

Over the last quarter of a century, since the emergence of British-born composers Michael Finnissy and Brian Ferneyhough, much debate has surrounded a style and aesthetic of music which maintains a staunchly modernist stance and, by its very nature, remains controversial. Despite this, it has already established a firm place in the repertoire by being performed regularly at major festivals of contemporary music worldwide. The style has developed a practice of its own through the necessity of performance and legions of young composers have been keen to adopt comparable compositional practices and influences.

My own relationship to Brian Ferneyhough's music began in 1989 when I heard a broadcast of his work *Transit* (1976), scored for six soloists and large ensemble. I was immediately impressed by the composer's ability to reveal in sound a violent density of musical possibilities which I continue to find gripping. Until that time my only experience of twentieth-century music had been through those works of Stravinsky and John Antill found on the secondary-school syllabus. *Transit* was directly responsible for my search for similar kinds of music. On receiving the score of Ferneyhough's recently completed guitar piece *Kurze Schatten II* (1990), I realised it was as complicated and as packed with events as the sound world I was encountering in recordings of the composer's other works.

This paper is concerned with my approach to learning and performing this piece and the ways in which performance practice, something more often discussed in relation to earlier music, is still an issue for the music of our own time. Many critics would certainly not ignore conventions which govern the rhythmic interpretation of Baroque scores or the Romantic considerations inherent in the works of Schoenberg and Webern; however, many will immediately expect the performed work to be an exact equivalent of the scored work, accurately and concisely rendered, particularly when the score is notated in great detail.

I based my interpretation of *Kurze Schatten II* on the performance practices of new music specialists before me, peers of the generation of composers to which Ferneyhough belongs. These performers have played a decisive role in the development of this repertoire, having premiered hundreds of new compositions, and include the flautist Pierre-Yves Artaud, percussionist Steve Schick, pianists Herbert Henck and James Avery and, most importantly for me, violinist Irvine Arditti. These specialists fully accepted the lack of precedents

in the performance of this repertoire, rose to the challenge of the return of musical parameters such as physical effort, and have tended to carry instrumental virtuosity to the threshold of incomprehensibility. Although their distinction from performers of traditional repertoire has been sharp and produced intense polemic, their role in this new instrumental music has been considerable.

Irvine Arditti's recording of Ferneyhough's solo violin work *Intermedio alla Ciaccona* (1988)¹ provided particular input into my approach to *Kurze Schatten II* through its constant sense of energy and dramatic performance attitude. The most striking aspect of the performance is that, despite the complexity of the various strata of the work, Arditti maintains a clearly articulated inner pulse. The gestural world sails above, each gesture containing innumerable potential lives. I aimed to imitate his performance style by identifying formal and gestural similarities between *Intermedio alla Ciaccona* and *Kurze Schatten II*. Arditti's approach of not making any compromises by way of technique or tempo was my ideal in the realisation of *Kurze Schatten II*.

The prefatory notes for Ferneyhough's *Lemma-Icon-Epigram* for solo piano (1981) are relevant to the performance of any of his works and outline my approach to preparing *Kurze Schatten II*. The composer writes:

An adequate interpretation of this work presupposes three distinct learning processes 1) An overview of the (deliberately relatively direct) gestural patterning without regard to the exactitude of detail in respect of rhythm: 2) a 'de-learning' in which the global structures are abandoned in favour of a concentration upon the rhythmic and expressive import of each individual note (as if the composition were an example of 'punctualistic' music). 3) the progressive reconstruction of the various gestural units established at the outset on the basis of experience gained during the above two stages of preparation.²

I took this quotation as a running-plan for the process of learning the work and followed the three stages that it outlines. In preparing the work for performance I realised that the dominant issue in *Kurze Schatten II* is one of rhythm and tempo.

The five tempo indications in Movement 1 are all marked *circa* and signpost the structure of this movement. These, together with *accel.* and *poco rall.* mark-

ings—both notated and implied by large-scale groupings of irrational rhythms such as 45:28,—clearly indicate a flexibility and openness which I would naturally associate with the relative clarity of the movement. The material is less dense than in other movements and relates to the natural sound character of ‘openness’ associated with the natural harmonics which characterise the movement.

