

COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION IN A HYPERLOCAL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT: This article explores ways in which compositional methods can respond to and articulate the specificity of localness, interrogating ideas of place, identity, collaboration and the local through an examination of the methods used by professional Birmingham composers to open out aspects of their compositional approach to the wider community. I share my findings from *for-Wards*, an ambitious public music project representing an artistic collaboration between myself, ten professional Birmingham composers, nine music organisations and residents from Birmingham to create a musical ode to the city. Non-conventional compositional approaches became instrumental in the development of an innovative music project, documenting the experience of the local within an ambitious citywide collaboration. The article considers the *for-Wards* project's background, notions of the hyperlocal, the *for-Wards* artistic team, ideas relating to authorship, the *for-Wards* compositional framework, collaborative challenges, an presentation of collaborative compositional methods employed by the *for-Wards* composers to examine the local including local histories and its playful variants, field recordings, environmental vocalisations, visualising the local and concluding remarks.

Background

In this section I outline the *for-Wards* project's raison d'être and provide an example of how creative projects can spring out of a curiosity about place and identity. My curiosity about place and identity resulted in a sonic exploration of what Lippard argues is the lure of the local – 'the pull of a place that operates on each of us' – that exposes our politics and spiritual legacies.¹ My interest in composing collaboratively in very localised settings emerged from a personal desire to learn more about the city in which I was born and raised. After time spent working abroad and studying in London, I realised I knew more about the geographical makeup of the capital than I did about Birmingham and sought to address this through composition.

for-Wards was initially a solo composition project, built on the ambition of composing forty short works through the lens of my own perception of each of Birmingham's then 40 electoral wards.² This approach has precedence in the work of Sufjan Stevens' project *The Fifty States* (2003–2009), in which Stevens set out to compose an album for each state of the USA. The project was ultimately unsuccessful, with Stevens only releasing two of the projected fifty albums in a six-year period before writing the project off. Learning from the logistical and creative over-stretch that Stevens faced in his project, I established a creative team involving community groups from each ward in the compositional process to realise the project. I have been able to use this process to establish some parameters for community composition projects more broadly. As iterations of the team developed, Harun Morrison, then joint artistic director of Fierce Festival, described my approach to community composition as 'hyperlocal', a term borrowed from media to describe highly localised news and community interest platforms that are concerned with events and stories within a specific geographic community.³ In *for-Wards*, I transposed ideas of citizen journalism's hyperlocal into a compositional framework to represent localised compositional activity. From the very earliest stages of my project, I have considered the concept of the hyperlocal, and questions about how this can be represented in compositional practice, to be absolutely

¹ Lucy R. Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (New York: New Press, 1997).

² The number of wards was subsequently expanded to 69 following a boundary review in 2018.

³ Damian Radcliffe (2012), *Here and Now: UK hyperlocal media today*. Available at: <http://www.nesta.org.uk/publications/here-and-now-uk-hyperlocal-media-today> [Accessed: 8 November 2021].

central to this project; building from notions of place and the local to sonically represent community group's subjective responses to these ideas.

Hyperlocal

In the field of citizen journalism, Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley define hyperlocal media operations as 'geographically-based, community-oriented, original news-reporting organizations indigenous to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region and to promote civic engagement.'⁴ Although there are many differing perspectives on what substantiates hyperlocal media and 'audience perceptions of what constitutes "local" vary considerably'.⁵ Kurpius, Metzgar, and Rowley define hyperlocal media operations as 'geographically-based, community-oriented, original-news-reporting organisations indigenous to the web and intended to fill perceived gaps in coverage of an issue or region and to promote civic engagement'.⁶ Radcliffe presents a comprehensive definition describing hyperlocal media as 'online news or content services pertaining to a town, village, single postcode or other small, geographically defined community';⁷ however, he also presents examples that constitute various types of hyperlocal sites operating at different levels of the geographical scale:

1. Hyperlocal can mean a whole town or city
2. Or it could mean just a single village
3. Some sites cover specific postcodes or wards
4. Whilst others serve a defined community, such as an estate, area, or niche geographic community of interest⁸

