

UNYAZI: An LMJ16 Special Section

Introduction and Abstracts

Jürgen Bräuninger: Special Section Introduction

South Africa is famous for many things but certainly not for its electronic music production. However, 35 years after the first electroacoustic music studio was constructed around an ARP-2500 synthesizer at the University of Natal, a small but dedicated number of computer music artists has evolved in the Johannesburg--Cape--Town--Durban triangle, and university music departments across the country are now offering music technology courses. Feeling in 2003 that it was about time to map the scene and to give it a boost simultaneously, NewMusicSA (the South African section of the International Society for Contemporary Music) proposed an electronic music symposium/festival with Dimitri Voudouris in charge of proceedings. After 2 years of networking, planning and fundraising, UNYAZI (the isiZulu word for lightning) took place 1--4 September 2005 at all three venues of the Wits Theatre complex in Johannesburg, assembling an illustrious group of local and international electronic music practitioners. Diversity was the obvious festival concept.

Halim El-Dabh, who as early as 1944 experimented with a wire recorder in Cairo's radio station, presented some of his vintage works. Among these were *Leiyla and the Poet* for tape, two dancers and two trampolines and *Michael and the Dragon* with trombone by George Lewis, who in his own festival slot performed *At Home in the World* in a trio with jazz drummer Louis Moholo (formerly of the Blue Notes and Brotherhood of Breath) and a laptop computer. Gaudeamus Prize winner Yannis Kyriakides [1] projected *Wordless*, a piece that uses only the pauses between words from various interviews as sound material, and Francisco López massaged a blindfolded audience with high sound pressure levels from eight sub-woofers surrounding the auditorium. Lukas Ligeti gave a virtuoso performance on a

Buchla Marimba Lumina, while Matthew Ostrowski controlled his interactive system by means of a data glove. Canadian Maxime Rioux set up a large array of acoustic instruments that were struck, rubbed and scratched by various implements attached to small loudspeakers that in turn were driven by sub-audio frequencies emanating from Digital Performer tracks. Rodrigo Sigal presented Digital Ear, for 8-channel audio and video projection, and Pauline Oliveros performed on her Expanded Instrument System (EIS). Austrian ensembles Schnee and My Kingdom for a Lullaby completed the international contingent.

Contrast was the motto of the South African deputation: The jazz set was represented by Carlo Mombeli and Zim Ngqawana; from the popular music branch Sandra Ndebele, the group Skid and Pops Mohamed put in memorable appearances. Warrick Sony of Kalahari Surfers and Trans Sky represented turntablism, mixing Ladysmith Black Mambazo with Stockhausen, while Toni Oliver exhibited two interactive audiovisual installations: Waving Window and Bridge to the Sun and Other Sonic Tales. James Webb played Tokyo Gothic in complete darkness, Brendon Bussy processed his mandolin with Audiomulch software, Theo Herbst and the Kemus Ensemble experimented with video, Dimitri Voudouris staged a large-scale multimedia work involving the Wits School of Arts Physical Theatre, while Sazi Dlamini, Ulrich SY-Nsse and I explored the combination of African instruments and electronics in Yinkosi Yeziziba and anywhere far.

Workshops by several of the festival participants complemented the 4 days of concerts: Every morning Luc Houtkamp rehearsed with local musicians towards a POW Ensemble performance on the last evening of the festival, Pauline Oliveros demonstrated the Expanded Instrument System and introduced her Deep Listening concept, and Meryl van Noie from Cape Town reported on the Soundhouse's creative audiovisual work with school children.

Two mornings were dedicated to lectures. Abstracts of five selected papers from these sessions are presented on the following pages, with the full articles with audio examples available at .

