



# SEAMUS

*The Newsletter of the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States,  
providing news, interviews, and announcements.*

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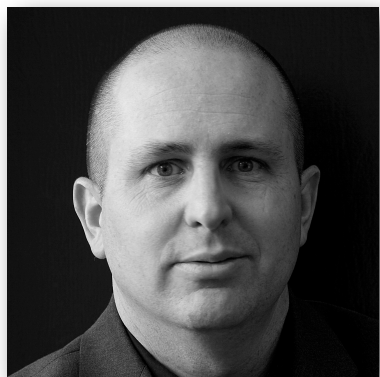
**“Text** brings us into a special cognitive, psychological space that is different than when we listen to non-text sounds or music. We create **meanings** that are deeply personal, and our emotions are touched differently when text and music are combined. That is the core business of singer/songwriters. In my work, I use a semi-narrative form of text that can range from abstract poetry to lists of facts. The text is meant to inspire me to pay attention to my music making in a different way than when I only relate via sound. It is also meant to inspire the audience to listen and receive the text meanings and musical sounds in their own ways.”

**- Anne La Berge**



*Interview begins on page 3*

## FROM THE EDITOR



*Hello SEAMUS Members,*

*I hope you had a great summer and that your fall is off to a great start. Winter is almost upon us, along with Holidays and the impending new year. I hope you're making interesting music and enjoying your activities.*

*This will likely be my last newsletter as sole editor (!). The SEAMUS Board of Directors recently appointed Cecilia Wu as the new Newsletter Editor, and she accepted. The next newsletter will likely represent a "passing of the torch," following which Cecilia will fully take over. I've loved serving in this position, but I'm ready to hand it off to Cecilia and see where she takes things.*

*In this issue I'm happy to present a power-packed interview with Anne La Berge, which includes several interesting links throughout and at the end. Also, another great essay from Dustin Ragland and a surprise book review from SEAMUS CD Series Director Scott Miller.*

*Then the usual features—member news and a message from President Ted Coffey—round things out. All best, SEAMUS friends.*

*Sincerely,*

Steve Ricks

SEAMUS Newsletter Editor

# SEAMUS 2020

March 12 - 14

University of Virginia

Charlottesville, VA

The Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS) 2020 National Conference will be held at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA.

The application deadline has passed and all submissions are being adjudicated via the double-blind process used in past conferences. Notifications will be sent as soon as decisions are made, likely early in 2020 if not sooner.

For more information on the conference venues, presentations formats, or to access future conference information, go to the official conference website:

<https://seamus2020.music.virginia.edu/submissions>



Interview with [Anne La Berge](#)

by Steve Ricks

Introduction

In 2000 I met composer and flutist Ned McGowan at an SCI National Student Conference in Ann Arbor, MI, a fortuitous experience that has led to a lasting friendship. At the time we met, Ned had recently relocated to Amsterdam to work with, among others, Anne La Berge. My connections with Ned led to my participation in a project he spearheaded called “WRENCH,” which subsequently connected me to several other composers and performers living in Amsterdam, eventually including Anne. Concurrent with all that, my friend and composition colleague at BYU Christian Asplund had met and performed with Anne several times through the improvising scene in Seattle and later in Amsterdam.

In 2017 these connections all came together. In February 2017 I hosted Anne and her husband, David Dramm, for a residency and concert at BYU that included her recent multimedia work *Utter*. Later that year in June, Christian and I organized a composition workshop for our students with Anne, David, Ned, and several other Amsterdam-based musicians we had come to know, which was hosted at Anne’s artistic home, Splendor Amsterdam. Those experiences in 2017 and subsequent listening have acquainted me more deeply with Anne’s work, which I find engaging, inspiring, and always with the right amount of “serious fun” (Anne’s words). I hope you enjoy this interview.

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**What are your most memorable early musical influences, and which of them seem to have had the most enduring influence?**

My parents were both semi-professional musicians. My father was also a research psychologist which evolved into neuropsychology as the field changed. They created the Minnesota Bach Society when we were living in the Twin Cities in my childhood years. My father was a choral conductor and my mother played the violin. In fact, they both just turned 90 and my father has just stopped conducting a community chorus and my mother is still playing the violin. Since birth I was present at rehearsals, concerts and musical gatherings. There was a lot of Bach. The two most enduring influences are the love of practicing from my mother and the deep curiosity that my father has for how the sounds and the emotions of music can deeply touch both performers and audiences.





photo: Isabelle Vigier

**How integral is Splendor Amsterdam—the venue/collective you co-created—to your work as a composer and performer?**

[Splendor Amsterdam](#) is a building and a community where I have been able to practice, rehearse, collaborate and perform for the last five years in my own timing and personal style. The high quality sound systems and the comfortable acoustics has inspired many hours of experiment and tweaking.

It has also given me a sense of responsibility and purpose to be part of a diverse community of artists where I can understand my role as a fellow artist both locally and internationally.

