

HCMF: Programme Note:  
John Butcher Group.  
*somethingtobesaid*  
1 hour

For most of the last 25 years I've been fortunate enough to make music in the company of some highly distinctive, occasionally idiosyncratic, generally opinionated, often innovative and certainly inventive musicians. In most of these groupings and encounters, the players will be drawing on their own music and history, realised with their own voice - as it is at the time. The performers are mutually responsible for content, form and meaning. This is not the world of the composer and interpreters.

Methods might run from a complete adherence to a particular group sensibility (and such concepts tend to take shape experientially, albeit helped and hindered by varying degrees of discussion and theory) through to individualistic push and pull and borderline exhibitionism. Improvisation is a poor term to describe the range of intentions, results and personalities, but somehow it is at the core of the action.

A concern in producing *somethingtobesaid* has been - as I chip away at, and redirect, the individual freedoms and responsibilities of improvisation, can I replace them with anything as worthwhile? To my mind, the unique qualities of improvisation come alive when the reason for something happening has only been born in the moments just before it is revealed. Of course, even in a "free" improvisation this will only be part of the story - but it's one so easily lost when rules, instructions and prearranged actions enter the picture.

The musicians in this octet have developed most of their techniques and languages to serve particular ways of making music, and mismatched methodologies can easily suck the blood from sounds and intentions - meaning relies on context (including that put in place by the listener).

That said, whilst the group has been chosen for a number of reasons, not least is my feeling that these players are sympathetic to compositional considerations. They are certainly expert in those that arise intuitively through group consensus in the moment, and

have nothing to do with a piece of paper - but also to the more overt systems of explicit organisation, including concepts that a “composer” might bring.

I have deliberately invited into the project a mix of long-term colleagues and, to me, newer faces. My musical history with Chris Burn stretches back 30 years, from student jazz to free-improvisation and composition; I've valued a decade-plus of improvising with Gino Robair, Thomas Lehn and John Edwards, whilst there have been just a handful of encounters with dieb13, Clare Cooper, and Adam Linson.

*somethingtobesaid* is music that could only happen with these players as it relies on their personal musical materials, judgements and experience - developed and honed in some very different cultures, continents and times. In terms of pre-formulating a piece it's easy to spot the danger, even temptation, of simply rummaging around in the sonic treasure-chest they provide and imposing one's ego in the name of order, clarity and the greater good.

As it happens, I have more sympathy in control at the microscopic than at the macroscopic level - personal rather than global, at least. Partly in keeping with this, the piece has been constructed through a mix of knowing and not yet knowing the musicians' sounds and methods, some hopeful psychology in predicting responses, engaging with my own personal concerns, tussling with the role of specifics, pondering the value of ideas that can be notated, and having a well founded trust in the power of improvisation - in certain hands.