

David Simons
Understanding Media Studies
Prof. Peter Haratonik
10/07/09

intellectual autobiography, or What am I doing in Media Studies?

*It's not enough to sit at home and write notes on paper
and expect to get it played.*

You must know your media technology so you can sequence the music on your computer, print out the parts, become a recording engineer, make interesting samples, learn how to best record and document your projects, edit in a non-linear digital format, then make your own CD. Learn graphic design to create postcards for your concerts and striking covers for your CDs. Next you need a website and all that it entails: bios, photos, sound bites, links, concert and recording notices. Film your performances, edit and post it on YouTube. Become your own advertising, production and creation house. Finally you bring it all to market. A composer's needs in multi-media are never ending; but the creative uses of media are endless as well.

Some major composers that have influenced me to expand the arena of musical thought are Edgar Varese, Iannis Xenakis, Harry Partch, John Cage, James Tenney <http://www.artsjournal.com/postclassic/2006/08/james_tenney_19342006.html>, Morton Subotnick <<http://www.mortonsubotnick.com/about.html>>. The last two were my teachers, at California Institute of the Arts (BFA 1974 music composition). Going there was probably the one major direction I took that forever altered my trajectory. Like Media Studies, the interdisciplinary concept of the school (founded by Walt Disney) was for research and development of new art forms as well as solid training in the foundations of Art. And this includes historical, conceptual and practical technique as essential concerns. On a pilgrimage with other percussion students I spent a day with [Harry Partch](#) (Genesis of a Music, Da Capo Press, NY 1974), the composer, theoretician and instrument builder. This was followed by years of serious study of his work, culminating in my composition **ODENTITY** which is just now (Oct '09) being released on [Tzadik](#). The music uses Partch's system of 43 pitches in Just Intonation played on a unique set of instruments.

Guitar I	Zoemoozophone saxophone	12 hour chromatic
1/1	1	G
81/80		
33/32		
21/20		
16/15	2	G#
12/11	3	
11/10	4	
10/9	5	
9/8	6	A
8/7	7	
7/6	8	
32/27	9	A#
6/5	9	
11/9	10	
5/4	11	B
14/11	12	
9/7	13	
21/16		
4/3	14	C
27/20		
11/8	15	
7/5	16	C#
10/7	17	
16/11	18	
40/27		
3/2	19	D
32/21		
14/9	20	
11/7	21	
8/5	22	D#
18/11	23	
5/3	24	
27/16		
12/7	25	
7/4	26	
16/9	27	F
9/5	28	
20/11	29	
11/6	30	
15/8	31	F#
40/21		
64/33		
160/81		
2/1		G

THE BOO

HARMONIC CANON II

note number	
1	7/5
2	10/7
3	16/11
4	40/27
5	3/2
6	32/21
7	14/9
8	11/7
9	8/5
10	10/11
11	5/3
12	27/16
13	12/7
14	7/4
15	16/9
16	9/5
17	20/11
18	11/6
19	15/8
20	40/21
21	64/33
22	160/81
23	1/1
24	81/80
25	33/32
26	21/20
27	16/15
28	12/11
29	11/10
30	10/9
31	9/8
32	8/7
33	7/6
34	32/27
35	6/5
36	11/9
37	5/4
38	14/11
39	9/7
40	21/16
41	4/3
42	27/20
43	11/8
44	7/5

ODENTITY

by
David J. Simons

(c) 2005, rev. '06

For 6-8 players and instruments
of NEWBAND and the
HARRY PARTCH collection:

- Guitar I
- Harmonic Canon II
- Chromelodeon
- Zoemoozophone 2&3
- Diamond Marimba
- Boo (Bamboo Marimba)
- Bass Marimba

PARTCH'S CHROMELODEON
(HARMONIUM)

composed, in part, thanks to a residency at the
Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio study center,
Lago di Como, Italy

PARTCH'S DIAMOND MARIMBA

PARTCH'S BASS MARIMBA

Most people are familiar with [John Cage](#), his conceptual pieces like 4'33", music for prepared piano, his writings (*A Year from Monday - New Lectures and Writings* by John Cage, Wesleyan University Press 1967) and other work with Merce Cunningham. Like [Edgar Varese](#), Cage can be seen in a lineage that liberated music from conventions of melody, harmony, and fixed instrumentation. [Iannis Xenakis](#), trained as an architect and composer, approached the construction of sounds like a sculptor of form, adapting mathematical probability theories into pitch groupings and processes, along with conscious use of spatial and acoustical exploration.

