



RNCM
ROYAL NORTHERN
COLLEGE OF MUSIC

Accounting for Performance

Society for Music Analysis Study Day
5 February 2005

Of all artistic phenomena, musical performance has probably the most complex and controversial relation with its own description. Many questions can be asked about how this relation is articulated and phrased:

What is an account of performance? What can empirical study say about performance? What do music-theoretical approaches offer? How can accounts of performance make use of journalistic and autobiographical writing by critics and performers? What overlaps and commonalities exist between these (and other) ways of accounting for performance? Can firm lines be drawn between them?

What social, political, and / or cultural work is achieved, or intended, by accounts of performance? What is their wider function in the economy of music? How do accounts of performance construct performance? What is the use / value of accounting for performance? Should performance be accountable? What can't accounts of performance provide? Why should we distinguish between performance, performing, performativity and performers? What impact do accounts of performance have upon performers? Are all accounts of performance directed at the same type of person? In all these questions, should 'performance' be rephrased as 'performances'?

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Programme

- 9.30am **Registration**
- Session 1** chair: Anthony Gritten (RNCM)
- 10.00 Vicky Ward (Leeds University)
 ‘Accounting for Student Performance’
- 10.30 Jonathan Tyack (Royal Holloway)
 ‘Accountable Performance: Audiences Surveyed at Performances of Handel’s *Messiah*’
- 11.00 **Coffee**
- Session 2** chair: Douglas Jarman (RNCM)
- 11.15 Danae Stefanou (Royal Holloway)
 ‘Accounting for Losses: Some Observations on the Elusiveness of Performativity in Analytical Discourse’
- 11.45 Iain Foreman (SOAS)
 ‘Musical Performance as Symbolic Mediation’
- Keynote Address** chair: Jonathan Dunsby (Reading University)
- 12.15pm Peter Johnson (Birmingham Conservatoire)
 ‘Settling the Account: Artistic Prerogatives in the Performance of Western Art-Music’
- 1.15 **Lunch**
- Session 3** chair: Anthony Gritten
- 2.30 Daniel Leech-Wilkinson (King’s College London)
 ‘Vocal Communication in Speech and Music’
- 3.00 Renée Timmers (King’s College London)
 ‘An Empirical Study of Musical Communication through Ornamentation’
- 3.30 Luke Windsor (Leeds University)
 ‘Structure and Expression: Staying Serious about Statistics in Music Performance Research’
- 4.00 **Tea**
- Session 4** chair: Nic Baragwanath (RNCM)
- 4.15 Uri Golomb (Cambridge University)
 ‘Performance in Theory and in Practice: Helmuth Rilling’s Interpretations of Bach’s B minor Mass’
- 4.45 Harai Golomb (Tel-Aviv University)
 ‘Accounting for (Mis-)Interpretation: Translational, Theatrical and Televised Perspectives on Scenes from Mozart’s Operas’
- 5.15 **Close**

Abstracts

Vicky Ward

‘Accounting for Student Performance’

Research concerning instrumental teaching has gained momentum in recent years, but most studies have generally focussed on the learning experience of students or on teacher behaviour and teacher / student interaction within instrumental lessons (see e.g. Hepler, 1986, Burwell, Young & Pickup, 2003). Whilst instrumental examinations such as those run by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music provide opportunities to compare and assess student performances at the end of the learning process, such systematic assessment is not usually engaged in at the early stages of learning a new work. As such there is little understanding of the factors which affect a student’s developing performance. Might the empirical study of developing performances help us to understand these further?

In addition, many empirical studies have sought to investigate moment-to-moment fluctuations of tempo in performance (see e.g., Palmer, 1997; Gabrielsson, 1999). Most of these studies have focused on adult expert performers, and often assume that changes in instantaneous tempo are ‘expressive’ rather than due to technical errors or difficulties (although see Juslin, Friberg and Bresin, 2002). Whilst research has shown that student performances are expressively timed, but with lesser magnitude than experts (Palmer, 1989), little is known about the short-term development of expressive timing.

This paper reports the results of a short-term investigation of the development of student clarinet performances and investigates whether the empirical study of such performances can help us account for them. It suggests that whilst measuring performances provides insights into how young musicians develop expressive means, this must be supplemented by other forms of inquiry.

