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**The Making of a Modern Fingerstyle Album:
Exploring Relevant Techniques and
Fingerstyle History**

Reece Cronin

**A thesis submitted to the University of
Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of
Music by Research**

The University of Huddersfield

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
1: Methodology	4
2: Techniques	6
3: Fingerstyle History.....	7
Blues.....	7
Folk.....	9
Modern Fingerstyle	10
4: Album Analysis	12
Conclusion.....	17
Bibliography.....	18
Discography	19

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Introduction

My aim in this project was to record an original ‘modern fingerstyle’ acoustic guitar album. I wanted to create music that reflects a combination of influences; I focused my interest into pushing boundaries through the use of ‘standard’, ‘extended’ and ‘percussive’ techniques. In order to achieve my goals, I have researched guitarists and other musicians who have pioneered the way in which the acoustic guitar can be played. My commitment to expanding the audience awareness of modern fingerstyle has led to personal investment in the making of a documentary film: *Acoustic Uprising*, (Roller, 2017). As Brewer explains, ‘It’s not so much the history of the guitar itself that has had an impact on music, but more the musicians who have crossed paths with the guitar and have revolutionised it again and again, each time breaking boundaries and reaching new heights’ (Brewer, 1986, p. 7).

Combining practice based research with viewpoints from these innovative players, I have collected ideas on playing styles, techniques and how they approach the guitar to help me better understand how to compose music for modern fingerstyle in my own original way. I looked to combine moods, genre and a wide range of techniques in order to create an individual catalogue of music that distinguishes modern fingerstyle. The guitarists’ fingers are crucial in producing specific sounds: ‘There are no keys, hammers, valves, pedals, quills, reeds or other mechanisms involved. This produces an intimacy of physical contact between the player and instrument which is both attractive and demanding’ (Brewer, 1986, p. 7). This ‘intimacy’ is one of the key elements I was aiming to develop throughout this project.

In an effort to find conclusions to the question of how modern fingerstyle has evolved and how to write and perform modern fingerstyle music, I have researched playing styles in different genres and have written and performed an original album which focuses on specific attributes of the style. The music is accompanied by a detailed account of fingerstyle used in popular music such as blues and folk, focusing on key artists within the stated genres. This thesis deconstructs my songs in order to find similarities in my influences and differences in my playing style which support the production of an album which represents new music and enhanced methods of technique and practice. Following a methodology which outlines my questions and details techniques, there is a brief history of fingerstyle in different genres. I then present an in-depth analysis of my album, where track by track I give an account of techniques and influences. The audio tracks are then followed by video evidence which illustrates the performance.

1:Methodology

When confronted with ‘new music’ as well as playing styles it often leaves a sense of wonder: How did they do that? What techniques were used? How can I use this musical idea to create my own original compositions with my background as a guitar player? To find answers to these questions I undertook different methods of research; firstly, I engaged in practice based research which involves studying musical performances from different genre, eras and cultures (Harrison, 2014, p. 78). This is where I gathered musical ideas from past and present influences and used parts of the guitar that I had not experimented with before: ‘Creative impulses, artistic passions, desire for personal understanding, ongoing research interests can all play a part to varying degrees’ (Doğantan, 2015, p. 175). Through this experimentation of playing the guitar with new features in mind, the stylistic sounds I was creating were shaped by my musical roots and influences, fused with modern fingerstyle; this generated a new breeding ground of music for me in which I could explore and develop my technique.

This new music raised more questions on how to properly organise melodies and structures within my chosen style and how to combine multiple genres into a single track or album; this meant that I had to bring the theoretical and practical aspects of music together (Doğantan, 2015, p. 151). Playing the acoustic guitar freely with a specific playing style in mind allowed me to discover what is possible, where my capabilities lie and helped me develop a deeper understanding of the genre I have aimed to showcase. This led me on to the second strand of my research which is text based. I began investigating and analysing artists, techniques, playing styles and influences to see how they work with song structures and drawing their roots of influence into an original musical idea. This encouraged me to broaden my mind as a musician and helped me to better understand how to develop as an acoustic guitar player, incorporating their methods into my music in an original way and portraying modern fingerstyle.

