

2021

## An examination of Graham Fitkin's saxophone music and implications for the modern saxophonist

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*An examination of Graham Fitkin's  
saxophone music and implications for  
the modern saxophonist*

This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the degree of  
**Bachelor of Music Honours**

**Sean Hayes**

**Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts  
Edith Cowan University  
2021**

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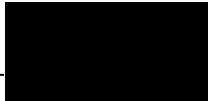
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## ABSTRACT

There is a significant body of academic writing on long-entrenched traditional chamber repertoire for the saxophone, both in the form of creative outputs (saxophone repertoire and études) and traditional academic writing (practical methods, journal articles, and dissertations). In contrast, the aggregate research output existing on “contemporary-classical” music for the saxophone is comparatively small. This research endeavours to contribute to the lesser-studied field, by providing an exposition on saxophone usage in the works of Graham Fitkin (1963-), an internationally recognised composer known for his music which demonstrates a variety of more recent styles, including post-minimalism, jazz and heavy influence from popular music. The study explores Graham Fitkin’s artistic process or processes and the construction of his pieces, the reasons for his use of saxophones in his music, what his usage of saxophones entails from a technical perspective, and examples of such factors in three selected works. The study employs a qualitative research methodology incorporating literature review, a semi-structured interview with Graham Fitkin, and supplemental compositional analysis of three works (*Stub*, *Hard Fairy*, and *Torn Edge*). The research identified three key approaches that Fitkin employs in composing his music and discusses these approaches in the context of three saxophone works, exploring related techniques, considerations, and effects. This research is intended to aid saxophonists in their study, interpretation, and performance of Fitkin’s saxophone works, by bringing to light aspects of musical design and Fitkin’s use of saxophones to achieve them.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Purpose of study

Saxophonists trained in the 'classical' tradition are typically educated in music of the twentieth century that was composed for the saxophone itself, as well as through the study of the great composers such as Bach and Mozart via transcriptions of works written for other instruments. With countless academic contributions from key pedagogical figures in classical saxophone music, such as Marcel Mule and Jean-Marie Londeix, and with the now 'standard repertoire' from composers such as Alexander Glazunov (1865-1936), Jacques Ibert (1890-1962), and Paul Creston (1906-1985)<sup>1</sup> there is a significant, widely-accessible body of knowledge on Western classical music available to saxophonists, to aid them in their study of traditional performance practices. Some saxophonists find however, that as they progress through their burgeoning careers, their focus gradually shifts toward more recent musical repertoire. Learning more about the composers of their lifetimes, discovering new genres, or paving the way for new styles, can be key interests to many current saxophonists. It is in this vein that this study seeks to present information about Graham Fitkin (1963-),<sup>2</sup> a prominent British composer of saxophone music exhibiting diverse influences, including works for "concerts, dance, film and digital media."<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Background

Fitkin is a composer of stylistically diverse music informed by extensive personal study into music of many eras and genres.<sup>4</sup> In his compositions, he often blends styles and incorporates his own artistic idiom into the works to yield unique results. Fitkin began his tertiary studies at the University of Nottingham with Peter Nelson and Nigel Osborne in 1981-1984, leading to further studies in the Netherlands at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague.<sup>5</sup> There he studied with Louis Andriessen (1939-), a notable composer and pedagogue.

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<sup>1</sup> Many authors have collated extensive lists of traditional repertoire for classical saxophonists. One such list can be found in Larry Teal, *The Art of Saxophone Playing*, 101-111; Alexandra Laederich, "Ibert, Jacques," (*Grove Music Online*, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.13675>; Boris Schwarz, "Glazunov, Aleksandr Konstantinovich," (*Grove Music Online*, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.11266>; Walter G. Simmons, "Creston, Paul," (*Grove Music Online*, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.06817>.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Potter, "Fitkin, Graham," (*Grove Music Online*, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.45763>.

<sup>3</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Scores," website, accessed April 26, 2020, <http://www.fitkin.com/scores>; Graham Fitkin, "Biography," website, accessed April 21, 2020, <http://www.fitkin.com/biography>.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin," interview by Giles Masters, (*The Oxford Culture Review*, 2015), <https://theoxfordculturereview.com/2015/09/23/lost-an-interview-with-graham-fitkin>.

<sup>5</sup> Potter, "Fitkin, Graham."

In his career Fitkin has published a large repertory of music, primarily available through his own website.<sup>6</sup> His compositions utilise a myriad of instrumentations, from music for piano solo and duos, to music written for his self-titled chamber ensemble (Fitkin Band) that incorporates instrumental influences from both traditional Western classical music as well as popular and jazz music. A significant portion of Fitkin's published works feature or include saxophone(s), providing ample opportunities for saxophonists to explore a variety of musical contexts within his repertory. This first-hand source of scores contains, for many of the pieces, information such as dates of composition, publication, premieres, as well as artistic notes about the pieces. In this way, Graham Fitkin's website provides saxophonists interested in exploring new saxophone music a trove of compositions for a variety of instrumentations, and featuring diverse musical influences.

### 1.3 Rationale

This research aims to increase the currently limited body of academic output on the works of Graham Fitkin by providing an understanding of his music for the saxophone, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the compositional reasons for, and technical requirements of, saxophones (and the saxophonists playing them) in the musical compositions of Graham Fitkin?
2. What are the resultant implications of the findings regarding Graham Fitkin's compositional process and aesthetic, on the saxophonist looking to approach his works?

This research will contribute to what is still a fledgling field – contemporary-Western classical music for the saxophone, especially that which features minimalism, pop, rock, dance, and disco influences in conjunction with the Western classical tradition. It is hoped that this document might further propel Graham Fitkin's repertoire into the consciousness of twenty-first century saxophonists.

### 1.4 Methodology

Three main processes were employed to inform this research. Firstly, a review of the literature took place, providing contextualisation of the explored repertoire by examining existing works of academic writing in the field, and also the compositional influences and aesthetics of Graham Fitkin. This process included a thorough review of dissertations, journal articles and conference papers, as well as various accounts of Fitkin's live performances and albums.

Secondly, utilising interview techniques explained in Eric Drever's book, one 90-minute interview with the subject of the research – Graham Fitkin – was undertaken, wherein the composer was asked questions within five major categories about his compositional processes, professional experiences, and views on saxophone usage in three selected works. Drever asserts the value of

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<sup>6</sup> Fitkin, "Scores."

semi-structured interviewing, positing the ability to gather information about a person's circumstances, as well as their opinions, preferences, experiences, and motivations.<sup>7</sup> Primary questions<sup>8</sup> asked in the research interview included:

- **Utilising saxophones and saxophonists in composition:** In your opinion, what does the saxophone and/or the saxophonists that you have worked with offer to your compositions?
- **Stub:** Were there any idiosyncrasies of the saxophone(s) that you found new or interesting to work with when composing your first published saxophone quartet, *Stub*?
- **Hard Fairy:** *Hard Fairy* is well-known amongst saxophonists (particularly classically-trained ones). Why do you think *Hard Fairy* has found success with saxophonists looking for contemporary works to perform?
- **Fitkin Band (including Torn Edge):** Your 'Fitkin Band' compositions utilise a relatively unique instrumentation, appearing to be somewhere between a rock band and a classical chamber ensemble – how did you come to settle on that instrumentation?
- **Future saxophone usage:** Where do you think saxophone composition could go? Are there particular sounds, techniques, ensembles, or any other ideas (that incorporate the saxophone) that you would like to explore in future?

The data collected from this interview was organised categorically, then cross-referenced with the reviewed literature to synthesise recurring ideas, patterns or trends in the repertoire.

Thirdly, supplemental analysis of the selected works took place, in light of Fitkin's comments in the interview. Adapting Fadale's analytical model<sup>9</sup> (from his Doctoral dissertation on the works of John Fitz Rogers) to accommodate the smaller scale of this study, the research investigated background to each piece's composition, notable influences on the general composition of each work, followed by analytical observations on use of rhythm, motivic ideas (melody), and form. The analysis of each piece also involved investigating the technical demands of the saxophonist(s).

