

SEAMUS NEWS

A publication of the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States, providing news, interviews, and announcements.

A Quarterly Newsletter

2012, Issue No. 2- August/September

Meaning?

*Keynote address given
by Lars-Gunnar Bodin
to the Electroacoustic
Studies Conference in
Stockholm, Sweden.*

Page 1

Departments

From the Editor
Page 2

*2013 Conference
Update*
Page 2

Members' News
Page 12

CD Announcements
Page 14

SEAMUS Online
Page 15

Advertising info
Page 15

About the Newsletter
Page 15

Meaning? *Some Observations by an EAM Practitioner* *by Lars-Gunnar Bodin*

Keynote address delivered to
the Electroacoustic Studies
Network Conference on June
12, 2012

Dear friends and colleagues,
it is a great honor for me to have
been invited to deliver a keynote

address during this conference
where so many distinguished
composers and experts from far
and near are assembled. At this
point I want to strongly
underline that everything I will
talk about today is purely seen
from an EAM practitioner's point
of view, which means that

specialists in information-theory,
semiotics and communication
philosophy, etc, may find my
viewpoints a bit naive. On the
other hand I been composing
electroacoustic music (EAM) for
more than 45 years and I hope
that I have gathered some
experience and thoughts about
this art form during that time.

The overall theme to be
discussed during these days is
not an easy task, but at the same
time I find it to be a most vital
and essential subject to
scrutinize. For me it is also a
great challenge.
It is not every day one has an
opportunity to discuss in detail
the "soft" aspects of

continued on page 3

FROM THE EDITOR

As some of you may know, we're in a state of transition at SEAMUS. Recently, a set of changes has been implemented to the Board of Directors, redefining some members' roles. Under the new system, I have been appointed "Director of Communications." Given this new situation, I am in the process of handing over the Newsletter Editing to Steven Ricks. We'll be collaborating on the next few issues before he fully takes over the position.

In this issue, our main story is the keynote address written by Lars-Gunnar Bodin, who has served as the Director of the Electronic Music Studio in Stockholm. This thought-provoking essay came to my attention through Jon Appleton.



As usual, there is the Member News, which includes announcements of recent performances, recordings, and, for the first time, apps!

Anthony Cornicello

Anthony Cornicello



Conference Update

The submission site for SEAMUS 2013 is now up and running. On the site you will find a call for works, papers, and panel discussions. SEAMUS 2013 will include options such as "Piece Plus Poster Presentation" (where the composer may choose to present information about the work in a poster session held in proximity to the concert) and "Club Venue Submissions", where the work is presented in a bar/club setting. Available performers include two ensembles in residence, *Zeitgeist*, and *Ensemble 61*, as well as the venerable Keith Kirchoff. The website provides links to these performers, as well as general information about concert venues and a general conference schedule. Travel and lodging information will be available in the near future.

The Conference Banquet will be held at the Minnesota Science Museum. Weather permitting, the banquet will be held on a balcony with a wonderful view of the Mississippi River.

SEAMUS 2013 will be held at the McNally-Smith College of Music in Saint Paul, MN, from April 18-20. The deadline for submissions is October 15, 2012.

The official website is here:

<http://blog.mcnallysmith.edu/seamus2013/>

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Electroacoustic Music, something I think is very important in order to constitute a fundamental basis for the development of an art theory for this form of music. With such an ambitious approach as indicated in the conference invitation various intellectual problems will surely arise. I think that the discussion of these things will be very exciting and of great value.

For me the problems start already with the conference heading. As far I understand, "Meaning" and "Meaningfulness" belongs to the group of notions that the philosopher Walter G. Gallie has described as "contested concepts", which could "involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of the users". According to Gallie the factors that add up to the label "contested concepts" are that "it should have an evaluating nature, and an ambiguous complex content. Those who uses these notions should also be aware of that other persons may use the terms differently". Gallie exemplifies this issue with art, democracy and justice.¹ When discussing art theory and aesthetics "contested concepts" are most frequently found. A glance in a dictionary of philosophy also shows that a number of thinkers have been dealing with the notion of meaning, and some extensive theories of a philosophical nature have emerged. A quick look in a thesaurus of synonyms also corroborate that "meaning" can signify a multitude of notions.

As far as I understand the concept "meaning" mainly belongs to the domains of philosophy and semantics, but when applied to the arts, it is also to a large extent a

matter of psychology. It seems to me that the study of "meaning" as a concept in the arts could be basically divided into two parts, meaning with a verbal content and meaning based on non-verbal "messages". Verbal content naturally have an advantage in literary forms over music when "meaning" signifies understanding. Non-verbal messages and content are more complex and problematic than semantics, but when applied to the arts, it is also to a large extent a matter of psychology.

