Reviews

Events

Futura 2000

Festival International D’Arts Acousmatique, Crest, France, 23–26 August 2000

Reviewed by Lawrence Fritts
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From its beginnings in 1993 as a two-day festival of French acousmatic music, the Futura Festival International D’Arts Acousmatique has grown into a four-day series of events featuring 124 works by composers from 18 countries. Organized by Denis Dufour, Futura 2000 took place August 23–26 in Crest, France, a small medieval town 60 miles south of Lyon. Guest composers included Michel Chion, Georges Gabriele, Laurent Ho, and Alexandre Yterce.

The events were held in La Tour de Crest, a 13th-century castle which proved an ideal setting for the festival’s presentations. Concerts of acousmatic works for tape alone—there were none for instruments or video—took place in four main rooms. Installations incorporating sculpture, painting, and interactive computer were situated throughout the castle, providing considerable visual context and creating an effective atmosphere for the festival. The concerts were presented in four formats: Acousma Radiophonica, a room in which longer radiophonic works were presented on a two-channel system; Acousma Domestica, a small listening room where short tape pieces ran continuously, according to a posted schedule, on a four-channel system; Acousma Da Camera, a medium-sized hall where works were presented on a 16-channel system; and Acousma D’Orchestra, where longer works were diffused on a 24-channel system on the top floor of the castle.

Both the Acousma Radiophonica and Acousma Domestica concerts eschewed sound projectionists, creating an intimate environment which encouraged listeners to develop a one-on-one relationship with each work. Most effective were the radiophonic works based on voice narratives, such as Robert Cohen Solal’s Les Shadoks, a highly entertaining work adapted from a 1968 science fiction animation film. Jacki Apple’s The Culture of Disappearance is a more somber work, recounting a list of atrocities committed against human and animal cultures. Set against a backdrop of alternating overdubbed choral lament and sounds of industrial encroachment, the narrator enumerates various instances of extinction in North America during the 19th and 20th centuries. In contrast, Roland Cahen’s La Culture Concrète is a playful and inventive interplay between the voice of a young boy and expertly manipulated close-miked objects. The dialogue between the voice and the physical world in which it resides evolves into an evocative and structurally sophisticated work.

Other radiophonic works included Dieter Kaufmann’s Dialogue Avec Wittgenstein, Luc Ferrari’s L’Escalier des Aveugles, and Beatriz Ferreyra’s Le Petit Poucet Magazine. The Acousma Da Camera and Acousma D’Orchestra concerts were presented by a well-rehearsed team of projectionists. The Acousma Da Camera sound system was asymmetrically arranged with speakers placed around and within the audience’s listening space. This arrangement was used to excellent effect, especially in such sonically demanding works as Elsa Justel’s intensely rhythmic Mats. Focused frequency bands from the composer’s carefully crafted sounds were presented in three-dimensional space by projectionist David Behar in a way which musically articulated the larger structures of the work. The rhythmic suppleness and vitality of the work seems to grow out of the smallest materials, primarily samples of small hand drums, and extend into ever-expanding phrases to create a work of powerful unity and drama. Ms. Justel’s morphological compositional aesthetic was shared by Ricardo Nilini’s On Swings and Folds, which features finely wrought sounds constructed out of small, iterative fragments. A resonance filter, along with other processes, helps unify sonic material which the composer has shaped into wonderful long arcs. Other works, such as Regine Cabanes’s Carapaces 2, required a more motion-oriented approach to spatialization. In this piece, time-expanded sibilants from a childlike voice grow into colorful washes of sustained, swirling harmonies, projected at this concert into the listening space as subtly moving sound images by Jonathan Prager. Another notable work using the voice was Georgia Spiropoulos’s Paralogismes. In a festival dominated by works of extreme sonic clarity, this piece was a model of transparency, meticulously projected by Mr. Prager in crystalline detail. Like these and other works for voice, Berangere Maximin’s Salem Pepsy Joke also had a humorous quality, punctuated here by a variety of coarse, broadband sounds.

A number of works on the festival were derived from recognizable instrumental sounds in ways that seemed to comment upon, rather than obscure, the source material. For example, Jean Mahtab’s Hors Antennes explores the aesthetic im-
plications of extending the concept of audio distortion of an instrumental source into other musical domains. As the source sound, a cello, becomes increasingly distorted over the course of the work, so do its melodic, rhythmic, and gestural figures. By the end, the transformation from the smooth, linear contours of the cello into irregular, angular, hard-edged sounds is complete. A different approach to incorporating the cello as source material was represented by David Berezan’s Unheard Voices, Ancient Spaces. Here, microtonal pitch-shifts of arco and pizzicato sounds extend the cello’s voice to create a compositional space of great depth and resonance. The electric guitar made an appearance in several other works, including Robert Mackay’s Postcards from the Summer. This is an exuberant work, rhythmically propelled, with the aid of Frédéric Kahn’s projection, from one sound world to the next. After climaxing in an energetic display of rock guitar pyrotechnics, the piece concludes with a contemplative setting of overlaid organ-like sounds. Alexandre Navarro’s Kio also features the sounds of a guitar, here in the form of a reversed recording of tonic-supertonic chord patterns intercut with “concrète” material. The work develops nicely out of the tension arising between closely- and distantly-related sounds. A more straightforward, but effective, use of pre-recorded musical material was heard in Lubna Loop, by Geoffroy Dadier, in which complex layers of transformations gradually fade out to reveal a simple, unaffected song loop.

While pitched sounds figured prominently in many works of the festival, they tended to be used in atmospheric, rather than structural, ways. One of the most evocative was Eleonore Bak’s Les Gardiens du Son. Here, isolated high-pitched sounds are presented in a spare, almost uninterpreted time-space. As the piece progresses, reverberation and multiple-tap delays act to sustain high-frequency regions of the sound, evolving into a slow meditation on the pitches C–B. Agnes Poisson’s sensitive placement in the concert of these frequencies in vertical and horizontal space helped evoke the poignancy of the work. A more complex and integrated handling of pitch could be found in Erik M’s Frame. Throughout this strongly imaginative and compelling work, the composer displays an absolutely confident handling of a wide variety of sonic and formal materials. The composer’s sensitivity to the pitched aspects of sounds contributes to the work’s overall harmonic interest, which seems to derive from overlaid tertian structures. These harmonies shift in blocks and layers within a richly-textured formal design, clearly articulated by Ms. Poisson’s projection. Hans Tutschku’s Resorption-Coupure presented a similarly multi-layered approach. This is an intriguing work whose interest derives from a sophisticated and lively interplay of short, scattered sounds and longer, layered phrases.

The Acousma D’Orchestra concerts were held in the evening on the top floor of the castle, a wide space which provided discrete separation of the 24-channel sound system’s loudspeakers. The symmetrical arrangement (including speakers suspended from the ceiling) over such a wide area helped ensure that sounds retained their spatial intentions. Works with such deep stereo imaging as Francis Dhomont’s Frankenstein Symphony took excellent advantage of this environment, especially with the aid of Philippe Fauchart’s projection. Virtually stitched together out of fragments of pieces by 22 composers, this one-hour-movement hybrid is a stunning work of acousmatic virtuosity in which anything seems possible. A wonderful moment of musical sorcery occurs in the Scherzo (Giocoso) movement, in which the sounds of a traffic jam are transformed into a gaggle of honking geese. Another large-scale work that drew on forms from the past was guest composer Michel Chion’s 24 Preludes à la Vie. Modeled after the preludes of Bach and Chopin, Mr. Chion’s 42-minute work is “transposed” from one timbral area to another, each with its own characteristic register, density, means of transformation, and source material. This is a demanding work in which material is presented in a stark, almost roughly-hewn manner, requiring that the listener make connections between such divergent sources as drum machines, guitars, oscillators, and a range of non-specific, but evocative, sound worlds. The festival concluded with Nuit Blanche, an all-night concert featuring works by Robert Normandeau, Ivo Malec, Ragnar Grippe, Aphex Twin, Trevor Wishart, and others.

Denis Dufour and his staff did an admirable job of selecting, organizing, and presenting a wide variety of electroacoustic compositions. The sound quality of the performances was uniformly excellent and it was a genuine pleasure to hear acousmatic music projected with such care. In the span of a few years, the Futura Festival has clearly evolved into an important international venue for presenting works from both new and established composers of acousmatic music.

Events
Music for Humans: International Computer Music Conference 2000 “Gateways to Creativity”

Berlin, Germany, 27 August–1 September 2000

Reviewed by Thomas Gerwin
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This year’s International Computer Music Conference (ICMC), one of the most important events in contemporary electroacoustic music, took place in Berlin from 27 August to 1 September 2000. Some 500 contributors, musicians, and researchers from all over the world presented and discussed their works and ideas. There were over 140 lectures, papers, presentations, and podium discussions in different locations around the region of Potsdamer Platz: the Berlin Philharmonic building, the State Library, the New National Gallery and the National Art Gallery, and various other cultural buildings. The music program of 20 concerts took place at the Matthäuskirche, the Akademie der Künste, and the Podewil Center for Contemporary Art.

The ICMC events received a friendly, sometimes delighted echo in the culture of Berlin. The city houses a growing and very active group of artists using electronics in their pieces and is a regular host to major festivals and concerts of electronic, electroacoustic, and all kinds of contemporary art-music events. Berlin has, in my opinion, a leading position worldwide in its sustained and growing receptivity to contemporary sonic art.

The ICMC organizers—Conference Chair Peter Castine, Music Chair Martin Supper, and Papers Chair Ioannis Zannos—are to be commended for their organization and presentation of the heterogeneous materials submitted, and for coordinating the entire program, including the ICMC concerts. Overall, there was a fluent and relaxed stream of information and events flowing through the whole conference. The event was very ambitious, perhaps a bit too much so; the press release statement that the aim of ICMC 2000 was for “public understanding about the role of new media in daily life and to provoke people to reflect consciously on modern culture” was perhaps more of an ideal than a reality. Nevertheless, the conference imparted a true sense of contemporary currents and was conducted with sincerity and rigor.

The symposia further consolidated the status and importance of electronic music, whose history spans some sixty or more years. Electronic music is today an institution and a genre, no longer a mere technical or aesthetic revolution, as it was once perceived. Rather, it encompasses information and different approaches to topics of contemporary relevance, and is able to be received as such. For this reason, the conference witnessed no great avant-gardist sensationalism or scandal. Instead, new aspects and developments of computer music unfolded in a kind of continuity. This held true both for the conference and the musical performances proper.

Because of the high quality of the Proceedings documentation [available from the International Computer Music Association, ISBN 0-9667927-2-6], I prefer to concentrate my review on the highlights of the concerts. The music program consisted of two or three concerts per day [20 in all], five sound installations at different locations, and—new this year to the conference—a so-called “Off-ICMC.” More about this later. The music chair, Martin Supper, is head of the Electronic Studio of Berlin University of the Arts. He conducted the selection jury and created the form and order of every concert. He, in agreement with the Music Jury, also chose the pieces for the ICMC 2000 compact disc. This excellent collection contains pieces by Horacio Vaggione [France], Cort Lippe [USA], Marc Ainger [USA], Agostino di Scipio [Italy], Richard Nance [USA], and Gerhard Eckel [Austria] and Vincent Royer [France].

The concert pieces and installations were selected by an international jury: Alex Arteaga [Spain], Elsa Justel [Argentina], Robin Minard [Canada], and Volker Straebel (Germany). They chose approximately 60 works from over 600 submissions. In addition to these choices was the incorporation, through invitation, of three historical works to broaden the scope and musical texture of the concerts. Gottfried Michael Koenig’s filigreed Intermezzo [1985–1991], for ensemble, was performed on the Thursday evening. During intermissions all through the conference, Iannis Xenakis’s famous Concret PH was played, a tape piece he had composed for the Philips Pavilion of the 1958 Brussels World Fair. For this work, the composer recorded cooling charcoal as well as the signal from a burning microphone. Then he cut the tapes into very small lengths and spliced them back together out of sequence and with different modular variety. Because of these composition procedures, Mr. Supper commented that “this can be considered a preliminary form of what in contemporary computer music is achieved with granular synthesis.”

