

OCCAM HEX II: A COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION

Cat Hope and Carol Robinson

Abstract: In 2014 composer, flutist and director of Western Australian new music ensemble Decibel, Cat Hope, sought to commission a work from Éliane Radigue. During discussions, Radigue proposed a collaborative composition with another composer, performer and lead interpreter of her acoustic work, Carol Robinson. The result was Radigue's first co-composed work, and the first work by Radigue for an Australian group. Robinson came to Australia to work directly with the Decibel ensemble for a nine-day development phase that culminated in a thirty-minute acoustic work, part of the *OCCAM* series, for flute, clarinet, percussion, viola and cello. Each *OCCAM* work is completely defined, and yet never exactly reproducible, because the particular interaction between sound, instrument, musician and acoustics requires constant adaptation. The process of developing the work, though extremely demanding, was fascinating and thoroughly rewarding because it obliges the performer to enter into a state of hyper acuteness, sensitivity and in some ways, belief. The musician is guided toward a level of awareness and reactivity that increases as the sound material itself is assimilated. It is never a question of replicating an event or sequence, but rather of understanding the elements that created the event and then allowing those elements to develop further. This article discusses the unique process involved in the elaboration of this new work and how it differs from the development of previous *OCCAM* pieces. It is written in the voices of both the commissioner, Cat Hope (main text), and the co-composer of the work, Carol Robinson (indented text in italics).

Introduction: A Meeting

I became aware of Éliane Radigue's music many years ago. I had always enjoyed her electronic works, and was very enthusiastic when I found Radigue had written a piece for electric bassist Kasper Toeplitz in 2004, *Elemental II*.¹ Later, in 2006, I had discovered that cellist Charles Curtis was playing an acoustic work by Radigue. This was the impetus for the idea of seeking out a new work for

¹ Éliane Radigue *Elemental II*. Kasper T. Toeplitz. Recordings of Sleaze Art - r.o.s.a._01, 1 CD, 2005.

the Decibel new music ensemble. Through our mutual friend, Annea Lockwood, I obtained Radigue's postal address (there was no email) in Paris, and in January 2014 I wrote a carefully considered letter. I introduced myself and my Western Australian ensemble Decibel, proposing a commissioned work for flute (me), clarinet, piano, cello, viola and electronics. I mentioned that I was coming to Paris, and that we could perhaps meet and discuss the details. I was excited to get a prompt reply proposing we meet, but also referring to my request for a new work as 'difficult to answer'. Radigue suggested I bring my instrument with me to a meeting.

Coincidentally, an Australian composer I had recently met suggested I contact a Paris-based composer named Carol Robinson, who also happened to collaborate closely with Éliane Radigue. As it turned out, Robinson coordinated my first meeting, which took place at Radigue's home in May 2014. After sharing tea and chocolate, I performed an improvised piece for Radigue and Robinson on the bass flute, and we spent a few hours discussing common friends, cats, music and the ways of the world. Unbeknownst to me, Radigue had already approached Robinson about the feasibility of them creating a work together for my ensemble:

You can imagine how pleased I was when Éliane Radigue proposed that we co-sign a new piece for the Decibel ensemble. Though surprised, I was not particularly intimidated by her proposition because our work together has proven over time that we share a deep understanding of the very special music that comprises the OCCAM OCEAN series. In fact, I found it quite moving to be the person entrusted with the transferral of Radigue's working methods to people who didn't necessarily know her music very well, and at the same time entrusted with bringing my personal point of view into the project.

During our work on the monumental Naldjorlak² trio (2007–09) and later with the various OCCAM pieces, Radigue had always been clear that only the performer could transfer the music to another musician at some point. If and when remained entirely at the performer's discretion. This new collaboration put me in the position of not actually conveying one of the pieces we had done together, but rather of sharing what I had learned from Radigue, and in some ways, sharing all relevant knowledge gained during my personal experience as a clarinetist and composer. I would be responsible for the hands-on creation of a new OCCAM piece in the pure Radigue tradition, but a piece that would incorporate my musical perspective and choices.