Some prominent theorists like Leonard B. Meyer have suggested that perceiving a meaning in a musical work could be best explained in terms of information theory. Meyer refers to Morris. A. Cohen's definition of meaning: "Anything acquires meaning if it is connected with, or indicates or refers to, something beyond itself, so that its full nature points to and is revealed in that connection".² Meyer considers moreover: "Meaning in this sense resides in what both Cohen and George Herbert Mead have called the "triadic relationship" between the stimulus, the thing to which it refers, and the individual for whom the stimulus has meaning. While meaning is thus a mental fact, it is not arbitrarily subjective. The relationship between the stimulus and the thing to which it refers is a real relationship existing in the objective world, whether physical or social."³

I think his ideas are both insidious and problematic because they, by and large, seem only relevant for a demarcated framework of classical art-music

and perhaps some other cases of tonal music, in particular various kinds of industrial entertainment music. Meyer himself has hinted that this could be the case when he speculates that one obstacle for a wider appreciation of "modern" art music is due to the low level of redundancy. If redundancy is low in an instrumental composition, like Pierre Boulez' *Structures* for two pianos, the redundancy is surely even lower for many EAM works. The fact that the potential sonic material for a EAM piece could comprise anything in the sound world is compelling.

Meyer has another interesting observation. When the term "experimental" started to be used as an attribute to more extreme forms of avant-garde music the problems really started for a wider appreciation and understanding of new music. In his book *Experimental Music*, Michael Nyman has mainly equated "experimental music" with the music by John Cage and his followers, but I don't think that is correct.⁴ There are other composers who deserve to be included among musical "experimentalists" and who not subscribe to John Cage's music philosophy. I will later discuss John

A crucial question will emerge whether "meaning" is an essential and intrinsic attribute to a work of art or not?

Cage's philosophy more in particular.

A competent listener of classical art-music is presumably to a great extent familiar with the styles of various musical epochs and their means of musical expression, which could make it easier to apprehend the musical meaning. However, I don't believe that it will help much to grasp any content that goes beyond the pure musical "language" – if we assume that a content of non-musical nature could be conveyed. It is well known that this matter has been heavily disputed from time to time during the history of western art music. Maybe that will remain to be an unsolvable problem for all times. The famous statement by Eduard Hanslick from the latter part of the 19th century has the following wording: "Tonally moving forms are only and solely the content and object of music" (*Tönend bewegte formen sind einzig und allein Inhalt und Gegenstand der Musik*).⁵ This statement is still under discussion in academic aesthetic circles. If content in traditional instrumental and vocal music is only a matter of "tonally moving forms" what would be the corresponding discourse in a great deal of EAM, where the pitch or "tone" parameter is weak or absent? Will "sonic moving forms" be all right?

From time to time it has been suggested that some art forms may have their own languages, particularly in music and in some areas of visual arts. The proverb "a picture tells more than a thousand words" indicates that some semantic information could perhaps

be derived from an interpretation of an image or an art installation, but there are definitely significant exceptions. A painting by Piet Mondrian or Mark Rothko, for example does not, in my view, convey a verbal message of a thousand words – if any,

The idea that music – EAM included – to a certain degree is based on a kind of "language" has also been current from time to time. In the valuable and important book *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*, Simon Emmerson and his contributors argue that EAM could be seen as a language with a syntaxis of its own.⁶ Metaphorically, traditional instrumental music could perhaps be perceived in that way since its sound-material is well defined, but EAM is not based on a defined and demarcated soundworld like classical instrumental art music. On the contrary, all of us know that any conceivable sound could be used in an EAM composition which makes this art form amorphous and difficult to put together into a language of some sort. If "meaning" signify "understanding" it may be difficult to grasp an EAM composition if you are not a very experienced listener.

A crucial question will emerge whether "meaning" is an essential and intrinsic attribute to a work of art or not? If so, is "meaning" an intellectual process that is automatically triggered when we listen to EAM or in fact music in general?

Therefore I anticipate a number of diverse opinions that will be presented about our theme during the days ahead. I would not even be surprised if someone will express the view that Electroacoustic Music has no meaning at all and that it is just a subsection of more universal concepts like "the Meaning of Being Rich" or "the Meaning of Life". Some pessimistic persons will perhaps arrive at the conclusion that life has no meaning at all – without necessary suffering from an existential crisis.

The Electroacoustic Music itself as an art form, should also be a subject discussed to some degree in order to create some sort of common idea of what EAM is today. I think it is vital that we have some common foundation as a start for our discussions because it seems to me that EAM is now a rather motley collection of genres and consequently far from being a coherent entity. Even if a majority at this conference have a pretty good idea of where the boundaries are lying for this art form it is not so easy to come up with a comprehensive and unanimous definition of Electroacoustic Music. There are always twilight zones. This is a recurring problem in aesthetics and art theory. It is not like in natural science where a definition is mostly precise and maybe indisputable. To my experience one may be quite satisfied if the core of a definition or a demarcation will be covered, let us say, up to 80%. One should in particular pay attention to where the boundaries are lying to adjacent genres in popular music such as Electronica and Techno, but also how Sound Art is related to EAM. Is it a demarcated art form or just a

diluted subdivision of *Musique Concrète*?

Nowadays it seems to me that EAM most often occurs in various improvised forms which I think add to the complex of problems that constitutes the notion of "meaning". In these circumstances I will therefore simplify my address by restricting myself mainly to EAM in fixed recorded forms, which I regard to be the core of EAM, but I am also going to discuss EAM in improvised forms to some extent. EAM in fixed recorded forms is, oddly enough, what some people in a pejorative way has labeled "Academic EAM".

