

Australian Experimental Music 1963–1990

Warren Burt

This article is a first attempt to survey the large field of Australian experimental music, with the intent of being as all-inclusive and nonevaluative as possible.

It is important to define carefully what is meant here by 'experimental music'. Like all definitions, this one is heavily dependent on context. One of the classic, and earliest, definitions of experimental music is that of John Cage [1]. His idea of music, the outcome of which cannot be predicted in advance, dates from the early 1950s, and forms the basis for much experimental musical activity up to the present day. Michael Nyman [2] takes a mostly Anglo-American look at the subject, and defines rather carefully the difference between two areas of activity he calls 'avant-garde', which he relates to Boulez's beliefs, and 'experimental', which he defines in relation to Cageian and post-Cageian practice. In New York at this time, this same distinction was referred to as the 'uptown-downtown' split, with 'uptown' denoting composers of the avant-garde and 'downtown' those of a more experimental bent. To some extent, Nyman's distinction still holds, though some of the pastiche and quotational ideas he described as experimental have since become the basis for the contemporary reactionary neo-romantic style. A different tack is taken by Trevor Wishart [3], who discusses the difference between scribal (i.e. written) musics and oral musics, in which notation is not the principal means of realising or preserving the work. Kenneth Gaburo is more technical, and inclusive, when he says that experimental music "explores such phenomena as electronics, lasers, computers, kinetics, perception, notation, biological feed-back, linguistics, environments, meditation, timbre, acoustical resources, serious communication, artificial intelligence, sound-touch, awareness, and silence" [4]. Experimental music today still operates, to a large extent, in most of these areas, although not all work in these fields can be considered experimental. Much 'new age' music, for example, uses electronics, lasers, computers and environments, but in producing a commercially useable, 'easy-to-listen-to' product, it seems to depart significantly from what might be called an experimental attitude. This questioning, exploratory attitude is summed up by Herbert Brün when he says, "We're interested in the music we don't like, yet" [5], and is echoed by Chris Mann, who says that "experimental music is not a problem-solving environment (that's commercial music) but a problem-seeking one" [6]. In notes to a 1986 concert, Larry Polansky describes one kind of experimental attitude when he says of his music, "So it is difficult to perform (and perhaps to listen to) because it intentionally avoids anything we might traditionally associate with notions of drama, entertainment or even artistic form. Those things which it does are very important to me for my own evolution, though occasionally I don't understand the results of my

own ideas" [7]. However, some experimental music very clearly works with notions of "drama, entertainment or even artistic form", so Polansky's thoughts can only partially cover the field.

In fact, to define a field as wide-ranging and sometimes conceptually anarchic as experimental music requires a similarly wide-ranging, nonexclusive definition—a series of *ands*, if you will. One might say that experimental music is a combination of leading-edge techniques and a certain exploratory attitude that places a high value on the integrity of the exploration of an idea as a good thing in itself. In this light, experimental music in 1990 could encompass such areas as Cageian influences *and* work with low technology *and* improvisation *and* sound poetry *and* linguistics *and* new instrument building *and* multimedia *and* music theatre *and* work with high technology *and* community music, among others, when these activities are done with the aim of finding those musics "we don't like, yet," in a 'problem-seeking environment'.

Experimental music in Australia usually departs from already established musical contexts. New contexts are developed appropriately for the ideas embodied in the music, which is concerned with social and political issues. Ideology plays a large role in shaping both the music and its environment. Experimental musicians in Australia are intensely aware of the history and aesthetics of the field and consciously attempt to extend and redefine elements of that tradition.

GRAINGER AND MELBOURNE 1963–1972

The earliest musical experimentation by an Australian probably was done by Percy Grainger. Throughout his life, his work with 'free music' was frankly experimental, delving into unknown and, at the time, physically impractical, musical techniques. His work with engineer Burnett Cross in the late 1940s and 1950s probably forms the earliest coherent

ABSTRACT

Experimental musical activities began in the early 1960s. They spread and proliferated in the 1970s with the return to Australia of several key expatriate figures. Later, migration to Australia by overseas composers helped to consolidate its position. This article covers the activity of key places and figures in experimental music in Australia from 1963–1990.

