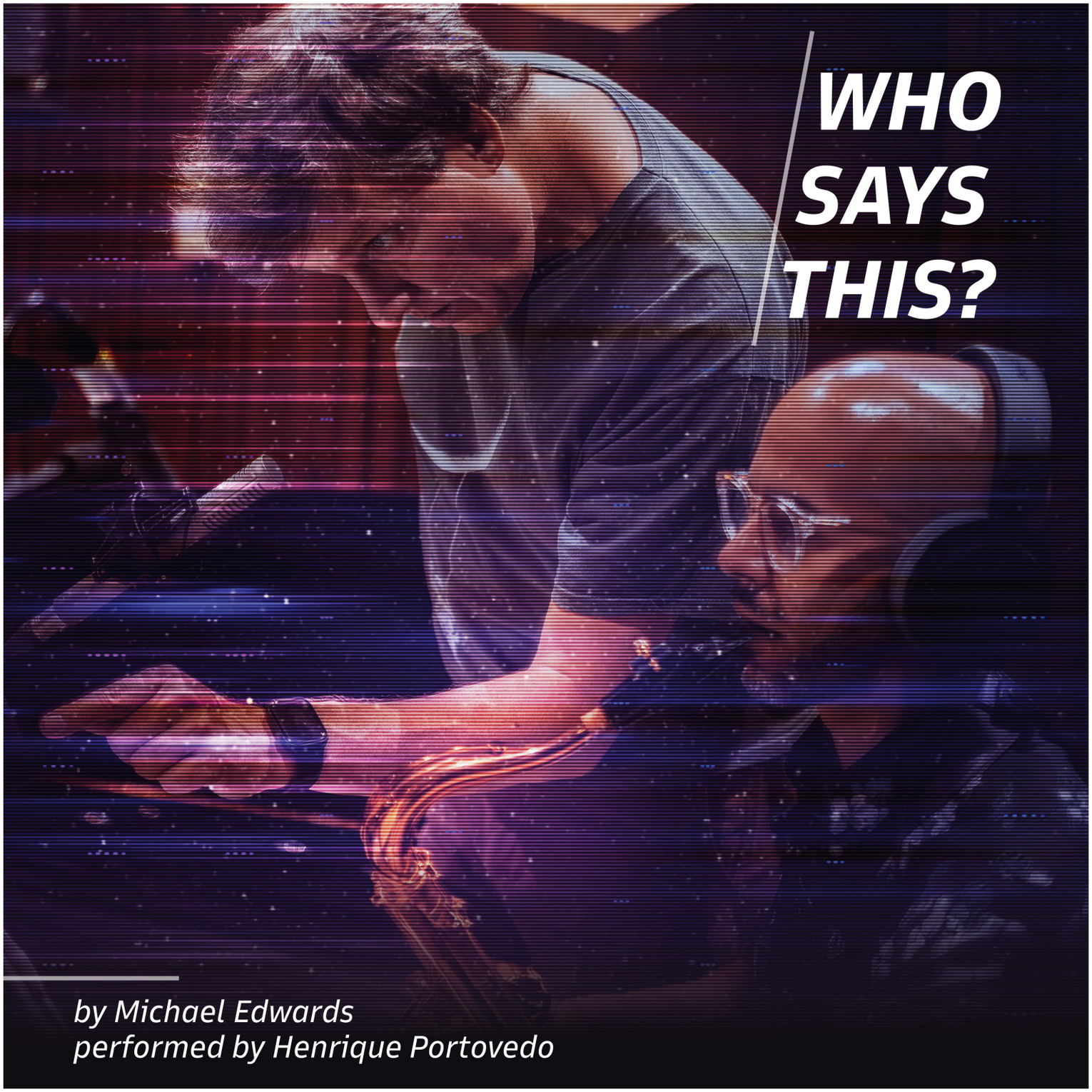
WHO SAYS THIS?
by Michael Edwards
performed by Henrique Portovedo





introductory remarks

The saxophone was the first musical instrument I ever wanted to play. As a child I used to stare longingly at the beautiful instruments on display at the local music store in Chester, England, where I grew up. There was no chance of me owning or learning saxophone but I did get access to the clarinet through my school, and after that the oboe.

I began writing for the saxophone as a student but only much later did I start playing it myself. The computer-musician/composer/programmer/improvisor/ saxophonist strands of my musical endeavours came together in the half-composed/ half-improvised *breathing charlie*. I wrote this for myself and my very limited saxophone technique; Henrique revivifies it here with quite a different complexion.

