EPHEMERAL MUSIC: ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC COLLECTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Ephemeral Music: A Survey of Electronic Music Collections in the United States

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Where’s the music? How much do we have?
How about long term access? Will time silence this music for ever?

Defining Electroacoustic music
Music in which computer-based technology is used to access, create,
explore and configure sound materials, without the aid of
western musical notation on paper and in which loudspeakers are the principal
medium of transmission. Often referred to as computer music, this type of music
was developed in the early 1950s in the realm of research laboratories and universities
as the evolution of sound recording technology allowed the manipulation
of sound in a manner similar as manipulating photographic images on paper.
These compositional techniques allowed composers to expand the limited
pool of sonic resources available through traditional musical instruments.

The Survey
In order to determine the breadth and scope of the material currently held by libraries and archives
across the country I am conducting a survey of electronic music archival collections in music and
performing arts libraries and archives in the United States. The survey results will yield data that will confirm
the existence and extent of this type of collections, whether the repositories are actively collecting these, and
if the collections are just a byproduct of other collection development policies. I will also determine if these
institutions are pursuing any preservation strategies to ensure long-term access to this born-digital content.

The survey will be distributed electronically to the members of the Music Library Association and the Society of
American Archivists, approximately 4500 recipients, later this Fall and will target repositories that serve research
institutions (primarily colleges and universities) given the origins of electroacoustic music as a compositional
technique. This will constitute the first step in establishing standards and best practices for the preservation
of born-digital art.

Looking into the future
Develop adequate standards for description and preservation
Provide long-term access to the homegrown software and hardware that usually
accompanies electroacoustic music.
Stylistic Migration: from academic environments to popular culture,
this compositional technique permeates fields other than music.

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Goals of Survey

- Determine extent of material
- Establish collecting practices
- Scope of preservation practices among respondents
The Survey

• Survey delivered to 499 contacts via email with additional 2 reminders

• Music Library Association College and University librarians and SAA’s College and University Archives Section

• 43 responses for an 8.62% response rate.

• Survey was available to the respondents between July 18 and August 11 2008.
Does your institution currently have one or more collections or record series that contain electroacoustic music as part of its holdings?

No 29

Yes 14
Of these 14 respondents...

• 13 institutions include the future acquisition of these type of collection in their collection development policy

• 9 don’t have preservation plans

• 2 don’t know if their institution has any preservation plans

• 3 plan to reformat for preservation
All 14 institutions have a college or department of music

Top three majors offered by these institutions
  Composition
  Music Education
  Performance
Extent of collections

Measuring units reported include:

- 53 cubic feet
- 86 linear feet
- 120-150
- About 1000
What’s next?

Establish common threads among appraisal criteria for these types of collections

Take closer look at composers’ documentary output in order to better inform our collecting practices

Target colleges and universities with renowned electronic music/composition programs to assess holdings and conduct comprehensive study
Thank you!

Thoughts, ideas, questions or concerns?

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