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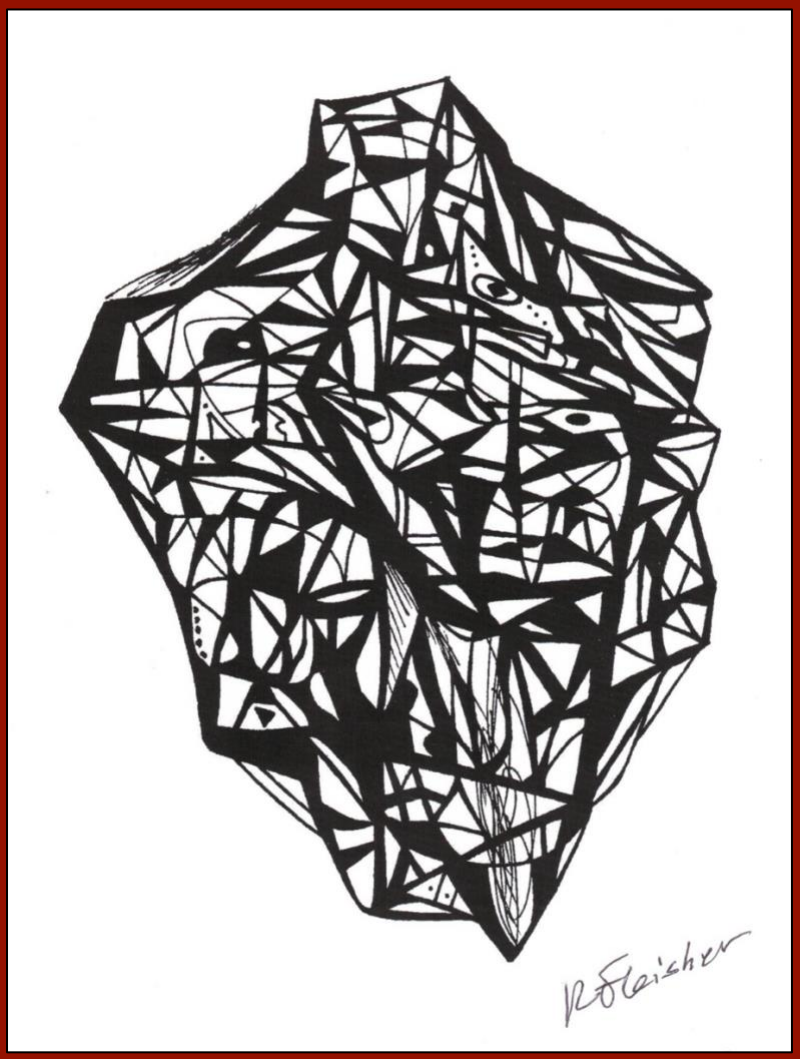

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Interested contributors should submit manuscripts by email. Manuscripts should be submitted in an editable format, such as a Microsoft Word document (*docx). The type of submission should be specified (e.g., scholarly article, review, studio report, interview, tutorial, etc.). Main articles are generally 2,000 to 6,000 words. Reviews, tutorials, and other items tend to be shorter, around 500-1,000 words.

Preparing Your Submission Manuscripts should use Times New Roman size 12 or similar font, double-spacing, and no columns or other non-essential formatting. Long articles should be divided into sections with bold headings (no numbered headings). Manuscripts should be formatted and prepared using The Chicago Manual of Style, 18th edition (2024) as a guide. References should follow Author-Date format, with parenthetical citations in text as necessary. All references should be listed after the text of the article in a section labeled "References." Footnotes should be avoided. Any computer code should be placed in fixed-width format to facilitate readability. The approximate location of each graphic (images, figures, musical examples, diagrams, etc.) should be indicated in the text by a (sequentially numbered) label and a brief caption. Graphics may be included within the body of the submission, but must also be sent as separate attachments (see below).

Supporting Materials Any graphics (including images, figures, musical examples, diagrams, etc.) should be submitted as separate individual files. If there are many files, please submit them as a single zip file or include an anonymized link to a shared folder. We recommend uncompressed graphic files such as TIFF at 300 dpi. We can support links to audio, video, and other types of supporting materials on a case-by-case basis.

AI Policy Authors are responsible for the contents of their own work, including its correctness and originality. This includes text, images, and all media associated with a given submission. AI tools should never be cited as an author or co-author. Where AI tools have been used in the creation of any aspect of a submission, the author must include a statement accompanying their submission describing the scope of such usage.

Submission All submissions, including articles, reviews, proposals, and items for *Tips and Tricks* should be emailed to the Editor-in-Chief, Drake Andersen: journal@seamusonline.org.

About SEAMUS

Founded in 1984, the Society for Electro-Acoustic Music in the United States (SEAMUS) is a national non-profit organization of composers, performers, and teachers of electro-acoustic music representing every part of the country and virtually every musical style. Electro-Acoustic music is a term used to describe those musics that are dependent on electronic technology for their creation and/or performance. Many members of SEAMUS—like Jon Appleton, the guiding light in the conception of the Synclavier—are recognized world leaders in their fields. All are dedicated to the use of the most advanced technology as the tools of their trade.

SEAMUS seeks to provide a broad forum for those involved or interested in electronic music. Through its journal, newsletter, national meetings, and its national archive at the University of Texas, SEAMUS seeks to increase communication among the diverse constituency of the relatively new music medium.

The Society's objectives include:

To encourage the composition and performance of electro-acoustic music
To develop a network for technical information and support
To promote concerts and radio broadcasts of electro-acoustic music both in the US and abroad
To create an exchange of information through newsletters and other means of communication
To establish and maintain a national archive and information center for electro-acoustic music
To attract a wide diversity of members and supporters
To advocate licensing and copyright concerns

SEAMUS strives to address not only relevant technology but also the non-technical issues pertinent to the electro-acoustic music community. In a field usually dominated by technical concerns, it is refreshing to hear paper sessions devoted to aesthetics, collaboration, education, and the ethical and social issues facing electro-acoustic musicians. The provocative sessions provide fuel for lively discussions during the national meetings.

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Journal SEAMUS

Volume 35, Number 1–2, 2026

From the Editor

I am excited to share the publication of Journal SEAMUS Volume 35 with the SEAMUS community and our wider readership. Leading off this issue is an article by Ali Balighi exploring a meditative methodology for musical composition. Noah Kaplan has conducted a fascinating and wide-ranging interview with the composer and multi-instrumentalist Elliott Sharp following the recent release of his book *Feedback: Translations from the IrRational.* This issue of the Journal also features a number of reviews of recent events and recordings. Outgoing SEAMUS board member Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner organized a slate of four reviews of Click Fest 2025, hosted at the Ohio University School of Music in October 2025 by Robert McClure, T. R. Beery, and Jamie Leigh Sampson. The reviewers, Zeynep Özcan, Fabio Fabbri, Mickie Wadsworth, and Hinkle-Turner, herself, highlight different aspects of the event. Jay Batzner also offers a review of Philip Schuessler's recent release *Atlas Chrysalis.* And finally, Sean Bailey offers a review of *PDMaxCon25~*, hosted at the University of Illinois School of Music in September 2025.

The cover art for this issue was contributed by Robert Fleisher.

Do you have an idea for a new article, series, or other content? We are eager to hear from you! This volume in particular offers an overview of some of the types of content that we hope to showcase in future issues. For example, Balighi's examination of the creative process behind one of his own musical compositions can serve as a template for future scholarship in the Journal. I would encourage composers interested in sharing their music with a wider audience to consider submitting similar studies in which they contextualize their own work and creative practice within broadly applicable themes, methods, and influences. Similarly, we are always eager to publish interviews and reviews that will be of interest to the SEAMUS community. Please feel free to write to us with your inquires or submissions: journal@seamusonline.org.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to Journal SEAMUS's new review board member, Mike Khoury. And, as always, our deep gratitude goes out to the Journal SEAMUS staff, SEAMUS leadership—including our newly elected board members President Adam Vidiksis and Diversity Officer Nick Hwang—and the SEAMUS community. We look forward to hearing from you!

Drake Andersen, Editor-in-Chief

Composing in Stillness: A Case Study of *Meditation* for Bass Saxophone and Live Electronics

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Introduction: Meditation as a Compositional Method

My composition *Meditation* for bass saxophone and live electronics (Balighi 2022) began as a practical response to a failure of process. I needed a way to make dependable decisions about musical time and timbre, and to treat silence as a shaped component of form rather than as an unexamined gap. During the months that led to the piece, anxiety disrupted drafting sessions and made revision feel like restart rather than continuation, as documented in my essay "Between Noise and Silence" (Balighi 2023). A meditation routine entered first as stabilization, then as compositional instrumentation: a way to reset attention so that pacing judgments and timbral choices could be made and remade without forcing closure.

The article offers a composer-specific protocol derived from a single electroacoustic work, then demonstrates what that protocol changed in the score and the electronics of *Meditation.* The contribution is methodological and concrete: attentional practice is treated as a compositional variable that can be made operational during planning, drafting, and revision, and evaluated through traceable musical consequences.

Meditation uses a reversed Fibonacci sequence (beginning with 233, then 144, 89, 55, and so on) to determine movement durations, producing progressive compression of section lengths while supporting a perceived deceleration in event-rate through the alternation of "Chaos" and "Silence." Fourteen movements, alternating titles "Chaos" and "Silence," frame the arc through contrasting event density and pause length rather than through thematic transformation. The sequence is treated here as a constraint on pacing, not as metaphysics; it disciplines the piece's durational intuition and provides a repeatable scaffold for revision.

Timbre articulates the piece's temporal design. The bass saxophone writing uses extended techniques, including multiphonics, voice, and half-air sounds, to keep the material close to the physical means of its production and to expose small instabilities of airflow and embouchure. The live electronics were adapted from an earlier software patch and reconfigured to mirror the instrument's spectral features while adding controlled microtonal adjustments; diffusion is treated as form, via a nine-channel spatial design that allows density and sparsity to be articulated as shifts in presence rather than as changes in "texture" alone.

Alvin Lucier's account of his 1965 composition *Music for Solo Performer* is procedural: "One is supposed to get into a relaxed, meditative state," because the work depends on physiological signal as an operating mechanism (Lucier 2012, 52). Pauline Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations* formalizes attention as instruction, with the first piece in the collection beginning with "Begin by simply observing your own breathing" and "Always be an observer," positioning a meditative stance as a practicable score for listening and action (Oliveros 1971, 1). My composition *Meditation* extends this lineage while narrowing the claim: one piece, one protocol, and a traceable set of musical consequences.