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<sup>7</sup> Eric Drever, *Using Semi-Structured Interviews in Small-Scale Research : A Teacher's Guide*, ed. Wynne Harlen and Rosemary Wake, (Glasgow: SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow, 1995), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Primary questions are listed here. A small number of sub-questions were also asked, listed in Appendix A.

<sup>9</sup> Gabriel Fadale, "A Comprehensive Examination of the Saxophone Chamber Music of John Fitz Rogers," (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2016).

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW & COMPOSER INSIGHTS

This research pursues information regarding Graham Fitkin's repertoire for saxophones, and its place in the wider sphere of Western classical saxophone music. This chapter thus presents insights into contemporary genres associated with Western Art music (including minimalism, post-minimalism, and postmodernism), fusion of genres, and the incorporation of popular and jazz styles with more traditional aspects of Western classical music. It also discusses the field of traditional classical saxophone music, as well as what would commonly be described as 'contemporary-classical' saxophone music. Finally, events and factors that led to the incorporation of saxophones into Fitkin's music are outlined. This chapter presents key data from other authors, as well as information from the interview with Graham Fitkin conducted as part of this research.

### 2.1 Influential genres and precursors to Fitkin's music: minimalism, post-minimalism, fusion, and PRD (Pop, Rock, Dance)

Identifying genre usage in Graham Fitkin's compositions can be a complex task, therefore ensuring some understanding of specified genres and styles, as well as identifying some precursor ensembles to Fitkin's, may be helpful in clarifying the musical contexts surrounding Fitkin's works. Yayoi Everett's book on Louis Andriessen<sup>10</sup> (Fitkin's composition teacher during his postgraduate studies) provides useful insight into the aesthetics of an area of composition that influenced Fitkin's musical approach.<sup>11</sup> Andriessen is perhaps best known for pioneering the musical traditions of the Hague School, his style being "typically loud, aggressive, rhythmically energetic, devoid of neo-romantic sentiments, and often amplified or electronically manipulated."<sup>12</sup> Andriessen (along with many composers who studied under him) is also particularly notable for his involvement in the field of minimalism.<sup>13</sup> Sweeney-Turner refers to Fitkin's music as inclusive of "minimalism, post-minimalism, and postmodernity",<sup>14</sup> genre classifications that several authors also reinforce in connection with Fitkin's music.<sup>15</sup> Understanding that these styles are associated with Fitkin's

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<sup>10</sup> Yayoi Uno Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511482007>, 145, 164.

<sup>11</sup> Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin."

<sup>12</sup> Gene Carl, "A sense of escalation: Diderik Wagenaar's discrete evolution," *Key Notes* 24 (1987): 14, quoted in Yayoi Uno Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 145.

<sup>13</sup> Jos Wouters, Ronald Vermeulen, and Elmer Schönberger, "Andriessen family," (*Grove Music Online*, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.47613>.

<sup>14</sup> Steve Sweeney-Turner, "Weariness and Slackening in the Miserably Proliferating Field of Posts," *The Musical Times* 136, no. 1833 (1995): 599-601. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1003498>.

<sup>15</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin;" Gramophone, "Graham Fitkin Works for Pianos," accessed April 9, 2020, <https://www.gramophone.co.uk/review/graham-fitkin-works-for-pianos>; Phil Johnson, "Classical Music: Graham Fitkin Group Arnolfini, Bristol: [1]," *The Independent*, Mar 17, 1998, <http://ezproxy.ecu.edu.au/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.ecu.edu.au/docview>

compositions, one can gain an understanding of the character of this music and begin to form ideas about musical approaches associated with playing these styles.<sup>16</sup>

Everett also discusses other composers taught by Andriessen, and some of these composers' notable ensembles, stating, "the groups that have adopted Andriessen's instrumentation (including brass, piano, guitar, percussion, electric bass) clearly set themselves apart from other groups... by crossing over into pop, rock, and jazz."<sup>17</sup> Perhaps the most notable example is the Steve Martland Band, the namesake of which also studied under Andriessen.<sup>18</sup> Many of these ensembles bear resemblances to Fitkin's band, through the use of similar instrumentations and/or the blending of contemporary musical styles, as well as those musical characteristics as described above.<sup>19</sup>

Rachel Swindells examines musical fusion (of 'classical' and 'popular' styles) in connection with Fitkin's works. In her PhD dissertation (1999), Swindells defines 'PRD' (pop, rock, and dance) as a term less specific than 'pop', 'rock' or 'dance', but one which comprises all three of these musical styles, using this term to provide a historical view of cross-influence in music.<sup>20</sup> Fitkin claims that his music comprises a wide variety of styles drawn from the influence of various composers or even from his appreciation of specific genres themselves (popular ones in particular).<sup>21</sup> With regards to these popular styles, Swindells notes Fitkin's apparent preference for fusing genres rather than merely incorporating multiple genres into his music<sup>22</sup> – one particular point of difference between his music and his contemporaries' (as listed by Everett and Potter).<sup>23</sup> Swindells' dissertation provides useful insight into Fitkin's earlier years of composing, however her work predates the publication of most of his current repertory, and certainly his music written for the Fitkin Band. To that end however, we can note Fitkin's continued embrace of PRD styles, which he discusses in his 2015 interview with Giles Masters.<sup>24</sup>

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/312676168?accountid=10675; Potter, "Fitkin, Graham;" Keith Potter, "Minimalism (USA)," (*Grove Music Online*, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2257002>.

<sup>16</sup> For further reading on minimalism and post-minimalism, see Keith Potter, "1976 and All That: Minimalism and Post-Minimalism, Analysis and Listening Strategies"; Dimitri Cervo, "Post-Minimalism: A Valid Terminology?," *Ictus* 1 (1999): 37-52.

<sup>17</sup> Everett, *The Music of Louis Andriessen*, 164.

<sup>18</sup> Keith Potter, "Martland, Steve," (*Grove Music Online*, 2001), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.45764>.

<sup>19</sup> Louis Andriessen, "Louis Andriessen: Interview about his new *Mysteries*," interview by David Allenby, (Boosey and Hawkes, 2013), <https://www.boosey.com/cr/news/Louis-Andriessen-Interview-about-his-new-Mysteries/100287>.

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Justine Swindells, "Stylistic Fusion in a Postmodern Context," (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1999), 6-8.

<sup>21</sup> Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin."

<sup>22</sup> Swindells, "Stylistic Fusion in a Postmodern Context," 243.

<sup>23</sup> Potter, "Minimalism (USA)."

<sup>24</sup> Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin."

## 2.2 Graham Fitkin: incorporation of genres, compositional style, and influences

In the previous section, notable genres and styles that critics and academics have associated with Graham Fitkin's music are discussed, however the approach that Fitkin takes in composing (and how he incorporates these styles into his music) is equally important to the saxophonist looking to perform his works. As described above, numerous genres and styles have been referenced in discussions about Fitkin's music, though likely the term most-often tied to Fitkin as a composer is 'minimalism'. One review published by Gramophone states that, "Fitkin has been seduced by the surface qualities of American minimalism, but prefers to do without its structural rigour."<sup>25</sup> In comparison, Fitkin himself says of his music:

...to describe me as a minimalist I think is untrue, because my work is not minimal in any way. With the exception of some of my solo piano pieces, everything is too complicated.<sup>26</sup>

Questioned on this matter in the interview for this research, Fitkin expanded upon that idea:

There's too many notes, first of all, and they're not repeated in the same way that a Philip Glass or a Terry Riley is repeating things. I'm not there creating drones, I'm not there to make the repetition... I'm still – quite classically – creating tension and resolution of things.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, Potter states, "Indeed, few so-called minimalist composers, even those who have established meaningful relationships with minimalist artists, are at all happy with the label."<sup>28</sup> Regardless, Fitkin does concede that certain techniques that he utilises might come out of minimalism, alluding to references in some pieces to Steve Reich or Arvo Pärt.<sup>29</sup> To this end, it is clear that the presence of *minimalist* techniques and tendencies in Fitkin's music certainly yields ongoing debate, however Fitkin does provide an alternative view on his compositions, stating:

I think to call me a minimalist is not right, but post-minimalism is something very different to minimalism, in my opinion. And post-minimalism is more an attitude, which I do think I've got...<sup>30</sup>

Fitkin claims that this attitude potentially presents itself in his works for other instruments more than his saxophone pieces (with the exception of his Fitkin Band works), though later cites *Spill*

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<sup>25</sup> Gramophone, "Graham Fitkin Works for Pianos."

