



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

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Womxn Who Build Spiritual Machines

By Sofy Yuditskaya

At the NIME conference this summer in Porto Allegre, I noticed a small but compelling group of practitioners; womxn who build spiritual machines. They incorporate spirituality into the design of their Digital Music Instruments. Spirituality tends to academic anathema, so why stir the pot? Media theory pioneer, Marshall McLuhan, famously said that media extends the human body, I would argue that the machines we build and the intentions we build into them, extend the soul.

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FROM THE EDITOR



Dear SEAMUS community,

It's my honor to have this great opportunity to serve you as the editor of our SEAMUS newsletter !!!

First, I'd like to thank our former editor, Steve Ricks, for his help with my first newsletter-making

process. I aim to create a series of agile newsletters that reflect members' activities, accomplishments, ideas, and passions, which includes the full spectrum of our musical activities at SEAMUS.

Please feel free to reach out to me and make your voice heard. I look forward to connecting with all of you via our newsletter and beyond!

Yours truly,

A stylized handwritten signature in black ink.

Jiayue Cecilia Wu

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 were adjudicated via the double-blind process used in past conferences. Notifications were sent and decisions are made in early 2020.

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>





LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear SEAMUS Members,

I'm taking off my SEAMUS 2020 co-host hat for a minute to write — if mostly about SEAMUS 2020. Leah Reid, myself, and a fantastic team drawn from UVA and beyond couldn't be more excited about the conference we're creating. First, our SEAMUS Award recipient Annea Lockwood will share a collection of truly stunning works with us during her concert, and speak some to her poetics. And as well, we'll feature work by her partner Ruth Anderson throughout the conference. The entire conference program is exceptional, featuring musical works, research, installation, projects in the community-engaged practice category, and workshops. A staggering amount of technical and artistic brilliance. As mentioned in my recent email to membership, we're experimenting with substituting an Awards Reception for the traditional Banquet in an effort to achieve broader participation in the conference's key cultural spaces. (Please let us know how you take that.) For a spot of non-conference news, Annie Hui-Hsin Hsieh will drop the call for Miniatures March 7, submissions due April 15 — stay tuned for that. That's the news from Charlottesville. Looking forward to hearing and seeing you!

Ted

Ted Coffey, President
SEAMUS

president@seamusonline.org



WOMXN WHO BUILD SPIRITUAL MACHINES

By Sofy Yuditskaya

At the NIME conference this summer in Porto Allegre, I noticed a small but compelling group of practitioners; womxn who build spiritual machines. They incorporate spirituality into the design of their Digital Music Instruments. Spirituality tends to academic anathema, so why stir the pot? Media theory pioneer, Marshall McLuhan, famously said that media extends the human body, I would argue that the machines we build and the intentions we build into them, extend the soul.

There was a piece in the installations section of NIME 2019 by Cecilia Wu that referenced the Buddhist tradition. Cecilia Wu's piece, "Embodied Sonic Meditation: Resonance of the Heart," captures hand gestures and their fluid changes making Mudras via Leap Motion and machine learning techniques, triggering associated musical phrases and gestures as well as computer graphics of the Buddhabrot fractal formations. Audio filtering effects are also triggered by the Mudras. I asked her, as well as the other womxn of NIME, a few questions about their creative process:

Video: <https://youtu.be/0IR0eSLrzKE>

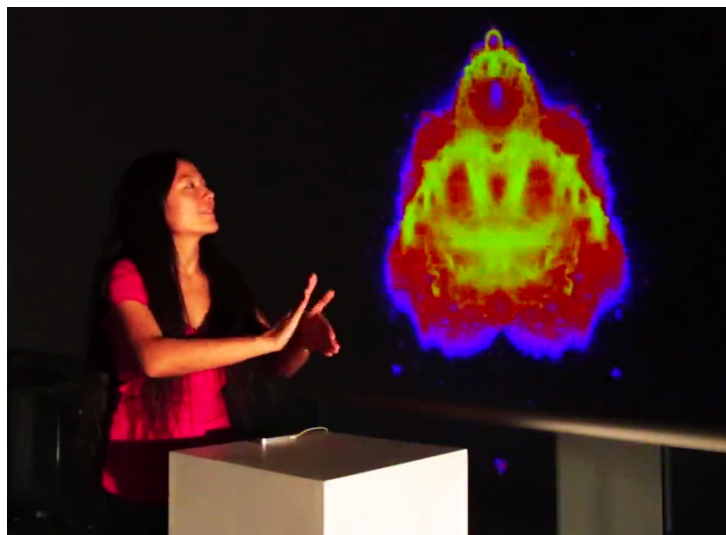
Sofy: Tell me how your performances tie into causes and ideas that are important to you personally, feminist visibility and your spiritual practice.

