

Improvisation Rites written by Stefan Szczelkun

Introduction

An improvisation rite is defined concisely by Cornelius Cardew in the Scratch Orchestra Constitution of 1969

"An improvisation rite is not a musical composition; it does not attempt to influence the music that will be played; at most it may establish a community of feeling, or a communal starting point, through ritual." (Draft Constitution, 1969)

By 1969 Cardew had assembled 152 of these 'rites' from about 28 different people who had been attending the classes at Morely College in South London. He published them as a booklet entitled 'Nature Study Notes' that was given to everyone who joined the Scratch Orchestra. In reality not everyone kept to Cardew's definition of a 'rite', some of them tell you what to do and can be seen as 'compositions'.

I missed writing anything for the original book in 1969 (so did Peter and Judith and Catherine and Bergit and many others)

But I *did* write some rites in the period that are hand-written on peach paper at MayDay Rooms archive

material collection. These were chosen to be exhibited in the vitrines in Athens. I will add them to this list when I get to view them again at a later date. <http://www.documenta14.de/en/artists/16230/scratch-orchestra>

Also have found a foolscap sheet of dated rites which are most likely to be mine - see below.

The later requests from Cardew were for Scratch Music / compositions. There was no talk of a new 2nd edition of NSN.

A List of my recently written Rites

Rites written just before going to Athens in 2017

Rite 1. (Athens) Talking to yourself - as you do.

Rite 2. (Athens) Outside voice. Make a call to someone on handsfree. The person may be amplified, with their permission, and full knowledge of the context in which the call is made..

Rite 3. (Athens) Are we a cog in the machine? Take a byte out of the cybernetisation of control.

Rite 4. (Athens) Take a selfie with someone you don't know in the performance space. Share on social media. Find a sound to go with the image and make it.

Rite 5. (Athens) Shake it off. Put it on again. Shake it off. (could refer to a mood or an item of clothing)

Rite 6. (Athens) Visit a police station and go inside to report something minor. Whilst inside take a sly photo. Use it as a score.

There is a rite by me in the Improvisation Rites book that is not listed at the end.

Button Rite: At last a chance to sew on that loose button. Make sure you can see what you are doing.

These new rites by me were listed in the back of the 'Improvisation Rites' book the numbering follows on from the original booklet of 1969. They were written in 2014 as part of our process.

SS153 Fire Comes from Heaven

As preparation, an image may be drawn or downloaded.

SS154 Before coming in please wipe your feet

Metaphoric use preferred, but can be performed as an instruction as well.

SS155 Willy Nilly

Choose a jingling combination, like 'willy nilly', and make up a sentence to declaim to the audience in the

manner of a street-corner orator or busker.

SS173 Txt Rite

Text someone a message from the performance space during the performance. Then copy the text message onto a sheet of paper (add a line drawing if you like). If you get a reply include that. Finally take a photo of it to share with the text recipient later.

Lament for Whistling in the Street. Choose a circuit that will take 3 - 10 minutes to walk at a slow pace. One person sets off from the group whistling. The next person follows on so they are ten paces or so behind. The rest of the group follow on each person ten paces behind the one in front. On completing the circuit the first person continues to whistle until 2 more people have arrived back and then falls silent. And so on there are never more than three people whistling in the returning group. When everyone has returned the group tries to improvise a completely new tune. When found whistle in unison. End.

Ideally accompanied by women who intervene to wolf whistle at the male whistlers! (Suggested by Amy Dignam 2018)

This write was written in 2017 for the book launch.
But was trumped by Hugh Shrapnel's Whistling rite
which came in before I got to publish this.

**Older Rites from 1970 found hand-written onto
an old foolscap sheet. Headed 'Scratch Music' (?)**

1. Proceed from one point to another

mindful of the circle. 3rd June 1970

2. Make an action.

Watch carefully for its consequences. 5th June
1970

3. An explosion ... followed by

multitudinous interrelated small events. 9th
June 1970

4. Take a moment.

Divide it in half.

Notice the division. 10th June 1970

5. Make an unsteady beat using

five sound producing elements. 11th June 1970

6. Matches ————— take care! 12th June 1970

7. Every so often... remember

a moment of delight. 21st June 1970

8. Using the acoustic properties of some naturally occurring entity - define a period of series of periods.
22 June 1970

9. Choose a simple form of ornament.

Work it until it becomes intricate. 25th June
1970

10. Make a public statement.

allow its weaknesses and strengths to be clearly
seen. 26th June 1970

11. Gravel/grate _____ but gently. 28th
June 1970

12. Imitate. (1) Sounds that are apparent whilst it is
raining in the forest.

a. use an incongruous
instrument.

b. transport yourself to a forest
to do your imitation (when the weather is fine).

c. climb a tree. 1st July 1970

On the same foolscap sheet was a piece headed -

Scratch Rite 25th June 1970

play whilst hungry (at least a 12 hour fast)

(inevitably followed by)

play whilst eating good food.

PS 2018 Was I thinking about the difference between
Scratch Music and an Improvisation Rite?

Scratch music is the music that people go about
playing when the Scratch Orchestra meet to
play. ??? see Tilbury

Did I submit these (or not) for the Scratch Music
book? Which Cardew made a call out for date?
ref? I was not confident in my compositional ability.
Typing them out in 2018 I feel that they reflect a
meditation on my 'spontaneous' improvising
practice. Things I did or would like to have done. But
I didn't include a favourite of mine: 'standing on one
leg and swinging the other.' (A Cunningham-esque

dance move I used to like)

On another sheet of paper in the same folder I found this rough writing: I think these were my alternative to the political turn that happened in 1973/4. but this writing is probably much earlier (after NE Dealer concerts? an is an affirmation of the value of the Scratch Orchestra)

“The scratch band is ideological and non-aligned: an open organisation which is a product of the political environment and a vehicle for the members assessment of their position within its organisation and within society. And for society’s judgement of its cultural integrity. Open and non-exclusive: we must try to realise this in classic terms, in terms of class. The scratch orchestra will develop to a classless organisation playing people music, which is their undefined joy and realisation of group potential, which is not our interpretation of their desires but which can arise from our complete commitment and intimate contact with the people and our search for a social organisation which will allow no person to exploit ... others in economic or political terms. This is what the scratch orchestra has achieved to provide an organisational structure in which every person

from the oldest and most experienced to the youngest and most naive to give communal expression to his own needs and to avoid being exploited by any established hierarchy or power structure.”

There is also this Sneeze Composition (from 1970?) that I kept.