Electroacoustic discourse also provides reasons to treat such methods as plural and situated. Sean Peuquet (2018) argues from the premise that no single epistemic frame can

exhaust the field, which matters for how any "method" should be offered. Likewise, Ryan Ingebritsen, Christopher Knowlton, and John Toenjes (2018) treat embodied attention as a performance condition that can be designed and cultivated, not merely asserted. These positions do not "justify" the present method; they locate it within an already plural field where embodied practice is a legitimate site of compositional knowledge.

Studies report that mindfulness meditation can modulate performance on some creative thinking measures in some settings (Capurso, Fabbro, and Crescentini 2014). Accounts of creative cognition also emphasize that productive work depends on shifting between generative exploration and evaluative control (Beaty et al. 2016). Such findings supply vocabulary for patterns that many composers already recognize, but they do not substitute for compositional evidence. Here, the evidentiary core remains the piece: what changed in pacing and timbral decision-making when attention was treated as a repeatable practice.

Meditation practice, as used in this composition process, is defined operationally: breath observation, brief somatic scanning, and deliberate nonreactivity, used before drafting and between revision passes to stabilize listening and pacing judgments. This definition is intentionally narrow. It neither collapses meditation into generalized "mindfulness," nor treats Buddhist traditions as interchangeable technique banks. That restraint matters because contemporary mindfulness culture can drift into self-optimization rhetoric and scientistic authority claims, a pattern sharply criticized by Evan Thompson (2020). It is a compositional procedure tested against a single work's demands.

The remainder of the article keeps *Meditation* as the running example. After specifying the protocol as it was practiced and bounded, the main body analyzes the piece as compositional evidence, tracking how temporal design and timbral decisions were revised through listening. Only after that analysis does the discussion isolate what can transfer to other electroacoustic practices, and what depends on this instrument, this electronics configuration, and this performance ecology.

Materials and Practice in Context: What "Meditative Methodology" Means Here

The phrase meditative methodology is used in this article as a compositional term of art, not as a synonym for any single religious, therapeutic, or scientific program. In Buddhist contexts, practices of attention are typically embedded in ethical, soteriological, and communal frameworks; "mindfulness" (sati) is not merely a technique but part of a disciplined path of cultivation (Thera 2014; Hanh, Mai, and Ho 1999). Contemporary discourse often detaches "mindfulness" from those frames and re-describes it as a portable cognitive skill or health intervention, a shift that has been widely noted and contested (Thompson 2020; Giannou and Mantzios 2023). This article therefore treats meditation with explicit boundaries. It draws on minimal, practice-facing descriptions of breath awareness and somatic attention, while declining to speak for Buddhist doctrine or to claim that the protocol below reproduces the aims of any tradition. The point is narrower: a repeatable way of entering and sustaining a compositional stance in which pacing, silence, timbral discrimination, and performer presence can be handled with less compulsive problem-solving and more stable listening.

The method is not offered as a universal theory of creativity, nor as a corrective to "composition" in general. It is a piece-derived protocol articulated from the inside of *Meditation* for bass saxophone and live electronics and described so that readers can test it against their own electroacoustic practices. The literature is used here as contextual support, not as authorization. The recurring criticism that mindfulness becomes reduced to brain states visible in EEG or fMRI is taken seriously; meditative practice is better understood as enacted, situated skillful know-how, not private inner observation (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 2017). In that spirit, the "materials" of this section are practical: session structure, attention cues, documentation habits, and the concrete limits of what can be inferred from them.

The operational definition used here is the protocol developed and applied during the composition of *Meditation*. It is not presented as

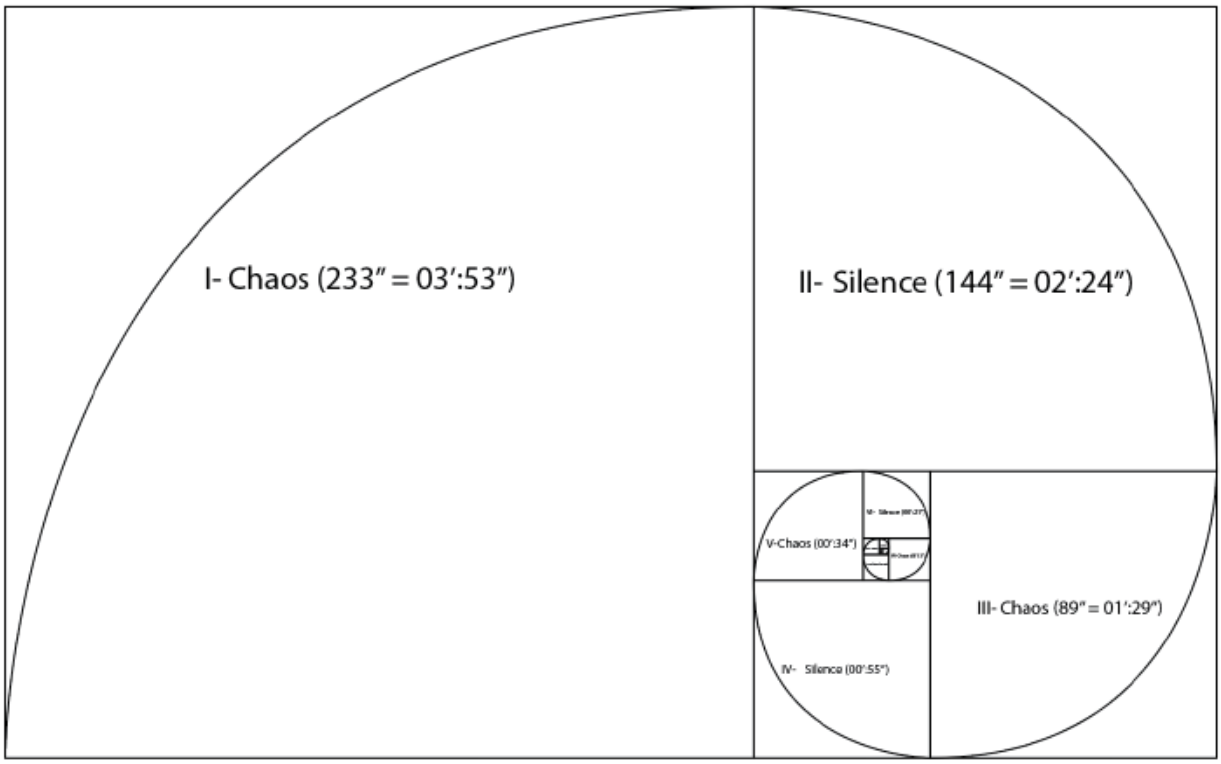

Figure 1. Diagrammatic representation of the movement-duration scheme used in *Meditation* (fourteen sections corresponding to fourteen movements). The diagram visualizes the proportional sequence used to set movement lengths; it is included as an aid to formal orientation rather than as an extra-musical emblem.

a spiritual ladder or a diagnostic instrument, but as a studio routine that ties attentional training to compositional artifacts. In implemented form, the protocol has five components: (1) a brief breath-centered settling phase (approximately 10–15 minutes), (2) a short somatic scan oriented to posture and breath, (3) brief journaling that names sensations, emotions, and auditory images without forcing interpretation, (4) a bounded drafting window in which attention is periodically returned to breath and posture to stabilize perception for pacing and spectral-density decisions, and (5) a separate reflective listening pass (typically 15–20 minutes). The reflective pass ends with roughly one minute of listening without editing, intended to preserve a temporal "afterimage" of the work's proportions rather than to chase solutions; the next day's work begins from that listening rather than from correction.

The practice context for *Meditation* also includes how first-person data were handled. Because the method is explicitly practice-based, it depends on disciplined documentation rather than retrospective narrative alone. The protocol's journaling component functions as a lightweight phenomenological record: it notes bodily cues (breath depth; jaw tension; postural collapse), affective tone, and recurring auditory images that emerge during stillness before they are translated into musical action. This aligns with a basic methodological point in contemplative and enactive approaches: the enabling biological conditions for attention (including neural systems) should be distinguished from the enacted skills and meanings that constitute the experience (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 2017). In practical terms, the journal was treated as compositional evidence only when it could be linked to an observable decision: a cut in duration, a change in spectral filtering, an altered density of multiphonics, a revised electronic response curve, or a re-spaced silence. Here, the written trace is admissible only insofar as it is