Warren Burt (composer). Flat 18/102 Park Street, St. Kilda West, VIC. 3182, Australia.

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body of musical experiment undertaken by an Australian. However, Grainger's experiments took place in the United States, mostly in his home in White Plains, New York, and dissemination of the results of his work in Australia have been extremely slow and piecemeal, such that composers who have been clearly extending some of the principles of Grainger's work have been, until recently, largely unaware of his activities [8].

Perhaps the earliest body of experimental musical work in Australia was done by Robert Rooney, Barry McKimm and Syd Clayton in Melbourne between 1963 and 1972 [9]. In 1963 trumpeter Barry McKimm was a member of the Heinz Mendelson Quartet, a group heavily influenced by Ornette Coleman's free improvisational work. Soon after this, McKimm formed a band with Robert Rooney on piano and Syd Clayton on bass. The trio was occasionally joined by Peter Webster on reeds and Barry Quinn on drums in performances consisting largely of free improvisation. Rooney, a visual artist as well as a pianist, introduced the group to the ideas of John Cage and also to notions of graphic notation. In 1964 the group performed Rooney's *Synops*, a graphic score. From 1966 to 1970 the group moved away from its jazz orientation and into work with large improvising ensembles. In 1969, for example, Jean-Charles François conducted an improvising orchestra in a graphically notated score of McKimm's. Syd Clayton's work assumed a more and more theatrical bent, and between 1969 and 1972 he produced 14 theatrical works at La Mama theatre in Carlton, many of which showed heavy Cageian influence and which crossed boundaries between music, theatre and ritual.

A notable event in Melbourne in this period was the return of composer, conductor and pianist Keith Humble. Humble had run an alternative performance space, the Centre de Musique, in Paris, and brought back from Europe many ideas both of an avant-garde and an experimental nature. Through his work at Melbourne University, he was responsible for training a number of Australian composers, and his Society for the Private Performance of New Music at Melbourne University gave a number of performances of both avant-garde and experimental works [10]. From 1974 until his retirement in 1990, Humble was the head of the music department at La Trobe University, which has continued to be a centre for train-

ing of Australian composers, even though in recent years the department has lost much of the experimental edge it had in its early days. Humble's own work spans the range from his *Sonatas*, expositions of classical avant-garde techniques, to his probing and exploratory work with electronics and improvisation in the group KIVA, which continues to the present day. Humble, in fact, disagrees with Nyman's dichotomy between the experimental and the avant-garde, believing instead that a 'complete musician' should fluently express himself or herself in all of the currently used compositional idioms and modes of thought. Another member of KIVA is French percussionist François, who at Humble's invitation taught at Melbourne University from 1969–1972, helping to educate a new generation of experimental composers.

A number of other musicians were also active in Melbourne in this period, working principally with electronic music. Three of these were the late Stephen Dunstan, who, in addition to his work in pop groups, produced sound sculptures using homemade electronics; Val Stephen, a physician who composed electronic music as a hobby; and Bruce Clarke, whose jingle workshop may have been the first user of musical electronics in Australian commercial music, and who improvised and performed in Felix Werder's sometimes experimental Australian Felix group for a number of years.

SYDNEY 1968–1975

In Sydney, the start of an indigenous interest in experimental music was marked by another return from overseas. Although the group of students around Peter Sculthorpe at Sydney University had shown some interest in these ideas, it was the return in 1969 of David Ahearn, fresh from working with Karlheinz Stockhausen and Cornelius Cardew, that crystallized the identity of experimental music identity in Sydney [11].

