

in competence



michael edwards
trio abstrakt

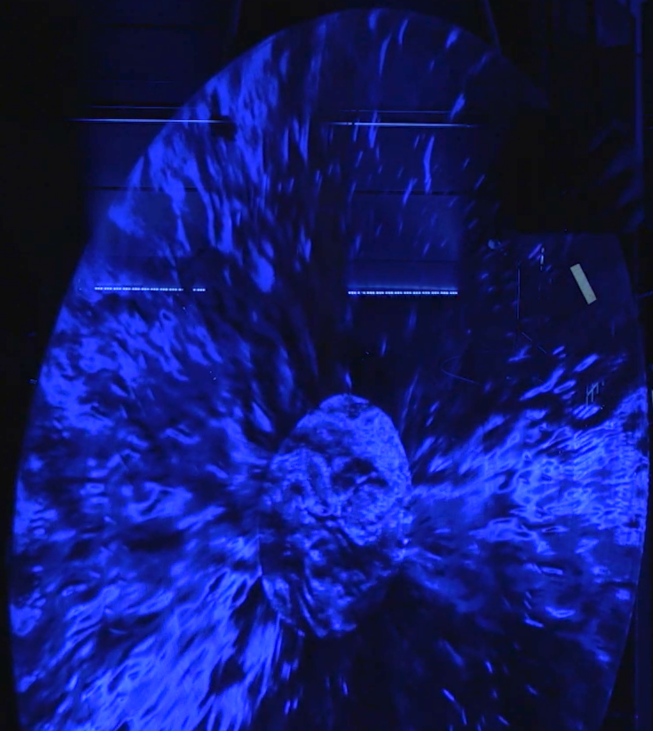


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track listing: audio only

[Both the audio and video flow from one piece to the next without a break (gapless) but the following timings indicate where each piece in the score begins.]

time	piece number	title
00:00	1	'tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay
07:25	2	the bay-trees in our country are all wither'd
12:28	3	and meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven
20:45	4	the pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth
28:09	5	and lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change
33:54	6	rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap
38:43	7	the one in fear to lose what they enjoy
42:32	8	the other to enjoy by rage and war
47:11	9	these signs forerun the death or fall of kings
48:50	9.2	these signs: part 2: jabby chords
55:07	10a	farewell
57:09	10b	farewell: improvisation
61:49	11a	as well assured
64:51	11b	richard their king is dead

track listing: video

[Note that some video-playback software (e.g. QuickTime, VLC) allows skipping and selection of the chapter markers that are embedded in the downloadable video file.]

time	piece number	title
00:00		opening credits
00:33	1	'tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay
07:57	2	the bay-trees in our country are all wither'd
13:00	3	and meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven
21:17	4	the pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth
28:40	5	and lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change
34:26	6	rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap
39:15	7	the one in fear to lose what they enjoy
43:04	8	the other to enjoy by rage and war
47:43	9	these signs forerun the death or fall of kings
49:22	9.2	these signs: part 2: jabby chords
55:39	10a	farewell
57:41	10b	farewell: improvisation
62:19	11a	as well assured
65:23	11b	richard their king is dead
69:45		closing credits



programme note

The word competence appeared in the English language in the 15th century. As far as we know, its antonym incompetence first appeared in 1595 and had the meaning of being not legally qualified. Late in the same year, the first performance of William Shakespeare's *Richard II* was given in London. Some of its scenes play at Flint Castle, a few kilometres from where I grew up:

ACT II SCENE III, A camp in Wales, Captain:
Tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay.
The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd
And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;
The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth
And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change;
Rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap,
The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
The other to enjoy by rage and war:
These signs forerun the death or fall of kings.
Farewell: our countrymen are gone and fled,
As well assured Richard their king is dead.

It can be argued that, amongst other things, *Richard II* thematises competence in its opposition of a King's Divine Right with his mundane human weaknesses, as well as his strengths. Some commentators have made a connection between the play and Queen Elizabeth the 1st s reign in England—she was old when the play was written and sentiment amongst some was that she was perhaps incompetent and needed to be replaced. These are timeless issues and thus also clearly of our time (think of Boris Johnson, Prince Andrew, Elizabeth II in the UK, but also the still recent antics of

Trump in the US, Modi in India, or Bolsonaro in Brazil).

Competence is, of course, of vital importance in many fields. The question of a musician's competence is fundamental, as technical competence on a musical instrument is the very least we expect from professionals, even students. But musical and artistic competence begins where instrumental competence is mastered and assumed. The public's expectations and estimations of competence are often a diversion, mired in myths surrounding virtuosity, artistic vision, even measures of sanity. In the arts, there is cultural capital in both insanity and technical wizardry. Artistic merit is often overshadowed by an audience's, or perhaps more apt here, a consumer's preference for short-lived, faddish qualities, often utterly unrelated to art. On the other hand, a concept of competence is not something that is usually thematised explicitly in musical compositions, yet in this piece it plays a central role, not least in the title, with its deliberately confusing conflation of "in competence" and its homonym "incompetence".

