Notes for HARK Session 5.

So this is the 5th Listening session for the pilot listening groups, the first one with live music, welcome! I hope you can get to know members of the other groups. Welcome also to those who have not been in groups but are interested in our explorations into listening to music, and of course thanks to Joseph Fleetwood and Mhadavi Navader for coming to play for us. The format is the same as the groups, Joseph will play for us, then we can talk for a while with our neighbours, and when Joseph is ready he might introduce his next pieces, play and we repeat the pattern. At some point I would like to tell you about the contents of the named packs ready for you to take away. A bit of enjoyable homework for the summer….

The Listening Groups have been very interesting I now have rich store of transcripts from the groups’ taped sessions, where we listened in total across the groups to some 38 pieces of music. A full list is in the packs. I have also some 25 transcripts of 1 to 1 sessions on the topic of ‘how you listen’, and ‘why music is significant to you’. I will be working on these over the summer. I have been able to produce a first draft for consultation with you of an *Ethnography of Listening to Errollyn Wallen’s four movement piece “Photography”* which turns your responses to the music into a script that can be performed, with the music, here on October 14th with the composer present.

I observed in conversation with Bede and Michael a few years ago rather cheekily, that audiences in St Andrews are ‘mute’, and that we know little about their experience of listening to music, particularly live music. How wrong I was! We wondered what would happen if we created some spaces in which it was relaxed and permissive enough for listeners to express their listening responses to music, the HARK mantra here is that all responses are valid, full stop. So we thought of Listening Groups, and adapted the Book Group model and many of you generously agreed, as the listening public of St Andrews, to explore responses to music with us in Piloting these groups. Thank you.

As these conversations unfolded I made a review of a fair amount of literature on listening and produced a paper called *Ways of Listening.* Some of you have valiantly tried to read through the paper……..Here I speculated that we might identify various types of listeners. Indeed E. M Foster wittily noted such diversity in his novel *Howards End* , he wrote:

**It will generally be admitted that Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is the most sublime noise that has ever penetrated the ear of man. All sorts of conditions are satisfied with it. Whether you are like Mrs. Munt, and tap surreptitiously when the tune comes ­– of course, not to disturb the others ­; or like Helen, who can see heroes and shipwrecks in the music’s flood; or like Margaret, who can only see the music, or like Tibby, who profoundly versed in counterpoint, follows the full score open on his knee…(E. M. Forster, *Howards End*.)**

All these differences seem alive a well in our groups. I had also speculated that listeners might develop a **repertoire** of ways of listening and not be limited to one particular style. This has also been evident in the groups. It seems, I suggest tentatively, that while we might start with a preferred mode of engagement that other modes elide with it creating a pattern of listening in various modes. I think the idea of a *listening repertoire* and the linked idea of *auditory imaginative* play can be developed from these patterns we find. There seem to me more starting pints than E M. Forster imagined –

some listeners begin with structure, patterns, formalism, and look for it;

others begin with the physical resonances of the sound as it affects them bodily;

others have fairly immediate emotional responses and are carried by the atmosphere of the piece;

others find that an image(s) readily pops up;

others find a story or narrative emerging;

others enjoy the abstract play of the music and find it curious that people see images;

others are drawn to particular instruments, my impression is that cellos were mentioned more than other instruments in the groups;

for some, familiarity is important and certain pieces link with particular and sometimes deep personal associations; and so on.

And not to be left out It seems also that one starting point can lead to and join up with others, for example, initial images, become word-pictures, become stories and the whole piece gets a narrative, but the narrative has a structure, and all these experiences can blossom into deep and moving feelings. By contrast the structural formal abstract patternist finds emotional solace in resolving cadences, and melancholy in false relations where elegance of structure is also aesthetic pleasure.

So there seems a playful cumulation and intermingling of modes, –might we call this polyphonic listening?

Reflection, curiosity about ones own responses and contrasts with different experiences of other group members also leads to further listening and to further exploration. So this idea of having, dare I say, a ‘developing’ repertoire in our listening modes seems a reasonable way of looking at it. However I do cleave to the view that play needs no justification, and we are not engaged here in betterment, self improvement, or indeed therapy, although funding I notice seems to be tied to something called “impact”, so do tell us in the survey if you have become a better person from being in the HARK project!

I look forward to a summer of going through the transcripts and shaping up, playfully theorising about our listening…now let me warmly welcome Joseph Fleetwood who is going to play for us. He will play, and we will take a short period after each piece to share our responses with each other.