

Negotiating the Musical Work.

An empirical study on the inter-relation between composition, interpretation and performance

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Abstract

In this paper we intend to explore the inter-relations between performer and composer, in the form of a theoretical study, which is intended to lay the ground for a new work for guitar and computer by Henrik Frisk for Stefan Östersjö. This project is part of our respective artistic research projects at the Malmö Academy of Music and is an effort to combine reflection, analysis, and empiricism in the framework of artistic research.

We find that the ontology of the mixed media work (in lack of a general terminology we use the term 'mixed media' in this article to refer to a work for instrument(s) and electronic sounds) is closely related to the general discussion of score-based works, but it is important to bear in mind that the programming of the electronics should also be regarded as notation in this discussion and the electronic part is itself another object of interpretation for the performer.

From a hermeneutic point of view, performance interpretation of music is a special case [Levinson, 1993, Davies, 2001, Stecker, 2003]. When elements of electronic real-time processing, sound synthesis, sound file playback or be it any other means of producing electronic sounds, are part of the work, yet another level of complexity is added to the issue of interpretation. This is closely related to the notion of authenticity, which is already a powerful factor in the performance of score-based works. How is this issue to be approached in mixed media works? If the programming of the electronic part is to be regarded as a special case of notation, how is this notation 'transcribed' and communicated to the performer?

A close collaboration between a living composer and a performer, allows for discussions on the rendering of a mixed media work. We find that this process could be described as a negotiation towards a version of the work [Kivy, 1995] and that this can serve as a model for understanding similar processes even prior to the existence of any notated material. This article aims at a closer understanding of the significance of these negotiations, specifically their meaning in relation to the two modes of musical representation; the notation and the sonic trace left by the computer part. Further,

we aim at creating a broader platform for reflection on and analysis of our respective artistic practices.

We approach this complex area empirically by analyzing selections of the video documentation of Östersjö's collaboration with composer Love Mangs, as well as versions of a certain passage in a piece for harp and computer by Henrik Frisk. Love Mangs' "Viken" is a work for guitar, banjo, e-bow and real time processing in Max/MSP. In the video material we find striking examples of how the traditional roles of "composer" and "performer" are exchanged, indicative of the difficulty to establish fixity in the definition of these seemingly discrete artistic fields. Following Stecker [Stecker, 2003] we would like to suggest that there is always an element of construction in a performance of a piece of music, but we also find that there are elements of interpretation in the act of composition. By using Molino's and Nattiez' terminology for a semiological analysis of music we attempt at describing the interplay in terms of poietic and esthetic processes, [Nattiez, 1990] [Molino, 1990] and with semiotic terminology in general.

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