Not all of the tempi given in *Kurze Schatten II* are possible. In the second movement the tempo decreases gradually in each of the variations, from quaver=90 to quaver=60. From the performer’s point of view however, the work actually increases in tempo as the composer packs more events into each bar. For Ferneyhough ‘[t]he result of this overlapping of tempo and density vectors is a tendency, towards the middle of the movement, for the ear to confuse the two’.³ As a result, this movement is one of the hardest to perform purely on account of the speed requested. Even the repetition of the pitches provides little comfort since the octave register, and therefore the left-hand position, changes throughout. In addition, the composer describes how ‘the increased rapidity of notated rhythm cycles through the available pitches ever sooner, so that, with each succeeding cycle, more “new” pitches have to be added on at the end of each section, thus progressively modifying, “wiping-over” the initial, quasi-motivic figural clarity’.⁴

This indication serves as a particularly relevant observation on the structure and how it affects performance, since the speed of the closing passages relied upon my realising the pitches as fast as was possible within the physical limits of playing. This is certainly a contrast to the figural clarity of the work’s opening, whose rhythms I learnt as accurately as possible using the methods described below.

Likewise, the scope of fluctuations in the flow of ideas in the fifth movement occurs at a great pace; however, the overall tempo does not change as greatly as in others. Ferneyhough points out that ‘[i]n any case, it is not so much a question of speed as of character: this, more than perhaps any other component of *Kurze Schatten [II]*, is a *Charakterstück*’.⁵

A general tempo indication is missing from the sixth movement. I approached Ferneyhough and he couldn’t remember; Magnus Andersson, the work’s commissioner and dedicatee, did not know the exact pace either but referred me to a recent BBC recording of his own performance from which I estimated the tempo as being quaver=108. Essentially this movement should be played as fast as possible. Since the tempo mark was not a formal component of the composition, and the movement comprises single notes and a simpler rhythmic scheme throughout, I realised

that the character should be one of seamless, ceaseless melody slowly disintegrating from constantly articulated notes through to a broken and angular collection of micro-gestures.

One of the principal difficulties in the third and seventh movements is dealing with silence. After having just performed passages of complex ideas, the performer must then sit still for uncomfortably long periods of time without jumping into the next figure early, despite any amount of apprehension or temptation to continue with the work’s forward motion.

In the seventh movement, pauses—sometimes silent, sometimes sustained sounds—range from two to five seconds in length and add to the work’s inner tension for the same reasons as in Movement 3: the player having to maintain his/her nerve despite the difficulty of the remaining passages. This combines with a dense musical syntax in which the tempo shifts between five different speeds some 35 times over just three pages. In this movement more than any other I was faced with internalising global tempi.

Meeting the challenge posed by the tempi in *Kurze Schatten II* can be understood as an attempt to realise the apparently impossible. Playing above one’s perceived limits, both in tempo and in the usage of extended techniques, gives rise to a particular sound world which would be unattainable by other means. Ferneyhough writes in the prefatory ‘Remarks’ to his flute solo *Cassandra’s Dream Song* (1971):

A ‘beautiful’, cultivated performance is not to be aimed at: some of the combinations of actions specified are in any case either not literally realisable...or else lead to complex, partly unpredictable results. Nevertheless, a valid realisation will only result from a rigorous attempt to reproduce as many of the textural details as possible: such divergencies and ‘impurities’ as then follow from the natural limitations of the instrument itself may be taken to be the intentions of the composer...the audible (and visual) degree of difficulty is to be drawn as an integral structural element into the fabric of the composition itself.⁶

This is also true for several passages in *Kurze Schatten II*. A case in point is the combination of plucking with the right hand both in the normal performing position and behind the pitches held down by the left hand, which occurs in the fifth movement from the second half of bar 23 into the first two quavers of bar 24 (see Example 1). This combination cannot be played clearly at the tempo indicated and the bi-tone produced by the left hand action of bar 24, where the left hand hammers against the fretboard producing two different pitches simultaneously, further removes the result from the

notation. The 'natural' dynamic levels produced by the physical action of playing, which in this case contradict those detailed, compound this difference between the score and the resultant sounds.

Example 1: Movement 5, bars 23–24.

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To expect the performance to equal the score would be to misunderstand the composer's use of a system influenced by tablature. Standard Western notation, as it has evolved over the centuries, has been directed towards the notation of sound. In tablature however, the composer notates the actions made by the performer, such as the specification of fingers and strings. The precedent to this lies in the instruments of the lute family and extends right up to the development of the six-string guitar.