These definitions of hyperlocals are quite similar, describing them as geographically based, community-facing and enabling civic engagement. The relationships that establish hyperlocals include a producer and the geographical community it serves. The hyperlocal producer is responsible for the content and creation of the online space and is resident within the geographically community she documents. The hyperlocal producer often invites the local geographical community to participate or engage with the hyperlocal content, sometimes inviting them write guest blog posts or as well as comment on the uploaded content. Within Radcliffe's definition of hyperlocals is the claim that 'a sense of place is at the core of all hyperlocal services'.⁹ The term 'sense of place' as a concept is multidisciplinary and is defined, theorised and used in architecture, geography, social sciences, to name a few, often with conflicting theoretical and methodological traditions

Hyperlocal Compositional Framework

In delivering and mapping out the *for-Wards* project, I was tasked with curating a citywide hyperlocal compositional collaboration and the main problem to solve was how to ensure all the composed material was *hyper-localised*? In other words, to consider how I would support the compositional teams to produce music that emerges from and represents or articulates place. In *for-Wards*, I adapted ideas of hyperlocal to the demands of working with communities on compositional projects that reflect the cultural identities of the people in individual localities in Birmingham with the aim to explore the formation of a compositional and curatorial methodology that intersected at the realms of socially-engaged practice, community music and artist-led community based creative projects, via the notion of hyperlocal and site-specific working methods. The main objective was to devise

⁴ Emily T. Metzgar, David Kurpius and Karen M. Rowley (2011), 'Defining hyperlocal media: Proposing a framework for discussion', *New Media and Society*, vol. 13, no. 5, p. 774.

⁵ Radcliffe, p. 6.

⁶ Metzgar, Kurpius and Rowley, p. 774.

⁷ Radcliffe, p. 9.

⁸ Radcliffe, p. 9

⁹ Radcliffe, p.8.

collaborative compositional methods that have both a high level of community engagement that result in new musical work demonstrating a sense of place. The compositional framework I devised aimed for as much as the compositional work to take place in each locality, for the compositional teams to actively engage with sounds found in each specific locale and to ensure there was an artistic consistency and compositional thread linking the commissioned works to place. The framework instructed that in each selected Birmingham district the artistic partner and their professional composer should deliver four field recording workshops (one per ward for each community group), at least five workshops for the composer to develop work and share findings in partnership with each of their four community groups, and a local performance (within their selected district and with transport support for community participants).

Artistic Team

The project was made up of ten professional composers (each a Birmingham native or Birmingham-based) who worked with 40 community groups (four apiece) located in the ten constituencies which make up Birmingham (at the time, each district was made up of four wards resulting in four community groups collaborating with each composer). Birmingham is Europe's youngest city and there was a need to represent the diversity not only of its different communities but also its different creative voices. In planning *for-Wards* I decided it was integral that the recruitment of the ten composers showcased a broader and wide range of Birmingham's musical compositional talent. I recruited a diverse team of composers, who worked across a range of genres, developing performances at a range of independent music organisations and venues dedicated to showcasing new music in the city. The *for-Wards* Artistic Partners are shown in Table 1.

District (Wards)	Year	Lead Organisation and partners	Community Group(s)	Venue: Performance date	Artist/Genre
Edgbaston (Barley Green, Harborne, Quinton, Edgbaston)	1	Midlands Arts Centre with support from Capsule	Martineau Volunteers; Local History Group; Chad Vale School; Haven Community Project.	Martineau Gardens: June 3 rd 2017	Pram (Experimental Pop)
Hodge Hill (Bordesley Green, Shard End, Washwood Heath)	1	Access Creative College	Ward End Park Friends; Women's Empowerment Group Bordesley Green; Shard End Pump Youth Group; Hodge Hill Girls Drama Group.	Royal George Hotel Basement: July 1 st , 2017	Justin K Broadrick (Grindcore, Heavy, Brutal, Electronica)
Northfield (Kings Norton, Longbridge, Weoley)	1	Birmingham Contemporary Music Group	Early Years Home Ed; Jervoise School; Home Ed Group; Naf Caf.	Weoley Castle Community Church, Northfield Baptist Church: 29 th June 2017	Percy Pursglove (jazz, contemporary)
Selly Oak	1	Royal Birmingham Conservatoire	Crunch Writers;	Bournville Junior School: 23 rd June 2017	Bobbie-Jane Gardner

