

Guest Speech

IN PURSUIT OF THE INNOVATIVE AND THE ACCESSIBLE: SOME OF THE DRIVING FORCES BEHIND MY MUSIC AND MY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

This talk will present the motivations related to both my work as a musician and as a scholar within the world of sonic creativity. Instead of focusing on technology and technique, it will introduce some of my ideas all of which are intended to move music forward. Issues will include: the (in)accessibility of new music; musical communication, dramaturgy and aesthetics; new musical communities; and even humour. Looking forward, John Richards and my new book (nearing completion), *On the Music of Sounds and the Music of Things* will be discussed. In it I investigate sampling culture and John DIY or hacking culture. Together we look at what we believe are the driving forces of the innovative 21st century sonic musician.

1.

The following text has been written in the form of an informal talk. It is intended to highlight issues of potential interest to its audience and future readers. Unusually for me, it is a bit of a self-portrait; the autobiographical framework for it offers the opportunity to focus on subjects that I believe are of great importance to those involved in any facet of the sonic arts. It is based on the assumption that we are all interested in the subject of music and innovation. Its structure is simple and straightforward: after an initial section running through my early career running up to what might be called my aha moment, the second section focuses on some of my views concerning what I have called the innovative and the accessible. Here aspects of my artistic, scholarly and pedagogical work are examined. The talk's final section concerns two current initiatives illustrating continued progressive endeavor in my pursuits.

2.

How I came to my key motivations as a musician and scholar Like many in my field, I had a dual education, let call it arts-science, in which I studied applied mathematics and computing early on as well as music from a very young age. I therefore have degrees in both, although all postgraduate studies were in music. My training was traditional in the sense of composition being intended for makers of high art music and, in fact, my composition teachers at Columbia University where I spent most of my

university years of study, were generally second generation atonalists, making music for a relatively small public but somehow offering the allure of great importance.

Fortunately for me, Columbia was the first university in the US engaging with what was then called electronic music, and it was a pleasure to work in the Columbia-Princeton studios as well as use the mainframe computer for my first digital works at this time. I use the word pleasure half ironically, for what was expected of me aesthetically was in dire contrast to what I was listening to elsewhere in New York City, such as the works of John Cage and the minimalists who were quite young at that time.

During this period, I also studied both musicology and ethnomusicology. The former was excellent in terms of acquiring research skills, but I always felt ill at ease about musicologists reluctance to engage with the very new or current musical trends as most of them felt that music needs time to find its place prior to its being able to be studied rigorously. Ethnomusicology offered me something precious, namely the opportunity to study very many varieties of music around the globe, a great number of which were totally new to me, Japanese music forming an area that fascinated me enormously. In fact, I realised at the time that what is old to some (the people of the culture of relevance) is new to others. This discovery has been important to me in later life, as I am aware that when working with cultural material of any sort, it should be treated with respect.

Prior to completing my studies and moving permanently to Europe, I spent a PhD preparation year at Buffalo working primarily with Lejaren Hiller. I had the honour to be his assistant and Morton Feldman, an old friend by then. Buffalo, New York states second largest city is a miserable place, once rich at the beginning of the 20th century, but now quite tired and very cold in the winter. In fact, Iannis Xenakis, when visiting, once told me it reminded him of Moscow. What made Buffalo special, however, was the departments open-mindedness towards new, experimental music, something that would inform my attitude throughout my career.

Moving to Amsterdam and commencing my career at the University of Amsterdam, I was pleased to note the appreciation of culture in Europe was more deeply rooted than in the US. This is, alas, decreasing somewhat currently given the unpredictable economic situation globally combined with a very powerful commercial sector. The fate of folk music in many nations exemplifies the power of that commercial sector.

What began to sink in was a feeling that new music was generally marginalised in society. (I know, for example, how difficult it has been throughout the years to organise new music concerts in Japan as many Japanese musicians have visited me and informed me about the new music scene.) Most concerts internationally are only performed once and many have a very small audience. The mainstream press and the broadcasters largely ignore this music and so-called classical radio broadcasters are much more interested in composers who died long ago than ones working currently.

Having lived for many years in major cultural capitals, I noticed that not all arts suffered in the same manner. For example, contemporary dance had a bigger public, although that one is a micro-public relatively speaking, too. Theatre was even better off.