I learned in my meeting with Radigue that she does not work with scores, nor does she combine acoustic and electronic instruments. She explained that only through a lengthy process of exchange between the composer and the musicians can a piece come into existence. Radigue felt that due to her diminished health it was not possible for her to spend the necessary time with the ensemble, especially if it entailed going to Australia.

She was confident, however, that Robinson would know exactly how to make this new piece for Decibel. At the conclusion of the meeting, I came away with a proposition for a co-signed composition by Radigue and Robinson. Their idea was that Robinson, who had premiered numerous OCCAM pieces, would come to Australia to make this new piece with us. This would be the first time that they had worked together in this way, and there was a strong feeling at

² Éliane Radigue, *Naldjorlak I, II, III*, shiini 9, 3 CDs, 2013.

the meeting that it would be rewarding for everyone involved. I needed to consider how this might work for our ensemble.

Radigue had kindly given me the recording of *Naldjorlak*,³ a triple CD of acoustic works featuring performances by Robinson, Curtis and Bruno Martinez. I also received a book of interviews with Radigue by Bernard Girard.⁴ Back at my Paris hotel that night I listened to the CDs, and did my best to read as much of the book as I could with my very limited French. What I discovered was very complex music, and the problems of developing or even notating this work became clear. Robinson's performances were exquisite. I reflected on my first reaction in an introductory essay for the premiere performance:

*I had not experienced this level of small, complex, delicate and fluid richness in acoustic music before, and it was almost impossible to believe this music was acoustic at all. This is an important note in thinking about how this music would be right for Decibel, a group who have an agenda to present music that combines acoustic and electronic instruments. This music does that in a special way; it is built from an understanding of electronic music. Whilst it contains the complexity and infinite possibility electronic music holds, it adds the suppleness, beauty and life found in instrumental performance. Radigue's background of intense engagement with synthesizers is fundamental to understanding her approach with acoustic instruments.*⁵

The proposition made sense to me, and I quickly got in touch with Robinson to confirm my interest and define a suitable time-frame for the project. The next step was to find and confirm funding that would enable us to go forward.

The OCCAM Series

Radigue and Robinson had given me some documents about the OCCAM pieces when we met in 2014. These outlined for whom they were written, the year, and some other information about each work. The pages began with a paragraph of Radigue's that included the following text:

*The freedom to be immersed in the ambivalence of continuous modulation with the uncertainty of being and/or not being in this or that mode or tonality. The freedom to let yourself be overwhelmed, submerged in a continuous sound flow where perceptual acuity is heightened through the discovery of a certain slight beating, there in the background, pulsations, breath.*⁶

Radigue's statements were a perfect introduction to the philosophy underpinning the OCCAM works. This preliminary text was followed by descriptions of three of the then nineteen solo OCCAM pieces, written by the musicians who had premiered them; Rhodri Davies (OCCAM I, for harp, 2011) Robinson (OCCAM III, for birbyné, 2012), and Julia Eckhardt (OCCAM IV, for viola, 2012). They outline the relationship of sound, motion and time throughout each OCCAM piece, and describe a series of personal journeys through subtle change and vibration:

³ Éliane Radigue, *Naldjorlak I, II, III*, shiin 9, 3 CDs, 2013.

⁴ Bernard Girard, *Entretiens avec Éliane Radigue* Collection Musiques XXe–XXIe (n.p. : Editions Aedam Musicae, 2013).

⁵ Cat Hope, 'Occam – The Music of Éliane Radigue', programme notes. Available from www.decibelnewmusic.com/occam---the-music-of-eliane-radigue.html, 2015.

⁶ Éliane Radigue, unpublished text, (2012).