Cecilia: As a Tibetan Buddhism practitioner for two decades, my work preserves, promotes, and further explores ancient Tibetan arts and their contemplative treasures, using emerging media art technologies and computer music. Deeply anchored in Tibetan culture, my research situates the practice of designing DMIs for performing arts to create social impact. By exploring the powerful force of the human voice, I focus on how vocalists can enhance their vocal expressions with state-of-the-art technology that facilitates cross-cultural communication. I invite new ways of using sensorimotor coupling through auditory feedback to create novel artistic expressions and to increase people's sonic awareness. I call my work "Embodied Sonic Meditation." To date, less than 5% of audio engineers are women¹. It is crucial to make our voices heard by actively presenting our work that is meaningful to our community as a whole.

My recent work brings attention to the importance of women's prenatal and mental care, as well as the support and assistance needed by survivors of baby loss and their families. I would like to explore more in my future work about women's wellness, women's studies, and feminism.

Sofy: Tell me about what novel electronic techniques or new software configurations you have made to create your unique sound.

Cecilia: For my performative sound creation, I use machine learning techniques to study body movement, gestures, and bio-data patterns, and translate them into interactive visuals and sounds. I often use Python libraries to achieve this goal. For music programming, I enjoy open-source! I use ChuckK as my primary language but also use Pure Data and Max/MSP when it fits (especially when using microcomputers and designed hardware). For recording sound creation, I am a big fan of Eurorack and modular synth! I am also a crazy field recording person. I blend electric sounds and recorded sound from the analog world in experimental ways to narrate my sonic stories.



Echo Ho's SlowQin uses machine learning to play back environmental sounds through a traditional instrument. The act of playing the Guqin is an embodied philosophical practice, determining the aural output of the Guqin with machine learning is a bold move, mixing cyberpunk ideas of consciousness together with embodied practice and ideas of consciousness pulled from Chinese shamanic traditions.

Video: <https://goechospace.com/video/zo-on-slows-slow-qin-solo>

Sofy: Tell me about what novel electronic techniques or software configurations you have made to create your unique sound.

Echo: SlowQin emphasizes the openness for continuously rethinking and reinventing the Guqin's possibilities. Acoustically the SlowQin resembles its predecessor Guqin. It is fitted with a B-Band piezo pickup under the bridge, a wide range of sensors connected to an Arduino Mega combine a JeeLink to provide a rich wireless connection to computer software. The sensory body of the SlowQin is comprised of seven switches, four pushbuttons, eight potentiometers, a light sensor, two pressure sensors, and a long slide potentiometer, seven synthetic silk strings. In the current implementation, most of these input control parameters are mapped on to multiple manipulations for real-time data and sound sampling and processing. These include real-time audio synthesis and manipulation, such as polyphonic pitch, reverse and pentatonic shifts, applying complex sound effects on acoustic inputs, multi-modes live looping, granular type modulation and complex layering. Reprogramming the computational side of the SlowQin can open many possibilities for different behaviors of the control elements. These facilities rely on the digital brain of the instrument, a standalone SuperCollider app (contributed by Hannes Hoelzl and Dominik Hildebrand Marques Lopes), which develops progressively in close collaboration between artistic concept and hardware and software prototyping.

Sofy: Tell me how your performances tie into causes and ideas that are important to you personally, feminist visibility and your spiritual practice.

