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## COLLABORATIVE COMPOSITION

### Unprecedented interaction between composer Reynolds and violinist Arditti leads to 'Shifting/Drifting'



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By [James Chute \(/staff/james-chute/\)](#) | 5:05 a.m. Sept. 13, 2015

Violinist Irvine Arditti and composer Roger Reynolds, friends for nearly four decades, have collaborated with each other and countless other composers and performers on numerous occasions. Music is not a solitary endeavor for either artist.

But in Reynolds' newest work, "Shifting/Drifting," which Arditti will premiere on Sept. 25 as the opening event of the 2015-16 ArtPower series at the University of California San Diego, they are moving into new collaborative territory.

For months, they have been exchanging emails and scans of rough drafts of Reynolds' ambitious work for violin and real-time computer processing.

They've met in Buffalo, N.Y., when the eminent violinist was touring in the U.S., and in Arditti's home in London, to discuss the score and allow Reynolds to record samples of Arditti's playing.

And in August, they spent 10 days with computer musician Paul Hembree in UC San Diego's Conrad Prebys Music Center Experimental Theater going through Reynolds' complex score measure by measure, section by section, trying to complete the work.

Neither Arditti nor Reynolds has had this much interaction over the creation of a piece of music.

"A lot of composers consider what they've written as sacred; they wouldn't dream of allowing (soloists to have a significant role)," said Arditti, during a break in the session. "What is nice is our continual to-and-froing, and seeing the transformation the piece goes through.

"It's nice too because it's not something that happens very often. In fact, I don't think I've ever worked with a composer quite so regularly, quite so intensely on a piece."

Reynolds, a distinguished Pulitzer Prize-winning UC San Diego faculty member, doesn't give up control easily. His early training was as an engineer, and carefully planning and then notating every detail of his meticulous handwritten scores is one of his joys and obsessions.

But he understands that without Arditti, whom he trusts implicitly, there is no music.

"I do the score all by my hand, as you know," Reynolds said. "I've never wanted to learn how to do the thing with computer, because when I'm making the score, I'm also editing it, I'm also feeling it, I'm also thinking about it, and that process gives me time.

"But the music is not the marks on the paper; the marks on the paper are a pathway to the music. So I'm not bothered at all by the idea that what Irvine effectively does is slightly different, or even sometimes markedly different, than what I've written.

"If it's more in the direction that the music needs to go, then I'm perfectly fine with that. I'm not protecting the score as though it were some sort of fixed specification that had value in itself."

#### New aspirations

Even as a young musician, Arditti was intrigued by new music and sought opportunities to collaborate. One of his earliest encounters, while still a student at the Royal Academy of Music, was with the enormously influential avant-garde composer Iannis Xenakis.

"I wanted to find a way to play his music that fit how he wanted the string sound to be," Arditti said. "I don't think anyone had done that with him before he met me; in fact I know they hadn't. And so we got on immediately. ..."

"But he never really explained anything, although it was apparent what he wanted me to do. I mean, vibrato was completely out of the question, this kind of attachment to the 19th century."

Soon after completing his studies, Arditti joined the London Symphony Orchestra and became co-concertmaster at the age of 25. But he also formed a string quartet in which he exercised his passion for the new.

"The first concert we played was with (Krzysztof) Penderecki; he was given an honorary degree at the Academy of Music, and we worked with him because he was there," Arditti said. "It seemed the logical thing to do."

"And after working with him, and understanding what he wanted, it seemed to me that the only way to play their music was to work with the composers. Because sometimes it's difficult to convey in a score exactly what you want. You just can't put it all down."

After four years as co-concertmaster, Arditti resigned to devote himself to the Arditti Quartet. Over the years, the ensemble essentially created a new repertoire for string quartet, working with and premiering works by Elliott Carter, Thomas Adès, Luciano Berio, John Cage, Elliott Carter, Brian Ferneyhough, Morton Feldman, Jonathan Harvey and György Ligeti, among others.

Reynolds' relationship with Arditti dates back to the late '70s, when he heard the Arditti Quartet performing the music of Xenakis and was impressed by its expertise and commitment.

"As a composer in this country, it's often the case that what you get in a professional situation is a kind of earnest reading," Reynolds said. "You have a limited amount of rehearsal time, and the musicians are very skilled, but they don't invest a lot of time in digging into the music and getting everything right."

"The thing that was immediately appealing about Irvine and his group was when you heard them play, you heard the same kind of investment that you might hear from the Emerson Quartet or an ensemble like that in Beethoven. There was no difference. There was that passion, that intensity, that desire to get it right."

## **Enduring relationships**

Reynolds has since written four pieces for the Arditti Quartet and five (including "Shifting/Drifting") for Arditti as soloist. In the process, he's formed a friendship that is inseparable from the music he's written.

"My friendship with Irvine, and my long experience with hearing him play under all kinds of conditions, has meant that there's something more than a sound that's in my mind and imagination when I'm writing a piece that he will be playing," Reynolds said. "There's something about the dynamism of his personality and the variability, the flexibility, the precision, also the humor and the love of life. ... All these things are in mind."

On a purely practical level, however, Reynolds is appreciative of Arditti's ability to give him immediate feedback. Arditti is able to quickly work a rough idea up to performance level, which is enormously helpful to any composer.

"In my experience, the performer is likely to say, if you ask, 'Well, can I hear that part?' They will look at it, and they'll say, 'Oh, that's playable,' or, 'There's a problem there.' But they don't really play it at the level they would be close to when performing. So you don't really know what the thing actually means until the last moment."

"It's rare to find a performer who will really give you a clear idea of what it will sound like and what it will feel like because they will put that energy into it."

Even now as they finish "Shifting/Drifting," Arditti's involvement is essential.

"Right now, Roger is sculpting the electronics part (the real-time computer algorithms that will be 'played' by Hembree in the performance) around the violin solo, but what's actually happening is both are changing; the violin solo is also changing in order to experiment with different versions of what's happening with the electronics."

"So it's not like anything is fixed; the whole thing is moving. It's kind of like a kaleidoscope going around and around before it clicks into place."

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