*Often, one only becomes aware of a change after it has happened. Time has elongated and also compacted. The music exists in time yet it possesses numerous times all at once.*⁷

*The force of inevitability as the smallest hint of sound gathers and grows. Air turned fluid. There is no choice, only the impulse toward union, flowing onward in a great rotational cycle.*⁸

*It is a path between activity and drifting with the play of water, wind, and light shaping abstract patterns the ear is drawn to, with concentration and ease.*⁹

The freedom expressed in these texts pointed to a unique involvement of performers in works made specifically for them. The *OCCAM* pieces were listed by artist, date and place of premiere. At the time, there were four *OCCAM RIVER* duets, five *OCCAM DELTA* trios and quartets, and *OCCAM HEXA I* for bass clarinet, tuba viola, cello and harp. These *OCCAM* pieces were initially inspired by a large mural that Radigue had seen in Los Angeles in 1973. She described the mural as depicting ‘the spectrum of electromagnetic waves moving from the largest to the smallest of known measurable wavelengths’¹⁰ (ref) and noted the limited range of wavelengths that were able to be perceived by humans as sounds. Radigue drew parallels with the fourteenth-century English logician William of Ockham’s thesis, known as ‘Ockham’s Razor’, which states ‘Entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily’, or in other words, ‘simpler is better’.¹¹ These combined with a recollection of a science fiction story about a mythical ocean she had read years before. Combining these influences, Radigue describes the base of the *OCCAM OCEAN* project as follows;

*the ocean with its multiple waves allows us to symbolically be in contact with a rather large spectrum of vibrating undulations, stretching from great deep-sea swells to wavelets sparkling on a fine summer day.*¹²

I imagined that the communication of these ideas might be a challenge, especially if one was working with a group of unfamiliar musicians.

My initial objective was to determine how to structure a new piece according to our mutual ideas and how to communicate the working method to the Decibel musicians. Before entering into contact with them, I needed to understand the best way to convey the fundamentals of reaching the receptive state necessary to play this music, more specifically, how to enter into the sound. It is as if once inside, the sound’s DNA begins to unravel, changing the perception of sonic components and the timescale in which they occur, as well changing a player’s manner of listening. There is a sense of entering into a scale of events so minute that the performer’s references become increasingly modified. By entering repeatedly into this state of hyper-concentration, we change not only the quality of the sounds being produced, but perhaps change ourselves as well.

Just as I had been entrusted with a certain understanding of what needed to be done, I had to trust in my ability to pass it on, and demonstrate to

⁷ Rhodri Davies, programme notes for the *Angelica Festival*, (2012).

⁸ Carol Robinson, programme notes for the *Angelica Festival*, (2012).

⁹ Julia Eckhardt, programme notes for the *Angelica Festival*, (2012).

¹⁰ Éliane Radigue, unpublished text (2012).

¹¹ W. M. Throburn, ‘Ockham’s Razor’ *Mind* 24 (1915), pp. 287–8.

¹² Éliane Radigue, unpublished text (2012).

the Decibel musicians that they could not only trust my propositions, but that the subsequent music would be extraordinary regardless of how arduous or obscure the process. While demanding absolute technical mastery, this music cannot be controlled too strictly. It must breath, be reactive. This may seem contradictory, but actually is not.

Radigue refers to the works as 'shared experiences', using a personal image to guide each musician through the work they make together. She explained to us that the image sometimes comes from a place known to the musician, yet at other times Radigue proposes an image to the performer. We came to understand that the image serves to provide an orientation for a succession of events, in place of a timeline. This creates the 'intuitive-instinctive process' that Robinson communicated to us when we worked together.

Éliane Radigue always uses an image as the genesis for an OCCAM piece. A visual and sensory score was proposed for each of the OCCAM pieces I had already done with her. Some of my colleagues are less motivated by the images, preferring to leave them behind as soon as possible. Others of us like to remember the images because they guide us toward playing with another energy, somehow far beyond the 'notes'. For instance, OCCAM III, for birbynè, is based on the shortest fleuve, or river, in France. In French, the word 'fleuve' denotes a river that flows from source to mouth, as opposed to a river that flows as a tributary into another river. The Uhabia, this shortest fleuve, is found in the Basque region. Intrigued by what the reality of this particular river might be, I went to near the Spanish border, located the mouth of the Uhabia and followed it as much as possible all the way to the marshy spot where it began. Through this direct observation, the piece changed significantly. Until then, we had worked with the idea of a spring bubbling up through white sand into a stream that gradually grew as it moved toward the ocean. I had tried to make my sound approximate the water's journey but experiencing the real river prompted something else. The piece became influenced by the power of the flowing water forcing it inevitability toward the ocean in a continually renewed cycle. Radigue generally prefers that the image not be shared with audiences, fearing that knowing it could have a limiting impact on the listener's experience.