A consequence of this was that I was to collaborate with artists in many different media, for example, dance, theatre, performance art and video/new media arts, throughout my career, often reaching a very large audience of people not specifically coming to hear my music.

This tension between the amount of new music being created and the combination of lack of opportunities to see works performed, broadcast or recorded and the modest public interested in it led me to what I have called an “aha moment” above, namely when I decided that it was important to: a) discover why this situation had evolved and b) do something about it. This decision was to determine the foci of my work as an artist, a scholar and pedagogue from that moment onwards. I am talking about a moment of enlightenment ca. 30 years ago.

3.

The innovative and the accessible: a survey across my work Although I had published on the subject previously, the first important opportunity to discuss the issues related to my “aha moment” in public was at the ICMC in Glasgow in 1990. I gave a talk entitled, *Is More than Three Decades of Computer Music Reaching the Public It Deserves?* (Landy 1990). The large hall was full and a follow-up session was organised. I knew that I was on to something.

I was already involved with engaging a broader public in my collaborations with colleagues working in the other arts. Many of the productions were repeated dozens of times in large theatres; some were televised. I received many commissions to make music/sound for productions that demonstrated that our new music was indeed of interest to a broader audience. In many of these productions I worked with a dramaturge, the person who puts into words what is being communicated in a production. How many musicians are ever asked to put the communicative aspect of their work into words? In fact, the ability to articulate intention was to become central to my music, my writing and my teaching.

The ICMC talk was rapidly succeeded with the publication of my first book, *What the Matter with Today's Experimental Music?* (Landy 1991), a book that indeed investigates those questions. It accused the broadcast media, pre-university education, governments and even musicians, themselves, for not working towards audience gen-

eration. The musicians were found guilty on two counts: 1) their music was potentially too difficult for a public beyond the micro-one that it had already, and 2) they spent too little time supporting the fate of new music. (I was discussing all contemporary experimental music even though, by then, I was more-or-less only making music with sounds, not with instruments and singers.) This book was followed almost immediately by another one, called *Experimental Music Notebooks* (Landy 1993) which was written for teachers and interested people of all ages who had no access to new works, a first step towards addressing wider audiences.

I shall return to my music later on, but the important thing to share at this point was that these writings and my artistic work throughout were focused on combining the innovative and the accessible. I had been brought up on the term, experimental music. This did not happen so much at Columbia, but instead the term was introduced by people including Hiller, Cage and Pierre Schaeffer. Originality and discovery were thus driving forces of my music. However, this is not a goal in itself. I wanted to avoid the arrogance of what I perceived to be the musical culture at Columbia at the time, replacing it with forward-looking music that communicated with communities of shared interest including that micro-public of peers that I was used to, but also many beyond this.

This challenge became the framework for my research and artistic endeavour. I am pleased to say that I have been able to have my practice inform my theory and vice-versa. Not only this, but both have informed my teaching and educational initiatives, such as the creation of an Experimental Music course at the University of Amsterdam in the 1990s, a very radical project-based Contemporary Musics course at Bretton Hall in the UK, curricula focusing on interdisciplinary arts education at Manchester Metropolitan University and founding the Music, Technology and Innovation Research Centre that is not embedded in a generalist music department at De Montfort University.

Although this talk is not specifically about educating sonic artists, I do believe one point is worthy of attention here, namely that one does not need a traditional musical background to thrive in our area of interest. Therefore, for example, we at De Montfort do not demand harmony and counterpoint of our incoming students. (Instead we speak of horizontal or layered composition for the former and simultaneous or vertical thinking for the latter.) We do not even demand music literacy (e.g., score reading). We are also aware that we are developing different skills in sonic composition than are needed for note-based work although knowledge of both can be invaluable. Confronting what is beneficial to students and innovating educational approaches is as important to me as is any other facet of my work.

Before moving on, I would like to state that one does not need to restrict oneself to dealing with access. One can be involved with “top of the line” or “cutting edge” thinking and composing at the same time as addressing access issues. Although virtually all of my compositions do take access into account, my scholarly output, not least editing the journal, *Organised Sound* (Cambridge University Press, since 1996) and co-editing a recent book with Simon Emmerson, entitled Widening the Horizon of El

electroacoustic Music Analysis (Emmerson, Landy 2016) focus on state of the art research.

Returning to the access issue, I would like to focus on a few of my more important contributions that I would like to share with you.

