

# jef chippewa & yves charuest + LUX:NM = suboptimal outcomes

*for alto saxophone and chamber ensemble, commissioned by yves charuest (Montréal) and LUX:NM (Berlin)*

An ambitious collaboration on the second in a series of four works provides a fertile context in which jef chippewa and Yves Charuest explore the creative potential arising from the convergence of fully composed and freely improvised music, with “adaptive notation” functioning as a binding agent for their respective backgrounds.

*Keywords: composition and improvisation; free improvisation; adaptive notation; experimental notation; graphic notation; multi-work cycle; saxophone and chamber music.*



## **chippewa & charuest: composition. improvisation. notation. project.**

This collaboration between a new music composer and an improvising musician is motivated by a common desire to draw on 25 years of friendship and musical exchange — coloured by experiences anchored in the new/electroacoustic music and improvisation/jazz scenes, respectively — to exploit and even exacerbate the creative tensions arising in the convergence of North American and European musical traditions, composed and improvised music, precise and vague or even absent notation.

In this project, chippewa's compositional process is based on, makes use of and amplifies Charuest's performance idiosyncracies, habits and skills. The saxophonist's central role is complemented with small chamber formations whose parts feature fully notated music and adaptive notation, whereas Charuest's part comprises adaptive notation and free improvisation.

The works in this collaborative project position the saxophonist and chamber musicians in a symbiotically responsive musical context that capitalizes on the inevitably fluid interpretation of an implicit notational instability. While *all* the musicians interpret and propose individual variations of their adaptive notation, Charuest is also often invited to not only respond freely and intuitively to the unfurling and interweaving interpretation of the adaptive and composed (or to varying degrees predetermined) notational materials, but also to contribute materials of his own invention.

## overview of the project

Individual works forming this ongoing project may be performed separately, but would ideally be combined and positioned adjacently (in any order) on the same programme. Short transitional works specific to each pair of works are composed in tandem with the individual works. This “modular” approach to large-scale form not only resolves organizational practicalities, but also offers a higher-level example of the performance flexibilities inherent to adaptive notation and, indeed, the project.

As of June 2023, the project is comprised of the following works:

- ❖ **tautological responses to systemic redundancies** (2021, rev. 2022/20:00), for alto saxophone + string quartet | Commissioned by Yves Charuest with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.
- ❖ **suboptimal outcomes** (2023/20:00), for alto saxophone + chamber ensemble (acc, tbn, vn, vc, pc) Commissioned by Yves Charuest and LUX:NM (Berlin) with the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, Akademie der Künste Berlin (Projekt Initial) and DMR — Deutsche Musikrat (Neustart Kultur).
- ❖ **new work** (2024/20:00), for alto saxophone + viola Commissioned by Yves Charuest and Benedict Taylor (London).
- ❖ **new work** (2024/20:00), for alto saxophone Commissioned by Yves Charuest.

### suboptimal outcomes — for yves charuest and LUX:NM

At the core of the broader project are *adaptive notational strategies*, historical and contemporary approaches to notation that offer the musicians a greater degree of decision-making responsibility and interpretational freedom than traditional, fixed notation. The particularities of adaptive notation provide a means for improvised and composed creative approaches to overlap and intersect each other, challenging and overcoming the traditionally prevalent segregation between these two practices.

The second work in the series, *suboptimal outcomes*, exploits LUX:NM’s extensive experience in improvised settings and theatrical or staged productions, as well as the musical and professional intimacy the composer has developed through three prior collaborations with the ensemble, notably on *something like this but not this and not that either* (2017). That live-notated work was in fact crucial to opening up and suggesting the potential of the new musical direction explored in this project.

This new composition exploits somewhat more “excessively” the adaptive notational strategies that effectively smear the boundaries between composed and improvised music than in *tautological responses to systemic redundancies* (2021), and sets the stage for the third piece, where Charuest’s musical companion will be Benedict Taylor (UK), a musician equally familiar with the worlds of composed and improvised music.

## adaptive notation — bridging composition and free improvisation

The varying degrees of precision encountered in *adaptive notational strategies* forge a context in which the musicians are invited, and sometimes even obliged, to make decisions resulting in sounds and materials that may effectively stray considerably from the actual symbolic or text notation.

**allochronic**

① ② ③ ④ ⑤

sax **D** *8va* *poco gliss. ad lib.* (... tout enchaîné ...) (loco) GUNIGUNI *poco* MPh  $\phi$

*pppp* *fff* [t-k] *fff* *fff* *ff* *ff*

**=** **≠**

play all 5 figures in the order given, then variations ad lib. (random order) on the 5 figures, creating a complex "contrapuntal" texture:

- 1) cresc. on held note each time faster and shorter
- 2) shoot slaps off once in awhile at increasing distance
- 3) always vary GUNIGUNI phrase length, register, breadth
- 4) MPh each time a different dynamic level and contour
- 5) slap either register; only sparsely (randomly)