The Making Of

Once a time-frame had been agreed upon, the collaborative process began. Robinson was to come to Australia for nine days, leading up to a concert planned for 30 October 2015. It was important to start work before Robinson arrived, and we decided to try some Skype sessions. An initial Skype conversation took place between Robinson and me in which we discussed how to structure rehearsals. The next meeting was with all of the Decibel musicians, Robinson and Radigue. Together we decided that the ensemble would be flute, clarinet, viola, cello and percussion. In this session Radigue explained what were the important elements in these pieces and more some general information about the nature of the OCCAM pieces. Robinson proposed some exercises Decibel members could undertake individually that would assist us to prepare before her arrival. These included simple long tones and practising the control of a 15-minute crescendo. These exercises emphasised that the fundamental process is based on solos that would later be combined as part of the final ensemble work.

The subsequent Skype sessions were one on one, involving Robinson and each instrumentalist. These private sessions explored

sounds specific to each person and their instrument. These sounds weren't necessarily notes – they included fingerings, bow holds, tunings, and processes of discovery to find unusual and fragile sounds. In these sessions, the individual members of the group worked with Robinson towards creating rich harmonic possibilities from unstable sounds and finding a way to be able to control them. We decided that I would perform on C flute, rather than my preferred bass flute. This was because the C flute offered more flexibility, a wider range of sonic possibilities that were more easily controllable over long periods of time.

Despite the mediocre sound quality, the Skype sessions were very useful, allowing me, for example, to explore the peculiarities of the string instruments being used. The cello had a wolf tone around F#, so despite the distance separating us, the cellist and I were able to prepare for rehearsals by finding a tuning that enhanced this wolf and created resonances that permitted him to produce three or even four simultaneous pitches while playing a single string. It was fabulous to see the astonishment on his face as the composite notes began to ring. In doing this, we touched on something fundamental to the music of the OCCAM OCEAN series, explicitly, having each instrument produce multiple beating vibrations that are later combined to form a complex scintillating mass. Technically speaking, for the viola and cello we made very specific tuning changes, in addition to exploring bow motion and position on the instrument as well as the strings themselves. For the wind players, this implied working with multiphonics and odd muted fingerings to create ghost tones, or iridescence. What may be defined a multiphonic, is in this case much more subtle, often a mere hint of pitch above a deeper undulation.

During the Skype sessions, the importance of having a common image as a starting point for the work was discussed. We were asked to propose some different kinds of places to consider, and this proved to be quite difficult for the group, as we attempted to grasp what the significance of this place would become in the work. Robinson and Radigue made some suggestions, perhaps driven from their own knowledge of Australia and experience of what makes an effective image. We explained that a visit to some of the places being proposed would be difficult – given the sheer vastness of Western Australia the travel time could involve days of driving. So we decided that a place on the coast would be suitable, as the coast is easy to access from the city. We would visit a coastal location together with Robinson, and discuss it together. It was becoming clear that the importance of and reference to this place in the work could vary, depending on how we decided we wanted to structure the work and its preparation.

For OCCAM HEXA II, Radigue and I had begun by constructing a visual image that would become the musical grounding for the new piece. We thought of a shoreline location with water flowing in different directions as it moved toward a cliff, and then eased into a cove. In talking with the Decibel musicians, I realised that there was a problem with this idea, namely that it did not correspond to the coast near Perth where we would be working. There are no cliffs in that part of Australia, meaning that there would be no concrete image to share, only something imaginary, which could differ between musicians.