The first, published in 1994, is a notion called the “something to hold on to factor” regarding timbral composition (Landy 1994). In this article version of a talk I gave in London in 1993, I investigated a substantial number of electroacoustic pieces in order to discover primarily musical but also extra-musical aspects that help inexperienced listeners navigate their way through sonic works. Many compositions investigated fulfilled none of the discovered criteria and were, therefore, potentially difficult for new listeners. This research was intentionally written in order to have composers keep these navigational tools in mind if they were interested in opening up their work to a broader public. This is one of the most cited of my writings.

A few years later, in 2001 I embarked, initially with a PhD student, Rob Weale, on the Intention/Reception (I/R) project (see, for example, Weale 2006, Landy 2006). This project continues today one and a half decades later and has been reproduced in at least six countries and further developed by researchers interested in its dual objectives. Briefly stated, carefully chosen electroacoustic works, originally all including at least some, if not a great deal of identifiable source material, were played to a variety of audiences including a benchmark group of specialists. Questionnaires about the chosen works were sent to the artists who had composed them. Others were used during the investigation after each of the three times the works had been played. Each time, more information about the work was shared with the listeners. The dual goals were: 1) for the inexperienced listeners, after one listening, they were asked whether they would like to hear this piece or a similar one again in the future; and 2) all listeners were asked whether the composer’s intention information that had been shared had aided the listening experience.

The results of this project were originally and continue to be fairly startling in a positive sense. First of all, the percentage of listeners potentially interested in this music is extremely high. After Weale’s and my initial testing, the worst result was 59% interest and the best was 80%. We would have been pleased if only a fifth of listeners were potentially interested in sonic composition. Furthermore, other than specialists, the vast majority felt that being offered a helping hand in terms of the intention information, that is, something to hold on to whether in terms of a programme note or aid in terms of how to listen to the work, was useful, a valuable lesson to anyone making or promoting sonic works.

During these early years of the new century Naotoshi Osaka, JSSA Director, and I were both on the International Computer Music Association board as Vice-Presidents for E. Asia and Europe respectively. A few board members showed a slight dissatisfaction with this association’s ICMC events as there seemed to be a big gulf between the many concerts and the multitude of technical papers (the former users carrying Macs and the latter UNIX machines). Our goal was to somehow facilitate more papers on musical issues, but this was, at that time

at least, not to be.

I therefore, in conjunction with Marc Battier at the Sorbonne and Daniel Teruggi, Director of the Groupe de Recherches Musicales (GRM) in Paris, set up the Electroacoustic Music Studies Network (EMS, www.ems-network.org). Battier, as many in Tokyo will be aware, went on to found a regional EMS-AN or Asian Network associated with EMS.¹ Again, here, the intention is to share cutting-edge developments in the more musicological areas of the sonic arts, that which the ICMC seemed unable to host. The first EMS took place in 2003 and has taken place yearly, with two exceptions, ever since.

Around this time, another initiative of mine, the ElectroAcoustic Resource Site (EARS, www.ears.dmu.ac.uk) was born. This resource offers the following: a terminology list (more about musical than technical terms) related to electroacoustic music with various definitions where there are different interpretations, a structured index based on these terms which aids both searches on the site and forms a structure for the field of Electroacoustic Music Studies, and a bibliography of over 3000 publications both print and online. The site is visited between 15,000 to 25,000 times per month (visitors, not page searches). It is currently being placed on a new platform allowing for data mining procedures to be added to semi-automate bibliographical updates.

EARS was adopted by Unesco. At a meeting in Paris, a Unesco culture specialist once asked whether an EARS for children might be possible. That was easy to ask, but not easy to make! EARS 2 (ears2.dmu.ac.uk) is an eLearning platform for children (middle school level but both older and younger children have benefitted from it already) and users of all ages. It approaches making music with sounds holistically and has an intuitive yet powerful software program especially made to support the creative side of EARS 2, called Compose with Sounds (cws.dmu.ac.uk) which was made with support from the European Union’s Culture programme and continues to be developed.

EARS was created for students and specialists; its successor, EARS 2 is for anyone. EARS is available in a variety of languages and EARS 2 is currently being translated into several as well. Hopefully the day will come when there will be Japanese versions of both!

EARS 2 was preceded by the publication of the book, *Making Music with Sounds* (Landy 2012), the second book that I have written made for teachers and anyone who would like to be introduced to sonic creativity.