Through research of traditional guitar music including ‘blues’, ‘folk’ and modern fingerstyle, I have analysed performances, deconstructed songs and studied techniques. This allowed me to achieve an individual way of playing which I would practise then frame as the foundation for writing my compositions. Although fingerstyle techniques such as ‘Travis picking’, percussion hit on the guitar, and open tunings were used as far back as the 1930s in Robert Johnson's blues, and in Davy Graham's $\frac{3}{4}$ AD (Graham, 1962) in the 1960s, they have become increasingly popular and are being used in innovative ways. Artists such as Jon Gomm, Mike Daws

and Thomas Leeb in the modern fingerstyle community which spawned with the birth of the internet and expanded with YouTube, have introduced many new intricate techniques. As Doğantan states this involves ‘sharing the locus of innovation and creativity within highly networked artistic community that spans the professional and academic spheres’ (2015 p. 34). It is by researching the ‘new music’ of these artists that I have been able to build dexterity and develop my technique to craft my own personal style which is reflected in the attached album.

I have aimed to pursue and link different genres together when approaching each track; this includes songs written with varied tunings. As Franco Fabbri suggests it may only be possible to define a genre by determining ‘whether a certain set of musical events is being considered in a relation to other opposing sets’ (Fabbri, 1981, p. 1). This approach allowed me to distinguish musical events in my music and understand the contrasting styles my music contains. David Milsom has argued that in the past there were no separate musical ‘events’, but that they are more common in modern, twentieth century music, especially pop music (2003, p. 4). This means that the concept of genre is a useful one but does not need to be restrictive.

With genre now more established I can pick apart stylistic sounds in my playing and combine them with my new approach to modern fingerstyle. Given my musical background as a hard rock/ metal musician, I combine stylistic features occurring in these given styles such as tapping, bending notes and guitar solos; I blend these features of other genres together on the acoustic guitar to obtain a level of individualism when writing music for modern fingerstyle. Being a lead guitarist for several years, my keenness to emulate my favourite bands’ such as Aerosmith, Guns N Roses and Metallica gave me a solid foundation in guitar playing. Techniques that I achieved from learning my favourite band’s music allowed me to approach modern fingerstyle in a way that would challenge my ability to blend genres. This forced me to think very carefully when composing, as not only is technique important but many factors must be considered such as style, mood, tempo, dynamics, space, and concept. ‘Composing is: thinking in tones and rhythms. Every piece of music is the presentation of a musical idea’ (Schoenberg, 1995, p. 15). Also, this enabled me to consider writing fingerstyle music on the electric guitar to fit in the space of the acoustic guitar. With my early influences drawing mainly from hard rock and metal, the attached album contains many idioms found in these styles. Blended together with the traditional feel of blues and folk, fingerstyle becomes the meeting ground for these influential genres; this allowed me as a musician to develop my own stylistic sound. Techniques such as those found in modern fingerstyle can offer a whole new way to connect and draw multiple influences, as well as allowing the

musician to compose from a soloist and or band's point of view. With the dogma removed from writing music for a specific genre, artists are free to write with fewer limitations while acknowledging all of their influences. This made me experiment and take risks in the composing stage, concluding in my debut album.

The debut album includes seven original songs and a cover of the traditional folk track 'Angie'; these are supported by relevant research and analysis. The acoustic guitar playing and the structure of the songs in the album are analysed to highlight my understanding of the styles being played and the ability to use standard, extended and percussive techniques creatively in my music, thus broadening my musical repertoire as a guitar player and most of all as a composer. There are many techniques that are used by different artists, and some techniques can distinguish a musical style or a particular artist. These are outlined below.

2:Techniques

The techniques that I explore can be grouped into three categories: standard, extended and percussive. Within these categories are subdivisions which characterise different levels of dexterity and skill. The standard framework includes 'fingerpicking', 'hammer on' and 'pull offs'. Fingerpicking allows the guitarist to use multiple voicings; by using fingerpicking the player can be more intimate with their notes and their dynamic range. An example of this kind of playing can be heard in Bob Dylan's '*Blowin' in the wind*' (Dylan, 1963, track 1). Hammer on is a technique where the player is to simply hammer down one of their fingers on a string located on the guitar's fret board. From this position, it is common to follow with a pull off. Pull offs are where the player will pull his or her finger off the string with some force to resonate the string. Hammer on and pull offs are commonly used together to perform trills, licks and/or fast major/minor pentatonic runs. These techniques can be heard in Van Halen's "*Eruption*" (Halen, 1978, track 2).