How can I extend the ways in which music composition becomes interactive? I'm currently negotiating for a solo show at a gallery for an exhibit of my musical scores. Each score can embody a different musical theory and unique approach to notation. For example, *The Night Sky in October* uses a chart of the stars in the month I was born. The stars are printed onto a disc that you can turn, and it's fastened in the center. Superimposed over that is a transparency with stationary treble/bass clef staff lines. As you turn the disc the stars

change position in relation to the staff, so the stars become notes . What if the stars are holes and I used light sensitive photo cells to register the light coming in? Sounds, or pitches could be mapped to relative placement and as the sky revolves, new harmonies are created - a music of the spheres. Many interpretations or realizations are possible. Another piece would be my **playback pen** which activates pre-recorded audio tape that is placed on the wall. Hanging next to it is a pen with a magnetic tape playback head attached, which in turn is connected to an amplifier and speakers. The audience can move the pen over the tape forwards, backwards, fast or slow and get different sounds out of it. Here's another example of a music score, text based and improvisational:

ALIEN COMMUNICATIONS
the open form musical composition

1. **different simultaneous time lines**
(independent autonomous tempos)
2. **interruptions**
(sharp chords, short rhythmic bursts)
3. **textures**
(beautiful long chords, sustaining or evolving clusters)
4. **collage**
(quick scans of information banks,
metascrawl from hundreds of years of graffiti,
receiving [as if from aboard an alien spacecraft]
errant TV and radio transmissions from Earth)

Directions for performing :
Interpret as you wish,
In any order or combination

David Simons
12/28/89
Toronto

My opera **The Birth of George**, written in collaboration with Lisa Karrer, was a major work that I expected to become a Broadway hit, or at least have a run beyond the initial workshop and a weekend at La Mama. Much was learned, much was written, and we did get a recording out of it. (Harvestworks CD, 2003, sponsored by the Aaron Copland Fund

<http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/dsalk>>). But I'm not through with opera yet, or the idea of telling a story through music and images. There are new frontiers to internet and interactive media, video projections and more that I believe will have a role in the future of opera. We actually experimented with a virtual set, but more R&D funding would be needed.

Another big piece I hope to develop at New School for a thesis project: creating ***an instrument that is played by the mind itself***. I have written grants for this project (as yet unfunded), but my proposal is that by measuring and controlling the amount of voltage produced by the brain, through stimulation of emotions, or thought processes, sounds and images can be triggered. The possibilities of a theatrical performance piece are very interesting, but I also see it as a tool to help paralyzed, non speaking, handicapped persons with higher brain functions. Anyone can be trained to use it as a tool to increase mental focus and concentration. I will enlist the collaboration of medical researchers I know who are mapping the brain and engaged in this kind of activity at Columbia University and elsewhere. Just the other day (Oct 4) I performed in a series called Entertaining Science (founded and curated by Nobel Prize winning chemist Roald Hoffman

<http://www.roaldhoffmann.com/pn/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=55&page=1>> in which an evolutionary biologist and myself and my wife Lisa Karrer were paired together, creating a mix of music, video, performance and highly inspirational science. When I think of New Media, and new uses that a composer can put together with music, image and media, these are just a few of the kinds of contributions I can make to the field. In terms of another performative aspect, I am also known as a Thereminist who has created an interactive method of using the instruments' electromagnetic sphere to activate samples by proximity sensitivity. No one else does that. Recently, at the city-wide Make Music NY Day June 21, I curated and directed the Interactive Music Festival on Coney Island boardwalk. It was great - here is a link to the video which I edited down to 13 minutes:

<http://simons-karrer.com/InteractiveMusicFestival.480x272.mp4>.

I've written grants and gotten quite a few which placed me in a role of visiting artist in another country, to collaborate with artists there as a kind of cultural ambassador. At the Sacred Rhythm Millennial Percussion Festival in Bali on Jan. 1, 2000, my composition

Music for Theremin and Gamelan was performed (*FUNG SHA NOON* CD, Tzadik #8067, 2009). I workshopped it for a month with a local gamelan group there. And over the course of 5 years (1996-2001) I visited Estonia through Arts International, and Open Society Foundation <<http://www.soros.org/initiatives/issues/media>>. If only the rest of the world would be willing to understand each other and be opened to new ideas as well as these projects, there'd be fewer wars, less territorial or cultural imperialism. Space doesn't permit me here to adequately describe my experiences on World tours, but let us say that of the many job positions I could be qualified for and actually would enjoy holding is project advisor for a foundation or agency that awards grants for cultural exchange programs. I have recently begun to curate, and that could expand into a role commissioning music, art and cultural study projects for institutions. My experience as composer in residence at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy <<http://www.rockfound.org/bellagio/bellagio.shtml>> made me realize this kind of life is not at all alien to me. In fact I have much to offer. I've been teaching music and instrument building to children in schools throughout the country using free, low cost or recycled materials, and focusing on original works and non-Western music traditions. Now I'm beginning to teach at college level, and I'm simultaneously taking an undergraduate course in Ethnography, training to teach *Cross-Cultural Perspectives* at Fairleigh Dickinson University. Armed with a Master's degree I'll be qualified (academically) to teach music composition, which I most certainly will pursue. I write and publish articles that are informative and critical essays on the arts (*EAR Magazine*, 1983-90, New Wilderness Foundation, NY). I'm just completing a soundscape with interviews for a documentary book and CD on the Tappan Zee Bridge <<http://www.rocklandhistory.org/index.cfm?>>. More creative sound work! Cinematic audio portraits, more film scores, concerts and sound installations on the horizon. Please see composer's biography for a complete list of publications and recordings <<http://simons-karrer.com/simons-bio.html>>.

Now for 3 of my favorite books: *UBIK* by Phillip K Dick, *The FUTUROLOGICAL CONGRESS* by Stanislaw Lem, *100 YEARS OF SOLITUDE* by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Just a few (of many) films that have impacted me: *Natural Born Killers*, *Last Year at Marienbad*., *Children of Men*.