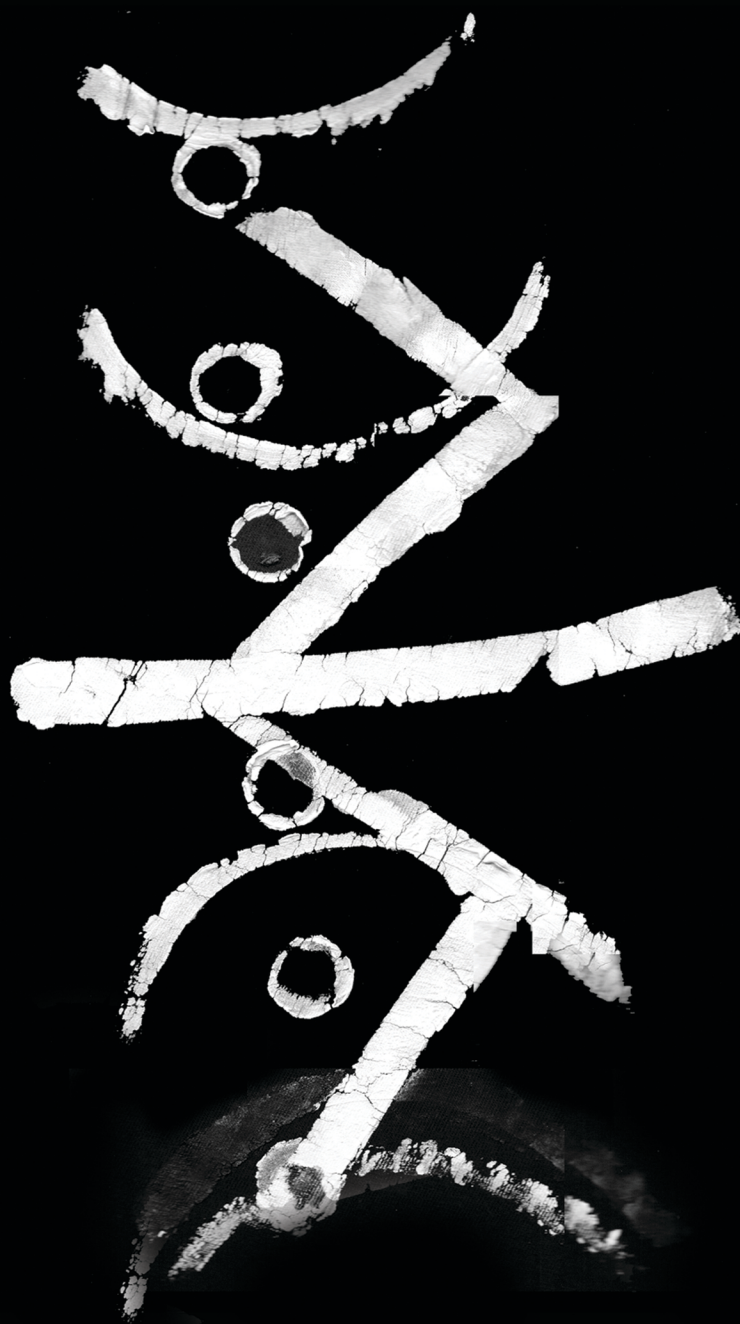


scores notes concepts

tilting curvaceous



patrick brennan

tilting curvaceous

scores

notes

concepts

patrick brennan



New York

*We don't determine music.
The music determines us.
We only follow it to the end of our life.
Then it goes on without us.*

*It begs to be born and wants to go its own way.
We just make it up and then we let it out.
Music speaks for itself and needs no explanation
Or justification.
Either it is alive or it is not.*

- Steve Lacy -

Soyez réalistes, demandez l'impossible.

- les situationnistes -

Be Realistic: Demand the Impossible.