(Bournville, Billesley, Brandwood)		(Birmingham City University)	University of Birmingham School; Elders Lunch Group Manningford Hall; Billesley Primary School.		(Contemporary, electronic, experimental)
Erdington (Erdington, Kingstanding, Stockland Green & Tyburn)	2	Flatpack Projects	Polish Expats Association; Kingstanding Food Project; Stockland Green Historical Society; Chivenor Primary School.	St. Barnabus Church: 16 th June 2018	Scott Johannsson (electronica, experimental, cinematic)
Hall Green (Moseley & Kings Heath, Sparkbrook, Springfield)	2	Midlands Arts Centre with Hare & Hounds	Robin Hood Academy; All Saints Youth Group Kings Heath; Ashiana Community Project; The Springfield Project.	The Springfield Centre: 28 th June 2018	Grandmaster Gareth (jazz, lounge, psychedelia, 2-tone, pop, punk)
Ladywood (Aston, Ladywood, Nechells, Soho)	2	Wassifca CIC	South Aston and Nechells Local History group; Deaf Cultural Centre Youth Group; Via Nova Choir; James Watt Primary School.	South Aston United Reformed Church: 23 rd June 2018	Xhosa Cole (jazz, electronic)
Perry Barr (Handsworth Wood, Lozells, Oscott, Perry Barr)	2	Wassifa CIC	DISC Dementia Information and Support for Carers; Handsworth Park Fitness Group; Yew Tree Primary School; Maryvale Community Project.	Lozells Methodist Church: 30 th June 2018	Simon Duggal (reggae, dancehall, hip hop, bhangra)
Sutton (Four Oaks, Newhall, Trinity, Vesey)	2	Access Creative College	Greville Care Home; Sutton Rock Choir; Whitehouse Common Primary School; Shaggy Dog Golf Club Boldmere.	Concerts in the Park, Sutton Park: 1 st July 2018	Pøgman (dubstep)

Yardley (Acocks Green, Sheldon, South Yardley, Stetchford, Yardley North)	2	Birmingham Contemporary Music Group	Kimichi School; Sheldon Tai Chi Group; Craft Group at South Yardley Library; Stechford Beavers.	St Edburgha's Church & Old Yardley School Trust House: 23 rd June 2018	Annie Mahtani (experimental, sound art, electroacoustic)
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Table 1: *for-Wards* artistic partnerships and compositional teams

Authorship

The question of authorship is obviously complex and sometimes contested in collaborative compositional works but claims over the work's conception and development of ideas are key to understanding authorship. An exemplar of this can be found in the work of John Baldessari, who was also a conceptual influence on *for-Wards*. Baldessari's *Commissioned Paintings* is a conceptual artwork that involved the commissioning of several local sign painters to copy fourteen photos of Baldessari's friend pointing at quotidian objects. The local sign painters were enlisted to support the realisation of *Commissioned Paintings'* artistic concept; a direct response to criticism that conceptual art was quintessentially pointing at things (Johnson, K., 1998), their inclusion was integral to the conceptual demands of the work which playfully examine ideas of appropriation and authorship however, the overall artistic idea for *Commissioned Paintings'* was created by Baldessari who is the author of the artistic work.¹⁰ Importantly, Baldessari clearly credits the local sign painters' contribution. The same approach to authorship correlates to *for-Wards* where the overall project concept and design is mine realised through the support of an accredited artistic team accredited. Ascribing authorship becomes a matter of understanding the layers of composition and recognising the significance of both overarching concept and formal compositional elements.

Hyperlocal compositional methods

How does a composer working in hyperlocalised community settings share and facilitate their unique compositional processes, which for a significant number of composers is a solitary and personal endeavour, with the wider public to collaboratively co-create new music? In this section, I unveil some of the compositional processes deployed, beginning with the historicising methods utilised by three *for-Wards* composers. I also include some of the resulting tensions that emerged in this process and were subsequently resolved. Three *for-Wards* composers commenced our co-commissions with local surveys, while the remaining seven composers preferred to meet with their collaborators to learn about each area through discussion and dialogue before proceeding.

