

### “The Folded Map: Polyphony and the Making of Coherent Worlds.”

My doctoral project examines polyphonic repertoire as a site where broader epistemic concerns are negotiated. Focusing on notation and encoded compositional practices—two genre-defining traits—it approaches Western polyphony not as an isolated art form but as a shared discourse embedded in debates about *knowledge* and *representation*. By following specific notational and compositional problems across multiple periods, I will trace points of resonance between polyphonic music, developments in visual *perspective* and early scientific models of physical reality. In doing so I hope to expose polyphony’s role in curating provisional world pictures over the course of early modernity. I’ll apply this framing reflexively to my own practice, creating an experimental workspace in which notational tensions are reactivated. This project adopts a critical, practice-based methodology, working directly with historical modes of representation and *distributed authorship*—often smoothed over in modern performance—to reopen important questions about *musical ontology*.

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Description of the proposed research (1908 words)

#### **3a. Research subject.**

This project operates at the intersection of musical practice, historical musicology, and early modern representational cultures. It examines polyphony alongside developments in the visual arts and early science, treating these domains as parallel responses to shared problems of representation, coherence, and mediation. Rather than approaching polyphony as a self-contained repertoire, the project situates it among practices that together shaped early modern modes of thought and critique

Early Modernity, in the sense of an *episteme*, is marked by sustained experimentation across media. Against this backdrop, the research develops a series of historically grounded analogies: between canonic procedures and anamorphosis, proportional transformation and cartographic projection, and counterpoint and even early models of motion and causation. These analogies are not offered as metaphorical flourishes, but as evidence of a shared representational ambition to construct, test, and critique models of reality under specific constraints.

I approach Mensural notation—the predecessor to modern staff notation—not as a neutral vehicle for sound reproduction, but as a representational technology that actively shapes musical thought, compositional procedure, and performance. Canonic, cryptic, and puzzle-like practices are likewise examined not as stylistic curiosities, but as techniques that foreground mediation, ambiguity, and distributed agency between composer, notation, and performer. This is not the story of representation’s mastery, but its deliberate problematisation.

From this critique of perspective, multiplicity follows almost inevitably. The *poly* in polyphony provides a means of thinking unity, identity, and plurality as relational rather than singular. Comparable logics appear in early modern art, cartography, and astronomy, from Giordano Bruno’s plurality of worlds to Albrecht Dürer’s systematic variation of human form in the *Four Books on Human Proportion* (1528). Polyphonic music operates in a similar register, multiplying subjects not to fragment them, but to render them knowable through difference and relation.

Musical encryption—canons, riddles, and puzzle-like procedures—are irreducibly plural in function, combining didactic, contemplative, performative, and competitive aims. Their deployment speaks to agency and attribution, destabilising authorship itself. Their semantic instability is mirrored in notation that departs from fixed semiotic norms and instead functions as a malleable workspace. By opening a deliberate gap between what performers see and what they must do, encrypted music turns representation back on itself, situating practitioners in a liminal space between sight and sound.

The project's key objectives are to assess the discourses around knowledge, representation, perspective, authorship and ontology as they appear in polyphony and adjacent domains, and reactivate those conversations through historically integrated artistic research.

These objectives are guided by the following research questions:

1. How do specific notational technologies shape the repertoire, and how does that same relationship appear in adjacent domains?
2. How does polyphony engage the discourse around perspective, commenting on identity, multiplicity, and object / subject dichotomy.
3. In what ways do compositional practices that rely on encryption redistribute agency and reimagine authorship?
4. What kinds of musical ontologies emerge when performance engages directly with historical modes of perception?

### **3b. Research Process**

The *Folded Map* is conceived not as a solution, but as a structured inquiry into what occurs when the world is subjected to representation. The project unfolds through interconnected investigations organised around shared representational problems. Selected musical sources serve as points of entry into wider networks of practice, allowing sense-making techniques to be traced across repertoires, media, and disciplines.

The research proceeds along two interdependent lines. First, a historical investigation examines how polyphonic music negotiated questions of representation and coherence through notation and compositional procedure, drawing upon adjacent domains for reference and stabilisation. Second, a practice-based inquiry reactivates these tensions through musical experiment, using performance and re-composition to stage the persistent friction between sound and score. My artistic practice does not illustrate historical findings, but functions as a site where these representational problems become experientially accessible.

Methodologically, the project adopts a problem-oriented and constellational approach. Rather than treating works as isolated case studies, it follows specific techniques—mensural notation, proportional transformation, and canonic or puzzle-based procedures—as they operate across contexts. These techniques are approached as active sites where musical action, decision-making, and agency are distributed and negotiated. Musical sources are placed in constellation with cartographic projection, perspectival construction, and early cosmological models that deploy comparable representational strategies, clarifying how coherence was historically produced, tested, and strained under conditions of complexity.

On a practical level, the guiding principle is to ‘let the gap sound’. Where notation diverges from execution, where semantic ambiguity or riddle-like instruction appears, performance is used to render these tensions audible rather than resolve them (see section 6a for examples). By bringing together elements not intended to coincide, the practice exposes notation’s productive deceit and stages new forms of polyphony never intended by the sources, yet implied by them nevertheless. Notation is thus treated not as a neutral record, but as a co-creative agent whose limits and affordances are probed through performance.

This work is documented through recordings, video, and writing, with particular attention to moments where notation comments upon itself, where clarity generates ambiguity, and where authorship is held in suspension. The research unfolds cyclically: historical study informs practice; practice exposes representational tensions; these guide further analysis. The “final” work is final only insofar as it stages tensions that would otherwise remain inaccessible.