The third historic piece, HPSCHD, by John Cage and Lejaren Hiller, opened the conference, performed with 51 harpsichordists, 51 tape ma-
chines, and 58 loudspeakers. The loudspeakers filled the large foyers of the Philharmonic on its several levels as well as the Chamber Music Hall. The concert venue continued through an open passage up to the Museum of Musical Instruments where some of the loudspeakers and keyboard players were more concentrated. The concept of this performance was different from others I have experienced because the harpsichord sounds were spread over a large area. It was a kind of “mobile” concert, impossible to hear everything at the same time or as a unity. Thus, textural density was given up and the musical operations were exposed clearly as chance operations, but the “Spirit of John Cage” pervaded the whole area that evening.

Two concerts took place in the official program each day, one at 2:30 pm in Mattäuskirke, and another at 8:00 pm in the Concert Hall of the Academy of the Arts or [on Thursday] in the Concert Hall of the University, the place where Herbert von Karajan made his famous recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic. All pieces were diffused on a multi-channel sound system [8 outputs, and sometimes more] during the concerts. Even the pieces in stereo format were performed spatially, mostly by the composer in person. Loudspeaker positions varied from concert to concert. Here are some notable pieces in order of appearance.

28 August, 2:30 pm, Mattäuskirke. One flute generates a whole orchestra in Rainer Bürck’s fine Flautando (1998), which won first prize at the 1999 Musica Nova competition. Derrière la porte la plus éloignée... is an intricate composition made of concrète sounds and soundscapes by Gilles Gobeil, and was a finalist at the 1999 Bourges International Festival.

8:00 pm, Akademie der Kunste. Akemi Ishijima’s Catalysis [1996] is a wonderful piece. She combines light sonic fabric with interesting textural turns, using noise in a thematic way. Pacific Dragon [1990] by Barry Truax oscillates between a radio play [through the natural use of the recorded material] and audiovisual shaman music [through the hypnotic repetitions of sounds and visual slides]. Ludger Brümmer’s well-calculated music came together perfectly with Silke Braemer’s miraculous animations in the audio-visual composition Le temps s’ouvre. Both the music and the animation were produced using the Genesis software from the Association pour la Création et la Recherche sur les Outils d’Expression (ACROE) in Grenoble.

29 August, 2:30 pm, Mattäuskirke. Guillaume de Machaut’s Biauté parée for three recorders was performed live on stage. After that, the like-named piece by Anna Ikramova was played using Renaissance recorders together with tape and live electronics. The idea of decomposing Machaut’s work using electronic and electronic-inspired procedures is quite a novel one, but the electroacoustic piece did not achieve the level of the original.

7:00 pm, Akademie der Kunste. Elsa Justel’s Mats [1999] was one of the rare conference works infused with humor and wit, refreshingly balanced between concrète, archaic [based on the sounds of very early instruments], and electronic sounds. One of the highlights of the whole conference for me was Cort Lippe’s Music for Hi-Hat and Computer [1998]. He utilizes in a perfect, light-handed way the complete range of possibilities for interaction with and processing through a computer, mixed with partly humorous elements of music theatre, and all generated solely from the sound of the hi-hat. I suspect that this work will become a classic like Włodzimierz Kotonski’s Etude on a Cymbal Stroke. Tim Kreger presented a nice scene in his Piano and Words [1999], with a skilled typist providing counterpoint to a computer hacker live on stage. Elizabeth Hoffman’s Manhattan Breakdown, for ensemble and live electronics, was both expressive and free. The acoustic instruments sometimes sounded electronic, and vice versa, in an interesting, interactively-processed mixture.

30 August, 2:30 pm, Mattäuskirke. One of the highlights, in terms of instrumental virtuosity, was Gordon Monro’s The Voice of the Phoenix (1997). The highly accomplished flute player Beate-Gabriela Schmitt performed this European premiere on her contrabass flute, playing with a strong sensitivity to the many nuances of the work [see Figure 1]. Another highlight, this time for tape, directly followed: Phonurgie [1998] by Francis Dhomont. In this profound work, the Canadian-French master re-invented 50 years of musique concrète and with total artistic freedom “tried to bring out the connection between Schaeffer’s moderate ‘objet’ of observation and the wildest ‘metamorphologies’ of the Art of Sound, our contemporary Ars Nova.”

8:00 pm, Akademie der Kunste. Beatriz Ferreyra’s Rio de los payaros azules [1999] is a work of rich spatial intensity. Palpable influences and re-influences from the sounds of the string quartet counterpointing the resonances of the concert hall let 5 Difference-Sensitive Circular Interactions by Agostino di Scipio be an ear-opener for tiny differences.
and nuances of sound. Dirk Reith’s Dialog from Mécanique Mon Amour, for alto sax, video projection, and live electronics, was a colorful, futuristic, and at times humorous homage to the so-called world of machines.


6:00 pm, Akademie der Kunste. Traverse (1999), by Gerhard Eckel (Austria) and Vincent Royer (France), was for me one of the major highlights of the conference. For perhaps the first time I witnessed a viola and a notebook computer performing together on stage in a fully integrated manner. Here the computer truly became a live instrument. A satisfying counterpoint to this experience was then offered by Kumiko Omura’s Imaginary Bridge (1999), a meditatively intense, slightly theatrical piece for shakuhachi and tape.

8:00 pm, Philharmonic Hall. This exciting event featured Luigi Nono’s Prometeo, performed by the Ensemble Modern as the concluding event of their extensive tour of this wonderful work. The performance was presented as part of Inventionen, an independent, Berlin-based electroacoustic festival.

1 September, 2:30 pm, Mattäuskirke. Fabio Cifariello Ciardi (Italy) skillfully incorporates acoustic and electronic processes in Games (1999), for double bass and live electronics. This work is simple, clear, and inventive, making the bass sometimes sound like a sitar, sometimes like a noisy electric guitar.

8:00 pm, Akademie der Kunste. A well-conceived work, using various analysis-resynthesis procedures on acoustic percussion samples, is Horacio Vaggione’s AGON, commissioned in 1998 by the Institut de Musique Electroacoustique Bourges (IMEB). Robert Normandeau’s Figures de rhétorique is an example of a well-balanced relationship between an acoustic instrument (piano) and tape—coherence and counterpoint at the same time. Benjamin Thigpen creates an expressive choreography of different rooms, influencing and penetrating each other, in his eight-channel Step under.

Mr. Supper defines computer music as “all kinds of music, which essentially need the computer to be produced or performed.” As a result, the possibility of listening to contemporary music other than “academic” computer music was offered at ICMC 2000. There is clearly an active scene outside of the institution-based tradition in Berlin, where, night after night, clubs present the newest DJs and VJs and Ambient, Noise, Jungle, Crossover, and other musical styles to a mostly young clientele. Thus, an “Off-ICMC” was organized, curated by Reinhold Friedel, with the aim of presenting all the non-academic currents in computer-generated music. He tried to integrate the “young electronic scene” into the venerable ICMC by providing free entrance to all ICMC events to the artists of the Off-ICMC. In addition, to cross the boundaries, he has proposed the formation of an “Alliance for Computer Music.”

Indeed, at the Off-ICMC one could experience new and interesting things, an array of occasionally fascinating acoustic art forms crossing and mixing many facets and styles of contemporary experimental and popular music. The opening of each evening was a one-hour DJ mix, beginning with Iannis Xenakis’s Concret PH and moving slowly or abruptly to other tendencies and genres. It was a testament, I feel, to attempts to increase the rapport between the “academic” and “independent electro” scenes, represented by artists such as Elliot Sharp (USA), Kozo Inada (Japan), Phil Niblock (USA), Carsten Nikolai (Germany), Toru Yamanaka (Japan), Marcus Schmickler (Germany), Kaffe Matthews (UK), Massimiliano Sapienza (Italy), artists from the Klangkrieg Resident Soundsystem, and many others.

But one thing is regrettable: not many participants of either event actually took the opportunity to cross over. Maybe it was because of the late starting times of the Off-ICMC events; maybe it was the sometimes incredible loudness of certain concerts; maybe it was the busy conference schedule (paper sessions from 9:30 am to 1 pm, a mid-afternoon concert, then paper sessions again from 4 to 6 pm, then another concert, often lasting until
11 pm or later). Yet most of those who made the effort felt excited and inspired by their experiences.

Earlier, I called Berlin a capital city of sonic art. Unfortunately, ICMC 2000 presented only five sound installations. This was a pity, considering the number and quality of international sound artists living and working in the city. I particularly liked Ted Apel’s *Surface Osculations*, which consisted of five steel plates of different sizes hanging from the ceiling (see Figure 2). Each plate was equipped with a microphone and a resonator. Conducted by computer, the sounds of each plate were recorded and processed and then “played back” on another plate, “each with its own resonant personality.”

Åke Parmerud’s interactive video/sound installation, *The Fire Inside*, was specially commissioned by the ICMC. Mr. Parmerud worked with 3D animations on a back projection and with several processes, all taken from the sounds and images of crackling fire—both interesting, but very loud. Perhaps he was trying to satirize the aesthetic of commercial video games, for the result looked and sounded like a kind of computer game. This tended to make his intentions a little too ambiguous.

Alberto Scunio’s *Green - Voice Tree* for soprano, cello, and live electronics was called a “performed installation” in the program book. It took place over three hours on 30 August. The computer transposed the initial live event, playing it back and transforming it slightly, producing a kind of tapestry within the performance time. I wonder why Mr. Scunio used this new term for a long performance where people can go in and out during the performance. The same term was used for *Color Code* (1998), presented by German Grupo Animato. There, it was used to describe an audiovisual work with hypnotic color fields and slowly evolving sounds.

*Stillegung*, a quiet, filigreed work done as a collaboration between Johannes Oberthuer (objects) and Martin Supper (sound), played with the idea of “closed” and “open” windows. It was presented in the “singuhr-hörgalerie” (Listening Gallery) of the Parochial Church, one of the places in Berlin famous for sound installations.

The Idea of David Tudor’s *Rainforest* was an interesting large installation which Ron Kuivila developed together with participants of two workshops before and during the conference. Mr. Kuivila’s ambitious and intense project was an homage to David Tudor and his project *Rainforest I–IV* (created between 1966 and 1972) as well as a basic introduction to digital music production tools such as James McCartney’s SuperCollider. This project was an initiative of the Off-ICMC.

The provisional highlight of the conference for me was Joel Chadabe’s short keynote speech, “Music for Humans.” Mr. Chadabe (see Figure 3), who had spent time in Berlin as early as 1964, ventured a kind of artistic resumé of “what we [the electroacoustic community] are doing at the turn of the century.” After a short overview of the most important developments in electronic music and its strengths, his message to the audience was inspiring: we all are building the ultimate creative instrument for artistic expression! The computer extends, on one hand, the sonic possibilities of traditional instruments to the level of the infinite, and, on the other hand, the possibilities of the composer, in capacity, complexity, and also for real-time processing. Thus, the composer not only can create the composition anew at each moment of the performance, but can also share responsibility with other people or even with the increasingly
Mr. Chadabe ended his speech with an appeal, a call to enable composers to create situations with sounds that can be shaped and interacted with by means of new controllers better and better corresponding with the abilities of the human body.” Music has been and will be made by humans for humans.

To summarize ICMC 2000 is not easy, nor is it difficult. It was a very solid and coherent program without sensations or scandals. Electronic and Computer Music is a genre, meanwhile, with borders and guidelines. Some verdicts are still in use and “protect” this particular part of New Music from becoming too popular in style on the one side or too narrative on the other. At the same time, there is a steady development of methods and techniques.

To me it looks as if the philosophy behind “academic” music is still Eduard Hanslick’s concept of absolute music. In a way, this music also tries to fulfill Arnold Schoenberg’s vision of a pure “Klangfarbenmusik,” a music of sound and timbre. In some of the pieces heard at ICMC, computer music has achieved these aims perfectly.

I also noticed a kind of “renaissance” of instrumental music, represented in various and curious combinations of acoustic instruments with computers or tape. The emancipation of noise has slowed or even moved backward a step, in my opinion. Very seldom does a composer use frequency spectra defined classically as noise. In addition, I seldom heard pieces that could be called experimental in the sense that the result is open and unforeseeable or absolutely astonishing. Instead, a lot of virtuosity, impressive craftsmanship, and sometimes even emotion was presented to colleagues and the public. Sometimes, unfortunately, the aesthetic result of a piece lagged far behind its conceptual premise.