An exemplar of this can be found in the creation of commissioned work *Sweet Selly* which took Selly Oak district in south Birmingham as inspiration. My collaborators and I began our historicising process with surveys that included internet searches and trips to nearby libraries to scour books on local histories for the four wards within the district. This process was used to uncover noteworthy facts and materials with the aim of potentially utilising ideas in the creation of the piece. For example, in Billesley ward, preparatory work for *Sweet Selly's Walking Down a Billesley Street* initially involved meeting with local history hobbyist Peter Haylor who is a Billesley native. The aim was to gain insider knowledge about the locality and to explore exciting narratives that could support content for the hyperlocal piece. Haylor shared research that was supporting preparation for the publication of the co-authored book *Billesley and the Surrounds*. Haylor's findings centred on the 'good old days' of Billesley, which did not correlate well with the lives and

¹⁰ Ken Johnson, 'ART IN REVIEW; John Baldessari', *New York Times*, 11th December 1998.

hyperlocal activity of my eight and nine-year-old collaborators at Billesley Primary School. Haylor's research findings did not make it into *Walking Down a Billesley Street* because he was not part of the Billesley ward compositional team. He was not a student at Billesley Primary School and, I did not feel it was appropriate to invite him to join the group. Nevertheless, this does not discount the potential of using this method for future hyperlocal compositional work. The tension for the composer working hyperlocally raises questions about whose voice to foreground? The local historian or the young people? Regardless of the decision I made, their participation was hyperlocal. However, in this case I chose to dismiss Haylor's hyperlocal findings because of the hyperlocal context in which I was collaborating. My Billesley Primary School collaborators' hyperlocal environment was a Year 5 classroom, their school and the surrounding area with which they had a direct connection. This leads to further questions regarding the collaborative process such as, should the local historicising activity be shared between community and composer? How do the composition teams work through different perspectives and narratives based on their locality?

Collaborative challenges

One of the challenges that can occur in the collaborative process is learning how to navigate differing ideas in order to find harmonious ways to generate new work. How does a composer working in community settings sensitively include the ideas of her collaborators whilst retaining artistic integrity? In *Sweet Selly's* 'Bournville Chimes' – a piece I co-wrote with the Crunch creative writers based in Bournville ward – I wanted to ensure that the idea of my collaborators as well as my own were respected to ensure for a balance collaboration and incorporated into our musical creation. 'Bournville Chimes' demonstrates a hyperlocal and historical thematic consideration in its composition and title: Bournville is the name of the place for which the piece was written and 'Chimes' was chosen to reference the sonority, and mechanical aspect of the instrument used to perform the piece; a carillon situated in Bournville. In the third composition workshop the idea that stimulated the co-creation of *Bournville Chimes* was connected to the hyperlocal survey of Bournville's history. The title of our piece suggests our artistic music was Bournville's development as an area and, its history; this was because the Cadbury's enterprise was the most talked about topic in our ideas/pre-compositional workshop.

My collaborators and I all had a keen interest in George Cadbury's care of their employee's welfare and well-being, such as ensuring workers had comfortable housing. However, there was much surprise (and for one collaborator shock) when I shared an experience of attending an art exhibition by visual artist Karen McLean. The exhibition was called *Sweet Ethics* and is a site-specific installation that 'confronts the way in which philanthropist and businessman George Cadbury is traditionally represented and by extension critiques the ethics of capitalism.'¹¹ The artwork is an examination of the discrepancies between the Cadbury family's treatment of their workers in England and the Caribbean. English employees in the Birmingham factory were given beautiful and individualised houses with gardens. However, in McLean's exhibition, she recreates (on a Bournville site), a replica of the wooden huts in which the Cadbury's Caribbean employees resided. So how was this resolved? After much discussion, my collaborators and I amended our piece to reflect our understanding of the Cadbury's moral behaviour. We eventually agreed that the piece would move away from just being a joyful celebration of the Cadbury family and would instead connect to our adjusted perspective on Bournville's history. We decided to create a 'dreamy' sounding opening first section that connected to the Cadbury's lofty ideology and vision for the treatment of their workers and agreed to use a D Lydian mode to achieve this (see Example 1).

Example 1: *Sweet Selly* – 'Bournville Chimes', demonstrating use of D Lydian mode in opening bars.

¹¹ <https://karenmclean.co.uk/work/sweet-ethics> (Accessed: 12.11.21).

The second section of *Bournville Chimes* connects to the group's response to the Cadbury family's lack of philanthropy regarding their workers in the Caribbean. My collaborators wanted the B section needed to be percussive and darker in its mood and so the music uses a quasi-D minor modality and a lower register (see Example 2).

Example 2: 'Bournville Chimes', bars 59 – 68.

The motif from the A section returns to a D Major sounding tonality at bar 79 which my collaborators and I felt signalled a more hopeful third and final section (see Example 3). This section was a musical response to one of the collaborators carrying out further historical research where they reported the Cadbury family role in the abolition of slavery. The structure and idea for *Bournville Chimes* were devised collectively. These ideas came about through our discussions in the composing workshops. We did not need to vote for one idea over another, our conversations naturally concluded to our piece manifesting in this way. 'Bournville Chimes' demonstrates the resolution of tension/conflict within the collaborative experience by reflecting on the ambivalence in the music itself.

