

# EDWARD JESSEN

(Composer)

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## ABOUT

Edward Jessen is a composer of works for concert and theatrical traditions. His music is made from broad collaborative elements. Projects stem from conversational processes with players and directors, filmmakers and designers, astronomers and anthropologists. Jessen's music is emotionally direct and centred upon diagrammatic aspects of our hearing. He works with a distiller's approach to sound—often refining single elements to best evoke a legible event or a phenomenologic message.

Edward first studied with Rand Steiger, Morton Subotnick and Mel Powell at CalArts. He later studied with Alvin Lucier and, between 1999–2002, was a doctoral scholar at the University of York with Roger Marsh. While at York Edward helped found the resident soloist's ensemble, York Vocal Index, with co-director John Potter.

Jessen is the recipient of commissions and awards from UBS, Meet the Composer, the Arts Council England, Performing Rights Society/Bliss Trust, Britten-Pears Foundation, Sinfonia Foundation, British Academy, the Yvar Mikhashoff Trust for New Music, British Council Grant Combined Arts Award, le Conseil Général du Nord de la DRAC and the Danish Ministry of Culture. Recent projects include Mother Tongue Tautologies for the London Symphony Orchestra, Chambre 119 for pianist Catherine Laws, Companion for the Black Hair Ensemble, Thype for Orkest 'de ereprijs', Körper-task for the English Chamber Orchestra Ensemble, Præda for the Orchestra of the Opera North and Braid for the Hilliard Ensemble. Edward is a member of the composition faculty at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music.

## PROJECT LIST

DAP-025 Pg 8



**PRIME**  
(2010)

DAP-021 Pg 6



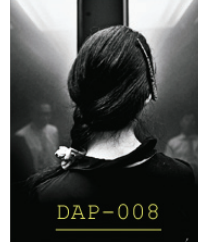
**MINGHELLA**  
**DIALOGUES**  
(2012)

DAP-016 Pg 5



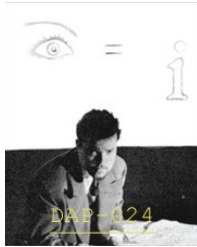
**THYPE**  
(2006)

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**BRAID**  
(2000)

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**MOTHER TONGUE**  
**TAUTOLOGIES**  
(2010)

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**CHAMBRE 119**  
(2009)

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**FELL**  
(2004)

DAP-007A

**PAIRDIAL**  
(2000)

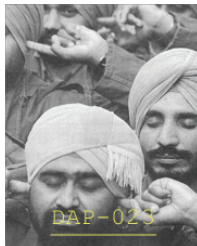
DAP-006A

**BOUNDARY CANTATA**  
(1999)

DAP-005A

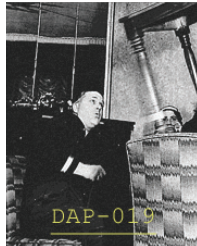
**STRING QUARTET NO.1**  
(1998)

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**FAR PARLOUR**  
(2009)

DAP-019 Pg 6



**INTIMATE**  
**HANDLING**  
(2009)

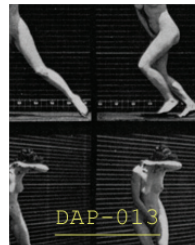
DAP-014

**FLAMMARION**  
**CORRESPONDENCES**  
(2003-)

DAP-004A

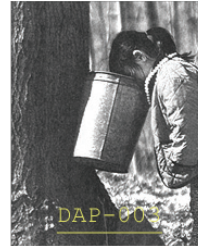
**EN NOUS ET**  
**AUTOUR DE NOUS**  
(1998)

DAP-013A Pg 4



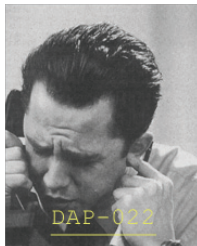
**KÖRPERTASK**  
(2003)

DAP-003A Pg 3



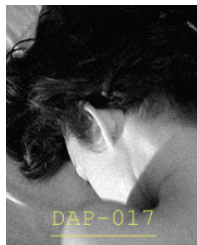
**SHE WAS**  
**IMPRESSED BY SOME**  
**REPRODUCTIONS** (1997)

DAP-022 Pg 7



**ETCH**  
(2009)

DAP-017 Pg 5



**COMPANION**  
(2008)

DAP-011C

**PREDÁ**  
(2001)

DAP-010B

**CROON**  
(2001)

DAP-009B

**BANNER**  
(2001)

DAP-002A

**POEM OF LEVITICUS**  
(1997)

DAP-001A

**SKEPTÍK**  
(1995)

**SHE WAS IMPRESSED BY SOME  
REPRODUCTIONS (1997)**

for solo performer (voice/trumpets), short-wave  
radio and two cd players in their random modes  
duration ca. 12 mins.

