

WFAE 2011 PAPER SESSION (9):

“Soundscape Composition Approaches”

Thursday, 6/10/2011—12:15- 13:15-- Ionian Academy, Corfu

Session Chair: Theodoros Lotis¹

Title of Presentation: “*Audio browsing strategies for soundscape real-time composition.*”

Abstract

Developing tools that use automated acoustic content analysis to control and structure large sound collections during a real-time composition is of interest for composer and researchers (Eigenfeldt, Pasquier, Birchfield, Janer, Schwarz). However, the challenges are many, as Barry Truax writes “... arbitrary juxtaposition of the sounds prevents any coherent sense of a real or imagined environment from occurring” (Truax, 2002). How could the composer and performer handle a large collection of environmental sounds in real time? How could he organize the material in a meaningful, intuitive and efficient way for real-time performance?

This paper will discuss audio browsing strategies used in the soundscape composition called *City Fables* (Kokoras, 2011). To exemplify the strategies the author used *Soundtorch* (Heise et al, 2011). It is a software application that uses a sophisticated suite of algorithms to analyze and intelligently classify the audio collection. It displays the sounds as ‘bacteria’ like form and plays them by hovering around with a torch like pointer. The examples from the work *City Fables* are going to provide a platform for the analysis and explain the proposed formulations. Such kinds of strategies used in the piece include the simultaneous playback of a great number of samples clustered according to similar sound content. This allows the creation of different textures from organic soundscapes to schizophrenic sonic layers or just focuses on only one sound at a time. Besides, the sound textures, independent of their density, get motion in acoustic space through surround features and in timbre space through gestures from bright to dark, noisy to harmonic or low to high. Further homogeneity of the sonic material can be achieved by applying suggestions of the most similar sounds within the whole sound collection in relation to a particular sound. In other words, certain sounds are pointed to function as magnets that gravitate the sounds that have similar audio content. They create various sound clusters as structural pillars for the composition ready for playback.

Audio browsing strategies may become integrated into specific

¹**Theodore Lotis** studied the guitar, flute, music analysis and composition in Greece, Belgium and the UK. He has completed a PhD in Music at the City University in London (England, UK). Having produced several instrumental works and collaborated with artists from various disciplines (dance, theatre, video) his current endeavours in music are focused on spectrum, timbre, sonic space and light. His music has been performed at festivals and conferences in Europe, Australia, America and Asia. He is currently lecturing at the Ionian University (Corfu, Greece). He is founding member of the Hellenic Electroacoustic Music Composers Association (HELMCA) and the Hellenic Society for Acoustic Ecology.

methods of composition and performance. It can aid the composer towards sophisticated structures, control, and coherence of the work, and the same time provoke intuition, serendipity and creative thinking.

AUTHOR

Kokoras, Panayiotis, Dr., Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

Panayiotis Kokoras (Greece, 1974) boasts an impressive list of achievements. He began his musical studies at the age of 13 studying guitar, saxophone, singing, piano, electroacoustic music and composition (Dip). In 1999 he moved to England where he concentrates solely in composition (MA, PhD). Since then his compositions have been selected by jury in more than 150 calls for music and programmed in over 400 concerts. He is president of Hellenic Electroacoustic Music Composers Association and teaches at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. His output ranges from solo, orchestra works to mixed and electroacoustic ones distinguished by 41 prizes and distinctions at international composition competitions.

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Title of Presentation: *“Listening through the compositional process: Soundscape models and transformational strategies in acousmatic music.”*

Abstract:

This paper refers to a soundscape project carried out by a Greek research group in Corfu and highlights some ideas developed through a post-doctoral research, completed as part of this project, regarding the utilization of soundscape recordings within the context of acousmatic music, from a composer’s perspective.

Soundscape recordings of nature may often provide us with a valuable sound-basis as a primary compositional material, offering a rich sound-world to transform and develop certain compositional strategies. Soundscapes can also be an inspirational source, offering a number of sound-images and sound-behaviours to be approached mimetically, and thus to develop a certain ‘nature-oriented’ type of musical language.

The soundscapes recorded in Corfu between 2006-2007 during the study of the area of lake Antinioti constitute a sum of different field sound-environments often demonstrating antithetic relationships regarding the existence of sound-sources and sound-behaviours within their boundaries, as these recordings were captured in different times of day/night and in different seasons throughout the year. To define these relationships through listening, one needs to consider a number of characteristics regarding sources and sound-behaviours and the manner in which these co-exist within the recorded soundscape.

Through the application of certain processing techniques, soundscapes may be transformed into different soundscapes, or into abstraction, or may be decomposed to their constituents. In the current research the initial aim was to create a rich variety of original ‘sound vocabulary’ overcoming basic problems existing in the recorded sound material (noise elimination, presence enhancement, event isolations, enhancement of tonality/sustainment). On a

next stage the aim was to further explore the transformational potential of the created sound material and experiment with a number of heavier transformations freely and creatively, often altering sound morphologies in order to neutralise sound referentiality.