Example 3: Sweet Selly's 'Bournville Chimes' bars 79 – 81.

Figure 1: Sam Owen from Pram using Sooty and Sweep puppets to play *Under the Blossom that Hangs on the Bough*

Local Histories

Local historicising as a compositional method corresponds to ideas of cultural and social aspects of community building and in the *for-Wards* project, a significant number of the professional composers described a profound sense of connection throughout the project. Historicising as a pre-compositional tool also supported compositional aesthetics outlined in this section. In Edgbaston and Erdington districts, the compositional teams including local histories as methods in contrasting ways: some were playful, and others encompassed fictionalised approaches. In Edgbaston district, composers Pram explored local histories for the creation of *Under the Blossom that Hangs on the Bough* and, they were excited to learn that Harborne ward (in Edgbaston district) is the home of Chad Valley Toys and felt it was a 'nice connection with Pram's history of using toy instruments and lots of potential for working with kids'.¹² As a result, In *Under the Blossom that Hangs on the Bough*, Pram wanted the section correlating to Harborne to link back to the history of Chad Vale in Harborne ward through a nod to the famous Chad Valley toy factory. They incorporated ghostly toy piano and plaintive squeaks of the Sweep puppet, from the longest-running children's programme *Sooty and Sweep* made in the Birmingham Chad Valley toy factory (The Woolworths Museum, n.d.). The inclusion of toy puppets is hyperlocal in that it has a direct connection to the Harborne ward. Pram's use of toy puppets (see Figure 1) served as an aesthetic choice to connect with their artistic concerns as a band and then incorporated into the final work in the later stages of the piece's creation. Pram's choice of hyperlocal instrumentation correlates with 'Bournville Chimes' written for the Bournville carillon. Scanning the locality for hyperlocal instruments and items which have the potential to be performed in new musical works presents a clear way of presenting new music that demonstrate a sense of place as well as having the ability to reveal to its audience new ways to engage with their locality. It also shows creative ways in which composers can continue to express their aesthetic concerns through local historicising methods. The next section outlines playful and fictionalised approaches to historicising through hyperlocal collaborative composition.

Playful local histories

Local historicising need not be a pedestrian activity, and arguably most local history enthusiasts exude a passion to have a deeper understanding about their locality. In *for-Wards*, some of the

¹² Email conversation with Sam Owen, Pram band member, June 2017.

compositional teams demonstrated a playful and subversive interrogation of the local through local histories. For their Erdington district commission, *I R I S*, mixed media composer Scott Johannsson created a compositional frame involving a mélange of personal and fabricated histories. Johannsson sought out a local history group in Stockland Green ward to be part of his creative team and collaborated with members of The Stockland Green Local History Society to locate information about Stockland Green ward. Johannsson stated that although the performance of *I R I S* was presented as based on historical research, outlining the life of Erdington native Iris Threadwell (see Figure 2), it was an entirely fabricated narrative. Threadwell was used as a vehicle to explore genuine aspects of Erdington district's rich history. Johannsson's Chivenor primary school collaborators wrote poems about Iris Threadwell, working personal histories into a fictional character (although only Johannsson knew about Threadwell being invented). Johannsson gave print outs of the Tyburn ward Wikipedia page to his primary school collaborators to cut up into words to use to create sentences for their cut-up hyperlocal and personalised histories. Johannsson then recorded them reading out their sentences and incorporated them into their piece. It was only until the evaluation process that Johannsson elucidated the fictional within his compositional method and personally, I found his approach really stimulating. As a composer, I was inspired to be less straightforward and literal in generating ideas for new compositions and to incorporate more playfulness in my work. Constructing contemporary local histories out of cut-up narratives related to the past via a fictionalised character enables the composer to involve their community collaborators in weaving in their own stories, identifying and imagining possible futures for the locality.