**I know you've been a force in the free improvisation world for years, and have also been an innovator with music technology—how do those two aspects of your work relate to each other? Both historically and at present?**

Many professional acoustic improvisers are still shy about engaging with technology whether that is using hardware or software or just cueing sound files on a device. Performers who are at home with technology have often given up playing an acoustic instrument. What a pity that these parallel worlds are taking so much time to share the stage together! Much of my career has been invested in creating works where

*(continued on page 6)*





## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear SEAMUS Members,

I hope this finds everyone well and homing in on their best ever Hallowe'en costume. First, we're pleased that our application to join CIME / ICEM, represented in Krakow by Konstantinos Karathanasis, was unanimously accepted earlier this month. We look forward to sharing and sounding work with our international composer colleagues. The SEAMUS Board has been busy publishing the SEAMUS Journal (Eli Stine), continuing to release new and historic recordings (Scott Miller), gathering nominations for Board elections (Olga Oseth), and effecting easeful adjudication for the SEAMUS 2020 conference (Eli Fieldsteel, Adam Vidiksis, et al). To a very fine pool of adjudicators — thank you! Stay tuned over the next few weeks for emails from Olga about said elections, and a rich socio-demographic survey from Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner et al. In addition, over the next few weeks we'll roll out a new initiative to support local SEAMUS happenings of Members' own designs, and offer a call for the next Miniatures album (Annie Hui-Hsin Hsieh). Meanwhile, co-host Leah Reid and I are planning a vital and abundant conference at the University of Virginia, March 12-14 — with plenty of help from our community. Looking forward!

Ted

[president@seamusonline.org](mailto:president@seamusonline.org)



virtuosic electro acoustic performers can play with creative pleasure and abandon and where music technology nerds can do the same. And they can perform with one another, sharing the same musical space.

One of my biggest projects to provide opportunities for electro acoustic improvisers was when I created and ran the Kraakgeluiden:

"In 1999, together with [Steve Heather](#) and [Cor Fuhler](#), [La Berge] founded Kraakgeluiden, a improvisation series based in Amsterdam, exploring combinations of acoustic instruments, electronic instruments and computers, and using real-time interactive performance systems. Many of the musical collaborations that have resulted have taken on a life beyond the Kraakgeluiden series, which ceased in 2006. La Berge's own music has evolved in parallel, and the flute has become only one element in a sound world that includes samples, synthesis, the use of spoken text and electronic processing." Bob Gilmore

**What are your current favorite electroacoustic music tools—software/hardware/etc.? How has your basic "rig" for live electronic performance changed (or not) through the years?**

My first electroacoustic equipment was a microphone. I used it to amplify extended techniques that not only come from the embouchure area of the flute, but other sounds that come from the end or the holes. I also used it to heavily amplify the mouth percussion sounds that have come in so handy when I play with certain groups.

The story I like to tell is that amplifying a flute did not solve the issue of being heard when playing in loud improv settings and I moved on to process the flute as a way to simply be heard. Processing was a way to expand the instrument sonically. I used a Clavia Nord MicroModular and then a Nord Modular rack synth. The Nord was punchy and could be made to sound unconventional which supported the range of extended techniques that I enjoyed processing. I originally used it mostly for processing and rarely as a compositional instrument.

It was a scary time for me when Clavia discontinued the Modular since I had no backup and I was touring the world.

I had been following the development of the [Kyma System](#) throughout the 1990's and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century but was not aware that it would be for me until they came out with the Pacarana and Paca which would be easy to tour with. The superb audio quality, the generous programming environment and the aesthetic dedication of Symbolic Sound to improvisation and invention has been a major inspiration to me since 2012 when I purchased my first Kyma System.

I use the Kyma System now to process the live flute, create audio and compose. In my solo setup I use Max to administrate control from an iPad and to route information from an Arduino connected to analog and continuous controller pedals.

I am interested in using the computer as a third party, as another personality in the performance. Many of my pieces are in the form of a Max patch or Max app that informs the performers when and when not to play and suggests musical parameters to focus on. The cues that the Max patch gives can be either visual, aural or both. For the visual cues I've used videos, lights, DIY LED objects, iPads and smartphones. I was able to purchase 6 iPads as part of the *Utter* project in 2016 and I use them regularly with ensembles. They run Cycling 74 Mira or Symbolic Sound's Kyma Control or Javascript, using the p5js library which is controlled using the node.script object in Max. The advantage of using touch sensitive devices is that the communication is two-way between the device and the main computer.



photo: Peter Kers

Using your recent work *Utter* as a springboard, can you talk both specifically and generally about your interest in text and how/why you enjoy exploring text in your work?



Text brings us into a special cognitive, psychological space that is different than when we listen to non-text sounds or music. We create meanings that are deeply personal, and our emotions are touched differently when text and music are combined. That is the core business of singer/songwriters. In my work, I use a semi-narrative form of text that can range from abstract poetry to lists of facts. The text is meant to inspire me to pay attention to my music making in a different way than when I only relate via sound. It is also meant to inspire the audience to listen and receive and interpret the text meanings and musical sounds in their own ways.

Using text is a way to shuffle our musical habits and to scramble listeners' expectations. Examples are my recent works [Assail](#) and [Utter](#). In both of these works I use text to startle people, to *jump-start* them out of their habits and truly be in the present moment.

**Your new album looks great! And its concept is very compelling so I can't wait to hear it. Can you talk about how it came together?**

My husband David Dramm and my daughter Diamanda Dramm and I wanted to document the music that we have been playing together in a form that would be consistent with how we usually perform it. That is, with a serious fun that is particular to us as a family. David and I have been performing as a duo since 1987 and we have been performing onstage in professional settings with Diamanda since she was 11. We've played