The other pieces on this release are far beyond my technical prowess on the saxophone. They explore both the instrument's intrinsic sonic character and its outer reaches. They also examine the possibilities of offline and real-time sound transformation and synthesis using bespoke digital signal processing routines. This work continues a tradition of combining acoustic instruments with electronics that goes back more than seventy years.

Thirty-odd years of compositional thought and software development have gone into the music on this release. Sound recordings for the electronics and the final mixes were made at various locations within California, Germany, Scotland, and Portugal. Each piece is unique, with different compositional and algorithmic concerns, some more serious than others, some more tongue-in-cheek; some based on poetry, and others abstract in the extreme.

My sincere thanks to Henrique for suggesting this project; for commissioning *HOTPO*;

for resurrecting, recording, and repeatedly performing the other pieces, always with superlative technique, insights, and a selfless dedication to the aesthetic world which each piece inhabits. Thanks also to the other saxophonists who have been closely involved in the pieces' genesis: Gianpaolo Antonirolami, Gary Scavone, and Marcus Weiss, in particular.

(Michael Edwards, October 30th 2025)

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Every project I've undertaken has been part of a journey toward becoming a more complete saxophonist. Early on, I realized how deeply the repertoire we choose shapes both our instrumental technique and our personal voice. The pieces we study, perform, and ultimately inhabit become mirrors of our evolving musical identities.

In 2016, I embarked on a project that has since defined much of my artistic path: a recording of the complete works for saxophone and electronics by Michael Edwards. This endeavor represents more than a documentation of repertoire — it stands as both a reflection on the evolving paradigm of complexity in saxophone performance and a treatise on composition for the instrument in the 21st century.

Michael Edwards's music reached me while I was living in London and developing a deep interest in electronic and computer music composition. Fascinated by the idea of Sonic Art as conceptualized by Trevor Wishart, I began connecting personally with figures such as Rolf Gehlhaar, Simon Emmerson, Dominic Murcott, and Martin Parker. During one of the Sound and Music Computing Conferences, Parker suggested that I get to know Edwards's music and work. Later that same year, while passing through Edinburgh to participate in the World Saxophone Congress in St. Andrews, I met Michael, and we began to envision a future collaboration. Edwards's compositions

revealed a dialogue between performer and algorithm, gesture and sound synthesis, breath and code. Engaging with his work meant negotiating the mechanical and the digital — the saxophone's acoustic resistance against the fluidity of electronic transformation.

At the same time, my PhD research on Augmented Musical Performance — and my work with Clarence Barlow, Curtis Roads, Paulo Ferreira Lopes and Marcelo Wanderley— was deepening my understanding of how technology extends not only our instruments but also our perception of performance itself. The recording thus became both an autoethnographic and/or a reflexive phenomenology of my own process — an inquiry into how embodiment, complexity, and collaboration intersect in contemporary music-making.

Through Edwards's music, I confronted the limits of control and the beauty of unpredictability. Each piece demanded a reconfiguration of my technique, my listening, and ultimately my identity as a performer. To play his music is to exist in a constant state of negotiation: between the composed and the improvised, the acoustic and the electronic, the self and the system.

Looking back, this project represents more than a professional evolution. It maps the contours of an artistic identity shaped through dialogue — with composers, with machines, and with sound itself.

(Henrique Portovedo, October 31st 2025)

programme notes

flung me, foot trod

alto saxophone and tape (stereo)
1993 - 1994

flung me, foot trod takes its title from the Gerard Manley Hopkins sonnet *Carrion Comfort*. This is urgent, violent, exciting poetry, but it was not until I read some of Hopkins' own notes to the verse that I felt particularly drawn to pilfering a title from him. He writes of one word, "rude", that must be enunciated with force, "in an uncouth, violent, barbarous manner". This, if anything, summarises the articulation necessary to interpret my piece. In preparing the tape I sampled selected portions of the solo part. In particular I concentrated on some of the more unorthodox sounds an alto saxophone can make, key clicks, breath noise, growling etc. For demonstrating these sounds I am very grateful to Gary Scavone who gave freely of his time and tolerated my often outlandish requests. Indeed, the whole piece was aimed at utilising his slick virtuosity.

Armed with these samples, it was my intention to create sounds that go far beyond the timbral qualities of the saxophone. Although the tape sometimes presents recognisable saxophone sounds, on the whole it is in its own sonic realm, marrying itself with the solo part only in its presentation of similar material types: driving rhythms, scurrying textures, etc. It was not my intention to create the effect of an orchestra of saxophones, or to have the saxophone play against itself on tape. On the contrary, *flung me, foot trod* takes its precedent more from the solo concerto, pitting two unequal forces against each other, their only common ground being material and, hence, structure.