Moving to extended practice, I incorporate techniques such as Travis picking, 'two handed tapping' and 'natural harmonics'. Travis picking extends from fingerpicking and allows the player to have an ascending and or descending bass line accompanied by melodic lines all played with one guitar. Travis picking was made popular by the great Merle Travis, who would utilise the technique in a distinctive way. An example of his distinct playing can be heard in *Cannon Ball Rag* (Travis, 1968, track 6). The use of two handed tapping allows the player to use a series of hammer on and pull off techniques where the guitar player utilises both hands on the fretboard to create multiple voices and harmonic lines. A thorough example of this technique can be found in Preston Reed's

Tractor Pull (Reed, 2001, track 4). Another extended technique that I have employed in my compositions is the use of natural harmonics. Natural harmonics are very concentrated tones; people have described hearing these as light beams of sound (Roller, 2017, 0:33). Located on the fifth, seventh and twelfth fret of the guitar, the string is picked while the guitar player's finger hovers gently on the string over the desired fret. A natural harmonic can be made anywhere on the fret board by holding a chord position or single note and then simply hitting the harmonic note five, seven or twelve frets up from the held position. Natural harmonics can be seen in Tobias Rauscher's song 'Memories Version II' (Rauscher, 2014) and in my composition 'Trouble'.

Finally, I employ percussive techniques such as harmonic slaps and percussive slaps as part of my repertoire. As opposed to picking a natural harmonic note/notes, harmonic slaps allow the player to strike the desired harmonics in a quick, sharp fashion, or emphasize a ringing harmonic passage. The intro to 'Devils Play' is a good example of that technique. This can be achieved by the player using the top end of their fingers to hit the strings of the guitar in the desired place for harmonics, fifth, seventh or twelfth fret, resulting in melodically percussive music. Percussive slaps essentially allow the musician to become a one-man band. Utilising the wooden box that is the acoustic guitar, can combine a whole drum kit's worth of sounds with chordal structures, bass lines and melodic/harmonic passages on the guitar to create more original and diverse compositions. A good example of this full instrumentation can be heard in Jon Gomm's composition 'Passionflower' (Gomm, 2013).

3:Fingerstyle History

Fingerstyle through the ages has excelled in developing through different genres, with blues and folk playing a huge role in its development. I obtained new found knowledge from these styles while focusing on the roots of fingerstyle. This led me to understand the growth of fingerstyle through methods of technique and stylistic idioms found in the early stages of these emerging genres. I look at important artists that both influenced me and pushed the barrier of fingerstyle within their genre and consider how the musical events in their songs has influenced other generations of musicians, thus gradually introducing the new genre of modern fingerstyle.

Blues

The blues has been associated with the Mississippi Delta. Weissman records that it was considered 'almost an independent and simultaneous invention in various southern African American communities or locales' (Weissman, 2005, p. 2). Blues music can sound depressing but can be cathartic. A blues musician's pain and struggle can be heard through their raw playing and use of

'whiney' voice among many other traditional blues traits. Blues guitar was an important element in the development of blues as it was the genre's main instrument (Jones, 1995, pp. 69-70, 81). Looking back to the 1930's Robert Johnson a Mississippi Delta blues man was making ground-breaking discoveries with the guitar; he would use open tunings such as open D, G and E in his compositions to assist in his slide guitar playing and or his multi voice guitar lines. Robert Johnson took influences from other artists in the Delta scene such as Son House, Willie Brown and Charlie Patton; he would sit and observe their playing while trying to achieve learning the guitar himself. Of all these blues musicians who surfaced from the Delta, it was the incredible sound that Robert Johnson was making with his guitar that was so ahead of his time and left 'the deepest impression' (Oliver, Harrison & Bolcom, 1986, p. 85).

Robert Johnson had a very interesting approach in the way he wrote songs but more importantly the way he played the guitar. Johnson could strike melodies and shape the sound of the guitar to suit his personal emotion; this was something that sparked great interest in me as a guitar player and drew me towards the acoustic guitar. Although his talents were extraordinary to the point that people put his playing down to a myth, there are many elements that lie in Johnson's work that define him as the 'Delta Blues giant'. One of Johnson's tricks is to play chromatically descending bass notes while having the high-end notes ring out; this is one of his popular blues turn arounds and this technique can be heard many times throughout his album (Johnson, 2008); songs such as 'Sweet Home Chicago', '32-20 Blues' and 'Kindhearted Woman' (Johnson, 2008, tracks 13, 14, 6) feature the musical event. Johnson's music would go on to be heard by and influence eminent blues, rock guitarists such as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Ray Vaughan and Jimmy Page.