It is a widespread view that art is about a sort of communication-process divided into the simplified scheme: a sender (the artist), a communication medium and a receiver, a listener, reader or spectator. If we assume that Meyer's theories are correct it may also be acceptable to conclude that the musical art – including EAM – could be a kind of language. The more you are familiar with the "language" of the art form in question the better you can comprehend what the artist is trying to say and convey. For instance, an expert listener of classical art music has surely acquired an intimate knowledge of the musical material and forms which may give him or her an aesthetic satisfaction, an emotional experience, and even an intellectual kick combined with a great deal of pleasure. In addition, a more analytically inclined person may also be able to enjoy structural aspects and the general evolution of a composition like thematic

variations, the polyphonic fabric, harmonic progressions, rhythmic patterns and the over all form, especially if this refers to the classical art music. The listener is likely to think that he or she in this case has a good understanding of what is going on while listening to a musical work and consequently find it meaningful. Meyer has suggested that a vast musical knowledge and listening experience constitute a demarcated musical culture and this is supposed to be a necessary foundation for the occurrence of "meaning". .

But what happens if the listener is not very familiar with the musical "language" or, in the worst case, finds the musical language completely alien up to the point where he or she doesn't think it is music at all? The communication seems to have ceased to work. There, I think we have one of the obstacles for a wider appreciation and understanding of EAM.

I have listed some characteristics that I think are typical for EAM in fixed recorded forms which I think are definitely divergent compared with instrumental and vocal music. My list is by no means complete and I will emphasize that you may not find all of them in the same EAM work. I will also point out that my first item is about the often weak position of pitch found in "classical" EAM. However in some more recent manifestations – especially works that are close to popular music – one may find both pitch and metrically based structures. Should compositions of this nature be included in the EAM domain?⁷

LIST OF ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC CHARACTERISTICS

- 1) The pitch-parameter compared with instrumental and vocal music has a reduced role or is absent. Object-oriented instead of pitch.
- 2) The time-parameter appears often as vague and subjective. It is seldom based on metrical durations in a traditional sense. Repeated and aperiodic sonic elements rather than rhythmic processes.
- 3) The entire sound world can in principle be used for a composition.
- 4) Discontinuous processes in sound sequences. Causal logic is frequently absent.
- 5) Mimetic elements are common on various levels of abstraction.
- 6) Parallel motions instead of counterpoint, "polysonic layers".
- 7) Composers almost always realize their works by themselves. Generally no interpreters are required.
- 8) Spectral and timbral compositions are frequently found. Continuous transitions occur from one sound to another, e.g. morphing, "mélange" etc. one sound to another, e.g. morphing, "mélange" etc.
- 9) Variable, virtual room acoustics and ambience are essential. Virtual sound movements are often employed.

10) EAM as a self-contained object belongs to the category fine arts while instrumental/vocal music belongs to performing arts.

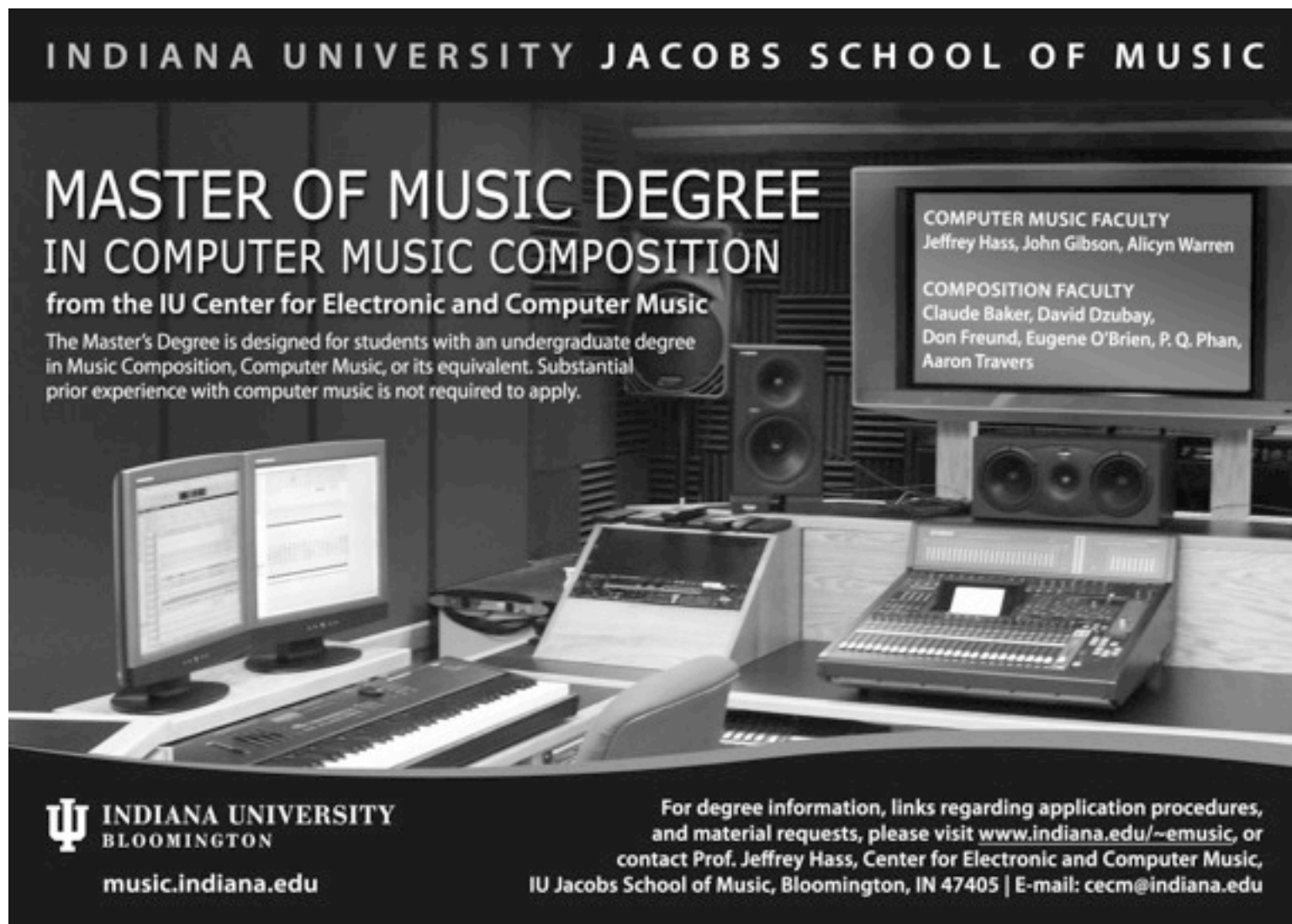
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It was an act of greatest importance when Pierre Schaeffer, in the end of the 1940s launched his concepts of *Musique Concrète* and the "sound object", which – among other things – resulted in the notion that pitch as the common denominator could be replaced by the sound object. In