On the more technical side, the samples were processed using Bill Schottstaedt's *Common Lisp Music*, the note lists were created with Heinrich Taube's *Common Music*, and the mixing was accomplished with Paul Lansky's *Real Time Mixer* application—all on the NeXT computer.

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HOTPO

alto saxophone and computer (stereo)
2020 (revised 2024)

Hinting at something a little more coarse, the title *HOTPO* is in fact a completely innocent reference to the *Collatz Conjecture*. This mathematical proposition, also known by other names, refers to a succession of numbers called the *hailstone sequence* (or *wondrous numbers*), because their values usually ascend and descend like hailstones in a cloud.

Though the mathematical proof of the conjecture is complex, the proposition is very simple: Take any positive whole number; if it is even, divide it by two; if it is odd, multiply it by three and add one (hence the acronym Half Or Three Plus One: *HOTPO*); repeat the process with the result and you will find that no matter which number begins the process, you will always, given enough iterations, reach one.

The algorithm is easy to programme and experiment with plus it produces rather nice images when given different starting numbers and plotted over various iterations. I used the algorithm in this piece to generate section lengths and repeated structures from nine basic rhythm sequences, hence my sequence was 9 28 14 7 22 11 34 17 52 26 13 40 20 10 5 16 8 4 2 1. The piece alternates sections opposing mixed materials (odd section numbers) with obsessively repeated material (even). The numbers are also

used for the generation of the sound files triggered during the performance. Despite the rather abstract nature of the generative procedure, the results of the algorithms were developed intuitively and the piece as a whole arises out of and proceeds through a maelstrom of events fitting to the imagery of a hailstorm.

HOTPO was commissioned by Henrique Portovedo for the World Saxophone Congress 2018 in Zagreb. That version included an ensemble. In 2020 I reworked the sound files to include MIDI data from the ensemble and made a solo plus computer version. This was revised in 2024.

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their faces on fire

baritone saxophone and computer (stereo)
2013 - 2014

their faces on fire is a flexible, musician-tweaked algorithmic composition for baritone saxophone and computer. The objective of the approach is the algorithmic specification of the global structure, parameters, tendencies, data, and data processing techniques for a composition, with the configuration of the open parameter space made by the musician from a series of limited choices. This leads to different versions of the piece—some easier than others perhaps—but with an identifiable character common to all. For instance, the saxophone part will always consist of a three-in-one contrapuntal texture created by leaps between three different registers: low, harmonic, and high (altissimo), but the order of these can be chosen by the musician.

The title comes from Samuel Beckett's *First Love* (1945):

"Wherever nauseated time has dropped a nice fat turd you will find our patriots,

sniffing it up on all fours, their faces on fire."

One thing I love about this and similar works by Beckett—especially the audience's various reactions to such passages when they're performed—is the jarring juxtaposition of such scatological imagery against the more palatable diversions within. In other words, such sentences create a spicy shock that can awaken you from the more uniform flow of prose surrounding them. Musical parallels to this have been an underlying concern of mine for years; moreover, the specific import of this quotation is, in my opinion, always worth highlighting.

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who says this, saying it's me?

tenor saxophone and computer (quadrophonic)
2009

"Where would I go, if I could go, who would I be, if I could be, what would I say, if I had a voice, who says this, saying it's me?"
(Samuel Beckett, opening of Texts for Nothing 4)

Composers' concentration on the musical text and the general perception of composers as exclusive musical visionaries who set down notes which performers need only play in the right order and with the required precision in order to succeed, greatly obscures the role of the performer and all s/he brings to a piece of composed music. We can see this not just in terms of conscious interpretation, but centuries of mostly undocumented and implied performance practice; all the intricate details which need to be mastered to bring music to life, but which are not to be found on the page. Anyone who has heard a machine performance of a well-known piece immediately hears and understands this.

In more and more of my recent works I treat the score not as an ideal which must be achieved but as a system to strive against which leads to expressive yet often out-of-control situations. All the usual notational details are present and most are quite simple (this is not the New Complexity); there is nothing aleatoric or random about the score; but one or two of the performance parameters will be extreme. In this piece, the speed at which musical material is to be presented is such that the performer is forced to skim, to improvise even, to react to the score rather than simply (!) play it. The intention is for an unusual energy and tension to arise, along with unimaginable and perhaps unnotatable instrumental sounds.

