

...I saw Henri Chopin dans la rue Saint-Laurent...

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Heritage and Future...an enticing proposition for the forthcoming EMS09 symposium in Buenos Aires. Heritage, our common memory, the many things we have shared during this last half century of electroacoustic music. I will leave the future to the younger and more savvy colleagues, for myself perhaps I should stay closer to the heritage, the memories of the recent past. I must confess that there are things that frighten me. One could be the rapid pace of our changing technology. Is it truly necessary to have to adapt to these constant and accelerating changes? Could we make an effort to 'extend a little' the validity of earlier technological moments? Scanning some significant steps that have taken place say, since Pierre Schaeffer... You will be surprised... paste discs and turntables – 78 rpms – 33 and why not, 45 rpm; the mono to stereo conversion; the early multitracks with 4 or 8 channels, then 16 or more; analog tape; DAT recorders; MP3s; sample-to-disk; the world of voltage control and MIDI; diffusion and multichanneling, from Varèse, Stockhausen, Normandea... 5.1, 9.1, and 16.2 sound; Multi-Channel Digital Projectors; well the list is long.

I can not help it...I am a pianist...the piano served well the Beethoven of his middle period and...is still – 200 years later, serving us well. In comparison, we are changing software programs, laptop computers or iPods yearly, or every few months in some cases. There must be some value to adopting a stance and say, I will stick to some recent/old techno approach or device and...try to create good new music with it.

Among recent experiences of mine, one was an eye/ear opener. Picture my History of Electroacoustic Music class, only october of last year, when more than one student felt the need to say "Prof. lanza, you refer to open reels, take up reels, erasing heads...tape recorders but...we don't know any of that...we have never seen one in operation." Wow...they are so young they do not have even a recent memory? I did ask around my own school at McGill and, surprise again...Our old EMS - retitled now as Digital Composition Studio - could not help my class. No analogue devices were kept. Fortunately I solved the problem by taking the class to another university in town, where a full analogue studio, with tape recorders, old filters and modulators, was still in operation.

Something similar is happening with performance practices and live electronics. We are removing ourselves from that intimate contact by touch, sight if not smell, of the old [say from the 60's] gear and techniques. Fine, Max/MSP can do a clinically clean job but...some prefer to stay closer to the original concepts, at least when an older composition is replayed.

In a paper I wrote for the First CEC Electroacoustic Days that took place at the Music Gallery in Toronto, September 1988 [really so long ago?..], with the title "...hey pop, watch it...", I quoted my friend and colleague Peter Lewis [1932-1982], at the time Director of the Electronic Music Studio at Iowa University [1968-80], who in an interview during the 1975 "Semaine de musiques nouvelles" in Montreal had declared: "I like the physical contact with the machines, their knobs and sliders, and if they are old, the better... I love things old in electroacoustics... there is a degree of uncertainty that is truly fascinating..."

Old analogue tape recorders... That brings to mind the last time I saw Henri Chopin ... well...no more than a year ago - hence the title of this article: a reference to Morton Feldman's work entitled "I Met Heine on the rue Furstenberg" (1971) Universal Edition for chamber ensemble. I had the chance to see Henri Chopin playing one of his last live concerts, in Montreal...only a few months before he passed away. He was taken into la Sala Rossa, situated on le rue Saint-Laurent, on a wheel chair but courageously he stood up in front of his two open reel Revoxes for the duration, and proceeded to perform for us, can i say "to audio-poemize?", with a hand held microphone...The old times and old gear...it sounded so vital, and so alive, with a rich sound and profound and magical sense of rhythm and intensity... These were his audio poems, composed with different layers of consonant and guttural vowels, Chopin speaking in a nonsense language... utilizing all the time the more simple of technologies... what a memory...