This tablature principle is employed throughout *Kurze Schatten II* and is particularly relevant to pitch. The notes as they appear in the score are in part a transposition of the scordatura which changes one string back to 'normal' tuning after the completion of every second movement. The tuning chosen has four scordatura strings arranged around two strings with standard tuning, the D and G. The B string is tuned down a semitone to B flat throughout the piece. The first string, E, is tuned down to E quarter-tone flat, the A string is tuned up three-quarters to B quarter-tone flat, and the low E string is tuned up a quarter tone. The changing of tuning from movement to movement gradually transforms the resonance of the work overall.

Another complicating factor is that the score, a composer's autograph, did not fully explain the symbols used in the notation. Deciphering the many signs used to indicate extended techniques only became possible when I was given a cassette recording of four live performances of the first three movements given by Magnus Andersson.

My overview of *Kurze Schatten II* began with the assignment of fingers. Left-hand fingerings were generally unproblematic. Choosing right-hand fingerings was more difficult as both the speed and nature of the

material left me without precedent in my performing experience. For the most part my fingerings were heavily influenced by the dynamic gradation within the phrases which dictated the division of strong and weak fingers. The many performance directions also served to inform my choice of tone colour and attack, which became more closely related to the harsher sound of flamenco performers than to that which the classical guitarist would consider 'good tone'. My departure from this traditional tone was deliberate and reflects closely the nature of the work played. By employing a sharper nail attack, I gave myself at least some chance of achieving the rapid tempi and precise articulation of the work's second movement.

The first movement consists of three polyphonic levels, two of which contain long natural harmonics. The third level is material described by the composer as 'four independently variable categories of micro-figure'.⁷ Therefore six virtual layers contribute to the overall effect of this movement. The most difficult aspect in the realisation of this movement is the care that must be taken not to stop the ring of the natural harmonics. Such is the physical closeness between the vibrating strings and the flurry of activity around them that I was forced to completely re-angle my left hand in the hope of achieving at least some of the effect required. The issue is further complicated by the fact that the natural harmonics requested would not resonate for the length notated even without the bottom staff. Despite this the movement is extremely idiomatic in terms of its layout upon the fretboard.

With the exception of an unfretted *quasi pizzicato* passage in bar 14, Movement 2 is completely free of the labyrinth of extended techniques which dominate *Kurze Schatten II*'s later movements. Movement 3, however, is an explosive mixture of extended techniques, percussion and silence, contrasting with Movement 4, a *tour-de-force* of left-hand technique.

Dealing with time-flow and the distribution of silence and sound, Movement 3 also requires from the player an enthusiastic interest in percussive techniques performed upon the face of the instrument. Two staves are used: one notates five different percussive sounds rendered by the thumb and four fingers of the right hand; the other details normally articulated notes, along with notes articulated by depressing strings percussively with the left hand alone and chords strummed in rapid succession.

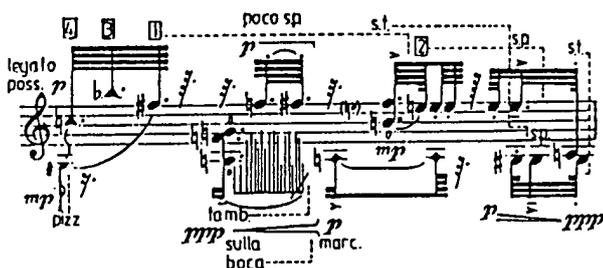
The fourth movement, which imposes extreme technical demands, becomes a study in the continual motion of the left hand across the fretboard. Composed using left-hand fingering possibilities rather than individual pitches, the movement consists of a permuted sequence of possible combinations of the six strings.

This sequence was then 'spread out' over a pre-composed metric/rhythmic structure recognising which combinations of strings, placement of the fingers and fret positions would be available at any given moment. The B section of Movement 4's ternary structure also contains the closest micro-tonal pitches and therefore dictates the position to the player most strictly. The third section tends to allow greater flexibility for the performer's left hand as a result of using ringing natural harmonics.