In 1969, Ahearn approached Joseph Post, then head of the New South Wales Conservatorium, for permission to set up a series of experimental concerts and workshops under the auspices of the Conservatorium. Extreme resistance from faculty members inside the Conservatorium, however, led Ahearn to transfer the series to the Boilermaker's Hall, under the auspices of the Workers' Education Association, a Sydney adult-education organization. From

1969–1972; Ahearn was the coordinator of A-Z Music, an organization run along the anarchic lines of Cardew's English Scratch Orchestra. A-Z Music gave regular performances and was a clearing house for many experimental ideas both within music and across media. Among its members were Ahearn, Robert Irving, Greg Schiemer, Ernie Gallagher, Peter Evans, Dierdre Evans, Phillip Ryan, Roger Frampton, Geoffrey Barnard, choreographer Philippa Cullen, video artist Ariel, flautist Geoffrey Collins and others. One notable performance of the group was the world premiere, in 1970, of Paragraph 4 of Cornelius Cardew's magnum opus, *The Great Learning*. In 1972, Teletopa, a free improvisation quartet derived from the A-Z membership, performed at the International Carnival of Experimental Sound (ICES) in London. The personnel in this group were Ahearn, Collins, Frampton and Peter Evans. The group dissolved in 1975, and Ahearn produced little work after that. He died early in 1988.

MELBOURNE 1972–1980

Several composers emerged in Melbourne between 1972 and 1975 who would continue to play major roles in the emergence of experimental music in Australia. A number of younger composers and performers banded together to form the New Music Centre at the urging of Chris Mann, whose major interest was in the area between language and music. The Centre's early membership included such people as Dan Robinson, Ron Nagorcka, Peter Mumme, Simon Wettanall and Jeremy Kellock. Over a 2½-year period, the Centre produced weekly concerts in a variety of venues and managed, briefly, to set up Melbourne's first public access electronic music studio. Also active at this time was the New Improvisation Action Group for Gnostic and Rhythmic Awareness (NIAGGRA), which gave a number of performances between 1972 and 1974, mostly at La Mama theatre in Carlton. The group consisted of Ian Wallace, Jeremy Kellock, Simon Wettanall, Bruce Woodcock, Dan Robinson, Steve Martin and occasionally Chris Mann. Of this group, Wallace, Kellock and Wettanall eventually abandoned experiment in favor of a bebop virtuosity of the most traditional kind. Woodcock continued along an experimental path until his death in 1982, while Robinson and Mann remain as

forces within the Australian experimental compositional community. In 1974–1975, Nagorcka, Mann, Wettengel and Kellock all left Melbourne for various overseas destinations, and both the New Music Centre and NIAGGRA collapsed.

Nagorcka returned to Australia in 1975, at the same time that I arrived there to take a teaching position at La Trobe University. Friends from earlier days at the University of California at San Diego, he and I, along with bassist John Campbell and others, set up the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre (CHCMC) [12]. A 'Dry-run' series of concerts had been held at La Mama, and later at the Student's Church in Carlton, to test the viability of the idea. In December 1975, when space became available at the Organ Factory centre in Clifton Hill, we transferred activities there.

The success of CHCMC was based on several principles. First, no money would ever be charged to an audience (in the last few years of the centre, this was modified: in order to cope with a nominal rent charge, an admission charge of \$1 was requested); no money would ever be paid to composers or performers; no equipment would be supplied. Advertising was to be mostly by word of mouth or by photocopied posters. We viewed the removal of economics from the music equation as being of supreme importance in setting up a space with a truly alternative set of values.

Secondly, access to the space was to be completely open. Anyone who wanted to perform was welcome. No restrictions were placed on style or content. All one had to do was phone up the coordinator and a date would be arranged.

Finally, the centre was anarchically run. A coordinator was responsible for allocating performance times, opening and closing the building and allocating the minimal publicity jobs. When one person tired of the coordinator's job, he or she passed it on to another person. In this way, a sense of continuity and adapting to changing needs was built into the Centre.

The Centre ran for 7 years, giving five or six seasons of six weekly concerts each year. It served as a training ground for many younger composers, and as a scene of focus and ferment for much of the experimental music activity in Melbourne. Ernie Althoff, Graeme Davis, Philip Brophy and David Chesworth are examples of four very different composers for whose development the Centre proved crucial.