*fff* *sempre decresc.*

vn 1 IF sax =  $\phi$ ; *ff* *poco gl.* FERR. pizz. 2-5x *fff* *sempre* *poco gl.* arco sul tasto randomly, every once in awhile *fff* *poco* (or no!) gliss

vn 2 IF sax =  $\phi$ ; *ff* *poco gl.* FERR. pizz. 2-5x *fff* *sempre* I./II. 9-15" fingernail or pick: high on the string or behind the bridge *fff*

**≠**

**=**

**FOLLOW THE LEADER**

**A**

va *raucous!* pizz. 13-17x 3x 3-5x *fff* ["expose" yves] *fff* (vc)  $\phi$

vc *raucous!* pizz. 13-17x 3x 3-5x *fff* ["expose" yves] *fff* 9-13x arco III. *fff*

**=** **↔** **=**

**♩=192-200 steadfast, plough onwards**

Admittedly, the incorporation of improvised components within a compositional context is hardly a novel phenomenon: a *plethora* of works since the 1960s have asked performers to "improvise" with given fragments, form or content. But the improvised component has too often delivered an exoticism that lends the notated work a new aesthetic "flavour" rather than providing penetrating reflections on the quintessentially different implications of creative and performance processes in composed and improvised music — not to mention on their compatibility! However, in recent years we see a growth in the openness from both these traditionally opposed communities to understand, explore and appreciate with greater insight the other's idiosyncrasies and potential.

Adaptive notation is perfectly suited as a cross-disciplinary, cross-border, cross-stylistic “binding agent” between mildly to wildly diverging practices — without compromising the unique and defining characteristics of each contributing component. On the contrary, it provides an organic means by which, for example, classically trained musicians can confidently and musically explore decision-making and performance reaction processes that may be foreign to them, while improvising musicians can engage with an entirely different approach to form and structuring than they might be familiar with. The particularities of adaptive notation provide a means by which improvised and composed creative approaches overlap and complement each other, challenging and overcoming the traditionally prevalent segregation between the two practices.

This project is informed by and builds on an increasing tendency toward the use of adaptive notation in much of my work. These have included such commonly encountered adaptive notational strategies as flexible durations, choice of materials to play or varyingly precise descriptions of sounds or materials for the musicians to produce. Some of the more singular examples include music composed and notated around the flow of a slam poetry-styled text in *1+5* (2006), “mobiles” and “matrixes” of musical fragments in *17 miniatures* (2012) and *al tallone* (2018), action-event notation in *something like this but not this and not that either* (2017) and even a classic Italian recipe for tomato sauce — used as performance instructions and passionately proclaimed as a manifesto — in *cabinet de curiosités* (2015), as well as other long-established approaches to and uses of adaptive notation.

The extension of the realms of composition and improvisation toward each other suggests an extraordinarily fertile ground to explore.

— jef chippewa, 6 July 2023

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## biographies

JEF CHIPPEWA is a composer, new music notation specialist, arts administrator... and a fantastic cook. Sound objects and funky performance techniques are essential to his work, while theatricality and gestural choreography characterize the concert-theatre-fluxus work *cabinet de curiosités*, the live-notated *something like this but not this and not that either* and the single-upbow string trio *al tallone*.



He is currently collaborating with improvising saxophonist Yves Charuest on a series of works exploring composed music and free improvisation (collaborators include Quatuor Bozzini and LUX:NM). chippewa's work has been presented in concert venues, art galleries, festivals and trains by such ensembles as LUX:NM, ensemble recherche and CrossingLines. chippewa founded shirling & neueweise in 1999, and has given seminars internationally on "New Music Notation: Score design, function and role". Since 2005 he is Administrative co-Director of the Canadian Electroacoustic Community (CEC) and Coordinating Editor of their journal, *eContact!* chippewa is a member of the CEC, CLC, INM (Berlin) and CMC.

<http://newmusicnotation.com/chippewa>

YVES CHARUEST has been active since the 1980s on the Canadian jazz and improvised music scene, playing with many Canadian musicians such as Michel Ratté, Jean Beaudet, Lisle Ellis, Jean Derome and Pierre Cartier and more recently with Nicolas Caloia, Lori Freedman, Sam Shalabi, and Peter Valsamis, among others. He was a member of the Peter Kowald Trio (1985–1990) with the late German bass player and South African drummer Louis Moholo and has played with numerous musicians from the US and abroad such as William Parker, Agustí Fernández, Nate Wooley, Georg Graewe, Roscoe Mitchell, Lê Quan Nin, Dominic Lash, Mark Sanders, Steve Noble, Richard Scott and Audrey Chen. Charuest is involved in many long-term projects (duo Charuest-Caloia, Now and Then, Charuest/Shalabi/Caloia, the Ratchet Orchestra, Charuest/Ellis/Valsamis, a duo with British violist Benedict Taylor, a duo with dancer Alanna Kraaijeveld). His solo work has gained renewed momentum, most notably since the release of *Le territoire de l'anche* (Small Scale Music, 2020). Charuest also collaborates with different composers and artists for specific projects, such as Canadian electro-acoustic composer Gilles Gobeil whose *Sentinelle*, an electroacoustic work composed for and with Charuest, won 1<sup>st</sup> prize in the Mixed composition category at Musica Nova (Poland) in 2020.

<http://yvescharuest.net>