Four of the papers, each in its own way, deal with North-South relationships and collaborations: Pauline Oliveros recalls her encounter with the Argentinean heavy metal band Reynols, which resulted in the CD Pauline Oliveros in the Arms of Reynols, a mix of an Oliveros solo concert recording and Reynols additions. After his collaboration with musicians from Ivory Coast in Beta Foly [2], Lukas Ligeti embarked on another project on the

African continent this time in Burkina Faso: Burkina Electric. In his paper he explores the aesthetic and creative possibilities of the combination of African musical forms and electronics. Mexican composer Rodrigo Sigal discusses concepts of heritage and identity in Latin American contemporary music including the problem of teaching and judging contemporary composition from a European perspective. Theo Herbst examines the music technology program at the University of Stellenbosch in a South African context, and Matthew Ostrowski investigates the possibilities and implications of mapping databases on to sound as a compositional technique.

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References and Notes

1. Yannis Kyriakides was awarded the Gaudeamus Prize in 2000. See www.gaudeamus.nl.
2. See Lukas Ligeti, "Beta Foly: Experiments with Tradition and Technology in West Africa," *Leonardo Music Journal* **10** (2000).

Jürgen Bräuninger was born in 1956 in Germany and studied in Stuttgart with Ulrich Süsse and Erhard Karkoschka and at San Jose State University, California, with Alan Strange and Daniel Wyman. Since 1985 he has lectured in composition and music technology at the University of KwaZulu–Natal, Durban, South Africa. In addition to many compositions for ensembles of acoustic and electronic instruments, he has also contributed to a number of film soundtracks. He has produced South African jazz albums as well as recordings for workers' cultural groups and neo-traditional praise poets. Furthermore, Bräuninger has collaborated with choreographer/director Jay Pather on various Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre productions, among them *Ahimsa–Ubuntu* and *A South African Siddhartha*. Some of his more recent work can be heard on the CD *dUrban Noise and scraps Works*.

Article Abstracts

Music Technology at Stellenbosch University

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This paper strives to provide an understanding of and insight into the music technology program hosted by the music department at Stellenbosch University.

The under- and postgraduate technology modules and qualifications are still in their infancy. Nevertheless, it can be argued that a number of trends have been observed and that results have been forthcoming. This paper is meant to serve as an introductory investigation into a few lines of thought. In the first place an attempt is made to highlight the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings that continue to play a role in the evolution and evaluation of the program aims. This is followed by a discussion of the program content and outcomes. In the third place stands a discussion of the non-academic activities inspired by the program. The discussion closes with a look at future aims and developments.

Full text and sound samples are available in *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* Vol. 15, No. 1 at leoalmanac.org.

The Burkina Electric Project and Some Thoughts about Electronic Music in Africa

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This paper is an updated summary of a presentation I gave at the Unyazi Electronic Music Festival in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2005.

Burkina Electric, founded in 2004, is an ensemble featuring two musicians (singer Maïœ Lingani and guitarist Wende K. Blass) and two dancers (Hugues Zoko and Idrissa Kafando) from Burkina Faso; the German pop music pioneer Pyrolator on electronics (both audio and visual); and myself on electronics and drums. Our objective is to create and perform original music combining the traditions of Burkina Faso with the world of DJ/club/dance electronica. In so doing, we build bridges between African and Western cultures, especially in the domains of pop/youth culture and experimental music. Burkina Electric's debut CD, Paspanga, was recently released for the Burkinab? market.

By using elements of Burkinab? traditional music, including rhythms not usually heard in contemporary urban music, plus rhythms of our own creation, we aim to enlarge the vocabulary of "grooves" in the club/dance landscape; the dancers help audiences interpret these unusual rhythmic patterns. Sonorities and structural models of West African music are transferred to electronics and reassembled and processed in various ways. Rather than superimposing drum programming on top of African traditional structures, we compose music that aims to organically counterpose and combine African and Occidental, and tradition and experiment, while maintaining the particular sensibilities of both worlds.

Working on electronic music with African musicians has inspired me to think about the possibilities inherent in this combination. I believe that these areas hold unique potential for each other, along with special challenges, both technical and conceptual/aesthetic. Using my work with Burkina Electric as a point of departure, I present a brainstorm on this line of work.

Performing music and dancing are hard to dissociate from each other in African culture, while the advent of electronic music has, in the West, reduced the kinetic aspects of music performance. I think that the African approach to playing music could infuse new life into live electronic music, especially through the creative use of MIDI controllers. Similarly, the connection between music and language in Africa, as well as analogies between music and visual art, could provide templates to be developed in the electronic realm.