<sup>26</sup> Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin."

<sup>27</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Keith Potter, "Minimalism (USA)."

<sup>29</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

(2013) – for soprano saxophone and harp – as one example where aspects of minimalism could be identified.<sup>31</sup>

Describing this ‘post-minimalist attitude’, Bernard explains, “It would appear that postminimalism can only signify matters of technique, effectively as vestiges of minimalism, since the composers in question are so diverse in aesthetic and stylistic orientation; all have seized upon elements of minimalism but have gone in very different directions with them.”<sup>32</sup> To that end, Fitkin’s stance on his music and the presence therein of minimalism can be justified, while the understanding that the works may still possess post-minimalist tendencies remains intact.

Swindells’ dissertation on stylistic fusion in a postmodern context explores Fitkin’s early music, addressing postmodern and popular aspects within Fitkin’s works:

Fully conversant in a variety of musical languages, Fitkin is a product of an eclectic cultural environment. This could initially be perceived as postmodern: his music is ambiguous stylistically and full of diverse influences, yet there is a strong concern with control of musical elements: rather than influences appearing superficially, the material is tightly organised into arithmetical structures. This suggests an approach allied to modernism in some respects... Yet the material used features popular tonal and rhythmic devices.<sup>33</sup>

Sweeney-Turner echoes this notion, praising the composer’s informed use of idiomatic writing in a manner that crosses perhaps equally between a variety of styles:

Fitkin actually manages to call the post-minimalist bluff and succeeds in getting his fingers around some truly idiomatic popular references. If this is crossover, then it's from both sides simultaneously - Fitkin is no cultural tourist. Which rather begs the question as to whether or not we should call him post-minimalist at all.<sup>34</sup>

However, as Swindells states, Fitkin’s proclivity for blending styles adopted from his vast and varied influences often leads to “inconsistent readings of style identity” with regards to his aesthetic, shedding light on the many varied opinions on Fitkin’s music described above.<sup>35</sup>

Fitkin praises specific music from both the classical and contemporary music spheres for their clarity (an aspect of musical design that he frequently refers to with high regards), referring to composers ranging from Bach to the Pet Shop Boys (an English pop duo).<sup>36</sup> From this, it appears that Fitkin’s reverence for clarity is uninfluenced by the genre it appears in. Indeed, he appears to

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<sup>31</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan W. Bernard, “Minimalism, Postminimalism, and the Resurgence of Tonality in Recent American Music,” *American Music* 21, no. 1 (2003): 130.

<sup>33</sup> Swindells, “Stylistic Fusion,” 285.

<sup>34</sup> Sweeney-Turner, “Weariness and Slackening,” 599-601.

<sup>35</sup> Swindells, “Stylistic Fusion,” 243.

<sup>36</sup> Fitkin, “Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin.”

actively engage himself in vastly differing musical genres, citing influences to his compositions – J.S. Bach (1685-1750), W.A. Mozart (1756-1791), Jean Sibelius (1865-1957), Igor Stravinsky (1882-1971), Steve Reich (1936-), and recent composers such as Keith Jarrett (1945-), Miles Davis (1926-1991), Charlie Parker (1920-1955), and Bernard Herrmann (1911-1975).<sup>37</sup> Such suggests that so long as the music he hears pertains compositional features that he aspires to (for example, clarity in those examples above), he is equally likely to incorporate those genres even if not related directly to his classical training.

### 2.3 Classical saxophone: saxophonists' current understanding, cross-genre music

Acknowledging various roles that the saxophone has taken as a solo and ensemble instrument is important in contextualising the roles that saxophone takes in Fitkin's music. Liley, in Ingham's *The Cambridge Companion to the Saxophone*, provides a detailed historical account of the instrument's adoption in orchestras, jazz bands, and concert bands, depicting the development of saxophone usage in each of these cases as being discrete from each other.<sup>38</sup> However, Delangle and Michat assert in the same book that these styles developed in parallel to each other and that many compositions for the saxophone comprise strong elements of jazz and contemporary-classical technique.<sup>39</sup> By now there is now an extensive list of composers who have written cross-genre works for the saxophone, typically blending jazz and classical technique. Well-known examples include Phil Woods' *Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano* (1962), Richard Rodney Bennett's *Concerto for Stan Getz* (1990),<sup>40</sup> and Andy Scott's *Nemesis* (1998).<sup>41</sup> Saxophonists embrace this blend of styles, as Tyson states, explaining that many current saxophone pedagogues incorporate understanding from both sides.<sup>42</sup>

Notions that the modern saxophonist is open to playing music that does not conform to one style, and that their existing capabilities can be utilised in alternative ways for executing wide-ranging musical roles, appear to be widespread in the field. Interviewed for Tyson's paper, Julien Wilson states:

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<sup>37</sup> Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin."

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Liley, "Invention and Development," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Saxophone*. ed. Richard Ingham, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 17-18.

<sup>39</sup> Claude Delangle, and Jean-Denis Michat, "The Saxophone Today," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Saxophone*, ed. Richard Ingham (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161-183.

<sup>40</sup> Delangle and Michat, "The Saxophone Today," 168.

<sup>41</sup> Andy Scott, "Nemesis," website, accessed November 6, 2020, <https://www.andyscott.org.uk/nemesis.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Rebecca M. Tyson, "Modern Saxophone Performance: Classical, Jazz and Crossover Style," *Artistic Practice as Research: Proceedings of the XXVth Annual Conference* (2004).



I don't think of playing the Saxophone in terms of style. I think that more and more style doesn't matter so much, there are bands that mix up so many different things, and I like it when you can't definitively say what style the band is playing.<sup>43</sup>

Tyson claims, "In Australia all saxophonists interviewed maintained that there is a real need to be able to play all styles of music to survive."<sup>44</sup> From this it appears that, at least in Australia, there is both an appetite amongst performers for music that does not strictly adhere to one's own training, and a belief that playing such music is a necessity for the modern saxophonist's career.

## 2.4 Fitkin and saxophone: professional relations and sonorous preferences

As a composer with little personal connection to the saxophone, it may seem unusual that Fitkin's repertory has now grown to include a notable number of works for the instrument. With more than thirty published works that include saxophone in their instrumentation, and numerous others for which the sheet music remains unpublished, the composer's tendency to write music including the saxophone over the last three decades appears to have resulted in large part thanks to a series of professional experiences and relationships with saxophonists throughout his career.<sup>45</sup> Citing various performances with Simon Haram and Nick Moss, two saxophonists whom he later went on to utilise extensively in his own band, as well as a commission by the Delta Saxophone Quartet, Fitkin describes how hearing the tonal qualities and possibilities that saxophones offer, brought to his attention the idea of composing for the instrument.<sup>46</sup> Fitkin also credits hearing an arrangement of one of his earlier piano works, *Sciosophy*, for fourteen saxophones of the Guildhall School of Music, as one of the most significant events that inspired him to begin writing saxophone works.