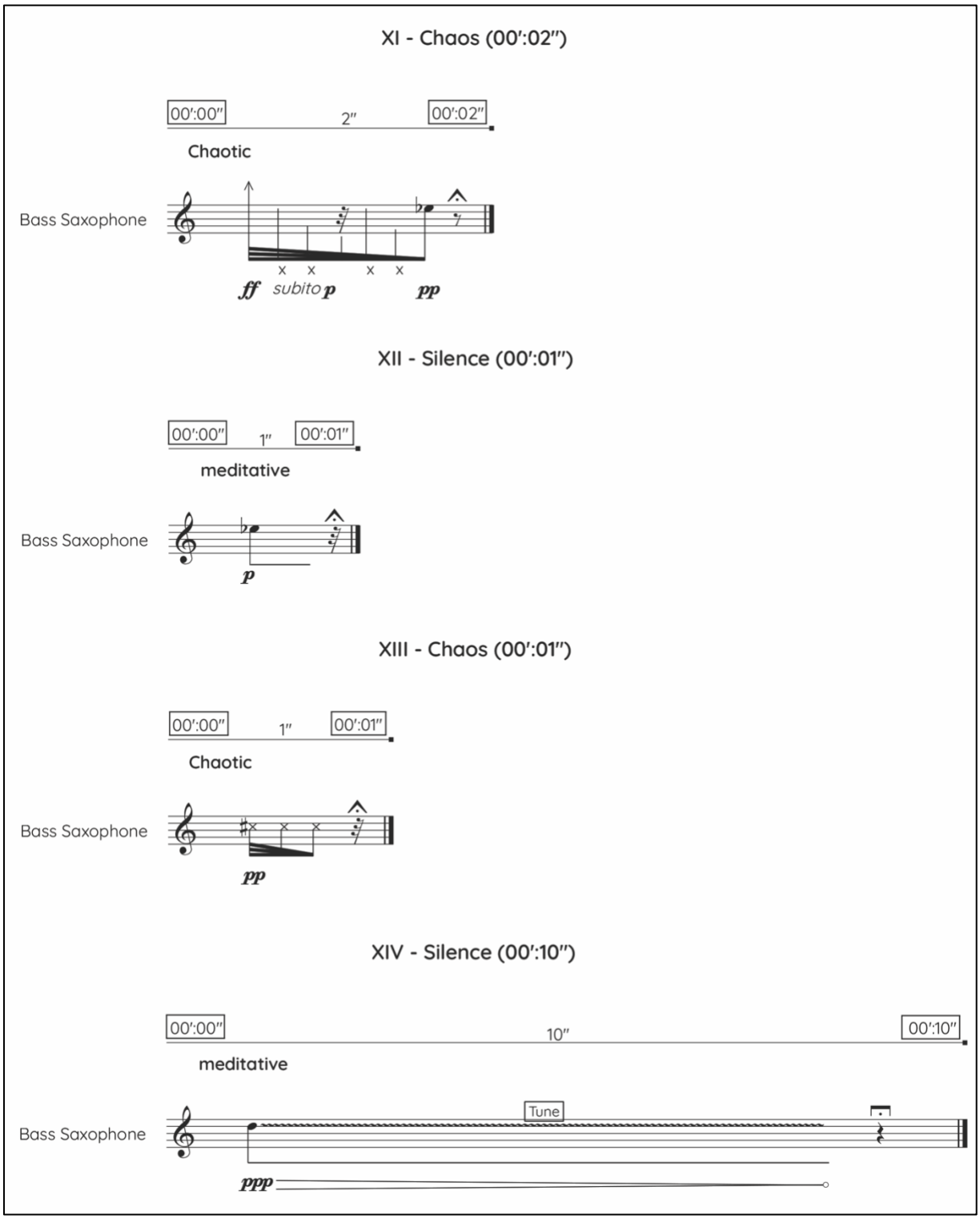

Figure 2. Movements XI–XIV from *Meditation* (bass saxophone part), showing the late-stage durational compression and the alternation between "Chaos" and "Silence." The excerpt also displays the concluding silence as a sustained ten-second-long tone, marked at very soft dynamics, which frames the ending as an explicit gesture rather than an unnotated absence.

audibly instantiated.

Materially, the method assumes the ordinary ecology of electroacoustic composition: a body in a room, tools that mediate audition, and an instrument whose physicality constrains and affords musical time. Contemporary accounts of composing emphasize that "thinking" in composition is distributed across bodily gesture, notational practice, remembered sound, and environmental affordances; the work is made through material engagement, not despite it (Pohjannoro 2022). The meditative protocol is designed to make that distribution more available to awareness rather than to replace it with abstraction. Breath awareness and somatic scanning are used as cues that return the composer to the body-as-timer: the felt duration of inhalation and exhalation becomes a reference against which the pacing of sustained tones, rests, and electronic decays can be judged with less haste. In this respect the practice is conservative, not utopian. It does not promise a purified "non-thinking" state; it seeks a controllable reduction in compulsive evaluation so that timbre and duration can be handled with steadier discrimination.

Meditation does not become musically relevant because a paper associates it with a network, but because it changes the conditions under which decisions are made. Still, cognitive and creativity research can be useful when it helps describe, without mystification, the kinds of shifts a composer reports. Studies distinguishing focused-attention and open-monitoring styles, for example, have been used to hypothesize different effects on convergent and divergent thinking (Capurso, Fabbro, and Crescentini 2014). The protocol's structure deliberately alternates between a narrowing move (breath anchoring; reduced distraction) and a widening move (reflective listening; allowing associative connections without immediate correction), because composition typically requires cycling between generating material and imposing form (Beaty et al. 2016; Bogunović 2019). Neural studies of composers are treated similarly: if they suggest that autobiographical memory, spontaneous imagery, and internal evaluation are active during musical creation, that can resonate with a composer's report of inner imagery during stillness, but it cannot substitute for the traceable musical consequences in a score and sound file (Lu et al. 2015). The article therefore uses such findings only as vocabulary for describing experience, not as proof that the method is valid.

Case Study: *Meditation* for Bass Saxophone and Live Electronics

This case study treats *Meditation* (Balighi 2022) as primary evidence for a meditative compositional methodology, understood in a narrow sense: a repeatable session structure that alters how decisions are made, and that leaves consequences that can be read in durational design, instrumental writing, and electronics behavior. To make the claim "traceable" in an evidentiary sense, the analysis below is organized around a small set of score-facing anchors. Each anchor identifies a location in the work (movement and internal timestamp) and an instruction layer (notation, time-stamp grid, gate selection, or pitch-processing premise), then describes the immediate consequence for what becomes audible in performance. The aim is not to translate compositional practice into generalized psychology, but to show how attentional procedure is externalized into constraints that remain legible in the work's materials.

The piece was conceived during a period in which anxiety disrupted compositional work; meditation became a stabilizing routine and a practical return to decision-making in sound. The piece is presented as a two-part design in which one section is linked to anxiety and the other to meditation, with "Chaos" and "Silence" used as headings rather than claims of metaphysical content. The methodological claim remains bounded, since attentional practice is treated as a compositional variable only insofar as it produces traceable musical outcomes in this work's materials.

The work's prefatory form statement specifies fourteen movements, alternating between seven titled "Chaos" and seven titled "Silence," beginning with Chaos and concluding with Silence. Movement durations are fixed in advance through a Fibonacci sequence list (e.g., 233 seconds for I, 144 seconds for II, 89 seconds for III, etc.), with the final movement realized as a ten-second-long tone rather than as an

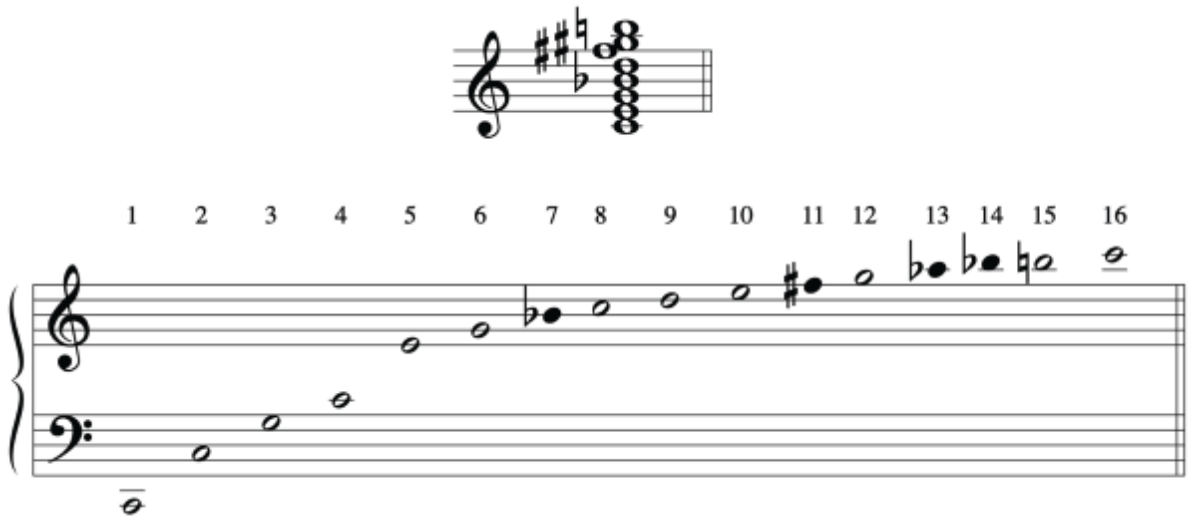

Figure 3. Musical notation featuring Olivier Messiaen's chord of resonance and a harmonic series. The top staff with a G-clef displays Messiaen's 8-note chord starting on C4. Below, a grand staff with both a G-clef and an F-clef illustrates a harmonic series beginning on C, comprising 16 notes in total. This demonstrates the relationship between Messiaen's chord of resonance and the harmonic series.

unmeasured cessation. This arrangement makes large-scale time resistant to local impulse: editing and revision can redistribute events within a movement, but the movement-scale temporal frame remains stable and checkable. A further constraint is specified in performance practice: silence between movements is excluded from the total duration in live performance, whereas a recording may incorporate those gaps into a single continuous track. The same materials thus support two distinct temporal experiences, one sectional and one continuous, without requiring new content to be composed. Figures 1 and 2 provide a visual summary of the duration scheme and its late-stage compression.

The score cites Cage's prioritization of time, and it links form to duration as the shared characteristic of sound and silence (Cage 1961). Within *Meditation*, the alternation of "Chaos" and "Silence" can be heard as a durational and energetic oscillation, not as thematic development in the sense of a sonata. The score states that, rather than developing ideas, "musical ideas destroy each other" (Balighi 2022). The consequences for the case-study are concrete, as the inverted Fibonacci scaffold externalizes pacing decisions into an auditable constraint.

Instrumentation and timbral methods are also grounded in underlying principles. The choice of bass saxophone is justified in terms of resonance and depth; its physical production encourages attention to breath, resistance, and airflow, which matters when stillness is treated as compositional material. The score formalizes this timbral orientation through a defined technique vocabulary. It names multiphonics and key clicks explicitly, then expands the palette with half-air tones and improvisatory passages. That vocabulary supports the work's central technical demand, producing gradations between noise-like and pitch-like states without switching aesthetic worlds.

