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Please consider contributing; the success of *Array* depends on input from its readers. I look forward to hearing from you!

Thank you,
Jennifer Bernard Merkwitz

Letters to the Editors

The letters below were received from *Array* readers about the 2007-08 double issue. The final letter is from ICMA’s former webmaster, Toine Heuvelmans, about the possible implementation of some of the ideas introduced in “The Future of the Concert Review” (pp. 75-76).

February 21, 2009
Dear Array editors,

Here is my answer to your question (ref: “The Future of the Concert Review”) “Do you read the reviews in *Array* as they currently stand?": Yes, I enjoyed the *Array* 2007/2008 issue’s concert reviews! Please keep publishing the reviews also in the future. Debate, riots and keen journalism, even, are most welcome. Maybe you could also include some works on the website...

but perhaps that would be easier (because of copyright and performance rights, legal and money issues) if you can appropriately protect the mp3 recordings’ access to ICMA members only.**

Best regards,
Kari Vakeva

**PS: Note that many composers (at least those in Europe, like me) have delegated their compositions’ public performance, radio and netsite play rights ownership to organizations, so general public access to the stored recordings may need to bring the organizations that own the rights into the process? (It’s possible, but may be costly and bureaucratic.)

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March 20, 2009
Dear Array editors,

I just wanted to say that I really enjoyed this latest issue of *Array*. It was nice to reminisce via those concert reviews of the past few years, and Max’s short story was an unexpected treat.

I thought the discussion of review purpose and integrity was very important. It does seem like because the ICMA is such a small community that not wanting to upset our peers and/or challenge friendships is a big part of the epidemic of niceness. I

think your idea of having a “live review” area on the Web site is excellent, and might be able to break down some of that anxiety. It could be invaluable to get multiple listens to a piece and promote a dialogue between composers, performers, and audience in (hopefully) a way that feels more like constructive feedback than the sense of one-sided judgment that can be perceived in a published review. Seems like it shouldn't be too arduous to get a couple of people willing to share their pieces online and submit to a test run of praise and/or pummeling and see where it goes from there. :-)

--John Young

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August 8, 2009

To the Editors of *Array*:

I was of course pleased that Nathan Wolek and *Array* took enough interest in my 2007 CD *Electric Brew* to include a review in the 2007-08 issue. In an era of media overload and intense competition for our attention, it isn't always easy to gain people's ear. I believe that Nathan's review, however, raises more questions about musical criticism than it does about my creative work. I write in response with some hesitance, as my general feeling is to keep the roles of composers and critics separate. However, in this case, both of us

are colleagues and, in fact, writers as well as creative people, and the present setting is a collegial journal. It seemed to me, particularly with the encouragement of the editors of *Array*, to take a chance and write. I do so in a spirit of collegiality and friendship with a goal of engaging ideas rather than personalities.

There are many forms of critical writing. The types that I find most useful are those that engage the ideas, sounds and processes that organically emerge from the work of a composer. Less useful, to my mind, are those where the concerns and judgments of the critic take center stage, replacing concerns of interest to the composer. This is especially the case where colleagues discuss the work of other colleagues. My hope in those circumstances is that the reader will emerge with fresh insight about a work already experienced, or a curiosity that moves the reader to explore the work for her or himself. While Nathan offers a complimentary note about my piano playing, I question whether his sharp criticism of *Electric Brew* was all that constructive. My point, and the reason for my writing, is that his criticism seemed to me to rest on issues that are far more about his own concerns than they are about my work. Surely, the balance between these is not an easy one. The problem here is that I find out far more here about Nathan as a listener than I do about any of the musical concerns that drive my CD.

