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The Electro-acoustic Music in the higher education in Taiwan – its evolution and its reception

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Introduction

Nowadays, more and more universities in Taiwan offer courses of electro-acoustic music in their programs. However the majority of these courses focus mostly on the learning of software. Even though the young generations in Taiwan are familiar with some software designed to produce electronic musical sound, the number of musical creations of Taiwanese composers supported by computer is still small. I will try to reveal the status quo of the learning of electro-acoustic music in Taiwan.

After a brief presentation of the local development of the electro-acoustic music in general, I will concentrate on the case of NCTU. I will present the origin of the establishment of some electro-acoustic music studios, their educational purpose, their equipments, their present situation and their vision to the future. This communication also discusses the divergences of the conceptions and the receptions of this music in the higher education in Taiwan.

The first studios

The first studios in Taiwan were established around late 1980's: in National Chiao Tung University (NCTU) in 1987 and Fu Jen Catholic University in 1988. The objectives of these two universities are to create and experiment music with the help of high technology. Fu Jen University, a private catholic University in the suburban town of Taipei, started at 1988 an electro-acoustic laboratory comprises MIDI studios, recording studios, audio control studios and student's personal studios, all were equipped with the newest equipments at that time. Fu Jen preserve almost all the old equipments since their beginning, such as the machine of Reel to Reel, oscillator etc. These physical evidences represent, in a way, the historical evolution of the development of the electronic music in Taiwan. Fu Jen University provides a large option of electro-acoustic music courses, in the field of academic music composition as well as in commercial field. Their courses include theoretical and practical ones; students are expected to learn basic academic theory and practical techniques, and to be able to work later in various fields of music: in popular music, recording, television or film music, as well as in composition in traditional sense.

In 1989, the composer Ma Jie-Ming 馬子民 started a program of algorithmic Music composition in Tainan Woman's College of Arts & Technology (now the Tainan University of Technology) where the courses include computer languages from Forth language to Csound, Basic Computer Music and software like Finale, Cakewalk, Midi, digital communication etc., as well as recording technology and courses on acoustics. In 2004, this university organised an international symposium and invites the director of CCRMA (Center for Computer Research in Music and Acoustics), Mr. Chris Chafe, as guest professor. It was a big event for the school.

The composer Tzeng Shing-Kwei 曾興魁 (born in 1946) introduced the ideas of electro-acoustic music to his students in National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) since his return from Germany (Musik Hochschule im Freiburg) in 1981. After another period of his study at Paris IRCAM, 1986/1987, Tzeng Shing-Kwei began to

include formally electro-acoustic music in his teaching in NTNU. In 1991, under the guidance of the composer Hsu Tsang-Houei 許常惠, NTNU started a small studio of computer music. In 1999, the “Computer Music Association of the Republic of China” was founded in Taipei. As president of this association, Tzeng Shing-Kwei organised several important projects and international symposiums, as well as festival of electro-acoustic music in this university. Composer Chao Ching-Wen 趙菁文 who graduated from the University of Stanford, now professor of composition and electro-acoustic music, runs a studio of electro-acoustic music in NTNU. In 2005, Chao organized the first international forum of “International Workshop on Computer Music and Audio Technology” (WOCMAT) in Taipei. The forum continued two times in 2006 and 2007, and has gained much success in integrating the resources of electro-acoustic music in Taiwan, as well as in evoking the communication among the composers, engineers, scientists of Taiwan and other countries. A colleague of Chao, Professor Huang Chun Zen 黃均人 also supervises a program of digital archive in NTNU.

In 1995, National Taiwan University established Dian Nao Yin Yue Yan Jiu Tuan Duei (電腦音樂研究團隊, Jeng's computer music group) that engages to the research of mixture of instrumental and synthetic sound. Since then, together with the progress of technology and the world tendencies, more and more universities in Taiwan established computer music studio and offer the option of computer music course. Jeng's computer music group is under the guidance of professor Jeng Shi-Kang 鄭仕康. Jeng had graduated from NTU with a doctor degree in engineering and from 1985 to 1993, he was guest scholar in the University of Illinois.-Jeng left for the research centre of the University of Stanford in 1999. Since its establishment, Jeng's computer music group published many important research reports, academic papers and articles at various international forums.

