

An examination of adolescents' electroacoustic compositions: Developing an aesthetic

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of the works of established electroacoustic composers relies to some extent on a knowledge of the technological procedures used in their construction. These are often couched in different programming languages, so it is easy to see why a critically reflective listener who is not a computer-programmer may be unable to explore them in any depth. Standard classroom practice has to be reviewed if music students are to discover how to pass judgements on music that lacks conventionally recognisable traits. This paper emerges from and builds on a small-scale scoping study comprising four short case studies researching electroacoustic composition at secondary school level. As teacher-researcher, I wanted my students to grapple at first hand with the transformation and organisation of raw sound within a creative structure, in order to build a foundation for listening to the existing repertoire of electroacoustic music. With little or no methodological precedent for this type of work and despite being a non-composer, I devised composing strategies as the projects progressed. The purpose of this scoping study was to discover what could be learnt from the finished products of novice composers working in the area of musique concrète, using easily obtainable software. Seventeen participants, aged between 16 and 18, were asked to compose pieces by manipulating 'found' sounds at a digital audio editor. Seven students had no formal music training and worked independently on their own individual pieces, even choosing the sound material. The other ten participants were music students who were provided with a range of sound sources and who worked in pairs with various degrees of scaffolding. Their composing routes have been discussed in two previous papers. Fourteen pieces were composed during these workshops at the end of which the young composers described their intentions and outcomes. The students' music was distributed on CD to a music teacher, an electroacoustic composer and an interested 'audience-listener' who were asked to pick out what they found to be the most and least musical aspects of each piece. Their views will feed into future composing projects and will contribute to evolving pedagogical strategies in the area. Aspects of the present study will be

explored in the presentation. These include programmatic features, timbral choices and organization of ideas. Conclusions drawn from this study are that unguided composing of musique concrète is chaotic; that the type and variety of available sound sources has an impact on the finished product and that prior musical experience is not necessarily reflected in the outcome. Bigger questions arising from the study will be addressed in my PhD research. What are valid criteria for evaluating electroacoustic composition from an aesthetic point of view? What is an authentic practice of electroacoustic composing? In what way can technology assist in young people's learning to compose electroacoustic music? How does working with electroacoustic music provide an effective environment for music learning? And most importantly, perhaps, what learning can be achieved in this domain?

Keywords

Electroacoustic, composing, evaluate, aesthetics.