But actually, just hearing all those saxophones do the same thing, that was quite a moment... At that time, the idea of having a big saxophone group was actually quite new, probably... But at that point to have fourteen saxophones do this wildly rhythmic, and quite broad range of stuff going on, with all these baritones doing the bass line, bumping with the bass line, was quite a moment for me, actually. I was thinking, "actually yeah, you know, this is something we should do more of..."<sup>47</sup>

While Fitkin's repertory for the saxophone does utilise all four of the most common saxophones – soprano saxophone, alto saxophone, tenor saxophone, and baritone saxophone – at one time or another, the composer appears to hold a special preference for soprano, stating:

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<sup>43</sup> Tyson, "Modern Saxophone Performance."

<sup>44</sup> Tyson, "Modern Saxophone Performance."

<sup>45</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>46</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>47</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

But I think you know, what I really love about the saxophone, especially the soprano, which I've written for quite a lot since... It's just that quality, it's... Before, when I was a school kid, I loved the sound of the oboe... and I still do love the sound of the oboe, but the oboe has certain... limitations, which the saxophone doesn't have. The saxophone's got a greater sort of... I don't know, it's- Well you know all about the saxophone character and the saxophone. But that character, I thought "yeah, I can work with this for my sort of music. It's going to work well."<sup>48</sup>

This apparent preference for the tonal qualities of the soprano saxophone is also evident in the proportion of Fitkin's published scores for saxophone that specifically utilise the soprano as the sole saxophone in the ensemble. Of the thirty-one published Graham Fitkin pieces that incorporate saxophones, nine of them utilise soprano saxophone as the sole saxophone in the instrumentation.<sup>49</sup> In this way, it can be seen that the timbral qualities of all of the main four types of saxophones appear to work sufficiently for Fitkin's purposes, though aspects of the soprano saxophone's sound in particular are seen by Fitkin to be especially useful in certain works.

Though there may be numerous chance occurrences that led to Fitkin's first works for the saxophone, it can be said that this eventuality primarily resulted from just a few professional interactions with highly-skilled saxophonists who were able to demonstrate a wide range of capabilities on the instruments. Expressing a desire for particular tonal qualities in his music, and describing saxophonists', such as Simon Haram, Nick Moss, and the members of the Delta Saxophone Quartet, ability to produce such qualities, and without some of the technical limitations he had previously encountered with other instruments, the place for saxophone in Fitkin's music is easily understood.<sup>50</sup> Fitkin states on numerous occasions that rhythmic factors and what he calls 'punch', are central to the effective performance of his music, and highlights his professional endeavours with saxophonists as exemplars in this approach.<sup>51</sup> In this way, the saxophone can be seen to play an integral part in much of Graham Fitkin's music, shaped by professional interactions between composer and performer in the creation of the works.

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<sup>48</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Fitkin, "Scores."

<sup>50</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>51</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

## CHAPTER THREE: SAXOPHONE IN FITKIN'S MUSIC

In the previous chapter, an overview of musical aspects of Graham Fitkin's compositions, existing cross-genre saxophone music, and a brief insight on Fitkin's foray into composing for saxophones, is presented. This chapter will explore three significant approaches employed by Fitkin in his compositions, identified by the writer through an interview with the composer. These approaches were observed throughout Fitkin's entire body of works, and specifically within three selected works that include saxophone(s). Each approach – composing for 'monotimbral' ensembles, modifying traditional contexts, and composing for the Fitkin Band – is explored here initially through a general discussion of Fitkin's composing within that approach, and then through an analysis of an indicative work. The latter sections also provide commentary on the wider application of techniques to other works that were written using the same compositional approach.

### 3.1 Monotimbral compositions

#### 3.1.1 Composing for monotimbral instrumentation

Though Fitkin has established several different approaches to composing new works of music throughout his extensive and varied career, perhaps his oldest and most dear to his heart is composing for what he has called 'monotimbral' instrumentations.<sup>52</sup> Establishing this approach in the earlier stages of his career, Fitkin would regularly write for groups of instruments that were timbrally similar or near-identical, writing many compositions for a ensembles such as a group of pianos, or a group of clarinets, or a group of saxophones. Fitkin's monotimbral compositions usually utilise one group of instruments that possess relatively homogenous timbral qualities. In particularly rare instances, he has written works that could be considered to utilise two monotimbral instrument groups, such as *Slow* which is scored for string quartet (the first monotimbral group) and two organs (the second monotimbral group).<sup>53</sup> Such cases are uncommon however, with the most of Fitkin's monotimbral pieces incorporating four of the same, or as similar as practicable, instruments.

In an interview with Giles Masters in 2015, Fitkin stated his passion for writing music using only piano, versus "multi-timbral groups, where you hear the timbres."<sup>54</sup> Fitkin elaborated on this idea while being interviewed for this study, explaining:

*Vent* is a clarinet quartet, which has actually been adapted for saxophone quartet as well... And in a sense, as long as you play all the notes and the clarity is there, then it still works for me, and what I [like] about writing for monotimbral groups... is that it

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<sup>52</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>53</sup> Fitkin, "Scores."

<sup>54</sup> Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin."

means... if the harmony is really important to you, and at the time it was... you can hear it much easier...<sup>55</sup>

From this, it seems clear that monotimbral writing has long been one of Fitkin's musical passions, due to the clarity that it affords his music. Fitkin specifies that in such works, he wants people to "think about the notes" – both in the rhythm and the harmony.<sup>56</sup> Fitkin's reasons for this approach are numerous, however, at the core it appears that his desire to compose in this manner stems from the fact that it affords him the ability to rule out unintended effects in the way in which different instruments' timbres may obscure their harmonic, melodic, or rhythmic role, or how their timbre may distract from the notes themselves. Fitkin comments:

...there's nothing taking your attention away to "oh that's a beautiful sound, because we've got that beautiful oboe coming out of that harp pluck", you know... I just wanted people to think about the notes.<sup>57</sup>

Fitkin also appears to, in these compositions, disregard timbre as a musical device, stating:

It's about, just focusing on one thing, or a few things, rather. But I mean there's so many things to focus on in music. And, certainly at that point timbre was... I wasn't particularly interested in timbre at all.<sup>58</sup>

As such, expressing musical virtuosity through the production of a soloistic tone that is employed for the primary purpose of 'sticking out' of the ensemble texture, could be seen to be unnecessary in Fitkin's monotimbral works.

Creating an informed performance of one of Fitkin's monotimbral compositions can be understood to rely primarily upon the ability to merge all players' tones together, creating one homogenous sound. Assuming that all players in a monotimbral instrumentation can blend their already-similar tones to be largely imperceptible from each other, then the harmonic, melodic and rhythmic intricacies should consequently (in Fitkin's view) come to the fore, unimpeded by distractions caused by timbral effects or interplay. As a result, this clarity in turn allows the performers to develop interest by way of highlighting melodic and harmonic features of the music through the use of balance, intonation, and intensity. Understanding the purpose and construction behind Fitkin's monotimbral repertoire can inform players' interpretation and execution of the pieces, and therefore may lead to more effective performances of his works.

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<sup>55</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>56</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

### 3.1.2 Saxophone in a monotimbral context; *Stub*

There are multiple compositions written by Graham Fitkin that utilise saxophone in a monotimbral context. Perhaps most indicative for the purposes of this study are Fitkin's saxophone quartets. Fitkin's *Stub* (1991) is an example of this type of composition, exhibiting musical factors and performance expectations of saxophonists that will be explored (with relation to those principles guiding Fitkin's monotimbral compositional process) throughout this section. Through effective focus on timbre, clarity, and the presentation of motivic ideas, saxophonists (or any other instrumentalist attempting a monotimbral Fitkin piece) can produce more informed and effective performances of Fitkin's monotimbral music.

