

Towards An International History of Electroacoustic Music: Some Preliminary Observations

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The history of electroacoustic music has generally been told from the perspective of Western Europe, the United Kingdom and North America. Indeed, most of the pioneering technological and musical innovations within the field originated in the West. Published histories that trace evolving technologies and experimental and avant-garde musical traditions center their attention on European and North American developments. Also, some of the activity beyond these centers had not begun before the publication of Schrader (1982) and Manning (1987). Holmes (1995, 2002) takes note of a studio in Argentina and Chile, but is otherwise limited to Europe and North America. Chadabe (1997) traces a greater number of international trends than his predecessors, yet exploration of Asia is limited to Japan.

As the field approaches its 60th year, it is now possible to craft a more international narrative. An international perspective makes it possible focus on diversity of expression rather than on technological innovation. An international history is also aided by the growth of the internet and the recent non-Western setting of international conferences, such as ICMC 1996 in Hong Kong, ICMC 1999 in Beijing, ICMC 2003 in Singapore, ICMC 2001 in Havana, and NIME 2004 in Japan, which have opened the historical writer to a broader geographic array of composers and institutions.

This paper is a preliminary presentation of two years of research, largely in the form of interviews and correspondence with composers across the world. Secondary sources were consulted, mostly country-specific historical materials, such as Ricardo Dal Farra's work about South America, Emmanuelle Loubet and Takehito Shimazu's writings about Japan and Warren Burt's research about Australia. It is hoped that as research proceeds, additional observations will continue to emerge. Some of these investigations have been conducted under the auspices of the Electronic Music Foundation's EMF Institute, which the author serves as co-executive editor, along with Joel Chadabe (<http://www.emfinstitute.emf.org>).

The origins of electroacoustic music in the 1950s, in the radio stations of Paris and Cologne and at the academic center in New York are well documented. The development of other centers, such as in Tokyo, Milan, Toronto, Utrecht, and, for computer music, Bell Telephone Laboratories, in New Jersey, are also well known. The involvement of the first electroacoustic composers from outside Western Europe, the United Kingdom or North America generally began in one of a few ways: study or immigration abroad, independent learning or happenstance.

Work and study abroad: Slamet Abdur Sjukur from Indonesia and Yizhak Sadai from Israel worked with Pierre Schaeffer at the Groupe de Recherche Musicale (GRM), as did a number of first generation Brazilian composers, including Reginaldo Carvalho, Jorge Antunes and Rodolfo Caesar. The Columbia-Princeton Center For Electronic Music in New York City was a locus of activity for composers around the world, among them Argentines Mario Davidovsky, Alcides Lanza and Francisco Kröpfl, Turks Bulent Arel and Ilhan Mimaroglu, Makoto Shinohara from Japan, Tzvi Avni from Israel and Halim el-Dabh from Egypt. The NWDR (Northwestdeutscher Rundfunk) in Cologne attracted Mauricio Kagel from Argentina, among others. Indonesian composers, Harry Roesli and Otto Sidharta, went to institutions in The Netherlands. In some cases, a local studio served as a magnet for composers in a region, most notably CLAEM - Instituto Torcuato di Tella, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, which attracted a large number of composers from across South America during its decade of operation. The studio gained the interest of major European and American composers, who came to teach there. Among them were Iannis Xenakis, Luigi Nono, Bruno Maderna and Vladimir Ussachevsky.

Home grown initiatives: in some countries, electroacoustic music developed through local, individual initiative; an example is the work of New Zealander Douglas Lilburn, who became the first pioneer in the field in that country. Halim el-Dabh began his own sonic explorations in Egypt before coming to New York. Israeli composer, Josef Tal drew inspiration from his experience as a young adult in the studio of German engineer Friedrich Trautwein, and chose, thirty years later, to tour studios around the world in search of models for a studio of his own in Jerusalem. In Japan, a non-institutional group of composers, *Jikken Kobo*, among them Joji Yuasa and Toru Takemitsu, included electronic musical exploration and multimedia in their work.

More recently, in countries where studios did not exist until the 1990s, composers, like younger Turkish composers Sinan Bökesoy and Tolga Tüzün, began their careers self-taught. Others, like Chinese-American composer, Dajun Yao, or Indonesian composer, Supto Raharjo, gained exposure to the field through jazz or rock music or electronic expansions of traditional musical forms. Indonesian composer I Wayan Gde Yudane listened to recordings sent by American friends and then witnessed a live electronic performance by future colleague Harry Roesli.

Opening a studio in one's home country often proved challenging. Despite initial institutional encouragement, Bulent Arel was unable to overcome a lack of government support when he attempted to found a studio in Ankara, Turkey in 1962. Mauricio Kagel was unable to create a studio in Argentina in the mid-1950s, and the first attempt to open an Israeli studio, in Jerusalem in 1957, also failed. Four years later, Josef Tal built sufficient institutional and financial support to open a Jerusalem studio. It took Cuban composer Juan Blanco nearly a decade to open a studio in Havana. Even in subsequent years, many others

composers found that their country simply lacked the resources to enable exploration of the field. Creative work with tape or electronics could only take place if the composer traveled abroad.