Once we were all together in Perth, we visited a beach north of Perth to seek a mutual vision that would later be used as a reference for our piece. We studied the water in the spring light, the glimmer of the waves, their movement along the contour of the coast, the power of the water and its turbulence. We talked about land, depth, action

and calm, and the interaction between them. We examined how coastal waters disappear from view, by way of horizon or the structure of the coastline.

We went to a local beach to observe the wave movement at that particular place. As our eyes moved along the beach from a rock formation on our left, we saw the different actions of the water, how different currents crossed and rippled, and how the waves became agitated before disappearing around a sand bar into a cove that we could only imagine. A common image emerged that would provide an important reference as we worked. Being water related, it would also never be static, or repetitive.

The value of the image became increasingly clear as we proceeded with rehearsals. The first rehearsals in Perth were individual sessions at the concert venue, a large reverberant exhibition space, in the heart of the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA). Being in the same room was a vast improvement over the pitiful Skype connection, allowing us to move closer to the extreme refinement that Robinson was aiming for. The reverberant acoustics were also a great aid for what was at times, a very confronting work – working to sustain sounds that seemed to teeter on the point of breaking, or even sounding at all.

Our work continued in person with individual rehearsals that gradually grew to include the entire group. The clarinettist and flautist were confronted with the task of creating the impression of a continuous sound regardless of the fact that their individual, and combined sounds, were interrupted by breathing. This implied mastering the intimate art of passing a sound back and forth over a distance with perfectly controlled entrances and exits. Once again, trust was a vital component.

Another important technique for the musicians to understand was how to avoid inherent rhythms related to breath or bow length. An overly regular ebb and flow determined by an ingrained physical response would be counterproductive to the awareness required. I repeatedly guided them toward an asymmetry that escaped the hierarchy of fixed lengths, encouraging exact but subtle sound placement.

The next phase was to work into what Robinson referred to as ‘combined lines’. This often translated into gentle crossings and communications between the players. As we began rehearsals where we would combine with the other musicians, we were required to maintain our individual control while at the same time creating complex interactions with the other musicians. This demanded a challenging and unexpectedly intense focus and concentration. The first duos were more complex than we expected. As the flautist, I was paired with the clarinettist. Despite having played together for over 30 years in various ensembles and projects, we found the process of melding into each other’s sound, given the unstable nature of the sounds we had devised, challenging.

The wind players soon experienced unusual hybrid sounds as their notes blended into those of the strings; for example, when a delicate clarinet multi-phonics created an arching ponticello effect with the cellist. The percussionist was also often paired with the cellist, using, for instance, a rocking bow technique on the marimba to make it just begin to resonate within the damped timbre of the cello’s bowed tailpiece. Normally if there had been more rehearsals over a longer period, the group would have made their own discoveries, but because we were pressed for time I prompted them to focus on particular

instruments and sounds as the piece advanced. The internal groupings and crossings became increasingly clear as we rehearsed, providing reference points as a tangible sound mass evolved.

The cello and viola worked together on their duo as well. The percussionist settled on playing primarily bass drum and marimba, which was bowed, rolled with very soft mallets and rubbed with a superball. The duos became trios with the percussion, and this was followed by coming together as an entire group. Robinson garnered an evolving harmonic cloud from the quintet sounds, and it was clear this was being influenced by the overwhelmingly reduced dynamic range. This also impacted the intensity of our concentration, but also the power of the music we were generating. The incredible softness and paucity of the sound required a matching that was challenging to undertake. This process required that we relinquish any sense of individuality, we were to be part of the sound as one, timbral elements in a greater mass.

It was necessary to help the Decibel musicians discover this other way of playing in a very short time. I kept telling them this is slow music, and they said yes, it is very calm. I replied that was not at all what I meant, rather that it takes a long time to reach the heart of this music, that the process is slow. Charles Curtis, Bruno Martinez and I had performed Naldjorlak some fifteen times before feeling that we had mastered it. The challenge for these musicians was having only nine days to go from zero to a hundred per cent, only nine days to understand how to listen inside a note, indeed, how to actually listen inside themselves and resonate beyond their instruments.