Figure 2: *I R I S* Performance. Actor Sam Owen playing Iris Threadwell (© Pete Bradbury 2017; used with permission)

Figure 3: Photo of Hall Green Academy students field recording (© Pete Bradbury 2017; used with permission)

Field Recordings as hyperlocal compositional method

Since the advent of Thomas Edison's phonograph in the late 19th century the recording of sound affected how we engaged with our surroundings. Consequently, sounds recorded outside studio settings, in the field, have been utilised by composers as a material for new work. In *for-Wards*, the process of capturing field recordings was two-fold in its ambition to connect professional and amateur composers through a shared sonic experience and also with the potential to affect the creation of the new music demonstrating ideas of the local, capturing localised sonic material to put their collaborators at ease. Nine of the ten *for-Wards* commissions wove hyperlocal field recordings collected by their community collaborators directly into their works, some creating exchanges between localised sounds and local community voice and others providing a dialogue with the past. There was no stipulation made in the commission brief for the composers to embed the field recordings into the commissioned works but the only piece not to do this was my collaboration, *Sweet Selly*. The following sections illustrates various ways in which the compositional teams incorporated and used found sounds to create hyperlocal new music.

Universal Sounds is a musical response to Perry Barr district and demonstrates direct inclusion of field recording sounds. When co-creating *Universal Sounds*' composer Simon Duggal incorporated field recordings captured by his community collaborators. For example, in *Maryvale*, a piece about Perry Barr's Oscott ward, it includes field recordings captured by members of Maryvale Community Project in their community centre. In *Handsworth Park*, collaborators from Handsworth Park Fitness Group completed field recordings in Handsworth Park where their hyperlocal fitness activity took place. Duggal divided the group into two smaller units where they captured the hyperlocal sounds of the group exercising on gravel, geese fighting and drunk men in park catcalling. Duggal invited his collaborators to play their found sounds on a MIDI controller keyboard. They created sequences in digital audio workstation Ableton Live to decide how they wanted the finished piece to sound. The group decided on a reggae style that incorporated their Zumba exercise routine.

Environmental Vocalisations

In Northfield district, composer Percy Pursglove was able to build composing methods out of field recording sessions to experiment with vocalised exchanges in each locality. Pursglove's methods included 'environmental vocalisations' or 'vocalised sounds'. In this process, Pursglove asked each community group to voice sounds they heard in situ during the field recording sessions. This represented an imitative exchange between found sounds captured by community groups in and their imitation of them within their specific locality. The vocalised sounds were recorded and uploaded to a bespoke application Pursglove commissioned for use during the performance of *Nord Feld Stefn* that allowed audiences to navigate Northfield district (hyperlocal) field recordings via personal headphones. During the performance this gave each listener control over an additional hyperlocal compositional layer in real-time. The sounds were made up of the Northfield district-specific field recordings that the audience could browse and listen to, while Birmingham Contemporary Music Group musicians performed their final work *Nord Feld Stefn (Northfield Speaks)*.

Mobile recording booth

For some musicians, composition is an intimate, deeply personal process that isn't privy to an audience or shared easily. For Hall Green district commission *Somewhere Over the Galaxy*, Grandmaster Gareth created a musical method for his collaborators to share in the joy of musical expression, partially informed by his shyness. He wanted them to compose music without being overly self-conscious or concerned with a potential lack of music-theoretical knowledge. Gareth was influenced by the principles of Orff-Schulwerk, a music education method devised by Carl Orff and Gunhild Keetmann and intended to enable participants to experience 'Menschenbildung', discovering themselves as creative persons and human beings. The Orff-Schulwerk methods Gareth absorbed in his collaborative work included musical exploration, movement and improvisation methods which often incorporating classroom percussion, body percussion and singing. In *Somewhere Over the Galaxy*, Gareth used an alien outing to the locality of Hall Green district to inspire his collaborators' musical exploration. He asked his primary school collaborators to move around the hall and imagine various scenarios in their locality for them to improvise sounds which he recorded and then incorporated these sounds into their piece.

Grandmaster Gareth also made a mobile recording sound booth and brought it to the four community groups with whom he collaborated. He selected different tempi for each ward (based on his perception of each group, faster tempos for young people and a slower tempo for his older groups). Each collaborator had space to create any sounds they wished by recording them with Grandmaster Gareth (on their own) in time to a click track. Collaborators did not hear any other sounds made by other members of their group. Gareth ran the activity a few times with his collaborators. The sounds consisted of body percussion, voice, classroom percussion, instruments they were studying at school, homemade items and homemade instruments Gareth encouraged them to make. In the second round of sound booth recording, Grandmaster Gareth brought in a selection of instruments that he owned. For each community group, he would add to his core selection of instruments items that followed a particular theme for each community group. For example, Gareth decided a water theme aesthetic for his collaborators in The Springfield Project, because one of his collaborators shared a song they had composed about Sarehole Mill and the surrounding canal. Gareth added water-themed instruments such as rainmakers, glasses filled with varying amounts of water and a water phone. All the audio created in the sound booth is hyperlocal as the community groups created it on the site where they were based.