References

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Jonathan Tyack

‘Accountable Performance: Audiences Surveyed at Performances of Handel’s *Messiah*’

Are performers accountable to their audiences? This paper explores the impact that performance practices have on audience perceptions, and on audience members’ feelings of inclusion in musical events. Without presuming to suggest that performances should pander to any market forces that could be extracted from such research, this paper offers to writers and performers alike a glimpse of audience perspectives.

Performance, once overlooked in musical study, is gradually making its presence felt. Composers are no longer regarded as absolute arbiters over musical experience and performers have had their creativity reasserted. However, the audience continues to be neglected as a constituent part of musical events. I argue that an account of performance that ignores audience perceptions is as lopsided as a musical history that sidelines reception. Without considering audiences, performance studies in music will remain a subject of exclusive interest to the few who are engaged in performing themselves. This paper represents an attempt to enfranchise the many who experience music as listeners, and to infuse research into performance practices with a greater social sensitivity.

In the research presented in this paper, a mixture of ethnographic and social-scientific methods were used to examine audience behaviour and attitudes. In particular audiences were a) assessed regarding the ways in which they could be understood as communities, and b) asked to describe their perception of performance practices. The first question reflects a concern to understand the motivations of concert-goers. Meanwhile the second addresses the extent to which the specific nature of musical performances impacts on audience experience. The results arising from this second question cast a certain perspective on the minute deliberations made by performers, and indeed the intricate observations made by performance analysts.

Audiences pose a number of problems to the researcher. How can their perceptions and attitudes be gauged in sufficiently accurate and useful ways? How can specifically musical data arising elsewhere in performance studies be related to audience experiences? While much may be learnt from ethnomusicological methods of research into music events, there remain significant areas for further development. For this research, four separate audiences of between six and eight hundred were studied. Though this makes the project one of the largest of its kind on classical concert audiences, quantitative data remains out of reach. Nonetheless, a wealth of qualitative data emerges, allowing the breadth of individual responses to be appreciated. The social-scientific methods applied to analyse the data from questionnaires, interviews and field-observation will be described in this paper. Such empirical methods add new depth to current accounts of performance.

Danae Stefanou

‘Accounting for Losses: Some Observations on the Elusiveness of Performativity in Analytical Discourse’

An account is a notion of remarkable semantic ambiguity, considering that it denotes a verbal narrative, a poetic, subjective description of events, an accurate mathematical calculation or merely a formalised numerical interpretation of concepts. This paper begins by examining the presence of such semantic attributes in the way musical performance has been conceived and theorised upon in the last century, and by outlining the emerging conception of the performance-account-as-calculation which is generated by the employment of numeric attributes, quantitative measurements and diagrams in response to the investigation of performance. Such attempts, in some ways a *sine qua non* of academic research in the discipline of musical performance studies, are certainly useful in formalising subjective interpretations and facilitating the conceptualisation of performance as a manageable series of events, but, arguably, cannot adequately address the qualitative nature of the process, phenomenon and experience of performance, particularly when considered against the emergence of interdisciplinary discourses on performance and performativity.

The set of qualitative characteristics that give us the adjective “performative” consists of active, subjective and fundamentally experiential attributes. Most importantly, “performativity” is distinguishable from the singular act of “performance”: the former is a property that may be traced in the potential of a score, the ability and gestures of a performer, or the dynamics of a performance situation, as well as, perhaps more convincingly, a combination of all three. Hence, for instance, as much help as one pianist may find in attempting to map, graph or measure the spatial properties and possibilities of a Morton Feldman piano piece according to his / her or others’ performance choices, this can scarcely give more than a quantitative account to subsequent readers / performers who follow the map, de-code the graph and replicate the measurement. A graph, as I intend to illustrate in this paper, can be formative, but not performative: it is inevitably reductionist in terms of its capacity to represent spatial qualities, and its temporality is rendered synchronic upon completion; it thus may fail to represent the process-based, imaginative space of performativity that might otherwise be conjured within a vivid verbal account.