Robinson shared with us that making this music as a performer was, for her, some of the most difficult music she had ever played. It was also the most exhausting, and we shared this experience.

People remark, 'but you are simply holding notes'. Though that may be true, it is very problematic to play a note repeatedly with all of the partials ringing and beating exactly as desired, and at the same time listen with heightened acuity to what is produced by the other musicians as the sounds combine and evolve. The hidden voices that we coax from the instruments are part of the magical sensation that the listener receives, as if resonance choirs are being generated in the space that no longer seem to originate from the instruments producing them. As the Decibel musicians began to understand the technique, the piece began to grow in length in direct relation to the original water image.

It was helpful to have a performer lead this compositional process, bringing an empathy for the unique difficulties, especially for the wind players. There was no doubt that one of the keys for a successful performance of the work was in managing the very low volume required, complicated by unique and unstable tones based on the idea of multiphonics.

Do we hear better when sounds are very quiet? Do we listen differently? Does a lower dynamic level lead to another perception of a sound and the resonating space that contains it? Perhaps, but playing softly also brings out the richness of the combinations. If even one person plays too loudly, it obliterates many of the delicate vibrations, crippling the music. Whereas for OCCAM HEXA II, playing the marimba with a steady bow would have caused the instrument to ring and obliterate the other instruments, by rocking the bow, it produced a ghost sound that blended easily with the cello, eliminating domination by either instrument.

Sometimes I refer to this technique as working with instability. Modern western instruments have been engineered to produce responsive, harmonically rich and stable sounds, whereas what I was asking the Decibel musicians to explore were the other often relegated voices that belong to their instruments. Through both liberating these more unusual sounds and learning how to control them, the musicians would gain access into the heart of an enchanted music.

This instability is key to the way the work comes together as an ensemble piece. The modern instrument is designed to be as stable as possible, so it was a real rite of passage to find the instabilities in one's own instrument and learn to use and control them. When combined, they enable new voices to be heard, and begin to sing. They appear as though no instrument is making them; they are in-between sounds, in between performers. They make part of the magic of listening to Radigue's work.

Special attention was given to the placement of the instruments in the physical space throughout the process. There was some experimentation around how we would situate ourselves in relation to each other, but also to the audience and the acoustic of the room. The percussion was positioned centrally. Robinson wanted the wind instruments to connect with the strings, and the marimba to enter into the sound of the cello. At certain points in the piece, the musicians need to follow each other across the ensemble, which became challenging when the dynamic grew. Being a large, open hall space, the positioning of the audience was completely flexible. We had been rehearsing in one part of the room, just by chance. We were situated very close to that place for the performance.

Given the very resonant exposition space where the piece was rehearsed and performed, I settled on an unusual seating arrangement with the percussion in the middle. This placement produced the best balance between the instruments, allowing the winds to enter into the string sound, and the percussion to merge with the rest as needed. The end effect sounds natural and easy, when the players are in fact doing very precise and difficult things.

We gradually became aware of the structure that Robinson had devised for the piece, after the sessions with different instrument combinations. We were reminded that the integrity of this kind of work lies first in the solos, and that we were not participating in a typical ensemble relationship. The fundamental structure for the work could best be described as a series of exchanges, of the right moment for a slight change to occur, of waiting for when to enter someone else's sound with one's own, of a constant but steadily building tension as the pitch rises to create a tautness that then gradually releases. The concept of a highpoint in this work is a complex one: there is no explosive moment but only an imperceptible evolution. A precarious fragility pervades the interdependence between the players.

The issue of remembering the work is an interesting challenge. During the residency, the only notes we made were of fingerings, and the ordering of them. These were not scores, as they provide only starting points for the sounds to be made. They contain no information about how long each lasts or how long the transition between them takes. I had made some notes about who to listen to at certain points, in relation to the ordering of the fingerings. I would listen for a certain kind of sound as a cue for change, as an invitation. We were not permitted to have these notes at the performance. Whilst we did

make a chart to assist us to remember the order of our interactions through time, we did not refer to this during the performance.