- The Situationists -

scores notes concepts

shots.....	1
about tilting curvaceous.....	3
another way of mapping.....	10
association chains/substitutions.....	12
by track on the <i>tilting curvaceous</i> CD:	
(1) — or “X1”.....	20
(2) — or “X2”.....	30
(3) tilting (3).....	32
(4) piano excursion.....	33
(5) cell 1 w/ pedal.....	34
(6) cell 1 around around.....	36
(7) cell 2 extensions.....	38
(8) cell 4B.....	52
(9) very very slow cell 3.....	57
(10) cell 4 elaborated.....	63
(11) 5 for a spin.....	66
(12) trio.....	74
(13) — or “X3”.....	77
(14) s0l0 sax0ph0ne.....	80
more shots.....	83

— thots / tilting curvaceous —

My relationship with musical ideas has developed out of a millenia long conversation. People have been encouraging me to put a book like this together to illustrate my own particular evolution and involvement with this always stimulating dialogue.

I chose to start with a focus on a single recording by sOnic Openings, *tilting curavaceous*, which features Hilliard Greene on contrabass, Brian Groder on trumpet & flügelhorn, Michael T.A. Thompson on trap drums, and Rod Williams on piano. I instigated and coordinated the music and played alto saxophone.

What's detailed here are the scores with additional notes regarding some of the core concepts as well as the development and extension of many of the patterns in play during that particular phase of the music.

Collectively improvised music (or *dialogical* composition) moves faster than a person can think. There's too much information per second for a participating musician to parse and analyze on the spot, yet these same musicians can nevertheless make sense of what's going on and together emit a coherent sonic event for their listeners. This certainly can *feel* magical, which is deeply worthwhile in itself, and these conditions might even correspond in some ways with Abraham Maslow's notion of peak experience, or what people more colloquially call "flow" or being "in the zone."

But, there are more generalizing or "slower" (which is to say, continuously recurring) vehicles of conception active in these situations in collaboration with what we call intuition, and that would be pattern awareness (especially regarding what's peripheral), pattern itself being a kind of more or less predictable repetition. We also might consider an arithmetic oxymoron such as $1+1=3$ as indicating a conjunction of two respective components *plus* their relationship, that being just as real as the other two constituents. But relationships, like patterns, are non-material actors, and, in that sense, "invisible," yet, at the same time, our perception of these is absolutely crucial to nearly anything we do.

tilting curvaceous presents a network of patterns. In designing musical environments, I tend to work from the rhythm section up rather than around a "lead" framework that the rhythm section then accompanies or responds to. This has particularly been the focus of sOnic Openings from the very beginning, with drums in particular as an equal expressive voice in an ensemble where all play a front line role. In that regard, I've thought about ways to draw winds, strings, and keys more closely into the orbit and logic of the drum without compromising freedom of invention. *tilting curvaceous* is only one of many settings where I've explored these potentialities.

While any sound might participate in music, melody happens to afford the special opportunities of being more easily recognized and identified, and this renders it an apt messenger within an ensemble. It can cue a gathering point, or indicate a change of direction, or provide foil to other activity.

As the hinge actor in a rhythm section, Bass, when plucked, functions more clearly than any other instrument (well, Tuba can deliver this too) as a vehicle for both clearly identifiable pitch as well as pulse within percussive formulations. This flexibility positions Bass as an exceptionally fluent translator between time & tone. And I remind myself through Robert Farris Thompson's quote from the Bakongo scholar Fu-Kiau Bunseki that "Treble voicings represent our world, but bass patterns come from the spirit." Master drummers in many African settings are those playing the lowest pitched instrument. And it's the long waves of bass tones that travel farthest (low E1, 41hz, on contrabass stretches to a wavelength of 27 1/2 feet or 8.37 meters — a single wave that long!). Clear evidence of Salsa from blocks away is almost always *that bass*. Not only that, elephants are able to communicate with each other through infrasound, tones well below the range of human hearing.