AUTHOR

Apostolos Loufopoulos, PhD, Composer, Lecturer, Department of Sound Technology and Musical Instruments Technical, Educational Institute of Ionian Islands, Cephalonia, Greece.

Apostolos Loufopoulos studied at the Ionian University (BA) and City University (PhD). His music is often performed worldwide and has been awarded at international competitions such as Bourges, SCRIME, Noroit (France), Metamorphoses, Space of Sound (Belgium), Franco Evangelisti (Italy), Musica Nova (Czech Rep.), D.Dragatakis (Greece). His music research focuses on the sound of nature. He has completed a post-doctoral research on soundscapes and composition at the Ionian University. He has participated and been member of organizing boards at conferences such as SMC'07, WFAE'11, 2nd Greek Conference for Acoustic Ecology, Electroacoustic Music Days 07, 09. He is a founding member of the Hellenic Society for Acoustic Ecology. He teaches at the Technological Institute of Ionian Islands.

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Title of Presentation: *«The Edmonton River Valley Project and the Role of Spatialization in Forest and the City.»*

Abstract:

The makeup of a soundscape can be divided into three categories of sound: keynotes consisting of pervasive sounds listened to unconsciously, sound signals consisting of intermittent sounds listened to consciously, and soundmarks for signature sounds that define an area (Schafer 1994, 9-10). While recording and listening to the soundscapes of the Edmonton River Valley in 2010-2011, I noticed that there were many differences in the role of each category of sound in different areas of the river valley. Since these sound documents are the foundation for the electronic and thematic material for my upcoming composition for string orchestra and laptop performer, *Forest in the City*, I wanted to create a spatialization model that could control the soundscape in an interactive manner by triggering and panning samples of such sounds in real time by dividing these sounds into pinpoint, panpoint, and background sounds, each controlled independently and intuitively using a keyboard and controller.

AUTHOR

Trifon Heney, University of Alberta

Trifon Heney has been an active composer since the age of eight, currently undertaking a Doctor of Music in Composition at the University of Alberta. He has studied with Allan Gordon Bell, David Eagle, William Jordan, John Abram, Howard Bashaw, and Mark Hannesson. His compositions have been performed in Canada, the United States and Europe; the Punctuation Pieces were performed in the 14th World Saxophone Congress in Slovenia. His

current dissertation work focuses on the soundscapes of Alberta as the basis for the creation of a composition for string orchestra and electronics.

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Title of Presentation: « *River Aura Symphony: Large scale outdoor sound installations and performances - Some thoughts about their reception, time and space.* »

Abstract:

Turku is Listening is a project in the program of Turku European Capital of Culture 2011. It aims to activate the inhabitants of Turku into thinking about and listening to their acoustic milieus. We have decided to advance on different fronts: Community Art, DIY/Workshop culture and Sound Art in public and semi-public spaces.

- by producing large scale community art projects that capture the attention and interest participants of different generations and backgrounds. With River Aura Symphony project we try to activate people of different professions and generations to work together in a frivolous act of producing a communal sound performance. Our aim is that River Aura Symphony will continue living after 2011 as a "new" tradition.

- by involving and recruiting local citizens into creating a Listening map of Turku. We use the term listening map because we aim to create a tool could be used as an instrument in charting changes in local soundscapes. Public can use our listening map to compare daily changes in sound environment or as an information bulletin board about seasonal sound events like owls or the returning of migrating songbirds in spring. We start with something as common as an internet sound map and try to turn it into instrument by which people could study and evaluate changes happening in their own soundscape.

With this project we try to test whether it is possible to combine activism, DIY Culture, Mass Observation and community art into a method that would allow citizens to observe the changes happening in their local soundscape.

- by producing three Sound Installations by international artists that reflect and/or provide a counterpoint to existing public or semi-public locales. By bringing new elements into existing locales and institutions we try to produce a context shift that would turn citizens attention towards their familiar sound surroundings.

At all these fronts we actively try to create new traditions or practices that would survive after the European Capital of Culture year is over. During the first half of we realized that our goal is a quite big challenge. In this paper we try to explicate how art can be used to focus citizens attention to their own acoustic environment and ecology, and how different approaches work and appeal to general audience. It is our first attempt to evaluate Turku is Listening 2011 project.

AUTHOR

Alitalo, Simo, Sound Artist, Finnish Academy of Fine Arts

Simo Alitalo is a Finnish sound artist who works with sound installations and radio. Alitalo's works often start from the basic question of acoustemology: what do we know about the world through sense of hearing, and how what we hear affects the way we understand the world. Simo Alitalo's sound projects have been exhibited and broadcast in U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in several European countries.

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