

**Finzi Scholarship Darragh Morgan
Violin and Electronics Project
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Time and **space** are words of absolute relevance and importance to any performing musician. When thought of in any literal sense in applying to performance, of course we need to understand tempo, the speed and indication of pulse in a piece. And space could be considered as the distance between pitches in a phrase of music or the necessity to breath both physically and for phrasing. In other words having a sense of space in music is paramount to the music's natural contour. In a more hypothesising setting time can indicate a period of reflection.

As an artist, to reflect on both one's body of work up to this point, and also on one's artistic vision and direction (contemplating and considering what direction to take in the future), is an essential component of any artist's constant evolution and development. This temporal and physical space is such a rare, essential and invaluable commodity to an artist. In the 21st century work place there is little to no time for an artist to allow themselves that time and space to consider their artistic relevance, merits and importantly future aspirations.

This Finzi Scholarship has awarded me a unique period of time for space for reflection as well as artistic development. Having been a self-employed, freelance violinist for over 20 years the concept of having time for some sense of sabbatical from the pressures of a modern day performing musician's life style is not often feasible. Even a short intense period of time for further study into an area of one of my artistic interests (Music for Violin and Electronics) has proven to be incredibly valuable artistically and, creatively, hugely satisfying.

I arrived in Chicago Illinois in late April 2019 transferring to the University of Illinois, Champaign which is known internationally for its early developments in computer music composition over 60 years ago. And so it was apt that I would be spending time here with esteemed Associate Professor Emeritus of Composition Zack Browning. I was first introduced to Zack's music in 2001 by my Irish composer friend Donnacha Dennehy (who I will speak more about later in this report) and was instantly enthralled by Zack's music, my attention being completely grabbed by it. Zack is a brilliant personality, highly energised and his enthusiasm for music is completely infectious. Indeed, just to spend time in his company whether it be on car journeys or over a coffee, and particularly in his music studio, I was constantly enthused and inspired by his conversations and thoughts on his art. I have been interested in a particular work by Zack, *Sole Injection* for violin and computer generated tape, for many years. Over an intense period of 5 days we worked thoroughly on the live violin part together. Not just simply me obeying his instructions on how to perform it from a composer's perspective, but a real sense of dialogue and respect evolved between us. Within this mutually creative atmosphere we were able to create a version of the violin part that we are both happy with in how it sounds, from the subtlest of violin bowing articulations to a more general sense of musical shape and character. In particular Zack's enthusiasm for the soul music of James Brown proved very effectual in my understanding of his compositional voice. Also, even though it was clear from the violin part writing, his interest in rhythmic precision formed an important parameter in our approach and interpretation. This energy in

the violin writing and Zack's expression of same has afforded me a completely original, authentic and collaborative approach to his writing which will lead to new directions. The end result of this episode was an audio recording we made over a crazy and intense 7 hour studio recording, listen here for the last section of the piece.

From Chicago I travelled to Virginia Tech Blacksburg , Virginia to work with composer Charles Nichols whose music I had first encountered 8 years ago when I was a featured artist at International Computer Music Conference ICMC 2011 at University of Huddersfield. Charles' musical background intrigued me. As a child he had been a former prodigy and student of Suzuki touring the world with him. As a composer with highly skilled violin training Charles' deep understanding of string technique made playing even his most difficult string writing an idiomatically pleasurable experience. We also discovered an unusual connection with each other in the form of family background - we both had ancestry from the village of Ballisodare, Co Sligo, Ireland! It was refreshing to work closely with a composer who understood intimately the complex technology he was using to create his work *The Multiplication of Machines - Pistons* (e.g. using real time recording of my live violin part and live electronics processing) but as well as understanding the technology he was using he obviously could follow the intricacies of his incredibly difficult notated score, thus always knew exactly where I was and what I was doing. This I felt was a real sincere 21st century chamber music interactive experience with a true sense of collaboration. Video

It is always a pleasure to return to work with my friend, very celebrated Irish composer Donnacha Dennehy, now professor at Princeton University. I first met Donnacha nearly twenty years ago when Fidelio Trio commissioned his piano trio *Bulb* which has now become something of a cult work, which we have performed well in excess of 50 times around the globe. I also recorded Donnacha's first violin concerto *Elastic Harmonic* with RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland for NMC and commissioned *Stamp* for my former String Quartet - The Smith Quartet. All these experiences have much informed my interpretative approach to Donnacha's compositional style and, because of our long musical history and connection working together, when it came to him hearing me play (for the first time, although I have been performing it for some years) his work for Violin and Soundtrack *Overstrung*, Donnacha was delighted with my interpretative ideas.

A primary element of the violin writing in this work is its many natural harmonics used throughout, and in which positions of the left hand these could be best achieved, occasionally on different strings or positions to where he had originally intended and indicated. Donnacha was very open to these changes and after working together we created a recording of the work which shows off its richness of sonority in what could be considered the ultimate version and Donnacha's enviable compositional style.

My final location for this trip was New York, a city whose artistic energies I always find immediately intoxicating. Unfortunately at late notice the composer I was to originally work with was unwell. However I had been recently in contact with an organisation called Composers Concordance who, for the last 35 years, have been acting as ambassadors connecting composers and performers to create new repertoire. I spent time with Faye Ellen Silverman who composed a new solo violin work in three movements for me. Through collaborative dialogue we worked on

elements of the notation and technical demands of the piece to achieve the most functional performance version of it. In the first movement in particular, which is pizzicato throughout, we worked on how best to achieve good results in large four note chords followed by fast repetitive plucked notes and, by utilising the violins open strings and a range of techniques (e.g. *Laissez Vibrer* - letting the sound ring) to achieve as sonorous a sound as possible that the instrument allows, without the use of a bow. Faye was very open to any suggestions I made and created a work which was beautifully melodic and yet shows off the virtuosic scope of violin playing and its wide sonic palette. I also met artist Mark Kostabi with composer Gene Pritsker - who works across a number of genres and musical styles and seems particularly influenced by funk music. Talking to these creative practitioners about their artistic relationships first hand with leading figures including Andy Warhol and Morton Feldman was incredibly inspiring.

It is always interesting to travel as a musician and meet fellow colleagues creating new work in other parts of the globe. A particular focus during this trip was being introduced to current compositional trends in the USA. The most profound outcome of this Finzi Scholarship is that it has stimulated my creative energies into producing a whole new range of original performance interpretations and informed recordings for music for violin and electronics, and without the support of the award I simply would not have been able to ignite and realise this projec