There was a diverse range of experimental music activity in Melbourne during the years 1975–80. CHCMC was only one centre of this activity. In early 1976, the *Gardens and Galleries* international electronic music festival took place as a 2-week event at the Why Not theatre and the Student's Church in Carlton. Electronic and computer music continue to be major areas of activity at both Melbourne and La Trobe Universities. In 1977 the La Trobe Improvisation Group (LIG) evolved out of improvisation workshops in the university's music department, and in 1978 the group evolved into Live Improvised Music Events (LIME), whose membership included Ros Bandt, Nicholas Tolhurst, Julie Doyle, Gavan McCarthy and Carolyn Robb. LIME's orientation was mostly minimalist, with occasional forays into theatre. Over a 10-year period it gave a large number of performances both in Australia and overseas, and recorded several albums.

In 1977 John Campbell founded the New and Experimental Music Show on community Radio Station 3CR. At the time, one of increasing Australian nationalism, 3CR had a policy that its programs play 50% Australian music. In the 2½ years of the show's existence, producers had little trouble meeting that quota, so great was the backlog of material for broadcast. Often we would record a new music concert and broadcast it complete a few days later. Pieces by most Melbourne composers of any type of new music (avant-garde, experimental, crossover pop, etc.) were broadcast on the show. This helped establish a higher public profile for new music in general, and helped to legitimise the activity of experimental musicians by placing their work within the broader context of new music activity.

A series of live radio forums was organized for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) at the Waverley Theatre East Malvern by Felix Werder. These forums featured performances by a group of musicians that later evolved into Werder's own group, Australian Felix, a group which experimented with graphic notation, improvisation and an often misunderstood radical reinterpreting of the role of the traditional score. Werder, like his generational colleagues Humble, Tristram Cary and James Penberthy, never really fully embraced the experimental aesthetic, but felt free to move in and out of it as his needs demanded. All four composers have consistently maintained elements of an experimental out-

look throughout every stage of their careers. Carey began creating electronic music in the 1940s, working with closed-groove phonograph loops and test oscillators; in the 1980s he composed pieces using mainframe and personal computer systems. Penberthy was the first Australian, in the 1960s and 1970s, to use computers in music composition.

La Mama also remained a centre for new music performances in the late 1970s. These included performances by Chris Mann and myself; electronics and percussion performances by David Tolley, Dure Dara and Phil Trelour; and multi-media events by Chris Knowles, James Clayden and David Wadelton.

At the Victorian College of the Arts, British migrant Richard David Hames ran the Victorian Time Machine, a student-based new music ensemble that gave performances of many experimental works. His work and that of James Fulkerson, an American trombonist/composer who was a frequent guest at the College, greatly influenced a number of younger composers, such as Sarah Hopkins, Les Gilbert and Herbert Jercher.

Some of the flavor of this era can be gained by looking at the three issues of the *New Music Newspaper* [13] that were published in 1977–1978. This paper described new music activity throughout the country and provided a list of events, performers and venues.

SYDNEY 1976–1986

In 1976, American composer Bill Fontana arrived in Sydney. For 5 months he ran a Sunday afternoon performance series featuring music, dance and performance-art events with both local and national performers. The series ran for some time at the recording hall of the Sydney Opera House, and then moved to the Institute of Contemporary Art, a private gallery run by Paul McGillick. Fontana's *Small Spiral*, for Japanese *rin* gongs, was premiered during this series of events, as was my music theatre piece, *Stalin*, which was created for a reader and three cassette recorders. Works by Greg Schiemer and a number of other composers were also performed at the gallery. The Central Street Gallery hosted a number of international performers as well, among them John Cage.

Fontana's work included a number of live and taped radio events and many sound-sculpture installations, which were

displayed in most of the Australian State Galleries. It is largely due to his efforts that sound sculpture gained a profile in Australia and that conceptual art became integrated into the Australian experimental tradition.