Echo: The guiding idea of performing with the SlowQin was first explored as a new electroacoustic instrument for improvisation contexts. Secondly, to rethink the Guqin in light of Western experimental music and implement the use of experimental music as an interdisciplinary art practice derived from the ancient concept of Guqin's playing as a practical philosophy. Above all, the experimentation with the SlowQin emphasized playability in today's world of complex cultural and ecological environments. It is an exploration of identity, a persona, a political/poetical statement, meant to recontextualize the performance space. My relationship with gender is autobiographical and spiritual. Thus, the SlowQin is technically treated as a ritualistic object, that is, mimed shamanistic technique of mediating between the human world and the spirit world; memories, or better yet, false memories of a fantasized past and an intangible future, create a

dreamlike apparently "magical" intensity in solo audiovisual performance. The performance itself becomes an alternative way of storytelling, in search of a place amidst rapid changes in all areas of life — principles of randomness, the oracle-like ephemeral tapestry in sound and vision.



Finally I encountered a project by MIT based Gabriela Bilá and Don Derek Haddad called Grain Prism. Grain Prism deals with the idea of the beyond as a conceptual and aesthetic frame to inform the interactive design behind a synthesizer. This project is fun, novel, more in the vein of aesthetic witchcraft than re-inventing a spiritual tradition. However I believe there is value in that light touch, doing exactly the work that it purports to in its project description: compelling the user to abandon preconceived notions about synthesizer functioning.

Silvia Federici's book "Caliban and the Witch" connects the Enlightenment era and its scientific method to advancing so-called rational thought while at the same time de-legitimizing populist belief in magic, which at its basis is "an animistic conception of nature that did not admit to any separation between matter and spirit, and thus imagined the cosmos as a living organism." ² The way we conceptualize functional machines (at least in the European and American tradition) goes back to this separation of mind and body, event and context. The Grain Prism is a welcome detour in this long line of scientific thinking.

Video: <https://vimeo.com/372460524>

Sofy: Tell me about what novel electronic techniques or software configurations you have made to create your unique sound.

Gabriela: The Grain Prism is a hybrid of a granular synthesizer and sampler that, through a capacitive sensing interface presented in obscure glyphs, invites users to create experimental sound textures with their own recorded voice. The capacitive sensing system, activated through skin contact over single glyphs or a combination of them, instigates the user to decipher the hidden sonic messages.

Sofy: Tell me how your performances and soundscape tie into causes and ideas that are important to you personally, feminist visibility and your spiritual practice.

Gabriela: The mysterious interface opens space to aleatoricism in the act of conjuring sound, and therefore new discoveries. The users, when forced to abandon preconceived ways of playing a synthesizer, look at themselves in a different light, as their voice is the source material.



You can find out more about Cecilia, Echo, and Gabriela here:

<http://www.ceciliawu.com/>

Originally from Beijing, Jiayue Cecilia Wu (AKA: 武小慈) is a scholar, composer, performer, DMI designer, and audio engineer. In 2013, Cecilia obtained her master's degree from CCRMA, Stanford University. In 2018, Cecilia obtained her Ph.D. from UC Santa Barbara, where she studied computer music with Dr. Curtis Roads. Her work has been exhibited at museums and international arts-science society such as the National Museum of China, Denver Art Museum, SEAMUS, NIME, ICMC, and IEEE. Her multimedia work <Virtual

Mandala> has been selected by the Denver Art Museum for their permanent collection. Currently, she is an assistant professor at the University of Colorado's College of Arts and Media.

<https://tamlab.ufg.at/team/echo-ho/>

Echo Ho is an experimental artist with a nomadic soul. Her work creates onomatopoeically distorted, poetically strange narratives with intertwined conceptual links of culturally diverse materials and different artistic disciplines. As part of her artistic journey to date, Ho has reinvented the ancient Chinese seven-stringed Guqin into a hybrid Plexiglas "SlowQin." Continuing exploration is the result of a process of building an open-ended new instrument and interface that is engaged in her interdisciplinary art practice. Echo Ho is currently a PhD candidate at the Tangible Music Lab in Linz.

