A PICKLE IN A BELL JAR: PRESERVING COLLABORATION IN HYPERSCORES

Terri Hron
Université de Montréal/CIRMMT
terrihron@gmail.com

RÉSUMÉ

Cette communication est une série de réfléxions sur la préservation de collaboration créative au sein de partition musicale de *Malý velký Svĕt,* une pièce écrite pour les trois pianistes Luciane Cardassi, Rosabel Choi et Katherine Dowling. Fidèle aux thèmes d'enfance et de jeu que la pièce aborde, cette communication contient des analogies et associations choisis dans un esprit ludique. Celles-ci aident à présenter la partition en formats multiples (la vidéopartition, l'hyperpartition et l'enregis-trement) et à expliquer de quelle manière ces formats déterminent et contribuent à la performance de l'œuvre et à la préservation de son côté collaboratif.

1. PRESERVING COLLABORATION

Family recipes often involve a lot of heresay. The electroacoustic performance *Malý velký Svĕt* resulted from a collaboration between three pianists: Luciane Cardassi, Rosabel Choi and Katherine Dowling and myself. I wanted to leave behind a recipe, some ingredients, and a sample of what we made. The hyperscore of *Malý velký Svĕt*, a videoscore for rehearsal/performance and recordings of performances (audio and video), offer a set of material in which I tried to highlight collaborative aspects and potential, to document the heresay. This presentation is an account of personal solutions I found to satisfy my interest in process rather than result, my collecting and sorting of moments of shared creation. I use playful analogies, associations and references, in keeping with the themes of *Malý velký Svĕt*: games and childhood.

2. FROM THE SCORE OF MALÝ VELKÝ SVĔT

My collaboration with Luciane Cardassi, Rosabel Choi and Katherine Dowling gave me the idea of creating multiple formats within a score[1]. I chose performers who were enthusiastic about a time-consuming and intimate collaboration. My goal was to create something with them and for them, something we could carve our presence on. To write Luciane, Rosi and Katherine into the score, I found an open, recursive, open system of recipe, lore and sample.

2.1. Videoscore: Sonic landscape

I enjoy simple, bare-bones instructions, preferably on a single page. As an electroacoustic performer, I am also convinced that listening to the sonic landscape of the work is inextricable from following its instructions. The videoscore for *Malý velký Svĕt* offers performers a rehearsal and performance tool that at once allows simultaneous instruction reading and soundworld listening:

http://www.birdonawire.ca/mvs-knocking-hyperscore/videoscore/

2.2. Hyperscore: Resist entropy

Every mark on the page should be rife with specificity*,* resisting the entropy of its message. I borrow this idea from William Kentridge's *ANTI-ENTROPY* section of his *Drawing Lessons*.

"Entropy, as we are all familiar, talks about the degree of disorder or randomness within a system. Entropy is a measure of the unavailability, in a system, of the thermal energy of that system to be converted into work. It can be most easily described as a tendency for order to dissolve into disorder. It refers to the breakdown of something that leaves its site of generation as a coherent thought, a coherent object, a coherent image—and gradually disintegrates, becomes fragmentary; so that when it reaches its site of reception, what arrives are shards and fragments." [2]

Sometimes this fragmentation of coherent ideas accelerates once the score is with the performers (unless they are 'in on it from the beginning'). I tried to outsmart entropy by creating an *aide-mémoire* to refer back to when entropy might set in and which could be extended when something important arose.

Collecting the fragments of moments of coherence and inspiration eventually created a kind of *lore*: a curated series of important things about the piece. The Proto-Indo-European root of *lore* is 'track' or 'furrow': of funnelling and leaving a trail. The lore includes both more general

observations and curiosities worth mentioning, similar to Barthes' concept of *studium* and *punctum* in photographs:

studium, which does not mean, at least not immediately, "study", but application to a thing, taste for someone, a kind of general, enthusiastic commitment, of course, but without special acuity.... The second element will break (or punctuate) the studium. This time is it not I who seek it out (as I invest the field of the studium with my sovereign consciousness), it is this element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me. A Latin word exists to designate this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument: the word suits me all the better in that is also refers to the notion of punctuation, and because the photographs I am speaking of are in effect punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely these marks are so many points." [3]

The hyperscore is thus an eclectic *aide-mémoire* of information, consciously incomplete that invites you to click on highlighted areas, without obligation or hierarchy.