Other composers were also very active in Sydney at this time. Greg Schiemer also emerged as an organizer of events [14]. His *Ashes of Sydney* festival in 1977 was an afternoon- and evening-long event that took place on a ferry boat and at selected locations all around Sydney Harbour. The mix of events included folk and experimental musics, dance, performance art, magic and various other environmental events. Schiemer continues to be a central figure in the Sydney experimental music community.

Martin Wesley-Smith composes electronic and multimedia work, frequently in collaboration with Ian Fredericks, in the group WATT. Wesley-Smith has also staged environmental events with sculptor/filmmaker George Gittoes at Wottamolla Beach in the Royal National Park. A large part of his work consists of very traditional musical theatre, but it is his experimental work, along with his teaching at the new South Wales Conservatorium (where Schiemer also teaches) that has probably had the biggest impact on the musical community.

British violinist, improviser, composer and instrument builder Jon Rose established free improvisation as a major component of Australian experimental music, first in Sydney and then throughout the country. Over a 10-year period (1977–1986), he organized numerous performances, several national and international tours with both local and overseas musicians as part of his Relative Band, founded Fringe Benefit Recordings (now defunct)—whose catalogue forms an invaluable document of Australian improvisation in those years—and gave encouragement to many younger Australian musicians. Worn down by economic pressures and what he regarded as a consistent lack of adequate response to his efforts, Rose left Australia for Holland in 1986, where the economic climate and the level of artistic feedback were more conducive for him.

EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC ACTIVITIES IN THE 1980S

By 1980, experimental music was firmly entrenched as a major form of Aus-

tralian composition. During the years 1980–1985, experimental musical activity left its Melbourne/Sydney origins and was occurring in every major city and a number of country centres. Despite the lack of official support, experimentalism had established itself as a musical way of life.

In Melbourne, Brophy attempted to extend the principles of CHCMC to the print media through the magazine *New Music* [15]. Each concert at the Centre was reviewed by a volunteer. The review was read by the performers, who then interviewed the reviewer. The results of these interviews were then published in the magazine. This helped to expand the Centre's public profile and institutionalised a tradition of debate and dialogue within the Centre.

In 1981 the Victorian Ministry of the Arts sponsored the International Music and Technology Conference (IMTC), held at Melbourne University with auxiliary events at the Victorian College of the Arts and CHCMC. The IMTC featured presentations of experimental works including sound sculptures by Stephen Dunstan, Dan Senn, myself, Ros Bandt and Les Gilbert; performances of "Love is a Beautiful Song" by Graeme Davis and Ernie Althoff; *Way Back Beyond* by Herbert Jercher; *Seven Rare Dreamings* by Ron Nagorcka and Ernie Althoff; and *Snodger Lip Lap* by Chris Mann and myself.

In 1983, Australian experimental music was given international recognition through an invitation by festival organizer Josephine Markovits to participate in the Paris Autumn Festival. Chris Mann, Ron Nagorcka, David Chesworth, Ros Bandt, Sarah Hopkins, Leigh Hobba (an Adelaide-based composer now living in Hobart, known for the elegance of his environmentally based works), Jon Rose, Martin Wesley-Smith and I travelled to Paris and performed at the Centre Pompidou and, later, in smaller groups in a number of other locations in Europe and America. Philip Brophy's work was also included in the multimedia section of the visual arts component of the Festival.

Experimental music had made its first significant impact on Australian radio in the 1970s with the setting up of the nationwide ABC-FM network. Andrew McLennan's weekly show, "360 Shift", not only gave wide exposure to overseas experimental music, but also commissioned works from a number of Australians. Soon after its opening, ABC-FM became much more conservative, but producers such as McLennan

and Jaroslav Kovaricek managed to keep experimental drama and music alive on Australian radio.

In the 1980s experimental music gained an increased presence on radio. At the ABC, McLennan and Kovaricek continued to produce new shows despite resistance from the station's management. They also managed to commission and present—however sporadically—new work by a diverse range of composers.