When I consider a constellation of beats, I turn first to the bass voice. I'm thinking in terms of melodifying a rhythmic pattern so that it can't be missed by the rest of the band, not to mention the listener. I think about Jimmy Garrison, Charlie Haden, Mingus, and how Bass can function as an independent, non-secondary voice within an ensemble with its own story often running parallel with whatever else might be going on. Then, I add contrasting lines to that with the intent of fomenting more stimulating environs for what a drummer might do.

When I stack melodies, or maybe more accurately, stack *rhythm*melodies, my priority is that they contrast each other as much as possible so that each can stand out clearly enough to maintain their own identities. For me, the greatest models of a strong, durable melodic line have been Monk and Ornette. It's something about the interval sequences that creates this resilience. "Dissonance" helps here because perception of tonality carries a powerful tendency to swallow up melodic shapes into its own hierarchical closures and become overly predeterminative. Tonal implications of this sort can't be totally avoided, but they can be complicated with a multiplicity of possible meanings, interpretations, and digressions, which also opens space for more limber improvisational possibilities.

We often talk during rehearsals about how most of the music is not on the page, that a literal reading, however welcome, offers just one possible point of entry among others. What comes along with this are following the implications that these patterns might suggest, taking on the kind of relational and generative thinking they gravitate toward, hearing how each part relates with the whole sound, and becoming alert to how each might resituate the others. There's riding the musical topography with flexibility, that an inaccuracy might be as interesting globally as a perfect match, and that these might be, in practice, indistinguishable from deliberate variation. It's all in what one makes of it. Likewise, the scores and diagrams here, with related narrations of how this web is spun, may hopefully prove both informative and useful, but with an understanding that these maps, whatever their valuable particularities, are not the actual territory itself. For that, return to the sound.

— about tilting curvaceous —

tilting curvaceous is an evolving organism with a history and ever expanding potential trajectories. It's also specifically a composition for improvisers. It should be recognized that improvisers are themselves composers who are deciding how sounds might be put together within the actual moments of a music's emergence.

In that sense, a composition for improvisers might be understood as a composition for still further composing. This proposes an intermediary position — neither the almost omniscient perspective of total control available through the construction of an endlessly repeatable, “fixed” sonic memorial (as modeled through Euroclassical practices or recorded studio production) nor the narrower, more evanescent horizons accessible within totally unpremeditated, “free” collective improvisation. I think a more precise term for this might be “interactive matrix,” but for simplicity's sake here, we'll stick with the more ambiguous term already set in common usage: *composition*.

tilting curvaceous is a flexibly jointed, pluridirectional construct built from an assemblage of multilinear, polyrhythmic cells. Its indications are generative, with constituent cells that continually evolve & suggest novel extensions and formations. The source material, or original “tune” interface, consists of five contrasting cells, each articulating a distinctive polyrhythmic relationship. Each cell voices two simultaneous (where not more) metric patterns, each with its own identifiable melody, one in bass register, another treble. In sequence, these cells unfold two concurrent, beginning-to-end melodies — again, one bass, one treble that can be heard separately or together.