The question posed here, is ultimately two-fold. On the one side, the paper considers to what extent the medium of graphic analysis could be deemed successful in addressing the time- and space-sensitive quality of performativity. On the other, it examines whether the proposed limitations of graphic analysis are ultimately born only when this medium is introduced into the wrong context: in other words, when a method which can usefully represent performance *techniques* and act as a practical tool for *performing* is taken up in an attempt to confront the performance *experience* and shape *listening*.

Iain Foreman

‘Musical performance as symbolic mediation’

The idea that a musical performance unfolds a world provides the basis for an account of both its meaning and affective and cultural power. Through a consideration of improvised music from different musical traditions, Western and non-Western, I explore the possibilities of building a model that accounts for both the cultural and ontological aspects of musical performance and its relation to our being-in-the-world. By understanding musical performances as mediated symbol systems, our interpretive accounts of performances should explore, drawing on Geertz and Ricoeur, the ways in which they contribute to shaping reality. Improvised performances, like narratives and cultural systems, gain their cultural and ontological vehemence from their ability to configure reality, to shape our confused, formless and mute temporal experience (Ricoeur 1991, 6).

Thus in musical performances we suspend our normal temporal and emotional referent to get a deeper representation of our being-in-the-world. This performative dimension also resonates in the realm of culture and selfhood. Since musical performances unfold a world, this world collides with the real world and symbolically recreates and expands our cultural horizons. Furthermore, since we are ‘unfinished egos’, our selves are constantly under modification through works of art, fiction, and musical performances – forms of symbolic mediation. From an ethnographic / interpretative perspective, analyses of performances need account for the ways in which music

provides humans with a means through which to understand and negotiate a potentially infinite field of experience, engage in the free-play of imagination, and receive an enlarged self.

As a basis for a cultural-symbolic account of musical performance, I turn to interpretative ethnomusicology and Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the relationship between time and narrative. Through an understanding of the temporal dimensions of musical performances we can steer a path between one dimensional accounts of time in which we experience time as either a linear succession, or phenomenologically, in terms of the past, present and future. Ricoeur develops a concept of human time, dependent on narrative, which is expressive of a complex experience in which phenomenological time and cosmological time are integrated. I consider the extent to which musical performances penetrate and heighten this experience in order to rework it from the inside, enabling new experiences to be uncovered.

Any account of musical performances must attest to the cultural and ontological power they affect. We must be able to acknowledge the ways in which a performance's embodied meaning is transformed by the listener into a meaning that we can 'care' for. By viewing music as a symbolic mediation of the temporal dimensions in which we are related to the world, our mood, we can understand that it's affective and cultural power lies in its ability to universalize an incommunicable experience and render it communicable and meaningful.

Thus, we begin to reformulate our account of music's meaning and move away from merely describing its forms and mode of representation, towards an understanding of the unique gestures the performer employs in response to their ontological condition, the worlds the performance unfolds, and the experiences a performance iconically augments.

Peter Johnson

'Settling the Account: Artistic Prerogatives in the Performance of Western Art-Music'

The term 'artistic prerogatives' is used by John Rink to describe the 'prism' through which the various factors influencing the interpretation of a work are 'synthesized' by the musical performer. The term seems accurately to capture those aspects of performance that are not strictly work-orientated, but Rink has little to say about what the prerogatives are or why they are 'artistic'. Looking more generally at the Performance Studies literature, it is ironic that so much is written about the preparatory stages of performance – its preparation, rehearsal, and as Peter Hill stresses in a recent article, the importance of thinking away from the instrument – yet there is still very little about the act of performance itself.

I set out in this paper to analyse the concept of the 'the performing artist's prerogative': what is it, how does it colour or qualify a prepared interpretation and how does it influence the perceived quality of performance in the art-music tradition? Drawing on a wide range of discourses, from Lydia Goehr and Naomi Cumming to Foucault and Adorno, with extensive reference to the Performance Studies literature on the way, I argue that an adequate account of performance in the art-music tradition requires attention to the independent actions of the performer or performers as both interpreters and as performers in the artistic sense of the word. In exercising their performers' prerogative, musicians are typically engaged in a second level of interpretation, 'the performance of the performance' as Goehr puts it.