What was quite new and thrilling was the emancipation of the computer as instrument. I have never seen such high-quality live electronics as at this year’s ICMC. This was true for both the official conference and the Off-ICMC. I anticipate for the future a point when we can think more about aesthetics and content and less about machine power and technique. We should reach a “state of the art” where it does not matter how many machines have to compute and for how long to produce this or that sonic result. I am looking forward to a time when people use the computer, the most powerful instrument we have, simply to compose “music for humans.” ICMC 2000 has taken a salutary step in this direction.

Surrounded by Sound: The 109th Convention of the Audio Engineering Society

Los Angeles, California, USA, 22–25 September 2000

Reviewed by James Harley
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The twice-yearly Conventions of the Audio Engineering Society (AES) are massive events. The autumn gatherings alternate between Los Angeles and New York, with spring-times in Paris, Amsterdam, or Munich. Audio engineers of all manner of specialization from all over the world flock to these affairs, and the Fall 2000 event, held at the Los Angeles Convention Center, was no exception. Perhaps it was the Wild West Party at the Gene Autry Museum of Western Heritage that drew the crowds. Perhaps it was the huge collection of exhibitors displaying their latest and greatest wares. Whatever the reasons, the AES Convention is always worthy of attention.

For this event, there were 16 paper sessions, 14 workshops, 13 technical committee meetings, 12 educational events, and a host of special events. In addition, the Exhibitors Hall was packed full of new and updated products from practically any manufacturer you can think of. Given the theme of the convention, “Surrounded by Sound,” I will focus on the products and research that are relevant to multichannel audio.

Research

Surround sound is by no means a done deal, to judge from the research being presented at the AES. There were two paper sessions on Perception and Psychoacoustics, with reports on research relating to issues of Head-Related Transfer Functions (HRTF), among other topics. This research included “Perceptual Soundfield Reconstruction” by James D. Johnston [AT&T Research Labs, USA] and Yin Hay Lam [University of Strathclyde, UK], “Spatial Acoustic Mode Shapes of the Human Pinna” by Yuvi Kahana and Philip A. Nelson [University of Southampton, UK], “Robustness of Acoustic Crosstalk Cancellation as a Function of Fre-
perceptual topics included “Magnitude Estimation of Sound Source Speed” by Mark A. Ericson (Air Force Research Laboratory, USA), “Correlation between Emotive, Descriptive and Naturalness Attributes in Subjective Data Relating to Spatial Sound Reproduction” by Jan Berg (Lulea University of Technology, Sweden) and Francis Rumsey (University of Surrey, UK), and “Psychoacoustic Models and Non-Linear Human Hearing” by David J. M. Robinson and Malcolm O. J. Hawksford (University of Essex, UK).

Some of the other research relating to multichannel audio included “On-the-Fly Multitrack Mixing” by François Pachet and Oliver Delarue (Sony Computer Science Laboratory, France), and “Interactive Multichannel Sound Reproduction Linked with VRML Graphics” by Setsu Komiyama, Hiroyuki Okubo, Kazuho Ono, and Koichiro Hiyama (NHK Science and Technical Research Laboratories, Japan) and Hiroshi Asayama (Timeware Corporation, Japan).

A couple of the workshops also took on aspects of multichannel audio. Tomlinson Holman, of THX fame, led an animated discussion on “How Many Loudspeaker Channels Are Enough?” Electroacoustic composers working in “acousmatic” environments may have had some pertinent comments to add, though unfortunately none had been invited to participate. For example, sitting in on two of the multichannel presentations at the convention, held in rather large halls, it was clear to my ears, sitting toward the periphery of the sound-fields, that five or six loudspeaker sets are not enough to fill in echoes of transient sounds present in more than one channel of the mix. One of the Special Events was a workshop on “Mixing 5.1 Surround Live,” led by Ron Streicher of Pacific Audio-Visual Enterprises. The issues focused on basic principles for mixing the audio “on the fly,” when there are no opportunities for re-takes. There was also a workshop on “Multichannel Audio Production for DTV [Digital Television],” a field that is beginning to see increased activity in some of the network studios.

An impressive demonstration of live streaming of high-resolution, multichannel audio over the Internet was given by Wieslaw Woszczynk and Jeremy Cooperstock of the McGill University research team in cooperation with Chris Cain of the University of Southern California [USC]. A jazz ensemble performing in Montreal was captured using 12 channels, which were sampled by two Mytek 8 × 96 digital-to-analog converters [at a rate of 24-bit/96 kHz]. The data packets were sent to Los Angeles over Internet2 [the necessary bandwidth and negotiations through various bottlenecks had been arranged in advance] where they were re-converted, monitored, then mixed for multichannel presentation in an auditorium at USC. A video feed was also sent along [separately], so that the audience could watch the musicians in Montreal. There was a latency-matching issue between the audio and the video, but the sound came in beautifully. It is not yet possible to assume that such bandwidth will be automatically available over the Internet, but no doubt the day is coming.

The Keynote Speech of the AES 109th Convention was given by well-known jazz musician, Herbie Hancock. Plagued by an untimely case of laryngitis, Mr. Hancock enlisted the aid of a couple of colleagues to present the history of his own involvement in digital audio and surround-sound production. In the late 1970s, he began building a digital studio, where all of his keyboard gear and other equipment would be fully controllable and able to be synchronized and patched through a matrix as necessary. This was in the very early days of personal computers and prior to the onset of MIDI. Mr. Hancock presented a few of his multichannel productions, including a new 5.1 mix of a live concert in London he had just performed the previous week.

For someone more used to the International Computer Music Conference [ICMC], it was interesting to witness the mix on the various panels and presentations of engineers, producers, and commercial musicians. While there may have been few pop stars at the paper sessions, the main draw for everyone was the Exhibition Hall, filled with all manner of new audio gear.

Products

One of the exhibits to attract a great deal of attention was the launch of Digidesign’s new 5.1 Pro Tools software. This package features numerous improvements and enhancements to the earlier versions of this industry-standard audio editing software, but one of its most notable new features is the ability to create surround sound [or any multichannel] mixes directly, and even to create more than one mix at a time (assuming one has the hard-
ware to support these options]. The graphic matrix for multichannel mixing that is included in the software can be expanded with various plug-ins, including Dolby Surround Tools, Kind of Loud Technology’s RealVerb 5.1 and SmartPan Pro, among others. In fact, the Digidesign display area featured a whole host of partners demonstrating their plug-ins, and one of the more impressive was the set of dynamic processors developed at the Groupe de Recherches Musicales called GRM Tools. Digidesign’s biggest rival at the show was probably Steinberg with its launch of the Nuendo Studio System, a hardware/software package that comes with eight channels of input/output and includes Surround Edition software, enabling real-time processing and mixing of surround-sound audio.

In the domain of loudspeakers, there were various companies exhibiting new or re-tooled products designed for optimal performance in a multichannel setting. These included Westlake Audio with its Lc3w12 monitors, and the Lc265.1 center channel loudspeaker. Tannoy presented its Universal SuperTweeter, arguing for decreased phase errors and increased transient performance, particularly for use with Super Audio CD format. Subwoofers were also displayed in abundance, including Genelec’s 1093A Active Subwoofer. Perhaps most intriguing was JBL’s EVO Intelligent Sound Reinforcement System. It is reported to enable digital control over room equalization, feedback suppression, delay settings, and amplifier dynamics. The system comes with EVOi.324 loudspeakers (each containing two drivers for low and mid ranges and a horn for high frequencies. The loudspeakers are monitored by the EVOi.net Controller.

Other interesting exhibitors included the Symbolic Sound team of Carla Scaletti and Kurt Hebel who were demonstrating the new 5.0 version of Kyma [bundled with the Capybara 320 hardware], which adds multichannel spatialization and panning features, among other things. The Cycling ’74 folks were also present, stirring up attention for the upgrades to both Max [4.0], MSP [2.0], and Pluggo [2.1]. They also had some interesting interfaces on hand, including the CM Automation Motor Mix controller, and the MTC Express Multi-Touch Controller. A creative extension of MIDI and audio into the visual realm the Cycling ’74 team were working with was Videodelic, developed by Eric Wenger [of MetaSynth fame]. On the nitty-gritty side, Analog Devices was promoting its Melody single-chip decoder, that works with THX Surround EX, DTS Extended Surround, and Dolby Digital. This should mean that consumers will be able to run these different encoding schemes through one processor.

There was, of course, much, much more to see at the AES Exhibition Hall—new microphones, preamplifiers, processors, consoles, amplifiers, recorders, network products, computer hardware/software, and so on. Unlike the ICMC, many people attend for a day just to browse the aisles and see what’s new. For the engineers and researchers, the glitz and hawking of the displays provided a break from the paper sessions and other presentations. The AES Convention is definitely worth attending. There is important work being done through the various Technical Committees of the AES, and it behooves all of us to keep up with the new developments. [For further information, consult http://www.aes.org.]

**Publications**

**David Cope: The Algorithmic Composer**


Reviewed by Michael Theodore Boulder, Colorado, USA

David Cope’s newest book, *The Algorithmic Composer*, is the third installment of a trilogy, of which *Computers and Musical Style* (1991) and *Experiments in Musical Intelligence* (1996) comprise the first two volumes. (These two books have also spun off three commercially available compact discs on the Centaur label: *Bach by Design*, *Classical Music Composed by Computer*, and *Virtual Mozart*.) All three volumes share the following compelling premise: “Every work of music contains a set of instructions for creating different but highly related replications of itself. These instructions, interpreted correctly, can lead to important discoveries about structure and possibly style.” The first two books describe in detail Mr. Cope’s method both for extracting these instructions into a database and for putting the instructions to use in the creation of novel works which are arguably in the style of the music contained in the database. Whereas the objective of the first two books is the use of “recom-
binancy” to create entire compositions in the style of the works in the database (by Mozart, Bach, Joplin, etc.), The Algorithmic Composer has a somewhat different orientation. The software program described within—ALICE (ALgorithmically Integrated Composing Environment)—is intended to function as a collaborative, interactive creative assistant, rather than as an independent virtual composer. The emphasis is thus on the augmentation and extension of user-composed music rather than on the creation of completed works. Mr. Cope envisions a working environment in which a composer, moments after creating a phrase of music, could request ALICE to spin out several stylistically consistent variations and transformations, which the composer could then consider as possibilities for inclusion in the work at hand. ALICE would also grow in understanding as the work proceeds, giving progressively more honed responses. As the importance of the current book lies equally with the quality of the software that is described within as with the prose contained in the book, the following offers both an overview of the program as well as reflections on the text.

The success or failure of ALICE’s output critically depends upon the quality of the database with which it works. The pieces of music in the database must all be massaged into a similar format—they should resemble one another with respect to meter, tempo, and so forth (this is to facilitate pattern-matching). The process by which databases are created is more or less the same with ALICE as it is with Mr. Cope’s Experiments in Musical Intelligence (EMI) program, and the author refers the reader to the second volume of the series for more information on this important process.

Once a robust database has been created, ALICE is ready to begin deriving rules from the music, rules which attempt to “extrapolate basic principles from examples.” This extraction of rules makes several powerful operations available. The user can view the rules from a given musical database and compare them to rules derived from another database, which may yield potentially important insights. Also, users can change the rules directly, taking, say, rules for pitches from one database and rules for rhythms from another. These types of transformations are all possible because ALICE works not with actual musical data, but with principles derived from the data.

One of the primary issues involved in analyzing the database is the determination of “grouping size,” that is, how to segment the music into meaningful chunks. When the sizes are too small, the results will be too random sounding, and when they are too large, too much of the source material will come through unchanged. ALICE addresses this problem with a “smart,” variable grouping size, collecting the vertical simultaneities that are present at the onset or termination of an event. This is, incidentally, only one example of the many quite tricky problems for which Mr. Cope has forged elegant solutions.