2.3. Example: *MvS - KNOCKING* hyperscore

Figure 1. Image of the hyperscore to *KNOCKING* from *Malý velký Svět.* http://birdonawire.ca/mvs-knocking-hyperscore/ © Terri Hron 2014

In the hyperscore for *MvS - KNOCKING,* there is an inspirational explanation of the notation by the original performer, Luciane Cardassi.

http://birdonawire.ca/mvs-knocking-hyperscore/inspirational-explanation/

Even here, her more general explanation is pierced by the improvisation she offers in the second half. The hyperscore is similarly punctuated a number of other links: click on B for Luciane's performance of *Time and Desire* by Linda Catlin Smith, and click D for a text about the conversation that starts at 2:40 in the soundtrack.

http://www.birdonawire.ca/mvs-knocking-hyperscore/workshop-window/

Each hyperlink is also an *hors d'oeuvre* to whet the performer's palate for learning the work, and at the same time, these tidbits acknowledge how integral the three pianists were to so much of the work.

3. ANALOGY: A PICKLE IN A BELL JAR

My mother's tradition stipulates I make potato salad on important feast days. Potato salad is a processed food. The degree of processing may be mild, if commercially-available mayonnaise is used, and even milder if one decides to make one's own pickle. The pickle is essential to my mother's recipe. She used *Polské Ogorki*, available at the local delicatessen. When I was seven years old, visiting our relatives in Staňkov for the first time, I tasted the pickles my mother remembered from back home in Czechoslovakia: my grandmother had made them with my aunt earlier that year. They may well have grown the cucumbers. In any case, the brine was such a delicate balance of sweet, sour and refreshing. The best potato salad hardly needs any emollient other than several spoonfuls of good pickle brine.

Potato salad is a food about texture. There are vegetables to cook to just the right amount and cut up in just the right size, and combine with a lot of stirring. Knowing you have just the right pickle helps, because there's your flavour started off right.

Why so much fuss about a pickle? Since I find analogies often useful, I offer that a score should include a good pickle: as you're making the salad, you sip the brine and enjoy the crunch as inspiration. If you've made the pickle, it's that much better.

Not everyone is a pickle aficionado; therefore, this is not the analogy for them. This is only a personal account of the results of a particular recipe. More to the point, the story makes me aware of wanting to know my grandmother's recipe and the stories around it. An ideal score for potato salad should (a) offer a taste of the pickle, (b) share the recipe, and (c) offer some hints and reviews. If this analogy only to appeals to foodies, a different approach:

"Musique concrète was a kind of abstractisation [sic] of sound – we didn't want to know its origin, its causality. Whereas here I wanted you to recognize causality... it wasn't just to make music with but to say: this is traffic noise! [Laughs.] Cage's influence, perhaps." [4]

In creating fixed sounds based on the performers' sound also recognizes the causality in this music: this is Luciane! This is Rosi! This is Katherine! These layers in the fixed sounds are part of the performance score, the recipe.

Wikipedia tells us:

"By pumping the air out of the bell jar, a vacuum is formed.... Purely decorative bell jars were common in the Victorian period for the display of clocks and taxidermy, as well as transparent dust covers." [5]

The audio recording of *MvS* and the video of its premiere are like pickles in a bell jar, intended as samples. They were made in the workshop leading up to the premiere, since we all wanted to leave a good pickle for future potato salad.