I first wrote *She Was Impressed By Some Reproductions* for Taylor Ho Bynum as part of a Recent Works programme at Wesleyan University in 1997. At that time Taylor and I had adapted his unique manner of playing to suit this piece. Later I made major alterations and distilled some of the theatrical activity—namely by removing one of the original stories used.

The single story for this work is taken from a “coincidence journal”, *Das Gesetz der Serie*, by the Swiss scientist Paul Kammerer (as translated and quoted in Arthur Koestler’s *Roots of Coincidence*, iii. Seriality and Synchronicity, 1972).

The spoken fragments of this story—taken from five actor’s readings—and the melodic elements from Taylor’s playing have been assembled onto performance CDs (over multiple tracks) and are to be played back in their shuffle modes, layering the narrative/melodic details to form an experimental presentation of basic facts.

In performance, the player incorporates the pre-recordings into the work at specific moments by starting each of the CDs in their random modes. When acting &/or playing—the performer is asked to allow the recorded material to direct the atmosphere and pace of the storytelling. Throughout this process and within the focused environment of a small tale told through many layers of repetition, the story should take on the qualities of a gradually-forming epic parable—with the minor actions, “...at that moment the door opens...”, etc. and the melodic fragments becoming almost epitaph-like.

**SCORE**

The shape of this mediation—this mediation between live and recorded sound (the ‘reproductions’)—is intended to move in one direction: firstly by preceding the recorded sound (foreshadowing sounds, the speaking or playing extracts just prior to hearing them elsewhere); then by coinciding with it with these elements (speaking or playing in unison); and lastly by following them (echos, imitations, etc.) Clearly the second of these performing prospects—the playing of material just as a CD player might be cued to play the same statement—is the least easy of the three to carry out. And yet by allowing for the possibility we have made a bid towards the likelihood of significant dramatic coincidence.

*She Was Impressed By Some Reproductions* is dedicated to Taylor Ho Bynum and was first performed by him on 4 October, 1997 in the World Music Hall of Wesleyan University, Middletown Connecticut.

## BRAID (2000)

duration ca. 7½ mins.

In the 1950s, Alain Robbe-Grillet set out to invent the nouveau roman, to explore storytelling using a phenomenological voice – one that describes the pure surface of any given situation. The style was built from repetition and subtle plot development. The reader is toured around descriptions of objects, directions of shadows, lengths of pauses, etc. in a manner that leaves the characters themselves seemingly deprived of their more-interior qualities. Instead, it is the inanimate material of the narrative which is left charged. And there, in the sober recounting of matter, is revealed the activities of living – where the story rests. Robbe-Grillet's most-recognised novel employing this formula is *Jealousy* (1957) in which one gradually learns of an infidelity between a man and a woman, living on neighbouring plantations in an undisclosed location.

The examination of the details and the rituals of these lives takes place over approximately two days and, among the dozen or so recurrent themes, contains the image of the woman, known only as A., at her dressing mirror, brushing her hair methodically.

## KÖRPERTASK (2003)

for clarinet quintet  
duration ca. 10 mins.

Körpertask was written for the clarinettist Anthony Pike and members of the English Chamber Orchestra Ensemble, with funding provided by the Britten-Pears Foundation and the Bliss Trust.

## SCORE

The three texts used in Braid are taken (and adapted) from the descriptions of this single activity. My design for this piece is not intended merely to depict a plaiting process – with an unnecessary romantic fondness – yet to actually be an audible braid. The narrative strands of the score are plaited between the countertenor, second tenor and baritone voices. The remaining tenor visits each strand as it folds to the surface, moving towards the tip of this object with an ever quickening pace.

Braid was written for The Hilliard Ensemble and was first performed by them on 3 June 2001 at the Theatre Royal (Ustinov Studio), as part of the Bath Fringe Festival.

## SCORE

## FELL (2004)

for percussion quartet  
duration ca. 7½ mins.

Fell 2 1. to knock, strike, shoot, or cut down; cause to fall 2. Sewing. to finish (a seam): The haunting and yet hard-to-name quality of the uncanny is that it possesses "hidden yet familiar things, having undergone repression and then emerged from it." Taking Freud's explanation of this opaque doubling, FELL shares a similar diagrammatic doubling between two iconic figures who generally lurk somewhere within many people's music consciousness: John Dowland and Nat King Cole. The piece uses two well known melodies, where tuned gongs sing of love – both nourishing and affronting–doubling longing with 1950s

## SCORE

naïveté. The process is an emblematic one, carried along by a listener's familiarity with both tunes. It is a gradual change from the sound of tolling to one of planks and logs – more 'subtle intensity' than 'energetic pun'.