Notation in *Meditation* embeds the temporal argument at the micro-level. The technique and notation preface defines the piece as "based on time" and therefore instructs performers to interpret musical icons according to shape rather than metrical equivalence (a quarter rest is not treated as one beat). This premise is implemented through recurring internal timestamps that segment attention into consistent windows. In I, Chaos (03:53), the part is organized around successive ten-second markers (for example, 1:10, 1:20, 1:30), and technique instructions appear inside that grid; "half air," for instance, is placed at 1:30. The consequence is methodological: the score provides a stable temporal lattice within which timbral variables

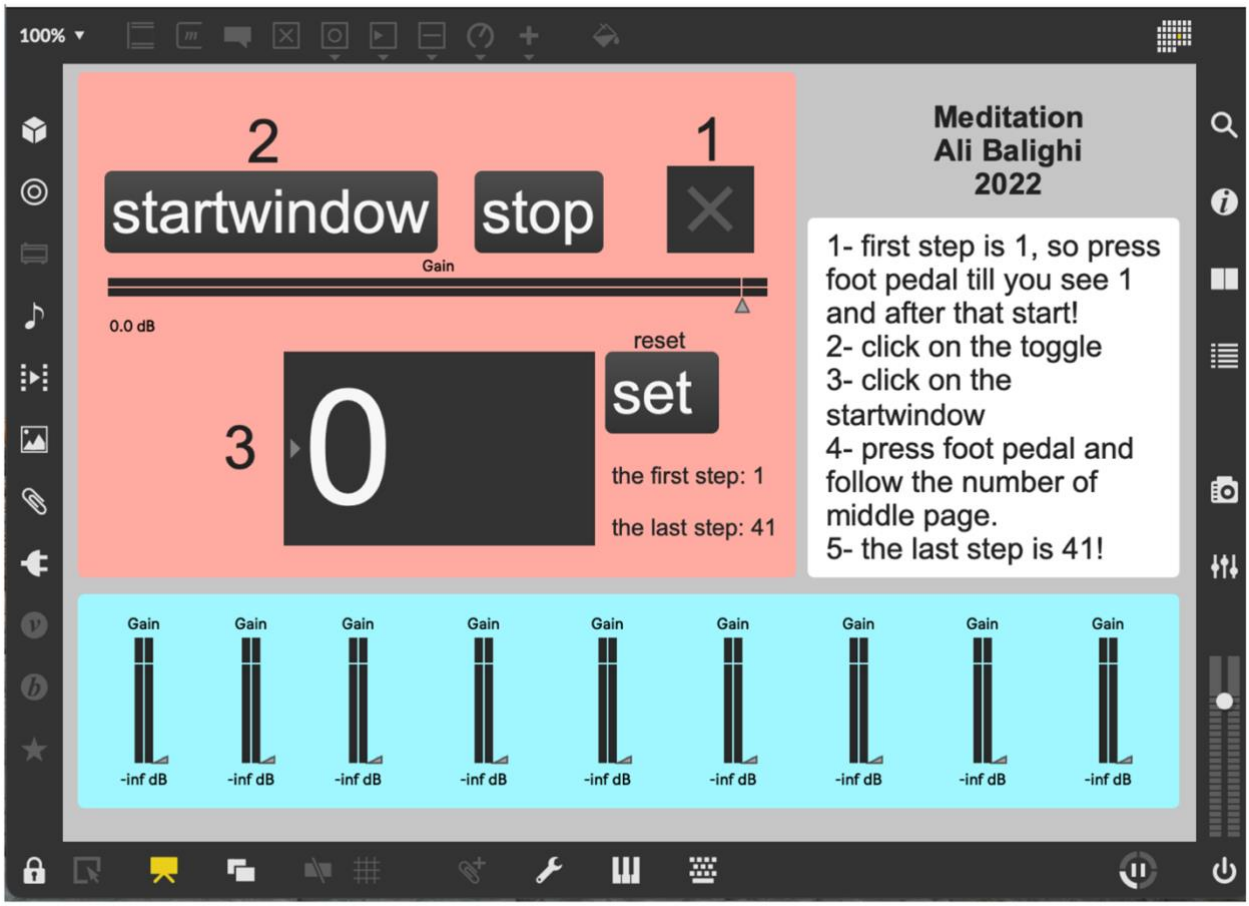

Figure 4. The Max/MSP patch is organized into three sections: control and parameter toggles with a numbered five-step workflow, level visualization routed through nine live gain channels, and real-time monitoring for managing the piece's audio processing.

such as breath audibility, onset instability, and sustained noise can be revised without converting the piece into meter. In analytical terms, the timestamp grid functions as a compositional unit of listening and rewriting, one that aligns directly with a practice-based method that depends on sustained attention to small differences in pacing and resonance.

Improvisation is not an ornamental add-on: rhythmic gestures are given without noteheads, and pitches may be improvised within the ligatures, with technique cues placed beneath the rhythm. The score also specifies voice actions ("SS" and "M") and defines "Tune" as an irregular vibration, which makes instability and threshold sonorities part of the notational system rather than performance excess. In analytical terms, these decisions bring attention to how sound is produced; breath, friction, and unstable periodicity become compositional objects that can support extended quiet fields without requiring conventional melodic activity.

Harmonic thinking enters through resonance and controlled microtonality. The work's resonance-oriented harmonic premise can be understood through a comparison with Messiaen's "chord of resonance" (Figure 3), which comprises a tempered compression of partials that highlights the ambiguities between semitones in the overtone series (Messiaen 1956, 50). Microtonality is used to further intensify these ambiguities. The second, fourth, and eighth movements employ a cluster derived from the harmonic series whose tones are rendered microtonal through the live-electronics layer. Read as compositional evidence, this design supports slow-change listening. A microtonally inflected cluster can sustain beating, spectral thickness, and perceived motion without requiring frequent new attacks, which is

consistent with a method that treats pacing decisions as products of extended attention to decay, resonance, and threshold audibility rather than of rapid thematic turnover.

The electronics system makes this attentional stance audible as environment and spatial form. In performance, the electronics are realized as nine loudspeaker output channels governed by notated gate states. Each gate state opens and closes defined routing paths so that electronic presence can be composed as a parameter rather than treated as postproduction diffusion. Movement II, Silence (2:24), makes the mechanism explicit. At 0:00 the electronics staff presents two successive gate states, (1-2-3-6) and (1-2-3-7), and the movement proceeds through timestamp windows (0:10, 0:20) coordinated with further gate-state changes (for example, [1-2-3-6] at 0:10; [1-6-7-8] at 0:20). Because these changes occur while the saxophone may remain continuous, the perceived sound does not "change material" so much as it changes its conditions of audibility: reinforcement thickens, spatial emphasis redistributes, or the field withdraws and the acoustic source returns to the foreground. The pedal-track procedure reinforces this as form rather than mixing. The pedal number is shown in the score and mirrored in the Max application, and a dedicated SET function restores the system to a known state so that gate behavior is repeatable across rehearsals and performances.

The Max system derives from an earlier patch used in *Colors*, but it is reconfigured so that diffusion and reinforcement are structural, not ancillary. The patch routes the processed signal into nine output channels, each monitored and adjusted through a corresponding live gain control, so spatial behavior can be rehearsed and replicated with the same rigor as instrumental technique. Pitch processing includes controlled microtonal offsets that are applied within the electronic layer, then distributed across the multichannel field (Figure 4). In the score, the electronics are treated as an integrated performance apparatus: required equipment is specified, and the pedal track ties numbered cues to callable gate states in the Max interface, keeping spatial and processing decisions legible as part of the work's notated form.

Taken together, these artifacts show how the meditative method is integrated within the piece. The method emphasizes breath-centered settling, treating silence as material, and using reflective documentation as an input to edit. In *Meditation*, those inputs are not left as introspective claims; they appear as durable constraints: a durational system that forces contraction, an alternation schema that frames event density against pause length, and an electronics design that treats diffusion and resonance as compositional form. The case study therefore supports a limited conclusion, since meditative practice functions here as craft that produces audible consequences in time, timbre, and spatialized resonance, without importing metaphysical authority or making claims about universal creativity.

Discussion: What Transfers, What Does Not

The argument of this article is rooted in a specific case study: *Meditation* for bass saxophone and live electronics, and the compositional protocol developed through it. It is worth considering the extent to which these methods are practically transferable. The question is not whether meditation in general belongs in composition, since experimental and electroacoustic lineages have long treated attentional stance as materially consequential (Lucier 2012; Oliveros 1971). The question is which elements of the protocol can be lifted from this one work and applied to other electroacoustic contexts without importing claims the evidence does not warrant.

A first transferable element is the protocol's insistence on separating session entry from session labor. The short breath-centered settling and somatic scan are not claimed to produce insight; they function as an attentional reset that stabilizes pacing judgments and reduces compulsive editing at the start of work. This is transferable because it does not depend on instrument, patch, or style. Any studio practice that involves sustained listening to small differences, especially in decay, spectral density, and event spacing, can test whether a brief settling phase reduces premature closure. The closest precedent in the literature is not a claim about neuroscience but a compositional orientation: Lucier's requirement that the performer enter "a relaxed, meditative state" is

framed as a condition for the work's mechanism to operate at all (Lucier 2012, 52). Oliveros (1971) likewise treats breath observation as the score's first technical instruction, not a motivational preface. Those references matter here because they clarify what is being transferred: not a spiritual aura, but a procedural condition that changes what counts as audible and how long one can remain with it.

A second transferable element is the protocol's deliberate alternation between generative work and reflective listening. In the case study, reflective listening and brief journaling were not framed as self-expression; they were used to mark what in the material demanded revision and what should be preserved. This resembles what composer-process research describes as cycling between intuitive emergence and reflective evaluation, with the key point that the cycle is managed rather than left to mood (Bogunović 2019; Pohjannoro 2016). The transfer here is straightforward: many electroacoustic workflows drift toward either continuous tweaking or continuous ideation. A scheduled reflective pass, separated from active editing, is a controllable intervention that can be tested in other projects, including those not oriented toward "stillness."

A third transferable element is the method's treatment of silence and low-activity sound as compositional materials that require technique. In *Meditation*, silence is not absence; it is part of the piece's pacing logic, and its placement is inseparable from decisions about resonance, breath audibility, and electronic decay. This transfers most readily to practices that already work at thresholds, such as sustained-tone work, sparse live electronics, and listening-centered performance. It also transfers to denser idioms insofar as silence is treated as a designed parameter rather than a byproduct of phrase endings. The method does not prescribe *how much* silence is correct; it supplies a way of listening that can support decisions about where silence is needed to articulate form.

A fourth transferable element concerns proportional thinking, but only under a strict interpretation. The case study uses an inverted Fibonacci scheme as a durational scaffold. What transfers is not the Fibonacci sequence as such, and not any claim that mathematical proportion carries spiritual meaning. Instead, what transfers is the compositional function of externalizing pacing decisions into a constraint that can resist local taste and anxiety-driven revision. Many composers already use proportional systems for this purpose; the protocol's contribution is to couple proportion with attentional practice so that the constraint can be heard as pacing rather than enforced as doctrine. If a reader replaces Fibonacci with another proportional strategy, the method still holds, provided the strategy can be audited against what the piece actually sounds like in time.