<https://www.media.mit.edu/people/gba/overview/>

Gabriela Bílá is an architect, multimedia designer and artist born in Brasília, Brazil. She uses discussions over the contemporary city as the primary raw material of her work, combining new media and tangible interfaces to reimagine realities. She is currently exploring intersections of sound and design as a new possibility in her field. Gabriela is enrolled as graduate researcher at the MIT Media Lab City Science group.

About the author:

<http://www.yuditskaya.com>

Sofy (@horusVacui) is a media artist and educator working with video, interactivity, projections, code, paper, and salvaged material. Her work focuses on techno-occult rituals, street performance, and participatory art. Sofy's performances enact and reframe hegemonies, she works with materials that exemplify our deep entanglement with petro-culture. She has worked on projects at Eyebeam, 3LD, the Rubin Museum, the Netherlands Institute voor Media Kunst, ARS Electronica, Games for Learning Institute, and has taught workshops at GAFFTA, MoMA, and the Guggenheim NY. She is currently working on her PhD in Audio-Visual Composition at NYU/GSAS.

(1) According to Women's Audio Mission:

<https://www.womensaudiomission.org/about/>

(2) Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch*. Autonomedia, 2004. Page 141.



Member News

Robert Fleisher's *Gig Harbor* (2010) and *Six Little Piano Pieces* (2018) are included in Vol. 5 of the American Piano Music Series on the PnOVA label, performed by the noted British pianist Martin Jones.

Released in October, the CD also includes solo piano works by Harry Bulow, William Neil, Jonathan Newmark, and Tim Reed. The November CD-release tour included six performances by Mr. Jones of Fleisher's *Six Little Piano Pieces* in Illinois, Indiana, Rhode Island, and Virginia. The *Six Little Piano Pieces* were also performed by Northern Illinois University Professor Emeritus, William Koehler, during the SCI V conference at Eastern Illinois University in October.



Maggi Payne was one of ten composers commissioned for a sound installation at the Downtown Berkeley, CA BART Plaza.

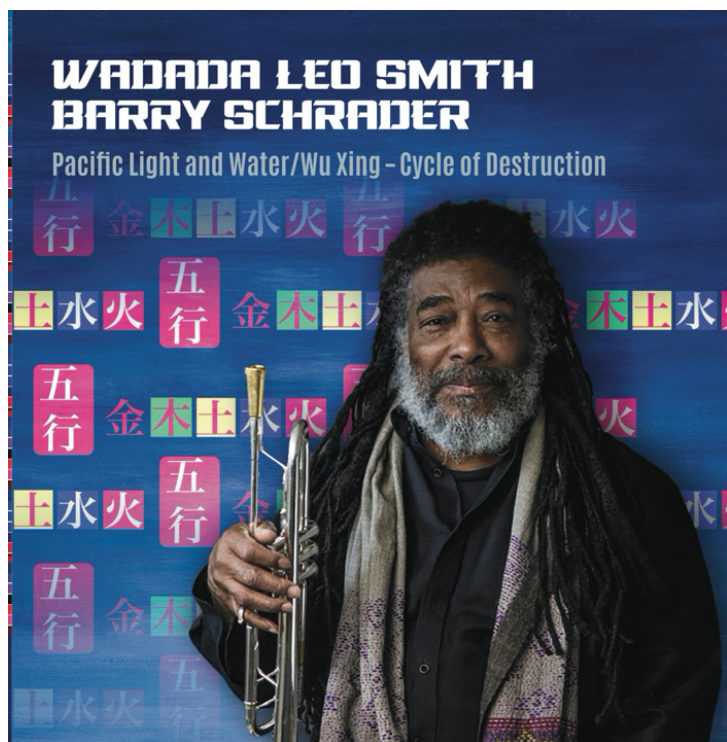
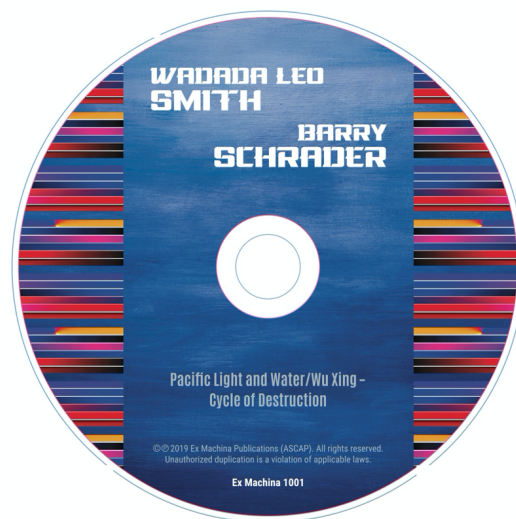
Her thirty minute eight channel work, *ImmersionBay Area Soundscape* looped continuously for three months, from 7/18/2019 until 10/18/2019. Consisting of recordings she made from the 1970s to July of 2019, the eight overlapping sections consist of a windstorm, thunder and rain, a stream, the ocean, waves lapping along a shoreline, underwater sounds, frogs, crickets, and birds, representing nature's water cycle.