addition his elaborate typology over all conceivable sounds is a great contribution as an analytical tool. All these achievements gave rise, in my opinion, to a great shift of musical thinking, in fact a new musical paradigm. I find it rather unique in music history that one person could create an entirely new musical art form.

In a peculiar way I find Schaeffer's typology of sounds reminding of Carl von Linné's famous typological system for the plants, *Species Plantarum* from 1753. Von Linné's system is ingenious when it comes to describe all possible and important properties of plants, but

is incapable to explain why we prefer one flower to the others. Likewise, a typology like Schaeffer's – which is aiming at a coverage of all psychoacoustic and other descriptive characteristics of the total soundworld – is unable to explain why we find some sound objects more aesthetically attractive than others. Moreover, it cannot elucidate why a specific sequence of sound objects would be perceived by the listeners as more meaningful than any other arbitrary sound sequences. In my opinion composers in general have very little control of how his or her artistic efforts could induce a sense of meaning among his audience. It would not be surprising that a



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composer, conscious of these problems, would give up trying. A composer who is working in a more intuitive way may just hope for the best.

The idea that a concrete music composition is an object composed as a whole of separate sound objects lies near at hand. This idea may also easily be extended to comprise EAM in general, especially for works in a fixed recorded form. This notion is of a fundamental importance for me and means that we could regard an EAM composition as a self-contained and, often self-referential, object that after completion is divorced from its originator and has a separate existence out of control of the composer. The composers have very limited resources to influence the listeners how they should evaluate and interpret his work.

The “triadic” model suggested by Meyer may not be the only way for a musical communication and the arousal of a meaningful experience among the listeners. If we accept the notion of the self-contained object, the way I have outlined, the “triadic” model has to be somewhat modified. The music in the middle of this “triadic” scheme has got a new function and is not a medium for conveying any particular message or meaning, but maybe act more like a “trigger” for the arousal of an aesthetic appreciation and an emotional satisfaction among the listeners. Such an object can be seen as “*ein Ding an sich*” in a Kantian sense and may not have any specific purpose than being a work of art. A narrative content is not in this case any

inherent characteristic of the art work in question, but when the music confronts the listeners a process of interpretation may start and give rise to various narrative versions on their part. When the composer has finished his composition, it is divorced from him and has got its own entity. Of course the composer may hope that the reception of the audience will be favorable, but it is out of his power. A disinterested attitude to what happens to his or her creations after completion are not uncommon.

When looking at a flower we may find it beautiful and get a great deal of aesthetic satisfaction and pleasure, but the fact that it arouses an aesthetic response in humans is not an intrinsic characteristic of the flower. A self-contained musical object may function aesthetically in the same manner. However, it has now and then been an issue of dispute among the circles of academic aestheticians whether an aesthetic object must be man-made or if we should include natural phenomena into the aesthetic realm. Some prominent artists like John Cage and Hans Arp⁸ have hinted that a work of art should be produced like an artifact from nature. The borderline between the man-made art and nature may not be so distinct after all when recordings of “natural” sounds are not so rare in EAM.