Some components of the protocol are only partially transferable because they are bound to the instrument. Bass saxophone is not an arbitrary vehicle in *Meditation*. Its physical resistance, breath demands, and capacity for unstable spectra make it a privileged site for linking bodily timing to musical timing. A composer writing for fixed media, or for an instrument with different breath and resistance properties, will not inherit the same affordances. That does not make the method irrelevant; it changes where the method attaches. In a non-wind context, the protocol's somatic cues may need to shift from breath timing to other bodily markers: muscular tension, micro-gesture, or postural fatigue. This is consistent with embodied accounts of cognition that treat experience as enacted and situated, not detachable from the organism's capacities (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 2017). The transfer therefore requires adaptation at the level of bodily cue selection, not merely copying the session outline.

The live-electronics component introduces a second set of dependencies. The patch in *Meditation* was adapted from earlier work and configured for nine-channel spatial diffusion, with microtonal adjustments used to extend resonance and spectral thickness. These are strong compositional commitments. What transfers is the design principle: electronics should be treated as an attentional environment that conditions timing, not as an effects layer placed on top of an instrumental part. That principle can be implemented in many ways, including stereo setups, binaural formats, and telematic contexts. What does not transfer automatically is the specific mapping logic, the spatial layout, or the psychoacoustic balance

between saxophone presence and electronic field, because those depend on room, diffusion system, and rehearsal conditions. In other words, the method is portable at the level of interactional goals but not at the level of specific signal chains.

A further limit concerns claims about meditation, mindfulness, and tradition. The protocol borrows breath-based attention and nonreactive noticing, but it is not presented as a Buddhist practice in any doctrinal sense. That boundary matters because contemporary mindfulness discourse often trades on scientific validation narratives that flatten Buddhist traditions into brain training. The transferable lesson is not to use Buddhism to compose, but to treat attentional training as a practice with histories, limits, and ethical contexts, and do not use cognitive-science vocabulary to make inflated claims. Where a composer does wish to engage Buddhist sources, the transfer would require a different level of specificity and accountability than this article attempts. The method presented here remains a compositional routine, not a spiritual identity.

The narrow generalization that remains defensible is this: in electroacoustic composition, where small differences in decay, spectrum, and event spacing can determine form, a repeatable attentional protocol can function as a compositional tool. It can help a composer sustain listening long enough to make decisions about time, silence, timbre, and presence without forcing closure, and it can do so without claiming that meditation confers special creative powers (Capurso, Fabbro, and Crescentini 2014). What cannot be generalized from a single case study is a universal model of creativity, a new ethics for composition, or a claim that contemplative practice will produce specific cognitive outcomes in ordinary studio conditions. The method transfers as craft: a way of working, a way of listening, and a way of documenting decisions so the work can be revised without losing its temporal logic.

Conclusion: A Restrained Claim

By examining the compositional process of a single electroacoustic work as a case study, this article offers a novel compositional protocol that should be regarded as a tool rather than an orthodoxy. The central evidence does not support a general theory of creativity or a claim that meditation is required for composition, but the documented compositional consequences that followed when attentional practice was treated as method in the making of *Meditation* for bass saxophone and live electronics. In that sense, the article's scope is deliberately narrow. It does not attempt to adjudicate what meditation "is" across Buddhist traditions, nor does it assert that contemplative practice can be reduced to cognitive mechanisms measurable in neuroscience. It presents a studio routine, its boundaries, and what it changed in one piece.

The protocol is modest by design: breath-centered settling, somatic scanning, a bounded drafting window, reflective listening, and brief journaling. Those steps are not framed as access to inspiration, and they are not treated as substitutes for technique. They are treated as compositional conditions that can stabilize pacing judgments, sharpen timbral discrimination, and keep revision from collapsing into premature closure. The case study showed that this matters most when the work's materials demand sustained attention to small differences in resonance, decay, and event density. In *Meditation*, silence is not an empty space between phrases; it is a shaped parameter that participates in form. The inverted Fibonacci durations and the movement contrast between "Chaos" and "Silence" are examples of constraints used to externalize pacing and support revision, not symbols used to import metaphysical authority. The bass saxophone's breath-based production and the electronics' spatial field also provide a concrete site where attention is audible, because the performer's bodily timing and the electronics' decay behavior continually renegotiate what counts as presence.

Placed in a broader lineage, these moves are not presented as unprecedented. Experimental and electroacoustic practice has repeatedly foregrounded attention and bodily state as materially consequential. Lucier's description of *Music for Solo Performer* presupposes a "relaxed, meditative state" as a functional condition for the work's signal-based sound production (Lucier 2012, 52). Oliveros's *Sonic Meditations* begins from breath observation and the discipline of remaining an observer, making

attentional stance itself a compositional instruction. This article has not tried to supersede such precedents with a new doctrine. Instead, it has sought to show how a contemporary composer can translate attentional practice into a repeatable workflow that produces traceable musical results, rather than leaving "stillness" as an attractive metaphor.

Meditation and mindfulness are not interchangeable terms, and Buddhist traditions cannot responsibly be treated as generic reservoirs for creative technique. Practice sources frame mindfulness as disciplined cultivation embedded in broader ethical and soteriological commitments. The method described here avoids that move. It does not claim that meditation confers special creative powers, nor that brief practice produces the capacities associated with long-term contemplatives. Where cognitive and creativity research has been cited, it has been used as a descriptive vocabulary for familiar compositional cycles, not as a warrant for historical generalizations or normative demands.

What, then, can be taken from this work by other composers? The transferable elements are not the particulars of bass saxophone writing, not a specific Max patch, and not a fixed proportional system. The transferable element is the disciplined coupling of attention training with compositional documentation: a way of entering work, listening, revising, and closing a session that supports sustained engagement with sound without rushing the piece toward closure. The limits are equally clear. Because the method was developed through one instrument, one electronics ecology, and one composer's circumstances, it cannot ground universal claims about creativity or about meditation's effects. It can only be tested, adapted, or refused in other contexts.

A final implication follows from that limitation. If meditative methodology is to become meaningful within electroacoustic composition, it should do so through accountable compositional evidence: score decisions, sound behaviors, revision trails, and performance realities. The value of the protocol, if it has one, lies in making those traces legible. That is the sense in which the article's claim remains restrained: composing in stillness is presented here as one workable method among many, grounded in a single case and offered for practical use rather than for conversion.

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Interview

An Interview with Elliott Sharp on *Feedback: Translations from the IrRational*

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Introduction

Elliott Sharp has been a central figure in the avant-garde and experimental music scene in New York City for over 40 years. A composer, multi-instrumentalist, producer, and educator, he has written two books, *IrRational Music* (2018) and *Feedback: Translations from the IrRational* (2025), the latter of which explores culture, consciousness, and music from Elliott's singular perspective.

I met Elliott at his studio in the East Village on January 20, 2026, and we talked about many things related to his new book. The following interview has been edited for length and clarity and contains strong language.

For more information on *Feedback: Translations from the IrRational*, please visit: https://www.weslpress.org/9780819502049/feedback/

Noah Kaplan: Can you talk about the form of *Feedback*? It's a very interesting structure— part memoir, part travelogue, and then there's philosophy and music theory.

Elliott Sharp: Well, it's funny, because that was probably the most difficult thing of all. And I have to thank the director of Wesleyan University Press, Suzanna Tamminen, who's fantastic to work with. My first book, *IrRational Music*, was a little more straightforward memoir with digressions into theory and whatever. For *Feedback*, Suzanna said, "Make it more organic. Try and find a way to create a narrative flow that makes sense in itself and yet encompasses all these different aspects." And so that was my task. And I had to bang my head against the wall a bit for that. But then once I began, once it began to become clearer, then it became easier.

NK: In *Feedback*, you write about your artistic process. How do you compose music?

ES: The first time I was trying to write music, I wrote a note, then the next note, but you can't write that way. There was a certain realization when I understood that you had to know what the piece of music is before you can write it. That led to a process of internal listening, to what I call the inner ear. And then when the piece made itself manifest, then I could write it and it became more transcription than sitting there and composing. Once I have the basics of a piece of music, the overall architecture of the narrative arc, I write certain things that give me enough information that I know what's going to happen next. Then I'll go back in and tweak and sculpt. And that's getting better and better the more I do it. In July I completed the libretto and the score for our next opera, which is called *Substance: The Infinite Spinoza*. All of a sudden, it became a reality, and I had to sit down and compose it. And I did it pretty much in two weeks.

NK: The whole opera?

ES: Yeah. I said, okay, I'm going to do it. And I just started sitting down and writing it. The premiere is going to be in Ostrava in the Czech Republic in June at New Opera Days Ostrava. The lead singer will be a tenor who plays Spinoza. But what I'm going to be doing is increasing and enhancing and modifying the sound of the choir for various sections. My recent operas all have electronic enhancement. You could say it's a way of expanding the orchestration. And in the case of the singers, like for the opera *Filiseti Mekidesi*, which I did at the Ruhrtriennale in Bochum in 2018, I had a choir of six, Vox Nova Italia, and we had an eight-channel sound system, so I could take the voices

and multiply them and pitch shift them and have a huge surround sound choir. Our last opera, *Die Grösste Fuge* (*The Greatest Fugue*) was for the Beethoven 250 Festival in Bonn, Germany. And for that, I just had one singer, Nicholas Isherwood, and a string quartet, and then a lot of electroacoustic stuff, expanding everything using sound design principles. I took MIDI files from Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* and then permutated it, randomizing and taking little chunks and repeating and looping and then randomizing those. It's this notion of this expansion to almost granularity, where things can reconfigure themselves out of almost random fragments, like infinitesimally small fragments. So really taking the DNA from the *Grosse Fuge* itself and scrambling it to use as the raw materials of the string quartet.

NK: The *Grosse Fuge* is an interesting choice—it's kind of a perfect thing to deconstruct, because Beethoven's already sort of doing that with the fugue form, and then it's like, you pull *that* apart, re-form, and re-organize the fragments into something new.

