Miriam Akkermann

Beyond practice?
Tracing cultural preferences in mixed music performances

Bayreuth University

Miriam.Akkermann@uni-bayreuth.de

Abstract

Re-performing compositions from the early days of mixed music faces several challenges. For example, the works often contained nowadays unusual combinations of computer and digital sound processors, or at that time especially developed technical solutions. Over the last 30 years, computer technologies rapidly developed. Original hardware and software, however, was mostly not archived along with the composition. In addition, in many cases the documentation lacks a description of the use of technology, as well as notes on the composition's performance. Establishing a re-performance of early mixed music pieces in the 21st century therefore causes many challenges, but can also create a new performative and interpretational space.

Based on a research on performances of early mixed music pieces in the 21st century in Paris and Seoul in 2015, the question came up, to what extent the cultural environment may influence the developed performances. The scope of this paper is therefore to ask for inherent and possibly hidden influences on the involved performer and their artistic decisions, and discuss this on an abstract level.

Initial thoughts and starting point

When re-performing mixed music pieces which were initially established with nowadays outdated technologies, there are two main challenges: revealing technical and artistic information concerning the composition, and deciding on suitable recent technologies for the performance. Both aspects are influenced by education or artistic/scientific training, surrounding artistic habits and traditions, production resources and the (aesthetic) expectation and imagination of the performer as well as the intended or expected audience.

The re-performances often base on somehow vague sources: documentations of these compositions usually include a description of the used technologies, an outline of the set-up, a score including a non-standardized notation of the electronics with varying performative information, barely an audio or video documentation of the premiere, and rarely the original code, excerpts of code transcription, or presets.

Considering that technology is crucial within the artistic process of developing and performing mixed music, one could argue that cultural constraints may not be as important for performing computer music as they were for acoustic music of former times. Knowledge on technological developments in music in the 2nd half of the 20th century was not strictly limited to certain geographic or cultural areas.

When looking at Europe and East Asia, there is evidence that technology was exchanged between the continents from the very beginning of the developments in digital sound processing[1]. The common knowledge on technology, however, does not imply that the questions concerning interpretation and performance of a composition are solved. There was – and still is – for example no common notation established for the use of technologies within musical productions or performances regarding playing instructions, or the use of presets. On performer's side, there is no defined standard on how to play with electronics, and it is negotiable if there already exists a tradition in how to re-perform early mixed music. When working on re-performances of early mixed music compositions developed at the Institute de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris, it turned out that some of this examined compositions quite recently had their Asian, East Asian or Korean premiere. This opened up new discussions: Are there differences between the European and Asian re-performance, and if so, why? Can a comparison of these re-performances help to understand better, if there already exists a tradition in performing early mixed music works?

These questions directly hook up with the initial thoughts: What aspects do influence the process of creating a re-performance, and how can these influences on performative aspects be traced? Are there differences in the final re-performance that can be linked back to cultural issues? In order to avoid being trapped in clichés or postcolonial structures, these questions will be approached on a more general and abstract level, aiming at establishing a structured summary of possible influences with which it is possible to hint at hidden aspects in performances that may have somehow cultural roots, but which invite to re-think performance practice and its inherent processes.

Referring to the research carried out at IRCAM in Paris (FR), and the Center for Electro-Acoustic Music and Audio (CREAMA) in Seoul (KR) in 2015, the observation starts with outlining the conditions for establishing a re-performance of early mixed music pieces at the beginning of the 21st century. This outline provides the ground for developing charts which gather optional aspects and dependencies that may take influence on the performer or the performance. This again can then be linked back to the initial discussion on tracing cultural aspects in re-performances by adding subsequent thoughts: Does the performance face musical or aesthetic expectations, and if so, who creates these expectations and where do they derive from? More in detail: Is there an expectation on performances deriving from the surrounding art scene and/or music tradition? Are the expectations influenced by inherent aesthetic guidelines, driven by the surrounding culture and/or the musical (aesthetic) education? What may influence the single performer, given the fact that many recent performer are explicitly seeking the influenced of their surrounding culture?

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[1] The American composer and musician David Wessel told Gregory Taylor in an interview, that he used the brand new synthesizer Yamaha DX7, a prototype of the Roland MPU 401, and an IBM PC on his concert tour in 1983 in Japan, which was organized in cooperation with the Japanese company Roland. Wessel, who at that time was based in Paris, stated, that he tried hard to bring this equipment also to France, and that he finally managed to get it there in 1984, cf. Gregory Taylor, "An interview with David Wessel", *Cycling'74* [online], https://cycling74.com/articles/an-interview-with-david-wessel, September 14, 2005 (last accessed 09/18).
The same year, Xavier Chabot (IRCAM/CARL), Roger Dannenberg (Carnegie Mellon University), and Georges Bloch (CARL) started to develop an 'instrument-computer-synthesizer system for live performances', consisting of an IBM PC, three Roland MPU 401, and four Yamaha TX7 modules, cf. Xavier Chabot, Roger Dannenberg, and Georges Bloch, "A Workstation in Live Performance: Composed Improvisation", in *Proceedings of International Computer Music Conference* (ICMC 1986), Den Haag (NL), 1986, p. 57.