Then we had the piece by Swedish composer Sten Hanson, Hallo piano...hallo room...! The pianist – and technicians – creating a sound that is actually bouncing from the four corners of the performance space... all done with two tape recorders [placed "5 seconds apart"] and, according to instructions, with the tape from the left side tape pool from TR 1 – recording – physically connected to the Right side pool of TR 2 – on playback. In addition, Microphone 1 picking up the piano sparse and separated in time notes, sending the signal via a mixer to TR 1. A second unit, Microphone 2, is picking up the

sound from the room, re-injecting it into the mixer to be added to the recording and feed-back process still active. When the accumulated sound mass reaches a desirable critical thickness... the pianist is to leave the stage, with the audience left immersed in the thick sound fog, intriguingly still with traces of harmonic/nious content. Consulting the program notes of a recital I did in Redpath Hall in Montreal, January 18 1974, with the provocative title 'alcides lanza: 77' 29" [program that included – of course – the 'original' version of Cage's 4'33"], in it Sten Hanson said: "In this piece, one of my main thoughts was to make use of the total environment. The many potentials of the instrument are exploited as well as the capabilities of the room acoustics. The complete material of the piece is contained within the key of B Flat." My assistants for that performance were Eric Johnstone, technician of the EMS, and student-composer [at that time] Kevin Austin. Oh...those were the days...

Getting closer to recent times, let us see what happened to the piece that Bruce Pennycook wrote for me in 1994, Praescio VII [Piano... and then some], for piano and interactive computer system. It was premiered during a concert with the Association pour la création et la recherche électroacoustique du Québec (ACREQ), in June 19, 1994. He said in the program notes for the CD recording I did a few years later, "This works weaves computer generated musical materials and audio signals deeply into the design, construction and realization of all compositional aspects. This results in a mixture of solo performer, performer-controlled interaction, MIDI controlled sample playback, and multichannel audio signals delivered under software control during the performance which are seamlessly integrated into an expressive, dynamic vehicle for the soloist." Impressive, to say the least. During the premiere, two desktop computers were required [at the time Macintosh IICI...remember those?], CD-ROM drives, an array of 8 loudspeakers, and Pennycook's own MIDI TIME CLIP system, which he had developed at McGill. The MIDI TIME CLIP allowed for by-directional communication between the computer system and the performer. The system included a digital display for the pianist, having a six characters display for cues and other alpha-numeric information. The MTC allows the soloist to determine increments [by using an extra pedal] of events, the display offering visual counting in beats or sequential numbers. It allowed the pianist to trigger the different events [62 in the case of P.VII], to communicate with the computer and call the pre-sampled materials. Obviously, the soloist was NOT playing against a pre-recorded tape or CD. Hence, tremendous flexibility. I did a couple of Montreal performances using all that gear. As soon as a South American tournée was considered...well...No way I could carry all that with me, nor to trust that in São Paulo, Brazil, I could find the required computer gear and etc. Pennycook, reluctantly at first, let me do a 'recording' of the electronic-sampled sounds emanating from the computer, and we put that on an audio disc. I have performed that piece successfully, dozen of times and in several countries. It is doable and practicable that way...even if the pianist must follow a more strict time. 'Memorizing' the electroacoustic components allows Praescio VII to have a longer life.

I believe that preserving the somewhat older technologies, machines and performances practices is as important as the compulsive need of always adding the 'next step' in technological advances. At the same time, since as we know older recordings –mostly the analogue ones- are deteriorating quite fast, the need to have specialized archives to preserve them, could also incorporate the preservation of the above mentioned technologies, gear and documentation on digital performance practices.

I wish to quote a portion of an Email I received recently, from Francis Dhomont. It concerns these rapid technological changes.

Il m'a dit,

" Ah! Je suis COMPLETEMENT d'accord avec toi. On passe tout le temps à "apprendre" un logiciel et, quand on sait enfin s'en servir, il est trop vieux, on ne parle plus que de celui - si indispensable et irremplaçable ! - qui vient d'arriver... et qui sera vieux très, très vite avant que les compositeurs aient réussi à faire VRAIMENT de la musique avec. " [Francis Dhomont, Email – May 20, 2009]

Well, I have in a way been criticizing some technological aspects of our business, keep more of the old, make it more lasting...But, can I offer other comments, solutions? No, I have no solutions to this dilemma. Let us seek ways of not easily accepting the manufacturers suggestions of...change it for a new one...it is faster...has more memory and is faster. By staying a bit longer with whatever units you are using, you may be guaranteeing more performance for those pieces, in their original format. And now, I could only close this presentation reminding everyone that as humans...we only have two ears. Two channel stereo is sufficient for me, however at times I dream of having a real total surround sound that...that will include sound projection from above and why not, from below. That will certainly break the constriction of always listening to the array of loudspeakers placed...only on a horizontal plane.

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