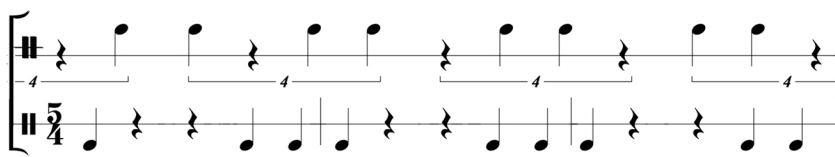
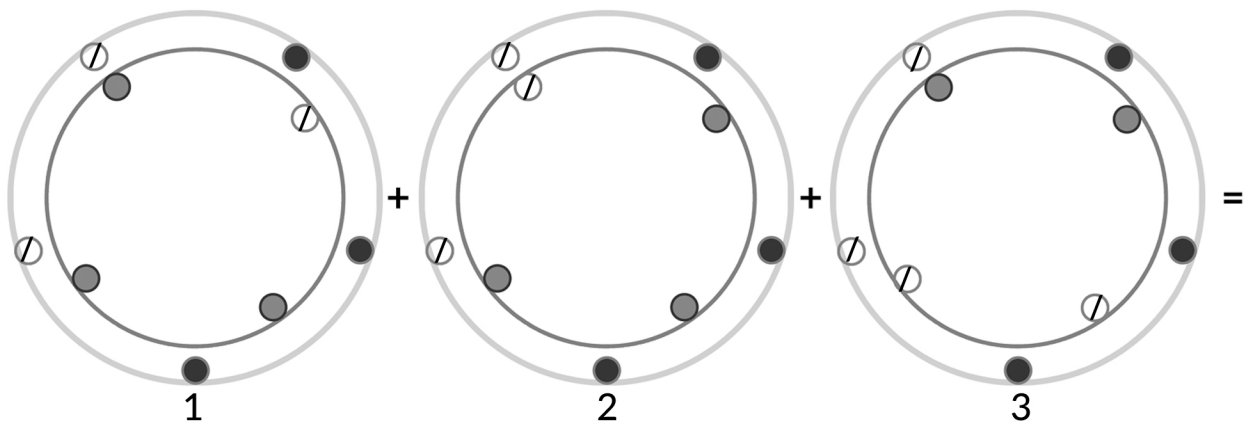
The “tune” may be looped recursively as in standard practice, pre-Ornette jazz. Each cell can additionally be explored as an autonomous, vamp-like loop in itself. The material may also be treated freely, potentially extending in any possible digression or direction as dialogues and discoveries reorient invention. Each bit of identifiable material may or may not as well be used extemporaneously by any player to cue ensemble shifts of direction, subject, of course, to interpretation.

— and yet another way of mapping this —

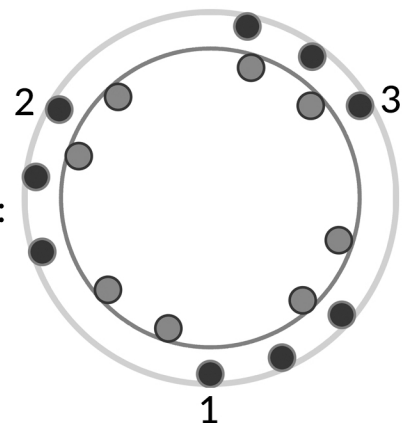
This kind of representation might make it easier to sense the shapes, or patterns, in play. I've seen this kind of rotary, or clock, or mandala/cosmogram (Adam Rudolph), notation in a number of settings. most recently in Melvin Gibbs' superb *How Black Music Took Over the World*, which inspired me to apply a version of that here. The mappings here are more developed than in the early 2000s initial version of *tilting curvaceous*, so I've matched each with conventional notation for further clarity. Unlike clock notation, the “one” or downbeat of each cycle falls at the *bottom* (as befits gravity & ascension) and rotates clockwise from there.

BASS VOICE = ● TREBLE VOICE = ● ADDITIONAL VOICE = ○
 “GHOST” or unsounded PULSE = /

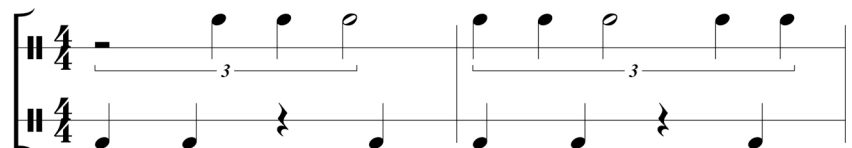
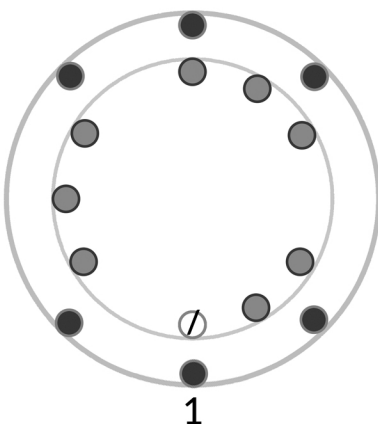
cell 1



complete cycle:

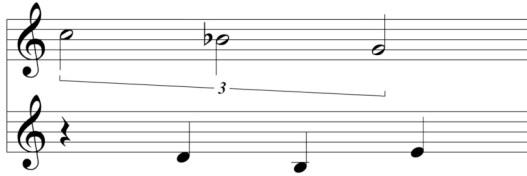


cell 2



— tilting curvaceous [10] —

This is another expansion on the possibilities of cell 4.