ES: In the opera, Beethoven goes into fugue states. And in these states, he goes to our time and sees the beauty and horror of the modern world which then causes him to go back to his time and inspires him to compose the *Grosse Fuge*. I wrote it originally in English and then had it translated into German. I used some letters and writings of Beethoven and some writings from Goethe. Beethoven was pretty mentally unstable. Some people attributed it to syphilis because he had all kinds of psychosexual problems and would only go to prostitutes and didn't have good relationships with females. There was one woman who he was in love with, and I think it was unrequited. And he also used to dip his head in ice water to keep himself awake. I mean, he had the delusion since he was young that he was the bastard son of a king.

NK: Didn't Wagner have the delusion that he was the bastard son of a Jew? I think he believed that his Jewish stepfather was maybe actually his biological father.

ES: I'm not sure about that, but he certainly had a lot of delusions. Did you ever read his text on the Jew in music? I mean, it's unbelievable.

NK: You write a lot about being a Jew in music—

ES: Well, not a lot.

NK: There's a chapter about it. I'm curious what it means to you.

ES: I'm not a Zionist. My mother's a Holocaust survivor, and when I was a kid we were fed this whole notion of Israel, as the hope of Judaism, the hope of Jewish people. And I began to question that, as I began to question the whole notion of a monotheistic religion called Judaism and all theistic religions. I mean, that's why this Spinoza opera is so important to me, because I was hugely inspired by Spinoza to follow the path of atheism. Spinoza's notion of the infinite is the absolute inspiration for me to go beyond the Word as presented in Hebrew school. And I said, this guy's speaking the truth, this is great, the notion of the infinite in everything, whether infinitely small or infinitely large.

NK: And is Spinoza the main character of the opera?

ES: Yeah, he is *the* character. I call it a mass for atheists. Jokingly, you know, when people say, what's it about?

NK: Is there a case for Spinoza being a religious mystic?

ES: A mystic, but a mystic fueled by mathematics, which to me is the ultimate mysticism. Because mathematics is about the things that you cannot put into words. Mathematics is like a utopian view of things. And also opens the door to understanding. I don't know if you came across the Rumsfeld quote.

NK: I did, yeah, about the "unknown unknowns."

ES: People laughed and they ridiculed him when he said that. And I mean, I hate the guy. He was like a fucking war criminal. But that one thing he said is absolute genius. Because, you know, it's like if you don't know what's out there, how are you going to know what's even unknown? You have to continue to open yourself to definitions that you never conceived of to get to the thing that you will then explore.

NK: The word "asymptotic" comes up a lot in *Feedback*, and seems central to your idea about making art. There's even an "Asymptotic

Manifesto" in the book. Can you talk about the meaning of the asymptotic in terms of the creative journey?

ES: I say it literally: you're never going to arrive. People have this notion of perfection. You write a piece of music and go, oh, this is perfect. No, it's not. Every piece of music is a part of the continuity of the piece that came before it. It has a lot to do with philosophical studies in Zen, the notion from Japanese culture, wabi-sabi, something is not perfect until it's broken. That brokenness is, for me, like the equivalent of this gap, this infinite gap that you can always see into, but you'll never reach the end of it.

NK: You write about not attacking a new project head-on, but rather taking some space from it and letting it kind of percolate for a while. Do you have any rituals around that?

ES: Sometimes just lay down on the couch, drink a lot of coffee, take walks. Walking is great for me for composing.

NK: And have you ever had a project where that hasn't happened?

ES: Oh yeah, but then you put it aside and then maybe you come back to it. Like this one piece, it was a series of short piano pieces that I started in the year 2000. I had a residency at Civitella in Umbria in Italy. I was there for like five weeks and I had a really nice piano. I'd played a lot of piano as a kid, so I was fiddling around on it, and that was giving me a lot of ideas. I probably wouldn't work in the same way now. At that time, I was working on these piano pieces and notating them very tediously. And then I just kind of gave up on them when I came back to New York. A few years later, suddenly it all made sense, and I was able in just a few days to get them to cohere into one long piece of music. I believe our brains operate in the background when we're not working actively on something. Our processors are much more powerful than we think! Some of my theories now encompass them accessing a larger continuity than what's enclosed in our cranium, our physical systems.

NK: What would you tell a young musician now in terms of having to "learn the sound of everything": notes, scales, chords, various musical styles, signal processing, production, etc. How do you find your own voice now and is it different than in the past?

ES: Well, I think musicians pre-Cage or even pre-Varèse thought of music as a bunch of notes. And it's hard to get musicians out of that, especially once you're trained. I think of training like how a dog is trained or, a wild animal is tamed, whereas someone who is more naive is open to any possibilities of music. You look at a lot of Outsider art, the painters who— like Grandma Moses— they're not formally trained, and yet they do these beautiful things.

NK: Do you think now, though, that it's important to take in as much as you possibly can and acquire technique in many different areas of music and sound?

ES: Not necessarily. For me, it was an obsession to learn how to play like John Coltrane or Arthur Blythe or Ornette, and Albert King, B.B. King, Jimi Hendrix and Wes Montgomery. I like having technique, personally. You know, just to channel that feeling, but I don't think it's necessary. If you hear something, if you're an artist and you have a conception and you can make it happen, then great.

NK: Speaking of technique, I saw you perform at Roulette in December 2025, which was fantastic. You made sounds through the guitar that I've never heard before.

ES: Well, a lot of it's the things that I— some of it's just physical techniques. It was this notion for me, which was revelatory when I was a science geek, that a guitar is a set of oscillators and a resonator, whether it's an acoustic resonator or a resonant system. And once you understand what a vibrating string can do, you can evoke other sounds out of it. I find the compressor great for bringing up all the microscopic sounds, like the incidental sounds that some people want to get rid of but also have a lot of incredible beauty in them. So, there's a compressor, then a distortion box, and then a processor— the Eventide H90— which I have down at the apartment, it's not here, but basically it's a stereo effects processor. What I also do is program a lot of randomness into some of the patches. And with the expression pedal, I can control the degree of randomness for

certain patches. The great thing is if I'm going to improvise, I'm truly going to improvise. I'm not going to rely on what I already know. It's a fine line between— and I've said this in a lot of places— between personal style and self-parody.

NK: Does having that sort of sonic environment that you've created help keep things fresh for you?

ES: Oh, absolutely. Well, again, the asymptotic, the thing you don't know, but you know you want it. You can imagine it, you can hear it, or you can't hear it, but you can smell it, you can taste it.

NK: How would you differentiate the process of authorial input with AI versus human engagement with electronic instruments or the electric guitar?

ES: One is human, and one is just kind of harvesting the results of a database. I'm not a fan of AI. I've used it in the past, when it first became available, like on Wombo, to generate some artwork for album covers, and when I was at a dead end, and that seemed like fun and harmless, and now I'm against that completely. They're trying to force it into every bit of software. I think we should resist it.

NK: I just wonder, I mean, the electric guitar was such a huge innovation that changed everything.

ES: Yeah, but it's still somebody playing it. Just made it louder and it made it possible to do things that an acoustic guitar couldn't do, but it seems like they're developing things now that there's part human agency, part AI, and it's hard to know where that leads. I mean, you can make a patch where you are inputting some data that is seed material for the AI. I guess if it's being used to generate something like a texture where it doesn't matter so much what each note means, sure, why not?

NK: Is the future of music more interesting than the past?

ES: We don't know. A lot of it depends on what happens to humans if we fight back against the tendency of the corporate world to try and fit us all into a uniform mold, the procrustean bed of consciousness, defined by marketing, which is really what we're faced with. Humans have great potential.

NK: This is kind of a general question about music: Can you talk about pacing in your work and how you think about the rate and density of musical ideas and material?

ES: Well, for myself, I really like things that are dense, and hot and packed, with some breathing. I can appreciate more durational music if I'm in the right mood, but what I tend to like are things that are saturated. Cecil Taylor. I mean, I love Bill Evans, but I'm much more interested in Cecil Taylor than I am Bill Evans, say, or Xenakis than Feldman, even though some of Feldman's pieces are really some of my favorite pieces of music. But give me Xenakis, you know?

NK: It was interesting to read about your time with Feldman at Buffalo.

ES: Most of my perception of what composers were like was from the people at Bard. I'd characterize them as academics. And then I got to Buffalo and Lejaren Hiller was just the nicest guy in the world and so encouraging and so open-minded. Jerry [Lejaren's nickname, ed.] was really innovative, but not flashy. He never created that kind of personal mystique that Feldman had. Because Jerry was a quiet guy, a little bit humble, very sardonic, whereas Feldman was a big personality. He was a big guy, and he was always bullying people. I learned a lot though. Sitting and listening to him talk.

NK: What do you give a performer in terms of notation to get the best performance of a composition?

ES: I really believe in the Ellington approach, which was to write for the musicians in his ensemble. And usually, the only people that commission works from me are people who know me. A real break from that and something that was incredibly inspiring was when Hilary Hahn commissioned a piece from me for that record of hers, *In 27 Pieces*. And Hilary was really fantastic to work with.

NK: I have one more question for you: Does a right-wing government inspire a robust, creative counterculture?

ES: Sadly, it does. You know, I think so does a left-wing government. Governments are always governing. One of the great cliches from my high

school days is no matter who you vote for, the government always wins. I mean, you look at the Russian Revolution, and in its original manifestations, it was very exciting. Walter Benjamin, when he was going out with Asja Lācis, who was this dancer and actress, she brought him to Moscow because she wanted him to move to Russia and be part of the revolution, this great flowering of creative thought. And of course, it ended up being a leftist government, if you want to call it that, of Stalin, which was anything but supportive of the arts.

Four Perspectives on Click Fest 2025

Click Fest 2025
October 3 – 4, 2025
Ohio University, School of Music
Co-hosts: Robert McClure, T. R. Beery, and Jamie Leigh Sampson

As part of my work as the SEAMUS board member for inclusion, I invited a collection of Click Fest composer participants to contribute their experiences of Click Fest 2025 from their wide variety of backgrounds and experiences and those who accepted the invitation are featured here.

Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner

First Perspective on Click Fest 2025

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Click Fest 2025 returned for its second year, bringing energy and creativity to the music community. The festival showcased bold, innovative works and provided a space for artistic voices to connect and inspire one another. I felt at home among fellow composers, sharing ideas that will shape the future of electronic music.