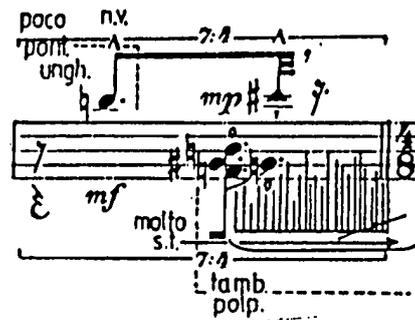
The fifth movement, based upon a chordal proliferation principle, exploits the full coloristic potential of the guitar like no other work I know. A beautiful textural conglomeration of pizzicato, nail and flesh attacks, tabora, right-hand tapping, bi-tonal effects and rasguado chords, this movement explores the lower dynamics of the guitar more than the work's other movements. In this movement Ferneyhough creates a microscopic view of the guitar's make-up which not only provides a stark contrast to, but also a pragmatic rest from, the extremes of the preceding movement.

Ferneyhough's ability to create extended techniques which are aurally interesting and fully realisable adds to the pleasure and ease with which this movement can be studied. Such techniques include holding down a chord with the left hand while bouncing the right-hand fingers across the strings percussively in a free pattern, an effect Ferneyhough describes as an 'unfocused, feathery "aura"'.⁸ Bi-tones, used briefly in Movement 3, are exploited in bar 3 of the fifth movement where the performer's right hand plays behind the held notes (see Example 2). Bi-tones also occur in a different manner in bar 9, where the first finger holds a C sharp as the right hand plays over the strings in the percussive manner described earlier (see Example 3). The right-hand little finger (indicated as e in Example 4), normally the preserve of flamenco guitarists, is used to articulate the final chord of bar 14 (Example 4), which once again involves pitches sounding on the other side of the left hand.

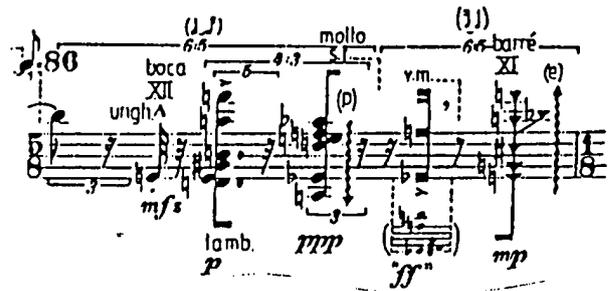
The sixth movement is notable for its freedom and variety, occasioned by the fact that the performer may choose his/her own fingering solutions to the pitch



Example 2: Movement 5, bar 3.



Example 3: Movement 5, bar 9.



Example 4: Movement 5, bar 14.

material. Given the scordatura tuning, different performers may produce quite varied results as they employ a preferred fingering which allows the greatest possible continuity and speed in the individual gestures. The end of the sixth movement signals a return to normal tuning (with the exception of the second string B flat), creating in the seventh and final movement a greater resonance from the instrument.

In his essay on *Kurze Schatten II*, Ferneyhough states that he wanted to create pieces which were 'immediate, direct and violently energized'.⁹ Movement 7 is directly focused on this violence yet, as the movement proceeds, the acoustic universe gradually becomes more and more restricted, to the point where all the strings except the second are silenced. Ferneyhough suggests that the 'natural harmonic B^b' represents 'a pyrrhic victory, perhaps, for the defamiliarization principle over the ineluctable encroachment... of "normal" guitar sonority'.¹⁰

My approach to *Kurze Schatten II* was at all times centred on rhythm and I employed a number of techniques which covered and responded to the importance of rhythm as it differed from movement to movement. Problems of rhythm influence the technical execution of *Kurze Schatten II* and finally shape the drive and direction of the movements, not to mention the differentiation in their character. The examples which follow provide a generalisation of the tech-

niques employed in learning to perform the work. These techniques include decoding rhythmic values by magnifying their make-up to some more recognisable form, deciphering nested polyrhythms by translating rhythmic notations into indications of tempo and marking time by drawing in beats to allow, through spatial representation, a certain amount of time in which to play the notated figures.

An example of the first method was employed for bar 2 of the second movement (see Example 5). The magnification method allowed me to multiply the 3/16 bar to 3/8 and 3/4. I practised the passage at different crotchet tempi to internalise the rhythmic feel and, having added pitch, I memorised the gestural feel.