Another artist who showed exceptional skill on the guitar is Snooks Eaglin. Eaglin would use Travis Picking and have an allegro feel to his music. As well as this, Charters mentions he would play complex material while making it seem effortless, being 'one of the most relaxed guitarists in the blues. He just swings, with a kind of easy rocking beat that's as casual as a man throwing stones in a summer creek. And along with his looseness he can do everything, any kind of rhythm figure, any kind of sudden solo' (Charters, 1975, p. 113) Snooks Eaglin performed the acoustic track 'High Society' (Eaglin, 2015) which Charters further explains contains 'everything that you'd expect in a full band version and it set a kind of standard for acoustical guitar fingerpicking' (Charters, 1975, p. 113, 112). This song challenged the way I played and through its Travis picking technique it influenced how I approached writing my track 'Diamonds'.

Folk

As folk music was becoming increasingly popular through the 1950s and 1960s, its sound and style continued to be crafted. Folk artists such as Davy Graham, Bert Jansch and John Renbourn were some of the key members in the revolution of folk music. With their own approach to the style and use of sophisticated techniques they have set a more in-depth, complex standard for folk music thus broadening the genre and how we perceive folk. This type of innovation in folk music has revolutionised the way we can play the guitar and has spawned interest in up and coming artists, such as the modern fingerstyle community. One technique that is popular within folk music is the previously mentioned Travis picking technique. With the folk revival from the 1950s it was common to cover and adapt traditional English folk songs, such as 'Angie' and 'Scarborough Fair' (Renbourn, 2000, pp. 4-6).

Guitar player, Davy Graham, pushed boundaries and is known as one of the most influential folk guitarists of the 20th century. Born in England 1940, 'This intense, bushy-haired young man was forging acres of new ground during the early 60s; every other guitarist in Britain was watching him very closely indeed' (Leech, 2010, P. 21). Graham wrote the traditional folk song 'Angie' in 1959. 'Angie' was on Davy Graham's first EP called *3/4AD* (1962). Graham was also one of the first musician to popularise the open tuning DADGAD. 'Around 1962 he began using the DADGAD guitar tuning, most notably in his arrangement of 'She Moves Through the Fair' (Leech, 2010, p. 21). This tuning went on to be adapted by many acoustic guitar players. DADGAD is a modal tuning using diatonic scales which means its opened strummed sound is neither major nor minor. As Harper mentions 'Davy Graham was on a mission to become the master of his instrument' (Harper, 2006, p. 86). With Grahams individual approach to the guitar being a historic breakthrough to the concept of fingerstyle, his mission of mastering his instrument would enlighten audiences to the concept of solo acoustic guitar which had never been done before, 'Graham had single-handedly introduced Britain to the concept of the folk guitar instrumental' (Harper, 2006, p. 88). Graham's song 'Angie' is being a well-recognised solo acoustic guitar piece with which he set the bar for solo acoustic guitar. This would lead other artists such as Bert Jansch, John Renbourne and Simon and Garfunkel to follow in his footsteps, inspired by Graham's work, these artists would seize the non-traditional solo steel string acoustic guitar style and adapt it in to their own work, thus challenging the genre of solo instrumental music.

Bert Jansch had his own style and individualism as a guitar player but was also an admirer of Davy Graham's work. He had known Graham since he was young and to a degree his guitar

playing emulated that of Graham. ‘In terms of guitar playing, Jansch was influenced both by the blues and by his peers, especially Davy Graham’ (Leech, 2010, P. 26). Jansch would write acoustic instrumentals before finding his voice and becoming an acoustic singer songwriter. He also covered ‘Angie’ and this was the first version I heard. Jansch was in the popular folk group Pentangle. Their earlier compositions (Pentangle, 1988) inspired me to try and use the guitar to achieve a full band sound. Folk as a genre is still thriving in the modern era, as artists such as Ben Howard (Howard, 2011) and Ed Sheeran (Sheeran, 2011) continually pioneer folk with approaching the guitar with new features like looping and effect processing.