I’m an active professional concert and recording artist, specialised in polyphonic vocal music of the Renaissance. Additionally much of my work is from facsimiles of original sources. The project builds on this expertise, extending it into a research framework that treats polyphonic works as designed procedures rather than merely historical sound objects. It uplifts an interactive, performer-centred ontology that is already normal to myself and my colleagues, and makes it possible to speak in a structured way about things we’ve felt all along. My recent presentations at conferences demonstrate sustained engagement with questions of authorship, mediation, ontology and representation, using practice as a means of self-inspection (see section 4). Several ongoing projects feed directly into the doctoral work—included in part 6a of this application—and evidence an active creative engagement with the ideas and methods detailed above.

### **3c. Research Outcomes**

The doctoral submission will take the form of an integrated portfolio combining artistic practice and written research. Its core components will include curated performances and performance-based experiments, newly developed notated and recorded materials, and a substantial written dissertation. Together, these elements articulate a single research argument: that polyphony functions not only as a historical musical practice, but as a model for thinking through representation, agency, and identity.

The artistic component will consist of live and recorded performances that foreground moments where notation, instruction, and execution diverge. Conceived as research situations rather than definitive interpretations, these performances stage historical techniques—such as canonic procedures, proportional transformations, and notational ambiguities—in ways that render their epistemic tensions audible. Documentation through high-quality audio, video, annotated scores, and related visual materials will form part of the submitted work.

The written component will situate these practices within historical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks. Rather than serving as commentary, the dissertation will articulate how historical analysis and practice-based inquiry mutually inform one another, and how artistic research can generate insight into representational problems that resist purely discursive treatment. It will also offer a rigorous model for engaging historical materials in good faith, attending to their internal logic rather than treating them as a reservoir of motifs or techniques.

During the doctoral period, the research will be disseminated through conference papers, lecture-performances, workshops, and presentations within artistic research networks, musicology, and related interdisciplinary fields. Performances will appear in academic, artistic, and hybrid contexts, while written outcomes will be developed into journal articles and essays. Selected audiovisual materials will be shared through a dedicated website and YouTube channel, The Folded Map. After completion, the project will circulate through publications, recordings, and curated performance formats, engaging both specialist audiences and a wider public.

### **3d. Contribution to Knowledge, Understanding, and Musical Practice**

This project makes an original contribution by treating polyphonic music not as a closed historical object, but as an active epistemic field in which questions of representation, coherence, and knowledge are negotiated through practice. By placing musical sources in sustained dialogue with visual culture and scientific modelling, the research allows latent connections to emerge from the materials themselves rather than being imposed retrospectively. Historically informed experimentation is not used illustratively or stylistically, but as a method for testing how representational systems operate from within.

Rather than relying on surface analogies or speculative re-imaginings, it engages directly with the notational, procedural, and performative conditions under which this music was produced and understood. While specialised scholarship and historically informed performance have yielded valuable insights, they often leave unexamined the epistemic commitments embedded in the sources themselves. This research aims to make those commitments audible, revealing how multiplicity, ambiguity, and procedural indeterminacy were not problems to be solved but resources deliberately designed into the music.

The project contributes to existing scholarship by reframing how polyphonic repertoire is approached and interpreted. Traditional musicological and performance-oriented research has produced detailed accounts of style, technique, and historical context, but often brackets the epistemic assumptions embedded in the sources themselves. By engaging directly with the material and procedural logic of notation, this research foregrounds how ambiguity, openness, and indeterminacy were integral to musical thinking: not problems to be solved but resources deliberately designed into musical works. The findings reinforce recent scholarship that challenges linear, author-centred models of musical production, while also posing a challenge to performance practices that prioritise clarity, fixity, and sonic completion over procedural openness.

A further contribution lies in its rethinking of musical ontology. Working directly from historical sources reveals that distinctions between composer, performer, and work—so central to modern musical culture—were historically unstable. Responsibilities such as resolving canons, supplying ficta, or negotiating text underlay demonstrate that the labour of transforming signs into events was not secondary interpretation but constitutive of the work itself. By making this labour audible through performance, the project challenges received wisdom that locates musical identity primarily in a fixed sound object. Artistic research is therefore positioned not as a means of recovering lost sounds, but as a way of accessing an internal perspective in which representation, procedure, and musical being are inseparable.

Finally, the project advances an original account of distributed authorship grounded in musical practice. Musical encryption—canons, riddles, and puzzle-like procedures—is often explained through rhetorical categories such as *obscuritas* or pedagogical display, but such explanations remain incomplete. This research approaches encryption as a deliberate strategy for obscuring agency, producing situations in which authorship is neither absent nor sovereign, but structurally deferred. Rather than seeking to replace the

composer with the performer or audience, the project destabilises attribution itself, showing how authorship emerges as an ontological effect of procedure. In doing so, it contributes a practice-based perspective to ongoing debates about authorship, agency, and creative responsibility in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Through these practical investigations, I will develop a deeper understanding of how artistic practice can function as a mode of research, shaping my approach to both performance and scholarship beyond the doctorate. The project will strengthen my ability to design, document, and reflect on complex practice-based inquiries, and to integrate historical research with contemporary artistic experimentation.

The scale and interdisciplinary nature of the work will also develop my skills in organising collaborations, curating performances, and initiating larger research-led projects, including workshops and conferences. These experiences will inform my future professional activity as a performer, researcher, and organiser, enabling me to contribute more effectively to artistic and academic communities.

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