Once the grouping process is complete, ALICE analyzes both the pitch-class set content and voice-leading of the groups. This analysis will later closely guide the creation of new music. It is supplemented with a generalized notion of scale. In this context, scale simply refers to the predominance of some pitches over others. When faced with music in which all pitches are present more or less equally, the scale is simply mapped as a series of half steps. This definition of scale implicitly contains the notion of both scale degrees and non-scale degrees, thus subsuming tonality, modality, and atonality all under the rubric of a single system of analysis, without the need for special considerations on the part of either the programmer or the user.

Mr. Cope devotes a chapter entitled “Creativity” to the various tools the program uses to come up with new material based on the analysis described above. As one would expect, most of the techniques are tasks that composers often do “by hand.” These include such things as reversing the order of a chord progression, inverting the voice motion, using “similar” yet distinct sets, and so forth. The computer, however, offers at least two important qualities not present in humans: blazing speed, and the ability to rapidly cross-reference a large database of stylistic constraints. ALICE can thus present unlimited amounts of (arguably stylistically consistent) variations on the core materials at hand, something composers generally don’t have the time to do.

ALICE also goes beyond mere variation of rules. For example, it can create entirely new voice-leading motions that have no precursors in the original rules or in the database of
music from which the rules were derived. This is accomplished by keeping track of various lexicons (a lexicon of all pitch-class sets, a lexicon of all voice-leading possibilities, etc.), and “improvising” new rules that, while not present in any single lexicon, are consistent with all of them.

Left to their own devices, rule-based composition programs will tend to wander aimlessly (as anyone who has experimented with common implementations of algorithmic composition is well aware). ALICE therefore seeks to impose a larger structure on its creations, by first searching for, and then inheriting, structure from the music in its database. The program searches for structure in the music by looking for “meta-patterns,” middle-ground patterns which repeat over the piece’s duration and which are not necessarily contiguous. The structural composition rules are then made to conform to the general shape of these meta-patterns.

ALICE uses a special pattern matcher to aid in the location of these hierarchical patterns. The pattern matcher evaluates foreground material in terms of “importance,” and then discards all elements falling below a certain threshold. The matcher does its work by utilizing a series of weightings; these are an attempt to quantify “salience.” They refer to such things as the interval of approach, duration, metric placement, and scale degree. These weightings are then filtered according to different threshold levels (only those greater than some numerical threshold pass through the filtering). Events that successfully pass through a variety of filter threshold settings are deemed significant. The program then searches for other instances of the resultant pattern. This method has the ability to reveal structural patterns that are hidden below apparent surface dissimilarity, a process which is similar to the Schenkerian aim of extracting middle-ground patterns. Unlike Schenkerian analysis, however, it [refreshingly] makes no assumptions about what the underlying patterns should look like.

In addition to seeking out middle-ground meta-patterns, ALICE also attempts to analyze the large-scale structural flow of the works in its database. This is accomplished with a tiered approach. First, the program seeks out obvious major thematic areas. If this search fails, the program searches for areas of contrast, changes in density, or shifts in the composite rhythm. In addition, the structural analysis is combined with cadence mapping, for Mr. Cope believes that “cadences represent the hierarchical linchpins of most musical styles, and thus form the backbone of their structure.”

Certain styles of music are not especially amenable to these types of analysis (such as those in which thematic areas are continually overlapped). In these cases, rather than using randomness to determine structural proportions, ALICE uses proportions found on a lower level of structure to guide higher-level decisions. This is another elegant decision that produces results which, while not always consistent with the given models, are nonetheless guided by some kind of palpable trajectory.

A simplified version of the software, including source code, is included on a CD-ROM accompanying the book. The manuals included on the disk supplement the overview of the program that is included in the book. The program can read MIDI files created with other programs, and also contains a rudimentary notation program for inputting music. One caveat is that the version of ALICE that is included does require the rather expensive Macintosh Common Lisp (MCL) application to run (although expiring demo versions are available for free from the Digitool Web site).

This book is guaranteed to be fascinating reading for anyone who has ever given serious thought to the problem of teaching computers how to think about music, or to anyone interested in the attempt to precisely describe musical style (including composers, theorists, musicologists, and even critics). Not only has Mr. Cope done a remarkable job of steering a persuasive course through a thicket of knotty issues (and thus opening a door for truly substantive and musical work in the field), but he has also shown that the current state of the art is already capable of producing “real music.” There may be some minor quibbles with the book, for example, the attempt to at times provide a Lisp quasi-tutorial is most likely too little information to be of genuine help to the neophyte Lisp programmer and breaks the flow for those already familiar with the language (a digression on the relative benefits of looping versus recursion comes to mind). On a similar note, Mr. Cope is so clearly taken with the mechanics of it all that he sometimes explores relatively peripheral issues (such as the precise procedure by which the program reduces sets to prime form). However, we should be happy that he is prone to such attention to details, as it is precisely this trait that has enabled him to take on and conquer some of the biggest issues in computer-assisted composition and then describe it all to us in lucid prose, copiously annotated with clarifying figures, source code, and audio examples.

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Computer Music Journal
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Richard Boulanger, editor: The Csound Catalog with Audio

CD-ROM, 2000; US$ 19.95; available from cSounds.com; http://www.cSounds.com

Reviewed by Daniel Hosken
Northridge, California, USA

Introduction

The Csound Catalog with Audio (CCWA) is a CD-ROM containing over 2,000 Csound orchestra and score text files along with their rendered audio (in mp3 format in the most recent version). This project is an outgrowth of The Csound Book, also edited by Richard Boulanger, a recently published, authoritative reference guide to the popular, if somewhat arcane, direct digital synthesis software. The first chapter of The Csound Book, an extensive tutorial on instrument design written by Richard Boulanger, is provided on the CCWA disc in HTML format. The disc also includes Csound binaries for Windows, Macintosh, and Linux; the Csound source code; and a large collection of WAV and AIFF sound files grouped under the heading “Impulses and Samples.”

Because CCWA is an offshoot of the book—it has been described as the “missing 3rd CD-ROM” from that publication—the question arises as to how much it depends on the user owning the book as well. CCWA duplicates the score and orchestra files from the book’s CD-ROMs, except for most of the instruments actually referenced in the book chapters (though some are provided in collections listed under the authors’ names), and adds pre-rendered audio. Because the first chapter of The Csound Book is also available on CCWA, the score and orchestra files [without rendered audio] for that chapter are included.

For those who own the book, the primary value added to those materials by CCWA is the provision of pre-rendered audio for the Csound instruments. This is a significant feature in that the time required to render the audio for such a large number of instruments would be prohibitive. The presence of the pre-rendered audio enables a more experimental and experiential approach to examining the instruments than would otherwise be possible. The only drawback is that, because most of the instruments from the book chapters themselves are not included on CCWA, one must still render all of those examples manually.

For users without the book, the material provides a wealth of Csound examples to imitate and explore. Of particular value is the inclusion of the comprehensive Csound instrument design chapter from The Csound Book in HTML format. At US$ 19.95, CCWA provides an inexpensive entrée to the large set of features available in Csound, while still providing some valuable written tutorial materials via the included chapter.

Description

The interface to the resources of CCWA is provided in HTML format with separate index pages for Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer. After a Splash screen, the catalog is set up as a navigation frame and a content frame. The primary sections in the initial navigation frame are “The Csound Catalog,” “Learning Csound,” “Csound References,” “Csound Music,” and “Csound Software.”

The Csound Catalog

The Csound Catalog section—by title presumably the most important—has several categories, each of which leads to score and orchestra files along with the rendered audio. In general, it is not clear what aspect of Csound each of the instruments in the catalog is meant to demonstrate. Some instruments are clearly documented in the orchestra or score files, but many contain no documentation whatsoever. Even as a fairly experienced Csound user, I often had difficulty gleaning the purpose of an example from its naming shortcuts and cryptic comments. Only by carefully examining the orchestras is it possible to discover their purpose. For a new user looking for clear examples of specific techniques to emulate, this is a problem.

The most important category in the Catalog section is “Instruments with Audio,” which leads to the subcategories “Collections,” “Students,” “Internet,” and “Authors.” The “Authors” section refers to instruments provided by authors of some of the chapters in The Csound Book (and some of the chapters on the book’s CD-ROMs) that are sometimes related to the content of the chapters, but not necessarily so. These seem to be random instruments contributed by those authors. The “Internet” subcategory leads to a long list of names that presumably were respondents to Mr. Boulanger’s open call for Csound orchestra and score files. Many of these names links lead to just one or two instruments. The “Students” subcategory is organized by institution and then by student name.

The “Internet” and “Students” subcategories demonstrate the often confusing organization of CCWA. There is little reason to choose to audition instruments listed under

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names you do not recognize, and only a few names are "household names even in the Csound community. By organizing the instruments under the name of the contributor, the editor forces the user to engage in a hit and miss process with each miss requiring the re-loading of another page of audio (usually 10 audio examples per HTML page). Copying the disc to your hard drive to decrease loading times is an absolute must.

The "Collections" subcategory is grouped into "Anthologies," "Catalogs," "Books," and "Psychoacoustics." The cryptic "Anthologies" grouping provides fairly large collections from a number of Csound users. However, what makes a group of instruments an "anthology" as opposed to just some instruments grouped under their creator's name, as in the "Internet" subcategory, is not clear.

The "Catalogs" grouping provides the Amsterdam Catalog of Csound Computer Instruments (ACCCI) that has been available on the Internet for a number of years and, presumably, includes the famous 1969 computer music instruments catalog by Jean-Claude Risset. It's useful to have Csound versions of some of the Risset instruments (particularly since the original catalog is hard to come by), but the ACCCI catalog is missing the Risset catalog's most valuable feature—the flowchart graphics that show the instrument design and categorization of instruments by synthesis method. The "Books" grouping contains Csound realizations of a number of examples from Computer Music by Charles Dodge and Thomas Jerse. Unfortunately, the specific example is often not cited in the score or orchestra file or in the file names. In addition there are some odd artifacts in the infinite glissando instrument (better versions of which are on the CD-ROM in a number of different places). Under "Psychoacoustics" there are listings for "Sumy's Rossing" and "Pavan's Deutsch and Noorden." Just who are these people? Users familiar with the literature will have an idea who some of them are, but otherwise, one must assume that the examples are just some random psychoacoustic demonstrations. None of these orchestrations and scores contain references to the original publications, and only the Rossing examples contain descriptions of the psychoacoustic effect being demonstrated.

The other "Catalog" subcategories are "Impulses and Samples," "More Instruments," and "Csound Sample CDs." The latter two links take you to the cSounds.com Web site where other instruments can be found by digging around a bit and a Csound sample CD for sale has just recently been added [some ten months or so after CCWA went on sale]. "Impulses and Samples" leads to a collection of soundfiles in Audio Interchange File Format (AIFF) and WAV format that can act as input to Csound instruments. The sounds here come from a wide variety of sources and can act as a sort of "starter" sample CD.

The Csound Catalog section of the CD-ROM contains most of the important material on the disk. Many of the instrument examples are excellent if you can find what you want and figure out what it is when you find it. The biggest problem is the lack of a useful organization of the materials. Since much of it is placed under individual names, you must first seek out the name and then hope to find the instrument you desire. If the chances are you don't know most of these people, why would you look for their instruments? An organization by type of sound or synthesis technique would have been much more useful.

One small quibble with many of the examples themselves is that the scores [the "musical" material played by the instrument design] often don't demonstrate the capabilities of the instrument. There are many examples whose scores consist of a few nondescript bleeps and bloops that fail to convey to the listener the primary intent of the instrument.

Learning Csound
The Learning Csound section of CCWA contains Mr. Boulanger's original TOOTorials—thirteen instruments of increasing complexity that demonstrate a variety of sound design techniques—and his "Introduction to Sound Design in Csound" chapter from The Csound Book. The user must obtain the orchestra and score files for the "toots" and the book chapter from a zipped archive on the CD-ROM. They do not include the pre-rendered audio component. Both the tutorials and the book chapter cross-reference unit generators via hyperlink to the HTML version of the Csound [Reference] Manual contained on the CD-ROM.