There is much to be said about the long history of musical works that quote or comment upon existing works. This appears to be Nathan's central interest in his discussion of *Electric Brew*, presumably because some of the pieces draw thematic elements from Miles Davis's landmark recording *Bitches Brew* (1970). Nathan's position is that the standard by which my work should be judged is Miles's original recording. This comparison imposes a framework that seems rather literal minded and questionably useful. Nathan holds: "In my opinion, you cannot write music that is inspired by another artist, draw motifs from his work and then absolve yourself from comparisons... I have no ideological qualms with him using these materials; sampling musical materials is par for the course in our post-modern world, and I will concede that Gluck has done something unique and original with them." This surprises me, since the two recordings inhabit dramatically different aesthetic universes, despite some shared thematic phrases. Nathan continues: "However, Gluck's compositions do not rise to the level of those works by his muses." Granted the iconic status of Miles Davis (and in point of fact, I do not sample any sound clips from Miles), this is not exactly an insult. However, the primary attention given to this issue results in Nathan misunderstanding what my 2007 CD was about and thus does a disservice to the

potential listener.

My starting place for the composition *Electric Brew* was a series of interactive Max/MSP patches for the *shofar*, none of which were designed to emulate Miles's playing. Instead, they allowed me to explore how a computer could take hold of my playing what was already a relatively unstable instrument and gradually spin the results out of control. Certainly the texture of Miles's multi-layered, intense "brew" was of interest to me, in particular the balance act between organization and chaos. I wondered how a single performer might create a musical fabric that reflected that kind of balance in live performance. After a few months of performances, I decided to place this work within the context of a few Miles-inspired pieces that I was developing. I thought of them as fantasias that build up swirling masses of digitally processed *shofar* sounds, within which the piano interweaves allusions to elements of *Bitches Brew*. These abstractions are further abstracted in the collage-like interludes.

I have found that audiences that recognize the historical allusions have "aha" moments, yet those for whom they are not familiar simply appreciate the music totally on its own terms. Nathan is the first I have heard to focus entirely on those references and present them as the fulcrum upon which a referendum on my music

should rest. To offer one example found in the review, Nathan correctly notes that Miles's recording and its large percussion-intensive ensemble work was tied to a strong sense of beat. However, what I do points in a rather different direction, despite the historical allusions. I'm glad that my work brought Nathan's attention to those originals, reminding him of how he loves the beat structure, but my work in question is simply not centered on a beat. It lives in a very different aesthetic universe. Of the five pieces that reference the work of Miles, it is conceivable that one, *Pharoah's Spring*, might be viewed in closer relationship to the original. Here, I overlay themes from *Pharoah's Dance*, once again on top of swirling abstractions (in this case, algorithmically generated phrases of electronic sounds). Surely, the electronic drum sound that appears cannot compete with the substantial rhythm section led by master drummer Jack De Johnette, but this is in no way my intent.

Nathan proceeds to dismiss my five-movement *In the Bushes* because I utilize sound samples of speeches by George W. Bush. In fact, this usage takes place in only a single movement. Nathan presents a generalized concern that since the piece is topical, being about the Iraq War, it is thus ephemeral and this ends the discussion. In fact, the final movement of *In the Bushes*, as the program notes point out, utilizes musical processes for their metaphorical

value, and the movement discussed by Nathan interweaves Bush's voice with speeches from militarists of the past. These ideas were selected specifically to help the piece transcend the historical moment, but Nathan skips over this dynamic, which pervades the entire piece. The final movement also integrates two layers of piano playing, one performed directly by the pianist and a second performed by the computer via the Disklavier. The same process comes into play during my performance of a Disklavier piece by Shlomo Dubnow. Nathan criticizes the recording for not separating these two layers. However, the integration of the two into a single whole played by a single instrument was precisely the point.

Nathan opens his review by noting that one can learn about this CD by referring to my personal history. However, he gets some of it quite wrong. That the Dubnow and Ben Amots pieces and *In the Bushes* appear on this recording is testimony to the fact that my musical training was as a concert pianist in a conservatory setting and not as a jazz pianist. The latter designation is the one by which Nathan marks the theme of this CD. *Electric Brew* in fact documents a series of performances that marked my transition towards my integration of jazz and avant-garde concert music. But I do not think that one will find here an integration that replaces electroacoustic music aesthetics with idiomatic jazz

elements, as this review seems to suggest. One also learns little of substance about my use of *shofar* on this recording beyond the anecdotal factoid that I attended rabbinical college and thus was familiar with the instrument.