As described in the previous section, perhaps Fitkin's foremost intended result of composing monotimbrally is to, as much as practicable, remove the element of individual musical voices obstructing the harmony (and perhaps melody to some extent), by way of their timbre, balance, or attack. In his own words, Fitkin does not want anything "taking your attention away" from the harmony.<sup>59</sup> While the instrumentation of *Stub* does in itself utilise only one family of instruments, saxophones, further efforts should still be made by the saxophonists to blend their timbres as much as possible. By working to blend the sounds of each saxophone within a monotimbral composition, a unified timbral approach can aid in the effective performance of Fitkin's works.

Clarity in the ensemble texture is also noted by Fitkin as a key facet of his monotimbral repertoire.<sup>60</sup> Fitkin also uses the term "simplicity" in reference to this aspect of performance.<sup>61</sup> Ensuring clarity and simplicity in *Stub* can be achieved through considered balancing of each saxophone part. In the opening theme of the piece, all parts are written in rhythmic unison and the same articulations appear in every part simultaneously (**See Figure 3.1**).

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<sup>59</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

Figure 3.1 shows the opening theme of *Stub*. It features four saxophone parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Baritone) playing in rhythmic unison. The music is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The first measure is marked with a '1' and a fermata. The melody is played in rhythmic unison by all four parts.

**Figure 3.1:** Opening theme of *Stub*, presenting all four parts in rhythmic unison.<sup>62</sup>

In sections such as this, balancing all parts in such a way that the ensemble sounds like ‘one instrument’, could aid in realising Fitkin’s compositional goal – a clearer and more simplistic sonorous effect. Rhythmic precision and aligned articulations (strength, length, separation) further improve this area of focus. A similar approach can be taken in the second theme (See Figure 3.2) of the work, however in this case there are two musical ideas: the first (melody) being played by the soprano saxophone by itself, and the second (chordal accompaniment) played by the alto, tenor, and baritone saxophones.

Figure 3.2 shows the second theme of *Stub*. The Soprano Saxophone part presents the melody, while the Alto, Tenor, and Baritone Saxophones play chordal accompaniment. The music is marked *ff* (fortissimo). The first measure is marked with a '44'.

**Figure 3.2:** Second theme of *Stub*, soprano part presents melody while alto, tenor, and baritone play chordal accompaniment.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Graham Fitkin, “Stub,” score, self-published, fitkin.com, 1991, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Fitkin, “Stub,” score, 5-6.

Delta Saxophone Quartet, who commissioned *Stub*, appear to treat the melody and chordal accompaniment relatively equally here.<sup>64</sup> As such, the soprano is being balanced against the combined force of the other three saxophones. Given Delta's collaboration with Fitkin in putting their performance together,<sup>65</sup> one can surmise that this approach is an acceptable or even preferable means of performing the piece. In this way, effective use of clarity in Fitkin's monotimbral repertoire can be seen to be a vital tool in preparing the works.

Fitkin uses only a small number of motivic ideas in the writing of *Stub*. Each idea is typically repeated many times, both in a smaller sense (building formal sections out of 2-4 bars of material) and in a larger sense – repeating these formal sections throughout the piece to create a larger structure. The piece weaves between sections built with intense, jagged motives that are presented in rhythmic unison between all players (m. 1-24); and lighter, more melodic sections that see some degree of interplay between two or more simultaneously occurring motives (m. 44-52). The delineation between these heavier and lighter sections can perhaps be more easily achieved through the piece's monotimbral design than it might otherwise be were it multi-timbral. The monotimbral composition of *Stub* can therefore be seen to afford saxophonists greater ability to explore key musical designs of Fitkin's writing.

## 3.2 Modified traditional contexts

### 3.2.1 Composing for traditional ensembles with modified instrumentation

One apparent feature of some Graham Fitkin works is the modification of traditional instrumentational formats, whereby through swapping, adding, or removing an instrument(s) from an established instrumentation, he creates updated versions of long-entrenched Western classical instrumental formats to which both musicians and audiences are more-likely accustomed. In this way, he is able to create new, interesting textures and musical effects that build upon frameworks established by compositional predecessors.

Much of the existing repertoire in the Western classical genre employs accepted instrumentations established some hundreds of years ago, including the string quartet, wind quintet, solo (any melody instrument) with piano accompaniment, and solo with orchestra. Fitkin acknowledges the benefits of composing using established instrumental formats, though also expresses an admiration for new and unique combinations of instruments:

...the interesting thing that you can do is you can still actually make it sound completely different because you can put four saxophones *with* four string players in a way which hasn't been done before, or you can bunch those instruments in

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<sup>64</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Stub," with ensemblebash, Icebreaker, Delta Saxophone Quartet, and John Harle Band, *Hook; Mesh; Stub; Cud*, Decca, [1993], MP3.

<sup>65</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

different ways... I'm very happy using, let's say tenor saxophones, but wouldn't it be great to write a piece for twelve tenor saxophones, you know, or just twenty violas. That would be a way to change things around but still use a viola which is an old instrument.<sup>66</sup>

In this way, traditional instrumentations can be seen to influence and inform Fitkin's approach, however, he undoubtedly expresses an interest for modifying these formats.

Graham Fitkin has composed several pieces that subvert musical norms by way of modifying an established instrumentation or creating a new one altogether. Examples of Fitkin's compositions of this type include:

- *Compel* (for a modified version of the reed quintet instrumentation, utilising a soprano saxophone instead of alto saxophone, thereby shifting the roles of soprano and alto voices in the instrumentation).<sup>67</sup>
- *Loud* (composed for the ensemble Piano Circus,<sup>68</sup> for six pianos – which could be considered an expansion of existing piano ensemble instrumentations such as piano duos and even piano six hands).<sup>69</sup>
- *MacGuffin* (for a modified string quartet (only one violin instead of two, and a double bass to make up the fourth part) and piano).<sup>70</sup>
- *No Doubt* (for MIDI-Harp and orchestra, the harp initially behaving similarly to traditional harp usage, then shifting towards "more brutal and macho" sound samples).<sup>71</sup>

These pieces all involve swapping out one or more typical instrument(s) for another instrument that is atypical in those contexts, or simply expanding an established instrumental ensemble. This method of taking a traditional instrumentation and implementing a simple change to produce a 'modified' version of that ensemble's sound is employed in Fitkin's *Hard Fairy*.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>67</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Compel," accessed October 6, 2020, <https://fitkin.com/product/compel>.

<sup>68</sup> Piano Circus is a contemporary-classical ensemble made up of six pianists at six pianos. For further information about this format, see: Piano Circus, "About," accessed November 1, 2020, <https://www.pianocircus.com/home>.

<sup>69</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Loud," website, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://fitkin.com/product/loud>.

<sup>70</sup> Graham Fitkin, "MacGuffin," website, accessed October 6, 2020, <https://fitkin.com/product/macguffin>.

<sup>71</sup> Graham Fitkin, "No Doubt," website, accessed November 1, 2020, <https://fitkin.com/product/no-doubt>.

<sup>72</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Hard Fairy," website, accessed October 6, 2020, <https://fitkin.com/product/hard-fairy>.



### 3.2.2 Saxophone in a modified traditional context; *Hard Fairy*

*Hard fairy*, takes us into a field reminiscent of the English Pastoral crowd in the slower, quieter sections, but with a soprano sax, rather than the Pastoral clarinet cliché, which allows for vague hints at raucousness in the faster sections (never without a good grounding in English pathos, though).<sup>73</sup>

*Hard Fairy* (1994) has been played by many performers worldwide and is likely one of Fitkin's most famous pieces of repertoire amongst saxophonists. Whether a result of the piece's technical hurdles (frequent time signature changes, and general stamina difficulties) or its juxtaposition of chorale-like harmony with driving, motoric characters, it is clear that a great number of students find themselves performing this work at some point during their secondary or tertiary education. Certainly, the number of recordings by professional saxophonists such as John Harle,<sup>74</sup> Gerard McChrystal,<sup>75</sup> and Nicolas Prost,<sup>76</sup> suggest that the piece is generally popular. The piece is often performed by students as a 'rite of passage' of sorts for students trained in the classical tradition seeking to break into the realm of contemporary-classical and cross-genre saxophone repertoire.