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Conditions for (re-)performing early mixed music pieces in the 2010s

IRCAM: Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique

The Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) in Paris, officially opened in 1977, was funded as an institute for technical developments and artistic productions in music.[2] Since then, it has been supporting as well as carrying out concerts, artistic productions/music performances, technological developments, and educational programs.[3] It gave home to several hard- and software developments as well as many creations and performances of mixed music compositions, and employed in 2016 more than 100 people.[4]

Establishing a performance within this environment provides technical support, adequate space and equipment for the aspired performance, as well as knowledge on former compositions, technical solutions, and performances by staff, associated composers, and instrumental as well as electronic musicians. When re-performing a piece which was developed at IRCAM, there is usually one person available who has already worked on this piece before, and who is engaged as team member, project manager, or at least as possible consultant. As IRCAM collaborates on a regular base with specialized ensembles or soloists, it is possible that the musicians play a piece several times. In this case, the performer becomes a source of knowledge on the piece. Musicians performing at IRCAM are usually well trained for performing mixed music. As there exists also an educational program for young music performer, some compositions are performed in order to train musicians. The performance is then developed in collaboration with experts in performing mixed music.[5]

A training program was established also for the upcoming electronic musicians held by the formerly called 'Réalisateur en Informatique Musicale' RIM or 'musical assistant'.[6] As can be seen in the programs and documentations of the concerts, it was common until the 2010s, that the person in charge of the premiere's electronic would be involved in almost all following performances. This had also practical reasons, as in the 1980s and 1990s there was no standardized technical equipment, but often specialized or custom-made technical solutions.[7]

For re-performances, the knowledge on the premiere could help to create a new technical solution along the initial ideas developed by composer and technician, especially when considering the fact that many compositions were established in mutual relationship with the development of new technologies. Additional information on a composition like knowledge

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[2] Cf. Alastair Williams, "Ageing of the new: the museum of musical modernism", in *The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Music*, Nicholas Cook and Anthony Pople (eds.), Cambridge (UK), Cambridge University Press, p. 506.

[3] "Rapports d'activité 2017", *Ircam/Centre Pompidou* [online], Paris (FR), Ircam / Centre Pompidou, https://www.ircam.fr/media/uploads/documents/rapports_activite/ra2017.pdf (last accessed 09/18).

[4] "Rapports d'activité 2016", *Ircam/Centre Pompidou* [online], Paris (FR), Ircam / Centre Pompidou, https://www.ircam.fr/media/uploads/documents/rapports_activite/ra2016.pdf (last accessed 09/18).

[5] See here for example "Workshop: Performance for Electroacoustic Music, 12/06/17-01/07/17", *Manifeste-2017, The Academy* [online], 2017, http://web4.ircam.fr/1138.html?&L=1 (last accessed 09/18).

[6] For more details on the work and position of the 'Réalisateur en Informatique Musicale' (RIM), cf. Laura Zattra, "Collaboration in Computer Music. An Analysis of the Role Played by Musical Assistants Obtained Through Semi-Structured Interviews", https://medias.ircam.fr/xb2f81c (last accessed 09/18), and Laura Zattra "Les origines du nom de RIM (Réalisateur en Informatique Musicale)", in *Actes/Proceedings des Journées d'Informatique Musicale*, Anne Sèdes and Alain Bonardi (eds), Saint-Denis (FR), 2013, pp. 113-119.

[7] "Cahier d'exploitation", *ressources.ircam* [online], Paris (FR), Ircam / Centre Pompidou, 1986-2002, http://ressources.ircam.fr/27.html?&np1=0&np2=10&p=1 (last accessed 09/18).

on how to perform the electronics was bound to one person, and often handed over in an oral tradition from one RIM to another. Composers were rarely involved in re-performance processes, but sometimes invited to rework on the composition.

Developing a re-performance of a mixed music piece at IRCAM takes place in an experienced environment, which also means that each performance is shown not only within a vivid music scene, but also strongly embedded within the historic context of electro-acoustic music and mixed music at IRCAM. This attempt is mirrored by certain expectations of the production team, and also of the audience, mainly consisting of experienced listeners with a good knowledge on the electro-acoustic and mixed music oeuvre.

