compositional processes and to present a portfolio of six original compositions. I will present an analysis of my own conscious, increasingly intuitive compositional decisions, through a portfolio of six compositions and an accompanying technical commentary.

I investigate Thomas Kuhn's work on revolutions in science through his landmark book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. This leads to work developed from Kuhn's theories by Miranda Fricker, which allows me to develop a definition of intuitive decision making in compositional processes. I use this definition, applied to my own compositional decision-making in the creation of the six pieces in my portfolio, to chart my own increasingly intuitive approach to the compositional process.

Aspects of my own music become more intuitive over time. The first piece composed, October 2010 for piano trio, is reasoned in the application of certain elements such as pitch and rhythm organisation, from the pre-compositional processes to the final outcome. The final piece in my portfolio, a chamber opera, is significantly different as much of the compositional processes are consciously intuitive. This evolution of my compositional decision-making is charted through all six compositions in the accompanying technical commentary.

I contribute to knowledge in the area of meta-cognitive thinking in relation to compositional decision-making. My six compositions contribute to the repertoire of contemporary art music.