Marcel Duchamp has written a little essay where he suggested that the artist could sometimes act like an ESP medium, a person that can transfer an esoteric message without necessarily understand its content or meaning. To that must be

added Leonard B. Meyers’ view that the composer usually is not the best person to explain what he or she are doing – a view I fully share.⁹ He writes the following: “To put the matter bluntly: creative artists – composers, painters and writers – are not necessarily knowledgeable, or even reliable, explainers of what their skills have wrought. The artist, like God, is a creator. But, as God, the comments of artists on their work are often cryptic and inscrutable. They know how to invent and shape patterns that intrigue and affects us but may be at loss to explain how and why we – and they – comprehend and respond to a work of art as we do”. I should like to add to that: the composers are often rather reluctant to explain what they have created and therefore may pay little attention to whether his or her work will appears meaningful to the listener or not. As I said earlier he or she may be completely disinterested in this matter. Many EAM composers seem to be mostly focused on technological and methodological issues and don’t bother with the aesthetics or meaning in their works. Goethe has once exhort us: “*Schaffe künstler, rede nicht*”.

Meyer once told an illuminating anecdote as an example. When Beethoven once had played his “Moonlight” sonata the audience asked what the piece was all about. Beethoven answered by playing the sonata once more.¹⁰ When I read this I come to think of another Goethe statement: “The meaning of life is life itself.” I would not be surprised if a great deal of composers would like to do the same as Beethoven did in a similar

situation. In addition the composer may have to learn to defend his integrity and be able to work even when he thinks that the audience and the Art World are hostile or lacking appreciation of his work and artistic endeavor. It is interesting to notice that also an EAM icon as Karlheinz Stockhausen was affected of these things when he once declared: "It cannot be decisive for me as a composer whether you like my music or not. If you don't like it, someone else will. If no one likes it, that wouldn't make me despair either. I work on something and when it is ready I create something new."¹¹ Such an attitude among composers is maybe typical and understandable but it will perhaps not enhance a meaningful communication with the audience.

Another aspect of regarding a work of art as a self-contained object is that it may often lead to an inner dialogue between the originator and his off-spring. The object, in this respect, could function as a kind of "mental discussion-partner". An EAM work does not represent any exception. The art object will in this case serve the composer as a communication medium and give rise to contemplation and a sense of artistic response from the object during the creation-period. When the process of creation is completed the ties between the work of art and its originator start to loosen. In my experience the memory of how I was reasoning during my work on a certain composition is fading away with time. Today I have lost practically all mental contact with a majority of my earlier works. The only thing left is that in most cases I recognize them as mine.

The originators of art, including EAM composers, are rather lonely persons concerning their artistic work. Samuel Beckett has written that the loneliness of man is incurable and that "the art is the apotheosis of loneliness". His conclusion is that art is the only way out of this predicament and be true to oneself. It is also the sole way of communication – not with other humans – but with oneself. In my view, the consequence of such thoughts ought to be that meaning is to a great extent an affair between the originator and his object of artistic endeavor.¹²

Today live performance seems to be the dominant way of the dissemination of EAM. Live performance covers a wide spectrum of manifestations from works with a definite and preplanned form often attached with a fixed score to more loosely, improvised performances. John Cage is definitely one of the most influential composers behind the development and implementation of improvisation in contemporary art music. His philosophy about the art has also been a source of inspiration for many visual artists, choreographers, poets, etc. but some of his ideas have also been leading to a few very troublesome problems concerning meaning in contemporary music.

Cornerstones of his philosophy are the concepts of "Indeterminacy" and "Depersonification" of the originator. In short it means that a work of music should never be performed in the same way from one performance to another. When

man is a creature of habit one must resort to specific manipulations to counteract the tendency of the artist to repeat certain patterns or conducts. Cage solves this problem by using random methods during the act of composing and sometimes also during the performance of his works. Cage calls these manipulations "Chance Operations". The ideal work of art – based on pure indeterminacy – should preferably be constituted in such a way that even the originator will not know how the work will turn out from one performance to another, thus a completely open form. The role of the originator will in this way be deliberately weakened and perhaps even completely insignificant. The process of creation will be obscure or hard to apprehend from the perspective of the audience.

The function of the work of art as a tool of communication between the composer and his audience will be greatly reduced, maybe even down to a definitive zero point. This is another slanted version of what I have said earlier about the EAM work as an independent object. But this is a far more extreme case where the work of art will come very close to an ever-changing but self-contained object and in fact makes it almost impossible for the audience to reach an understanding how the composition is related to the composer – if the composer is not visible and participate during the performance. This could be one reason why so many composers of live EAM also are performers of their own works. It may be a way out to partially overcome these problems and give the audience a sense of contact with the composer

and maybe also induce some sort of musical meaning among the present listeners.

The work of art, that appears as a self-contained object, entails the character of series of facts or a single fact that could be observed and scrutinized in the same objective and impersonal way a scientist looks at a natural phenomenon in his laboratory. In addition the work of art does not need to be interpreted or analyzed when it is in principle empty of content and emotional expressions. The work of art could be looked at "ein ding an sich" in a Kantian sense as I have said before. If you like to be a little mocking this is somewhat comfortable for the composer. He does not have to worry too much of his responsibilities towards his audience since there is nothing in his work that conveys any messages with moral or political or religious standpoints, etc. Above that he may think that he becomes immune to any nasty critique. This way of thinking has perhaps been even more evident in the visual arts where a bunch of Brillo boxes or Coca-Cola bottles presented in a art gallery will be perceived as inviolable as natural phenomena.

