

A Symposium on Musical Composition at Iowa

THE COMPOSITION PROGRAM

Some (not quite random) thoughts on musical composition at Iowa.

A composer is somebody who realizes ideas in sound. Probably there will always be a gap between idea and realization — our main concern is to help young composers narrow it.

In a very real sense, composition cannot be taught — it can be encouraged, or perhaps permitted.

Roger Sessions has said that composing is an act or deed. This is not to deny the hours of preparation, planning, contemplation, analysis — the pre-composition intellectual activity — but to note that at some time or other the composer must commit himself (to paper, or on magnetic tape).

The next step is audition, preferably before an audience. Locally the next such audition is the Composers' Symposium, 2 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 6th in North Rehearsal Hall. A welcome feature of this program will be the inclusion of works by two women. (Composition has been, traditionally, man's business; the absence of women is a classic instance of "role-playing.")

We formed the Center for New Music in 1966 both to facilitate these auditions, and because there was a large body of unperformed music, much of which required more time to prepare than was available within existing means. CNM concerts since then (about 35) have but rarely included pieces previously heard in Iowa City. There has been a trend in recent seasons toward the performance of a larger percentage of works by local composers, faculty and students.

Too much has been made of the hiatus between the contemporary composer and the audience ("He obviously doesn't care about the audience" — "The audience will never understand this" — etc.) The fact is that in Iowa City, and the U.S., there is not one but many audiences. The audience for the Iowa Quartet is not the same as for the Opera Workshop, or for the Collegium Musicum, or the Symphony Orchestra, or for the Center for New Music, but there is AN audience for each. Why should everyone have to like everything? (There is also more than one composer.)

R. Hervig
Head, Composition

THE ELECTRONIC MUSIC STUDIO

The Electronic Music Studio (EMS) is a facility of the School of Music available to faculty and student composers for course work and independent composition. The studio consists of a Moog Synthesizer, professional recording equipment, and various related electron-

ic music instruments necessary to the operation of a "composing" studio.

During the past year, the EMS has played an ever larger role in the university's musical life. New works by students and the studio director have appeared on Composers' Symposiums, Center for New Music concerts, events of the Center for New Performing Arts, special concerts of electronic music in the Art Museum, and in films, plays, and recitals.

Although electronic music is a relatively new medium — scarcely 20 years old — it has fostered prodigious production of all manners of commercial and artistic works throughout this country and abroad, a few of which have achieved widespread recognition. Yet studios are expensive propositions — the equipment is generally custom-designed to high professional standards — and are usually owned by various educational and state institutions.

The UI Electronic Music Studio was founded seven years ago. Initially a modest installation, its main concern was experimentation and research in the field of acoustics. But as new equipment was added, practical difficulties were overcome and it became feasible for a composer to produce and manipulate electronically generated sounds for a musical composition.

In the present studio, a composer's febrile imagination may be stimulated by dizzying sonic possibilities, for he is theoretically able to control all aspects of his domain. These aspects can be reduced to four general categories: wave form (tone color), frequency (pitch and rhythm), amplitude (loudness), and directionality. Since these are the four basic areas that have concerned composers over the centuries, it may be seen then that electronic music composition is essentially no different from "traditional" composition for voices and instruments. What the Electronic Music Studio does signify for the composer is an expansion of sound media and new methods of compositional control.

Peter Lewis, Director,
Electronic Music Studio

THE CENTER FOR NEW MUSIC

Richard Hervig makes two significant points about the composition program that pertain directly to the purpose and function of the Center for New Music: (1) to narrow the gap between idea and realization; (2) composition as commitment.

If the musical score can be seen as the "idea" and performance as the "realization" of that idea, then the tutorial function of the CNM is largely to demonstrate the execution of the idea.

Rehearsals are very important for this reason, becoming progressively a discovery of relationships upon which decisions of musical projection are made.

The gradual process that is the very nature of rehearsing may be a model to the composer concerned with the "gap narrowing" problems mentioned above.

Commitment in performance involves much more than an accurate reproduction of a given set of instructions or a set of symbols on a page. (This much is professionally assumed.) What we are speaking about is a process that arises in private study, practice, and rehearsal: the projectional importance given to the particulars in the discovered set of relationships. All decisions about tempi, dynamics, and other inflectional means affect the hierarchy of relationships inherent in the ordering — or lack of it — of the musical material.

Improvisation is perhaps the most obvious way of demonstrating these points. Here the performer is largely response-oriented. Rarely can he or the whole group maintain a tautness of form and consistency of approach so often typical of composed music. Consequently one's contextual contribution is often a direct result of the events of that particular and surrounding moments. Effectively such falls into two categories: collaboration and contrast. To witness an improvisation is to be aware of the strength of these two poles and to observe how they influence the generation and execution of ideas.

What I have said concerning rehearsals, performance, and tutorial "gap narrowing" is not restricted to the Center for New Music. Indeed they apply to ALL performing areas in the School of Music; the CNM simply specializes in the 20th century. Additionally, our personnel conduct laboratories in new performing techniques as part of the CNM's contribution to the composition program. By using talented student performers to supplement the CNM staff, we are able to provide valuable professional experience in the performance of numerous and diverse contemporary styles.

To quote R. Hervig again, "In a very real sense, composition cannot be taught — it can only be encouraged," — this is our *raison d'être*.

William Hibbard
Music Director,
Center for New Music