CREAMA: Center for Research in Electro-Acoustic Music and Audio

The Center for Research in Electro-Acoustic Music and Audio (CREAMA) was officially funded as an organization in 2012, after having been working under the auspices of the Hanyang Electro-Acoustic Music Institute in Seoul (KR) since 2005. Being strongly linked to the computer music studios of the composition department at Hanyang University, CREAMA was established with the aims of fostering education, research, creation, and performance of electro-acoustic music. In addition, the visibility of electro-acoustic music established in collaboration with the computer music studios should be enhanced also outside the university.[8]

Following the Studio Report from 2013, the organizers were especially interested in establishing performances of a "renowned array of international composers"[9], as well as providing an environment for contemporary composers interested in collaborating with CREAMA and the composition department at Hanyang University.

Composer Jongwoo Yim, co-founder of CREAMA, described in an interview in 2015 that it was quite difficult to create concerts with performances of mixed music pieces in their early years. Following him, one main challenge was, that most of the existing oeuvre has never been played in Korea before they started to launch mixed music concerts. That meant, the production team could neither rely on experiences from former performances, nor on additional information kept by involved instrumental or electronic musicians. The performance of a piece had to be established completely based on the score and the officially available documentation. Yim claimed also, that the composer would usually not help out with further information.[10]

From 2012 to 2015, the selection of the compositions as well as the performances were established mainly based on the instigation of CREAMA director Yim, and composer Richard Dudas, associate professor at the composition department at Hanyang University since 2007, and associate director of CREAMA. Both studied in France electro-acoustic music composition in the 1990s, and are familiar with the developments and music productions at IRCAM. Dudas additionally brings in technical skills necessary to establish mixed music

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[8] Cf. Jongwoo Yim and Richard Dudas, "Studio Report: CREAMA – Center for Research in Electro-Acoustic Music and Audio at Hanyang University", in *Proceedings of the International Computer Music Conference* (ICMC 2013), Perth (AU), 2013, pp. 397-400.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Cf. Jongwoo Yim, *Interview with M. Akkermann*, Seoul (KR), Hanyang University Seoul, November 25, 2015.

re-performances.[11] Until 2015, he served as electronic musician for the concerts organized by CREAMA, providing the experiences in programming and performing the electronic parts. Despite this, the involved musicians were not yet trained in performing mixed music compositions in the beginning. Yim pointed out, that a main challenge for the first concerts was to choose compositions, which were playable for the performer, as those had to learn how to play with (live) electronics for these concerts.[12]

This also hints at the situation concerning the audience: in the beginning, there was very little audience which was hardly specialized for mixed music, as the music genre was not yet known amongst the aspired listeners. Occidental electro-acoustic music was not promoted and hardly performed in Korea before the 21st century. Like the musicians, the audience had to make the field of electro-acoustic music accessible for themselves, as the compositions were not set in a well-known historic context within the country's music scene. The choice to perform these yet unknown pieces at CREAMA can be linked to several reasons. Amongst others, Yim's and Dudas' knowledge and artistic interest in this music, and, as Yim pointed out, funding opportunities for the concerts in Seoul, as some of them were sponsored by the Korean government and the French Cultural Center, supporting cultural cooperations between France and Korea.

Tracing influences on the performance – a structural approach

After having looked at the general conditions for creating a re-performance at IRCAM and CREAMA, the gathered information will now be used to outline aspects that directly or indirectly influence the process of establishing a re-performance.

Primary material for most re-performances is the composition's score with annotations, and the documentation of the electronic part. Involved performers are the electronic musicians who establish and control the set-up, and the acoustic musicians who play the score and interact with the electronics (depending on the composition).

A first influence on future performances can be taken by the publisher of the documentation: sometimes it includes more than composer's score and notes, e.g. descriptions of the premiere's realization or tips like best practice for technical implementations. If the performance is established in an environment like IRCAM, these information can also be provided by formerly involved performer and may also include suggestions or expectations – an influence that may be strong at one place but not existing at another as long as it is not embedded in the publicly available documentation. The documentation of the technical requirements directly influences the set-up created by the electronic musician, and therefore indirectly influences the acoustic musicians and their range of interaction and interpretation. The documentation can therefore strongly influence the interpretation of the score. The same time it may mirror the music tradition or surrounding culture a composition or performance is embedded in at the time of the creation. This applies to the score too, and touches follow-up questions: How much knowledge is required in order to 'properly' understand a certain score?