What would or could it mean to examine competence musically? Do we question the musicians' competence? Question the composer's competence? Question technical, in particular music-technological competence? Question the listeners' competence even? (Think of that that lovely story of Beethoven's anger when his secretary Ries criticised the horn player's entrance ("too early") at the recapitulation of the Eroica's first movement during its premiere.)

More concretely, can we present musical structures multiple times, with different 'competence levels' required of both the musicians and listeners? If so, to what effect? And what is the role of noodling? Is that itself an example of incompetence, i.e. an inability to come to the point? How can we explore and perceive seemingly impossible hocketing in the context of deliberately overstretched manual dexterity? Or the playing of chords tightly together, and perhaps failing? Or

juxtaposing impossible sequences of, e.g. fast saxophone slap-tongues against the comparable ease of playing the same from a sampling keyboard? Or music-technological failures against the supposed perfection of sound-file playback, and the perception, in some quarters, of the latter's musical-expressive poverty?

All of these questions and more are interrogated in this through-composed work lasting approximately one hour, where the durations and structure—alternating instrumental (+/- electronics) with solo electronics interludes—are derived and scaled from an old recording of the Captain's speech given above, with all of its competently-delivered tonal shadings and expressive pauses at the ends of, or in the midst of, its eleven lines.

N.B. All sounds recorded/processed/synthesised/mixed by the composer except for some commercial synths and one highly processed sound made by freesound.org user stormpetrel of an iceberg recorded in Antarctica in 2009. Thanks for making this freely available.

(Michael Edwards 2022)



programmtext

Das Wort „competence“ tauchte in der englischen Sprache im 15. Jahrhundert auf. So weit wir wissen, wurde sein Antonym, „incompetence“, erstmals im Jahr 1595 mit der Bedeutung, rechtlich nicht zuständig zu sein, verwendet. Ende desselben Jahres fand in London die erste Aufführung von William Shakespeares Richard II statt. Einige der Szenen des Stückes spielen in Flint Castle, wenige Kilometer von dem Ort entfernt, an dem ich aufgewachsen bin:

ACT II SCENE III, A camp in Wales, Captain:
Tis thought the king is dead; we will not stay.
The bay-trees in our country are all wither'd
And meteors fright the fixed stars of heaven;
The pale-faced moon looks bloody on the earth
And lean-look'd prophets whisper fearful change;
Rich men look sad and ruffians dance and leap,
The one in fear to lose what they enjoy,
The other to enjoy by rage and war:
These signs forerun the death or fall of kings.
Farewell: our countrymen are gone and fled,
As well assured Richard their king is dead.

Man kann behaupten, dass Richard II auch den Komplex der Kompetenz thematisiert, indem er das göttliche Recht eines Königs mit dessen weltlichen Schwächen sowie seinen Stärken konfrontiert. Manche Kommentatoren haben eine Verbindung zwischen dem Stück und der Herrschaft von Königin Elizabeth I. hergestellt: Sie war bereits sehr betagt, als das Stück geschrieben wurde, was manche dazu veranlasste, über ihre Zulänglichkeit und einen vorzeitigen

Thronwechsel nachzudenken. Eindeutig handelt es sich hierbei um zeitlose und sehr gegenwärtige Themen (man denke an Boris Johnson, Prinz Andrew und Elizabeth II. im Vereinigten Königreich ebenso wie an die noch jungen Eskapaden von Trump in den USA, Modi in Indien oder Bolsonaro in Brasilien).

Kompetenz ist natürlich in vielen Bereichen von entscheidender Bedeutung. So ist die Frage nach der Kompetenz eines Musikers von grundlegender Bedeutung, denn die technische Beherrschung eines Musikinstruments ist das Mindeste, was wir von Fachleuten und sogar von Student:innen erwarten. Musikalische und künstlerische Kompetenz beginnt jedoch dort, wo die instrumentale beherrscht und vorausgesetzt wird. Die Erwartungen und Einschätzungen des Publikums hinsichtlich der Kompetenz haben oft den Charakter von Ablenkungsmanövern, angetrieben von Mythen die sich um Virtuosität, künstlerische Vision und sogar den Grad der Vernunft ranken. In der Kunst liegt kulturelles Kapital sowohl im Wahnsinn wie in technischer Zauberei. Künstlerischer Wert wird oft von der Vorliebe des Publikums oder, hier wohl zutreffender, der/die Verbraucher:in für kurzlebige, modische Qualitäten überschattet, welche nicht selten einen Bezug zur Kunst vermissen lassen. Andererseits wird die Idee der Kompetenz in musikalischen Kompositionen nur selten explizit adressiert. In diesem Stück hingegen spielt es eine zentrale Rolle, nicht zuletzt im Titel mit seiner bewusst irritierenden Verquickung von „in competence“ und seinem Homonym „incompetence“.