Modern Fingerstyle

The acoustic guitar and its many aesthetic qualities can be manipulated by the player to compose pieces that contain full orchestration. Modern fingerstyle has made its way into the music world and is now considered its own individual genre containing a variety of styles. Don Ross discusses Michael Hedges saying that modern fingerstyle has become a meeting ground for all other genres (Roller, 2017, 42:55). Music performed on the acoustic guitar in a modern fingerstyle approach can be extremely varied in terms of genre, dynamics and tonal aspects with possibilities that are almost endless. Michael Hedges performed modern fingerstyle music and he was renowned as the pioneer of the new genre. Little (2015), makes the point that ‘just as Jimi Hendrix revolutionised the electric guitar via his broad imagination and bold execution, Michael Hedges had a similar impact on acoustic guitarists with his ground-breaking technique, changing how the acoustic guitar is played and perceived by many’. Hedges studied at the Peabody Conservatory collecting a series of ideas and techniques through his own research into many composers ranging across multiple genres (Raitt, 2011, P. 23). His ideas set the stage and went on to inspire the world of modern fingerstyle. His ‘research-led practice’ analysing different styles and genres allowed him to make, ‘intuitive and intellectual leaps towards the creation of new knowledge’ (Smith & Dean, 2009, p. 43).

When I emulate modern fingerstyle, I work around its natural traits which include a collection of playing ideas that Hedges further developed such as his ability to adapt new tunings when writing each of his compositions, the tonal range of the instrument and percussive hits (Raitt, 2011, P. 12). Hedges is important in the development of modern fingerstyle as he was an all-round composer and not just a guitar player; he would use the acoustic guitar to write his compositions as it allowed him to ‘Dream out loud’. In his vision, there were fewer limitations through the use of the acoustic guitar as opposed to other instruments and every time he approached the guitar he felt able

to innovate (Raitt, 2011, P. 1). Hedges found new and exciting ways to manipulate the guitar to best suit his inner musical ideas, in particular through the use of ‘alternative guitar tunings and combinations of notes’ (Raitt, 2011, P. 12). As can be heard in Hedges’ music, such as ‘Aerial Boundaries’ (1984) and ‘Ritual Dance’ (1990) his approach to the guitar was unique of its time which gave great motivation to many other musicians who wanted to challenge the traditional playing style of the standard acoustic guitar.

Another key artist, Jon Gomm, has added his own essence to the revolution of modern fingerstyle by his approach to the guitar that has allowed him to create individual techniques. In Gomm’s composition ‘Passionflower’ he employs all the techniques discussed earlier as well as additional methods, such as bending the pitch of a note up, down or both by the use of his tuning pegs on the head stock. The rate at which he can change pitch is greater than that of normal guitars as he manually fitted a banjo tuning peg onto the head stock of his guitar on the high B and E strings. This allowed the pitch to ascend and descend at a greater speed as well as to give Gomm greater control over the sound and pitch he wants to achieve. This method of thinking has resulted in a non-traditional technique being implemented into his personal style. This technique can be heard in Gomm’s piece ‘Passionflower’ at (0:47). This led me to experiment with the pitch bending technique he displayed; although I did not have a banjo tuning peg on my guitar, I still experimented and eventually approached the technique in a different way through guitar effects and processes such as octave pedals.

Thomas Leeb is another modern fingerstyle artist who has contributed to my development as a musician. Leeb’s ability to think as a drummer while composing on the guitar is a mindful state which I wanted to achieve. I experimented with all the drum sounds accessible to me to find the correct method in approaching percussion on the guitar for composing. These sounds can be located on the guitar in many different locations allowing the composer to consider the timbre of his percussion elements in his composition. An example of carefully thought out timbre can be found in Thomas Leeb’s track ‘Desert Pirate’ (Leeb, 2007). This song features an abrasive ‘whoosh’ sound in the percussion and can be heard at the start of the track. The effect comes from Leeb’s ability to scratch the surface of his guitar in a soft, subtle fashion to achieve the desired sound for his composition. Leeb is able to achieve this sound as he has a rough piece of wood fitted on to his guitar to enable him to produce this distinctive sound.

Tommy Emmanuel is an all-round fingerstyle guitar player. Emmanuel’s technique on the guitar has been achieved through years of intense practice and learning songs. He creatively adapts music from all genres into his playing, he achieves this through considering melodies being heard

and finding a way to play all the different melodies on one guitar. Emmanuel openly discusses his method of practice and his approach to his technique and song writing, he considers himself an adaptive player. His music, particularly his rendition of 'Classical Gas' (Emmanuel, 1995) showed me ways to incorporate modern fingerstyle idioms into my playing.