Considering CCWA as a stand-alone CD-ROM, the inclusion of the book chapter is one of its best features. The chapter provides a full-blown introduction to using Csound along with good discussions of topics such as digital audio sampling rates, resolution, and aliasing. In addition, there are sample exercises that can serve as self-guided explorations of the topics under discussion. The CD-ROMs that accompany The Csound Book contain this chapter and many others in HTML format with similar hyperlinking to the Reference Manual.
Csound References, Csound Music, and Csound Software

The Csound References section includes links to the Csound manual (on the CD-ROM), the Csound Frontpage (mitpress.mit.edu/e-books/csound/frontpage.html), the Csound Magazine (www.csounds.com/ezine/), and the Csound Book (via cSounds.com). These links provide the core of available information on Csound, with the Csound Frontpage acting as the Web nexus. The reference manual is probably the most useful inclusion in this category, although Hans Mikelson’s Csound ezine consistently contains interesting articles on a variety of synthesis techniques in Csound (including a regular section “for beginners”).

The Csound Music category contains links back to cSounds.com where there is a link to audio files for several pieces by various composers and a new Csound CD for sale entitled “Young Masters, Vol. 1” [and perhaps more by the time you read this]. The Csound Software section contains links to Csound binaries for the PowerMacintosh, Linux, and Windows versions, including a real-time version of Csound for Windows.

Practical Issues

Because of the amount of audio that loads for each page, users really must copy CCWA to a hard drive for it to be of much use. Otherwise, the time required to load the examples discourages exploration—even the limitation of ten examples per page doesn’t mitigate the problem much. Another useful practice to avoid the page-loading delay is to set up your browser to bring up score and orchestra files in another application such as a word processor or Csound itself. A number of hints like these are included in a “tips” section, part of which is found on the cSounds.com Web site. Unfortunately, these tips are accessed by a separate icon at the bottom of the primary navigation frame and could easily be missed.

The CD-ROM is in ISO 9660 format, which should make the HTML files accessible on a large number of computing platforms. The inclusion of the rendered audio in mp3 format should make the sounds widely accessible as well.

Summary

The Csound Catalog with Audio provides a large number of examples of the vast array of sound synthesis techniques available in Csound. The inclusion of the rendered audio for these examples makes browsing for interesting sounds merely a matter of clicking a button rather than having to render the examples yourself in Csound. The addition of the chapter “Introduction to Sound Design in Csound” from The Csound Book in HTML format turns CCWA into an excellent introduction to the use of this complex program.

My largest criticism of the disc is the lack of a readily useful organization of the wealth of materials it presents. There is no introduction that explains the contents and the organization by contributor name makes the process of discovery somewhat random. This problem could be mitigated somewhat by the inclusion of a sentence or phrase next to the audio links to describe each example.

It’s clear that the publication of the CD-ROM independently of the book was an afterthought. If built from the ground up, a better organization would turn this disc into a nearly perfect resource for learning and mastering Csound. As it stands, it is quite good if you are willing to follow some winding roads.

Recordings

Kenneth Gaburo: Tape Play

Compact disc Pogus P21020-2, 2000; available from Pogus Productions, 50 Ayr Road, Chester, New York 10918-2409, USA; fax (509) 357-4319; electronic mail pogal@pogus.com; World Wide Web www.pogus.com

Reviewed by alcides lanza
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Tape Play is a welcome addition to the limited number of recordings of works by this important American composer. Kenneth Gaburo (1926–1993) was also a teacher, conductor, writer, and publisher, working at the University of Illinois in the mid-1960s, at the University of California at San Diego during the 1970s, and finally at the University of Iowa, where he directed the Electronic Studios in the 1980s and early 1990s. This release has compositions produced at all three universities as well as at his own studio.

Fat Millie’s Lament (1965), Mr. Gaburo’s answer to ill-mannered music criticism, is done with tongue-in-cheek sarcasm. It shows him at his best in combining simple but effective studio techniques. The piece is a collage including tape loops, speed changes, and quotations from a big-band piece by his friend Morgan Powell. The Wasting of Lucretetia (1964), also a collage, again expresses a sarcastic tone, but at a higher level. The piece consists of bits of sped-up screams, percussion loops, and altered saxophone sounds. Apparently nonsensical, The Wasting of Lucretetia is another example of the composer sticking out his tongue at the establishment.
For Harry [1966] is a meditation on and for Harry Partch, whose music Mr. Gaburo had conducted and recorded. It is more pitch-oriented than the earlier pieces, and makes use of electronic sounds mixed with sounds from a monochord the composer built. It is a beautiful piece, engaging and inspiring with its clear and precise manipulation of pitch patterns. Lemon Drops [1965] is more improvisational, even reminiscent of jazz played on an electric piano. It was actually produced by skillful splicing intended to sound fluid and spontaneous, using sounds produced by a harmonic tone-generator developed by James Beauchamp. Melody, performance gestures, and attacks all sound natural and “in performance.”

Dante’s Joynite [1966] is a perfect musical expression of the composer’s interest in and dedication to the Italian poet. The “joint” is, of course, Dante’s Inferno, but references to Dante are mixed with those hinting at the Illinois jazz club “Dante” and its infernal music. The production is impeccable, containing looped percussion and quotes from popular music as well as traditional African tribal music. Some sounds move very slowly, gliding through short intervals only to be displaced by hectic textures with strong rhythmic lines. Re-run [1983] was created after some experimentation with a Buchla synthesizer and tape recorders. Mr. Gaburo did four improvisational recordings, not listening to the previous ones while recording. The result is a very vocal and enchanting all-electronic piece. The freedom of its lines indicates an “electronic counterpoint” with just a trace of vocalization. Mouthpiece II [1992] is a vocal piece inspired by the shock of seeing a dysfunctional family having supper. The monologue tells the story. Hiss [1992] exploits the noise-producing capabilities of an old mixer found in the University of Iowa Studios. Instead of trashing it, Mr. Gaburo turned it into an “instrument” its amplified noise was frequency-shifted with an analog Bode unit. This is a beautiful piece, rich in subtle textural changes, its breathing rhetorical, at times bordering on industrial noise.

Few [1985] is a happy and inspired improvisation between Mr. Gaburo playing a Moog synthesizer and the throaty voice of concretist poet Henri Chopin. This is an intriguing duet recorded monophonically—the vocal processing and synthesizer sounds are blended together in the middle of the sound field. It also documents Mr. Chopin’s visit to the University of Iowa during 1985.

The last track, Kyrie, ORBIS FACT/OR; a very odd do [1974] was completely created in the composer’s own studio. In this work Mr. Gaburo produced a satirical adieu to academia. Stereo separation is total: his voice sings a plainchant Kyrie, with a short tape delay, on one channel; the other carries the profane, personified by the composer reading the nursery rhyme “This Old Man” in a venomous tone. Filtering and distortion bring this material into the realm of incomprehensibility, a guttural utterance having a demented quality. On the other hand, the plainchant peaks into beautiful Tibetan overtone chanting.

This disc is a much-needed recording that should bring more attention to the production of an important American composer. For anyone interested in further resources, the Fall 1999 issue of Musicworks [No. 75] features a collection of articles on Mr. Gaburo along with a CD which includes four more of his compositions: Line Studies, Noyse, testimony with flow of [u], and Antiphony II [On the World Wide Web, see www.musicworks-mag.com].

Tim Hodgkinson: Sang

Compact disc ReR TH2, 1999; available from ReR Megacorp, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, UK; fax +44 (0) 181-771-3138; electronic mail megacorp@dial.plpex.com; World Wide Web www.megacorp.u-net.com

Reviewed by Ross Feller

Milledgeville, Georgia, USA

The self-taught British composer/multi-instrumentalist Tim Hodgkinson is probably best known for his work with the avant-garde band, Henry Cow, co-founded in the late 1960s by Lindsay Cooper, Chris Cutler, Fred Frith, John Greaves, and Mr. Hodgkinson. This band was at the forefront of the Marxist-inspired Rock in Opposition (RIO) movement, founded on the premise that small groups of unconventional rock or jazz musicians could come together to create supportive performance and distribution networks in opposition to commercial culture (Cutler, C. 1985/1993. File Under

Although the RIO movement ceased to exist some time ago, the grassroots, do-it-yourself, uncompromising spirit that fueled it lives on in Mr. Hodgkinson’s new compact disc entitled Sang, featuring four difficult-to-classify compositions. As stated in the liner notes, most of the instruments heard, both “real and virtual,” are played by Mr. Hodgkinson himself. Each piece involves both acoustic and electroacoustic instruments and conventions, but in different forms. The first, The Road to Erzin, is written for a mixed quintet and live electronic processing. GUSHe is for B♭ clarinet and tape. The Crackle of Forests involves a large number of real and virtual solo instruments. And M’A is for tape alone.

The Road to Erzin was inspired by the music the composer encountered during his travels in central Asia. One hears frenetic ponticello bowing and high harmonics against a discontinuous layer featuring loud percussion, piano, electronic keyboard attacks, and abrasive saxophone multiphonics. Behind this there is a subdubed piano part bathed in reverberation. The composition proceeds by way of distinct, rhythmically complex, textural foils. Later in the piece there are thick, layered percussion barrages reminiscent of the Art Ensemble of Chicago. On several occasions the musical flow stops abruptly in an almost sloppy manner, leaving one to wonder about the intentionality of such moments. The ending, for example, sounds like a tag, or afterthought, rather than as a consequence of the preceding material, strangely inconsequential in comparison with the largely dynamic force of the rest of this composition.

In GUSHe, Mr. Hodgkinson works with difference tones, the result of some very loud, high-register string and synthesizer sounds. These are set against clarinet glissandi and quarter-tones referencing a style not uncommon in Eastern Europe or parts of the Middle East. A gushe is a kind of Iranian mode containing a set of pitches with associated instrumental techniques. The composer extends this idea to include multiple modes and gestural links between the live clarinet and recorded guitar parts. For example, a guitar tremolo is paired with an amplitude-modulated, flutter-tongue clarinet sound. Some of the taped sonorities are processed in such a way as to conjure up images of analog modular synthesizers. The extreme improvisatory expression in this piece comes close to the work of the iconoclastic German composer, Hans Joachim Hespos. The compositional aspects might be compared with Henry Cow compatriot Fred Frith, except that GUSHe covers a wider berth without falling back on explicitly repetitive grooves.

The 23-minute algorithmic nihilism of The Crackle of Forests presents relentless hocketing marked by occasional changes in speed and the addition of sustained tones. One is not surprised to learn, in the liner notes, that this piece owes something to the filmmaker Andrey Tarkovsky and is Mr. Hodgkinson’s response to “signal events” such as the new millennium. The composer states that “all impressions are formed from multitudes, from the regularities of ceaseless flux in fields of minute elements. A change of light or pressure, and the flow takes another form: this is the moment at which the absolutely ordinary gives birth to the extraordinary.” This is an expansive idea but, unfortunately, the piece suffers from some all-too-ordinary MIDI timbres and a late-1980s algorithm that has already played its hand many times over.

In contrast to The Crackle of Forests, which is globally abstract and mechanical, the final work, M’A, is a very personal and theatrical composition for tape, apparently related to Art Bruit and Buto dance. The composer utilized recordings of his Second String Quartet, Eixam, a work for wind ensemble, percussion, and double basses, and some improvisational vocalizing by an actress he worked closely with. The result is compelling. Often there is a kind of hushed stillness that threatens to explode and destabilize the composition. Dense textural layers shift suddenly in unexpected ways. In the midst of this one hears the sound of heels on a hard floor, and a potpourri of expressive vocal styling à la Shelly Hirsh or Dagmar Krause.

Seemingly, the music on Sang is about as far from the catchy Brecht/Weill sardonic tunessmithing of Henry Cow as it is from the dark assault found on the 1978 release entitled Western Culture, which featured Mr. Hodgkinson’s three-part magnum opus, History & Prospects. On Sang we encounter the high-culture accoutrements of late 20th-century compositional and improvisational practice. For those who believe that these tokens are no less politically or musically persua-

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sive than more overt manifestations, Sang will be a welcome addition to their compact disc library.

Hugh Le Caine: Compositions-Demonstrations 1946–1974

Compact disc JWD 03, 2000, available from JWD Music, 146 Ridge Road West, Grimsby, Ontario L3M 4E7, Canada; electronic mail ridge@vaxxine.com; World Wide Web www.hughlecaine.com

Reviewed by alcides lanza
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

This compact disc is a must for electroacoustic teachers, researchers, and lovers of music with a technological edge. Canadian inventor, scientist, and composer Hugh Le Caine (1914–1977) was a pioneer in the development of machinery used for electroacoustic music. He was also responsible for the design and installation of electronic music studios at the University of Toronto (1959) and McGill University in Montreal (1964). His earliest creation, the Sackbut synthesizer, dates from 1945.