Tseng Yu-Chung 曾毓忠, composer and computer musician who graduated from the University of North Texas in 1998 (with a Doctor degree of Musical Arts), has since returned to Taiwan and currently teaches composition and electro-acoustic music at National Taipei University of Education and Soochow University, also in National Chiao-Tung University. Under his suggestion and with his effort, a computer music studio was established in 2000 in National Taipei University of Education. He also started courses of electro-acoustic music in both undergraduate and graduate program at the same school. An active musician full of passion for electro-acoustic music, Tzeng organised regularly forums and concerts, invited experts from Taiwan and overseas. He wishes to promote this kind of music and to establish an electro-acoustic music and technology centre in the future that will attract more and more musicians to participate.

The National Taipei University of the Arts also has an electro-acoustic studio from the beginning of their establishment in 1980's, which is attached to Applied Arts centre. The woman composer Pan Shi-Ji 潘世姬 has been teaching electro-acoustic music courses since then. Now Professor Huang Zhi-Fang 黃志方, member of faculty of NCTU has also joint the program. In 2000, the National Taiwan University of the Arts founded a computer music studio under the guidance of the director of music Wu Die 吳疊 who had studied at IRCAM. Wu Die organised some workshops on computer music and MIDI, and produced several concerts. But after he left for the National Tainan University of the Arts to teach, the concern of the studio concentrates more and more on commercial music.

In 2002, the National Tainan University of the arts started department of Applied Music, with curriculum of music creation, music technology, music administration, music performance and music therapy. As the name of the department implies, the curriculum of music technology emphasizes on its commercial use.

20 years since the founding of electro-acoustic studio in NCTU (National Chiao Tung University)

National Chiao Tung University 國立交通大學 was founded in Shanghai in 1896. In 1957, the University was re-established at its present location in Hsinchu, Taiwan. In compliance with a contract between the R.O.C. Ministry of Education and the United Association of International Telecommunications, the Telecommunication and Electronics Training Center (TETC) was established at the Hsinchu campus in 1961, with special funding from the United Nations. The TETC played a pioneering role in building up the technological foundation for Taiwan's electronic industry by introducing computer technology, initiating television broadcasting, and manufacturing the island's first transistors and solid-state lasers. As a result of TETC's success, the Computer and Electronics Center was established in 1962.

In attempt to achieve a balance between humanistic concern and technological advancement, the NCTU started a human science program from late 80's: various new programs were set up in the summers of 1992 to 1994. The electro-acoustic studio was established by the composer Wu Ting-Lien 吳丁連 (or Wu Dinglian, born in 1950) at NCTU in 1987 and in the following year they started officially a workshop for electro-acoustic music and integrated it into the Institute of Applied Arts. Since the opening of this workshop, Wu has frequently invited Phil Winsor (born in 1938) to come to help the studio and give lessons to the students. In the beginning, Winsor was sponsored by the National Science Council Fellowship from USA and he stayed most of the school year time in Taiwan during the first three years.

After the establishment of Music Division since 1992, still attached to the Institute of Applied Arts, there was only one computer music course in spring semesters. From 1993-2004, Winsor still came to NCTU every year, but taught only that computer music course each spring semester. Wu Ting Lien left NCTU several years after the establishment of Institute of Music. Winsor was invited in 2004 by the President of NCTU to be full time professor and to start a technology music program. He remains the key person and the witness of the 20 years of the evolution of electro-acoustic music education in NCTU. From the beginning of his teaching in NCTU, Winsor has always kept his position in the University of North Texas, and that is the reason why many young composers have gone to the University of North Texas for further study after graduating from Taiwanese universities. Some composers and teachers now leading electro-acoustic music studios and courses in the universities in Taiwan, like Tzeng Yu-Chung, full time professor in National Taipei University of Education or Huang Zhi-Fang in NCTU, are all students of Winsor. In this point of view, Winsor plays a principal role in the development of the electro-acoustic music in higher education in Taiwan.

