

Gwrth-gitâr

The notable guitarist Derek Bailey wrote that non-idiomatic musical improvisation is often viewed as a 'conjuring trick, a doubtful expedient or even a vulgar habit'

When placed outside the tradition of Western music however, improvised music is categorically none of the above!! On the contrary, I'd argue that improvisation provides a much greater variety of musical conclusions than diatonic music will ever be able to provide.

A cross cultural use of dissonance in improvised music traces a direct line to the primitive and unconscious spaces in sound and helps us express ideas from a non-academic, more intuitive perspective.

Gwrth-gitâr then is a process for conveying these ideas. It is free playing in the sense that anything goes. It does not explicitly reject standard Western tuning, melody or harmony, but it does reject the need for such things.

It seeks to explore new ways of using a guitar to paint an alternative view of the world. It is improvised, harmonically unstable, unrehearsed, and leaves as much to chance as it does to the ability of the operator. It has no interest in being reproducible.

Gwrth-gitâr is, in part, the answer to the question of 'what else can this thing do?' and in its execution recognises the following two approaches

Approach A: a technically proficient guitarist can become bored and frustrated by the conventional language of acoustic guitar playing - the predictable chords and rhythms of singer-songwritery, or the slavish commitment to reproducing the jaunty fingerpicking of American Primitive Guitar.

Approach B: a technically limited guitarist can become bored and frustrated by his or her own inability to even copy existing sequences. They might wonder whether there is any point to devoting a thousand hours to the task of improving dexterity and hand-eye coordination if the end result will simply be the ability to play Wonderwall or Brown Eyed Girl from memory.

While preparations are used and encouraged, no electricity is used in Gwrth-gitâr to generate these sounds, only to

record them. This precludes the use of, for instance, e-bows, electric toothbrushes, mini hand-held fans etc.

Does this therefore mean that this is not truly free playing? Perhaps, although a line has to be drawn somewhere, and given that the focal instrument is acoustic, it seems right that any preparations should also be acoustic.

Free playing is not a new idea, but one that I feel is still very much under-explored and under-represented. It offers challenges and thrills that are not easily found in other contexts

Questions that a gwrth-gitarydd must ask:

1. How can we disguise, suppress or alter this instrument's natural sound?
2. How can we use this instrument's natural sound in new ways?
3. How can we force this instrument to make unnatural sound?
4. What happens when we lose ourselves within this instrument?
5. How can we surprise ourselves with this instrument?
6. What happens when we introduce this instrument to this object? What else can it do?

The above questions become even more intriguing when they are being answered while someone else is also trying to answer them at the same time. This provides many opportunities for surprise, chaos, harmony and disharmony.