The cyclic and additive structure of much African music lends itself well to digital environments, and since African music provides the structural foundation for most international pop, sequencer programs have much African-based thinking embedded in them. This gives food for thought: Is most electronic music actually African music? Could one create music software geared more specifically to African musical approaches?

Other areas worth examining include African sonic ideals and their similarities to electronic sound processing, as well as the role of instrument building in Africa, which has created a highly varied landscape of instrumental standards not unlike the customization of software environments by individual users.

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Pauline Oliveros in the Arms of Reynolds: A Collaboration

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Reynols is an unusual group of creative heavy-metal musicians in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This paper discusses the nature and history of our collaboration as well as the philosophical and technical aspects. I discuss my own work as I performed it in Buenos Aires, the Deep Listening seminar that I led with Reynols in attendance, how Reynols responded to the seminar, to me and to my concert and the resulting remix CD, *Pauline Oliveros in the Arms of Reynolds*, which consists of a pirate recording of my solo concert and Reynols additions in the remix.

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The Anxiety of the Client: Dilemmas of the Database as a Compositional Tool

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Recently, there has been a great deal of interest among electronic composers and new-media artists in using data sets as base material for compositions and artworks. These strategies, historically rooted in algorithmic composition techniques from the fugue to the tone row and facilitated by computers, usually embrace a rhetoric of using sound as a tool of exploration or discovery of the underlying order immanent in the data. This data is presumed, by virtue of having some kind of internal structure or real-world referent, to not only reveal some kind of truth about the phenomenon analyzed but also to resonate aesthetically. This paper is an attempt to reveal some of the contradictions inherent in this method, examined in the light of Theodore Adorno's distinction between instrumental and mimetic forms of knowledge.

Any sonification work is by definition a client program: bound to the protocols, data structures and methods of its server. In some sense these works are its creatures and subject to its laws. At the same time, however, these client programs are culturally and socially treated as artworks, which we habitually think of as instruments of free expression. What this paper refers to as the anxiety of the client lies in the irreconcilable conflict between these two ideals: the reliable processor of data that gives us information we need, and that of the interpreter of data, which aims at using the world as a base point from which to create aesthetic experience, as distinct from information.

This paper examines two aspects of this anxiety in the light of recent sonification works by Andrea Polli and Mark H. Hansen and Ben Rubin: the inevitably arbitrary nature of selecting parameters in a work of sonification, and the conflict between the composer-as-technician and the composer-as-artist. The first has its roots in the ontological status of the digital object and the belief that objects in the digital world can have the same relationship to artistic production as objects in nature. The second, based on the assumption that working with these materials does not change the nature of

the artistic subject, has led to a cognitive split between the Romantic subject as creator of art and the digital client as data processor.

Full text available in *Leonardo Electronic Almanac* Vol. 15, No. 1 at leoalmanac.org.

The Borders of Identity, A Personal Perspective

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This text deals with the concepts of heritage and identity in Latin American contemporary music, with a special emphasis on electroacoustic composition. A composer's idea of a heritage goes beyond the simple definition of "the possessions obtained from previous generations"; it is something intangible and therefore it refers to everything that is available for a person as a composer. Heritage is also what I know and how I integrate it into my own musical discourse. Trying to define a identity as something we belong to and therefore something that existed before us and to which we have to integrate, instead of defining a identity as what we are, is a strategy that goes against the core ideal of an artist, which is to create something new and novel, a personal perspective and an individual way of resolving problems. The paper also discusses the problems of teaching and judging contemporary composition from a European perspective and the implications of the concepts of a heritage and a identity when working with technology. When composing, it is impossible to avoid the use of a heritage, because sonorities and musical elements are always being judged by the listener from his or her own personal point of view and social environment. However, it is the composer's task to give direction, attach meaning and design an original approach to the problem of sound identity. The text exemplifies these ideas throughout three recent mixed pieces.

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