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[11] Dudas worked at IRCAM (1996-1998), and was freelance developer for Cycling 74 (1998-2008), cf. Richard Dudas, "Curriculum Vitae", *Richard Dudas* [online], http://www.richarddudas.com/cv/, 2014 (last accessed 09/18).
[12] Cf. Jongwoo Yim, *Interview with M. Akkermann*, Seoul (KR), Hanyang University Seoul, November 25, 2015.

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Along which criteria 'properly' is defined? What about performances which do not match these criteria?

These questions are implicitly debated within another influencing factor: the audience. The expectations of the audience derive from knowledge on the field of music, from traditions and surrounding culture they may or may not feel committed to, and from the cultural environment in which a concert with re-performances is presented. Re-performances at IRCAM, for example, seem to face a significant number of different expectations which are expressed more or less directly to the performer via reviews or the number of sold ticket. At CREAMA, the expectations of audience gain very limited influence on the re-performance. The small number of listeners is attracted by the expectation that they will perceive something rare or new, but the expectation on a certain interpretation is of almost no importance.

Tracing cultural preferences?

Following the outlined considerations it becomes clear, that all influencing aspects are always just one single part of a mutually influenced complex system. Some constraints within this system may derive from cultural traditions, but their potential effects usually take place on a quite individual level. Therefore, the last focus is set on aspects that may take influence on the single performer.

Every person is influenced by the surrounding music culture and the cultural based sound, while growing up. That does not necessarily mean that a person likes what happens around, but knows about the implications and connected values. Tracing cultural preferences therefore also means understanding the various contexts and inherent structures of how for example music is perceived within a certain context.

Musicians are influenced by their teachers, the music they play and listen, their idols, the surrounding value system, but also by the way how music is taught. Yim mentioned in the interview that one of the challenges contemporary music composers in Korea are facing is that Korea has "[…] a great music culture, but no composer's name, because that time the artist is nothing."[13] With this, Yim implicitly describes the value system as well as the way traditional Korean music was maintained: the tune and its interpretation by a well-known master is significant, the composer is not important. A new performance is measured by the ability to copy the masters play. Only masters themselves can add minor changes to the performance without derogating the performance. This can create not only a challenge for recently upcoming composer, it also may take a strong indirect influence on the interpretation of a score. Is the Korean interpretation of an early mixed music piece composed in France for example oriented on original recordings from the premiere, this implies that a sound impression is taken as point of reference, which was formed by criteria deriving from a western music tradition and context. The documentation, and especially the recording becomes the most important source of information for these re-performances. This goes together with another observation: musicians who are not specialized in playing with electronics seem to be less influenced by the interaction with the set-up. One reason seems that the musician is not taught how to play with the electronics, but learns how to play this exact composition. In both cases, the documenting recording becomes its own image, cut from artistic context or technical issues like recording conditions.

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[13] *Ibid.*

Some of these outlined considerations can be applied on performances of Kaaija Saariaho's composition *Lonh* (1995-96) for female voice and electronics, which was created for the festival Wien Modern in 1996. The basic material for the composition comprises a traditional score, and information on the set-up and used technology. In addition, there exist several recordings. Dedicated to the soprano Dawn Upshaw, the electronics was established by Gilbert Nouno, RIM and electronic musician at IRCAM.[14] In 2015, the Korean premiere of *Lonh* took place, established by a team of CREAMA, with soprano Namyoung Kim and electronic musician Richard Dudas, and Yim as artistic director. When comparing the listening impression of the recordings from the world premiere and the Korean premiere, it is very difficult to hear clear differences in the interpretation.[15] This is interesting as over the last 10 years, composer and musicians in Korea, and especially at CREAMA, gained all required skills for playing and interpreting mixed music. Technically spoken, it is no longer necessary to copy an interpretation due to a lack of knowledge or experience. In addition, the audience would accept also a more free interpretation of the yet unknown composition. When taking in account Yim's complaint, however, it seems that this way of approaching a new re-performance may be one cultural issue that can be traced in performances of well-documented mixed music pieces. Hence, in this example, the influence of the occidental musical aesthetics is implicitly fostered by the traditional Korean habits of learning music pieces.

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[14] Cf. Kaija Saariaho, *Lonh* (1995-1996), London, Chester Music, 2007; "Programme Note", *Music Sales Classical* [online], http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/work/1350/7852 (last accessed 09/18); "*Lonh*", *ressources.ircam* [online], Paris (FR), Ircam / Centre Pompidou, https://medias.ircam.fr/x6babe2 (last accessed 09/18).

[15] *Ibid.*, and Kaija Saariaho, "*Lonh*", *Music and Electronics!*, Seoul (KR), Olympus Hall, TIMF Ensemble and CREAMA, Oct 23, 2015.

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