If the artist's prerogative is manifest in performance, it serves as a measure of the extent to which performances are independent of the works of which they are based. Performances can thus be heard as free critical responses to the work, so that even when the performer's intention is to be 'true' to the text or a performing tradition the resultant performance will be logically distinct from the work upon which it is based. But the listener's response to the consequent music is similarly independent of the performance itself and represents a third level of interpretation. I discuss some of the consequences of these observations, for performers and listeners, in the context of selected recordings, including an extended video extract from the recent Covent Garden production of *Madame Butterfly*.

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson

'Vocal communication in speech and music'

Singers know that sounds communicative in everyday life (for example, sounds representing feelings or situations in which feelings are generated) form an important ingredient in communication in song. Musicology has tended to assume that the role played in musical understanding by listeners recognising these signals is trivial, and that they are at most superficially decorative of the relationships at work between notes, which do the bulk of the communicative work when performances of pieces are found to be moving or satisfying.

Psychologists have proposed and tested a number of plausible hypotheses to show how this process works. Some involve understanding music as acting like a person, some as a template against which bodies configure themselves, some as a means of generating empathy through mood contagion, some as a system of signals calling on naturally selected abilities promoting survival and closely tied to fast emotional reaction. Clearly, if any of these

is correct (and they may all be), then music interacts with shared psychological processes to such an extent that perception must depend on signals that come from particular performances of a musical text more, and on signals that come directly from the text itself less, than we have assumed.

Musicologists can provide innumerable examples from 100 years of recorded performance which show that expressivity and the signalling of emotions changes over time. This raises important questions for studies of music perception to consider. If the signalling of feelings changes, can the process be fundamental to the way our bodies work with sound, or is it simply that performers make different choices from a range of possibilities, only some of which are realisable at any one place and time due to cultural constraints? There is much more work to be done on the details of this process, and on the relationship between changing styles of expressivity in music and changing styles of emotional expressivity in society at large.

But what kind of scholarship are we doing when we make these sorts of observations? Is this another form of hermeneutics, culturally determined and of no more than heuristic value? Is it essentially metaphorical, depending on the brain's predisposition to search across domains for connections between incoming data and models stored in memory? Is it still recognisably music analytical, in the sense that we are trying to understand how pieces of music work? Or are we reaching towards science and making observations about physiological and psychological states, observations of a sort that are best tested empirically? Is the musicology of performance leading us inexorably towards becoming scientists?

Elena Gerhardt's 1928 recording of Schubert's *Schlaflied* (also known as *Schlummerlied*, D527), a performance exceptional for its use of portamento – a now forbidden expressive code – to model universally used infant-directed vocalisations, provides a focus for discussion of these and related questions. It may be heard in advance at <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/music/ksa/Cc12964-2.mp3> with the text and a translation of sorts at http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=11005.

Renée Timmers

'An Empirical Study of Musical Communication through Ornamentation'

One type of account of music performance is to interpret it as a process of musical communication. A performer has a concept and interpretation of the music, which he or she expresses by musical means, and this influences how listeners perceive and interpret the music. The communication may concern structural interpretations of the music as well as emotional interpretations.

The musical means of a performer include tempo and timing, dynamics and accents, timbre variations, and changes in pitch. But a performer also has the possibility to introduce ornamentation or to improvise to some extent. Although mostly out of practice, ornamentation has partly returned as an expressive means in performances of early music. The main question is how these means are used for musical communication and how musical communication functions. Because loudness, tempo, intonation and articulation are phenomena that have an existence outside of music as well as within music, the basis of communication through these means may relate to speech and perception of auditory signals in general. Ornamentation is however more specific to music and its basis of communication seems therefore more abstract from cues present in daily life, even if general cognitive processes play a role.

The main hypothesis is that communication through ornamentation is not based on a direct interpretation of auditory cues, but on a metaphorical interpretation. Ornamentation can be used to communicate for example an emotional interpretation of music on the basis of analogies between musical concepts and concepts of emotions.

Three experiments were conducted to test this hypothesis. 1) A violinist and a flutist were asked to ornament three fragments from a Handel sonata in order to express a mild and intense version of four emotions: happy, sad, lovingly, and angry. 2) 24 music students were asked to listen to the performances with ornamentation and to rate the presence of the four emotions in each performance. 3) The 24 music students were asked to describe their concept of each emotion and their ideas on how the emotion can be expressed in music.