In Sydney, Alessio Cavallaro and Rik Rue produced experimental radio performance series for 2SER and 2MBS. Cavallaro's "cntmpr ydtns" series provided a forum for live radio work, and the publication of tapes of these programs, in two sets titled "Men of Ridiculous Patience" and "Lunokhod", served to distribute the work around Australia and internationally.

In this same time period, I developed two series that commissioned original works for radio. These were "Composing for Radio" in 1983 and "hear/now" in 1986. Produced in 1983 by myself and Simon Britton, and in 1986 by Britton alone, the series resulted in new works by Vineta Lagzdina, Les Gilbert, ts, ts, ts, (Philip Brophy, Gerard Hayes, et al), IDA (Nagorcka, Althoff and Davis) Ros Bandt, David Chesworth, visual artist Aleks Danko and myself in 1983; and Elwyn Dennis, Rainer Linz, Sue Blakey, Peter Mumme, Alestair Riddell and Herbert Jercher in 1986. These works were then broadcast nationwide on the Public Broadcasting Association of Australia (PBAA) network of stations. In 1989, ABC-FM changed its format, welcoming experimental work once again.

During this period NMA Publications was founded by Rainer Linz and Richard Vella, who later moved to Sydney. Headed by Linz, NMA has become the major source for writing and recordings of Australian experimental music. NMA produces the journal *NMA* (New Music Articles) [16], the NMA tapes label, and occasional other publishing, such as Chris Mann's *The Rationales* [17] and John Jenkins's book *Twenty-Two Contemporary Australian Composers* [18].

Jenkins's book was the first since 1978 to concentrate on the activities of Australian composers. It was not intended as a complete survey of experimental composers, but rather aimed to provide information about some composers with experimental tendencies, and, by example, to stimulate further writing about Australian music.

SOME RECENT ACTIVITIES

Two recent creative uses of radio are Chris Mann's projects *The Blue Moon Project* and *Quadrophonic Cocktail*. For *Blue Moon*, Mann solicited over 100 versions of the old standard from pop, folk, amateur, art and experimental musicians and then broadcast them, one each day, at the same time each morning, on the light entertainment channel of the ABC. The project provided a framework for a day-by-day comparison of musical evolution that was hilarious, surreal and bizarre by turns. It also played with the idea of 'radio formats'. *Quadrophonic Cocktail* was a 4-channel tape piece involving four simultaneous readings of four texts that were European writers' fantasies. These were broadcast on the three ABC radio networks—two channels of the stereo FM network and one each on the two AM networks. Listeners were invited to play with their three radios necessary to receive the complete piece in anyway they desired. Producers such as McLennan, John Crawford, Paul Petran, Stephen Snelleman and Ros Chaney are currently commissioning and producing for the ABC a number of compositions, including the 1989 Prix Italia winner, Jim Denley's *Collaborations*.

In 1983 Greg Schiemer staged a "Concert on Bicycles" in Canberra. A concert of monophonic electronic tape pieces was broadcast on Canberra community station 2XX on an afternoon when members of the public were invited to join in a bicycle ride around Lake Burly Griffin, each carrying a transistor radio on their bicycles. The phase shiftings and multiple doppler effects that resulted from the many single mobile sound sources, which were heard differently by every single participant in the event, whether mobile or stationary, formed an essential part of the music.

Rainer Linz's PBAA-commissioned radio piece, *The Opera Crossed Purposes*, was also produced during this period. It was written in the form of a documentary radio program, with an announcer describing the action of an opera with a revolutionary political libretto and playing examples from it. In fact, the 'opera' did not really 'exist', except as this radio show. All the arias were elegant 'fakes', improvisations made by two singers improvising in operatic style with found operatic texts accompanied by orchestral tape loops. Since this form of artistic production is indeed as 'real' as any other, Linz's piece challenged the conventions of opera and operatic presentation.