Tobias Rauscher is my most influential modern fingerstyle composer who sets the standard in writing music for modern fingerstyle. Rauscher creatively employs all the techniques found in modern fingerstyle; his compositions such as, 'Memories II' and 'On the Run' (Rauscher, 2014) are some of the key songs that captivated my attention towards the style and led me to pursue similar music. The way Rauscher works with percussion, melody and structure were the highlights of my interest and it was researching these factors that helped me to emulate the style but to develop it in my own way. Through analysing Rauscher's music added to my other influences I was able to branch out from Rauscher to write my own original music that would reflect my influences and detail my song writing abilities as a composer.

4:Album Analysis

The acoustic guitar may be described as a wooden box with strings but as I explored the different features and techniques, I began to realise that this instrument meant that I could become my own one-man band with all the different aspects of instrumentation and timbre at my fingertips. The tuning DADGAD allowed me, as a fingerstyle artist, to approach the guitar differently and explore with every technique I had. This would force me into new territory as a musician and channel my energy into developing a different standard in playing the guitar. The guitar itself has not changed, shape, sound and standard tuning have remained the same for centuries but, although the guitar has stayed the same, 'it has accommodated more diverse players, techniques, and styles than any other instrument in use today' (Coelho, 2003, p. 4). Track by track I will now discuss idioms drawn from influences and explain my experimental approach towards writing my songs. Writing an album was a learning experience, I shall touch on some of the things that I would do differently in writing a second modern fingerstyle album.

Change

Written as a solo acoustic guitar piece 'Change' is one of my first compositions in the modern fingerstyle world, the tuning is Eb, G, D, G, Bb, D and features many of the new techniques that I have incorporated into my playing style. The introduction of the song begins with a soft descending arpeggio pattern where I simply pluck individual notes into a standstill harmonic bass note phase at 0:17 seconds in, followed by a declining slide on the bottom string leading into the verse. As I start to introduce some hi hat type sounds with my thumb hitting the bottom string, allowing me to keep a steady flow I was then able to fold into a pre-chorus section. The pre-chorus drops the hi hat sound and focuses more on a harmonic resonance accompanied by a bass drum and tom sound at 1:02. This was achieved and produced by my hand hitting the saddle of the guitar to get the bass drum effect and my thumb gently hitting the side of the sound hole to make the light tom sound. I then bring my fingers in and start to hit the strings using my nails, this creates a sharper timbre. This worked with my idea of progression as my hand was in a capable position to build harmonic/ rhythmic dynamics to follow on into the chorus of the track at 1:17. With the chorus being the hook of the track I make sure to use many techniques to capture a band perspective with one guitar. Utilising both hands in a melodic and rhythmic way, techniques I use include; kick drum with palm of hand, slides, harmonic rakes and snare drum sounds. After the chorus, we enter the interlude at 1:31, which brings the song down in terms of dynamics and re utilises the hi hat sound for a transition into a short but steady kick drum section. At 1:47 I employ a technique used in Tommy Emmanuel's 'Classical Gas' (Emmanuel, 1995) at 1:37 Emmanuel incorporates percussive elements to follow through to another section of the song. I use a similar method at 1:47 but apply variation, which leads back into the verse. Once we reach the middle eight of the track at 3:25 the song uses brief silences and sharp strummed accents alongside melodic, harmonic slaps. I wanted to achieve an almost reverse type sound with muted/ muffled strings and percussive slaps and proceed into the final chorus with an ascending passage of harmonic slaps and body hits of the guitar at 3:59. The outro at 4:35 is strummed in a descending fashion and here I focus on lowering dynamics before bringing the song to a final close with a harmonic rake. 'Change' took influence from artists such as Tommy Emmanuel, and Tobias Rauscher. Emmanuel's use of technique and Rauscher's use of structure in the song 'Memories II' (Rauscher, 2014) played a huge role in constructing 'Change'.