In 2000, the Music Division that used to attach to the Institute of Applied Arts had become the Institute of Music, an expanded and independent department. As the country's only independent graduate music institute (that is not allied with an undergraduate department) offering a full scale musical study, the Institute of Music has been offering degrees in the Master of Arts and Master of Music. Future degrees in Ph. D and D.M.A are now on the agenda. In order to reflect the advances of technological achievement of today's world and their effects on music making, the Institute of Music further supports a division of Music Technology created since 2005. This division meets the increasing need for today's musicians to master computer applications in music and hopes to open another world for students' job opportunity in the industry. The Centre of Audio and Visual Experiment was set up during the same year to provide a music technology research environment, encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration among other departments of the university and the Institute of Music. Multimedia Musical Arts has

also become a branch of their new path to creativity whether in composition or in performance. The activities of the Institute include The International Workshop on Computer Music and Audio Technology in 2007.

Diverse attitudes

According to the questionnaires that I collected from students of the electro-acoustic Music Courses, principally in three Universities: NCTU, National Taiwan University of the Arts and National Taipei University of Education, I observed an interesting phenomena: there are some who approach the new technology with enthusiasm and others who consider it a necessary requirement only to become a ‘modern’ composer. Students with technological background and without receiving formerly a traditional Western Music training show a huge passion for electro-acoustic Music. Some of the students said that as they didn’t have the opportunity to study music in their childhood, they wish to use their ability in high technology to develop software that can one day help people to compose music easily, without necessarily having traditional music training or knowledge. To answer to my question about their objectives of learning the electro-acoustic Music and their wishes in the future, they described passionately of how useful the computer music can be, how it can work together with internet, games, produce commercial music like the ringing of cell phone, also help to conserve and to renew the local traditional music. It means that with new technology as a tool, one can conserve disappearing traditional music by recording it and use the recording as a source to create new music by using systematic composing software and so on.

Students majoring in Music Composition usually assume the electro-acoustic Music to be an indispensable part for their future career. Even though some of them prefer to study deeper into writing for traditional instruments, they still think that the computer can be a useful tool to their work. In general, they wish to widen their horizon with multiple tools, but do not show much passion to the application of their newly acquired skills to broader and combined fields, such as commercial music. However, one will be wrong to think that these young composers are not interested in computer Music. In National Taipei University of Education, professor Tzeng Yu-Chung encourages and takes his students to participate in international festivals. He also organizes regularly student’s concerts to perform their creations. Most of the works of these students are not pure computer music but combination with traditional instruments or human voices; we can find fresh vitality in their works.

Conclusion

In this twentieth year since the establishment of the first electro-acoustic studio, we can see more and more courses of electro-acoustic music offered in Taiwan, by many new universities together with the historically renowned ones, in music department program or in the institute of applied arts. Part of the reason is that the number of universities on the island grows rapidly and excessively in the recent years far beyond the real need. However, one can not deny that electro-acoustic music in the higher education in Taiwan is on its way to development. Although there are different receptions and attitudes facing this kind of music, the young generation shows an interest to it. A sustained and continuous observation should be interesting and rewarding.

Abstract

Though the history of the Western Music in Taiwan is brief, the musicians on this island always strive to catch the recent tendencies of the Western musical world. Since the 1960’s, some pioneers had tried to bring the electro-acoustical elements into their works already, yet we waited until 1988 to see the establishment of the first

studio and the teaching of electro-acoustic music in the University specified in the field of Telecommunication and technology science in Taiwan : the NCTC (National Chiao Tung University).

Nowadays, more and more universities in Taiwan offer courses of electro-acoustic music in their programs. However the majority of these courses focus mostly on the learning of software. Even though the young generations in Taiwan are familiar with some software designed to produce electronic musical sound, the number of musical creations of Taiwanese composers supported by computer is still small. There are some who approach the new technology with enthusiasm and others who consider it a necessary requirement only to become a ‘modern’ composer. In Taiwan, the conceptions and attitudes toward the electro-acoustic music are much diversified.

After a brief presentation of the development of the electro-acoustic music in the higher education in Taiwan, this communication will concentrate on the case of NCTU as an example of its evolution. It also discusses the divergences of the conceptions and the receptions of this music in the higher education in Taiwan.