New ways of musical thinking demand new instruments and new modes of presentation. Experimental composers were extremely active in the field of instrument building during the 1980s [19]. Some examples of this work are the music machines of Ernie Althoff, percussive devices activated by turntables; the Alemba, a set of tuned bass triangles made by Moya Henderson; Colin Offord's gigantic mouth bows; Ros Bandt's clay and glass instruments; Herbert Jercher's educational sound sculptures; Greg Schiemer's Tupperware *Camelan*, a set of community electronic instruments; Sarah Hopkins's work with cut tube Whirlies [20]; Rodney Berry's work with electronically resonated tube instruments; Jon Rose's violin- and cello-like instruments; and my own work constructing oversize tuning forks and semi-intelligent electronic performing instruments.

Experimental composers working with electronics include Rik Rue; sculptor, environmental activist and composer Elwyn Dennis; Schiemer, who continues to work with interactive computer-based performance devices; David Worrall, who is investigating the applications of fractal mathematics and chaos to computer music, and whose *Dome Project* attempts to provide a unique portable performing environment for electroacoustic music and multimedia; Ian Fredericks, Martin Wesley-Smith and Graeme Gerrard, who are all investigating high-end synthesis on personal computers; Alestair Riddell, who works with algorithmic composition and computer-controlled pianos; Ernie Althoff and Rainer Linz, who continue to produce work using very low-budget technology; and my own electronic work, which explores algorithmic composing, interactive processes, improvisation and timbral and polyrhythmic investigation [21].

Recent efforts in music theatre worth mentioning include *Brothers*, a play and musical by Syd Clayton; the many theatrical productions of Richard Vella; David Chesworth's video opera *Insatiable*, the music of which is made up almost completely of musical found objects; the theatrical presentations of the Pipeline ensemble, founded by Simone de Haan; the dance/music presentation *Skysong* by composers Sarah Hopkins and Alan Lamb, choreographer Beth Shelton and dancer Ian Ferguson; *Dialogue of the Angels*, a dance/music collaboration between composer Caroline Wilkins and choreographer Susie Fraser; and the 1988 Arena theatre pro-

duction of *The Rainbow Warrior*, which featured music and dance collaborations between Andree Greenwell and Darrell Pellizzer.

Works in environmental musical interaction include Leigh Hobba's video compositions of Tasmanian rivers; Les Gilbert's installations of environmental sounds and images; Alan Lamb's continuing investigations of aeolian music produced using very long wires; Syd Clayton's 9-hour keyboard composition, *Lucky Number* (a gradual deceleration to one short note every 3 min and back again, where the notes become ripples spreading through the performance environment); Ros Bandt's *Aeolian Harps* project; Ron Nagorcka's recent tape compositions using environmental sounds, *Lovregana* and *Soundscapes from Wilderness*; my own *Responses and Compressions*, a radio work commissioned by the ABC involving members of Pipeline interacting with various environments; and the collaborative radio soundscape *Words and Sounds in the Australian Landscape*, composed by Les Gilbert, Walter Billeter, Kris Hemensley, Chris Mann and myself. Other noteworthy activities include Chris Mann's recent works in compositional linguistics and the voice-based poetic musics of Jas H. Duke and Amanda Stewart.

Practitioners of improvisational experimental music in Australia include Jim Denley and Rik Rue, both individually and as part of the group Mind/Body/Split in Sydney; expatriate vocalist, composer and improviser Josephine Truman; Colin Offord; the work of the Evos music group in Perth, including composer/improvisers Ross Bolleter, Nathan Crotty and Tos Mahoney; and in Melbourne, a number of groups of younger composer/performers such as the Melbourne Improvisers Association, Gong House and the Shrieking Divas.