The difficulty associated with *Hard Fairy* is likely due to the work's numerous challenges that it presents to the saxophonist – notably the piece's fast, often syncopated, and unrelenting rhythmic passages. The first instance of this occurs at m. 47 (See Fig. 3.3).



Figure 3.3: Syncopated rhythmic motive at its first appearance in the soprano saxophone part of *Hard Fairy*.<sup>77</sup>

Such passages sometimes occur in line with equivalent rhythmic gestures in the piano part(s), but sometimes the saxophone instead plays longer, more atmospheric lines over rhythmic passages in the piano. The latter requires the saxophonist to play with what could be described as a sense of 'timelessness' while simultaneously keeping strict track of the pulse by paying great focus to the rhythm in the piano part(s). One occurrence of this musical design occurs from m. 6 to m. 18 (See Figure 3.4).

<sup>73</sup> Sweeney-Turner, "Weariness and Slackening," 599-601.

<sup>74</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Hard Fairy," with John Harle (saxophone), John Lenehan (piano) and Graham Fitkin (piano), *Fitkin: Hard Fairy*, Decca, [1994], MP3.

<sup>75</sup> Gerard McChrystal, "Graham Fitkin - Hard Fairy with Gerard McChrystal soprano sax.," filmed February 2017 in Florida, USA, Youtube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Arz7mnLcSAM>.

<sup>76</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Hard Fairy," with Nicolas Prost (saxophone), *The Art of the Saxophone: Nicolas Prost*, Indesens, [2013], MP3.

<sup>77</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Hard Fairy," score, self-published, fitkin.com, 1994, 3.

Figure 3.4: Musical score for Soprano saxophone and two piano parts. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 6-8) shows the Soprano Saxophone (S. Sax.) playing a long, atmospheric melodic line marked 'dim.' over a motoric, rhythmic passage in the first piano part (Pno.) marked 'mp' and 'cresc. slowly'. The second system (measures 9-13) shows the S. Sax. playing a melodic line marked 'mf' over a rhythmic passage in the first piano part marked 'mf'. The third system (measures 14-17) shows the S. Sax. playing a melodic line marked 'ff' over a rhythmic passage in the first piano part marked 'f' and 'cresc.' leading to 'ff'. The second piano part (Pno.) is present in all systems, providing off-kilter interjections.

**Figure 3.4:** Soprano saxophone plays long, atmospheric melodic shapes over motoric, rhythmic passage in first piano part and off-kilter interjections in second piano part, in *Hard Fairy*.<sup>78</sup>

In this way rhythmic challenges can be identified throughout the majority of the piece, in both styles of melody that are presented within *Hard Fairy*. Further to this, the challenge may be exacerbated by the presence of two piano parts instead of one, which provide what Fitkin describes as “a greater

<sup>78</sup> Fitkin, “Hard Fairy,” score, 2.

motoric, rhythmic back-drop for the saxophone to play over the top of,”<sup>79</sup> a product of the piece’s modified take on the solo and piano format.

Technical challenges such as the rhythmic ones described above, as well as frequent prolonged motives occurring at the top of the second register and sometimes extending into the third, may also be intensified as the performer’s stamina wanes throughout the piece. As *Hard Fairy* typically has a duration of 11-13 minutes consisting of mostly rigorous rhythmic passages and heavy use of the upper range (including altissimo), there is a possibility that the saxophonist may encounter stamina challenges. This could be considered an inevitable consequence of the piece’s design, as Fitkin states:

It sort of starts, and it goes on this journey, and then it takes you up a notch and then it goes up again, and then it carries on at that, and then it goes up another gear, and it doesn’t let you go. It goes up another gear and it sort of just wraps it all up... I like to think that it just sort of keeps going on that wave and it doesn’t let you go, and it just cracks on. And just when you think “I’ve had enough”, you know, “it can’t get any more.” It then goes a bit more.<sup>80</sup>

Another musical feature of *Hard Fairy* that may present challenges to the saxophonist is the piece’s range. There are many portions of the piece wherein the saxophonist is required to extend up to the higher reaches of the second register (the palm key notes), in some instances repeatedly articulating consecutive F#s with accents at loud dynamics (see m. 196 and m. 201 in Figure 3.5).



**Figure 3.5:** Soprano saxophone plays high-range melodic part in *Hard Fairy*, featuring repeated, accented F#s at loud dynamics.<sup>81</sup>

Though this is not in itself an extended technique or beyond the common capabilities of the advanced saxophonist, it could present challenges in maintaining correct intonation whilst ensuring that every note speaks correctly, if the player is experiencing stamina degradation. A careful, methodical approach to preparing *Hard Fairy*, allowing adequate time to build the stamina required, may benefit the saxophonist attempting the work.

<sup>79</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>81</sup> Fitkin, “Hard Fairy,” score, 8.

Disconnecting the piece from concrete, predictable rhythmic structures was a key focus in Fitkin's composition of the piece, which again creates specific technical demands of the saxophonist. Fitkin states that in composing the piece he not only sought to create a sense of asymmetry within the rhythm of the musical lines, but he also in the length and combination of musical ideas too.

...this is a problem I might have with other composers' works, is that it's fairly obvious that it's going to be sixteen bars of this and then it's going to be sixteen bars of that... But getting the balance between keeping things interesting and just maybe just putting one and a half bars of something in... in the back... So, I mean rather than change things every four bars, eight bars, sixteen bars, standard stuff, that doesn't really interest me. I do like a snippet of something sometimes, to come in, to just sort of jolt the listener a certain amount, before returning them to where they were.<sup>82</sup>

Creating unpredictability in the piece, by way of frequently changing between time signatures (often a mix of simple, compound, and irregular) can lead further to challenges when playing the work. The saxophonist must at all times maintain a strong connection to the rhythmic pulse and potential imminent changes at any point in time. At rehearsal mark P of *Hard Fairy*, Fitkin incorporates 15 time signature changes (2/4, 3/4, 4/4, and 5/8) in the space of 25 bars. **Figure 3.6** highlights the portion with the greatest number of changes.

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<sup>82</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

265

(mf)

(mf)

(mf)

(8)

269

(cresc.)

(cresc.)

(cresc.)

(8)

273

(8)

Figure 3.6: Rapidly-changing time-signatures in *Hard Fairy*, incorporating both simple and irregular time signatures.<sup>83</sup>

From this, it seems clear that the composer's intention in writing the work was to continuously build momentum and intensity as the composition goes on. The angular sense of pulse and continuous, quick rhythmic and melodic material can be both mentally and physically taxing for the saxophonist. The moments of relief from the rhythmically-propelled material that make up the majority of the piece, namely those 'atmospheric passages' described in the previous paragraph, are likely what Fitkin is referring to when he states "just when you think "I've had enough"..." Despite the contrast that these sections provide, and the opportunity they give the listener to metaphorically 'breathe a sigh of relief', this musical material provides a further challenge with respect to the mental and physical stamina required to tackle issues of tonal quality, resonance, air support, and intonation. In this way, it can be seen that *Hard Fairy* presents several technical hurdles to the saxophonist, which are primarily influenced by the piece's insistent drive and unerring intensity.