Figure 4: Composer Scott Johannsson and Chivenor Primary School Students playing with Erdington District archival footage (© Pete Bradbury 2017; used with permission).

Visualising the local

Visual media is a powerful communicative tool and we are saturated with images everyday designed to capture our attention and often to sell us things. In *for-Wards*, two composers used the moving image in both the creation of new material and during the performance to situate the conceptual demands and audience into the local in which they worked. In Erdington District commission *I R I S*, Johannsson, selected by Flatpack Projects, a Birmingham arts organisation who specialises in commissioning and programming film including audio/visual pieces, asked his Chivenor Primary School collaborators to improvise using their voices whilst they viewed archive film footage from Erdington district (see Figure 4), and the sounds the students made were recorded and used in the final piece. Archival footage of the Erdington district locality accompanied with layers of performed music and student collaborators voices supported the fictionalised narrative of Iris Threadwell, as mentioned earlier used as a vehicle for contemporary hyperlocal histories.

In *Moving Ladywood*, Xhosa Cole, also used film to support the structure of his piece. Using a GoPro camera, he filmed himself cycling, walking and using public transport to navigate Ladywood district. Cole filmed the journey where he travelled from each of the four community groups' community spaces. He then worked with collaborators from James Watt Primary School to vocalise the filmed footage which he also recorded and used as part of *Moving Ladywood*. What is interesting about the different approaches used by the composers is how one utilised moving image from the past to re-create quasi fictional hyperlocal histories that spoke to the lived experiences of their community collaborators and the second, used the filmed journey of the composer moving from each of the four community groups location as a geographical informed structuring device layered with field recordings, collaborators' voices and composed material performed live.

Continuing in the visual realm, graphic scores were employed by composers as creative ways to suggest the feel and express ideas that might be less fluently articulated through western music notation. The visualisation of the local was utilised for works *Nord Feld Stefn*, *Moving Ladywood* and *Re-Sounding Yardley*, where each composer facilitated workshops for their community collaborators to create graphic scores to detail their feelings about their area to create a sonic visualisation of their locality. Pursglove asked his Northfield district collaborators to create large-scale emoticon signs detailing how the community felt about the area. The emoticons were composed into the piece and used to incite the audience's vocalised responses during the performance.

In *Re-Sounding Yardley*, Mahtani invited her Kimichi School collaborators to spend time outdoors in the school garden. She asked her collaborators to draw visualisations of outdoor sounds onto sound maps. The students then improvising to their recorded sounds using their musical instruments. The scores they devised for their improvisations were directly added to *Re-Sounding Yardley* (see Example 4).

Example 4: *Re-Sounding Yardley*: Acocks Green Section, Kimichi School students' sound maps (© Annie Mahtani 2018; used with permission).

Figure 5: Xhosa Cole and collaborators from Deaf Cultural Centre Youth Group '*Paintgate*' (© Bobbie-Jane Gardner 2018).

Figure 6: Revised colour coded music grids and codes with Deaf Cultural Centre Youth Group (© Bobbie-Jane Gardner 2018)

The Ladywood district commission, *Moving Ladywood* suite is split into numerous movements derived from graphic scores created by the Youth Group at the Deaf Cultural Centre and, composer Xhosa Cole faced some minor struggles working with this group. Cole designed composing

activities that brought a visual element to the realm of sound, as his Ladywood ward collaborators were profoundly deaf. Cole initially wanted to use paint in order for his collaborators to design colour coded music grids and codes inspired by Ladywood ward. His aim was to transform the musical grids into melodic content. The inclusion of black paint in this exercise proved challenging as Cole's collaborators were enthusiastic in their mixing of paints and everything turned into grey mush! To support Cole's follow-up workshop, I investigated graphic scores and systems and shared research insights with him. I uncovered a fabulous collection of illustrated music scores in Theresa Sauer's book *Notations 21*.¹³ The insights proved invaluable as I was able to examine composers who had created graphic scores in response to place and coloured grids which Cole was trying to develop.