The festival highlighted a wide range of musical formats, concepts, and personal stories. Approaching it as both a composer and organizer for Spaceout, an international ambisonics festival, I was struck by the program's variety. The styles, moods, and concepts changed with each piece, demanding thoughtful planning and strong organization. This intentional breadth of programming brings unique artistic voices to the forefront. From both the composer's and organizer's perspective, I value how such diversity requires careful curation and collaboration.

This commitment to variety continued in the festival's performances, which brought together works filled with humor, technology, and emotional storytelling. One highlight was its commitment to creative vulnerability. Autoethnographic pieces, rooted in personal experience, were a powerful part of the program. For example, Yi-Ning Lo's *Alien, Cabbage, and Me* (2023) was open and honest. The performance created a shift in the room. Laughter made the music feel welcoming. As an organizer, I appreciate programming pieces that create joy and connection. These moments make electronic music more approachable and relatable. Similarly, Ancel Fitz Neeley's *Blossom* (2021), for snare drum and vocoder, combined autobiography with musical metaphor. Exploring personal themes of burnout and renewal, the piece leverages instrumental and technological possibilities. The snare drum, which can be a tough instrument for expressive writing, became a symbol of growth and transformation. As a composer myself, I am drawn to Neeley's willingness to channel difficult periods into sonic optimism. I appreciate the programming that centers on healing and personal evolution, speaking courageously about issues often unspoken in our community. Such pieces offer necessary reminders of art's capacity to transmute adversity.

Expanding on these personal stories, the festivals' programming also embraces works that invite reflection on significant life changes. One such piece was Lisa Renée Coons's *Essay 1: Mater* (2019, rev. 2023), which offered a heartfelt exploration of motherhood. This work stood out

for its emotional depth and for its ability to inspire empathy among listeners. It was a reminder that electronic music can be a powerful vehicle for sharing personal stories and building understanding across diverse experiences.

Managing an in-person festival requires significant coordination and effort. The support of Ohio University music students was essential. Their work setting up spaces and assisting throughout the event ensured the festival ran smoothly. Without their help, creating such a dynamic, live experience would not have been possible.

Reflecting on this year's Click Fest, I am excited for future festivals. The collaborative spirit and artistic risk-taking displayed here are what make electronic music thrive. I look forward to seeing the community grow.

Second Perspective on Click Fest 2025

Fabio Fabbri

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I participated in the second edition of the festival with my electroacoustic piece *Ruah* for fixed media in stereophonic format. With this work, I had the honor of taking part in several international festivals in 2025, including MOXsonic and the SEAMUS Conference. Click Fest represented another important occasion for artistic exchange and critical listening within the electroacoustic community.

Seventy-two hours of travel and six flights allowed me to experience an intense and meaningful weekend. As with other international events I attended this year, the festival was for me not only a performance opportunity, but also a concentrated space for analytical listening, aesthetic comparison, and compositional reflection.

Everything surrounding the festival contributed to making the experience memorable: shared travel logistics, extended conversations over meals with composers and performers, and the welcoming atmosphere of the venue and campus. Walking through the Ohio University campus toward the recital hall—immersed in a natural environment—created an almost paradoxical yet fitting prelude to concerts centered on artificial, transformed, and reimagined sound worlds.

The festival program unfolded across multiple concerts with a strong sense of curatorial balance. One of its most notable strengths was the listening flow across sets: works were ordered to maintain perceptual contrast without fragmentation, alternating densely textured pieces with more gesture-driven or spatially transparent works. This programming strategy supported sustained attention and helped prevent listening fatigue—a particularly important factor in electroacoustic concert settings.

Across the concerts, I observed a wide spectrum of approaches to sound organization—from finely sculpted micro-textural writing to broader gesture-based and process-oriented forms. Several works stood out for their control of spectral density and their sense of morphological continuity, where form emerged through transformation rather than sectional contrast.

I was especially struck by works that demonstrated refined timbral layering and a strong relationship between material identity and formal trajectory. In *Automaton Monk* for fixed media by Anna Rubin, for example, I appreciated how the sonic materials evolved through gradual internal variation — changes in grain, register focus, and energy distribution—through the interplay of drones and chaotic sounds, harmonic washes and percussive timbres, intelligible and unintelligible words. This approach allowed structure to be perceived as an evolving process rather than a sequence of blocks. The pacing suggested careful attention to perceptual thresholds and temporal elasticity.

I was also impressed by how some composers developed spatial implication within a stereophonic framework. *What Batters You Becomes Your Strength* for fixed media by Elizabeth Hinkle-Turner revealed an effective use of depth cues, spectral placement, and motion trajectories capable of producing convincing virtual spatial layers. Even without multichannel diffusion, the internal spatial dramaturgy of the materials generated a strong three-dimensional listening impression.

Cross-Pollination by Zeynep Özcan presented a compelling gesture–texture interplay, where articulated sonic events interacted with broader environmental layers. From a compositional perspective, I found this work particularly engaging because of its balance between recognizability and abstraction: traces of source or gesture remained perceptible enough to anchor attention, yet were sufficiently

transformed to function within a broader electroacoustic language. This balance created a productive tension between referential listening and purely morphological listening.

More generally, I noticed a recurring interest among several composers in threshold states between noise and pitch, pulse and continuum, figure and field. Many works explored these liminal zones through spectral shaping, filtering, and dynamic envelope control, resulting in forms that felt internally responsive and organically evolving rather than mechanically assembled.

From a personal standpoint, I was very pleased that my piece *Ruah* was presented in a large recital hall rather than in a small listening room. Hearing it in that acoustic and projection context allowed me to perceive aspects of its spectral balance and dynamic design differently. Low-level detail and slow transformations translated effectively in the larger space, reinforcing how strongly room scale and playback projection influence electroacoustic form perception.

Another aspect I particularly valued was the coexistence of established composers and emerging voices within the same concerts. From both an artistic and pedagogical perspective, this created a productive listening environment: younger composers were heard not in isolation, but in dialogue with more mature compositional practices. Some emerging works already demonstrated notable technical control in spectral organization and temporal design, while others revealed promising exploratory directions and a strong willingness to take risks — both essential qualities in a research-driven artistic field such as electroacoustic music.

I returned home with many new listening references and compositional questions — which, for me, is one of the most important outcomes of a festival like this. Beyond performance, Click Fest functioned as a laboratory of listening strategies, technical approaches, and aesthetic positions. I hope to continue participating in and contributing to similar opportunities for exchange, where artistic practice and critical listening actively reinforce one another.

Third Perspective on Click Fest 2025

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"Thank you for trusting us with your music" were the words of co-host Robert McClure at the closing concert of this year's Ohio University Click Fest 2025. This is the second year for the event which has already gained a reputation for high musical standards and merit as well as warm and friendly fellowship on a beautiful midwestern university campus. This was my second year here, too, and I enjoyed the comfort and familiarity of being a "repeat guest". This is the same sort of warm feeling that happens at MOXsonic and the Florida Electroacoustic Music Festival (now the FSU Festival of New Music)—regularly recurring events and locations that bring together often-returning participants along with new colleagues in intimate and affordable settings to experience the continuous development and diversity of ideas in the large genre of electroacoustic music. What I like to think is *my* unique perspective is that of a "composer-musicologist" often known more for my research (and tons of written reviews!) than my music. I have been fortunate to have returned to creating music instead of simply writing about it after about a 12-year hiatus and here I offer up thoughts about what to me was of particular note at this event.

Click Fest 2025 featured soprano soloist, Mickie Wadsworth, and applicants were encouraged to submit works for consideration for performance by them. Wadsworth is an extremely versatile performer with a wide range and (as described in the call for pieces) a specialty in "eccentric pitch spaces, counting, and acting." Ohio University composer Lydia Kress had her work *Emotions: Shame* (2025) for real-time processed vocals and electronics beautifully and dramatically performed by Wadsworth. The text of Kress's work came from past journal entries after disappointing her parents. On the same concert, Wadsworth presented a powerful work by Lisa Renée Coons, *Essay 1: Matar*, for fixed multimedia and voice processed via live electronics. This was a collaborative work with Wadsworth outlining the composer's experiences of erasure, fragmentation, and transformation in her first encounter with motherhood. All aspects of *Essay 1: Matar* resonated with me (the mother of two sons) and this ended up being one of the most memorable works for me of the entire festival. Wadsworth's performer excursions concluded the festival as well with the presentation of Seth Schafer's 2022 work, *r u ok*, which I had seen before but certainly not as well-performed as it was by Mickie! *r u ok* features quick changes of musical and performance styles and requirements, a lot of interesting glitch sounds and a rather catchy pop-style-tune which did become an ear worm (a GOOD ear worm) for me for a while! Wadsworth had their own piece, *Gaslight* (2022), featured on an earlier concert at the festival; this 8-channel fixed-media work used as much of the source material texts, dialogues and descriptions of situations that victims of abuse often as described by the program note "find themselves in with their abusers" and are taken from the experiences of the composer.

Because of performances like this I seemed to be especially attuned to the composer's use of their own voice(s) in works at the festival even when the "voice" was an instrument or laptop. Addison Hill's 2025 voice, synth, and electronics work, *Let the little girl speak*, was extremely impressive as a performance and as a composition on the opening concert. Hill's work utilized vocalizations along with generated "vintage" (to my ear, at least) electronic sounds and soundtracks. She used her breath effectively to express anxiety and frustration; the entire experience was riveting for me. Yi-Ning Lo used her laptop as the "voice" in *Alien, Cabbage, and Me* (2023), an amusing and pithy piece about the experience of a non-native speaker exploring the

English names of fruits and vegetables. Video and sounds for the piece were triggered by laptop typing. A beautiful vocal performance was given by Liann J. Kang for her *L'amour pur* (2024) with interactive electronics which was the first prize winner commission of the Sweetwater/SEAMUS Student Commission Award (2024) and also received this year's ICMC Best Student Music Award. I was happy to be able to hear this for the second time after hearing it first at SEAMUS – Purdue.

Some notable "instrumental voices" for me at this conference was Mark Phillips' short, lyrical meditation *Waiting* (2025) for EWI and electronics, Kerrith Livengood's *Improvisation* (2025) because of its incorporation of humor within a well-structured performance and Yvonne Pruneau's musical and idiomatic performance of *2 Pianos* (2023–24). I remember Ancel Fitzgerald Neeley's *Blossom* (2021) for live-processed snare drum performed by the composer because it must be hard to write for snare drum solo and he did it really well! I hadn't heard a good snare drum solo piece since being privileged to hear so many works by and for percussionist Allen Otte, so it was a treat. Finally, *Gradient Field* (2025), created and performed by David Bird was a live audiovisual performance with the composer using his laptop as his instrument and content-generator for the piece, as Yi-Ning Lo had in the piece described above.