FELL was written for the Ensemblebash and was first performed by them as part of the Tate Liverpool's exhibition, The Uncanny, on 10 April 2004.

## THYPE (2006)

duration: ca. 12 minutes

Written for Orkest de Ereprijs with funding from the Composer Assistance Program of the American Music Center, from the PRSF/Bliss Trust (UK) and from the Arts Council of the Netherlands. The piece was first performed 2 May 2007 at the Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, York.

## SCORE

### PROGRAM

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-... . / -.. --- -. .

## COMPANION (2008)

for four performers: voice,  
toy pianos, violin and cello  
duration ca. 6 mins.

Commissioned by and written for Black Hair Contemporary Music Ensemble and first performed by them on 9th June 2008 as part of the Late Music Festival, National Centre for Early Music, York. The string ripieno was later added and was first performed, in this version, as part of the British Music Information Centre's Cutting Edge series on 20th November 2008, The Warehouse, London.

## SCORE

### VIDEO

## INTIMATE HANDLING (2009)

duration: ca. 30 mins.

SCORE

AUDIO

A collaborative, and speculative, devised sonic theatre project, based on 19th-century spiritism and domestic séance—with Jane Chapman (harpsichord) and with Michael Oliva (sound manipulation)—resulting in five short films. The project was a bid to render believable sonic situations from which the dramatic, instrumental and electroacoustic aspects are all essential and meaningfully-combined.

## CHAMBRE 119 (2009)

for performer: amplified voice, piano,  
toy piano and cd accompaniment.  
duration ca. 6½ mins.

SCORE

AUDIO

VIDEO

PROGRAM

PUBLICATION

Written for Catherine Laws with funding provided by Arts Council England. First performed as part of the Peninsula Arts Contemporary Piano Series, Upper Lecture Theatre, Sherwell Centre, Plymouth on 18th March 2009.

## MINGHELLA DIALOGUES (2013)

a dramatic work for two vocal soloists, recorder consort,  
visual projection and auxiliary audio  
duration ca. 80 mins.

SCORE

In development for the Spitalfields Summer Festival 2013 with funding provided by the PRS Foundation. In collaboration with Fifty Nine Productions, Dominic Murcott, John Potter, Anna Maria Friman and Consortium5.

## ETCH (2009)

for audio and planetarium projections

Etch was part of the Four Fictional Glances project, a collaboration with Greenwich's Public Astronomers. The project stemmed from a commission to respond to the precise imagery and the evocative lectures that form the working life of the Harrison Planetarium.

Early on in the process we realised that our biggest ambition was to tell disconnected stories using the existing imagery of the Planetarium—that is, the real accounts of space, real distances, real planets, the “non fiction” of the heavens. However, we wanted to invent a duplicate of this imagery and to make it behave very separately—an imperfect replica, a substitute cosmos—where a set of alternative laws might take hold. We began making small visual scripts with the idea that it wasn't so much the objects we would be looking at (planets, systems, nebulae, etc.) but the activities of movement and behaviour in that fictional environment.

These sorts of ‘behaviours’ then became unverifiable questions, “how might it look if one's head were caught in a perpetual side-to-side pendulum motion, staring across unimaginable distances?” Or “what might it feel like to move forward and backward through billions of light years with the inhale and exhale of our individual breathing?” These scripts then became the visual answers to these speculative questions, placed just so, and spaced in such a way that not the things but the activity around them seemed arranged—and believable.

## PROGRAM

### AUDIO

As a compensation to the vastness of space, the soundworld was to be very small. Each script was composed from only the sounds of toys: chime piano, toy guitar, log drum and children's recorder. Additionally we sought out an objet trouvé (a found recording, an archive speech, a machine sound, a radio broadcast, etc.) to complement each theme.

Like all things that take on a new life when allocated new neighbours, the imagery of the cosmos has become less infinite as we attached small aural stories to them. In doing so, I think we have succeeded in making frieze-like patterns, detailed pieces of innovation that suggest exaggerated celestial gestures as they become small, personal and understandable events.

## FAR PARLOUR (2009)

for five harps  
duration ca. 6 mins.

Written for Gabriella Dall'Olio and harpists from Trinity Laban with funding provided by the Festival of Time and Space and the Royal Observatory Greenwich. First performed in the Peter Harrison Planetarium as part of the Harmony of the Spheres event, 19 20 and 21 November, 2009.

## SCORE

## MOTHER TONGUE TAUTOLOGIES (2010)

for orchestra  
duration ca. 5½ mins.

Commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra as part of UBS Soundscapes: Pioneers.

## SCORE

## PRIME (2010)

for voice, cello & auxiliary sound  
duration ca. 2½ mins.

## SCORE

Sticks with notches carved into bone, ivory or antler have been known for over 35,000 years. The notches are usually considered as tally marks: one notch corresponding to one object. The Ishango Bone—a real star of African archaeology—was found in 1960 by the Belgian geologist Jean de Heinzelin de Braucourt in what was then the Belgian Congo. It was subsequently dated to the Upper Paleolithic (the Late Stone Age), some 20,000 years ago. The bone was found among the remains of a small community that fished, gathered and grew crops around the African area of Ishango, centered near the headwaters of the White Nile River. The owner of the bone is unknown. It possibly belonged to a baboon. Possibly a lion. The bone has been thinned down, scraped, polished and engraved with 168 small notches split over three columns. One of these columns is divided into four groupings of notches: 19 17 13 and 11. (Totaling sixty and representing all the prime numbers

between ten and twenty). Many scholars have put forward interpretations of the bone: This is the oldest piece of evidence as to the mathematical knowledge of ancient mankind. This is the earliest example of man grappling with the irregularity of the primes. It is a counting object for the purposes of record-keeping... Perhaps the bone is concerned with a latter-age, Yorkshire composer, dashing and accomplished, who would later total sixty and who, in his own prime, would say after first seeing a picture sent from the Muséum des Sciences naturelles in Bruxelles, "Ha ha! It looks positively obscene." Prime was written for John Potter and Charlotte Bishop and was first played on the occasion of "Not a Soul but Ourselves: A Roger Marsh Celebration", Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, York on 24 November 2010.



## OTHER PROJECTS

### **LAUGHTER SCORES (2005)**

Cabinet Magazine, Brooklyn NY,  
Spring 2005, Issue 17.

Competition collaboration with Architects Alex Gino & Jason Griffiths; overall winners of competition with the prize of the commission to build sonic structure. Judges: Thom Main, Wolf Prix, Eric Owen Moss, Arthur Erickson.

I began scoring laughter in 1994, when Jason Griffiths and Alex Gino entered an architectural competition to build a Temple of Laughter, and asked me to contribute. (Their design went on to win.) They explained that their small building, basically a shipping container to be transported around the country on the back of a truck, would support a kind of laughter system which would both encourage visitors to laugh by playing them canned laughter and record their laughter responses. The idea was to create a building that would contain an ever-expanding cacophony of laughter.

My job was to make distinctions between the different categories of laughter – the giggle, the guffaw, the bellow, etc. – by recording

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samples from friends, children, TV, etc. and make musical notations of them. It became immediately evident that the process of faithfully transcribing pure sounds of emotion was going to be enormously difficult. Unlike speech—which generally has a decipherable pitch—laughter seemed to be ecstatic, more like the sound of forced air and involuntary pitchless spasms. With each sample of laughter I resolved to take impression of the vowels, the speeds and the curvature in the way that a court artist might quickly sketch a villain during a big murder trial – not the deepest likeness, yet not unrecognisable either. The impressions are based on a series of closer and closer approximations. A person should be able to look at the impressions and execute the same sounds in an accurate and, with any luck, emotive manner.

### **TEN LEGIBLE HEARINGS (2006)**

Ten Legible Hearings of Edward Jessen; composer profile by Thomas Weaver Autograf Tidsskrift for Ny Kunstmusik, Særnummer, Årgang 15, May 2006.

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## ELABORATE DISPLAYS (2010)

A series of lectures on new music and video collaboration given as part of the Grove Lecture Series, Royal College of Music, London; Fifth Biennial International Conference on Music Since 1900, University of York and as part of a tour of China at the Central Conservatoire of Music (Beijing) and Wuhan Conservatory of Music.

## LEGIBLE HEARINGS (2006)

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for orchestra  
duration ca. 5½ mins.

Dansk Musik Tidsskrift,  
Number 5, 2005/06  
An article on themes of new music  
collaboration. [In Danish only.]

## SPOR FESTIVAL (2006)

for voice, cello & auxiliary sound  
duration ca. 2½ mins.

Edward Jessen, 2006 Festival  
curator, Århus Denmark. Portrait  
concerts, installations and films  
centred on the work of Samuel Beckett,  
Alvin Lucier, Roger Marsh and Pelle  
Gudmundsen-Holmgreen. Featured  
performers and ensembles include:  
Århus Sinfonietta, Ars Nova, Black  
Hair Ensemble, Concert Clemens, Juice,  
John Potter and Richard Wistreich.