### 3.3 Fitkin Band

#### 3.3.1 Composing for the Fitkin Band

One of Graham Fitkin's more recent musical endeavours was his 'Fitkin Band'. With this band, Fitkin recorded two albums: *Vamp* and *Veneer*, in which he describes in detail his interest in incorporating elements of disco style into those compositions.<sup>84</sup> The band utilised a somewhat flexible instrumentation, which appears to have been borne out of Fitkin's earlier projects that used combinations such as saxophones and trumpet with a string quartet and percussion. Fitkin explains that in its most recent format however, the Fitkin Band typically contained the following:<sup>85</sup>

- Saxophone [1] – soprano saxophone
- Saxophone [2] – soprano saxophone and bass clarinet, (alto saxophone)
- Trumpet – trumpet and flugelhorn
- Percussion [1] – various percussion and vibraphone
- Percussion [2] – drum kit and marimba
- Harp – concert harp, lever harp, bray harp
- Piano – piano and keyboards
- Guitar – electric (with E-Bow)
- Bass
- Vocals – (used when the band recorded the album *Veneer*)

The soprano saxophone is the saxophone preferred by Fitkin within the instrumentation, which is potentially a result of Fitkin's enjoyment of what he calls its "purity of tone".<sup>86</sup> Fitkin describes his choice to utilise saxophones in his compositions, referring to qualities he noticed when hearing both

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<sup>83</sup> Fitkin, "Hard Fairy," score, 11-12.

<sup>84</sup> Fitkin, "Lost: An Interview with Graham Fitkin."

<sup>85</sup> Graham Fitkin, Email message to author, October 12, 2020.

<sup>86</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

Simon Haram and Nick Moss – the two saxophonists he later employed in the Fitkin Band – play the instruments:

...what I really love about the saxophone, especially the soprano, which I've written for quite a lot since... It's just that quality... Before, when I was a school kid, I loved the sound of the oboe... and I still do love the sound of the oboe, but the oboe has certain limitations, which the saxophone doesn't have. But that character, I thought "yeah, I can work with this for my sort of music. It's going to work well."<sup>87</sup>

In addition to the inclusion of soprano saxophone as a result of Fitkin's professional experience with Haram and Moss, it appears that Fitkin's style and techniques in writing for the instrument within the context of the Fitkin Band were directly influenced by his knowledge of both Haram and Moss' musical abilities on the instrument. Fitkin states that both Moss and Haram possess unique sounds, very different to each other, but praises that the two saxophonists seemingly naturally found a way of working together (to create a unified sound where needed).<sup>88</sup> As such, the way in which players performing Fitkin Band works might blend their tones in some instances, or employ a tonal approach that allows them to cut through the texture in other instances, could be seen as paramount.

Fitkin also describes various technical limitations as reasons for incorporating the above instruments into the eventual Fitkin Band instrumentation. Explaining that as the band was initially non-amplified, the issue of dynamics and 'punch', was one that required him to depart from including strings (for example, violins) in the ensemble, and instead move towards those instruments such as saxophones and trumpet.<sup>89</sup> He further states that in his experience, skilled string players will "still attack the notes at different times to the way a saxophone will, or a percussionist will."<sup>90</sup> From this it appears that musical features such as dynamics, articulations, and the players' interpretation of rhythmic placement were some of the foremost factors in a choice of instruments that are perhaps more typically associated with contemporary, popular styles.

The personnel utilised in the band all possessed specific talents, carefully chosen by Fitkin after careful consideration about what people and instruments would make the "ideal band".<sup>91</sup>

I mean just knowing the sounds that those people, those musicians make – not just the sax players, but the other players as well. I knew what Noel would sound like when he plays his trumpet or his flugel. With Ruth I know intimately what she can do on a harp and how she approaches the harp, and she's one of the few harpists who can keep a groove going, really as well. And also I knew that I was writing for

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<sup>87</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>89</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>90</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>91</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

me on piano, and I'm very bad at certain things, and I'm pretty good at other things.<sup>92</sup>

It is also clear that familiarity with a jazz-based approach may be helpful in faithfully creating Fitkin's intended sounds, as Fitkin later states:

I think if you've got somebody who's comfortable with jazz and is fundamentally comfortable with that sort of language, that's a really good start for playing a lot of my band music. They do need also to be able to stick to the notes which are there, there's no improvisation going on, you know they've got to do it. I'm not writing music for improvisation. I very, very rarely do that. So you know, I want it to be what is on the page.<sup>93</sup>

Fitkin claims that technical proficiency alone will not necessarily be sufficient in recreating the effect of the works, but that "they need to approach the music in the right way."<sup>94</sup> Some players may find it beneficial to familiarise themselves with specific musical facets external to the scores, in order to achieve the desired effects. For example, classically trained players may be advantaged by working with jazz players in order to understand the jazz-informed aspects of the works. In this way a multi-faceted approach, collaborating with musicians from different genre specialities, is touted by Fitkin as being the "right" way to go about effectively rehearsing and performing Fitkin Band repertoire.

### 3.3.2 Saxophone in the Fitkin Band; *Torn Edge*

For the saxophonist attempting to play a saxophone part in a Fitkin Band piece, several considerations must be made with regards to one's approach to the music. Using *Torn Edge* (2016) – from the Fitkin Band's *Vamp* album – as an example, this section will explore considerations including rhythm and melody, tone and intonation, and approaches to working with other instrumental types in this ensemble format.

Within *Torn Edge* Fitkin utilises a small handful of rhythmic and melodic ideas, often incorporating each idea in a repetitive, ostinato-like way. One example of this occurs from the upbeat to m. 67 in the soprano saxophone, where the primary melodic idea of the piece is introduced for the first time. Fitkin utilises ideas such as this one economically, creating numerous unique sections by way of firstly introducing the idea, reinforcing it through repetition, then juxtaposing it against another idea (that in itself has also gone, or will go, through this process). One can see how this occurs by comparing the instrumental textures of three different sections within the piece that utilise the same saxophone motive. The first setting (**See Figure 3.7**) introduces the

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<sup>92</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>93</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>94</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.



motive for the first time in the soprano saxophone part, over a simple, dark, atmospheric accompaniment comprised of crotchet arpeggios, held chords, and a triplet ostinato in the harp.

50

S. Sax. *mf*

Hp. *mf*

Pno. *mf*

Vibe. *mf*

Mba. *mf*

Bass. *mf* Arco

Gtr. *mf*

**Figure 3.7:** Primary motive presented in soprano saxophone for the first time in *Torn Edge*, over simple, dark, and atmospheric accompaniment.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Graham Fitkin, "Torn Edge," score, unpublished, 2016, 5.

The second setting (**See Figure 3.8**) features accompanimental figures including echoes in the second soprano saxophone and trumpet, as well as heavy, staccato chords in the piano and vibraphone.

The musical score for Figure 3.8 is written for an 8-piece ensemble. The staves are arranged vertically from top to bottom: S. Sax. (Soprano Saxophone), S. Sax. (Soprano Saxophone), Tpt. (Trumpet), Hp. (Harp), Pno. (Piano), Vibe. (Vibraphone), Mba. (Maracas), Bass. (Bass), and Gtr. (Guitar). The score begins at measure 84. The first two Soprano Saxophone parts play a primary motive consisting of a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. This motive is echoed in the Trumpet part. The Harp part plays a continuous eighth-note pattern. The Piano part plays heavy, staccato block-chords. The Vibraphone part plays staccato chords, with the instruction 'Slightly Damped' above the first measure. The Maracas part plays a steady eighth-note pattern, starting at a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic and marked with 'very gradual cresc.'. The Bass and Guitar parts provide a rhythmic foundation with eighth-note patterns and sustained chords.

**Figure 3.8:** Primary motive presented in first soprano saxophone part, echoed in second soprano saxophone and trumpet parts, over heavy, staccato block-chords in piano and vibraphone, in *Torn Edge*.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Fitkin, "Torn Edge," score, 8.

The third setting (See Figure 3.9) features drum kit with the motive for the first time, arpeggio-like runs in the harp, and an overall aesthetic more akin to a ‘rock’ feel.

The musical score for Figure 3.9 is a page from a score for the piece 'Torn Edge'. It shows measures 130 through 134. The staves are arranged vertically: S. Sax. (Soprano Saxophone), S. Sax. (Soprano Saxophone), Tpt. (Trumpet), Hp. (Harp), Pno. (Piano), Vibe. (Vibraphone), Dr. (Drum Kit), Bass. (Bass), and Gtr. (Guitar). The key signature is one flat (Bb) and the time signature is 4/4. The primary motive is presented in both soprano saxophone parts, over a 'rock' feel drum kit pattern and arpeggio runs in harp.