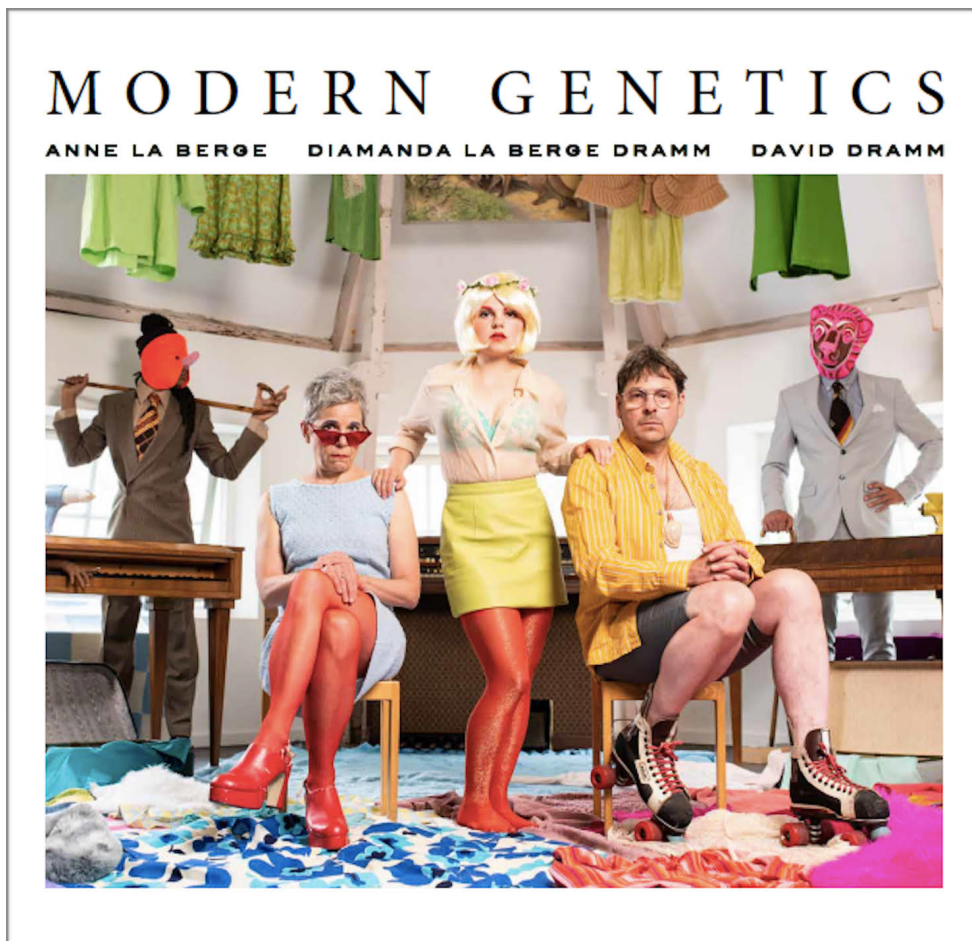


photo: [Carmen Schabracq](#)

arrangements of numbers from projects that we've all been involved with individually and we've created arrangements of our arrangements for specific events over the years. This triple LP project has given us the chance to have most of that music in one place.

We describe it as a collector's item upon release, a musical family history unlike any other. An impossible, rousing mix of punk, country, spoken word and electro.

The 21st century von Trapp family La Berge Dramm.

One final question I had was your perspective on current (or even less current) American electroacoustic music/works/ideas/technologies that seem to have the most resonance in Amsterdam/Europe—and why? Basically, some sort of response that allows for your unique vantage point of your earlier life and training in the US and then your professional life in Europe to the present.

American electro acoustic music is so diverse these days that I cannot draw specific correspondences between such a large country and the small and concentrated scene in Amsterdam. The part of my own roots that I have an intimate connection with is my dedication to the experimentalists including John Cage, Alvin Lucier, Pauline Oliveros and Annea Lockwood. I have also found younger electro acoustic artists such as Katherine Young, Sam Pluta, Lauren Sarah Hayes and Natascha Diels to be sources of inspiration for me. In other words, the pioneers and the mavericks who have developed their own imaginative musical languages remind me of my earlier training and give me food for thought regarding my work here on the other side of the ocean.

Another thought on my US past and my European present is that I left the states after establishing the beginnings of an artistic career. The usual options for young US artists at that time was to pursue an academic career following a PhD. Since I carved a different path by migrating to The Netherlands and financing my work through Dutch grants, fellowships and gigs, I have shared my work with people from walks of life inside and outside various teaching environments. I held a salaried conservatory job for a short time in the 1990's and for the most part have been freelance. These opportunities to experience a diversity of people and places is a major influence in my vision of humanity and my work. Conversations with myself often touch on: Who are we here in this space right now? What are we doing here and why are we doing it?

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URLs of interviews and performances:

<https://news.symbolicsound.com/2014/09/portrait-of-anne-la-berge/>

<http://earreader.nl/archives/14>

<http://www.paristransatlantic.com/magazine/interviews/laberge.html>

Vear, Craig: The Digital Score, Musicianship, Creativity and Innovation; Routledge, 2019.

Interview Portrait by IMA: <https://ima.or.at/en/imafiction/video-portrait-07-anne-la-berge/>

The Hidden Alliances Exhibition at Ars Electronica: <https://annelaberge.com/ars-electronica-2018/>

Maze Festivals where my works have been premiered and played by MAZE, the ensemble that I am a member of:

<https://www.maze.nu/maze-festival/>

Interview on Mexican TV regarding composition and feminisim: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki33YgR4ZDg>

Interview regarding works and review of my performance at the first Heroines of Sound Festival in Berlin:

<https://missy-magazine.de/blog/2015/07/14/verfremdete-floete-vertraute-geschichten/>

Review of IMA Portrait interview and feature on Anne La Berge in Freistil Magazine, Vienna

<https://annelaberge.com/freistil/>

Performance of RAW for improvising ensemble by MAZE at the Bologna Angelica Festival including the review:

<https://annelaberge.com/bologna/>

Performance and review of *Swamp* for improvising ensemble, small speakers and 8m film projector and review at the Wien Modern Festival:

<https://annelaberge.com/wien-modern/>





## Embodied Rhythm in Electroacoustic Practice

By  
Dustin Ragland

In early electronic music, particularly those works based on environmental sounds (what we might call field recordings, however spliced and arranged they might have been), we hear a world of sound objects that are irregular and fragmented. This reflection was made possible by the various recording and replay technologies that allowed us to reflect back on the sounds we might encounter. This reflection is assisted by the conceptual container of *composition* that early sound collages provide a listener. If a listener can recognize (or hear something similar to) the sonic world they might encounter any given day, there is a new way of hearing one's real-time experience of sound, whether or not it is captured in an intentional recorded work. Regardless of how organized that sound experience might be, much of it is *irrythmic* at best: a collection of sounds that blur and mask the air more than they do regulate intervals between sonic events. This industrial, and now post-industrial soundscape dovetailed quite nicely with emerging socio-philosophical trends in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fragmentation in the post-modern age already had a soundtrack, and it was difficult to dance to.

When my students encounter [Etude aux chemins de fer](#), the most common pick-up point for their admitting they recognize it was a work of music – not just a claimed work of music – is the moment when the train resembles a regular, repeating rhythm (around 00:30, and at various places throughout the piece). Timbre, pitch, and harmony – all are secondary in their appraisal of the work to their perception of the *beat*. On that beat their minds begin to build their own elements of composition. A beat without those other expected musical signifiers feels incomplete in many cases, but it does offer bedrock on which to construct an imagined set of musical gestures, even if just imagined in the moment. However there is a problem of sorts: “beats” belong to pop music, to the myriad subgenres and hashtags of [Ishkur's Guide to Electronic Music](#); they belong to the dance club; they belong to the common slang for contemporary music production as “beat-making;” they are “[Study Beats](#)” in the background of Third Wave coffee shops, not “serious music.” Already we can see where the problem lies in cordoning off beats as a subversive musical gesture in art music – we've excluded vibrant and diverse communities of music by *a priori* exclusion of sounded pulse. In most cases, this socio-sonic exclusion was never anyone's intent (at least in recent years); but even so, there are compositional assumptions that remain curious at the least, if not pernicious at their worst. In a brief conversation with composer and educator [Ethan Hein](#), he noted the exclusion of beats in even informal commissions: “I was asked to compose something for the NYU Laptop Orchestra. I said I would be delighted, and asked what kind of thing they were looking for. They said, “Write whatever you want, as long as it has no beats.”

What I hope to explore in this essay are various responses to the ways *beat* is understood and employed in various instances and worlds of electroacoustic music. By *beat* I mean a steady metronomic pulse as a starting place, but within that polyrhythmic, glitch, and modulating beats are all possibilities. I also want to emphasize beat - in this essay - as driven by percussive sounds, not only drums and various “unpitched” timbres, but primarily those pulses within a work that are voiced. Of course, a great deal of music has a pulse embedded within the composition that is felt – but it is not always instantiated in an instrumental voice.

By no means is this an exhaustive look, nor is it intended to be particularly polemic – I’m concerned more with the possibilities for self-aesthetic reflection and connections to pop music gestures that are, more often than not, excluded on a compositional level. As is the norm for this series of essays, I lean more on a few key reflections and hope to offer brief commentary on them as we move along.

A brief look through a handful of contemporary electroacoustic collections offers some insight into how beats are understood in our specific context for this exploration. In the newest [SEAMUS collection](#) (No. 28), there are some moments with recognizable beats: Chi Wang’s lovely *Poeony Garden* features some rapidly modulating but regular pulses at various points in the piece; Caroline Louise Miller’s excellent *Subsong* “bridges practices of future bass, instrumental hip-hop, and *musique concrète*,” at least two of these genres providing for a typical pop understanding of beats, re-imagined in an electroacoustic context. In this work, the beat is slowed down to a seemingly-intermittent pulse, a wonderful reworking of the expected steady beat found in the seed genres of the piece. In Bandcamp.com’s “[Ten Musicians Updating Electroacoustic Music for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century](#),” we see only Poppy Ackroyd’s “Resolve” employing a regular beat, and it is primarily an ostinato that becomes as textural as it is accentual. In the Lebanon Music Survey’s [Anthology of Electroacoustic Lebanese Music](#) we see a few more pronounced examples of voiced musical pulse, as in Jad Atoui’s “Diving Blue,” where the arpeggiation of the main voice gives steady rhythmic information, aided by the modulation of the low-pass filter at work in various points. In Ricardo Del Farra’s [Latin American Electroacoustic Music Collection](#) few works include anything resembling a beat, though Juan Blanco’s “Interludio con Màquinas” harkens back to Schaeffer’s rhythmic train recordings – incidental or not.

In each of these examples we see how beats have remained elusive in application among contemporary and canonical electroacoustic works, and working past the more obvious compositional influences that might explain this absence (outgrowth of orchestral and chamber music, focus on pitch-timbre as locus of experimentation), we can see some of the issues with genre that emerge in electroacoustic music. Without stepping [all the way back](#) to our definitional study last year in this newsletter, we can gain some insight from Andrew Hugill’s “[On Style in Electroacoustic Music](#),” where he claims “The collapse of style becomes particularly evident when beat-based music is introduced into the electroacoustic domain.” Hugill goes on briefly examine how a few electronic music artists in the pop world (Amon Tobin, Autechre, The Chemical Brothers) use the beat in a manner “subservient to an interest in timbral manipulation that is related to the theoretical constructions of spectromorphology,” but could more accurately be described in genre terms as having been influenced by electroacoustic music, while remaining outside of the mainstream of it.

