Book reviews

Leigh Landy, *Making Music with Sounds*. New York: Routledge, 2012. ISBN 978-0-415-89846-1 and 978-0-415-80678-7 (hard cover)
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There is a feeling of nostalgia for me reading Leigh Landy's new book, which was reinforced by the recent and untimely death of Richard Orton, one of the pioneers of radical composition education in the UK. *Making Music with Sounds* is very much in the tradition of Orton's 1981 book *Electronic Music for Schools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), as well as the work of John Paynter, Brian Dennis, George Self and R. Murray Schafer. But (as discussed in the Introduction to this book) much has happened since those days, particularly with regard to the tools which we all now have available. Processes that once took many hours of patient work with tape and a razor blade can now be done almost instantly.

Making Music with Sounds is not a book about 'music technology'. As director of the Music, Technology and Innovation Research Centre (MTI) at De Montfort University in Leicester UK, Landy is very proud of the comma that comes between Music and Technology. This book is more about an approach to composing music that starts with sound and listening but encompasses the advantages that recent technological developments in recording and processing sounds have brought us.

I find it quite encouraging to read a book that explores this subject (in the tradition of Schafer et al.) that does not obsess about particular pieces of technology. In fact in the first chapter, the section 'Making Music with Technology', occupies a single page!

Landy says:

> we need not be obsessive about technology for technology's sake, but instead look to use it for specific purposes. (5)

When music technology became a subject in schools in the UK, it separated itself from music as a practice and 'thinking' subject. What Landy is proposing as well as an examination of how we might compose is a reunification of music with the technologies one might use to make it.

It is, I think, no coincidence that the MTI that he heads has become a centre for radical experimentation at the 'edges' of music and its relationship with technology. The comma, which I mentioned above, is vital to this. If you want a book to teach you 1,000 neat tricks with Cubase for your students making dance music this isn't it, BUT the same students might discover some radical ways of rethinking their relationship with the sounds they work with and find some uncharted ways of working via this book.

At this point I have to declare an interest. As a freelance composer often working in education, I have been one of the composers working with the Beta version of the Compose with Sounds software (which was originally called Sound Organiser, as it is in this book) and have recently composed a piece with the software to demonstrate some of the things it is capable of. However, aside from my own interest in having tools that I can use with the students I work with, I have found that there is a real dearth of books that one can dip into and use to encourage others to work in this field.

The book is squarely aimed at a readership of music educators and presents a compressive sequential curriculum starting with sound and listening rather than what one often finds in music education practice, which often places enormous emphasis on genre and music history which can discourage students from creating their own compositions.

One of the main ways in which this text differs from the previous works (e.g. Brian Denis's *Projects in Sound* (London: Universal Edition, 1975)) is the link to the EARS 2 website, with the corresponding Compose with Sounds (CwS) software. Compose with Sounds is a cross-platform piece of software that has a simple graphic interface which enables those with little or no previous experience to quickly start to create pieces from sets of sounds selected from 'sound cards' and dragged onto a timeline in a series of 'lanes'. Compose with Sounds is structured in a number of 'levels' so that at 'Level 1' there are a few transformational possibilities and these get progressively more sophisticated as one develops in experience and skill. Inevitably, as with every software project I have ever encountered the process of making this in a way that will work on more or less any computer one is likely to encounter as well as being completely stable, able to run on networks with limited user rights, has been a long and sometimes frustrating journey. This software is intended to take the frustration out of the journey.

So, for the first time, *Making Music with Sounds* presents a combination of ideas, theory, practical activities and the means whereby one can actually get to grips with making something. The EARS 2 website and CwS software will link into the content of the book so that hopefully if one is inspired to make something, or to listen to examples, then there is a place to start.

Making Music with Sounds is structured as a series of explorations starting with 'Discovering music all around us', which could be seen as a way into soundscape composition, acoustic ecology and listening as an active process. With more than a nod to the pioneering (but recently much neglected in education) work of R. Murray Schafer we get straight into the whole area of modes of listening, soundwalks and acoustic ecology. This stress on personal experience is, to me, one of the great strengths of this approach. Instead of having a 'history of electroacoustic music' in the way that Western classical music is often taught, we have a series of activities and strands that start with experiencing the sonic landscape.

Throughout the book there is a series of illustrations (by Manuella Blackburn, drawing on her research in the area of visual representation of sound) that serve as scores, visual references and suggestions for how one might develop this work. The visual content is clear and simple so that seemingly complex sonic transformations are rendered in a direct visual way.

Moving on from the listening stage the book explores the nature of sounds with many ideas about how one might classify and talk about them. In my own work I am often struck by the limited language that younger students have for talking about sounds. Some of the activities here (which are neatly inserted into the text as we go) are really useful for working on this.

The middle section (chapter 3, 'The Sounds of Sound-Based Music') contains a fairly comprehensive and progressive catalogue of a wide range of transformational techniques starting with looping and basic editing (the choice of looping at the start is particularly neat as it is one of the processes that inexperienced explorers of this world are often immediately drawn to) and moving on to more complex transformations such as time stretching, harmonisation and modulation. The EARS 2 website also builds on this in a similar way to the glossary that can be found on the original ElectroAcoustic Resource Site (EARS, http://www.ears.dmu.ac.uk).

Chapters 4 and 5 about 'Organising Sounds' deal with various ways of structuring and combining material to make pieces, including several ideas about using (or not using) narrative and the 'something to hold onto factor' that Landy has discussed at length in several articles and books.

So will it find a home on the shelf of the music education community at whom it is aimed, and will it influence teachers and the composers of tomorrow?