In September she performed fixed media analog synthesizer works *Black Ice*, *Coronal Rain*, and *Heat Shield* at the San Francisco Electronic Music Festival. In November she presented four channel works *Sferics*, *BAM (ver 2.1)*, and *Heat Shield* at CNMAT, in Berkeley, CA. Two of her early 16mm films (now digitized) dating from the 1970s, the oscilloscope film *Orion*, and the video feedback, colorized *Allusions*, are being shown in the By repetition, you start noticing details in the landscape, Le Commun exhibition space, in Geneva Switzerland 12/13/2019 - 01/19/2020.

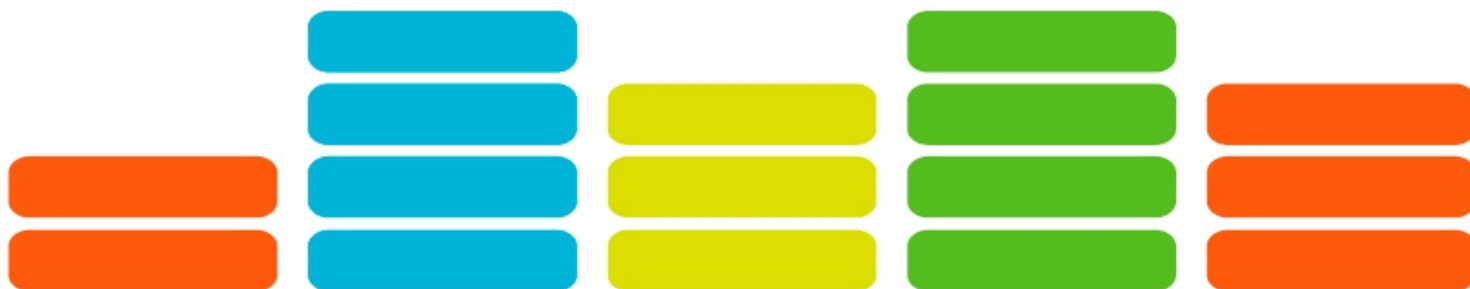
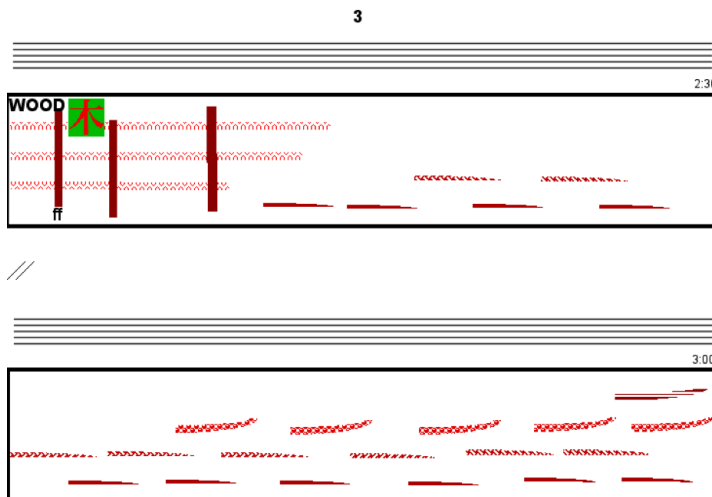


SEAMUS founder and past president Barry Schrader and renowned composer and jazz trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith have released a limited edition CD single of *Pacific Light and Water/Wu Xing – Cycle of Destruction*.