Juices

'Juices' is a standard tuning instrumental E, A, D, G, B, E written for acoustic guitar in the key of A minor, using standard, extended and percussive techniques previously mentioned. The folk

song builds on a foundation of modern fingerstyle with a blues influence. The intro starts with a free style feel plucking then gently brushing the main chords of the track, which are A minor and G major. From this I add variation by ascending and descending a semi tone on the bass note; this leads to more variation on the higher register before forming a full chordal sound for the verse section at 0:27. The chords ring out much more in the verse and is accompanied by lead lines of melody that sing the song. In the pre-chorus at 0:52, I push the chords being played, alongside the chords are single note descending melody's which help evolve the passage into a key change, A major at 0:59. Once the chorus concludes the second-time round at 2:15, I enter a solo section, this features me utilizing the flat-picking technique for the first part of the solo before I put aside the pick and continue to solo with fingerpicking technique at 2:41. This changes the solo as I work with finger roles to achieve more complex solo patterns before closing the song with a kick drum sound. Influences for this song include Pentangle tracks 'Waltz', 'Mirage' and 'Pentangling' (1988, tracks 8, 6 and 4). Lead breaks in 'Juices' pre-chorus section leading into the chorus (0:59) were inspired by 'Waltz' (1988, track, 8) at 1:01).

Doctor

'Doctor', written in the style of the blues. The song is in standard tuning and is played in the key of E major. 'Doctor' uses various blues turn-arounds, some original and some borrowed from the classic blues idiom found in the intro to Robert Johnson's song 'Kindhearted Woman' (2008, track, 6). With the input of selective standard and extended techniques combined with vocals I composed this blues standard track with a basic driving finger style groove. The song features a solo section at 2:33 where I use fingerpicking to achieve an intimacy with the strings, this allowed me to have great control over the strings sound. I could make the strings sound sharp or muted with using my fingers as opposed to using a plectrum. I used a lick from Tommy Emmanuel's track 'Guitar Boogie' (1990, track 11, 0:43) at the start of the solo but instead of playing it at the speed and pitch shown in his track I slow the melodic line down and play it an octave lower to give 'Doctor' a strong feel of the blues.

Diamonds

'Diamonds', is written in standard tuning and features standard, extended and percussive techniques. Composed in the key of B minor 'Diamonds' is written with a pop feel but still falls in the category of other genres such as blues, folk, and hard/soft rock. When composing 'Diamonds', I aimed to achieve a pulsating melodic drive which would act as the head of the song, once I felt

content with my verse, chorus, solo sections and space I started to think about the narration of the song through melody. The structure of this track is key to its status of a driving composition. For the first phase, the song crosses between intro and verse creating a back and forth drive that helps build tension towards the first chorus at 0:57. I then bring the track down with control over dynamics to prepare for the next part of the song. A short solo section follows at 1:19, here I add a layer of finger picked electric guitar as opposed to flat picking. I employed finger picking in the solo as I wanted to create a more intimate atmosphere between the guitar's harmonic tones. I lead back into the intro at 1:43 and follow with the verse and an extended chorus before leading into the interlude at 2:45. Following with the solo section at 3:05, the acoustic guitar provides a steady backing with bouncing bass notes, struck descending melodies and the guitar's hi hat sound; this left space for the electric guitar to take the stage. In the solo section I aim to emulate a Red Hot Chili Peppers' solo I appreciate, the song 'I could have lied' (1991, track 6). It features a soft crunch distortion solo guitar alongside melodic elements, and I aim to achieve this sound as well as employing fingerpicking to the electric guitar for the songs solo section.

Beneath

'Beneath' was written in the guitar's standard tuning and is a solo acoustic instrumental in the key of E minor. The track features standard, extended and percussive techniques previously stated. Implementing key techniques led me to look closer in to the structure of the piece and to think how I could layer my new-found knowledge of techniques into linking with one another to create a driving musical composition. 'Beneath' contains many sections; when I wrote the tune I found myself playing around with different melodies and linking them in without a set structure, this made some of the material seem diffused. I aimed to set apart sections and started associating melodies with key parts of the song. This helped to make 'Beneath' form better as a song. The intro starts with descending chords from G major to E minor before leading to the main riff of the song at 0:15. This leads the song into a descending pattern at 0:43 which incorporates the Travis picking technique. The pre-chorus of the song rises in pitch to build tension before introducing a percussive kick drum at 0:55 to lead into the chorus of the track. Here I use the hi hat sound with my right hand while playing the chorus melody, following this is a descending pattern at 1:05, here I use slide techniques combined with Travis picking to bring the song back round to the main riff. At 2:48 I enter an interlude which brings in some of the percussive techniques such as kick and snare drum. The interlude concludes with the use of harmonic slaps and naturel harmonics at 3:23 leading in to the self-accompanied guitar solo, this was achieved by employing the Travis picking technique.

Thomas Leeb's album 'Desert Pirate' (2007) and Pentangle's album 'The Pentangle' (1988) had great influence on me in the process of writing this track.

