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Distilling the Essence: Vocal Provenance in the Work of Jack Body

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A thesis and portfolio of original compositions submitted to the New Zealand School of Music in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music in Composition.

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Abstract

Jack Body is a prolific New Zealand composer of contemporary art music, who is best known for his engagement with the cultures of our Asian neighbours, and his transcription and transformation of their music has influenced a whole generation of composers in this country. However, in addition to this fascination with non-Western music, the use of voice as a means to express and explore the human condition has been an underlying theme in much of his work. This study uses critical analyses of three specific works by the composer to explore both text setting and his use of vocal provenance as a transformative compositional process. The string quartet *Saetas* is examined as a straightforward example of vocal provenance in instrumental music. An analysis of the text setting in *Love Sonnets of Michelangelo* informs an examination of the subsequent work for solo violin and string orchestra *Meditations on Michelangelo* where Body uses his own earlier vocal work as provenance for instrumental music. Body’s compositional practises in regard to the transformation from voice to instrument can therefore be separated from his response to original text, allowing an examination of the specific techniques he employs in works in which vocal provenance strongly informs instrumental compositions.

This written dissertation is submitted with a portfolio of my original compositions that explore the use of voice in solo and choral works, as well as using the provenance of voice for instrumental music. These compositions were informed and influenced by my research of Jack Body’s work.
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