**Figure 3.9:** Primary motive presented in both soprano saxophone parts, over a ‘rock’ feel drum kit pattern and arpeggio runs in harp, in *Torn Edge*.<sup>97</sup>

From the above figures (3.7-3.9) we can see that the saxophone parts, at each presentation of the motive, sit atop vastly different ensemble textures which must be accommodated for by the saxophonists through a dynamic approach to tone, balance, and phrasing.

Both of the saxophone parts in *Torn Edge* involve significant challenges regarding tone and intonation. The primary motive (as described above) is at several points throughout the piece traded alternately between both soprano saxes, dovetailing the two parts together producing an effect as if they were one (See Figure 3.10).

<sup>97</sup> Fitkin, “Torn Edge,” score, 14-15.



**Figure 3.10:** Primary motive presented in both soprano parts, dovetailed for an extended section in *Torn Edge*.<sup>98</sup>

In these instances, impeccable intonation and blending between both saxophone parts would aid in achieving a unified sound, creating the sensation of a seemingly endless echo. Simon Haram and Nick Moss demonstrate this effect in the Fitkin Band’s original recording of the piece on the album *Vamp*.<sup>99</sup> Fitkin comments, “they... blend together and... find a way of working together,”<sup>100</sup> going on to praise both saxophonists and the rest of the band for their ability to achieve a oneness of sound. Asserting that this was one of his foremost hopes for the project, intonation and tone of all parts (including the saxophones) can be seen to be critical to the authentic reproduction of Fitkin’s work.

Other considerations should be made with regards to achieving a unified approach in Fitkin Band repertoire. On the subject of establishing a ‘oneness’ of sound within *Torn Edge*, Fitkin states: “It is for that whole band... You all have to have that sort of singularity of purpose, and it’s difficult all the way around...”<sup>101</sup> In the work’s exposition, the soprano saxophonist doubling on bass clarinet plays long, chordal tones in the lowest range. In the Fitkin Band’s recording, Moss blends seamlessly with the bass and left hand of the piano, rising and falling with the written dynamics without overpowering the ostinato-like harp motive. Conversely, both saxophonists at m. 183 release their sounds so as to float atop the now massive ensemble texture (all instruments at *f* or *ff*) that has developed throughout the piece. This instance highlights qualities that Fitkin describes as key reasons governing his choice to employ the soprano saxophone in his works – that is, it’s ability to produce a soloistic, piercing sound similar to that of an oboe, but with a perhaps greater ability to push into very high levels of volume in the process.<sup>102</sup> Certainly, the saxophonists must ensure to cut through the ensemble at this point to produce a triumphant, grandiose climax to the work.

<sup>98</sup> Fitkin, “Torn Edge,” score, 14-15.

<sup>99</sup> Graham Fitkin, “Torn Edge,” with the Fitkin Band: *Vamp*, GFR, [2016], MP3.

<sup>100</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>101</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>102</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

## CHAPTER FOUR: DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

### 4.1 Discussion

This research has explored Graham Fitkin's musical repertoire, including information about his compositional approaches. Three approaches to composing his pieces were identified and each were explored using a related work as a musical example. This paper has also reviewed background information regarding Fitkin's musical style, genres of interest, factors that led to his usage of saxophones, and the roles that his music could fulfil in the field of classical saxophonists.

The first compositional approach discussed in this paper was monotimbral composition. In such works, excellent timbral blending and clarity in presenting motivic ideas were identified as key requirements for the successful execution of these works. Indeed, Fitkin even suggests that the specific timbre set used for a monotimbral piece (for example, saxophones, or clarinets) may not impact the effectiveness of the music: "as long as you play all the notes and the clarity is there, then it still works for me".<sup>103</sup> The above points considered, establishing a timbral approach (tone colours, articulation style, etc.) within the ensemble can be identified as the foremost goal when performing Fitkin's monotimbral repertoire.

Fitkin's modification of traditional chamber ensemble formats was also explored in this paper. Though technical challenges for saxophonists were explored in the context of *Hard Fairy* within section 3.2, perhaps the most useful conclusions in this area of study involve the purpose and construction of Fitkin's modified chamber ensemble repertoire. It is clear that Fitkin willingly distances himself from traditional ensemble formats on some occasions, but always with some greater musical intention in mind. In *Hard Fairy*, for instance, Fitkin abandons the format of melody instrument and piano in favour of an approach incorporating two pianos so as to establish a "greater motoric, rhythmic back-drop for the saxophone to play over the top of."<sup>104</sup> By taking established formats and employing simple changes such as the addition of an extra piano, Fitkin's repertoire of this type may appear familiar and understandable to both the musicians trying to approach such pieces and also the audiences who listen to the works, while still affording him the ability to push the boundaries of traditional chamber music and explore new sound worlds.

Fitkin's self-titled band and the music he has written for it was examined in section 3.3. The Fitkin Band's instrumentation was given, and some of the professional experiences that lead to its creation were discussed. The Fitkin Band can be seen to incorporate aspects of classical chamber ensemble design and aesthetic, and an equal presence of jazz and popular music instrumentation in the form of the rhythm section. Approaches to rhythm, melody, tone, intonation, and to working

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<sup>103</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

<sup>104</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

with instruments from both classical and jazz contexts, are presented. Perhaps the foremost finding through interviewing Fitkin was the notion that despite the timbral differences between each instrument and the likely differences in style of training amongst the ensemble members, the challenge of pursuing a unified goal in the music was key to achieving its primary purpose. Fitkin Band music often presents musical design reminiscent of both Western classical melody and popular styles such as disco, within a single piece, and Fitkin remarks the abilities that the saxophonists in his band provided towards achieving these designs. In this way, Fitkin Band music could be seen to potentially serve as a multi-stylistic learning experience for the classical saxophonist: demanding technical and lyrical features of several genres/styles, while also encouraging the development of these areas through collaboration with musicians trained in jazz and popular styles.

## 4.2 Conclusion

It seems lots of people need to pigeonhole people into certain categories, for their own benefit. Whether it's the benefit of selling products or whether it's just to compartmentalise, that's why people do it, but the problem is there's a lack of nuance, if you like. And there's a lack of nuance in the world, generally... it's either *this* or it's *that*, there's no sort of middle ground. There's no grey, really.<sup>105</sup>

This research sought to bring the works of Graham Fitkin into the academic arena, shining a light on the key characteristics of Fitkin's musical writing through the analysis of three works that feature the saxophone(s) in their instrumentation: *Stub*, *Hard Fairy*, and *Torn Edge*. These works, selected for their representation of a variety of compositional formats that Fitkin uses, exhibit musical features from a diverse range of genres and styles. Through the examination of both compositional formats and selected repertoire, Fitkin's music can be understood to fall under the category of 'cross-genre' repertoire, incorporating influences ranging from Western classical composers such as Bach, to popular styles such as synth-pop and disco.

Understanding the niche that Fitkin has carved for himself in the musical landscape of contemporary-classical music, one can begin to look upon the role that his music embodies in the art form. Fitkin's music as a whole, defies traditional categorisation, instead crossing from genre to genre, and in some cases fusing multiple styles. Broad sources of inspiration provide a sense of freshness to the works, therefore offering saxophonists the ability to perform repertoire that requires new skills and presents new challenges, whilst also connecting with wider audiences thanks to its relatable popular language. It is the hope of the author that the existence of this research will allow both professional and student saxophonists to understand more about the musical influences and fields from which Fitkin's music was borne, and to view with positivity the breadth of instrumentations, styles and purposes of the saxophone music that Fitkin has written.

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<sup>105</sup> Graham Fitkin, Interview by Sean Hayes, July 11, 2020.

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The APPENDICES are not included in this version of the thesis.