The results showed that the violinist varied the complexity, density, loudness and metrical position of the ornamentation to express the emotions, while the flutist varied the timing, duration, complexity, metrical position and harmony of the ornaments. The adaptations of the violinist to the ornamentation primarily related musical intensity with conceptual activity of emotions. Angry was more complex, dense, and loud than happy, lovingly, and sad (in order of decreasing activity). The adaptations of the flutist to the ornamentation showed some other mappings as well. In her performances, the angry ornamentation was timed short and on the beat, like an attack, while the happy ornamentation was timed more often before the beat as in restless anticipation. The sad ornamentation had long ornaments often dotted in duration as if hesitant to resolve, while lovingly had relatively many slides as to connect the notes together.

The listener responses confirmed that ornamentation can be used to communicate an interpretation of emotion, and the results of the questionnaire gave further evidence for communication based on metaphorical relations between concepts of music and emotion. For example, lovingly could be expressed as if the performer caresses each note, while sad was expected to linger.

Luke Windsor

‘Structure and expression: staying serious about statistics in music performance research’

This paper will focus on three recent attempts to tackle the relationship between musical performances and musical structure. Two of the approaches compare the output of closely specified generative models with human performances (Zanon and de Poli, 2003, Sundberg, Friberg and Bresin, 2003), whereas the third (Windsor, Desain and Penel, paper submitted) takes a more inductive approach. I will argue that the three methods described here are examples of a general class of statistical methods which should be more widely applied within the field of performance studies.

The paper will be illustrated with examples which

- (a) demonstrate the weakness of some standard approaches to the description of expressive timing;
 - (b) illustrate how linear modelling of various kinds can better evidence our claims;
- and
- (c) show how a linear model can be applied to performances of a short Beethoven piano piece to uncover a richly detailed picture of the different ways in which expressive timing might be motivated by musical structures.

References

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Uri Golomb

‘Performance in theory and in practice: Helmuth Rilling’s Interpretations of Bach’s B minor Mass’

Several performers have presented their interpretations of music in words as well as through their actual performances. Helmuth Rilling provides a particularly striking case: between 1977 and 1999 he produced three recordings of Bach’s Mass in B minor (1977, 1988, 1999) as well as a book on the same work (1979, trans. 1984, rev. 1986). The book provides detailed analyses and performance instructions for each movement of the work, often prescribing the way individual motifs and figures should be rendered. It thus appears to provide a detailed record of Rilling’s thoughts on this music and the motivations behind his choices as a performer (at least in 1979-1984); and his decisions to publish his views invites comparison with his other durable records – namely, his three commercial recordings of the work. The information from the book can be further supplemented by Rilling’s articles and interviews, which document his general views on Bach’s music and its performance.

As one might expect, none of Rilling’s recordings realises precisely all the recommendations and prescriptions contained in his books. Surprisingly, however, the recording that seems most consistent with the conductor’s verbally-stated views on the work’s rendition is the one which is most chronologically removed from it (the 1999 version).

George Stauffer writes that Rilling’s “suggestions for performance are closer to nineteenth-century traditions than to the practices of Bach’s day”. Reading the book on its own, that conclusion is understandable. A comparison between the book and Rilling’s recordings, however, sheds a different light on the former. Listening to the performances on their own, one would conclude that the 1977 version reflects a more “romantic” style, whereas the 1988 and 1999 recordings increasingly reflect the influence of historically-informed performances. Yet these later versions also realise many more of Rilling’s 1979 / 1984 recommendations.

In his book, Rilling repeatedly exhorts performers to trace the ebb-and-flow of tension within the music. His earlier performances, however, often display an internal rigidity which belies this ideal. This disparity might represent the tension between Rilling’s aesthetics and his adoption, in the 1960s and 1970s, of a performance style better-suited for the projection of strict Unity of Affect, reflecting the influence of several of Rilling’s mentors and erstwhile colleagues. In subsequent years, Rilling and his ensembles have gradually adopted a more locally flexible performance style, reflecting, in part, the influence of period-instrument performances.

The comparison between book and recordings thus provides a fascinating case study on the relationship between a performer’s statements and practices; but it also provides insights into how the ostensibly anti-Romantic influence of historical performance has actually increased the expressive options for Bach performance, even for “traditional” musicians like Rilling.