One of the major contributions that electroacoustic music continues to make within musical communities, and even outside of them, is in the way the experimental edge of electroacoustic music re-centers music in environmental and embodied contexts, such as [Lea Bartucci’s](#) “Site-specific sonic investigations,” and [Marcus Fischer’s](#) “sound art (that) can be political even without words.” When one examines [Jeff Pressing’s](#) notions around beats in “Black Atlantic” musical groove, you see an insistence on a beat’s “effectiveness in engaging synchronizing body responses (e.g., dance, foot-tapping).” [Mark Campbell](#) finds this notion of the “soul controller” in how DJ’s work with a crowd in a reliance of “relational rather than rational thought” as the DJ works to “foreground relationality.” In “[Roots and Wires](#),” Erik Davis argues that jungle electronic music – rooted in West African drumming and black British communities - evokes “the mandible-rustling telecommunication of the insect world” (2005). In keeping with the ethos of many electroacoustic

communities, Davis claims “one must learn to listen and dance to jungle’s complex and extremely recombinant rhythmic language,” placing polymetric rhythms in the realm of the experimental and demanding - drawn not merely from disembodied computational processes, nor from deconstructed historical forms, but from Afro-diasporic music that is most commonly cited within pop music forms.

In Ben Neill’s [“Pleasure Beats: Rhythm and the Aesthetics of Current Electronic Music,”](#) he notes John King’s description of “art-music composers” resisting regular 4/4 rhythms in their work as “fear of the funk.” Continuing the idea that electroacoustic music not only challenges a listener with timbral innovation and tonal de-centering, but also with innovations in procedural composition and re-situating music in embodied and environmental contexts, Neill notes that for rave musicians (who would sit in most minds as pop musicians) “the audience truly becomes the performance.” He recounts seeing Squarepusher [at the Coachella Festival](#), where Tom Jenkinson

presented 1½ hours of music in which long stretches of highly processed digital noise and textures that would rival any art-music composer’s sonic palette alternated with completely frenzied hyper-speed beats that exceeded 200 beats per minute – hardly dance music as anyone on this planet would recognize it (p.4).

Neill later describes Terence McKenna’s idea of “shamanism” in regular pulsing beats as just one of the ways in which pop electronic music is not only culturally embodied, but active in producing experimental effects among its listeners (p. 6).

On the other end of this approach to “the fear of the funk,” is a note from Prince in *The New Yorker*, [confronting](#) Dan Piepenbring on his understanding of Prince’s musical approach. When the writer had described Prince’s work as “magical” at one point, Prince made sure to correct him: “Funk is the opposite of magic. Funk is about rules.” This spirit of beat application leans into the procedural aspect of dance music, one that could find more purchase when confronted with the question of just how then (and if), electroacoustic music can have conversation with more funk-informed beats and pulses. The very materials of “funk-feel” rely on minute variations, abstractions, and interpretations of note values, durations, and blocks of musical timing – all applied in a bodily context to evoke movement in dance.

There are some practical possibilities for applying regular beats within electroacoustic contexts. Shiau-uen Ding’s [work](#) on synchronization with tape and piano music might call this a “steady strict rhythmic relationship,” but I also see this as an outcome of funk being about rules: a complex relationship between pre-recorded material and live performance is made possible by this common rhythmic reference, to be disintegrated when needed, and in relationship when needed. David Ogborn offers [insight](#) into how pulses can give all manner of practical and aesthetic possibility to a laptop-based orchestra:

What happens instead is that the rapid underlying cycles of pulses give the orchestra (individual members and the group as a whole) a way of controlling moments of synchrony (things that happen at the same time tend towards perceptual fusion), material distinctions (things that happen at different times and places tend to stream separately) and density (things that happen only on a certain pulse versus on sets of pulses or in the space between pulses). This control has a flexible granularity, in that one can specify something as simple as ‘make this sound on every downbeat’ or as involved as ‘begin



this sound a gesturally controlled short period of time after every 13th pulse, with no regard to the length of the underlying pulse cycle, and continue the sound until 2.5 seconds after a separate gestural control on brightness passes a certain threshold.

What are some genuine options for electroacoustic composers to interact with beats inside of their works? Of course, many electroacoustic pieces might find beats inappropriate, or simply not aesthetically viable. There is of course, no requirement for beats like there might be in various pop electronic styles – this is perhaps one way to approach a genre distinction as well. However, when it is a possibility, the inclusion of beats – even with the purpose of deconstructing them in the course of a single work or an oeuvre – offers some unique possibilities within electroacoustic music, beyond the practical-sync ones mentioned above.

Since a lot of younger musicians develop their skills either primarily on mobile and computer DAWs, or these alongside acoustic instrument studies, “beat-making” as an early skill gives young musicians a language with which to approach electroacoustic music that emerges from their communities and their own interests. This is not to say that students shouldn’t be exposed to composers and musicians from more experimental and historical sources – they absolutely should encounter these possibilities. However, a real access point for them conceptually and practically exists at this collision of their developing skills in music theory, music history, and computer music techniques. In interviewing my early Studio Recording and DAW I students, a majority of them from across ethnic, economic, and stylistic backgrounds approach music production through rhythm. Thus, to encourage them “to have something to say that can only be said in the near-future,” as Adam Harper [describes](#), not only do I work to expand their notions of what production entails, I would also hope to use beats as a building block for them to explore new sonic possibilities. Rhythm becomes a connective tissue for typically-excluded musicians who only need the slightest push to embrace and explore electroacoustic musical approaches.