Steve Roden's *Mapping Space in Sound* from the 'Pavilion Scores 1-5 for children's glockenspiel' (2005) uses various forms of specific notation (words, musical scores and maps) which are translated into self-invented systems and then into scores. *Mapping Space in Sound* is a site-specific collaborative work created for Serpentine Gallery's 2005 summer pavilion. The scores were performed by Serpentine Gallery staff and the composer who sat in the audience in various locations in the space. Glockenspiels can be purchased with coloured tuned keys, Roden utilised the colourful keys to create a coloured musical grid incorporating the architect's drawings of the building design as a score.¹⁴ I shared Roden's score with Cole and encouraged him to use coloured pencils or crayons in his following workshop, allowing his collaborators to create musical grids with more than one colour. This was to avoid the error of the previous session where the paints became one grey mush, which would signal only one pitch and limited material for their collaborative piece. Using coloured pencils would allow more pitch material to be generated into their work. The visualisation of sound was successful in supporting several compositional teams in generating place-centred musical work, for some composers as a mechanism to mimic and draw from sounds experienced in a particular moment in a specific place or to enable meaningful participation regardless of hearing loss.

Although ward boundary maps are fundamentally used in politics for the subdivision of the English geographical electoral, in *for-Wards* they were utilised for field recording sessions and to support the sounding of the hyperlocal in *Sweet Selly's* 'Walking Down a Billesley Street' and 'Bournville Chimes'. My collaborators and I created melodic material using Billesley and Bournville ward maps that had musical staves superimposed on them. Each of my student collaborators placed a dot to identify their favourite place in their ward, I learned that the popular 'Hot Spot' in Billesley was the local chip shop! Once completed, my collaborators' musical dots were performed back to them and recorded. They became a library of ward sounds that I could later incorporate into our pieces.

Figure 7: Bournville ward maps with superimposed musical staves (© Bobbie-Jane Gardner 2017).

This final example presents a geographically informed way for the composer to encourage her collaborators to generate new material entirely focussed on the specificity of the area in which they are based; significant landmarks are allocated a sounding pitch for creative exploration.

Conclusion

This examination of the collaborative compositional methods used by the *for-Wards* creative team to articulate the specificity of localness has demonstrated various ways in which the composers experimented with place-specific ideas of historicising, playful fictionalisation, the visual, field recordings and how to navigate tensions over prioritising different voices. As project lead, I created a compositional framework for *for-Wards* to ensure continuity between the ten commissions, loose enough for the pieces to begin in a similar fashion but flexible enough to allow each compositional team to add their voice and responses to the specific

¹³ Theresa Sauer, *Notations 21* (Mark Batty Publisher: New York, 2009).

¹⁴ <http://www.inbetweennoise.com/works/sounding-architecture-and-pavilion-scores> (Accessed: 12.11.21)

localities which served as their muse. Three of the ten commissioned composers began their pre-compositional work with local surveys which when shared with community was able to trigger creative starting points for their work, this also resulted in artistic tensions that needed careful resolution as outlined in *Sweet Selly*. I found Johannsson's use of fabricated and cut-up histories really fascinating, a fabricated character was used with great success as a vessel for the realisation of contemporary Erdington district local histories.

Local histories also supported the inclusion of hyperlocal instrumentation utilised to perform the works: from the Cadbury's family's gift of the carillon to Bournville residents used in *Sweet Selly*'s 'Bournville Chimes' to incorporating puppets created in Edgbaston district's Chadwell Valley toy factories as music instruments – their inclusion both visually and sonically have the potential to communicate their historical significance to the place and people creating new music there. Field recordings serve as direct way to communicate found sounds from each locality and was the main collaborative composing method used by the *for-Wards* composers. The only musical work that did not directly include field recordings was my collaborative work, *Sweet Selly*. Despite stressing to the other nine composers that direct inclusion of field recording was not necessary, nine of the pieces included them. This leads to the consideration that perhaps the field recording element in the curatorial framework was too strong in directing the composers down a particular compositional approach. Did the inclusion of field recordings dominate the compositional approaches too much? Perhaps. The most enjoyable aspect of the collaborative process was knowing that I was not alone when faced with compositional decisions in which I usually struggle. I had a sounding board of committed individuals – be they eight-year students or fifty-year-old creative writers. It was also fun to be taken on unexpected musical journeys with my collaborators. The pieces I co-wrote represent the group and not one individual voice and would have sound much different if I had worked alone.