



音樂系

Department of Music  
The Chinese University of Hong Kong

# Mok Hing Yiu Visiting Professor 2018 Public Lecture

## Music as Creative Practice

Speaker

Prof. Nicholas COOK

Mok Hing Yiu Visiting Professor  
Emeritus Professor of Music  
University of Cambridge

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5:30pm  
LT3, Esther Lee Building  
Chung Chi College, CUHK



## Synopsis

There is a long history of myth-making around creativity in music. The myths focussed on composers, who were imagined working alone in garrets, conceiving complex works in a flash of inspiration. Such ideas, which retained currency through most of the twentieth century, came into being around the canon of classical masterworks, but even in that context they had little basis in fact. And since the turn of the millennium thinking about musical creativity has been turned upside down. Increasingly it is thought of in terms of collaboration, of people working together and sparking ideas off one another—and the people in question are as much performers as composers. Indeed the new way of thinking has largely emerged from the study of musical performance, and this lecture pulls a thread out of the forthcoming book which is my contribution to the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice, hosted by the University of Cambridge.

Of course the solo creativity in evidence when composers work alone at their desks or workstations hasn't gone away, and one of my particular aims is to develop a way of thinking that embraces both individual and collective creativity in music. Central to this is the idea of creative emergence, as embodied in collaborative performance. In the real time of jazz improvisation everyone responds to everyone else, generating music that is owned by the group rather than by any individual, and that is unpredictable in much the same way as the weather is unpredictable—because there are so many possibilities, and every decision that every player makes at any point opens up a new range of possibilities. In short, I see performance in terms of networks of creative interaction. And I develop this model into one that can embrace the notated works of the western classical tradition, by showing how scores, too, can act as agents within these networks of creative interaction, so enabling sounds to be shifted across time. This allows us to retain the idea of creativity emerging out of social interaction while expanding its scope.

But that only goes half way towards my aim of embracing individual and collective creativity within a single conceptual framework. The other half lies in developing an approach to creative imagination in music—to how, by imagining music, composers and performers bring new sounds into being. Central to this is what I call sonic ontology: musicians imagine sounds by mentally manipulating mental objects such as notes, just as perfumers imagine scents by mentally manipulating musk and leather, and in this way—as also in creating music at the keyboard—real-world objects are incorporated within what Andy Clark calls the 'extended mind'. But what in particular brings together individual and collective creativity is the way in which composers interact with what they imagine. Just as novelists talk of the stage when their characters start speaking for themselves, so composers find their compositional ideas talking back to them; they even talk of having conversations with them. Solo creativity is itself a form of collaborative creativity, but one in which the social world is translated into the domain of objects, images, and symbols.

## About the Speaker

**Nicholas Cook** is Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Cambridge, having previously taught in Hong Kong, Sydney, Southampton, and London. His *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (1998) is published or forthcoming in sixteen languages. Among his more recent books, *The Schenker Project: Culture, Race, and Music Theory in Fin-de-siècle Vienna* (2007) won the SMT's Wallace Berry Award in 2010, while *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance*—based on his work as Director of the AHRC Research Centre for the History and Analysis of Recorded Music (CHARM)—appeared in 2013. His latest book, *Music as Creative Practice*, is just about to appear, and he is currently finalising a book provisionally entitled *Music, Encounter, and the Relational*, for which he was awarded a British Academy Wolfson Research Professorship. A former editor of *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, he is a Doctor of Humane Letters of the University of Chicago and was elected Fellow of the British Academy in 2001.