A recent Australian experimental music project in interactivity was *Fair Exchanges-Hear the Dance-See the Music*, a 5-way collaborative music/dance project involving composers Ros Bandt and myself, and choreographers Sylvia Staehli, Jane Refshauge and Shona Innes. This project used inventor Simon Veitch's 3DIS video-to-MIDI interface [22]. The 1989 Ars Electronic Festival in Linz, Austria, also featured specially commissioned interactive works from Rik Rue, Jim Denley, Amanda Stewart, electronic sculptor Joan Brassil, Chris Mann, David Chesworth, Les Gilbert, Alan Lamb, Ross Bolleter and myself [23].

CONCLUSIONS

In all of this activity, spanning a quarter of a century, there has been a sense of 'do-it-yourself' about the music and the composers, who also have a sense of being outsiders to the musical establishment. Of all the Australian media, only radio has recognized and consistently supported the continuing existence of the experimental side of Australian composition. Most of this music has been created, until recently, on a very restricted budget, which has profoundly affected its aesthetic. Experimental composers in Australia largely feel that the music they make should be democratically available to both poor and rich alike. Visual arts institutions have generally been more receptive to experimental music than have musical institutions. This fosters the sense that experimental composers are outsiders. These 'outsider' conditions have fostered in composers a social and sometimes overtly political concept of musicians and their roles and an analysis of how social conditions affect one's role and how one reacts to those conditions. For experimental musicians here, the question has not been how to fit oneself to the existing institutions, but rather, how one tries to change the institutions to fit one's needs—or even how to make one's own institution.

Despite its sustained high level of activity, Australian experimental music is largely ignored by the press. Australia lacks any critic who has both an understanding of and sympathy for its aesthetic. The same can also be said of the musicological community. Nearly all the historical writings on Australian experimental music are by the composers themselves, or by sympathetic nonmusicians such as John Jenkins. The various commissioning policies of the Australia Council have provided funding for experimental music only when the music conformed to their 'gebrauchsmusik' ethic. Promotional bodies, such as the Australian Music Centre, often do not know how to promote this music, which often does not produce a hard copy of scores or hi-fi recordings. Another difficulty is that the attrition rate among experimental musicians has been enormously high. Producing a non-conformist music for very little material gain has often been too difficult a task for those initially attracted to it.

I believe that experimental music today is the leading edge of Australian musical thinking, and will probably re-

main in that position for a number of years. It pushes ideas, both new and old, farther and examines the social implications of musical acts in a way that other groups of Australian composers are just not willing or able to do.

Experimental music will probably continue to remain resistant to absorption by the musical establishment. Quite simply, if one makes work that questions the viability of an institution, usually that institution will be little inclined to present that work. This quality may help the music to retain its integrity.

Paradoxically, much experimental music has become, and will continue to be, a popular artform. Consider the extremely experimental work presented on the popular ABC-FM Andrew McLennan/Tony McGregor-produced "Listening Room" program, or the approximately 8 million visitors who participated in assembling my computer-music interactive sound sculpture in the Sensus technological playground at Expo 88 in Brisbane, or the many composer-in-the-community projects that have involved experimental composers such as Herbert Jercher, Ros Bandt and Sarah Hopkins, as cases in point. This mode of public interaction may indeed prove to be a more fruitful avenue for exploration than the established musical institutions.

However, the very nature of musical experiment will mean that it will always, to some degree, remain an outsider's music. Consider the careers of the four composers over the age of 60 discussed in this article, Keith Humble, Felix Werder, Tristram Cary and James Penberthy. They remain the four senior composers in Australia whose work has been least absorbed in the current bout of Australian nationalism, and this lack of absorption has been in direct proportion to their involvements in experimental work. Other factors may also contribute to this, of course, but the link between working with experimental ideas and a lack of establishment acceptance, even for composers such as these, is strikingly clear.

The recent rise of various conservative styles and performing groups shows very clearly that there are still plenty of composers who are willing not to challenge sociologies of musical behaviour and continue the line of conservative academic twentieth-century musics. But Australian experimental music continues to develop its own identity—more politicised than its North American counterpart, and less accepted as a part of a 'fringe' than in Europe. A concept

of historical parallelism is developing in Western classical music, of which experimental music is forming both one of the branch streams and one of the major sources.

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