Example 5: *Movement 2, bar 2.*

An example of deciphering nested polyrhythms occurs at bar 3 of the first movement (see Example 6). The first step was to assess which of the bar's three lines contains the most recognisable rhythm. With only one attack in each of the top two staves, it was obviously important to realise accurately the activity of the bot-

tom stave. Since five semiquavers occur in the time of four, I translated this into a tempo change by multiplying the quaver=44 tempo by five, then dividing it by four, giving me a full bar of five quavers at quaver=55. Using the same process, bar 4 becomes quaver=47.1, bar 5 becomes quaver=49.8 etc. In this manner one can at least approximate the rhythm and feel the natural tempo changes in passages of discernible rhythms where the original tempo was slow enough to allow for audible and playable changes.

In some instances I translated the speed of a particular gesture within a bar. In bar 23 of the third movement, for example, the percussive triplet which occurs in the last two thirds of the bar's two crotchet beats has an independent tempo of crotchet=55.5 (see Example 7). The shifting tempi approach allowed me to identify the most obvious and 'rational' rhythmic relationships and thus to decipher the rhythm of the fourth movement. Described by Ferneyhough as a 'generic waltz', the movement displays a triplicity which governed my characterisation of it.

The shifting tempi technique is, however, not recommended by Ferneyhough, as he has stated that such treatment implies a reorienting of the overall metric view.¹¹ However, this technique is certainly used by percussionist Steven Schick,¹² as well as many other performers, and can be especially useful in the learning process.

Example 6: *Movement 1, bars 3-5.*

Example 7: Movement 3, bar 23.

In numerous passages of Movements 2, 4 and 7, the speed of the musical discourse means that the rhythm occurs as a by-product of the physical actions notated and is therefore less controllable. This is intended to highlight tension in the performance as the player attempts the unattainable. I practised these demanding passages by marking the beats and, using a metronome, played them through, carefully observing points at which I could realign with the beat. By using a metronome which can delineate a strong beat at the beginning of the bar, I rehearsed in the traditional way. In the example of bar 24 from the fourth movement (see Example 8), I learnt the top line as accurately as possible, and then I added the bottom line, which acts ornamentally (as if grace notes), in varying degrees of distance from the upper line.

A variation of this technique was employed in bar 11 of the third movement (see Example 9). The most constant rhythmic figure was the repeated quintuplet rhythm of the percussion part. Here I recorded myself

Example 8: Movement 4, bar 24.

tapping the percussion part with the metronome beat. By playing the tape back I could then realise the pitch material of the lower stave against the accurate execution of the percussion part with its relationship to the beat. I then had an aural perception of the two parts combined, which I used to guide my performance of these passages.

Example 9: Movement 3, bar 11.

In the process of learning these details I constantly returned to the larger-scale structure of the piece because it is crucial for the performer to communicate the form in this work on both large and small scales. Ferneyhough describes the construction of *Kurze Schatten II* as consisting of three pairs of slow-fast movement groupings, described as panels,¹³ as well as a concluding fantasia, movement number seven.

I approached each panel by identifying contrasting characteristics of each two-movement group. In addition to the slow-fast concept, the difference between Movements 1 and 2 exists in terms of harmonic approach, remembering the 'six virtual layers' discussed above, as well as use of gesture and dynamics. Movement 1 is characterised by *sforzando* indications and other sudden dynamics, while Movement 2 is more conventional in its rate of dynamic change.

According to Ferneyhough '[t]he second movement's "topic" is the potential distinction between performance tempo and perceived density of material'.¹⁴ A set of variations, Movement 2 repeats the notated pitches of each of its sections identically at first. The means of variation is the circular sequences of bar structures 5/16, 3/16, 2/8, 1/8, 3/8 and 5/16 (ABCDEF), which in the second variation becomes BCDEFA, in the third variation CDEFAB, etc.

Structurally the third movement employs measures of different lengths which, from the mid-point of the movement, run in retrograde back to the starting point. Only small differences occur between the two halves; principally, where every second measure in the first half contained silence, in the second half the opposite is the case. The relationship between silence and resonance in the two halves is therefore like the juxtaposition between positive and negative images in photography.

Deliberately placed in the central position of the suite, Movement 4 is, as the composer states, 'perhaps the "weightiest" movement of the set'.¹⁵ Whereas my pace in learning the first three movements had been slow, Movement 4 brought the process to a virtual standstill. Very, very slowly I memorised the completely unfamiliar chord shapes which jumped cease-

lessly from one position to the next, infested with sustained natural harmonics reminiscent of the first movement. Fortunately the use of vibrato on the bottom stave in the B section provided me with some opportunity to elucidate the formal structure of the movement. The use of a second stave indicated a melody and accompaniment texture in which the accompaniment is actually more dense and elaborate than the melody.