Aesthetically, playing with listener expectations, providing the possibility of dance (even “[Mental dance](#)” as Erik Davis describes it), and the evocation of regular metronomic pulse in various pop styles without giving one’s work over entirely to a pop structure – all of these offer points of conceptual and musical exploration that sits at the heart of so many electroacoustic works. Ogborn’s [approach](#) is worth considering in this respect:

Within a general context of engaging with pulse-structures without necessarily or directly engaging with popular or traditional musical genres, the distinction between entrainment (brought about by pulses and the expectation that they will continue), distraction (when the periodicity is longer than 5 seconds or so, leading to a different type of listening) and boredom (when material is too predictable) represents a useful conceptual tool (Emmerson 2008). By aiming for an interplay between entrainment and distraction, we can sidestep genre expectations without discarding the potential enjoyment, interest and perceptual orientation effects of beats.

The dissolving of audience and performer given embodiment in certain dance music venues and communities is a point of possibility for electroacoustic music, not a signifier of “less-serious” musical events. The discomfort that certain atonal approaches evoke in a listener can be an analogy to the discomfort one might experience going to an ostensibly “art-music” event and finding moving human bodies not merely there as observers (indeed, consumers), but there as participants – welcomed into a music they might not

even have semiotic understanding of, that meets them at various levels of embodied consciousness and sub-consciousness.

Rhythmic beats are a potential de-colonizing force *contra* the basic assumptions of electroacoustic music that resists regular pulses and beats *a priori*. This is of course, not to say that the presence of a beat inoculates a given composer from long-standing musical traditions rooted in the assumptions of primarily Euro-centric art-music. Nor does the exclusion of a beat automatically promote a given work of music from a club to a concert hall. However, for those rooted in various communities that have been excluded on aesthetic levels (or relegated to “ethnic” musical forms), rhythmic approaches within electroacoustic music can reclaim and offer new departure points for composition, performance, and the building of ever-new languages of imagination.

*With thanks to Ethan Hein for providing sources and conversation to better approach this topic.*





# Member News

**Brian Belet's** *Loose Canon*, for any three instruments and Kyma real-time processing (composed 2016), was performed by The SPLICE Ensemble (Samuel Wells, Keith Kirchoff, & Adam Vidiksis), with Mark Zaki controlling Kyma in performance real time, at the International Computer Music Conference (held in conjunction with the New York City Electroacoustic Music Festival), on June 17, 2019, in New York City, New York.

**Kyong Mee Choi** reports the following news items:

\* ***Train of Thoughts*** has been published on the Music from SEAMUS CD volume 28. SEAMUS (Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States) releases its 28th volume of works by its member composers, representing the newest trends and ideas in electroacoustic music.

\* ***To Unformed*** for piano and electronics was performed by Ricardo Martín Descalzo at the Festival Sierra Musical at the Teatro Municipal Villa de Collado in Madrid, Spain on August 2, 2019.

\* Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University hosted the Summer Composition Institute on July 15-26, 2019. Coordinated with Dr. Stephanie Salerno, Drs. Kyong Mee Choi and Stuart Folse taught a two-week dynamic program including lectures, private lessons, seminars and the student concert at the end of the program. Dr. Winston Choi (piano) and MingHuan Xu (violin) joined the Institute to coach and premier student pieces.

\* Kyong Mee Choi was a featured guest artist at the ***SPLICE INSTITUTE*** 2019 at Western Michigan University School of Music in Kalamazoo, MI on June 23-29, 2019. She taught various workshops, gave a featured lecture on her music and compositional process, gave private lessons. Three of her works were programmed. ***Vanished*** for harp and electronics was performed by **Ben Melsky** (harp) from Dal Niente, and ***Sublimation*** for marimba and electronics, and ***To Unformed*** for piano and electronics were performed by the SPLICE Ensemble members; **Adam Vidiksis** (percussion), and **Keith Kirchoff** (piano).

\* ***Freed*** for bass flute and electronics was performed by Shanna Gutierrez at the Festival at Centre for Present-Day Music at Hochschule für Musik und Theater "Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy" in Leipzig, Germany on June 22, 2019.

\* ***Pendulum*** for oboe, english horn, and electronics was performed by Oboe Duo Agosto (Ling-Fei Kang and Charles Huang) at the 2019 ICMC/NYCEMF Conference and Festival at Hebrew Union College, New York, NY on June 18, 2019.

\* ***Vanished*** for harp and electronics was premiered by Ben Melsky at the Dal Niente's Party at The Revival, Hyde Park, Chicago, IL on June 16, 2019.

\* ***Train of Thoughts*** was chosen for the Ars Electronica Forum Wallis 2019. The participating composers are James Andean, JP Lempke, Emma Margetson, Robert McClure, Joao Pedro Oliveira, Paolo Pastorino, Ermir Bejo, Kyong Mee Choi, Epa Fassianos, Dave Gedosh, Ivonne Hernandez, Dimitris Savva, Chatori Shimizu, Nadir Vassena, Yiqing Zhu.



**Robert Fleisher's** *musique concrète* composition, *Loretto Alfresco* (in SEAMUS's Electroacoustic Miniatures 2012: Re-Caged) was included in the "Magic Bus" program during NWEAMO's Electronic Music Festival at San Diego State University on April 25. Another of his fixed media works, *Dans le piano*, was heard during the VU3 Symposium (Park City, UT) on July 12.