This notion was reinforced when Cage and his associates started to use the term "experimental" as an extra embellishing factor to his music. Cage was not alone by using this term. Other artists used the term "experimental" for the same purpose, like for instance in experimental film, poetry, etc. It was in the air, so to speak, and it was a way to add more prestige and respect to their art, but also an

indication that their art belonged to the definite front of the avant-garde art. The artists were surely influenced by the enormous prestige and respect that science and technology gained after the Second World War, but I don't think it really enhanced the ability among the listeners to apprehend a meaning, on the contrary it was probably more bewildering. Also within the EAM domain the term "experimental" was used in order to elevate its importance and give it an aura of being scientific and an artform of the future.

In Cage's case the term experimental was even more difficult to apprehend since Cage used it in a rather unorthodox way. In a statement from 1955 he says: "The word experimental is apt, providing it is understood not as descriptive of an act to be later judged in term of success and failure, but simply as an act of which the outcome is unknown".¹³ Obviously Cage use the term in a quite opposite way than what is common in natural sciences where an experiment is set up to give an answer to specific problems or to verify certain theories and hypothesis. The experiment gives rise to new knowledge and findings that in turn may generate new experiments.

Cage's version of "experimental music" is different and it is the situation or the performance that constitute the experiment. Since every experiment should be unique and is not allowed to be repeated or evaluated, no new knowledge would be accumulated which could for example improve the piece from one performance to another. In such

an instance earlier versions would be repeated and the work of art would be step by step more predetermined and the indeterminacy of the work could not be maintained.

Another fundamental concept in Cage's philosophy is that there should be no distinct borderline between art and life. Art is de facto an integrated part of life. Life, according to Cage, is completely impossible to predict and it should therefore act as an model for the art. Life is always changing and can never be "logical, abstract or symbolic". All this together will corroborate that art must be indeterministic.

Cage's views are remarkably close to another philosophy of art formulated about 200 years earlier and which could be summarized in the following way:

Art is without intention and meaning

It does not need any interpretation

It does not require any justification

It can not be explained in philosophical or other terms

It is suitable just by being without purpose

When Cage was asked about his spiritual testament, he answered "to have demonstrated how practical it is to create works of art deprived of

intention and purpose” I don’t know if Cage was familiar with Kant’s philosophy but it proves that you could find eminent forerunners to his ideas.

Cage’s ideas had, in my view, a negative influence on the development of EAM in fixed, recorded forms, especially in the US. Even if many US composers of EAM did not fully subscribe to Cage’s philosophy it was there as a sort of background ideology. Michael Newman has written in his book *Experimental Music* that “Indeterminacy in performance guarantees that two versions of the same piece will have no perceptible musical ‘facts’ in common.”¹⁴ Reasonably it must be interpreted that “indeterminacy” counteract the emergence of an identity of a work of art and that is a virtue in itself. A recording of an experimental work of music will in principle be without meaning. Cage has said that recordings of experimental music are misleading and that “a recording of such a work has no more value than a postcard”.⁽¹⁵⁾ An EAM composition in a fixed recorded form must from this point of view be regarded as a misunderstanding and a complete failure.

However there is a snag here. In order to judge whether a performance is based on indeterministic principles or not the listeners must get a chance to hear the work several times in a relatively short span of time. However, such an opportunity will seldom occur for a majority of the audience. These circumstances will most likely counteract the arousal

of meaning among the listeners. I think this is also a problem in the EAM domain and for composers of advanced new music in general. The greater part of EAM compositions will only be heard once or twice. I think I have heard several hundreds of pieces during my professional life, but most of them only once.

On the other hand an intimate knowledge of the EAM repertory could to some extent compensate for this by giving you a general idea of the various means of artistic expression and the aesthetic approaches. It may facilitate to form some apprehension and understanding of what EAM is about, but I guess that these expert listeners are pretty rare.

Maybe I have spent too much time on discussing John Cage’s musical philosophy but I think his ideas have been very influential and important for generations of composers and surely on my generation here in Sweden. However, it does not necessarily mean that everything in this complex of ideas has to be always accepted, his philosophy is not sacrosanct. We can question Cage’s ideas or maybe disagree completely but it is hard to circumvent his thinking.

I like to summarize my talk this evening in the following way: Meaning in the arts is a problematic task and especially when comes to non-verbal art forms like music. EAM constitutes even greater problems, because it does not really exist a coherent and common musical culture that could be a

foundation for a wider understanding and meaning. In my view, meaning in music is basically a mental process that takes place in the minds of the listeners. It is very difficult or maybe even impossible for the originators to convey a well-defined and comprehensible meaning to the audience. Likewise it is a rather futile endeavour to “charge” an EAM work with a highly specific emotional content because the composers are in most cases incapable to guide the audience in a definite perceptual direction. In addition many composers seem to be rather reluctant to think in these terms and manifestations. Some composers may even oppose such thoughts.