One of Landy's previous books (*What's the Matter with Today's Experimental Music?: Organized Sound Too Rarely Heard* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991)) and much of his more recent work address the issue of music (and in particular electroacoustic music) finding an audience, and *Making Music with Sounds* also touches on this.

It is interesting to note that many active electroacoustic composers have arrived at this music almost by accident, by studying 'note-based' music, playing instruments and going to university or college and only then discovering that there is a whole other world of sonic exploration that they were previously unaware of.

What would the future sound like if instead of this we had a sound-based music approach earlier in our educational careers?

Some of this is already takes place. For example, the organisation Sound And Music in the UK is running a 'Minute of Listening' project in primary schools, which could have been lifted straight from this book, and there are also the well-known Vancouver Soundscape Project, Sonic Postcards, Aberdeen Sound Sites and World Listening Projects. The EARS 2 initiative includes a pan-European project where students are making pieces with the CwS software and playing these alongside works by established electroacoustic composers.

In spite of the above-mentioned initiatives we do face a huge task to try and wrench the controls of music education and, in particular, the way in which composition is taught out of the hands of those who are welded to the idea that music begins and ends with the organisation of pitch.

Making Music with Sounds is about electroacoustic music. It touches on ways in which this music can be combined with other art forms (in a similar way to John Paynter's seminal *Sound and Silence* book from 1970 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)) but is primarily concerned with composition as an individual practice. Hopefully we won't have to wait too long for another text that deals with electroacoustic music as a collective art as well (something the author mentions as a possible follow-up project).

Speaking from the UK there will be some teachers and institutions who will jump at this text; many others will be a little bewildered by its approach, as we have in this country become much more conservative in some of our music educational practices. Indeed, there are rock songs in exam syllabuses BUT where is sound-based composition taught and why shouldn't it be? Why is electroacoustic music completely 'off the radar' of mainstream music education?

One of the challenges that many of us face as musicians and educators is to try to encourage the institutions we work with to see music as much wider than one might first imagine. The students we work with often have no problem with (for example) the idea that we might go on a soundwalk, make a map of our journey, recreate the journey using recordings we make and gradually transform these from the recognisable to a new imaginary sonic world. Convincing some music teachers that this work is a valid 'output' to submit as a composition in an exam is a

much harder task. This book is intended to help move things forward.

The picture isn't the same everywhere, but as Landy says in the final chapter:

> Until schools at secondary level acknowledge the importance and value of this kind of music and the creative as well as generic skills that evolve after working in the field, one needs to pursue other avenues of action. (181)

This, to my mind, is key. There is no point in complaining about how educational policies (which are largely shaped by politics) don't include this music. It is far better to find lateral means of incorporating these ways of working into the educational experience of the young people so many of us work with. Sometimes abandoning the music department in favour of an acoustic ecology or soundscape approach with geographers can yield great results both educationally and musically, or even abandoning the classroom altogether and finding other locations for sonic exploration.

Making Music with Sounds is a timely publication that deserves a wider audience than a narrow electro-acoustic community. My suggestion would be to buy two copies, one for yourself and one to give to the music teacher in your local school. You never know what might result, and that potential is worth investing in.

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In the age of broadening participation (to use the prevalent UK term), computer programming in university music technology programmes is taught to populations far more diverse intellectually, culturally and aesthetically than in the past. Many of us are more likely now to teach students who may have relative difficulty navigating sizeable gaps between theory and practical application or who are readily overwhelmed by overly abstract and engineering-oriented presentation of concepts.

In this context, many teachers and students alike will find great value in Alessandro Cipriani and Maurizio Giri's *Electronic Music and Sound Design*, Volume 1. First, the text sets itself apart by being designed from the outset with clear pedagogical principles. It makes an explicit structural distinction between theory and practice, and then balances and integrates them in a way that helps students directly experience how theory and practice interrelate fruitfully. In the process, the authors have crafted a book that, though written explicitly for training in Max/MSP, transcends that specificity. The approach makes it very clear to a student that Max/MSP is simply one vehicle in which the theory can be manifest, and helps students experience the dialogue between theory and practice as something natural, useful and perhaps even fun.

Each chapter clearly sets out the 'learning agenda' – helping to ensure that intended learning outcomes, rather than specific teaching processes, are the priority. The chapters integrate a variety of exercises and information sources such as listening tasks, analysis, tests, glossaries of terms, and discographies. Chapters conclude with concept summaries and short questions that review the covered territory. The book is meticulously structured, so, despite the many types of information presented, the material is easy to read and follow.

Theory chapters do not reference specific computer languages, but they do make excellent use of a downloadable program (a Max/MSP-authored standalone) from the book's website to provide interactive examples. These immediately tie the theory to concrete results and invite aural exploration. The theories are described with great care to be clear and readily understandable, alternating appropriately between abstract concepts and concrete examples.

The practice chapters demonstrate how the preceding theory chapter translates into Max/MSP, and, as such, they essentially repeat the structure of the corresponding theory chapter. The coding is supported by a set of downloadable Max/MSP abstractions and objects that provide useful functions not available in the core Max/MSP release. The authors have adapted ideas from foreign language textbooks, designing exercises that help students to experience a sense of mastery even when they do not yet have the full 'vocabulary' needed to make extended algorithms from the ground up.

Finally, occasional 'interlude' chapters look more closely at specific Max/MSP programming topics that are not necessarily related to broader computer music theory.

Given its thoroughness and clarity, the book is well aligned with active-learning approaches that seek to steer away from using class time to deliver only theory and demonstrations. Indeed, one could potentially use the book to provide excellent theoretical and practical self-study assignments for students. Then class time can address hands-on problem-solving activities that allow the teacher to truly gauge and respond to students' level of understanding of the material.

In our first use of the book in our own classes, we used it to help prepare students to compose algorithm-assisted