In addition to the live performance of *Gradient Field*, all the other video works were of exceptional quality at Click Fest. Of note for me was Carolyn Borcherding's *Our Lineage is Not in Our Blood* (2023) for its effective development of the video themes throughout the piece and *Water Vignettes: Ten Miniatures* (2023) by Michael Rene Torres with well-meshed audio and video elements. Christopher Biggs' *Avoidance Rituals* (2025) dramatically absorbed my interest and it made me "very twitchy and a bit anxious." Robert McClure/Mare Hirsch's *untangle my tongue* (2011) was an effective video with spoken poem and sounds especially all the cicadas which to a Texan's ear triggers memories of extremely hot temperatures (cicadas are a "hot sound" in Texas).

The fixed media works for a variety of multi-channel audio configurations, the prevailing category of pieces featured (at least half of the works), were well-presented in Glidden Hall. (T. R. Beery, co-host, served as sound engineer for the festival as well.) Several of the pieces I had only heard in listening rooms at other conferences and it was good to hear them in a performance hall instead. Robert (who came back from a sabbatical to co-host), T. R., and Jamie gave all participants a well-paced, carefully planned, and skillfully executed festival and I'm glad to hear there will be a Click Fest 2026!

Fourth Perspective on Click Fest 2025

Mickie Wadsworth

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This past fall, I had the opportunity to return to my alma mater, Ohio University, as the featured guest artist for Click Fest 2025. Needless to say, I was thrilled. I've traveled to several festivals and conferences performing both my own works and those of others, but this was my first experience serving as a featured guest artist. I was grateful that my first opportunity came through an organization and academic environment where I have always felt at home and welcome.

As the guest artist, the Click Fest team gave me full creative autonomy over the pieces submitted for consideration. There were no preliminary rounds—I was given complete agency to decide which works fit together naturally and, importantly, which were the best fit for my voice as a performer. I deeply appreciated this. Working with the human voice is a uniquely personal process; even extraordinary pieces sometimes cannot be performed simply because they fall outside of what a particular voice can do. Having the space to make those decisions myself was invaluable.

After reviewing the submissions, I selected four works for performance: *Essay 1: Mater* by Lisa Renée Coons, *r u ok* by Seth Shafer, *Emotions: Shame* by Lydia Kress, and *Sudden Swan* by Holland Hopson. I had several months to prepare the pieces, and I was fortunate to be in communication with each composer ahead of the festival. This allowed us to collaborate creatively as needed and ensured that, by the time I arrived in Athens, I was ready to represent their work in the best way possible.

All four pieces were scheduled for the Saturday afternoon and evening concerts. This arrangement allowed me to use Ohio University's Electronic Music Lab as a rehearsal space on Friday. I was able to meet with composers throughout the day and schedule rehearsals at my discretion between other festival events. On Saturday, each piece received generous time during sound checks. One aspect I admire about Click Fest is how the tech schedule is structured: live works are given ample time to ensure a successful performance. Knowing that I had space not just to run the music but to confirm that the electronics were functioning smoothly made it much easier to fully focus on performance. As always, co-host T.R. Beery, who ran the board for the festival and co-host Robert McClure offered excellent technological support, and co-host Jamie Leigh Sampson cultivated a warm, well-organized festival environment.

Performing each piece—and collaborating with their creators—was an absolute joy. The atmosphere at Click Fest is consistently welcoming, supportive, and creatively invigorating. I loved not only sharing these works but also listening to the other performances and participating with my own fixed-media piece. Ohio University and Click Fest hold a special place in my heart, and I was truly honored to serve as this year's featured guest artist.

I'm hopeful that I'll be able to return next year with a new piece for Click Fest 2026, and I encourage everyone to keep an eye out for the next submission period.

Reviews

Review: *Atlas Chrysalis* by Philip Schuessler

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Atlas Chrysalis by Philip Schuessler
Released August 31, 2025 on Aucourant Records
https://aucourantrecords.bandcamp.com/album/atlas-chrysalis

Atlas Chrysalis, Philip Schuessler's follow-up to his 2024 album *Canticle Station*, continues the composer's exploration of textural atmospheres. The album gives off serious ambient vibes at first, but the rapidly evolving timbral foreground prevents this music from becoming sonic wallpaper. Schuessler deftly manages an active stereo field and keeps the spectral space alive with bright and noisy synths that ebb and flow throughout each track.

This music lives in a world between texture and gesture. Each time I listen to the album, I'm never 100% sure what elements are going to catch my ear at any given moment. The music is atmospheric yet directional. Elements of the music could be used in a sci-fi video game setting, but that is not to say that the sound world here needs some external story to connect with the audience.

Schuessler's titles for the tracks are more than enough to create a sequence of coherent places and moods. "Suspension Shards" features fuzzy sizzling that gives way to dark and metallic punctuations in "The Bloodwax Miners." I don't know what "bloodwax" is or how it is mined but Schuessler's composition (assisted on a few tracks by Kari Besharse on electric guitar) is evocative enough to paint an aural picture.

The bristling noise-forward synth shapes recede to reveal more human-derived performances. Something as simple as the piano-like intervallic oscillations at the end of "Guild of Glass Plangents" gave me a brief peek at something that sounded human before being beaten back by "The Crimson Templar"'s more piercing and aggressive wall of sound. "Thred Thaw" mellows out that pent up energy and reduces the activity level in a subtle but meaningful way. The final track, "The Stags on Mutation Plains," provides a detailed soundscape of storms rolling through open spaces. At seventeen minutes, "Stags" works as a standalone summation of Schuessler's universe.

Each track's oblique narrative merges together to form the shape of a futuristic sci-fi universe. I only wish that Bandcamp's playback was better equipped to handle the transition between tracks without a hiccup.

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"So, are you a Max or PD person?"

The question was a common refrain over the cafeteria-style tables nestled in the campus eatery—or bellowed at a friendly face over the din of a late-night show at the art bar. However, wherever it was asked, it served more as an acknowledgment of attendees' collective creative spirit than as a genuine provocation to a verbal jousting match about the superiority of one piece of software over the other. Hosted at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign over the first weekend in September, 2025, PDMaxCon25~ was a celebration of computer music. Headlined by Miller Puckette and David Zicarelli, the pair responsible for the original graphical patching language, the conference was filled with a dizzyingly robust smattering of ideas and applications, delivered in the form of concerts, paper sessions, workshops, and installations. It was at once both a near-comedically specific event—almost, but not quite, prompting the question: "who throws a whole conference around one piece of software?!"—and the perfect way to embody the breadth of possibility within computer music as a field. Over the course of a weekend, it was reenforced time and again that the heart of the artistic and academic accomplishments shared throughout the proceedings were not merely demonstrations of the innumerable capabilities of the Max and PD programs, but rather a showcase of human creativity—expressing ideas as aesthetically, politically, and conceptually charged as one could imagine, across a spectrum of mediums and artistic practices.

Puckette and Zicarelli, both hailed with rockstar status among the cadre of attendees, delivered touching and energizing keynote talks. Perhaps unsurprisingly, they both alluded to, or recounted outright, the practical history of their software development (including some thrilling anecdotes that, for several reasons, are not typically printed along the usual histories of Max and PD development)—and yet, with an inspiring air of the same vigorous curiosity that led to Max in the first place, each speaker quickly moved on to sharing the problems at the front of their minds today: whether that meant Puckette searching for ways to represent computer music more effectively within a software environment, or Zicarelli examining the codebase of this generational software for novel contexts or portability between platforms.

Beyond the usual highlights of an academic conference (the thrill of an impromptu conversation; the diversity of perspectives that comes from an international body of work; the many humbling moments of sheer admiration for someone's musical charisma or programming adroitness) there was a sense of unity, as if our varied paths to enabling our own and each other's musical expression through computer programs were converging in Illinois—transfixing each of us, in our own way, with the allure of expressive potential. Musical presentations spanned the spectrum of electro-acoustic possibility, from the blaring woof of Jeff Albert's jazz trombone in "Is That What I Said?" for Improviser and Computer, to the dissection of vocal sounds in a dramatic performance by Pak Hei Leung in "#ABetterMe." On the screen, David Bird's audiovisual performance "Gradient Field" captivated an eager audience with its hypnotic visuals, testing the boundaries of shape, pattern, and texture. Eric Lyon artfully constructed and cleverly delivered his paper demonstrating FFTease, a well-known toolkit full of creative Fourier applications (https://cycling74.com/packages/fftease) developed with Christopher Penrose, in haiku form. His presentation was met with wide grins and a well-earned chuckle at the selected audiovisual media for a final application. In a workshop on live-coding in Pure Data, Miguel Moreno took off at a breathtaking speed, dazzling

attendees with the elegance and palpable expertise shining through the near-instantaneous realization of an algorithmic EDM machine. Possibilities for remote collaboration and audience interaction were illuminated in varied contexts—for example, by Marcel Wierckx in the "Tinmendo: New Directions for Jazz Improvisation with Max and Smartphone Interaction" paper session (https://tinmenandthetelephone.com/tinmendo), exploring modalities for audience engagement and delighting attendees by suddenly controlling our smartphone flashlights (and subtly encouraging us to prod at the expletive filters in a word-input segment). Nick Hwang and others led a workshop and remote-hybrid performance featuring their "Collab-Hub for collaborative network performance with PD and Max" (https://www.collab-hub.io/). Through the weekend, we flowed from one creative marvel to the next. It was electric, eclectic—"eclectric," perhaps?

The "Max or PD" question was almost antithetical to the point of the conference, which was even named as an amalgamation of *both* storied software ecosystems: PDMaxCon25~, rather than "PD-or-MaxCon." An exhaustive review of each contribution would exceed my present scope, but the complete program may be accessed online (https://music.illinois.edu/pd-max-con/).

Many thanks to Kerry Hagan, the organizing committee, and the cohort at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign for spearheading this exceptional and invigorating conference. I arrived back home fortified with the ambition to one day be able to respond to the "Max or PD" query with an answer that it seemed only the enlightened were able to summon: *"It depends: What for?"*

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