I welcome constructive criticism, yet question how constructive this review is in understanding my music on its own terms. I worry that when colleagues read sharply dismissive pieces of writing crafted by another colleague, critical thinking about the work will end rather than be furthered. Who would chose to listen to something that has been so dramatically dismissed? My preference is always for people to listen and judge for themselves, doing so with open ears, hopefully not constrained by presuppositions that make it impossible to hear that which a composer seeks to convey. My hope is that musical criticism will shed light on musical issues that arise and, when raising questions, open them for exploration and consideration. I fear that here any such questioning is shut down rather than opened up. In the end, I'm not sure how the reader is served.

--Bob Gluck

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In response to Jennifer Merkwowitz's article "The Future of the Concert Review," I made an attempt to write down what we

actually hope to improve. As the title of her writing suggests, it's the *concert* review. The main issues with this kind of review are the problem of enabling repeated hearings and the lack of honest and intelligent debate. I believe that reviews of festivals and seminars encounter these same problems, and thus I wish to include these in this small revolution. To extend this, I also wish to include the CD or DVD review; although it does not suffer from any temporal problems like one-off events, it is reviewed in the same manner, thus qualifying for the second issue.

If you look at what can be reviewed at an ICMC, apart from the conference in general, there are tape pieces or "sound tracks"; live performances with musicians and/or laptoppers; video pieces, sometimes combined with live performance; and last but not least, installations. The above-described issues all apply up to a certain degree. However, installations often present a third issue when it comes to reviewing or discussion, which is *interactivity*.

As Merkwowitz mentioned, a reviewer of an event or performance "jots down notes [...] and types them up a week (or a month, or six months) later." This delayed review is an issue that, considering the solutions I have in mind for the other issues, is worth keeping in mind. A somewhat similar issue is the *social experience*. An opinion is best formulated when it's

fresh, and discussion (i.e. talking about the social experience) can best be done when the audience's opinions are fresh.

To summarize the issues, we have:

- 1) Enabling repeated hearings
- 2) Honest and intelligent debate
- 3) Interactivity
- 4) Delayed reviewing
- 5) Social experience

And now to tackle them. Concerning the first, I'm not going to debate the purpose of reviewing a one-off event; as designer of the ICMA website and former ICMA webmaster, I'd approach this from a more technical standpoint. I'd focus on the problem of readers of a concert review having no idea what the actual concert was like. I believe we should not try to use the Internet to provide repeated hearings. However, we should use it to give an impression of the concert, just as images in an article don't tell the entire story, but accompany it. Via the Internet, we can provide photographs, audio and video (with copyright taken into consideration)—whatever is best suited to give an idea of what the reviewer is talking about. As long as we don't wish to provide the reader with exactly the same experience (f.i. 8-channel pieces) but only an impression (f.i. a stereo excerpt) of what the reviewer is writing about, then I see almost (see issue no. 3) no technical complications.

The second issue, honest and intelligent debate, makes me think about the movie *Ratatouille*. There's the critic, who is respected for his honest opinion about what's served in restaurants. This expressed opinion can be negative; if he says a restaurant is bad, then apparently it is. When a critic is only "back patting," I believe this damages his credibility, and his review helps no one. An honest critic is someone with whom people can identify, which is impossible if he likes everything. However, he remains an individual, and everyone should be able to express his or her opinion. Not everyone is as eloquent as the acclaimed critic, and not everyone wishes to express their opinion while having their name published with it. Luckily, the Internet is an ideal way for these people to express their opinion. Anonymity can easily be realized on fora, and for people who just want to "rate" something, there are numerous possibilities, of which I think a *folksonomy* is very interesting. A folksonomy enables people to anonymously *tag* certain online content, either by selecting one or more tags from a list, or by adding their own words (ingenious, brilliant, longwinded and the like). When these words are given a certain value, content can be sorted on popularity. A nice example can be found at <http://www.ted.com/>.

Interactivity is best experienced and understood when you actually participate.

I believe that for installations or performances in which interactivity with the audience plays an important role, it is up to the reviewer(s) to provide the right combination of words and supportive online media to create an impression of the experience of this interactivity (NOT to mimic the interactivity using some interactive web content).