Was würde oder könnte es bedeuten, Kompetenz musikalisch zu untersuchen? Stellen wir die Kompetenz des Musikers in Frage? Oder jene des Komponisten? Hinterfragen wir die technische, insbesondere die musiktechnische Kompetenz? Bezweifeln wir gar jene des Zuhörers? (Man denke an die schöne Geschichte von Beethovens Entrüstung, als sein Sekretär Ries den Einsatz der Hornisten in der Reprise des ersten Satzes der Eroica bei deren Uraufführung – „zu früh“ – kritisierte.)

Konkreter gefragt: Ist es möglich, musikalische Strukturen mehrfach zu präsentieren und dabei den Musiker:innen wie den Hörer:innen jedes Mal unterschiedliche „Kompetenzniveaus“ abzuverlangen? Wenn ja, mit welchem Resultat? Und welche Rolle spielt das Klimpern? Ist dies ein Beispiel von Inkompetenz, der Unfähigkeit, zum Beispiel, auf den Punkt zu kommen? Wie können wir einen scheinbar unmöglichen Hoketus im Kontext vorsätzlich überbeanspruchter Fingerfertigkeit untersuchen und wahrnehmen? Oder das Spiel eng beieinanderliegender Akkorde und möglicherweise das Scheitern? Oder die Gegenüberstellung von unmöglichen Sequenzen—beispielsweise schneller Saxophon-Slap-Tongues—und der Leichtigkeit, werden diese auf einem Sampling-Keyboard gespielt? Oder jene von musiktechnologischem Versagen und der mutmaßlichen Perfektion der Wiedergabe von Klangdateien sowie derer mancherorts unterstellter musikalisch-expressiver Dürftigkeit?

All diese Fragen und weitere werden in diesem etwa einstündigen durchkomponierten Werk untersucht. Die Dauern und die Struktur des Stückes—alternierend zwischen instrumentalen Passagen (+/- Electronics) und rein elektronischen Zwischenspielen—sind von einer alten Aufnahme der oben abgedruckten Rede des Kapitäns abgeleitet, mit all den kompetent gesetzten tonalen Nuancierungen und ausdrucksvollen Pausen an den Enden, oder inmitten, der elf Verse.

Notabene: Alle Klänge wurden vom Komponisten aufgenommen, bearbeitet, synthetisiert und gemischt, mit Ausnahme solcher einiger kommerzieller Synthesizer sowie eines stark bearbeiteten Klangs eines Eisbergs, den der freesound.org-Benutzer stormpetrel 2009 in der Antarktis aufgenommen hat. Vielen Dank für die freie Veröffentlichung dieser Arbeit.

(Übersetzung vom Englischen: Ruben Philipp)





Michael Edwards is a composer, improviser, software developer, and since 2017 Professor of Electronic Composition at ICEM, Folkwang University of the Arts, Essen, Germany. He studied at Bristol (UK) and Stanford (US) universities, was a computer programmer in Silicon Valley after his studies, and held academic positions at Stanford, the Mozarteum (Salzburg), and at the University of Edinburgh. Michael is the programmer of the “slippery chicken” algorithmic composition package. His compositional interests lie mainly in the development of structures for hybrid electro-instrumental pieces through the integration of algorithmically produced scored materials with similarly generated computer-processed sound.

Trio Abstrakt is the musical home of musicians Salim(a) Javaid (saxophone), Marlies Debacker (piano), and Shiau-Shiuan Hung (percussion). Firmly anchored in the chamber music tradition and yet always in dialogue with the ‘now’, the ensemble pursues the goal of making the ‘music of today’ resound.

In view of their exciting interpretations, their sensitive playing, and their preference for complex, intricate, and multi-layered music, it is not surprising that the musicians are the dedicatees of new works by renowned composers such as Pierluigi Billone, Franck Bedrossian, Isabel Mundry, Giorgio Netti, Michael Edwards, Alberto Posadas, and many others.

The “modern” instrumentation of saxophone, piano, and percussion allows the ensemble to reach out into diverse musical styles thus the compositions of the ensemble’s repertoire often incorporate influences from improvised, electronic, classical, rock, and jazz music. In addition, the musicians are constantly researching and expanding their repertoire of sounds.

credits

Michael Edwards - composition, mix, master
michael-edwards.org

Marlies Debacker - piano and sound file triggering
Shiau-Shiuan Hung - percussion
Salimfa) Javaid - saxophones
trioabstrakt.com

Paul Clouvel @ ELEKTRAMUSIC Berlin - Distribution
elektramusik.eu

Recorded at Zentrum für Kunst und Medien Karlsruhe, December 21 & 22, 2022
zkm.de

Benjamin Miller - sound director and edit

Hans Gass - light & stage technician

Max Clausen, Andy Koch, Peter Mueller - camera operators

Andy Koch, Peter Mueller - video editing

ZKM team - cover photo and blue gong video stills
Rebecca ter Braak - Trio and Michael Edwards portraits, photos
from the premiere at the Alte Feuerwache, Cologne, 3.12.22

Special thanks to Ludger Brümmer and Dominik Kautz at ZKM

For more information on the project see
michael-edwards.org/wp/?tag=in-competence

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