Returning to more theoretical concerns, I discovered what one calls a hole in the market and decided to write the first book compiling theories regarding electroacoustic music. It appeared in the same year as did its successor, a book that had a more manifesto-like character. Their titles are: *Understanding the Art of Sound Organization* (Landy 2007a) and *La musique des sons/The Music of Sounds* (Landy 2007b). In these volumes I introduced the concept of “sound-based music” as an alternative, more accessible term than electroacoustic music. It is a synonym for sonic art but one that clearly states that it is music that is being made. I go on to suggest that there exists an enclosed body of knowledge related to production, understanding and ap-

¹ The first EMS to be held in Japan commences three days after this talk, namely 5-8 September 2017 at Nagoya City University.

preciation concerning this broad body of work, thus introducing the notion of the “sound-based music paradigm”. Although this is high-level research, its ramifications form a foundation for the specialisation, electroacoustic music studies.

I would like to move on at this point to the other side of my brain, the creative one and focus particularly on some of the items in this talk that have not already been discussed as well as return to the others in this different context and add sound examples to illustrate some of the concepts.

We all tend to rebel at one time against someone of authority in our lives, whether it is a family member, teacher or someone else. For me, the key rebellion was against the elitist attitude of some of the composers I met at Ivy League institutions. Perhaps you are aware of the fact that Milton Babbitt, who worked at Princeton, wrote an article in 1958 entitled, *Who cares if you listen?*. Although I realise he was not as arrogant a personality as came across here, the idea seemed to be that the people should learn to understand this music as opposed to his attempting to see how best to connect with his listeners whilst composing based on his musical approach.

What we are talking about here is aesthetics, a subject many musicians today carefully avoid. Some are satisfied to discuss aesthetics as related to the “what” and “how”, thus the making of their music. I am at least as interested in the why of a work and the “for whom” questions. In other words, I am interested in optimising musical communication even though music is essentially an abstract art.

How, then, can this communication be established? I assume you have already guessed that I have more or less shared the answer already. Offering listeners things to hold on to, offering an intention/reception loop, thus considering the dramaturgy of a work (its why factor, that which is to be communicated) including potential emotional responses, thinking of whom the ideal public for your music might be or perhaps adapting the music to better connect with a public when performed more than once all of these are essential to my work. I also am not at all afraid to be humorous, a human emotion usually left untouched by so-called “serious music”.

Here follows some of the key elements of my work: recycling (sampling) with found sound objects; the 1% tilt (take something from daily life and represent it within an artistic context); surrealism, speech (influenced by text-sound poetry and text-sound composition), musical and cultural diversity, specific sites (thus not just the concert hall), humour and surprise, thus allowing an “aha moment” for the public, of course the something to hold onto factor the flexible artwork and addressing musical communities. I can remain as abstract or representational as I like but whatever is of relevance at a given moment, the work should be accessible to the public in question.

Does combining the innovative with the accessible mean somehow simplifying my work? In my case, the answer is negative. I have never intended to be obscure, at least after my aha moment but would like to be original in the sense of discovering new things every time I compose as well as in the sense of offering something new and challenging to the listener. I am not a composer who wants to be appreciated for making something so difficult that it is respected due to its not being understood. Instead, understanding can

take place at many levels, as is the case in so many things in life, depending on the background of the listener. This is something that I consciously seek.

Selecting works in a context like this one is a bit difficult. It could never cover the breadth of my work over the years. I have chosen for this talk four excerpts from works spanning over three decades: a collaboration with the video artist, Michel Jaffrennou, entitled *Vido Circus* (1984), a performed work based on the recomposition of texts by the 20th century writer, Gertrude Stein, *Stein’s Way* (2009, fully performed as it is very short), a sample-based composition made prior to my later Radio Series, entitled *I Conduct Electricity* (1996) and a recent work using samples from traditional Chinese music (a commission of the Musicacoustica Festival in Beijing) entitled *China / Music Old / New* (2013).

In the first piece, the theme of circus was the motivation of the piece although there is no narrative. Jaffrennou created the storyboard and we created sound and image at the same time. I’m pleased to share that this commission of the Belgian television has been broadcast or performed in over 80 countries.

Stein’s Way takes Stein texts and has them cut up and rearranged. Many composers have set her quasi-repetitive texts to music. I believe the music is already in the texts and enjoy combining the same voice on a recording with a live voice creating a very theatrical performance of not-quite-coherent texts.