The first studios in Israel opened in 1961, 1971 and 1974, although two of these have closed. A new studio opened in Haifa, in 2000. A studio did not appear in Turkey until 1999, when the Dr. Erol Üçer Center for Advanced Studies in Music (MIAM) opened at Istanbul Technical University. Although José Vicente Asuar founded the first electronic music studio in Chile in 1958, the institution closed when he left the country a decade later. Other studios opened in the 1960s in Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Venezuela, Mexico (in 1970), and, while some have gone through various phases of reorganization or restructuring many remain in operation. A studio opened in South Africa at the University of Natal, Durban in 1971, and others took root at several Japanese universities in the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, and at various universities in Australia, in the mid-1970s.

China and Korea were not ready for organized activity, including studios, until the 1980s and 1990s. This later start was due to a lag in technological and institutional developments, a lack of musical models, scant financial resources, little public or governmental support for experimental music, and, at times, the presence of political turmoil. The first Chinese studio dedicated to electroacoustic music emerged from the work of graduate students at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, especially Yuanlin Chen, who founded the studio in the mid-1980s. Soon after, the Chinese government sent future Central Conservatory Studio director, Zhang Xiaofu to study in Paris. A decade later, an association of composers was formed, a non-academic computer music scene has begun to emerge, and several multi-media computer arts programs have opened.

First generation Korean composers, among them Sung Ho Hwang and Jaeho Chang, generally began their university-level musical studies in their native land, followed by graduate education in Europe, often in The Netherlands. A studio at Hanyang University was founded in Seoul, Korea, in 1993, as was a Korean Electro-Acoustic Music Society. Government support has aided developments at Hanyang. A second center recently opened at the Korean National University of the Arts.

In most countries beyond North America and Europe, composers face major challenges, largely due to a lack of public acceptance or insufficient institutional support. Many countries, such as Turkey and Israel, lack venues for non-commercial electronic music and there are very few opportunities for experimental work to be broadcast on radio or television or covered by the media. In Israel, few electroacoustic composers have won national prizes and in one case, a noteworthy award provoked enormous controversy. Most Israeli composers who were born in the mid-20th century have sought professional opportunities in the United States. Economic difficulties have limited the number of experimental composers in Indonesia.

Many non-Western electroacoustic composers view their work as aesthetically or sonically related to European, British or American models. However, there are composers whose work draws upon musical resources from their own cultures. The earliest such manifestation may have taken place within the Japanese “Return to the Source” movement of the late 1950s through the 1960s, which featured traditional Japanese musical sounds and aesthetics. In Indonesia, the first developments in electronic music were closely tied to traditional *gamelan* performance and sounds. Electronic instruments were designed for *gamelan* performance and the first electronic work was for *gamelan* and tape.

Many recent electroacoustic works by Chinese composers integrate traditional instruments and live electronics or tape, as do some recent works by Korean composers. The combination of traditional instruments and electronics has at times proved controversial, as practitioners are often protective of the purity of inherited musical forms and sounds. Nonetheless, this is an avenue being explored currently by a number of younger composers.

Sound elements in works by Chinese composer, Dajuin Yao, and Israeli composer Arik Shapira, often derive from sonic and semantic qualities of their native tongue. Bolivian composers Atiliano Auza, Nicolás Suarez, Oscar García and Cergio Prudencio have also integrated traditional language and instruments within their compositions. Israeli composer, Avi Elbaz from Tel-Aviv, draws upon elements of Moroccan music and culture into his work. Raised in Peru, Rajmil Fischman’s ‘Alma Latina’ engages musical motifs and rhythms from the Latin dance, the mambo.

The audience and institutional base of electroacoustic music in Western Europe, the United Kingdom, United States and Canada remains more firmly established than in other international locations. Yet, the field has a long history in many corners of the world beyond its initial places of origin, notably in many South American nations, as well as in Australia, Japan, Israel, South Africa, and New Zealand. Its presence in Asia is growing, especially in China and also in Korea. Electroacoustic music is finding a home in Turkey. Although composers often have to travel abroad for advanced studio, there are an increasing number of educational opportunities close to home in a number of nations. Countries that were the site of past struggles to establish studios, now host such facilities. A provocative area for further study is the phenomenon of composers drawing upon traditional cultural resources within their work.

Many questions remain to be asked for future study: in countries where economic resources are limited, will support continue to exist for non-commercial music that engages technology? Will culturally distinctive approaches to electroacoustic composition take root in non-Western societies? What can Western composers learn from the creative work and experience of their colleagues outside of Western Europe and North America? The present paper represents an early

attempt at describing the field from an international perspective. It is hoped that others will continue this potentially fruitful and fascinating endeavor, as will this author.