Furthermore, I have suggested that an EAM work could be seen as a kind virtual and self-contained object that soon after its completion will forever be divorced from its originator, and become “ein ding an sich” in a Kantian sense. Such an object could nevertheless be a triggering device and arouse various degrees of aesthetic appreciation and emotional satisfaction among the listeners, but it is the individual listener who in the end will make an interpretation of the work of art and sanction its content and meaning. The composer has very little control over this mental process.

A self-contained art object of this kind has a twofold function. It is primarily an artifact that the composer gives to the art world, but his object also serves as a “mental discussion partner”

which give rise to an inner dialogue and contemplation during the creation of his offspring. Finally, I would like to add to this conclusion the rule number one when dealing with aesthetics and art theory: There are always exceptions.

Lars-Gunnar Bodin
(June 2012)

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Member News

Jon Appleton participated in "Acta media 10: Simpósio Internacional de Artemidia e Cultura Digital" in August, 2012 and in performances with Paul Botelho at the Universidad de Bahia in Salvador, Brazil. Appleton will be teaching at the University of Hawaii (Manoa) during the Spring, 2013.

Composer **Larry Austin's** computer-assisted realization/completion (1974-1993) of Charles Ives's *Universe Symphony* (1911-1951) received its New York, Carnegie Hall premiere on May 12, 2012, performed by the Nashville Symphony, Giancarlo Guerrero, principal conductor. In a New York Times review, James Oestreich wrote: "...Ives's *Universe Symphony*...opened the program in a realization and completion by Larry Austin. Though you couldn't easily count the players on a stage teeming with them, it seems safe to say that all 21 of the percussionists listed in the program (in addition to the timpanist) were holding forth, and the middle section, with its welter of meters and tempos, took 5 conductors (including Mr. Austin) working simultaneously to hold it together. So conjectural is this completion, based on muddled sketches and annotations emitted over decades, and so different from another, more recent completion by Johnny Reihard, that it is hard to know how to fit it into our conception of Ives. It is a powerful utterance, to be sure, with a persuasive contour from the deep past (a suspenseful pulsing) through the present (that Ivesian complexity to the max) to the future

(heavenly lightness). Here was adventure all right, and Mr. Guerrero and the orchestra carried it off, like the rest of the program, with fine skill and artistry."

Bret Battey is now Subject Leader for Music, Technology and Innovation at De Montfort University, UK, where he has worked for the last eight years. He enjoyed visiting the U.S. in September 2011, flying to New York City for the premiere of his new audiovisual work *Clonal Colonies* by the Avian Ensemble, to see his audiovisual work *Mercurius* at the NYC Big Screen Project, and to present seminars at NYU (courtesy Elizabeth Hoffman) and Juilliard. He also visited his *alma mater* Oberlin to present a guest concert and seminar with the TIMARA program, and enjoyed catching up with Tom Lopez and Peter Swendsen. He is looking forward to the publication this year of his chapter "Convergence of Time and Space: The Practice of Visual Music from an Electroacoustic Music Perspective," written with Rajmil Fischman of Keele University, in *The Oxford Handbook of Music, Sound and Image in the Fine Arts*. Battey's current research involves the mapping of gestures of an Indian classical vocalist to abstract imagery to inform new ways of conceiving audiovisual relationships.

Stephen David Beck has been named director of the Louisiana State University School of Music effective July 1, 2012. Beck, who served as president of SEAMUS from 1996-2000, has been a faculty member at LSU since 1988, and was

Interim Director of LSU's Center for Computation & Technology (CCT) from 2008-2010. In addition to his new post, he will maintain his joint appointment at the center, where he served as director of the center's Arts, Visualization, Advanced Technologies and Research (AVATAR) Initiative in digital media and head of the Cultural Computing group. He holds the Derryl and Helen Haymon Professorship in music at LSU. sonification to the album's liner notes.

Julius Bucsis will have his composition *Solifluction* (violin, viola, trumpet, and electronics) included in the **SoundProof** ensemble's autumn 2012 tour. His composition *Convection* (violin) will be included in the Fifteen-minutes-of-fame program's *My Dad's Violin* film project. *Quintessence's Breath among the Branes* (electric guitar and live processing) was presented in July at Ireland's Hilltown New Music 2012 festival and will be presented in October at the Soundcrawl 2012 festival. *In the Interest of Time* (fixed media) will also be presented at Soundcrawl 2012 as well as at the Electroacoustic Barn Dance 2012 in November. He has also been performing a set of original compositions for electric guitar and computer. Recent appearances have included performances at the Windup Space in June and at An die Musik in July, both located in Baltimore, MD, and also in June at the Pyramid Atlantic Arts Center in Silver Springs, MD. An upcoming performance will be at New Jersey's Woodbury Arts festival in September.