These are the same sound situation, simply notated differently. What's important is that the sound is the same. Conventional European notation meets this in an awkward fit.

These are the two lines synthesized into one, yielding a new melody, and the placement of accents (/) can tell very different stories with these identically arranged components.



There's a perceptual switch in play here much like the Rubin vase. What if we could keep both interpretations active at once?



The treble line might be elaborated like this to give its thrust more presence and then synthesized with the bass voice into a single line:



The bass figure can be expanded using rotation and then synthesized with the elaborated treble line.



This might look ridiculous on paper, but it's constructed through a different logic than what this kind of notation predicts and actually connects with a number of layers of activity all at once, and it sounds good too. The piano version of this in the score is an easier read.

LINER NOTES BY HOWARD MANDEL:

tilting curvaceous is all-of-a-piece, sOnic Openings' instigator & extraordinary alto saxophonist patrick brennan informs us, emerging from a single "metagroove interface," to be heard whole. That may come naturally to fans of creative improvisation since the breakthroughs of Ornette Coleman, say, and new constructions by composers including Cecil Taylor, the Art Ensemble of Chicago, Henry Threadgill and brennan himself.

However, as presented in 14 distinct tracks, this album is also a suite of inter-related movements — separate, comparable, able to be curated for play lists or broadcasts. Taking to it in smaller bits first may be if not the best way nonetheless inevitable, as we follow along one moment to the next. Identifying the parts of a complex/compound entity – even if, blind, we're feeling an elephant – actually does help us get the shape of an unfamiliar entirety, which *tilting curvaceous*, though of an established tradition, may yet still be.

So here are elements contributing to and reflected in this greater whole: The dense urban milieu of downtown New York City, where highest skill levels, quickest wits and social adaptability are key to an individual's survival as well as their expressive productivity. The freedom artists take to explore possibilities envisioned in their personal alternatives to conventional order. The hearts and minds of five wide-ranging, experienced, colorfully imaginative instrumentalists making their ways forward together, spontaneously and intuitively through protocols employed for generative qualities. Playfulness, humor, irony, devotion and sensitivity to the collective ideal.

To hear this ensemble state a striking connective cell, go directly to "tilting curvaceous 8." The muscular rhythm team of Hilliard Greene and Michael T.A. Thompson holds strong while the horns of brennan & trumpeter Brian Groder duet fiercely in "3." Pianist Rod Williams unfolds a second melodic cell in "4" – brennan & Groder blow in syncopation against it in "6". "9" is restrained, deliberate and emotionally evocative. "10," the longest exploration here, is akin to a narrative, turning on Thompson's fine drumming.

Those are just glimpses — there's much more happening, simultaneously, new aspects revealed in each listening. Throughout, the players like quantum particles weave together, split apart, reunite and/or remain at distances but mysteriously entangled. To try to absorb the universe of *tilting curvaceous* all at once challenges our ears as our eyes would be overtaxed if directed to "see" simultaneously every facet of a diamond and all the trajectories of its refractions, too. The effort is futile but we go for it, as if entranced by a spinning globe, seeking its far side.



s0nic 0penings

patrick brennan - composition/saxophone

Hilliard Greene - contrabass

Brian Groder - trumpet/flügelhorn

Michael T.A. Thompson - trap drums

Rod Williams - piano

tilting curvaceous

Clean Feed CF613CD

www.patrickbrennansound.com