In June, **Charles Nichols** taught the Max Computer Music Workshop at the Charlotte New Music Festival in Charlotte, NC, where Transient Canvas premiered his composition *It does not shy away from the sword*, for bass clarinet and marimba, at Bryant Hall. In July, Tanner Upthegrove presented the paper "The Art and Science of Soundscape Auralization for High Density Loudspeaker Arrays", cowritten with Nichols and Mike Roan, at the International Congress on Sound and Vibration in Montréal, Canada.

**Steven Ricks** attended his first Kyma International Sound Symposium (KISS2019) in Busan, South Korea, August 29 – September 1. The Symposium included the premiere of his piece *After the Storm* for live percussion and Kyma by Glenn Webb. Ricks was assisted in preparing and performing the live electronics by Austin Lopez.

Summer for **Neil Rolnick** started out on June 29 with the premiere of a dance version of his recent solo laptop piece, *Messages*. The choreographer was Julia Bengtsson, who was joined by Mauricio Vera at the Higher Ground Festival in upper Manhattan in New York City. A link to the performance is here <https://vimeo.com/346743672>

In the performance Rolnick is playing the laptop live, and responding to the dancers, though off camera in the video.

In mid July Rolnick spent a week at the Crested Butte Music Festival in Colorado, where the VOXARE Quartet performed his *Oceans Eat Cities* on July 13. Over the next few days Rolnick and the group recorded the quartet for an upcoming CD on the Albany Records label, as well as recording his solo piano & computer piece *Mirages* for inclusion on the same CD. In *Mirages* Rolnick plays both the piano and computer parts. The CD has an expected release of April or May 2020.



VOXARE Quartet recording *Oceans Eat Cities* at Colorado Western University in Gunnison

**Dr. Adam Vidiksis** has been appointed by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission as a Director of Arts Technology for a performance during the 2020 Olympics in Japan celebrating the first inclusion of karate in the games. He will be working with composer Gene Coleman to lead a team of American and Japanese artists and musicians to capture movement using sensors and generate original music and visuals. Later this fall, Vidiksis will be exploring the Mammoth Cave National Park with his electroacoustic trio, SPLICE Ensemble, and composer Paula Matthusen of Wesleyan University. With special permission of the National Park Service, they will hike instruments and gear over two miles into the caves for a recording session that captures the cave's unique sonic characteristics through a technique of recursive processing. This research will culminate in a new work composed by Matthusen to be premiered by SPLICE. In early September,



Vidiksis's work will be seen in Philadelphia in a series of interdisciplinary performances, workshops, and an art installation. This project, entitled *kNots & Nests*, is directed by choreographer Marion Ramirez in close collaboration with Vidiksis and glass artist Kris Rumman.

volunteered to teach at the Young Woman Composers Camp (in its second year), as well as directed and taught at the inaugural SPLICE Academy, a week-long music technology program for high school students hosted at Temple University. In June, composer Steve Ricks of Brigham Young University

a live music performance with the film at the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

A new theatrical work by Vidiksis and director Mike Durkin of the Renegade Company, called *That Time We Talked About Spaceships While Recreating Matisse's 'Le Bonheur De Vivre'*, will premiere this fall at the Barnes Foundation.

*Quanta*, Vidiksis's recent new work for voice and electronics, will be performed this fall by bass baritone Nicholas Isherwood at Warsaw Autumn, Amsterdam's STEIM, and the University of Birmingham, UK.

Vidiksis's music technology ensemble, BEEP, was invited by the American Composers Forum and Mural Arts Philadelphia to perform three concerts this fall on their upcoming music festival celebrating the opening of Philadelphia's new Rail Park, which will showcase newly commissioned sound art installations at sites throughout the park. Also, BEEP will premiere a new work based on commuter data released by SEPTA by composer Andrew Litts in two public performances in Philadelphia's Suburban Station this fall.

Most importantly, Vidiksis is pleased to announce the upcoming addition of a baby boy to his family. His wife, Patty, is due in early December. His daughter, Olivia, is excited to be a big sister.



*SPLICE Academy faculty and participants at Temple University (left to right: Elaine Lillios, Megan Zhong, Samantha Farace, Sophia Solomon, Othello Gamboa, Mara Zaki, Adam Vidiksis, Jules Keenan, Chris Biggs, Sam Wells, and Keith Kirchoff)*

This summer, Vidiksis recorded percussion and electronics music by Anne Neikirk for release on an upcoming album with Parma Records. The SPLICE Ensemble was a featured performer at the NYC Electroacoustic Music Festival and International Computer Music Conference, where they played multiple concerts. He taught at the SPLICE Institute at Western Michigan University, where the trio performed a number of concerts, including a premiere by composer Brittany Green. Vidiksis also

and SPLICE Ensemble were endowed a Barlow Commissioning Award to collaborate on a new work.

Vidiksis is currently completing the score for two short films, one with director Tetsuki Ijichi, as well as a VR film with filmmaker Rod Coover. Coover and Vidiksis's work, *Tidal Impacts*, will be presented in a series of VR installations on the University of Pennsylvania's campus in November, as well as in

**Silen Wellington** presented their first full-length solo show, 09/14-09/16 in Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins.

Weaving together electroacoustic music, spoken word, and ritual, Wellington shares their transgender journey, exploring

themes of legibility/illegibility, coherence/incoherence, survival/resistance, and the sacred/profane.