I Conduct Electricity is part of a full-length work of the company that I direct, called *Ide Fixe: Experimental Sound and Movement Theatre*. Recordings made during one evening on a single BBC radio station were recomposed in a three-minute sequence, the first two of which are to be conducted and the last one mocked by dancers who repeat and vary the conductor’s movements. Subsequent to this piece, a Radio Series of currently six works has been composed focusing on sampling broadcasts from public radio in a given country. Other than the most recent Czech radio piece, these are all filled with samples that are being used illegally. I am not a troublemaker, but the laws on sampling are ridiculous and, through these culturally focused pieces, I am attempting to combine something related to the listeners’ experience that is entertaining, new and politically (or at least legally) challenging at the same time. As with the first two example compositions, I believe and have experienced that a very large audience can enjoy these radio pieces.

The final work was made primarily for a Chinese public. That said, performances outside of China have also been very successful, be it more exotic. As in the case with many of my works, I am taking something known and presenting it artistically, making it new again. It is a means of honouring rich East Asian musical traditions whilst making timbral sounds that are new within these very old musical genres.

I hope that these few examples illustrate how my thinking and my scholarship are totally intertwined. I attempt to “practice what I preach” and also “preach what I practice”.

Before moving on, you may have noticed that I have spent little time discussing technical innovation. There is a reason for this. I am more of a user than a developer. Between artistic, scholarly and educational work there is

little time left for this. Developments, whether minor ones such as architecting internet resource sites or more considerable ones, such as leading the development of Compose with Sounds and the EAnalysis software (logiciels.pierrecouprie.fr) only have taken place when it was discovered that something was needed to fulfill needs in our area that do not already exist. All of these formed another type of collaboration, here with technological developers sympathetic with the sonic arts, who could fulfill my dreams.

4.

Current initiatives The final part of this talk focuses on current initiatives, in this case a large-scale European Culture project and a book that I am writing with my colleague, John Richards (who is also speaking at JSSA today). The ideas presented in parts I and II form the basis for the approach to both as well as my current composition work.

Interfaces This is a project founded on the motto, “bringing new music to new audiences” (www.interfacesnetwork.eu). The project host is the Onassis Cultural Centre in Athens. Other participants include IRCAM and the ZKM. We at my university are involved in about a dozen so-called actions ranging from short festivals with site-specific sound installations and visual music, a resource site and a conference on community music initiatives related to the theme, a further development related to the Intention/Reception project, educational projects focused on making sound-based music and DIY instruments and our first action will focus on telematic hacking, that is hacking the network involving DIY musicians around Europe and beyond.

Everything about this project is related to the need to take action after that “ah moment”. Working with eight partners around Europe and musicians around the globe is a privilege and simply drives forward the goals I set for myself almost thirty years ago.

On the Music of Sounds and the Music of Things In parallel with this project, John Richards and I are writing a book together with this title. He is focused on DIY electronics/hacking and I am writing about sampling culture. Our view is that innovation in this new century is less about the discovery of new musical materials, structures, languages and the like, but instead of new means of production and dissemination including new approaches to workshoping music, that is, collaborating together and a more inclusive environment for music making allowing for participation by anyone, not just trained professionals.

Sampling with sounds is just as possible as it is with musical clips. The idea of having others remix your work is unthinkable for elitist artists, but in the era of Creative Commons, it is a logical thing to do today for 21st century artists.

In both cases, DIY and sampling, innovation and accessibility are inherent on the way one works. This is a welcome development in my view, as it allows our music to come closer to many people in our cultures, in some cases offering new forms of people working together thus making music of the folk also known as folk music using new technologies in exciting new ways.

To close I have attempted, in this talk, not to boast

about the successes in my life. Instead, I have attempted to underline the importance of finding an alternative to both commercial culture and an art music culture, thus one for the sonic arts that is not necessarily elitist or, in fact, doomed to be marginalised. I have attempted in my music, my writing and my work as an innovative educator to open up this world of sonic creativity to an ever-increasing number of people. Given the growth of student interest in our area, this is something to celebrate. Finding the best way to educate these people and work on developing new musical communities of interest related to the sonic arts remains my goal and, fortunately, that of a growing number of others. I hope that this goal is of interest to those attending this talk as well as those reading this article.

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6. AUTHOR’S PROFILE

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