

Performance practice of electroacoustic music – A practice-based exchange between musicology and performance

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Study of performance practice of electroacoustic music becoming increasingly relevant

60 years after the birth of electroacoustic music, questions concerning performance practice are becoming increasingly relevant. Many composers who traditionally have been the foremost interpreters of their own music are now at old age or no longer alive. The same can be said of other important witnesses to history such as instrumentalists, conductors, technicians, studio assistants and musicians concerned with performance and sound projection. Younger generations of musicians and researchers are now becoming involved with this repertoire. For any of them, but particularly for performers, the question of how to perform a piece taking into account its specific artistic, historical and technical genesis becomes critical, considering that the technical means available nowadays are much different from original conditions. The disappearance of old technologies and the availability of new ones present challenges while opening up new possibilities. Different attitudes and experiences of today's audiences must be taken into account as well. As in (instrumental) performance practice of older music, those questions lead into an area marked by the tension between historical performance practice and modern reception. The preservation of knowledge about the genesis of electroacoustic works, the original performance conditions and the development of a performance tradition is an essential prerequisite for developing an adequately informed interpretation practice.



The electroacoustic production of RAI's Studio di Fonologia was the focus of the pilot study.

Pilot study: «The performance practice of electroacoustic music – the Studio di Fonologia years»

In 2012 and 2013, the Zürich University of the Arts financed an internal preliminary study entitled «The performance practice of electroacoustic music – the 'Studio di Fonologia' years.» Its focus was mainly on repertoire that was composed at the Studio di Fonologia of RAI, Milano by composers Luciano Berio, Bruno Maderna, Luigi Nono, Henri Pousseur and others. It was organized in four 2-day workshops taking place in 2012 and 2013 at the Zürich University of the Arts and at partner institutions in Italy. The core team at ICST included Prof. Germán Toro-Pérez (project leader, director ICST), Prof. Dr. Angela Ida de Benedictis (musicologist, research associate ICST) and Lucas Bennett (musicologist, research associate ICST). The team was complemented by an external board of experts composed of musicologists, performers and archival specialists. The project's goal was to study selected pieces, identify challenges and problems and establish specific criteria for their performance today. The discussion of the specific works always included a summary of their genesis, an overview and discussion of surviving sources, a discussion of esthetic aspects and of issues related to performance practice. Selected works were performed in concerts concluding each workshop.

Institutional partners in this study were among others:

Archivio di Fonologia RAI Milano, University of Milan, Conservatorio Statale di Musica C. Pollini / SaMPL Padova, Centro d'Arte degli Studenti dell'Università di Padova, Archivio Luigi Nono, Venezia, Tempo Reale, Firenze, Centro Studi Luciano Berio, Firenze, Paul Sacher Stiftung, Basel, Ricordi, Suvini Zerboni, Universal Edition



Pianist Stefan Litwin performing Luigi Nono's ... sofferte onde serene... at a workshop concert in March, 2013

Upcoming book publication

A publication presenting the findings of the workshops in detail is currently being prepared at ICST. It will include essays on

- Electroacoustic performance practice in a historical perspective
- Performance practice involving electronics and instruments
- Editions, scores and reconstructions of electroacoustic music
- Composition, spatiality and changing formats
- Practical perspectives and performance concepts
- Performance and authoriality in electroacoustic music
- Literature on electroacoustic performance practice: a review
- The source problem in electroacoustic music

The book will also include a register of sources for the works discussed. A complete transcript of the workshop sessions, as well as illustrations and historical documents will be included on CD-ROM.



Workshop session: Discussing Luciano Berio's Differences

The next step: Towards a practice-based exchange between musicology and performance

In September 2014, a further research project on electroacoustic performance practice will be launched at ICST entitled «Performance practice of electroacoustic music - a practice-based exchange between musicology and performance». It will be funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). Main project partner is the Paul Sacher Stiftung (PSS), Basel. While building on the methodology of the first project, it greatly expands the practical focus, bringing together teams of musicologists and musicians in order to develop and validate performance concepts.

The Paul Sacher Stiftung will provide access to its collections, allowing the team to study a broad and varied repertoire including works by composers such as Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Morton Feldman, Brian Ferneyhough, Gérard Grisey, Sofia Gubaidulina, Jonathan Harvey, Heinz Holliger, Mauricio Kagel, György Ligeti, Bruno Maderna, Steve Reich, Karlheinz Stockhausen and Edgard Varèse. The project will be conducted over a two year period with 4 recurring cycles of research, analysis, discussion and performance. The core groups will be complemented by an external board of experts meeting at the end of each cycle.

The project aims to establish a research methodology for performance practice of electroacoustic music where musicologists and performers enter into a practice-based dialogue. Such a dialogue between theory and practice serves a double purpose: to deliver a model for research methodology and to yield concrete results with respect to compositions that can be considered exemplary study subjects in terms of the problems they present to performers. Providing methods of study and practice-validated evidence that allow performers to formulate their own interpretation criteria, the overarching objective of our research on performance practice is thus to contribute to the realization of artistically adequate performances of electroacoustic works.