Ghost tones, wolf tones, shadow notes, multiphonics or subtones can be named and described, some can even be notated as references, but due to the extreme subtlety of what is actually happening, this music is very difficult to notate. What is being generated briefly by a single note would take several lines to explain, forcing the performer to concentrate on following instructions rather than being receptive to the qualities of the interacting sounds. It is a very fine line between producing and reproducing, and this is music in constant evolution. Communicating how to master a technique, yet always remain open to its evolution is not evident, no more than having it be understood and retained without being written down. As the group discovered, it was possible to enter into this special sound world with everything seemingly clear and the music vibrating, but the next attempt would, for some reason, seem completely empty. The shimmering magic would be gone.

While working on Naldjorlak II, Bruno Martinez would often ask, 'Why is it so difficult, to play what is basically only a 20-minute crescendo on low C?' Rehearsing with Radigue it would sound lovely, and then working without her the next day, we would be at a loss for exactly what we had done. Luckily, we persevered before finally premiering it, rehearsing our duet again and again until we entered into a particular communion through the music.

Something needed to change in us, and the same happened for the Decibel musicians. At one point during the rehearsals, after returning from a concert elsewhere, the violist said it had been so strange to play only one note at a time, instead of listening to harmonic sweeps through the whole spectrum. He said, 'now when I walk down the street I hear everything in a completely different way'. Bravo, I thought, we are getting there.

Cat Hope spoke to me about the sensation of feeling sheltered by the other ensemble sounds, of how the other vibrations provided stability and support. She mentioned how the sense of individuality was lost within the group because something else was lifting the sound. In my opinion, she was experiencing the meshing of partials into a thicker harmonic weave that almost pulls the sound out of the instrument. I think that this way of playing is confounding at first, because it differs not only from how we have been taught to play our instruments, but how we have learned to listen as well. It becomes easier with practice, as was proven by our work together in Perth.

The Performances

After nine transformative days, *OCCAM HEXA II* was premiered at PICA in October 2015 to a captivated audience. It was performed in the same venue in which it was developed, with the audience lying on cushions or sitting on stools. The work was performed again in March 2016 in a more conventional concert hall, a much less reverberant space, providing new challenges when revisiting the work.

Decibel intends to continue performing the work as often as possible, with knowledge that we are on a long road to fulfilling its full potential. The experience of performing this music was nothing short of magical. It was a challenging and rewarding process that required extraordinary physical endurance and focus. We ended up understanding our instruments in a new way. It seems to me that playing certain pieces changes your perception of sound, perhaps because musicians have a particular approach to sound that differs

from someone who only listens to it. I came to appreciate my own instrument in a different way, becoming able to discover and nurture sounds that I had never found in it before. I have been involved in noise music – playing it and listening to it, so I was no stranger to the idea of sounds that could be ‘outside’ the instrument’s usual expectations. But the delicacy experienced in this music provided a different access to the sound an instrument produces, and the fluctuations that can occur through time. Further, we learnt a lot about ourselves as an ensemble, especially the way we communicate and manage subtle change. There is nowhere to hide in this piece. As you come in and out of other people’s sounds you must gather courage and find a way in at the right time. Performing this piece changed the way we approached other works too – our sensitivity has been heightened, we have discovered a new richness in each other’s sounds. It has changed how we listen to music, a change that is intensified each time we play the piece. As a result of this experience, something changed in all of us, as Robinson had suggested it would. It is an honour to be part of Radigue’s and Robinson’s family of works.

This experience brings into question the concepts of conception, exchange, transfer and ownership. I feel that a true OCCAM piece was made with Decibel, though I alone was responsible on-site. Further, rather than just copying, or imitating the experiences that I had shared with Radigue, my personal interpretation of those experiences came into play, as well as my own inherent musical leanings. Radigue trusted me, and I respected the grander musical path we share. It was a great and fascinating pleasure to work with Decibel.