The musical examples included on this CD are very impressive. The musicality, versatility, and playability of Mr. Le Caine’s early instruments is quite evident. Regrettably, no model of the Sackbut has survived. Also included is his last composition, Paulution (1971–1972), produced using the polyphonic voltage-controlled synthesizer he developed for McGill University in 1970, a machine that was ahead of its time. The prototype and only copy of the “pauli” or “Poly,” as it was affectionately referred to around the McGill EMS, was donated in 1987—together with other Le Caine machines—to the Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa.

The music on the disc is grouped into two sections: Compositions [1955–1972], and Demonstrations [1946–1957]. The compositions are short, but are quite clearly more than mere demonstrations. They are witty, imaginative, and based on solid musical ideas. Dripsody, Mr. Le Caine’s best-known composition, appears in the original monophonic version from 1955. Also included is the stereo version from 1957, basically the same but extended by about 30 seconds. A definite plus, and enough justification for purchasing the CD, is the inclusion of a recording of Mr. Le Caine explaining the making of Dripsody, which uses his sensational Multitrack Tape Recorder [also known as the Variable Speed Tape Recorder, or the Special Purpose Tape Recorder]. This machine could play back any combination of up to 10 reels of stereo tapes [or loops] utilizing speed control. This enables up to 20 channels of diversified information, speed control, flexible mixing, and stereo spring reverberation on the final mix.

Other tracks offer enjoyable and informative examples for creating music using his other inventions. Especially remarkable are 99 generators [1956], produced on the machine bearing the same name (imagine having 99 generators at once at your fingertips!), and Music for Expo [1967], done using his Serial Sound Structure Generator [SSSG], an apparatus permitting total integration of all units in the studio—with no splicing required.

This is a rich document reviewing the lifelong achievements of this extraordinary Canadian inventor and composer. It features beautifully recorded sound, well-written liner notes, and hard-to-find photographic documents. Gayle Young, author of the Le Caine biography, The Sackbut Blues, produced the CD and wrote the booklet. [Editor’s note: For a review of The Sackbut Blues, see Computer Music Journal 19 (4): 96–99.]

Robert Normandeau: Figures

Compact disc empreintes DIGITALes iMED 9944, 1999, available from DIFFUSION i MéDIA, 4850 avenue de Lorimier, Montreal, Quebec H2H 2B5, Canada; telephone (514) 526-4096; fax (514) 526-4487; electronic mail info@electrocd.com; World Wide Web www.electrocd.com

Reviewed by Douglas Geers
Oslo, Norway

Robert Normandeau’s recent compact disc, Figures, presents four of his acousmatic compositions from the latter half of the 1990s, documenting his continuing investigations of the medium and its stylistic evolution. The results of these explorations are more focused and less physical than his earlier work, yet for the most part they clearly retain Mr. Normandeau’s distinctive compositional fingerprint.

Although the liner notes speak of the composer’s ideal of a “cinema for
The second striking element, as in many of this composer’s works, is his talent at choosing and sculpting materials. Nearly every sound has a bite to it, a sense of physicality and place. The “place” here, however, is not as literal as in earlier works, in which Mr. Normandeau would actually include recordings of subway stations, children in the park, the seashore, and so forth. In Le Renard et la Rose and the other works on this CD, I sense that the individual sounds are abstractions that retain enough qualities to point to their origins—original sounds or sets of sounds which often never appear themselves. While Mr. Normandeau has been processing sounds for years, his newer pieces atomize the source sounds more. Meanwhile, he makes less effort to perceptually tie unprocessed sounds to their processed relatives. Combining these well-defined sonic scenes and colors with the work’s swirling activity, the listener has much to enjoy.

The second piece, Figures de Rhétorique (1997), is quite different from Le Renard et la Rose and is not quite so successful. It is scored for tape and piano, and in this recording the piano part is played by Jacques Drouin, for whom the piece was written. Mr. Normandeau states in his liner notes that he constructed the music in four movements, creating structure by utilizing devices of rhetoric. He categorizes these speech-types into “figures of meaning [hyperbole, litotes, metaphor, oxymoron, parable, and pleonasm], words [alliteration, embellishment, and rhyme], thought [allegory, apologue, bombast, irony, and tautology], and construction [antithesis, ellipse, repetition, and reticence].” Although the piece is sectional I could not identify specific rhetorical devices while listening—I assume that the composer would not mind this. Mr. Normandeau also limited the source materials for the tape part to sounds of the piano, which seems reasonable. However, the sound world which he creates in Figures de Rhétorique does not seem nearly as vibrant and intriguing as the rich palette of sound colors he created for Le Renard et la Rose. It sounds as if he began with a limited set of sounds and then allowed them to remain rather static throughout the piece. He does explore several varied sonic environments, but within each of these the sounds themselves as well as the gestures they create don’t vary much. Possibly these repeating gestures represent specific rhetorical figures?

It could be that the composer purposefully left space in the tape part for the piano to fill. The piano part was evidently written after the tape part, which makes this seem natural. However, if this is the case, then he overestimated how much the piano would dominate the soundscape. I think that both the tape and piano parts in this piece would benefit from more variation in their materials and the treatment of these.

Venture, the third work on the disc, definitely does not suffer from a poverty of material. Named after the rock group The Ventures, this
As he did in Le Renard et la Rose, Mr. Normandeau uses rhythmic activity to retain a sense of energy throughout most of Ellipse. However, in the latter piece these sounds are less frequently organized into pulsing polyrhythmic stretches. Instead, the inner rhythmic activities of a variety of tapping, strumming, and scraping sounds overlay each other without always creating a composite organization. Ellipse also seems to possess more regularity in its progression of ideas than the earlier piece. There are no “jump cuts” between sections. Instead, the materials are consistently dovetailed, allowing elements to fall from the texture and resurface repeatedly, appearing in a new context each time. Overall, the pieces on this CD, as well as many of Mr. Normandeau’s other works, succeed best when he allows them to be (or at least seem to be) a bit out of control. This is not to say that I only like the busy sections of the music; rather, that I enjoy his music when it seems to roam, seems to have its own purpose, when it takes chances and allows itself to be quirky. For instance, I love the tag endings he added to both Venture and Ellipse—short, throwaway moments that risk silliness, but work to my ears. Mr. Normandeau’s best work involves a sonic kaleidoscope, a tour of musical places, a sort of spelunking through sounds more than a cinema of the ear. Thus, even though these recent pieces feature fewer real-world sounds than his earlier works, they still have highly dramatic profiles. On this CD, only Figures de Rhétorique fails to conjure the feeling of three dimensional adventure. His music is usually not about economy of material, but in this piece he attempts a quite strict control. Unfortunately, the material he chooses and what he does with it do not work out so well. However, his other successes clearly outweigh this aberration.

In the end, what I appreciate about Mr. Normandeau’s work is that his music generally seems to have no pretensions, even at its most symphonic. He is willing to let his guard down, to be funny, to admit that he used to listen to ELP all the time—and that maybe sometimes he still does! [I have to admit that I smiled when I caught his references, especially the bits of the Beatles’ Revolution #9.] Yet the real success is that his music grabs me. And I like that.

Evan Parker, Ghost-in-the-Machine: New Excursions

Compact disc Ninth World Music NWM 019, 1998; available from Ninth World Music, Humlebaekvej 56, DK-3480 Fredensborg, Denmark, telephone (+45) 49-19-20-30; fax (+45) 49-19-20-13; electronic mail renee@city.dk; World Wide Web www.vow.dk/ninthworldmusic/discography.htm

Evan Parker Electro-Acoustic Ensemble: Drawn Inward

Compact disc ECM 1693, 1999; available from ECM Records, Postfach 600 331, D-81203 Munich, Germany; fax (+49) 89-8545652; electronic mail order@ecmrecords.com; World Wide Web www.ecmrecords.com

Reviewed by Ross Feller
Milledgeville, Georgia, USA

In case the reader is unfamiliar with the world of contemporary free im-
provisation, it should be noted from the outset that British saxophonist Evan Parker is one of the best known proponents of this type of making. His virtuosic style of saxophone playing was honed during his tenure with the Music Improvisation Company (MIC), a group formed in the late 1960s. The other members included Derek Bailey (guitar), Hugh Davies (live electronics), Jamie Muir (percussion), and Christine Jeffrey (voice). MIC was internationally recognized for its innovative approaches to free improvisation. Often, the instruments and voice blended so well that their respective identities were effectively disguised. It was a true improvising ensemble rather than a collection of individual stars.

The seven improvisations on New Excursions were recorded live at the Copenhagen International Experimental Festival in June 1998. Mr. Parker performs on soprano and tenor saxophones. The other four members of Ghost-in-the-Machine play keyboard, bass guitar, percussion, and electronic sounds from amplified toys and tapes. Being a recording of a live performance, in which visual cues often play important roles, the listener is offered a skewed perspective of the event. For example, at the end of the first track one hears audience laughter followed by an abrupt ending. What happened? Those of us not present at the concert will never know.

There are many free improvisers who hold that recordings defeat the very purpose of their activities. According to Cornelius Cardew, “What recording produces is a separate phenomenon, something really much stranger than the playing itself, since what you hear on tape or disc is indeed the same playing but divorced from its natural context.”

There is a loss of the contextual backdrop; the process of recording captures only a snapshot of the total experience—so the argument goes. But the problem with New Excursions is not that it is incomplete. Rather, it is a document of an uninspired performance. Ghost-in-the-Machine is simply no match for Mr. Parker’s relentless machinations. The performers seem to spend much of their time searching for some common musical ground. This produces a lot of rudimentary imitation. Mr. Parker plays his signature fast-and-choppy, double-tongue licks; the others try their best to do the same. Someone plays a quasi-jazz riff and the others follow. Someone else puts forth a “funny” noise; the others rush in to do the same. You get the picture.

Ostensibly, it is the use of MIDI keyboards and live electronics that justify this review’s appearance here. Unfortunately, the electronic sounds on New Excursions are of the most rudimentary type. We hear amplified toys, telephone ringing, a recorded voice played in fast forward, and mild feedback. This is the kind of banality that John Zorn reacted against during the early 1980s, leading him toward more formalist improvisational models.

The second disc, Drawn Inward, is much more successful and challenging than the first. Mr. Parker is joined on this studio recording by some highly experienced improvisers, including violinist Philipp Wachsmann, bassist Barry Guy, and percussionist Paul Lytton. Additionally, there are no less than three others who get credit for live electronics and sound-processing: Lawrence Casserley, Walter Prati, and Marco Vecchi. This disc is the Evan Parker Electro-Acoustic Ensemble’s follow-up to their first ECM disc entitled Toward the Margins. ECM is a label known for its magnification of sonic detail through three-dimensional approaches to microphone technique, mixing, and reverberation. Drawn Inward, produced by Steve Lake, does not disappoint in this respect.

On only two of the disc’s eleven pieces is the entire septet utilized all at one time. The rest feature different combinations of performers. Although he is featured in several pieces, Mr. Parker is never heard alone. Like his work with MIC, he mostly functions as an ensemble player, albeit one whose presence lends weight and direction to the overall flow of events. In Serpent in the Sky we hear him perform slurred, angular, repetitive motives while doing circular breathing—one of his signature techniques. He builds to a climax with computer-like precision. Surrounding this, Mr. Guy and Mr. Wachsmann create the effect of a sound mass, thanks to the live electronics. On the title track, Mr. Parker uses a similar approach but with even more speed and clarity. On other tracks we hear one of his background signatures—small staccato packets one might associate with the sound of popcorn popping.

The most compelling aspects of the Electro-Acoustic Ensemble reside in the pivotal roles played by live...
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cenced power relationship. However, the human processors use their skills in mostly subtle, effective ways.