At conferences like ICMC, you'll see quite a number of attendees carrying around laptops or smart-phones, and a great number of them are able to connect to the Internet. If you provided them with a means to quickly comment or rate a performance online, you could avoid delayed reviewing, and the opinions would be fresh. You could choose to let these people surf to <http://www.computermusic.org>, navigate to the appropriate performance, and fill in a form or hit a button. However, there are ways to speed this up. Think for instance about what you can do with widgets (like Mac OS X dashboard's), which can be directly connected to a website. An ICMC widget could list all recent performances, and when clicking on these, you would be able to instantly shout an opinion, or add to a folksonomy. Similar instant reviewing can be achieved with software ("Apps") for smart-phones such as the iPhone.

These types of opinions are often shared within small groups during or after a

concert, but they are seldom discussed within a larger group. Thus the importance of the social experience gets overlooked. I think it would be great if there were an organized forum at the conference, as soon after the performance as possible.

Let's focus on the online reviewing and discussion. As opposed to printed reviews, often with a limited amount of words, a website is flexible enough to incorporate all sorts of background information, in this case full program notes, composer bios, media files and perhaps interviews. The role of the reviewer changes into a discussion moderator; however, he will additionally write either a summary of this discussion or a personal review to retain a printable report. Additionally, there could be a tag cloud as a product of the folksonomy for each event, roughly illustrating the average opinion of the audience. Composers should—if possible—be involved (or better, active) in the discussion.

If the piece warrants, it would be possible to have two discussion categories: one about the experience of the music, and one about the technology/notation/"realizational apparatus" of the music. While proposing multiple discussions per event, one can think of discussions for each performance (gathered under the event, which might have a general discussion), since experiences in

both of the above categories can vary per performance in a single event. A standard concert review also discusses each performance separately.

A final technical point is notification when there's an update to the discussion. The moderator would be automatically notified, but anyone else could sign up to receive a notification (not the actual update itself) through email. To be more up-to-date, though, I believe that RSS feeds are ideal for this purpose.

Having shared my ideas on the technical part of "The Future of the Concert Review", we are now left with issues like the purpose of reviewing a one-off event, avoidance of mutual back patting, and live fora on social experience. I believe this can best be discussed at the next ICMC.

--Toine Heuvelmans

ICMC 2008 Keynote Address

by *Trevor Wishart*

given at Queen's University, Belfast,

Northern Ireland

August 27, 2008

First of all, I'd like to say how honoured I feel to be asked to give this keynote address to the ICMC in Belfast, especially looking at and listening to much of the innovative work on display here. At 62 I'm beginning to feel like one of those aging rock stars, with the droopy eyes, advancing weight problem and receding hairline, rolled out on TV chat shows to talk about the good old days. But we all get old eventually, so I hope you'll bear with me.

I want to begin by saying that I intend to be controversial, because I want some of the issues I'll raise to be discussed and argued about. I may exaggerate a little for the sake of encouraging debate! I'm going to talk about my experience over 40 years of working with music technology, and I want to focus on 5 important questions. These are:

- 1) The Access question: who can use this new technology?
- 2) The Repertoire question (a question for performers or promoters): how

easily and how widely can this music be performed?

- 3) The Visibility question: who listens to this music?

- 4) The Stability question: are these technologies sufficiently stable to be widely adopted and explored in depth by the musical community?

- 5) The Aesthetic question (probably the most contentious): how can we evaluate the work we're producing?

To start at the beginning of my own journey into this new world, we have to return to the 1960s. At that time computers were almost mythical entities, vast purring beasts kept in sealed, air-conditioned rooms at a constant temperature and exclusively attached to University Science Departments or huge business enterprises. They were attended by their grateful 'minions', who had to type computer code onto punched cards or paper tape and feed these into reading devices that would not have looked out of place in a mass-production factory.

Live-performance devices for electronic music consisted of things like analogue filters, distortion boxes for electric guitars, or delay-lines based on looping-tapes. Some were packaged in a black box "effects unit" to do a pre-ordained task like flanging or phasing. The format of these devices was determined by the demands of the commercial music industry. Widely available electronic synthesis was primitive,