Harai Golomb

'Accounting for (Mis-)Interpretation: Translational, Theatrical and Televised Perspectives on Scenes from Mozart's Operas'

This presentation is about several layers of 'accounting' for performative interpretations of excerpts from the Mozart / DaPonte operas. Operatic performance always involves several components and human agents: the verbal text and its relation to the dramatic situation; the music's account for both; and two hierarchical ranks of performers: (1) conductor and director, and (2) the actual singers / actors. In a production sung in a non-original language there is also a translator, and in a filmed / televised one the photographing team makes its 'accounting and accountable' impact as well.

My first example is the famous aria "*Voi che sapete*" from *Le Nozze di Figaro*. In a performance led by John Eliot Gardiner, Cherubino-singer Pamela Helen Stephen departs from a tradition of treating this aria as a 'musical number' deserving the singer's highest quality of performance. Echoing Mozart's effects of tonal – and thereby emotional – instability, this performance moves from initial wavering pitch and insecure breathing to triumphant jubilation at the end, signalling control and security. It is a dynamic process, rather than a static monument, giving priority to theatrical considerations over some musical and 'diva'-motivated ones.

The second example is the *Terzettino* in Act I of *Così fan Tutte*. Da Ponte's text speaks of charming the breezes, the waves and all the elements, to grant everyone their hearts' desires. The Italian word used, *desir*, is virtually identical with its English equivalent, 'desire', in potentially referring to lofty aspirations and to carnal lusts alike. Mozart gives two totally different accounts of the word 'desir', interpreting it first as high-minded wishes and aspirations and later as Macbeth-like "black and deep desires", ominous and premonitory for the entire opera. Yet, some videotaped performances are soft and gentle throughout. In one case, this approach is largely in accordance with a wrong-headed English translation, substituting "shore" [in the phrase "and guide them to shore"] for the correct translation-solution, "desires". The failure here is also the director's and the conductor's, who went along with the translator's error. Another director, Peter Sellars, understands Mozart's interpretation of the text, as seen in the way he guides gestures and facial expressions of his performers (I don't like his specific interpretation, but at least he has one).

In the last example, also from *Così fan tutte*, the four would-be participants in the mock double-wedding raise their glasses to celebrate their 'love'. Three of them repeat the same text, set to an accurate canon in three voices; but instead of joining the canon at the musically prescribed moment, the fourth participant cannot hide his anger and sings different, hateful words, with different, discordant music. One film director, though, displays a total missinterpretation (i.e., missing Mozart's cue). He moves the camera away from the most important character when he sings his dissenting part, out of the spectator's sight and mind.

It is demonstrable, then, that performances can change hierarchies between components of a complex operatic whole, producing strikingly different, even diametrically opposed, meanings. In some cases, it is a matter of different reasonably defensible accounts of the verbal / musical whole; in other cases, there is no artistic accountability, and the result is untenable.

Future SMA events

TAGS Day for Music Postgraduates
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 23 April 2005
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Dublin International Conference on Music Analysis
 University College Dublin
 23-25 June 2005
 Programme announced: Feb 2005
 Email: julian.horton@ucd.ie or heneghaa@tcd.ie

Fourth Biennial International Conference on Twentieth-Century Music
 University of Sussex
 25-28 August 2005
 Deadline for receipt of proposals: 11 Feb 2005
 Email: c20conference@sussex.ac.uk

Future RNCM events

Conference: John Cage, Thinker-Performer
 16 April 2005
 Deadline for receipt of proposals: 18 Feb 2005
 Email: anthony.gritten@rncm.ac.uk

RMA Study Day: 21st Century Music: Aesthetics and Reception
 14 May 2005
 Programme announced: 10 Feb 2005
 Email: anthony.gritten@rncm.ac.uk

Symposium: Sculptors in Sound: The Piano Music of Beethoven and Tippett
 6-7 May 2005
 Including performances of all Beethoven Sonatas, Bagatelles and Variations, and all four Tippett Sonatas
 Including performances and talks by Charles Rosen, Stephen Osborne, and Barry Cooper
 Email: anthony.gritten@rncm.ac.uk