In Movement 5 the composer contrasts a constantly accelerating rate of change in one dimension with a static or reducing level of complexity in another by using one chord in Section 1, two chords in section 2, three in Section 3 and so on. As the piece continues and the chords change with increasing rapidity, there is also an increase in the use of arpeggiation. The overall effect of this is a sonority more associated with the traditional repertoire of the instrument, which is all the more effective given the scordatura of this movement.

Completing the third and final panel, Movement 6 is a scherzo in nature whose principal feature is the gradual replacement of natural notes with harmonics. The sixth movement is also characterised by small graduations and diminutions of tempi, for example 12:9 becoming 11:9 in the following bar (Movement 6, bar 62–63). As the movement unfolds, brief rests are imposed upon the pitch continuum, creating a sense of ‘punctuation’.

The seventh movement carries the performance instruction: ‘As if playing (whilst unconscious) several pieces simultaneously’.¹⁶ This indication served to illuminate the way in which the composer combines effects and material so as to render the music almost impossible to perform.

Like other movements in *Kurze Schatten II*, Movement 7 is based on cyclic structures. This ‘fantasia’ movement uses recurring metric patterns: ‘[s]ix sections, each containing six measures with identical (albeit permeated) measure lengths are present’.¹⁷ Ferneyhough describes this movement as

an initial welter of textures and colours which succeed one another with great rapidity, although, as section succeeds section, a violent *glissando* gesture comes to dominate the gestural repertoire. Like some sort of wind-up toy, the argument staggers back and forth across the whole gamut of the instrument’s expressive potential in a surrealistically miniaturized time frame, and practically every conventional device of traditional guitar usage may be encountered somewhere in this movement in epigrammatic guise.¹⁸

In reflecting on the learning processes and their influence on performance, several points arise. First, one can imagine from the density of the piece that a

huge amount of time is required in preparation. The construction of the piece from the smallest level up requires the ‘patience of an archaeologist’¹⁹ but, at the same time, returns a rarely found musical satisfaction to the player. Further, this ‘glacial’²⁰ pace of learning enforces and allows the natural growth of an interpretation to occur.

The act of learning becomes a simplification of the work’s detail, whilst performing is the reconstruction of the piece. The performer has to be thoroughly convinced that the composer understands his/her instrument. The difficulties which arise in the work are, I believe, genuinely necessitated by the fabric of the music and are not grafted over the top as an after-effect.

Notes

1 Brian Ferneyhough, *Intermedio alla Ciaccona* and other works, Irvine Arditti and Nieuw Ensemble, Etcetera, KTC 1070, 1989.

2 Ferneyhough, Performance Notes, *Lemma-Icon-Epigraph* (London: Peters, 1987) n.p.

3 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II* for solo guitar’, *Brian Ferneyhough: Collected writings*, ed. James Boros and Richard Toop (London: Gordon and Breach, 1995), p.142.

4 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.142.

5 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.149.

6 Brian Ferneyhough, Remarks, *Cassandra’s Dream Song* (London: Peters, 1975), n.p.

7 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.141.

8 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.148.

9 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.139.

10 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.152.

11 Ferneyhough cited in Steven Schick, ‘Developing an interpretative context: Learning Brian Ferneyhough’s Bone Alphabet “alphabet”’, *Perspectives of New Music* 32.1 (1994), p.138. See also Brian Ferneyhough, ‘The tacility of time (Darmstadt Lecture 1988)’, *Perspectives of New Music* 31.1 (1993), pp.20–30.

12 Schick, ‘Developing an interpretative context’, pp.138, 140.

13 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.142.

14 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.141.

15 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.148.

16 Ferneyhough, performance annotation, *Kurze Schatten II* (London: Peters, 1989), Movement 7, n.p.

17 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.150.

18 Ferneyhough, ‘*Kurze Schatten II*’, p.150.

19 Magnus Andersson, ‘Brian Ferneyhough: *Kurze Schatten II*—considérations d’un interprète’, *Contrechamps* 8 (1988), p.131. Trans. by Stephen Snook (1995).

20 Schick, ‘Developing an interpretative context’, p.133.