This is what Smith calls an “overlay” composition, combining works of two composers to create a new work. Merging Smith’s live performance of his piece *Pacific Light and Water* with Schrader’s electronic composition *Wu Xing – Cycle of Destruction* creates a one-of-a-kind duo. At Smith’s request, Schrader created a graphic score (available from Theodore Front Music), for Smith to follow and coordinate with the electronic music of *Wu Xing*.



Images from the score are used in the graphic design of the CD cover and booklet. This performance was recorded live at REDCAT in LA’s Walt Disney Concert Hall. Initially, only 100 copies of the CD have been made, and only 40 of these will be sold on CD Baby; MP3 copies will be available at most online stores.



September 14, the Kandinsky Trio performed three movements from Charles Nichols' composition *Multiplication of Machines, I. Pistons*, for amplified violin and computer, *III. Springs*, for amplified violin, cello, piano, and computer, and *IV. Pendulum*, for amplified cello and computer, at Olin Hall Theater at Roanoke College in Salem, VA and December 9, cellist Alan Weinstein again performed *I. Pistons*, in the Cube of the Moss Arts Center at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, VA.

October 15 and 16, violinist Charles Castleman premiered Nichols' composition *In Gratitude*, for string quartet, with Virginia Tech string faculty, violinist John Irrera, violist Molly Wilkens-Reed, and cellist Alan Weinstein, in the Recital Salon at Virginia Tech and at Eastern Divide in Blacksburg, VA.

October 20 and November 30, Nichols' *Current Threat Level*, for computer music, was played from fixed media, on the Il Suono Delle Lingue concert of the Contemporanea festival in the Teatro San Giorgio in Udine and the Antico Teatro Sociale G. Arrigoni in San Vito al Tagliamento, Italy.

October 20, his *Sound of Rivers: Stone Drum*, for computer music and video, a collaboration with choreographer Nicole Bradley Browning, animator and video artist Amber Bushnell, poet and reciter Mark Gibbons, and dancer Allison Herther, based on research by limnologist Mark Lorang, was played from fixed media, on the Sunday Night Multimedia Series in Reynolds Recital Hall at Montana State University in Bozeman, MT.



Sept 19 – Dec 8, 2019. Jon Bellona had his first solo sound art exhibit at Edith Langley Barrett Art Gallery in Utica, NY, which included six sound art works.

In the show were three environmental sound art works including his most recent piece *Wildfire*, a forty-eight foot long speaker array that plays back a wave of fire sounds at speed of actual wildfires. (photo credit: Janelle Rodriguez)

<https://www.jpbellona.com/work/wildfire/>



April 27 – Sept 28, 2019. As part of Harmonic Laboratory (Jon Bellona, John Park, and Jeremy Schropp), they built *Awash*, a kinetic 120-speaker array moving over the listener's head as a single 32' sinusoidal wave. The piece depicts the life, color, and environment of the High Desert and was part of the High Desert Museum's *Desert Reflections* exhibit in Bend, Oregon. The exhibit went on to win the 2019 Charles Redd Center for Western Studies Award for Exhibition Excellence. Attached image.

<http://harmoniclab.org/portfolio/awash/>



Two SEAMUS members, Panayiotis Kokoras and Juan Carlos Vasquez, were two of the commissioned composers during 2019 by the ZKM in Karlsruhe (Germany), for the project CECIA (Collaborative Electroacoustic Composition with Intelligent Agents).

The CECIA project “integrates the creative agency of 5 composers and Machine Learning algorithms in order to produce a coherent composition of electroacoustic music”. The project started in February 2019 and culminated with the premiere of an acousmatic piece on December the 14th at the ZKM’s Cube. I attach here a couple of links with more information about the project:

CECIA – Official Website:

<https://cecia.net/sample-page/>

Interview and Article on the Ulysses Network:

<https://www.ulysses-network.eu/focus-on/connections-2-cecia/>

The Association for the Promotion of New Music (APNM) presented a concert of electronic music in honor of Mario Davidovsky on December 19 at the National Opera Center in New York City. Mr. Davidovsky (born 1934 in Médanos, Argentina—died 2019 in New York City) won the Pulitzer Prize in 1971 for *Synchronism #6*, for piano and electronic sound. He was an honorary member of the board of APNM for over 20 years.