Devil's Play

'Devil's Play' is an instrumental solo guitar piece inspired by Tobias Rauscher mainly tracks such as 'Memories II' and 'Acousticore'; the tuning of the composed piece is D, G, D, G, Bb, D from low to high, written with a combination of melodic passages and elements of percussion; In the beginning of 'Devil's Play' I fused melody and percussion together using harmonics. I would allow the harmonics to resonate with one another while striking different harmonics across the neck. The resulting pattern constitutes a repeating riff, to which I add variations. For example, I use my left hand to create a snare break to complement the melodic passage. I enter a break in the song at 2:38, aiming to create a similar feel to Rauscher's 'Memories II' (2014) at 1:12. I employ a similar percussive kick sound, but I locate the sound in a different section of the guitar, as well as this I conjure my own riff with the accompanying percussion. From this I use another idea Rauscher displays in his song 'Acousticore' (2015) at 0:24 seconds in he performs a hi hat sound by hitting the string with the tip of his fingers on his right hand, he then hits the string faster creating a fast pulsating hi hat sound. I aimed to emulate this in 'Devil's Play' at 3:00 with using a similar idea but performed with a kick drum rather than the hi hat sound.

Trouble

'Trouble' was written with influence from Ben Howard's EP 'The Burgh Island' (2012); my aim was for this track to create an atmospheric drive which flows with aspects of open tuning resonance and a combination of percussive techniques. The tuning of the song is Eb, G, D, G, Bb, D. 'Trouble' begins with a percussive kick and strike of the opening chord, and from there I play an arpeggio pattern that concludes with sliding down the neck and pulling off to the open chord. Here I apply sounds from the guitar's body to emulate a drum break leading into the intro section at 0:12. Using harmonic slaps, percussive slaps and a combination of natural harmonics, hammer on and pull offs I play a soft melodic pattern which descends on the bass notes leading to another short drum break which brings in the verse of the song at 0:45. I slam down my index finger on the 7th fret on the bottom three strings; this is played alongside a percussive kick and plucked open strings using the right hand. This section raises the dynamics of the track to maintain impact and create distinction in the song. From here I enter the pre-chorus at 1:08 using a melody constructed in the higher register; the melody takes influence from the chorus of Ben Howards track 'To Be Alone' (2012, track 3) at 1:54. The song leans towards the chorus but goes in for a second verse then pre-

chorus. The chorus at 2:11 being the head of the song creates a subtle dynamic change in the music through use of my right hand, I use the palm of my hand to create a steady kick drum, I also use my clenched hand to hit the strings with my fingers to create a sharp resonance. The song features a finger picked acoustic solo at 4:15 using the Travis picking technique before entering a finger picked electric guitar solo section at 4:29.

Angie (cover)

‘Angie’ is a complex song that has a descending bass line while the melody rings out on the off beats. This is the Travis picking technique. As the song ‘Angie’ is well-covered by the likes of Bert Jansch (2001) and Simon and Garfunkel (1985), after listening to their versions of the track I decided to adapt some of the new modern, percussive techniques that I had learned to modernise it and make it fresh. John Renbourn’s work on guitar (1986) was extremely useful in learning ‘Angie’ but it was still a difficult task as I struggled with the multi voice Travis picking in the main riff. Only by constant practice playing the melody was I able to achieve my technique. Additional techniques and processes that are more established these days, such as modern day percussive elements were used to recreate ‘Angie’ in my own voice. A choreographed improvisation in the middle eight is also used to divide the piece.

Conclusion

The answer to the question in my thesis was answered through exploration of technique combined with research of fingerstyle and modern fingerstyle artists. Through analysis of performance practice fused with past and present influences, I was able to experiment with modern fingerstyle consequently creating and showcasing an album that represents the style giving the albums stylistic features. Through research I found new artists who have inspired me; this led me to find a catalogue of techniques which I have studied, emulated and practised. While incorporating these ideas in my music, I have also developed new techniques in the vein of the style (such as the percussive-harmonic passages in ‘Devil’s Play’), thus furthering and adding to the growing repertoire. Considering the new concept of modern fingerstyle guitar playing, it is important that we continue as a community to push what we know and discover other distinctive ways to approach the guitar. This also shows how music has yet to evolve and how new artists should be more and more aware of the guitar’s role in past music and how its shape and sound changed with different comings of music genre, thus allowing musicians to challenge what they know and explore new possibilities.

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