The saxophone as we know it is slowly revealed through various more unusual views of the instrument, as a technological extension of the human vocal apparatus, and as a resonating tube. Each of the six sections proceed via the same but ever-shortening algorithm: a two-in-one-voice hocket-like exchange of foreground and background notes, most often in different registers. Both saxophone and computer play through the same basic material but this is obscured in the former by a superimposed note-rejection procedure and in the latter by intentionally programmed rhythmic sloppiness. The obscuring reduces over the course of the piece until in the final section the computer and saxophone are locked in a uni-rhythmic and euphoric mêlée of sharply accented, ever-changing metrical assaults. Whose music you are hearing though—mine or the performer's—is open to question.

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in limine

two (or one) soprano saxophones and computer (octophonic)
2003 - 2005

in limine is based on the syllabic and verse structure of Eugenio Montale's

(1896-1981) 1924 poem of the same name The third of a set of pieces based on Montale's poetry, *in limine* (Latin: at the threshold) particularly takes its impetus from the imperatives of the poem: Rejoice, Look, Advance, Find, Leap, Flee, Go. These active verbs are countered, however, both in the poem and the music, by the static, timeless quality of the reliquary, the coast, the wall; the summer heat of Montale's native Liguria.

Also at work is a deliberate distortion of musical proportions: sections at the beginning are compressed to an unusual degree, they rush through material to the point where musical ideas are only hinted at, creating an almost schizophrenic musical atmosphere. Later, sections and material are stretched beyond their means, to the point where the musical fabric almost tears or bulges into ungainly shapes; like your reflection mutated in a hall of mirrors.

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breathing charlie

alto saxophone and computer (octophonic)
2004

"and nothing, and nothing. the days of
the bosses, yellow men
with bad breath and big feet, men
who look like frogs, hyenas, men who walk
as if melody had never been invented, men"
(from Charles Bukowski, *Something for the Touts, the Nuns, the Grocery Clerks, and You*)

From Charles to Charlie (Parker), and working on his assertion that if it's not in you,

it won't come out through your horn, this piece is based around the two versions of *Bongo Bop* Parker recorded in October 1947: a four times augmentation of the 9x12 bar blocks, rhythmically and harmonically derived from the source, there is very little of Parker sampled for the piece (most samples are of myself on alto), but you may hear snatches of a very young Miles Davis and, later in the piece, lots of the short rhythm section fills between solo phrases, complete with wax disc aberrations, clicks, and general lo-fi distortions. Most of all, however, you'll hear breath, so in performance you probably won't notice much correlation between what you see the saxophonist doing and what you hear—the saxophone is used more as a system exciter than as a normal musical instrument. So for one thing, you probably won't hear any normal notes. Also, due to processes such as live sampling, granulation, and looping, if something audible *is* done live, you may not hear it at the time but rather later, or perhaps not at all.





Henrique Portovedo is a professor at the University of Aveiro and coordinator of the Creation, Performance and Artistic Research Group at INET-md. He holds a PhD in Performance and Computer Music from the Portuguese Catholic University. Portovedo has also held various research positions, including a Fulbright Researcher at the University of Santa Barbara California, an Erasmus Researcher at the University of Edinburgh, and a visiting researcher at both the ZKM Karlsruhe and McGill University Montreal. In recognition of his work, Portovedo has been awarded several prizes, including from the Portuguese National Centre of Culture and the British Society for Education Music and Psychology. As a performer and saxophonist, Portovedo has found his place in contemporary music by working with composers as H. Goebbels, C. Barlow, C. Roads, M. Edwards, P. Ablinger, R. Barret, P. Ferreira Lopes, M. Azguime, S. Carvalho, J. P. Oliveira among others. Recent colaborations include Ensemble Modern, Sond'Art Electric Ensemble, Orchestre de la Garde républicaine or Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música. Portovedo is currently president of the European Saxophone Committee. ***www.henriqueportovedo.com***

Michael Edwards is a composer, improvisor, software developer, and since 2017 Professor of Electronic Composition at the 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.
michael-edwards.org

1	in limine	17:46
2	flung me, foot trod	9:04
3	HOTPO	10:25
4	who says this, saying it's me?	15:08
5	their faces on fire	8:49
6	breathing charlie	10:55
	total duration	**1:12:07**

credits

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

Henrique Portovedeo - saxophones
www.henriqueportovedo.com

Photographs

Andreia Parente - cover, pages 8 & 19
Henrique Portovedo - page 2
Michael Edwards - page 16

Recorded in

Edinburgh, Scotland
in limine; breathing charlie; flung me, foot trod
July 2016, January-February & June 2017
Essen, Germany
their faces on fire; hotpo
April 2018 & February 2020
Aveiro, Portugal
who says this, saying it's me?
September 2025

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