The concert featured music by several former students and associates of Mr. Davidovsky:

Stephen Dydo, Joel Gressel, Arthur Kreiger, Alice Shields, and Maurice Wright. APNM hosted a competition for new electroacoustic works for the concert, and performed winning works by Kristis Auznieks, Alex Dowling, Louis Goldford, and Aine Nakamura.

Mr. Davidovsky was represented by a dazzling performance of *Synchronism # 9* by violinist Rolf Schulte, who premiered the work in 1988. APNM president, Erik Lundberg, delivered a touching tribute to Mr. Davidovsky and his music.



Maurice Wright, Temple University

John Akins

Akins' 2018 stereo fixed media work "Cymbalindrome II" was presented at two venues in 2019 -- in the spring at the SCI Region VI conference (premiere) in Commerce, TX, and again in the fall at the CFAMC conference in Clinton, MS. The 4-minute work makes use of numerous samplings of cymbals which were then processed exclusively with Audacity. The second half is a retrograde of the first half, with numerous smaller scale "palindrome" gestures also used.



The Association for the Promotion of New Music (APNM) is now inaugurating its audio distribution wing with the release of a double CD.

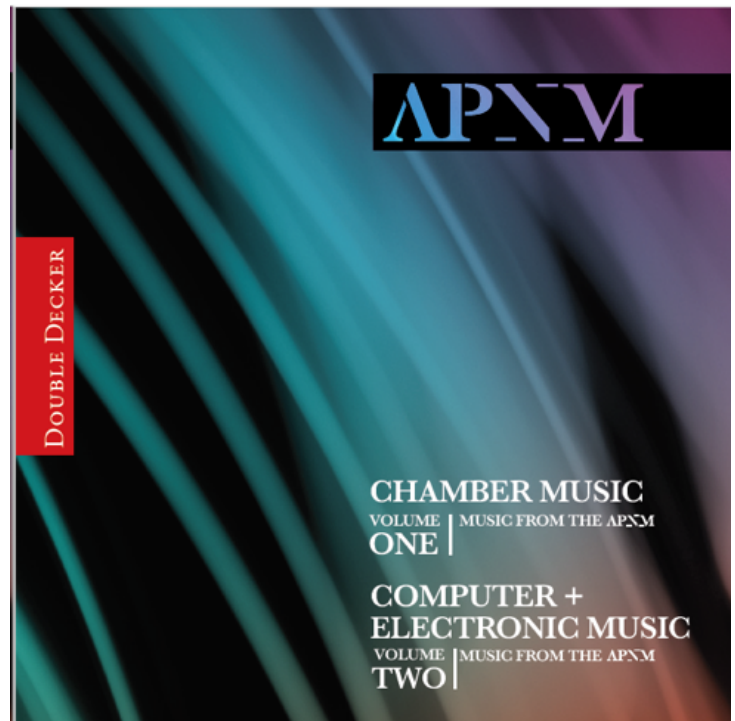
The release is through New Focus Recordings and is distributed through Naxos, with both physical and digital releases. The digital release is on February 14 and the physical CD's will be available four weeks later. Volume 1 is entitled *Chamber Music from the APNM* and Volume 2 is *Computer + Electronic Music from the APNM*. The set includes works by SEAMUS members Stephen Dydo, Arthur Kreiger, Hubert Howe, Adam Vidiksis, Samuel Wells, and Maurice Wright. The complete list of works is:

VOLUME 1:

Wind Chimes, Stephen Dydo (2012); *Elective Affinities*, Laurie San Martin (2010); *Odd Numbers*, Tom James (2015); *Faygele's Footsteps*, Elaine Barkin (2007); *Round Trip Ticket: A Theme with Variations for Seven Players*, Sheree Clement (2009); and *Starry Night*, Joseph Hudson (2010).

