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**Open Ears: Music as Interactive Experience**

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My project sets out to examine the shifting ideas regarding music's function through the medium of chamber music. The focus will be on music written after 1945 and specifically on those composers classified as "experimental". Works by Cornelius Cardew, Frederic Rzewski, David Bedford, and others will be studied through examination of scores and theoretical writings (manifestos, critical and musicological essay etc.), and its realization through performance. Much of this research will have to be carried out through performance of the works in question and could not be effectively carried out during the academic year. Also, there is currently nothing in the curriculum that covers these composers or their music in depth. My research will culminate in three chamber works to be performed in the coming fall semester. These works will utilize the most effective techniques of the composers to be studied (as well as any techniques I discover for myself) and will be performed in the fall.

Chamber music has always been one of the more flexible genres of art music. The term encompasses the early music groups that played for dances, the aristocrats who played together for personal enjoyment, and the virtuosic ensembles that arose in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ensembles ranging from the string quartet to the Philip Glass Ensemble (four electric organs) are described as "Chamber ensembles." They are usually small groups that perform in intimate settings and, as a result, they have become the medium of choice for a number of composers that wish to explore their more personal philosophies of life and music. Of such composers, few were more radical or divisive than John Cage. Cage pioneered

indeterminacy and chance techniques (compositional decisions to give up certain aspects of performance or composition to chance), the use of noise in music, and, memorably, silence in music. *4'33"* was Cage's exploration of the idea that musical performance (and music itself) could be a tool to attune the listener to the sonic world that is constantly around him/her, to create an active and engaged audience.

Those composers that followed in the footsteps of Cage in their attempts to create a focused and active listener are usually called "experimental". The term does not describe an actual similarity in style as far as the sound of the music, but rather a similarity of approach and goal. Many of them employed indeterminacy insofar as the pieces usually left some element of performance up to chance, but the important link among them is that each attempted to draw the audience into piece. Some composers explored ways to make music performance possible by untrained performers (*Treatise, Play*), while others wrote pieces that were playable by performers from any musical tradition (*In C*). There were game pieces (*Fun for All the Family, Pitch City*), ritual pieces (*Paradigm, Makrokosmos Vol. I-III*), and interactive pieces (*Sound Pools, Public Opinion Descends upon the Demonstrators*). The types of pieces are varied, but each one is trying to make a performance that is a shared experience rather than a formal presentation. Each piece was the composer's attempt to create the kind of audience that Cage first set out find.

Some of these pieces worked while others did not, leading me to believe that there must be some ratio of restriction and freedom for these kinds of works to be successful. One must study the ideologies behind, and scores of these pieces in combination with their practice in order to define that ratio. It is a valuable study

too, because if the proportion is correct, the experience is on a level different from any other musical experience. This is a study not only of new music, but of new approaches to music and its performance, a vital element in an era when music itself can be produced and distributed infinitely.

### **The Cell – The Interactive Orchestra**

While this project studies ideas about musical performance in chamber music, Kurt Ebsary will be studying similar developments in the orchestral medium via works by some of the greatest writers for that medium. Our research will culminate in a collaboratively written piece for orchestra that attempts to reconcile recent performance practices I am studying with the tightly controlled structure of the orchestra, the limits of which Kurt will be studying. The form of the piece will likely be interactive for the audience and will be decided as we move through our studies and find techniques from each project that will work most effectively. Together, we will study pieces such as Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* and David Bedford's *With 100 Kazoos*, and investigate the psychology of group decision making and group creativity for further insight into how an interactive orchestra might work. Our goal is to co-compose the work during the summer and revise early fall so that the work can be performed during the Fall Semester 2010.

Furthermore, this cell will work as a part of a larger cell made up of other students also conducting music research on campus. We will use whatever performers are available to test out the ideas that we, as composers, are investigating. This group of performers and composers will form a new music ensemble that will perform, during the 2010-11 school year, the works studied and

written over the summer. It is our hope that this “new music ensemble” will then continue with new students and be a group that will last for years to come.

**Individual Schedule (Meetings with Dr. Hu twice/week)**

Week	Literature	Piece completion
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<i>Music Since 1945: Issues, Materials and Music</i></li> <li>-<i>Experimental Music: Cage and Beyond (Music in the Twentieth Century)</i></li> <li>-<i>The Cambridge Companion to John Cage (Cambridge Companions to Music)</i></li> </ul>	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<i>Pitch City</i></li> <li>-<i>Round</i></li> </ul>	Piece 1
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<i>Adorno's Aesthetics of Music</i></li> <li>-<i>Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration</i></li> </ul>	
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<i>In C</i></li> <li>-<i>Talking Music: Conversations With John Cage, Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, and Five Generations of American Experimental Composers.</i></li> </ul>	Piece 2
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<i>The New Music: The Avant-Garde since 1945</i></li> <li>-<i>Background Noise: Perspectives on Sound Art.</i></li> <li>-<i>Soundpieces</i></li> </ul>	
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-<i>Material</i></li> </ul>	Piece 3

	<i>-Prose Collection</i>	
7		(Begin group piece)
8		
9		
10		

**Cell Schedule (group meeting with Dr. Hu once/week)**

Week	Literature	Piece completion
1	The Medium Is the Message". McLuhan	
2	<i>Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technologies. Chap. 3</i>	
3	<i>Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technologies. Chap. 4</i>	
4	<i>With 100 Kazoos</i> Bedford	
5	<i>Mass. Bernstein.</i>	
6	<i>Votre Faust. Pousseur.</i>	
7		Begin Writing
8		
9		
10		Finish

**Individual Bibliography (Chicago Format)**

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- Sawyer, R. Keith. *Group Creativity: Music, Theater, Collaboration*. 1 ed. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003.
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**Cell Bibliography (Chicago Format)**

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