The two best pieces on Drawn Inward feature Mr. Guy and Mr. Wachsmann, respectively. In Reanascereena, Mr. Guy uses harmonics, ponticello bowing, and some very focused playing to create an intense, layered texture that is impressively fluid and hard-edged. He is not afraid of abrupt changes in his improvising. Hence, he is able to steer this piece around some sharp corners. Unfortunately, the live electronics and processing almost get in his way, especially in the overuse of reverb and delay techniques. In Writing on Ice, Mr. Wachsmann takes a different but equally effective approach to create a riveting, abstract soundscape. Angular, powerfully fast, atonal runs punctuated with snap pizzicati and scratch tones are taken over by the processors in an organic and unobtrusive manner. Given the vast potential for development in this piece it seems much too short at 3:43.

According to Simon Emmerson, in the informative liner notes to this recording, “All the best improvised music balances processes of continuity (with the inherent dangers of formulaic repetition) and change.” For the most part Drawn Inward strikes this balance. During the less successful moments, the performers merely retrace old ground, falling into formulaic, repetitive patterns. And most of the endings sound abrupt and arbitrary. But fortunately, the lion’s share of the disc is dynamic and challenging.

James Phelps: ATallMirror


Reviewed by Douglas Geers Oslo, Norway

James Phelps’ recent release, ATallMirror, represents his conscious attempt to write an extended piece for the compact disc medium. The recording is a suite of thirteen short pieces which range in duration from 0:55 to 7:30. In the liner notes, Mr. Phelps describes his work as “an ‘album as genre,’ or perhaps ‘an album play’,,” and adds that “this feature pays homage to one of the composer’s earliest musical influences, The Beatles.”

One imagines that The Beatles album Mr. Phelps refers to is Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band, and, interestingly, his disc, like Sgt. Pepper, is composed of 13 tracks. In addition, the total duration is 39:32—the Beatle’s album is 39:50. Thus, even though the individual track durations don’t correspond (nor the musical content!), the similar timings and number of tracks seem to be more than a coincidence, a sly homage to the classic album we know so well.

The music of ATallMirror combines seven tracks of solo classical guitar (performed by Fareed Haque), three of bass voice with tape (sung by Myron Myers), and three of computer music that use the guitar and/or voice as source material. The result is a pattern of short works that relate to each other through shared elements, including recordings of the guitar and voice which have been manipulated and re-presented in the computer music. The pieces are ordered as follows: computer music—tracks 1, 6, and 12; voice and tape—tracks 4, 8, and 10; guitar—2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, and 13.

Obviously, the guitar pieces outnumber the other works on the CD, and to me they also represent the most substantial and satisfying music on it. Mr. Phelps’ composition, acoustimix, is the richest piece of the set, employing a wonderfully curvy compositional logic and pleasing range of sounds from the guitar. These include soft, rapid arpeggios; flourishess of forte strummed chords; and darting polyphonic lines. The music is gestural but unpredictable, with moments of flash but an underlying impression of contemplation. Mr. Haque performs with a graceful sense of breath, using dynamics, phrasing, slight tempo changes, and tone color shifts to give every moment a sense of meaning and uniqueness. The piece follows an unusual ritornello-like form, which
the composer credits in part to a computer program he wrote to help create musical structures.

The six other guitar pieces, entitled *sunfiftyeight:one*, *sunfiftyeight:two*, etc., are brief improvisations of about 1:30-2:30 in duration, based on a 10-chord harmonic progression taken from *acousticmix*. Mr. Haque gives each of the six improvisations a fairly distinct profile, using the harmonies and a few gestures from the source piece to sketch engaging miniatures. The improvisations also utilize some standard guitar idioms, including at times a jazzy feel, at other times a Spanish flavor, and in one a hint of tango. The ideas here aren’t as dense or varied as in *acousticmix*, but they are interesting and are presented with energy.

The three tracks of bass voice with tape are excerpts from a performance of Mr. Phelps’s piece about *Myron*a monodrama. In these three extracts, the singer speaks, sings, and is processed by reverberation and delays. The tape material is primarily vocal, ranging from straightforward recordings of Mr. Myers singing to granulated versions of repeated syllables.

These tracks are not as satisfying to me as the guitar music for a few reasons. First, they sound like excerpts. The pieces don’t establish strong compositional shapes as individual entities. In addition, these excerpts do not create a strong, coherent referential presence on the disc. Whereas the guitar pieces recur enough to constitute a clear thread of musical ideas, the “Myron” tracks do not. A greater number of short excerpts may have been more effective, woven in among the guitar tracks. In addition, these recordings from a live performance sound more distant than the other tracks. The vocal extracts just don’t seem to be part of the same sound world as the rest of the CD. Finally, the texts of these segments feel like fragments, too, so that I felt I was missing something about their underlying meanings. Thus, I wasn’t sure whether the intended tone was serious or, as I believe, playfully self-mocking.

The three computer music pieces vary considerably. The first, *M-I-R-R-O-R*, opens the CD and is simply a series of time-stretched syllables from the word “mirror” as spoken by Myron Meyers. The second, entitled *TextCerpts*, appears about halfway through the collection. This piece is a slowly evolving 4-min texture of high buzzing noises and processed vocal sounds. Mr. Phelps employs tone clusters of subtly pulsing synthesized tones, using both a bright foreground timbre and a duller, lower-pitched, softer one. Within this texture, the notes of the dense harmony enter and crescendo independently of one another repeatedly. Meanwhile, filtered, long vocal tones with very slight glissandi appear and accumulate until near the end of the piece when they all suddenly disappear leaving only the cluster texture, which crescendos and then dies away. I found this piece pleasant but a bit too static. I wished for more exploration or manipulation of the material as it progressed.

The last and most interesting computer music track is *academix*. In the liner-notes, Mr. Phelps describes it as “a computer-music remix of a live remix of *acousticmix*, the live mix being offered by a jazz quartet [Fareed Haque Quartet West].” I found this piece to be my second favorite, next to *acousticmix*. Here, as in the “Myron” tracks, the composer employs a recording of a performance. However in this case he abstracts the material and mixes it in with both itself and processed bits from his studio recording of *acousticmix*. The result is an engaging collage that plays with ideas of place and performance and the act of listening to a recording.

*academix* begins with high-frequency noise sounds, leading one to a typical electroacoustic composition. Soon, however, these sounds disappear. As it progresses, the music utilizes sounds that are obviously instrumental, those which appear to be processed versions of these, and others abstract enough that their origins are unclear. Early in the piece, the more abstract sounds dominate and the clearly instrumental sounds only appear sporadically. Then, about halfway through the piece a loud smacking sound intervenes, and the instrumental sounds begin to appear more overtly. Eventually an intriguing cacophony of moments of drums, cymbals, guitar, and keyboard arises, and this continues until nearly the end of the piece.

As in *acousticmix*, *academix* employs a twisting form, with unexpected moments of action and others of stillness interrupting each other. This was generally interesting, but I believe there are a few problems. First, I felt that a few areas of the piece were too static. Moreover, I had problems with a section of the music in the middle dominated by rising glissandi, mainly because I have heard enough glissando gestures in computer music that now seems cliché. Finally, while I enjoyed the energetic jumble of events that mix to form the end of the work, this section seems too short and its end too abrupt.

Overall, the album is quite listenable, and this reveals some underlying strength in its design. Although I might not love all of the works, as a whole it is interesting as a tour of

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possibilities. The solid guitar tracks wrap around the weaker elements and hold them up. This is the kind of album one can enjoy, with focused attention, or while reading the newspaper, or while looking out one’s window over a cup of coffee. That, to me, is a sign of success for a work inspired by The Beatles, whose music I often listen to in various positions. By definition, PeP latest two compact disc set of electroacoustic community (CEC)/Productions Electro Productions (PeP) available from Canadian Electroacoustic Community, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke West, RF-310, Montreal, Quebec H4B 1R6, Canada; electronic mail cec@vax2.concordia.ca, World Wide Web cec.concordia.ca

Reviewed by Patricia Dirks Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Presence II is an appropriate title for the Canadian Electroacoustic Community (CEC)/Productions Electro Productions (PeP) latest two compact disc set of electroacoustic compositions. By definition, “presence” is the state of being present [such as the listener’s physical presence] or a person or thing that is present [as there is a presence in the listening room when hearing this music]. Presence II is an international collection of works from 13 countries: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Korea, Spain, Taiwan, and USA. It is the second self-funded CD project of CEC/PeP and features a total of 34 compositions by 32 composers. The first noticeable characteristic of this collection is the variety: works that deal with text and voice, the use and creation of new electronic sounds, rhythmic variations and soundscapes, and a single acoustic source exploration.

Various: Presence II

Compact discs [2] PeP 002, 2000, available from Canadian Electroacoustic Community, Concordia University, 7141 Sherbrooke West, RF-310, Montreal, Quebec H4B 1R6, Canada; electronic mail cec@vax2.concordia.ca, World Wide Web cec.concordia.ca

Reviewed by Patricia Dirks Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Presence II is an international collection of works from 13 countries: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Korea, Spain, Taiwan, and USA. It is the second self-funded CD project of CEC/PeP and features a total of 34 compositions by 32 composers. The first noticeable characteristic of this collection is the variety: works that deal with text and voice, the use and creation of new electronic sounds, rhythmic variations and soundscapes, and a single acoustic source exploration. Works on Presence II range in duration anywhere from 0:37 to 12:36. La beauté indiscrète d’une note violette (1995) by Brazilian composer Jorge Antunes is the opening track of the first disc. The entire composition is an electroacoustic exploration and transformation of a single pitch, E. The fascinating timbral changes of octave material with the juxtaposition of a sung vocal sound on “no” make for an interesting work. Mr. Antunes bases this composition on his theory of Chromophonique, in which octaves of this particular pitch correspond to the color violet. Other works of the collection that were created from a single sound-source exploration include Gordon Fitzell’s Zipper Music II (1998) and Jørgen Teller’s Ō e o u y x ø à pt. 2 (ex.). Mr. Teller’s excerpt is also a composition based on a single idea, in this case human laughter. He uses a more rhythmic approach through the juxtaposition of sound loops to accomplish his single-source exploration.

There is something for every listener’s musical tastes on Presence II. While compositions that are relatively short in duration but definitely not in content make up the majority of the works, a few of them are excerpts from larger electroacoustic compositions. These include Hans Tutschku’s densely processed soundscape, extrémités lointaines (ex.) [1998], Dugal McKinnon’s sporadic electronic conversation of sounds, Horizont im Ohr (ex.) [1998], Martin Gotfrit’s timbral exploration of filtration, A Palaver with Procrustes (ex.) [1998], and Adrian Moore’s fast paced, vocally playful Soundbodies: Bodypart [1998]. According to Mr. Moore, his featured excerpt is representative of a 55-min composition/installation/collaboration for two singers, dancers, video, and electronic sounds entitled Soundbodies. Although Canadian composer Yves Gigon’s Ephémère (1997) is not an excerpt, it was created from a larger sound sculpture. This is a colorful composition both in the sonic material presented and the effective spatialization used to draw the sounds into a three-dimensional realm. Jef Chippewa’s DUO (1997–1998) uses the acoustic sounds of a saxophone in playful communication with a synthesizer. The sonic illusions and transformations of original material along with impressive aural sound placement make for a very effective composition.

If your time is limited, there are even shorter works, such as Ian Chuprun’s word play, Reading Allowed (PA 11) [1998] and Jean Routhier’s pop-based Stereotyped Latter-Day Opinion [1999]. The briefest composition on Presence II is Chris Wind’s to be led [1993], a 37-sec whimsical version of a waltz. Mr. Chuprun’s composition was written for the Birmingham ElectroAcoustic Sound Theatre (BEAST) Web site. It uses spoken phrases playfully pro-
cessed to sound as if created with early computer music techniques. In keeping with the theme—electroacoustic works that employ the use of text and voice—British composer Alastair Bannerman’s manipulation and treatment of a young voice in his work, In th’air or th’earth (1997, revised 1998–1999) immediately summons up aural images of Karlheinz Stockhausen’s well-known Gesang der jünglinge (1956). In this composition, the text, both sung and spoken, comes from Shakespeare’s play The Tempest. This is a well-composed and stimulating composition. Steve Bradley’s “volalle melodie vi to trot” / “fowl melody to trot” (1999) also employs text and voice. The spoken text in this composition is made to sound like an old phonograph recording juxtaposed with the voices of children at play. The treatment of word play in this work is reminiscent of compositions by Annette Vande Gorne as featured on her 1998 Presence II. This is a well-composed and stimulating composition. Steve Bradley’s “volalle melodie vi to trot” / “fowl melody to trot” (1999) also employs text and voice. The spoken text in this composition is made to sound like an old phonograph recording juxtaposed with the voices of children at play. The treatment of word play in this work is reminiscent of compositions by Annette Vande Gorne as featured on her 1998 Impalpables, created with poet Werner Lambersy.