VOLUME 2:

For Diane, Arthur Kreiger (1995); *Deconstructing Maria*, Joel Gressel (2015); *Ouroboros*, Adam Vidiksis (2010); *Stereo Fantasy*, Maurice Wright (2011); *Souvenir*, Carl Bettendorf (2012); *From the Winds of Avalon*, Jeffrey Hall (2005); *Strange Pilgrims I. Light Is Like Water*, Samuel Wells (2016); and *Inharmonic Fantasy 6A*, Hubert Howe (2017).





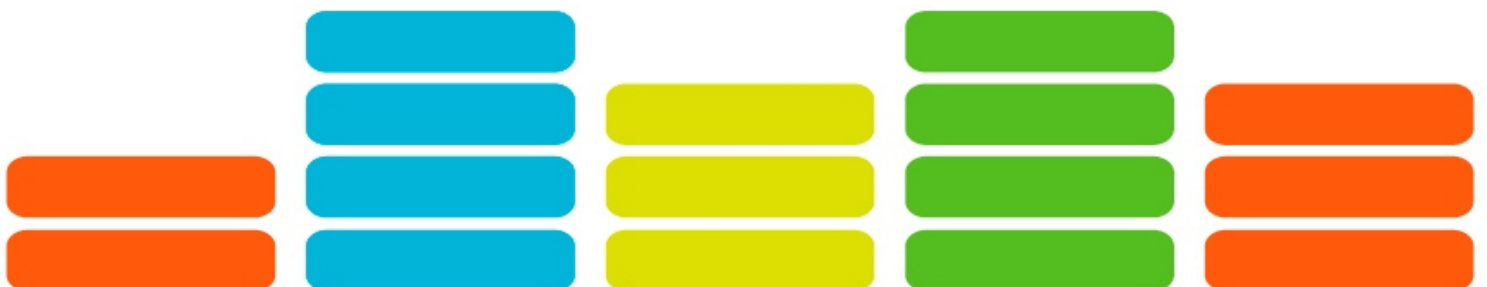
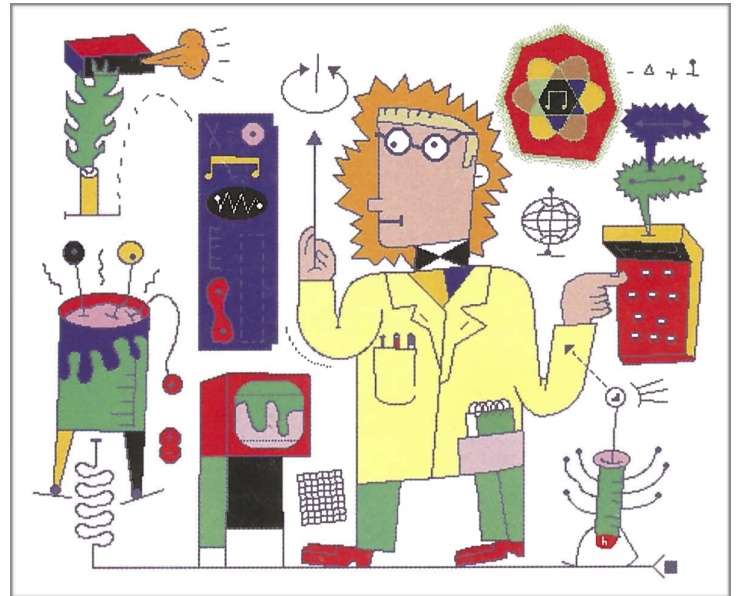
Christopher Dobrian published the *Max Cookbook: Useful and Instructive Programming Examples* online at

<https://music.arts.uci.edu/dobrian/maxcookbook/>

The *Max Cookbook* contains 700+ patches with brief explanatory texts, demonstrating programming

techniques in Max, MSP, and Jitter. An interview with the author was published online by Cycling '74 at

<https://cycling74.com/articles/an-interview-with-chris-dobrian-creator-of-the-max-msp-cookbook>.



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All ideas regarding content are welcome. Please let us know if you'd like to participate in its production.