## BODY LIKE SCRIPTURE

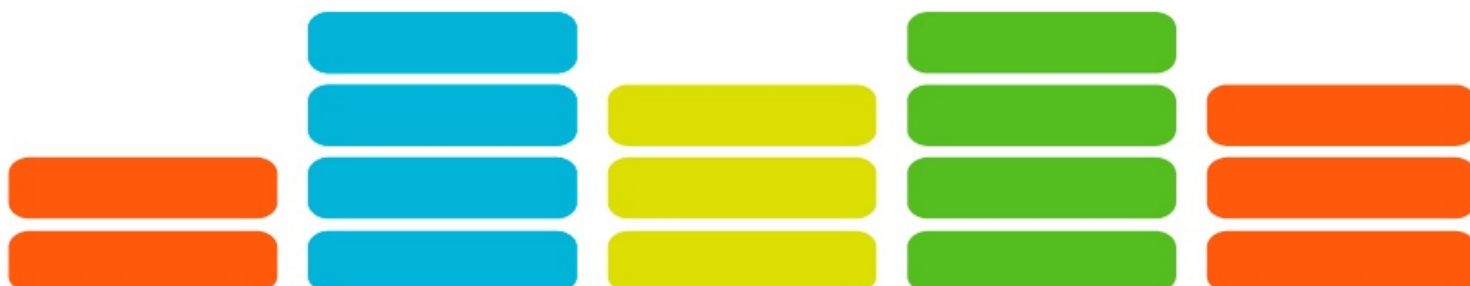
A night of Queer/Trans performance art, electroacoustic music, spoken word, and ritual.

9/14: Mercury Café, Denver @10pm (\$10 - \$15)

9/15: Wesley Foundation, Boulder @7:30pm (\$10 - \$15)

9/16: Wolverine Farm, Fort Collins @7pm (Free)

Tickets & info at: [SWellingtonComposer.com](http://SWellingtonComposer.com)





## *Music Beyond Airports: Appraising Ambient Music*

Edited by Monty Adkins and Simon Cummings

Book Review by **Scott Miller**

A quick search for music identified as “ambient” in your favorite streaming music service will result in a long and diverse collection of works, and perhaps not even include Brian Eno’s *Ambient 1: Music for Airports*, the album that launched the use of the term as a musical bin label, if not genre. *Music Beyond Airports: Appraising Ambient Music*, edited by Monty Adkins and Simon Cummings, is a collection of essays developed from “papers given at the Ambient@40 International Conference held in February 2018 at the University of Huddersfield. The original premise of the conference was not merely to celebrate Eno’s work and the landmark release of *Music for Airports* in 1978, but to consider the development of the genre, how it has permeated our wider musical culture, and what the role of such music is today given the societal changes that have occurred since the release of that album.”

I was excited to read these essays, particularly for having been unable to attend the conference myself. I could not agree more with Monty Adkins, who points out in his essay that “there has been little critical reflection on the state of ambient music today.” This book brings together a wonderful collection of different ideas AND cites a diverse repertoire of musics whose connections may seem tenuous on the surface. It is a long overdue book that helps us understand how disparate threads of “ambient” artistic and philosophical inquiry—dating back long before *Music for Airports*—seem to be intersecting today in many interesting ways.

There are a lot of ideas in this book, each worthy of greater exploration. One feature of the collection is that it serves as a locus for contemporary notions of public and private space, environments both real and virtual, and the role of the listener. Many essays highlight how Eno’s “ignoresting” so often seems to be misunderstood as a call to not actively listen to music. Several address this from a philosophical perspective. David Toop draws on the work of François Jullien and Byung-Chul Han to confront the easy, corporate definition of “Ambient” as a bin describing the surface gestures of music marketed for a function. He repositions the definition from the perspective of the listener, as a “state of mind attuned to inclusivity rather than an industry genre whose aesthetic integrity depends upon withdrawal.” Justin Morey analyzes the use of technology in “Little Fluffy Clouds” to consider the listener’s contribution to musical meaning, drawing on Jean-Jacques Nattiez, Philip Tagg, and E. H. Gombrich in support of this idea. And I was pleasantly surprised to see Richard Talbot cite the work of Nelson Goodman in his essay on spatiality in ambient music, and its “particular ways of creating imagined, embodied and representational space.”

How to define, or recognize ambient music when one hears it, is considered in multiple essays. Simon Cummings proposes the idea of “the steady state as the essential, objective, universal component – the quiddity – of ambient music, as encapsulated in Brian Eno’s ‘ignoresting’ dichotomy” and that “ambient is best defined by its organisation.” This idea of the steady state resonates strongly with me for its flexibility and inclusiveness, inviting musical comparisons that might otherwise be overlooked. Ambient is redefined by Ambrose Field in order to consider what Ambient Music might mean or be in contemporary society, when



notions of what constitutes the ambient environment in our information-saturated, everyday existence, is considerably different than that of the 1970s.

For those interested in possible approaches to creating, I encountered inspiring ideas in most of the essays. Monty Adkins offers the concept of fragility in sound, “a state of tension in which the sound’s ‘failure’ is offset by its continued temporal movement forwards. Within this there is a sense of both beauty and danger. The beauty is of something prone to failure that needs attention, and the danger is of it ceasing to function musically.” This description alone makes me want to hear the music he’s referring to. From both an analytical and compositional perspective, Axel Berndt provides a tremendously useful “taxonomy of adaptive music techniques.” This essay includes specific examples that serve as an excellent starting point for analyzing or experimenting with ambient environments in video gaming.

I highly recommend this book for the excellence of its content and for its contemporary relevance. Based on this collection of essays, I sincerely hope we can look forward to an Ambient@45 International Conference.

Scott L. Miller, October 2019



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