Presence II contains a number of works by composers who have received international recognition for their compositional achievements. It is also important to note that there are a fair number of women composers included in this collection. Chin-Chin Chen’s Points of No Return (1997) features a unique sound world highlighted by her placement of silence and subtle repetition, at times creating a drone-like background. This composition won First Prize in the Concorso Internazionale Luigi Russolo in Varese, Italy. One of my favorite works is Sylvie MacCormac’s Spirit Wheels: journey (part 1 of a puppet opera) (1997). The way in which she uses the processed penny-whistle motif to enclose her composition produces a definite sense of arrival by the end. It is this, combined with the processing effects used on the spoken and sung voices, and the lyrical lines, that create a satisfying listening experience. If you are in the mood for a more acoustic realm, then Canadian composer Diana McIntosh’s Climb to Camp One (1989) will be to your liking. It is performed entirely on an amplified piano featuring the ambient sounds of the piano’s strings. This is combined with a rhythmic flare and a splash of vocal interjections to produce an entertaining, storytelling work. Pascale Trudel’s Ce n’est pas ici (1999) also features familiar acoustic material. In this case, sounds such as crackling fire, voices, thunder, and various other snippets of nature are presented on their own or juxtaposed, stimulating remembrances of sounds one might hear over a lifetime. Moving back into what is more commonly thought of as electroacoustic music, Belgian composer Annette Vande Gorne’s Amoroso: Vox Alia, 2e mouvement (1998) is a calming composition, a sonic study based on a Gregorian chant, highlighting the melodic, rhythmic, and timbral transformations of the voice.

Presence II definitely features a wide variety of compositional styles. For a taste of nostalgia, there is Argentinean composer Martin Alejandro Fumarola’s ARGOS (1988) and SET IN (1994). The first was created with a Yamaha DX7 and a reel-to-reel tape recorder, and the second with a Yamaha TC7 tone generator and a sequencing program. For more pop-based sounds incorporated into a composition, there is Finnish composer Antti Saario’s B-Side (1998), whereas water sounds play an active role in Canadian composer Dave Solorsh’s composition, We (1998). Effective use of aural placement of sounds can be heard in Mr. Chuprun’s journey of electronic sounds in To many moments passed (1998), which highlights this work’s rich sonic colors. Near the end of the second disc is Todor Todoroff’s serene employment of voice and breath sounds in Voices Part I (version stéréo) (1997). Daniel Zimbaldi’s meditative tapestry of electronic transformations rounds out this remarkable collection with Au-delà du miroir (1998).

Kudos to the composers, producers, and anyone else involved in deciding the order that each extraordinary work appears on Presence II. I strongly believe that the organization of pieces of music (be it a concert, a recording, or a radio broadcast) is in itself a work of music on a macrocosmic level. In general, both discs of the set feature works that are complementary to one another when listened to in the order presented, creating a relaxing, calming listening experience. Presence II is a great sonic escape from the daily bombardment of sound stresses such as traffic, construction, and neighborhood activity. This is an excellent collection of current electroacoustic music, giving a presence of its own to the existing repertoire. For those who might be interested, Presence II is available for free with every CEC membership.

Franco Evangelisti: Evangelisti


Reviewed by Agostino Di Scipio L’Aquila, Italy

In the mid-1950s, the Italian composer Franco Evangelisti (1926–
1980] adopted a most radical approach to music, and in a few years became part of the musical avant-garde of his time. His music, initially reflecting a thoroughly serialist attitude, soon opened itself to aleatoric processes, giving the interpreter(s) responsibility over the actual shape of large musical sections. His scores became more and more like “systems,” or “programs,” for possible compositions, based either on deterministic and/or indeterministic strategies. Of his Campi Integrati n.2, for example, Mr. Evangelisti said that it was “not a composition, but a field of possibilities by means of which a composition can be created.” Gottfried Michael Koenig described the Italian composer as “a pioneer of electronic music.” Indeed, many consider his Incontri di Fasce Sonore (1957) one of the most remarkable pieces ever produced in the Studio für Elektronische Musik of WestDeutscher Rundfunk in Cologne, due to its outstanding musical quality and the innovative use of the technology then available. In the making of that short electronic piece [3 min 24 sec], Mr. Evangelisti focused on the automation of the compositional process. Working side by side with Mr. Koenig himself, and with Herbert Brün composing his Anepigraphe at the same time, Mr. Evangelisti was exploring the “computer-like” character of automated compositional processes in the analog studio, an approach that, in retrospect, foreshadowed later joined by Frederic Rzewski, Egisto Macchi, Giancarlo Schiaffini, Jesus Villa Rojo, and others. In 1980, a few weeks after the world premiere of Campi integrati n.2, Mr. Evangelisti died of a cerebral aneurism. His utopian “new sonorous world,” coming at the end of an age of silence, is the object of his book, Dal silenzio ad un nuovo mondo sonoro [Rome: Editore Semar, 1991].

Many of Mr. Evangelisti’s compositions are aphoristic. Few exceed six minutes, and when they do, they are presented in short sections with more or less violent gestures isolated among them by silent pauses. The composer “refuted… the dream of the long work,” his music rejected any narrative.

Of the ten scores written by Mr. Evangelisti, three are published by Universal Editions [Incontri di Fasce Sonore] and C. F. Peters [Die Schachtel and Random or not Random]. The remaining were initially published by Tonos Verlag [Darmstadt] and are now available through Editore Semar [interested readers may contact semarpublishers@altavista.net]. Prior to this new release, only a few works had been released on media available to the public [Incontri di Fasce Sonore on Wergo CD 9106, Die Schachtel on Deutsche Grammophon LP 2561 106]. So it is with a particularly warm welcome that we hail this double disc from Edition RZ in Berlin, collecting the complete Evangelisti repertoire.

What is particularly notable in this release is that it offers a comprehensive view of Mr. Evangelisti’s music by presenting the listener with a selection of historically relevant documents. It features, for example, three different recordings of the short, nervous piano piece, Proiezioni Sonore [Sound Projections] from 1955–1956, one with David Tudor [from the premiere, Darmstadt 1958], and two by Aloys Kontarsky [live recordings from 1972]. The collection also features two performances of the string quartet Aleatorio [1959], one by the LaSalle Quartet [from 1982], for whom the piece was originally composed, the other by Enzo Porta’s Società Cameristica Italiana [from 1967]. Also included is the world premiere of the utterly serial piano and violin pieces, 4! [1954–1955], with Aloys Kontarsky on piano and Wolfgang Marschner on violin [Darmstadt 1957], the premiere of the elegant, cloud-like Campi Integrati n.2 [by the ensemble Spettro Sonoro, with Luca Pfaff conducting, Rome 1979], and Eberhard Blum’s 1985 performance of Proporzioni [1958], for solo flute.

As for the electronic pieces, the discs include Incontri di Fasce Sonore, Spazio a 5 [1959-61], for percussion, voices, and live electronics (with unnamed performers and an unknown date of recording), and two versions of Die Schachtel [1962-63]: the full score for actors,
chamber orchestra, and tapes (Munchener Kammerorchester, Eberhard Schoener conducting, Munich 1968), and a version scored for chamber orchestra and tapes entitled Cinque Strutture da Die Schachtel (Orchestra della VI Settimana di Palermo, Giampiero Taverna conducting, Palermo 1968).

The present release of Incontri di Fasce Sonore sounds to my ears a little more rough and grainy than the Wergo release that readers may have heard. This could be due to the fact that Wergo had subjected the original analog sound signal to some digital filtering, while Edition RZ probably did not. The difference is minimal, in any case, and the slightly “dirty” feel of the new release should not be a detriment to the listener’s appreciation.

Die Schachtel is Mr. Evangelisti’s only music-theatre work. Thirty minutes in duration, it consists of several short sections separated either by silent rests or taped sounds. The pre-recorded parts are made from a variety of traffic noises, crowd voices, the noise of rockets being launched, and an American announcer counting down, repeated over and over to hypnotic, alienating, and threatening effect. The traffic sounds sharply contrast with the fluid and luminous instrumental textures. When they first enter (at 6:40), the contrast brings to mind Edgard Varèse’s taped interpolations for Deserts. In Cinque Strutture, drawn from Die Schachtel, the tape parts are not identical with those of the full-scale version. The source materials are more heavily processed, and the countdown is heard over and over for a longer period. As the two performances documented here both date from 1968, we are led to consider that Mr. Evangelisti was still re-working and refining his tapes—five years after the date of composition and two years after the premiere (conducted by Larry Austin in Davis, California, 1966).

Pieces like Die Schachtel, with its dense textures, and the softer, crystalline Campi integrati n.2, are surprising in their clear and transparent orchestration, achieving a kind of impressionistic musical surface eventually interrupted by clangorous percussion and punctuated by percussive patterns in the strings. This timbral clarity is found in other works, too, notably Ordini (1955), for 16 instruments (conducted here by James Demby, Rome 1993), and the more articulated Random or not Random (1957–1962), for large orchestra (Orchestra Sinfonica Siciliana, Gabriele Ferro conducting, Rome 1980). Each piece has a distinct character of its own, but I was particularly impressed by the discontinuous and dramatic gestures in Random or not Random, sometimes very noisy and harsh, that are still capable of bringing out the subtlest sonic details.

Considering the serialistic and/or aleatoric methods employed in the writing of such works, the beautiful sonorous surfaces they in the end offer testifies to Mr. Evangelisti’s dialectical attitude toward structuralist composition: his “program,” or “field of possibilities,” either wholly pre-determined or left open to performer initiative, was capable of enabling a personal and free musical vision to emerge. What we hear is a music of pure sound, a music of sonic gestures creating a world of their own, bearing traces of the composer’s active confrontation, and even fight, with inherited materials and innovative techniques, none of which are uncritically accepted per se. Despite the predominantly instrumental nature of his musical material, the composer reveals an attitude closer to later electroacoustic composition. This is especially evident in Spazio a 5, where he explores the sound of various percussion instruments and modalities of vocal utterance in totally free and inspired ways, as in a kind of “live musique concrète” [Karlheinz Stockhausen’s Mikrophonie was still to come, and John Cage’s Cartridge Music was being composed at the same time].

This new release of Mr. Evangelisti’s music encourages a fresh perspective on a compositional approach that has all too easily been given incongruous labels, often having more to do with the composer’s political and ideological stance than his music (“negative music,” or “integral serialism”). It provides important documentation for historical and theoretical study, offering a far more interesting and articulated picture of a poorly understood personality than is usually signified by the stereotypical phrase, “post–World War II avant-garde composer.” The collection also provides an essential opportunity to listen to the voice of an uncompromising musician, a refreshing and nurturing experience that should be a source of inspiration for today composers, students, and listeners alike.

The double-CD package comes in a very simple, elegant red cartoon sleeve, with rather enigmatic symbols on the front cover [all covers from Edition RZ are designed in a similar fashion]. On the back cover and in the internal booklet there are plenty of annotations concerning recording dates, tape locations, publishers, etc. There is also a short presentation by German musicologist Heinz-Klaus Metzger [in German and English]. With few exceptions, all of the performances are convincing, and some are simply

Recordings
outstanding (David Tudor’s *Proiezioni sonore*, the LaSalle Quartet’s *Aleatorio*, the unknown performers of *Spazio a 5*, and the Orchestra Sinfonica Siciliana’s rendering of *Random or not random*). Also remarkable are *Die Schachtel* [Munchener Kammerorchester] and *Campi Integrati n.2* [Spettro Sonoro]. All tracks are recorded live, and most of them were initially produced with less than professional recording equipment, not having been intended for commercial release.

This circumstance reflects mainly on the audible differences in equalization between tracks (compare, for example, the three performances of the piano piece), but it never really seems to disturb a full appreciation of the music.