Many caution about the normative effect of including such recordings in a score, possibly limiting a performer's creativity. I do not worry about this, since everyone will respond to the sample differently. The works also require a fair bit of improvisation, which encourages re-creation. Each re-creation and iteration starts from what's in the bell jar, its consumption being part of the process towards a "moment of performance", in the sense that Georgina Born puts it:

"On the one hand, there is the moment of performance (P1) as a dialogical, participatory creative act grounded in an aesthetics of collaborative improvisation, one that entails a particular experience of musical intersubjectivity and place, in which the interaction is at once musical and social. On the other hand, there is the capture of that moment in commodity for my recording (R1), an objectification that is productive in enabling improvised performance to be disseminated and known beyond its original time and location -- in which form it becomes the aural means of educating and socializing other musicians and later generations, who are thereby empowered to create something new or to cover, re-work or transform the original (P1) in subsequent improvised performances (P2). The history of jazz is a history of this cumulative movement between focal musical events – $P^1 \rightarrow R^1 \rightarrow P^2 \rightarrow R^2 \rightarrow P^3 \rightarrow$ ... – in which successive re-creations are afforded and communicated both by recording technologies and by a détournement of the commodity form. [6]

The bell jar analogy appeals to me because low-quality vacuums compromise the preservation of the specimen. At the same time, a performance, deprived of its medium, fades as a vacuum is created. This inherent paradox is another example of how certain complementary variables of a musical work, its performance and recording, cannot be known simultaneously. It also suggests that there is a living presence that must be maintained and refreshed.

4. CONCLUSION

"There has to be some gap, some lack, which provokes people to spend 20 years, 30 years, making drawings, leaving tracings of themselves. It has to do with the need to see oneself in other people's looking at what you have made. An insufficiency in the self, the need to be a snail, leaving a trail of yourself as you move through the world. Hansel, leaving a trail of crumbs to lead you home. To leave a report of the journey around the center on the walls of the studio, of galleries of museums. As if it is in the reflection of people looking at these traces that one finds one's existence." [2]

One of the paradoxes of trying to inscribe someone else' characteristics within my work is that the inescapable filter of my own gaze comes steadily into focus. Another is Sartre's "illusion of immanence," the delusion of thinking that an image is *in* our consciousness and that the object of the images is *in* the image [7]: these works for specific performers, even as portraits of a sort, do not represent them, and neither do any number of hyperlinks in a score. However, the documentation of *Malý velký Svět* – including this text – are attempts to leave a trail if only to provoke other peoples' reflections. From a more altruistic position, it is also an effort, however imperfect, to bear witness to a coming together of ideas, to find a way to tell stories together.

These playful and associative reflections underlign *Malý velký Svět*'s connection to childhood and games, themes that helped expanded my notion of score. It allowed me to shift my focus towards notation and documentation as tools to harness in creating an intimate dialogue that extends outwards. Further experimentation with multiple authors (with performers writing notation and texts) could enhance the use of multiple formats greatly.

5. RÉFÉRENCES

[1] Hron, Teresa. "Useful Scores: Multiple formats for electroacoustic performers to study, rehearse and perform." *Organised Sound*, 2014. **19**(3): p. 239-243.

[2] Kentridge, William. *Six drawing lessons*. The Charles Eliot Norton lectures. 2014, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

[3] Barthes, Roland. *Camera lucida : reflections on photography*. 1st American ed. 1981, New York: Hill and Wang.

[4] Ferrari, Luc. *Luc Ferrari Interview*. July 22, 1998, D. Warburton, Editor. 1998, Paris Transatlantic Magazine: Paris.

[5] Wikipedia. "Bell Jar." 2014 [cited 2015 February 17]; Available from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bell_jar.

[6] Born, Georgina. "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity", *twentieth-century music,* vol. 2, n° 1, p. 7-36, 2005.

[7] Sartre, Jean-Paul and A. Elkaïm-Sartre. *The imaginary : a phenomenological psychology of the imagination.* 2004, London ; New York: Routledge.