Member News, continued from page X

Kyong Mee Choi has enjoyed and is looking forward to several recent premieres and performances, including: *For those who left us*, for guitar and piano, was premiered at Ilshin Art hall in Seoul, Korea on June 25, 2012; *The words of Tagore*, for voice, piano, narrator and electronics, was premiered at the Con Brio Festival in Mumbai in India on July 13, 2012; *Condolence* for video was programmed at the FILE 2012, the Art Gallery of SESI at FIESP, Ruth Cardoso Cultural Center in Sao Paulo, Brazil from July 16 to August 19, 2012; *Water Bloom* for eight hands and two pianos will be premiered by Pianissimo ensemble in Youngsan Art Hall in Korea on August 28, 2012; *In Void* for four hands and two pianos will be premiered in Korea on September 10, 2012; *Breathe Life* for solo piano will be premiered in Chicago, IL on September 16, 2012; *Tensile Strength*, co-commissioned work for electronics, will be performed at the 2012 Soundcrawl Festival in Nashville, TN on October 6-13, 2012; *Sublimation* for marimba and electronics will be performed at Electronic Music Midwest on October 11-13, 2012; *Inner Space* for cello and electronics has been selected for the IAWM Annual Concert 2012, and will be performed by Ensemble Pi at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) as part of the Livewire Festival of Contemporary Music on October 28, 2012; *Ceaseless Cease* for clarinet and electronics will be performed at the Electro-Acoustic Barn Dance

Festival on November 8-10, 2012; "Spatial Relationship in Electro-Acoustic Music and Painting," will be published in Korean in the Korean Electro-Acoustic Music Society Computer Music Journal Emile in December 2012; *In Void* for four hands and two pianos won the Tempus Continuum Ensemble's competition 2012.

Butch Rován and Lucky Leone performed "Slim Jim Choker", for spoken word and interactive typewriter, in London and Copenhagen this past summer. The London concert was part of the 2012 CMMR (Computer Music Modeling and Retrieval) International Symposium, and was held in London's historic Wilton's Music Hall. The Copenhagen performance was part of the 2012 SMC (Sound and Music Computing) conference, and was held at the Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art. For more info on "Slim Jim Choker", see: <http://www.soundidea.org/rovan/portfolio/slimjimchoker.html>

Benjamin D. Taylor (benjamintaylormusic.com) was commissioned by a consortium of saxophonists led by Zach Herchen to compose *Shipbreaking*, for alto saxophone and live, interactive electronics using Max/MSP. The piece has already received 9 performances including international performances in Sweden and Norway. In April 2012, New Music USA supported Mr. Taylor in accompanying Zach Herchen on a performance tour of New York City, Boston, and

Baltimore. A recording of the live performance at The Red Room in Baltimore can be heard here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W55jVDISwuY>



Saxophonist Zach Herchen

Adam Vidiksis will perform his work *Mitochondrial Dreams* for solo percussion and electronics at the SCI Regional Conference in Canyon, TX and the Soundcrawl Festival in Nashville, TN in October. He recently performed this piece at the Toronto Electroacoustic Festival in August. He will premiere a new work commissioned by Network for New Music in Philadelphia for percussion and electronics entitled *synapse_circuit*. Adam recently joined the Omaha Symphony for a performance of his work *From the Ashes*. The Temple University Wind Symphony performed his large work for concert band *Nightfall Hysteria*. The Zephyrus Duo will perform his work for flute and djembe, *NGC 981*, at the College Music Society National Conference

CD / App Releases

Ryan Carter recently released an album of algorithmically generated, listener-interactive music for iOS devices, called *iMonkeypants*, which is now available in the App Store.

A link to the app:

<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/imonkeypants/id547532522?mt=8>

For more information:

<http://www.ryancarter.org/imonkeypants.html>



<http://www.panyrosasdiscos.net/pyr048-sarah-j-ritch-string-theory/>

About *String Theory*:

“The five tracks on *String Theory* offer a brief overview into Ritch’s development as a composer and skillful manipulator of electronics and cello. Aside from the notated tonal music of *Sonata de Kinor* and the violin on *400g live*, played by Carmel Raz and captured at an Israeli festival, the three other tracks on the album are played by the composer herself. The free-form noise of the 14-minute *Duo for Solo Cello* explores the properties of strings, transforming an acoustic instrument into the crackling static of a Tesla coil. The epic *16 Days* constructs an astral starscape of eerie drones. *String Theory* beautifully captures the ongoing bloom of one of Chicago’s most daring young composers. – [Time Out Chicago](#)



Sangbong Nam’s fixed media piece *Awaken* is featured on the recent Ablaze Records release *Electronic Masters, Vol. 1*. It is also available on iTunes and amazon.com. For more information visit the CD’s website: http://www.ablazerrecords.net/Electronic_vol1.html.

Sarah Ritch recently released two debut albums on the Pan Y Rosas Discos label: *String Theory*, released in March 2012, and *53:38*, featuring Sound Collision Alliance (Sam Krahn - guitar/slinky; Darren Bartolo - gu zheng; Sarah Ritch - cello/guitar), released in July 2012.

About *53:38*:

“...the musicians’ backgrounds come through in the intuited, largely rhythmic structures that give these four tracks a certain sense of internal cohesion...moves over an urgently rapid pulse and explores a sound world surprisingly reminiscent of early Velvet Underground”. - [Avant New Music News](#)

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